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Experimentalism in Romanian Art  
after 1960

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The purpose of the project was to select, collect and disseminate texts on contemporary art practices in the Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, around Soros Centers for Contemporary Art, written in and about art of the 1990s. The coordination of the project was carried out by Janka Vukmir, SCCA – Zagreb, today the Institute for Contemporary Art, Zagreb.

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All of the texts we have collected at the time have been later published on the website of the I\_CAN, International Contemporary Art Network, the short-lived successor of the SCCAN.

On the occasion of the exhibition **90s: Scars**, revisiting the art practices and social and political context of the 1990s in the postcommunist countries, the Institute for Contemporary Art is now reoffering a collection of **89 texts and a comprehensive list of then proposed further readings**, on the website of the Institute for Contemporary Art, [www.institute.hr](http://www.institute.hr).

The exhibition 90s: Scars is curated by Janka Vukmir and organized by the Institute for Contemporary Art and the MMSU – Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Rijeka, on the occasion of the **European Cultural Capital Rijeka 2020**. Originally planned to open May 14, 2020, at the MMSU in Rijeka, due to COVID-19 crisis, is postponed until further notice.

Alexandra Titu

## Experimentalism in Romanian Art after 1960

From the point of view of someone with a predisposition to experimentation, I have attempted to evaluate approximately 40 years of contemporary Romanian art history. These were certainly marked by everything appertaining to historical determinism, geopolitical context, their own traditions and models generated and spread by the cultural centres of the modern world. I opted for an experimental approach as a point of perspective and a criterion for the analysis because of my sympathy for a philosophy directed towards a phenomenal world, essentially opposed to the defining strata of Romanian spirituality. The latter is an aspiration towards the sacred, towards a truth which transcends immediate meaning, which emphasizes the tension of trying to fit in with modern European values. Experimentalism is the "style of contemporary culture" (A. Guglielmi) and belongs to a methodology of knowledge and existence which can be defined as European and modern. A set of precautions is needed in searching for a single perspective from which to read such a complexly conditioned phenomenon as Romanian art during the latter half of the century. In this sense I feel that the most important effort is that of establishing a real connection between the various levels of conditioning. One must avoid the almost natural tendency to render any of these absolute and, understand the relationship between this complex of conditioning and the freedom of creative act.

The historic context, at the confluence of several great civilizations which have recently gone through a period of captivity with both a social and a cultural impact, may lead us to confuse creative freedom with merely immediate freedom connected to ideological dogma. Perhaps the freedom of the artistic act, rendered transparent and actualized by the experimental attitude, at the highest level, aims at a much wider and profounder field of manifestation. Even if we avoid the tendency towards the absolute freedom

which leads to art being completely divorced from any kind of reality ("the indifference towards reality and truth" - Harold Rosenberg), the interest itself, as opposed to the differing areas of reality, proposes a field and territory of freedom. The experiment, as an instrument of research, of investigation of several inexhaustible realities, is the practice of departure from any kind of convention, or at least a natural accompaniment to being conscious of convention. From this point of view, the experimental attitude defines that area of art and that type of artist whose work introduces methodologies of new expression and communication. It approaches parts of reality from a new point of view which have already been attended by common experience, or which have become familiar and used by a lengthy referential practice, at the precise moment when they have not turned towards the area of new reality itself. This is the case of that vast territory annexed to traditional realities of a technology which rapidly translates the most daring scientific ideas, scaling the boundaries of utopia. And, again, this type of attention to the change of perspectives is by definition European - we could even say that it defines Europeanism, and is definingly modern.

Let us note here that beyond any other observation, we criticize according to the intrinsic value of a work which is of an experimental nature or involves a level of experiment. This is the area of detachment of all that becomes craftsmanship through prolonged practice using significance. In the case of a civilization which moves forward rapidly, analyzing its original premises with perspicacity and detachment, and which raises the consciousness of the relativity of truth, accessible through reading and human knowledge, the motivations of formal immobility, preserving a still-functioning significant nucleus, become inoperable, and immobility itself becomes useless. Therefore, modern artistic expressions, once condemned to repetition and craftsmanship, become totally uninteresting. They either become obsolete immediately, or hang around as habits, in areas not of parallel or alternative cultures, but of numerous subcultures. More specifically, in such conditions, when the concept proves extremely important for the motivation of the artistic act, the disappearance of the tension towards experimentation or towards the expression whose stake is itself the subject, cannot create forms retaining a latent message, typical of the craftsmanship produced by traditional cultures. Academization of formerly innovative tendencies leads to a mindless craft which is sometimes more dangerous to a culture than exterior constraints. Moving, swinging like a pendulum in the field which divides and connects the subject and the object, closer to one and then the other of the terms, experimentalism proves to be the most attentive attitude of renewal. In fact

it motivates the prospective engagement of artistic gestures. From the perspective of this body of motivations, this approach, which places knowledge, communication, and the obsession with renewal and originality at the centre of the artistic act, we see contemporary art acquiring weight and justifying itself. To be sure, the landscape of the artistic tendencies of present-day postmodern art is much more diverse. But following the recurrent waves of avant-garde, following and concomitant with all destructuring tendencies, experiment remains as a defining parameter with the adequacies of orientation of the interest of the language to the media, from the formal plan to the intentional one, and the possibilities of making an impact on society.

