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The Last Ten Years

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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.

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.

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.

Octavian Esanu

The Last Ten Years

The last ten years in the history of Republic of Moldova has been marked by dynamic successions of dramatic and exciting events. It was, as a matter of fact, a compressed cycle which has been concentrated and resumed throughout the whole history of this land, like playing an old phonograph polyvinyl record at 78 speed. As it usually works, losing the content and retaining only an impression. The famous Perestroika started with street marches and gathering in crowds calling for democracy and national independence. It ripened into new democratic elections, a national language, a new flag, new symbols, and war's rages, all leading up to the present-day political and economic chaos, corruption, huge social disparities and total disappointment commonly called the *transition period*.

Visual arts' poerestroika followed almost the same scheme: first were scandalous exhibitions, then artists started a process of splintering into groups and producing events. The last ten years of local visual arts were played at the same 78 speed as the whole society. Inheriting a traditional for this closed-area historical conservatism, due largely to inheriting the "traditions" of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova, the local artistic community has *tested* during last decade almost all contemporary artistic *tools*, from performance to new media and the INTERNET.

The first artistic 'disorders' broke out in 1988-89. Even so, I have to mention a previous important artistic development in local visual arts called *Bariera Sculeni*, after the place where it started in 1985. During those times there appeared a series of iron constructions "which can be catalogued as 'assemblage' or 'interventions'* made by a sculptur Valeriu Mascov and an

architect Nikolae Iskimji. The ensemble of works exhibited under the title *Rust & Co.* and signifying society's erosion were made out of metal refuse brought from a scrap metal graveyard. Later on, many other artists joined the initiators, outlining an artistic movement.

New artistic initiatives intensified in 1989 and synchronized with the major changes which had succeeded in the social-political medium. *Search 89*, an exhibit launched by the association of the youth branch of artists within the Union of Artists, the open air Sculpture Biennial, exhibits and actions of the group *Phantom*, and the works of Iurie Horovski and Andrei Sirbu molded altogether the first antipode of official - s o c i a l i s t art. Seemingly in order to achieve a better effect and following the 'revolutionary dynamics of the time' they gathered in coalitions. Groups like *Ten*, *Phantom*, and *Bariera Sculeni* compiled all the 'rebels' in one stream.

After the first thaw that took place in 1989 -1991, followed a period marked by the activation of a new generation of visual artists. The last ones emerged suddenly and took the places of those who started the melt in 85-89. The last ones, for many reasons i.e. national, economical, political, moved to their *historical motherlands* or immigrated to new *promised lands*. During this time, we essentially "lost" an entire generation of artists, particularly those who were born in the 60s. The missing link in the chain of our artistic community became very obvious. This evident break between the generations of the 40s, 50s and 70s and those of this "lost generation" have had a great impact on Moldovan visual arts.

The years 1992 till 1995 and up to the present are marked by a more individual artistic approaches, complying with the new social 'dynamic'. Marc Verlan, one of the most representative contemporary artists who is also called "Marioca, Son of Rain," belongs to this new generation. He appeared on Chisinau's artistic scene at the beginning of the 90's. His *Exhibition of Illusions*, in 92, the exhibitions and actions of the group *Phantom*, works of Violeta Zabuica, Igor Scerbina, experiments of some lecturers and students from the Institute of Arts who tried to assert themselves through diverse ways of alternative expression started a new cycle in visual arts. In the fall of 1995, a group of artists and theatrical actors helped Marioca Son of Rain to bury a Barbie doll in an action called *Exodus. Barbie's Funeral* started a new period in local visual arts, and namely one which integrates a new type of institution, i.e. NGOs. In this case it was Open World House, a new institution which appeared at that time in Chisinau with the help of the Soros Foundation.

The democratization of the artistic message became broader with the establishment of the Soros Center for Contemporary Art, Chisinau in 1996. This

fact gave birth to the third cycle which started in 1996 and continues up to today. As a preamble to the *6th Kilometer*, the first contemporary art exhibition organized by SCCA in Chisinau, occurred the art camp *carbonART* in the summer of '96. Then followed a series of events curated and organized by the center, *Multiple Home, Pune Ochiul, CarbonART 97, Mesaje de la Tzara, Reflectii in RE, Tzara Rerum Novara Video Marathon*, etc. All these events outlined a new assembly of artists and critics. Pavel Braila, Vasile Rata and Stefan Rusu, couple Dragnev/Macari, Alexandru Tinei, Iurie Cibotari, Igor Scerbina, Veaceslav Druta, and others have composed a group of young individuals who are producing regularly contemporary art works and events. The theoretical aspect, another weak zone, has been undertaken mostly by critics and art historians i.e. Vladimir Bulat Constantin Ciobanu and Alexandru Schiopu.

The boundaries of the state's cultural policies are exclusive of contemporary visual art and limited mostly to organizing seasonal, traditional musical festivals, music being the 'vital necessity' of the Moldovan people. The infrastructure of local visual arts' cultural institutions keep the same structure as those acquired during socialism. The main state fine arts museum and the exhibition hall for the various Unions (i.e. Union of Artists, Union of Designers and Architects) endure the consequences of the transitional economy. Regularly succeeding governments during the last decade have not paid and do not *now* pay much attention to the main museums and their collections. Meanwhile the contemporary art sector has not turned into a structure with private galleries and curators producing events due to the lack of an art market and a permanent engaged audience. At the time the Soros Center for Contemporary Art is the single structure which carries out contemporary art activities i.e. documentation, grant allocations, sponsoring events and publications.

A periodical publication which would reflect contemporary visual arts has never existed in Moldova. Those cultural magazines regularly issued until about a decade ago and which compounded visual art sections share the same fate as the whole of that society. The first and single periodical at the moment is the one financed and published by SCCA - *Art hoc bulletin*, which is dedicated entirely to contemporary arts.

*Leo Gherasim, *Art Hoc # 6*, 1998