

Ruxandra Balaci

Photography — A Proposed
Chronology of An Experimental
Epoch

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Romania



EUROPSKA PRIJESTOLNICA
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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.

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.

Ruxandra Balaci

Photography — A Proposed Chronology of An Experimental Epoch

The Years 1965-1979*

-there is a rapprochement with an environment that defines a new perception framework, another visual type, allowing for several levels of interpretation and exploration of the vision (with influences of Surrealism, Dada, Bauhaus); this allowed an interconnection of nature-technology-art: it relies on immediate contact, rapid visualization (capturing), fixing and preliminary processing of a plastic idea.

-that is the time when relatively haphazard events take place: a lot of photography work is probably done, but photos are rarely exhibited as such (they stay in the lab, absolutely experimental, a drill conducted before a finite work is achieved, opening up to novelty and a non-conformist vision.)

-sometimes another type of creative act is shown (idea sketch, detail, investigation instrument)—be it traditional or not; sometimes it touches on other types of approaches (for example Bratescu, Bernea), in other cases, the interest is already intrinsically polarized by the environment (Ion Grigorescu, Mihai Oroveanu, a.o.)

1960-1961: Florin Mitroi (student) begins to make documentary photos (documentary photography that “still bears the mark of his own subjectivity”); he is still continuing his work today. He does not wish to cross his self-imposed frontier of the document, for fear of jeopardizing the exclusiveness of painting.

1963: Ion Grigorescu exhibits photographs for the first time.

1964-1966: Horia Bernea begins to make frequent use of photography (landscape).

1965: Paul Neagu exhibits his graduation work, a painting called *Targul de pe muntele Gaina* (The Fair on Mount Gaina) with an extensive photographic documentation.

1969: Ion Grigorescu exhibits with Manuel Zeltzer at the Youth Athenaeum; the exhibition poster was a photo collage.

1969-1980: The Timisoara School, coordinated by the Sigma group, promotes photography as an instrument of plastic research (modeled on functionalism, Bauhaus, a.o.) ("Our interventions in nature were a mixture of study and emotion, where 'group solitude' made the investigations authentic. All these moments, most of them evanescent, were projects dedicated to the film and photo camera." Constantin Flondor). From 1970, photography is included in the curriculum of the Timisoara School.

1970: the Sigma Group (Bertalan, Tulcan, Flondor, Gaita) foresees the knowledge and investigation of form with the help of photography: "Photography and film accompanied us like a briefcase, preparing our re-entry into the 'state of painting' " (Constantin Flondor)**

1970-1971: Diet Sayler exhibits documentary photographs.

1971: at the Richard Damarco Gallery (Edinburgh), within the Romanian Art Today exhibition, the Sigma Group participates with documentary photography.

1973-1984: Doru Tulcan is preoccupied with photography (*Autoportret—Self-Portrait*). Peter Pusztai makes combinations of photographs and drawings superimposed by transparency and re-photographing (collage, *cliches-verres*, a.o.)

1974: The UNESCO week of fine arts—photo slides are shown.

-Geta Bratescu exhibits a photo-montage.

-Ion Grigorescu and Ion Condeescu exhibit at the Apollo Gallery, the former showing large photos with painting.

-The Union of Plastic Artists presents a group exhibition called Studio 35 in Cluj.

New Issues of the Image: Ion Grigorescu and Horia Bernea exhibit photos. In 1974-1982 Ion Grigorescu conducts experiments in the camera eye technique, getting fuzzy, formless images, super-imposed images against a black background; he is interested in the inter-relation between photography, film, and happening.

-Radu Igazag makes his debut in photography.

-In the 70s Mihai Oroveanu begins to create his "subjective photographic archives," a project that was to acquire existential dimensions.

1975: Geta Bratescu exhibits photos at the New Gallery.

1975-1977: Dragos Gheorghiu is concerned with superimposing and photographic intervention on various materials (palimpsest), with iconographic references to cultural anthropology, and to Leonardo's "naturalism." He uses photography in his design research.

1975-1978: Laurentiu Ruta, Iosif Kiraly, and Vlad Barbu conduct photographic experiments within the workings of the Timisoara School.

1976: Realgrams (a name provided by the poet Ion Draganoiu) a photographic exhibition at the Writer's House with the following participants: Matei Lazarescu, Florina Goulin, Andrei Gheorghiu, Ion Grigorescu (this group is reunited in 1991 in Paris, in exile, except for Ion Grigorescu.)

-attempt to draw attention to photography as a means of alternative expression by the inauguration of several exhibitions coordinated by Ion Grigorescu at the Friedrich Schiller Cultural Centre: Photographs by Plastic Artists.

-in the Studio III Toward White exhibition, Geta Bratescu shows the photographic recording of a happening produced in 1971 and *Autoportret in alb* (Self-Portrait in White), photo by Mihai Bratescu: photographic collage, playing with intellectual-sensuous images, etc.

1976-1978: during his studies at the Fine Arts Institute, Dan Mihaltianu does personal research in the area of photography.