Once we have noted the how open the general public is to cultural communication and to a subtle understanding of the creative act, involved in the experimental attitude, rightly accepted as a criterion of historical research proposed on top of almost four decades of contemporary Romanian art, we can approach the complex of conditioning which confers originality on this period. From this same perspective comes the clear explanation for the delay and the connection to the great movements of universal ideas. The coherence of various facts, which at first sight might appear not only disparate but even opposed to the intention and formulation, becomes especially transparent. Being only an attitude which can make use of highly varied tools for concreting, experimentalism offers us the opportunity to operate without restrictions imposed by concepts and programmes tied to a movement or a specific delimited artistic trend. Of necessity the experiment aims from one decade to the other at problems of expression, at artistic behaviour, at expression and materialization. It distances itself or moves closer to the social, manifesting a repulsion or attraction to the reference. It delimits itself again and again in accordance with changing technology or becomes excited by the latter to the point of transforming it into central myths and subordinating the language of these spectacular sources of renewal.

Line by line, experiment is an instrument of defalcation beneath the empire of political ideologies. It can then become united with the most pure aestheticism or may define the means of finding in the social, in the historical experience, and even explicitly in politics, a field of reference and action. We can follow the evolution of artistic trends in contemporary Romanian art (obviously in connection with the whole of the universal artistic phenomenon), from the tension towards abstraction and self-reference to the most acute implication in the commentary on reality and the action within reality, from Constructivism of the 60's to DeConstructivism,

etc. We are also continuously witnessing reconsidered attitudes of the idea of definition in connection with its own traditions or the tendency explained as national impersonality. This is of obvious interest to autochthon traditions (local, regional, etc.) or completely detached from them, in its aspiration to be in the forefront. It affords the creative subject an open and immediate dialogue with any one of the ideas of the moment. In some cases, independence from cultural conditioning of any kind is very great. Either due to the lack of assumed information or from a liberating process of all this data, the experiment expresses a pure structural curiosity in connection with a fresh reality whose rational or iconographic contemplation leads again and again to surprising discovery. We move through the stage of enthusiastic exploration of the most frequented reality as a meeting between the contemplative and analytical subject. The world proposes a succession of sensorially or rationally accessible truths. It arrives at the nucleus, inaccessible to the sensorial experience as well as to the most sophisticated inductive mental tool. The experiment recharges itself paradoxically with significance with which it seems by nature to be incompatible. This happens with artists who are little preoccupied with the seductions and imperatives of the most pressing actualities. It is a way to engage in a reintegration along a recently transtemporal, even transcendent vertical line to the temporal level, but on which is inevitably written the succession of several options which contradict or recover an autochthon cultural predisposition. The extension of the concept towards this phenomenon seems paradoxical. But when the motives and the operating methods are deeply analyzed, we notice that precisely here one of the most interesting cultural syntheses occurs. However, it is this very capacity that proposes original solutions and operates the synthesis between accentuated polar trends of a specific historic path that constitutes the purpose of this research. And therefore we must also analyze the problems which inevitably arose in these decades for artists who created historical landmarks with radical cultural consequences.

As the Romanian culture was configured at the end of the 1950's, it was dominated by the repulsion of an esthetic ideology. More recently this has had a rudimentary consequence, in the esthetic plan of political ideology, foreign, filled with its traditional essence, as with the group of Western European models towards which it had turned only one century before. The desynchronization with Western European models, to which Romanian society turned in its conviction to break its ties with medieval conservatism, is one of the first problems of our culture in the postmodern period. It also appeared as something absolutely necessary,

indispensable, even dangerous to the effort of homogenous modernization. Suffice it to recall here the thesis "forms without depth" formulated by Titu Maiorescu at the end of the XIXth century. Culture between the wars appears tense and creative. It is between these two poles of renewal that it reaches its apogee in the avant-garde movements of the 1920's and 30's, as well as the conservative trends which attempt to fix the movement and the contribution of models to things already assimilated. Or more radical and fertile yet, it reactualizes the old models and gives them more prestige in an attempt to highlight the inalienable defining lines of an autochthon spirituality. The post-war Soviet occupation brutally severs both trends, at a time when they already furnished operating creations within the local parameter, and brought major contributions to European culture. On the one hand, the avant-garde spirit resolved categorically the problem of de-synchronization. It cancelled with irony the importance of a long evolution in cultural history from which we were absent, offered first by Tristan Tzara through Dadaism, a by no means negligible element of European avantgardism. Brancusi, on the other hand, capitalizes on the deepest traditions, and prehistoric substructures - here the feeling of prehistoric time gains importance - bringing in his turn a substantial contribution to the classicizing direction of modernity.

After 1947, Romanian art broke not only from Western Europe, but also from these traditions, whose model is only recovered at the end of the 1950's.

However, one of the factors responsible for the renewal of art during the 1970's is the exhibition of the work of Ion Tuculescu (1965), who can be understood only in the context of an extended avant-garde. Underlying relations with the cultural heritage appear in many forms, perhaps more obviously in literature and theatre, but the general climate is that of programmed ignorance.

