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## Short Treaty on Wear

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This text was archived at the Institute for Contemporary Art in Zagreb collection, as part of the **Research project** conceived in 1997 by a SCCAN – Soros Centers for Contemporary Art Network, funded by the Open Society Foundation, New York.

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.

We did not intervene in any of texts more than just correcting obvious typos and spelling. On the occasion of collecting texts, we were given permission from all authors, to rightfully use them. If anyone now has different instructions, please, contact us at the [info@institute.hr](mailto:info@institute.hr).

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 them 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.

## Leo Gherasim

### Short Treaty on Wear

The Bessarabian visual art - considered in its ensemble - may be fitted into the theoretical schema, called by Anca Oroveanu "The two models."<sup>1</sup> Applied tale quale, this distinction illustrates those two (predominant) poles characteristic of the visual phenomenon. On the one hand one can distinguish a certain "post-romantic" and paternal deposited tradition, which stylistically preserves the well-known "tics," typical of the "socialist realism." On the other hand, a group that is aware of synchronization coagulates; although belated, this one is felt as urgent, a connection with the "ad hoc," "equidistant-from-the-means" type of expression ("their wear is contextual, just as the message is contextual").<sup>2</sup>

This distinction becomes legitimate only if we analyse the Bessarabian art after 1989; until that time, with few exceptions, the works of autochthonous artists were tributes to the "traditional" model. Shortly before 1989 an artistic event occurred which determined me to start believing that the taste for "experiment" is older, even though is consumed almost in an undertone.

The adjustment to the nonconventional means and materials was hard and cautious, if not even perfidious, for the artists of Chisinau. They were not prepared to express themselves in a way different from what their mentors had accustomed them to in classes. Neither those who graduated after

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<sup>1</sup> see Anca Oroveanu "Cele doua modele," in *Arta*, #1-2, 1993, p. 4-6

<sup>2</sup> idem, p. 4

1980-1985, i.e. in a (illusory) reformist time, resorted to other means than those with which they were familiar. They did not feel this need, being aware that there was no demand for such an approach to the problems of art.

Sociologically speaking, it did not promise any profit. Their "experiments" were naturally consumed inside the predetermined limits, avoiding any kind of "attempts" upon the traditional technical and stylistic skeleton.

It might be surprising for some, but sculptors gave the tone of changes. In 1985, on the bank of the lake from Bariera Sculeni, in a courtyard of sculpture studios, appeared an ensemble of constructions of iron, which can be catalogued as "assemblages" or "interventions" - some "sculptures" made from ready-made refuses, and brought to a "cemetery" of used metal. Their mission was to draw the public's attention to the incontestable wear of society. The exhibition was entitled "Rust & Co.," and the poster warned: "Exhibition without the right to be presented on the television! The corrosion of the bureaucratic apparatus and its terminology continues. Everybody to "Sculeanca!" The authors invite you tomorrow and throughout the year to the exhibition."<sup>3</sup>

This event, which is still not fully understood, may be quoted as one of openness and detachment, at least at the mental level, from the old clichés and the comfortable ossification of the visual environment of Chisinau. These assemblages, conceived by the sculptor Valeriu Moskov and the architect Nicolae Ischimji, rather detach themselves as an effect of the vague relaxation in society (being at the same time a "holiday in relation with the fundamental concerns")<sup>4</sup> than strictly represent some artistic manifestations. It was an act of great courage to appear in public with such sculptural improvisations, because times turned out to be pretty muddled and still inappropriate for a creative freedom. However, thanks to this experiment a mobilization of young forces to support that start was felt; the latter artists themselves ventured in the course of time upon making similar things, performing at length metal sculpture, welding improvisations, chromatic interventions on rusted surfaces, joining many metals, etc. Moreover, for the first time was mooted the question of the sculpture relation with the environment as well as the interaction of pieces. One should also add that in the milieu of sculpture studios from Bariera Sculeni

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<sup>3</sup> It is interesting that an article about this event could appear only at the end of 1989, in a moment of maximum ideological relaxation. But even then, its author had to talk about this ensemble as one that was drawn upon a literary source (Platonov, Tendriakov, etc.); cf. Gr. Potostky "Jeleznoye krujevo svalky XX veka" ("The metallic lace of the 20th century dump") in *Molodeji Moldavii*, October 10, 1989, p.1,

<sup>4</sup> Anca Oroveanu "Cele doua modele" *Arta*, #1-2, 1993, p.4

a group of young sculptures asserted themselves; among them it is worth mentioning Iury Horovschi, Simion Rabinkov, Serghei Gonenko, Grigore Pototsky, etc.

Consequently, in connection with that milieu one can talk about a growing cleavage between a public, which was until that in a subordinate relation to the artwork, and the "interventions" specific to the contemporary art. They talked about wear and invited spectators to a dialogue, to an analysis of otherness ("the otherness of masterpieces ultimately consists in their impossibility to be fully assimilated by the receiver, while the otherness of the contemporary artistic products on the contrary consists in the possibility offered to the receiver to assimilate them completely."<sup>5</sup>

Without exaggerating too much, the ensemble from Bariera Sculeni meant a turning point, an innovation; it was the start of a stage for the visual art of Moldova. From then on, the "Rust & Co." project would constitute, for those who could read it as such, a kind of model for the experimental approach of social action with an ideological substratum.

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<sup>5</sup> Erwin Kessler "Existenta operei in arta contemporana," in Revista de filosofie, #3,