1977: Horia Bernea (who has been using photography since 1973) wishes to exhibit at the New Gallery several nude fragments with a system of coordinating lines—the paradox was that this motif underlay the creation of

Prapori (Banners)***. Bernea generally does both painting and photography toward the end of a cycle, when he has exhausted the iconographic motif (only in the case of *Prapori*, photography is made in advance of the painting motif, the painting being based on the photography.)

-Flondor participates in The Netherlands in an exhibition of the photography of artists in eastern countries.

-Wanda Mihuleac uses photography for various purposes (even if she does not do it directly) and applies photographic ways of thinking to other media.

1978: Ion Grigorescu organizes Photos Used by Plastic Artists at the Friedrich Schiller Culture House. Participants: Geta Bratescu, Sergiu Dinculescu, Gheorghe Rasovszky, Eugenia Pop, Dan Popa, Radu Bogdan, Mihai Oroveanu, George Leolea, Doru Tulcan, Viorica Mihaescu, Ion Dimitriu, Liviu Rusu, Matei Lazarescu, Stefan Iacobescu, Cseke Tamas, Andrei Gheorghiu, Constantin Flondor, Vlad Micodin, Antonio Albici, Alexandru Preise, Rodica Zanian, Bogdan Bocanet, Cristian Pepino, Ion Grigorescu, Wanda Mihuleac, Decebal Scriba.

-the Study exhibition (Bastion, Timisoara) includes photos. Bertalan shows his project *Fasolea*—Beans (photo collage and slides.)

1978-1982: Dan Mihaltianu does photographic research in connection with the texture of materials, the expression of natural and artificial forms, etc (the series: Velomancia, Clothes, Chairs, The Human Body.)

1979: Experimental photography and film. Studies, projects, plastic documentation (The House of Art Gallery, organizers: Radu Procopovici, Decebal Scriba.) Participants: Antonio Albici, Doina Botez, Geta Bratescu, Aurel Bulacu, Andrei Butak, Alexandru Chira, Dorin Cretu, Alexandru Crisan, Ioan Cuciurca, Doina Danescu-Gheorghiu, Sergiu Dinculescu, Ion Dimitriu, Ellekes Karoly, Constantin Flondor, Paul Gherasim, Ion Grigorescu, Ion Horvath Bugnariu, Dan Alexandru Ionescu, Casian Labin, Gheorghe Mazilu, Wanda Mihuleac, Ladislau Molnar, Nagy Arpad, Mihai Oroveanu, Nicolae Petcu, Damian Petrescu, Eugenia Pop, Radu Procopovici, Peter Pusztai, Decebal Scriba, Dan Stanciu, Ion Stendl, Radu

Stoica, Szilagy Zoltan, Szortsey Gabor, Doina and Radu Steflea, Napoleon Tiron, Titu Toncian, Doru Tulcan, Varga Katalin.

-Marilena Preda Sanc and Vlad Iacob begin to be interested in photography.

-Gheorghe Rasovszky, interested in photography since the 70s, creates an inter-related discourse between painting and photographic, as these are conceptually equivalent means in his system. During that period of time he arranged several photographic “artistic occurrences” with Dan Stanciu.

The Years 1980-1990

-photography increasingly becomes an art form, but it is still an area of experiment. Following the western model, the photographic image is being increasingly integrated, although still cautiously, into conceptualist works. Photography is a co-participant in mail art, happening, performance, mixed media works, etc.

-the period’s characteristic trait is a dramatic lack of high-quality photographic materials on the Romanian market (small prints with a bad definition inherently make the technique look “modest,” so it is enriched by intervention and by integration with other art forms.)

1980: in the Writing exhibition, photographers Wanda Mihuleac, Antonio Albici, Doru Tulcan, Stefan Bertalan, Dragos Gheorghiu exhibit.

-from 1980 Mihai Oroveanu is a photographer for the Publiturism agency, continuing his photographic project (begun in the 70s), now the project of a “lifetime,” to amass enormous personal “open” archives, a visual “diary,” daily fed in a virtually obsessive way, over the years, by capturing images from all fields of existence (nature, society, culture, etc); the images are on the frontier between documentary and personal impression, conceptual clarity and aleatory subjectivity, capturing the essence of the image as memory and self-rediscovery. These images look like documents.****

-At Studio 35, Bandalac, Graur, Mihaltianu exhibit photographic paintings based on photographed images. Photography is not present, but implied.

1981-1985: Peter Jacobi is preoccupied with photography, and he exhibits works in Germany, the United States, France and others; (The Institute of Fine Arts, the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art, Aschaffenburg Scholssmuseum, Musee d'Art Moderne de la ville de Paris, and others)

1981: the exhibition called Man, City, Nature (in Bucharest and Iasi)—several artists exhibit photography.