The geopolitical imprisonment of the Eastern region, imposed in the 1950's and 60's, affected all artistic forms, even superficially. But their relationship to the recent avant-garde tradition occurred differentially. Socialist Realism, the single concept imposed on the cultures of the Eastern European bloc, is not directly integrated, although it generates many works of compliance solicited by political propaganda in an attempt to create its own mythology. Most of these cultures reject it, or if it enters as a factor in the genesis of certain original phenomena, these are relevant precisely as phenomena of opposition. We must mention that political oppression is not only a factor which hinders the natural evolution of these cultures seeking their solutions in the face of the fascinating contemporary reality. It is also the

decisive factor for the elaboration of strategies of opposition. Due to these radical situations in the attitudinal plan, any creation which is nonconformist charges itself with political meaning, implicit or declared.

According to their older or more recent traditions, the Eastern Bloc countries would find ways to resist and escape from isolationism. Eloquent examples are found in former Yugoslavia with typically experimentalist groups EXAT 51 of Zagreb, OHO JUNIJ of Ljubljana, COD of Novi Sad, in the Polish school of poster and stage designing, in the Hungarian (Actionist) movements, in the Czech Neo-Suprrealist directions, as well as in the uniform wave of Abstractionism practiced in this entire region. However, a spectacular and convincing integration of Socialist Realism is produced in Russian culture. Here the very clear persistence of realist strata and political commitment (even of the opposition) from the Glasnost decades, are illustrated by Erik Bulatov's Citationism and Ilia Kabokov's Installationism, which cannot be understood without this point of reference. Of particular importance is the fact that the cultural reality of the Eastern countries owe their unity to a similar situation in connection with common exterior pressure and a similarly joint opening towards the European models, and not to open and fruitful communication between the diverse national enclaves. The circulation of the model occurs between each culture in part and European Universalism, more often than in a regional framework. The real transparency and systematic communication between these cultures is a phenomenon of the 1990's.

On closer analysis of the artistic phenomena of the 1980's and 90's, when a powerful come-back of the Supernumeraries occurred in direct relation with the Western movements of the new Supernumerarity with Hyperrealism and other forms of Neo-Realism, we will notice a specific tonality and content of Supernumerarity and Realism of the East. The most important example in Romanian art is the work of Ion Grigorescu, an experimental artist par excellence, who uses all available media and techniques to besiege reality. He is an artist who is always aware of what is going on in contemporary and universal art news. He is similarly aware of historical motivations and trans-historic places. He engages a complex dialogue, in search of specific human truth, even with the vision of this type of Realism naturally opposing the tendencies towards academization, free formulation and permanent innovation of expression.

The generation of the 1980's (Aniela Firon, Dan Mihaltianu, Marilena Preda Sanc, Teodor Graur, Ioana Batranu, Cristian Paraschiv, Mircea Tohatan, Andrei Chintila) practiced Bad-painting, image collages, references to kitsch, and irony, engaging in the Realist exploration of the human as a



biological dimension or as a personal drama in connection with society, with the opening towards new techniques and media, and often with Expressionism.

The theme of Socialist Realism, which had become the referential content, reappeared powerfully in the 1990's, dominated by an intensive engagement of art in politics. It becomes the programme not only for several explanatory essay-like syntheses, but even for the creation of news. In any case, Realism becomes diversified, not only stylistically, but as a media option, and further as an area for investigation. The most interesting phenomenon of this is the practice of Sociological art, and Live art (the subREAL group, Marcel Bunea, the Euroartist group, Dan Perjovschi, Teodor Graur, Marilena Preda Sanc, Lia Perjovschi, Sandor Bartha, Kinema Ikon, Utto Gustav), which largely dominates the most innovative manifestations of the last years. The Timisoara Intermedia Festival, AnnArt of Sfantu Gheorghe, the exhibitions of the Soros Centre for Contemporary Art, etc.. We find ourselves at the opposite pole of esthetic autonomy in relation to the 1960's, and the first signs of escape from the post-war crisis of cultural imprisonment. This break-out was unavoidable, precisely because of the esthetic dissociation from other corresponding functions, primarily from propagandist rhetoric and through the liberation of the image from the servitude of representation. The constant debate about the connection between form and content, probably one of the most sterile of our culture, which absolutizes and generalizes esthetic attitudes which are in themselves equally controversial or legitimate, covers a real situation of the late 1960's and the beginning of the 1970's. It continued very late, even after Abstraction in its diverse forms had become a more acceptable attitude for the authorities than critical Supernumerarity.

The cultural rebirth is dependent upon the evolution of the historical situation, of the beginnings of various relaxations in East-West relations, produced at the end of the 1950's, which allowed freer circulation of information, of persons, and even of art. The first attempts at regaining esthetic autonomy, begun in the late 1950's, the exhibitions of Ion Bitzan, Virgil Almasanu, and Constantin Craciun for instance, remains in the area of recreating connections with the most inoffensive esthetic tradition which precedes the moment of the 1947 cleavage. There are two directions through which art reformulates its expression and even its motivations throughout the 1970's and later decades. One is the open direction towards universal information. The other is the recovery of traditional sources and, although the configuration of the artistic climate includes both simultaneously, for the purposes of analysis we must approach them successively, noting the moments when they converge.

The first direction in which the experimental spirit evolved is the opening to information, a critical distancing from any burden of inertia, of any kind of stake which might slow down the movement.

Originality is conceived as a novelty, delimitation does not occur in connection with the horizontal uniformity to which it intensely aspires, but rather towards vertical immobility. The only roots susceptible to recovery are those of the avant-garde between the wars, while the connections with this channel, for example in literature, are persistent through an oneiric direction. In the visual arts these are realised fairly late. The renewal does not come with the recovery of the gesture of this avant-garde, not at least in the experimental areas. When the most spectacular renewal took place, it appeared as a renewal of expression, primarily through the Constructivist and Abstract wave. We can consider that the experimental elements appear even at the beginning of the 1970's, although they are not made public until the middle of this decade. After all, the experiment is primarily a workshop problem, or one of artistic elaboration, even when at a particular moment it concentrates on the relation of communication. The 1970s witness a movement of fairly well-represented artists who, with varying degrees of caution, experiment with the renewal of expression: Doru Bucur, Vlad Florescu, Ilie Pavel, Vincentiu Grigorescu, Mihai Rusu, Andrei Cadere, etc. The 1970's are dominated by tensions towards Abstraction, of the Constructivist or Purist forms. Constructivism which was practiced by the Timisoara artists (the 111 group: Roman Cotosman, Constantin Flondor Strainu, Stefan Bertalan), Diet Sayler, as well as Mihai Olos from Baia Mare, brings form and artistic expression back into discussion, as well as the very current at this time of social communication and the engagement of art, included in Constructivism and kinetic Estheticism. These preoccupations about the role of art, the democratization of communication through a formal artistic language, and the elimination of unlimited connotative plans were typical of Constructivism, with a more pragmatic Estetic than that of purist Abstraction, practiced by artists like Vincentiu Grigorescu, Horia Mihai, Stefan Sevastre, Liviu Stoicoviciu. On the other hand, the mobility of the artists who started out under Constructivism and who in the 1970's practiced experimental action between Land-art, Impressionism and studies, the members of the Sigma group - Flondor, Bertalan, Tulcan - is due largely to Constructivism being open to collision with the Conceptualist movements towards the large field of problems which do not end at the level of form. Pure Formalism, even if it changes its definition in time from Abstract art to Concrete art, will in fact retain motivations, operative methods, tools, the experiment consuming itself only as an

individual adventure, as a deepening of formal or chromatic situations, in a theoretic, academic parameter. It is the area of the disunified and disinterested experiment of renewal.

On the other hand, Constructivism itself dilutes its theoretic barriers, and its tendency to glide towards new territories is marked by the Constructivist Biennial in Nürnberg of 1969, in which the Timisoaran artists of the 111 Group and the Bucharest artists Ilie Pavel and Miha Rusu took part as well. Too few of the contemporary movements of the time were missing from the ambitious programme of the Biennial. In any case, here the problems under consideration were the ambient, as a spacial extension of the image, and the artistic object. In Romanian art, preoccupation with the ambient will find an ample echo in most artistic genres; in other words, the status of the artistic object, of the object image, had already been put into the forefront by Pop art, not from positions of a rational estheticism which affords order at the level of esthetic experience, but on the contrary from the area of the ironic commentary, of a world more and more object-oriented. This is the place for free expression of the subject. If a direction of painting had become action, and the crossing over from Action-painting to Happening is a logical solution, then various directions of lyric Expressionism can meet the object as extension of a subjective concrete. This direction of search at the crossroads between Expressionist painting and the three-dimensional object can also be found at the end of the 1960's and throughout the 1970's, in the works of Romul Nutiu and Cirprian Radovan of Timisoara, Florian Maxa of Cluj, and Teodor Moraru of Bucharest, and continues to be present into the 1990's with painters such as Petru Lucaci.

One of the most interesting versions of the object is presented at the end of the 1960's by Paul Neagu and Ion Bitzan. Paul Neagu launches the concept of Palp'art and constructs objects meant for sight and touch. This represents the beginning of an approach of complex obtaining of the world through the immediate, material holding of the sensory, passing through Edible art (Cake Man) and Happenings from the series (Blind Bite, Going Tornado, or Jump) extended throughout the 1970's. We recognize here, along with a taste for games, a serious alternative to the approaches in the Conceptualist area which begins with the cycle Anthropocosmos and continues through "Generative Art" and its Conceptualist sculpture, like materialized drawings, towards "Visual Hermeneutics". At the beginning of the 1980's the object acquires new connotations in its extension towards environment, installation, scenic ambient, as proposed by Wanda Mihuleae, Sorin Dumitrescu and Marilena Preda Sanc.

Through the work of Ion Bitzan, an artist highly sensitive to the events and preoccupations of Universal art, and with a great affinity with materialism and artifact, the object moves from game with matter, through the book object and cassette addressed to the affective or sensorial memory towards the Installation (the "Library" series of the 1990's). Preoccupations with writing, with this medium which loses ground in the face of new systems of communication, mobilizes almost all experimental artists exploring the mediatic universe (Geta Bratescu, Wanda Mihuleac, Decebal Scriba, Alexandra Chira, Horia Bernea, Marilena Preda Sanc, Andrei Oisteanu, Ion Grigorescu, Lia Perjovschi, Ion Stendl, Roxana Trestioreanu, Serbana Dragoescu, Doina Simionescu, Ruxandra Grigorescu, Dan Mihaltianu, Suzana Fantanaru, etc.), authors of text or book objects.

Special problems are raised by the experiment in the area of sculpture, whose expression is renewed in the 1960's through an abstraction with various sources, from the autochthon, explored by George Apostu, to the Constructivism of Mihai Olos and Paul Vasilescu, to the formal Purism of Napoleon Tiron, and industrial ready-made of Vigh Istvan. Subsequently, sculpture developed concomitantly towards a new semantic scope, reapproaching the anthropomorphism of a new perspective (Napoleon Tiron, Doru Covrig, Mircea Spataru, Aurel Vlad, Darie Dup, Mircea Roman), and naturally without losing the technical specificity of the genre, towards the ambient and the installation (Mihai Buculei, Neculai Paduraru, Marian Zidaru, Romelo Pervolovici, Iulian Olariu, Aurel Vlad, Relu Marasteanu).

The sculpture camps of Magura-Buzau, Arcus, Galati, Buteni, Hobita, Casoaia, and Scanteia create space, the ideal moment for the cultural experiment, constituting itself in its entirety as large museal ambients. Interesting proposals for the destiny of the object come during these years from the area of Decorative art, especially tapestry. Preoccupation with volumetric or ambient tapestry, as a source of inspiration for the technical resolution in diverse cultural areas, appeared already during the 1960's with the tapestries of Ritzi Jacobi and Ana Lupas, and continue throughout the following decades. Ritzy and Peter Jacobi extend tapestry towards the ambient, towards mixed techniques (assemblages of metal, wood, etc.) and the Installation. Ana Lupas, who creates Actions and Installations with textile materials, is preoccupied with three-dimensional spatial tapestry (Flying Carpets) series, with the object in collision with sculpture (objects created with the sculptor Mircea Spataru) and arriving in a natural manner at the Installation based on the textile element (Humid Installation, 1960's and 90's), or intermediaries (the cycle Preparation for a round Grave). The

lucid objects of Serbana Dragoescu, presented in Lausanne in 1977 (Game for adults), her textile miniatures which become more and more independent of woven techniques, the volumetric tapestries of Daniela Grusevschi, belong in their turn to the area of the experiment. In addition, these artists in the area of tapestry naturally extend their research and exploration in the area of specific techniques and towards installation, actions and spatial modelling. Flags, Stairs, Chairs, the curtain-architecture tapestry The Hero by Serbana Dragoescu, the ambient-action of the cycle The Seasons, ample ambient, anthropomorphic, labyrinthine structures by Daniela Grusevschi, open the textile genres to a combination of several disciplines with complex theoretical motivations. This same phenomenon can be noted in ceramics. In the 1970s we witnessed an interest in monumental ceramics. The urban Symposium of Medgidia is probably the most eloquent example. Other innovations come from the highly applied study of the technical possibilities, from the attempt to adapt them to a continuously growing and nuanced expression, beyond the decorative. And again, the path leads to complex manifestations, to installations (Mircea Spataru, Vasile Cercel, Cornel Ailincai, Mircea Popescu, Arina Ailincai) and even actions in which, at a certain moment, ceramics might not even be of interest anymore, and even the study of materialism moves into a secondary plan (Alexandru Antik, Nicolae Onucsan).

And in addition, one of the characteristics of the last decades is precisely the combination of several disciplines, the use of various techniques which from the auxiliary become autonomous (photography, film). Photography and the slide are used in the formal and pedagogic study of the Sigma Group as early as the 1970's. In another direction, linked to subjective introspection or the realist image, photography becomes a preoccupation of Ion Grigorescu and the youth recognized during the 1990's (Iosif Kiraly, Dan Mihaltianu, Marilena Preda Sanc, Dorel Gaina, Aniko Gerendi, Gheorghe Rasovszky, Teodor Graur, Radu Igaszag, etc.). These artists were preoccupied with all new media forms. The artist's film also becomes an important area for the experiments (filmography) of the Sigma Group, with the cinematographic installation Multivision, the films of Serban Epure, Ion Grigorescu, of Geta Bratescu, Wanda Mihuleac, Radu Igaszag, Olimpiu Bandalac and of the experimental group Kinema Ikon of Arad, led by Gheorghe Sabau, etc. In a natural way those working with film begin to become preoccupied in the 1990's with video art, which wins ground. More and more artists opt for this medium (Geta Bratescu, Radu Igaszag, Alexandru Solomon, the subREAL Group, Sorin Vreme, Marilena Preda Sanc, Josef Bartha, Laszlo Ujvarossy, Matei Bajenaru). One of the

most fascinating and novel works, in which we rediscover the technical preoccupation with the object and the combination of several disciplines, is the research of Constantin Baciú, a traditional graphic artist. During the 1970's and 80's, he becomes interested in the study of various non-conventional sources of energy, of principles of movement, of technicality at the limit of utopia. His approach remained, however, as did many others already mentioned, at the stage of conceptualization. This conceptualization, which governs a large part of the innovative phenomena of the 1980's and 90's, succeeds the abstract directions, but the area covered is much vaster. From it issue forth the directions which are preoccupied with the sign as well as with the relation between the significant and the meaningful. Artists such as Wanda Mihuleac, Decebal Scriba, Sorin Dumitrescu, Andrei Oisteanu appear interested in semiotics, in the same way that the Timisoara artists were searching for motivations in the theory of information, in the psychology of forms and communication, and Paul Neagu is preoccupied by Chomsky's Structuralism. A parallel language is sought and the combination of several disciplines goes beyond the esthetic framework of the convergence and the interference of genres and ventures into a different area of thinking (Cybernetics - Serban Epure, Adina Caloenescu; Physics - Constantin Baciú; Architecture and Design - Dragos Gheorghiu). Serban Epure's interest in communication between the mathematical language (Cybernetics) and the language of visual arts responds to various insistent attempts, through which new systems and technologies of mathematization - computerization - informatization of the intellectual and spiritual experience progress more and more into the field of esthetics (Abraham Moles, with his essays dedicated to art and the computer, is translated during this period). The direction of Informational art can be found again in the 1990's, practiced by artists such as Alexandru Patatic, Sandor Bartha, Josef Bartha, Alexandru Antik, but here the computer is already an instrument for an art of another kind of reflexivity, and not the source of a new model of expression. Art takes on solidarity with the scientific spirit, the most fertile relation to generating the experiment. On the other hand Conceptualism also characterizes many of the first experiments in the area of action (those of the Sigma Group of the 1970's, Paul Neagu, Iulian Mereuta and Mircea Florian's Happenings). Decebal Scribal's actions also have conceptualist premises in which he uses the alphabet and other signing systems and codes. He also uses the landscape, the human body, or objects containing cultural connotations, the clew-labyrinth or the mirror, for the cycles of photographic images of traces of consumed action, usually solitary, "of workshop", with a limited public. A part of this theme, as a system of exploration, combining action with methods of fixing traces in the pictures - drawing, photography, film -

are used in this same period by Wanda Mihuleac. However, she accords a much more implicative nuance to visual experiences, starting from Body-art and Installations on the theme "Tautologies" which continues to explore more closely the territory of intermedia, analyzing the structures and operating methods of language. A special place must be reserved for the rebellious and unconventional behaviour of Andrei Cadere. In the 1970's he exhibited his objects (from the cycle The Walking Stick) in a parasitic manner in the exhibitions of several consecrated artists in Parisian galleries. From this very generous body also come the approaches of Horia Bernea, participant in the Paris Youth Biennial in 1971, in the conceptualist section (together with Serban Epure and Paul Neagu), with the cycles Shoulder Straps and their graphic and textual meanings about A Certain Disorder. He will evolve towards a type of analysis in which the realism of observation and Expressionism will meet in a landscape that will lead towards the most profound motivations of tradition, those of Christian philosophy. But this path towards a religious philosophy originates most naturally from Conceptualism. Its relationship with the object is also symptomatic, beginning with spectacular experiments with bi-dimensional objects (Zmee, Lancl), leading to the image (in plan), with traditional cultural connotations, connected to the morphologies of religious art (Proporii). All of these premises offered by Conceptualism, by the new poetics of the object, hypertrophic in the ambient and the Installation, by the interest for new techniques and the diversity of the relationship as well as the recurrence of Realism, are found in the preoccupations of the generations asserting themselves during the 1980's and 90's. The artists who began during the exhibitions of Workshop 35 (organized by Mihai Driscu, Horia Bernea, Wanda Mihuleac, Radu Procopovici, Ana Lupas, Ion Grigorescu, Magda Carneci, Mircea Oliv, Anca Vasiliu, Calin Dan) are characterized by mobility, by diversity of methods, by the actuality of the information and the simultaneousness of the experiments used. They seem just as preoccupied by esthetic ideologies intersecting with political ideologies and social research, by the possibilities of the extension of media, by the adaptability of expression in relation with the continuously new problems raised by the historic context and cultural information. They are receptive to tensions revolving around esthetic ideologies which are emphasized during the new decade, linked to the theory of information, of new subjectivisms, of new forms of a narrative art, in the end to the entire body of styles and genres dependent on the synchronistic movement. We have already seen many among these young people practicing a Realism in communication with Bad-painting or in the meeting with Expressionism, a Realism which descends at times into the social, at times into the biological. The borders of the field become more and more

permeable. Not all of these manifestations are to be found in the experimental field, but we find ourselves on fertile ground for experiment. The subject, a field insistently explored in its intimacy, is the motivation for investigations of very different artists, such as Dan Mihaltianu, with introspective Installations and Actions; Dorel Gaina and Dan Perjovschi (before the discovery of the social as a source for commentary); Marilena Preda Sanc, preoccupied with the complexity of biological, psychological and social expressions of the id; Lia Perjovschi, known for her performances which approach the id and social behaviour without gentleness; Roxana Trestioreanu who uses the intimate id as her reference point in media Installations; Sandor Bartha and Laszlo Ujvarossy who follow the identity of the subject in the impersonal context of mediated communication. For all these artists, the id and subjectivity do not generate self-confessional gestures, or a territory for research and exploration, even if we are not looking at detached observations. What dominates in their introspective actions is the proposed, controlled framework of the incursions.

It is appropriate to mention here that for many of these artists who work with photography, film, video art, mail-art as an extension of artistic communication, and of course, traditional genres, the Installation and action are favourite methods of manifestation, precisely because of their behavioural complexity. The young generation, Alexandru Patatic, Matei Bajenaru, Tudor Vreme, Mirela Dauceanu, Ecaterina Orbulescu, Aurora Dediu, Cosmin Paulescu, Stefan Cios, coming out during the 1990's develops in this climate, and their works stand out due to the attempt to find solutions to originality, particularly through the infusion of a specific content into various manifestations for which the interference of the media and the equivalence of expression no longer constitutes a novelty. We have seen how nuanced the evolution of the artistic object is when submitted to various experiments. Action benefits from an evolution of motivations and methods as varied and captivating, from pure experimentalism with a character of study practised by the members of the Timisoaran Group, to Paul Neagu's Happening with philosophic motivations (1970's), to the cultural itineraries of Mihai Olas (A Statue roams through Europe, Meeting Gaudi, Meeting Beys, 1970's), and Andrei Cadere (The Wanderer from Cassel). The same is true of the passage through intimism during the 1980's by the Bucharest group (Wanda Mihuleac, Andrei Oisteanu, Dan Mihaltianu, Teodor Graur, Iosif Kiraly, Calin Dan) with House Party, the shouldering of the social and political content (Teodor Graur, Alexandru Antik, subREAL, Dan Perjovschi) and the religious (Marian Zidaru). This political involvement is also announced by the manifestations in 1986 in



Sibiu, otherwise forbidden by censure. The last decade recovers almost all sources of the genre, exploring historical, cultural, religious, social and even subjective reality. A special case of "sociological art" which affords a wider panorama of the problems of the 1980's is a series of interesting phenomena which occurred in the area of the intersection between art and industry, not within the areas of experienced industrial design, but as a phenomenon of sociological art. In 1971, the sculptor Vigh Istvan trained workers in the Factories of Suceava in formal, creative experiments with industrially produced parts. In 1973, the collective composed of the painters Corneliu Vasilescu and Lucian Georgescu, the psychologist Catalin Mamali, and the art critic Alexandra Titu experimented with the transformation of space in a productive area of the Barlad Bearing Factory through a vast action of psycho-sociological investigation which yielded an artistic ambient.

We are witnessing a vast movement of esthetic ideas evaluated and even catalysed by a series of exhibitions with a programme, organized by critics and artists directly involved in the genesis of the artistic phenomenon (Dan Haulica, Mihai Driscu, Coriolan Babeti, Wanda Mihuleac, Horia Bernea, Paul Gherasim, Ion Grigorescu, Ana Lupas, Calin Dan, Magda Carneci, Ilie Boca, Imre Baasz, Stefan Savastre, Anca Vasiliu, Liviana Dan, Erwin Kessler).

The exhibitions "Art and energy" (1974, Bucharest), "Art and the city" (1975, Bucharest), "The Study" I and II (1978, 1982, Timisoara), "The Writing" (1980, Bucharest), "Medium" (1981, 1992, Sfantu Gheorghe), "Geometry and sensibility" (1982, Sibiu), "Expression of the human body" (1982), "The place - hearth and metaphor" (1983, Bucharest), "The Mobile-Photography" (1985, Baia Mare), "Alternatives" (1987, Bucharest), "Medium" II (1992, Sfantu Gheorghe), "Ex Oriente Lux" (1993, Bucharest), "01010101" (1994, Bucharest), "Media Culpa" (1995, Bucharest) foster the active, theoretical spirit, in which the local cultural syntheses are prepared. The exhibitions of Workshop 35 unveil particularly the mobility of the young artists, their inter-media availability and their rebellious spirit. In the last decade, the inter-media and performance festivals in Timisoara, Arad, Lacul Sfanta Ana, the combination of fine arts, performance and street theatre in Bistrita, express the dynamic character of a culture which is committed to adapt less accessible genres or to reconsider the border of artistic communication in a synchronized dialogue with postmodernism.

I have left until last the body of phenomena which leads towards autochthone syntheses, based more on recovery of the deeper levels of

tradition. This attitude operates simultaneously with the synchronistic one. Often artists who are aware of the movement of the universal idea and present in the centre of the renewal of expression, are those who ensure the scope of the synthesis movement. The interest in ideologies of abstraction (Paul Gherasim, Marin Gherasim), conceptualist directions (Horia Bernea, Constantin Flondor), and realist premises (Ion Grigorescu) converge towards synthesis. The regional tradition is stratified while the method of approach, from Christian sentiment and dogmatic consciousness of this spirit (Prolog Group, Sorin Dumitrescu) to the historic picturesqueness of the subREAL Group ("Draculaland"), raises the complexity of relations with the local patrimony, and reference to this heritage becomes once again very current from the postmodernist perspective.

We return to a short chronological overview. I have seen motivations of abstractionism practiced during the 1960's dependent on constructivist and purist European formalism. It would however be incorrect to justify the suspicion in relation to realism and supernumerality which dominate the 1970's, exclusively as a reaction in socialist realism or as an effect of a desire to synchronize with the Western models of the epoch. The repulsion against realism is due in large part to a much older attitudinal background, of byzantine traditions and, even deeper, that of a transhistoric, transparent strata, present as a living, yet still inoperative element in popular peasant sculpture. Some of the most interesting approaches of the 1960's are those of Mihai Olos. On the one hand he approaches Constructivism as a type of abstraction, using elements of folkloric morphologies. On the other he practices the happening in relation with ritual and magic gesture from local rural traditions. He is an informed artist at the European level, but operates from the first moment in virtue of a spirit of synthesis. Let us recall his happenings 25 (Baia Mare, 1969), Gold and Wheat (Herja Mine, 1972), The Earth (Cuhea, 1973), ((Dedeochiul) (Giessen, 1978). These same European and local sources are used also by Ana Lupas in her installations during the 1960's and 70's which modernize textile arts, inspired by the behaviour and the nucleus of meaning of peasant civilization.

For a short while George Apostu calls on the structures of peasant sculpture. His work can be considered as an essential reference point for new formal and symbolic thinking.

The recourse to the folkloric model can be noted also in the experimental choreographic and musical works of these decades.

The rural universe will continue to furnish referential substance to the various approaches during the 1980's and 90's, culminating with a large ambient installation, Horia Bernea's Museum of the Romanian Peasant. Always preoccupied with the interaction of the current modes of operation

derived from conceptualism and the national traditional strata, he becomes Director of this institution in 1991.

Several exhibitions will be dedicated to the crossing of the modern and tradition in the world of the village and the reflection of popular culture and the universe of the peasant in modern art. Many artists will attempt this as a source of morphology (Gheorghe Iliescu-Calinesti, Ovidiu Maitec, Claudiu Filimon). But only those seeking to recover the entire dimension of this version of society, the alternative along the path of disappearance of contemporary civilization, belong to an experimental direction (Ion Grigorescu, Paul Gherasim). The most spectacular and highly complex recovery is produced in the work of Alexandru Chira, who, for nearly three decades starting from his debut at the beginning of the 1970s, elaborates a project concretized in stages of drawing, painting, film, object, textile, and in the 1990s in a vast magical-mnemo-technical-utopian installation of the village (Tauseni) as an entity containing the universal model. This traditional stratum will be ever present. In each of these decades there exists creative tension between the experiment linked to a technical world and the scientific premise and the peasant model.

The other dimension of tradition, which operates primarily at the end of the 1970's as an alternative to all the universal problems, is the byzantine model. It is recovered as a formal source in the 1980's by Marin Gherasim, Cristian Paraschiv, Stefan Ramniceanu, or as an opening towards a reactualizing Christian ideology, with methods of expression belonging to Western tradition. Here we are referring to the landscape painting of the Prolog Group. A separate place is occupied by the explorations into comparative artistic anthropology and iconic archaeology of Sorin Dumitrescu. These explorations from the platonic premise of formal degradation in relation to the absolute model highlighted by the icon and to which his concrete reality and realist representations and modernist post-Picassoian are merely inevitable deformations.

A spectacular case of absolutism of several very old Christian spiritual traditions, formulated into an acute postmodern expression is that of Marian Zidaru, author of a Christian workshop, within the framework of religious architecture and daily behaviour in which ritual and aesthetics merge.

Landscape painting, which is probably the most used genre of modern Romanian art, is reinvested with a prospective character by the Prolog Group. It is no longer the reflex of paradisiacal or hedonistic nostalgia, nor

a pretext for a pure painting, but the result of serious contemplations, taken on again as a path towards truth. Although the methods are, as I said, those elaborated by Western post-Renaissance practice of observation and representation, it is now invested with the function of the icon, the revealed face of divine harmony.

Horia Bernea is the artist par excellence of this transition from an area of a secular interest in reality who, while practicing landscape painting, arrives at this ultimate dimension of reality. The synthesis operates in this case in a highly complex manner, rallying the level actuality with different steps (as temporal depth) of these traditions that define a certain specific spirituality. Certainly, this is a symptom of postmodernism which precisely opposes the interest in cultural identity, in differentiation and alternative, the internationalist tendency of modernism, expressed by formal purism and the search for uniformity at the level of deep structures.

Certainly, experimentation in this area, as a spiritual predisposition and a selective discernment in relation to international matters, had to be permanently delimited during the 1990s. The years are dominated by a new wave of nationalist dogmatism, part of a political attempt to accredit the typologies of a natural culture at the most conventional level. A prolonged proletcultism, undermining value through political kitsch, through rhetorical iconology, through academic form, defines during the 1980's the territory of the production of cultural inertia. The directions of experimentalism do not exhaust the attempts to oppose the authentic value of the wave of mediocre nationalism, but this is the subject of other research.

The relation of the assumed experiment-tradition appears paradoxical, if not radically incompatible. It is precisely here that one finds the opening of this concept, for which, unlike avant-garde, the past is not an inert mass, hindering the linear advance of progress. It is not the favourite term of a destructive critical aggression, but one of the many elements of reality - as fascinating as any other territory. Naturally, the motivation of artists who attempt a redefinition, not merely plausible but coherent and operative, of cultural identity, is not belong exclusively experimental. It does, however, belong to the experimental area by virtue of its interest in certain problems which are confronted, not rhetorically, not even sentimentally (rhetorical subjectivism), but rather with a lucid instrument of the artists which imposes and takes on theoretical terms of various attitudes. And the methods used are experimental, often beyond conventionality of appearances, precisely because they use and comment on even the destiny and functionality of conventions.