1982: the last of the exhibitions organized by Ion Grigorescu at the Schiller House, called Artists Exhibit Photos: Ion Grigorescu, Geta Bratescu, Ana Golici, Marica Grigorescu, Stefan Zorzor, Liana Axinte, Cristian Paraschiv, Gheorghe Rasovszky, Radu Igaszag, Olimpiu Bandalac, Decebal Scriba, C. Popian, Radu Procopovici, Marilena Preda-Sanc, Dan Mihaltianu, Varga Katalin, Arina Ailincai, Napo, Horia Muresan, Teodor Graur, Ileana Muresan-Sbarcea, Ion Dumitriu, N. Golici, Violeta Bulgac, Dan Stanciu, Eugenia Pop, Laszlo Ujvarossy, Dodi Teodorescu-Romanati.

-the exhibition Space as Object (organizer Wanda Mihuleac) with photos.

1982-1985: Mihaltianu displays works in several exhibitions, with overlappings of photography, graphics, installation, research on the building of space and forms of light (which make it necessary to include the time dimension and to fix images on film for ever), several books written by the photographed authors.

1983: in the exhibition The Expression of the Human Body (Kalinderu) Dan Mihaltianu, Marilena Preda-Sanc and Radu Procopovici bring works based on photos.

1983-1984: Marilena Preda-Sanc continues her series "captured photos," the motifs being the human body (her own, preparing feminist rhetoric, which came later), and the metaphorical transmutation between the anorganic and the organic. She already uses Xerox copies of photographs in some works, like Mihaltianu.

-Iosif Kiraly in mail art works uses photo collage, interventions on photos, prints on film frames, etc; with Calin Beloescu he opens the exhibition *The Artist and Photography* in Timisoara.

1983-1985: Andrei Chintila begins to use photography as a parallel choice and an opening for the vision of painting (the frames are a novelty, which later influences his neo-figurative painting; mutual exchanges in the basic creative mechanisms between the two media.)

-Wanda Mihuleac and Decebal Scriba organize innovative exhibitions in the Romanian art world, with emphasis on photographic creation.

1985: Dorel Gaina and Aniko Gerendi work in Oradea to build their series of photographs entitled *Discourse at the End of the Century*.

-Laurentiu Ruta and Radu Igaszag create a photographic happening in Sibiu.

-Mihai Oroveanu is a photographer for the Plastic Art Enterprises (he exhibits very rarely), he writes for *Secolul 20* (20th Century), *Arta* (Art), etc.

-photography is used in the mail art exhibition in Bucharest (Studio 35, commissioner Magda Carneci.)

1985-1990: Mihaltianu and Kiraly separately use photography for various experiments on interconnections among media, as part of installations, objets, collages, a.o. (Mihaltianu: *Blow Up*, *Alternative—Alternatives*, *Cascade—Waterfalls*. Kiraly: *Arhitecturi sifonate—Creased Architectures*, manifold projections, deformation in catoptrics, a.o.)

1986: several Romanian artists participate with photos in *Experimental Art* (Budapest) and *Budapest Art of Today*.

-the *Space as Mirror* exhibition (organized by Wanda Mihuleac and Zeno Bogdanescu) includes photographs.

1984-1986-1988: the *Mobile Photograph* exhibition (three shows): most of the photos on display are by the Oradea group, led by Dorel Gaina, Dan Perjovschi, Laszlo Ujvarossy.

1987: the *Alternatives* exhibition (organized by Magda Carneci, Dan Mihaltianu, Calin Dan) includes photos by Mihaltianu, Graur, Rasovszky, Iacob.

1987-1988: Kiraly creates the series *Pseudoreportaj cu porcul* (Pseudo-Report with the Pig), large scale prints in 1992.

1988: Mihaltianu exhibits artist's books made up of photos at the Galateea gallery.

-Trestioreanu uses Xerox copies and photos in artist's books.

The Years 1990-1996

-following the overwhelming political and social unrest of December 1989, increased contacts with the west favour a continuous improvement of technique and an increasingly frequent use of photography as an autonomous means of artistic expression, or integrated in multi-media expression systems (contemporary visual culture, which makes great use of photography, film, multi-media systems, is assimilated with art, not everyday civilization, in Romania.)

-attempts are made to create a program to promote photography and photo installations and specialized exhibitions.

1990: subREAL is formed as a group (Calin Dan, Iosif Kiraly, Dan Mihaltianu****); here, photography is systematically used as a major means of expression and a conceptual element, as an instrument for socio-political investigation, etc.

-the Teodor Graur Museum exhibition (Simeza Gallery, Bucharest, and Unirii Gallery, Cluj).

1991: Mozart's Sex (curator, subREAL): objects and installations that include photography are displayed.

-the Book-Object exhibition (Bratescu, Kiraly, Igaszag, Trestioreanu, Dediu, Bocanet exhibit photos and Xerox copies.)

1990-1992: Emilian Savescu publishes photos and participates in important international photography shows (*Plaisir*, at the Maeght Gallery, Paris, *L'annee de l'Est* at the Musee de l'Elysee, Lausanne, a.o.), opening up to the western creative photo report (symbols suggested by remarkable visual conspicuousness.)

-photography is used by Mihaltianu as a method of artistic, personal, historical, and socio-cultural investigation (the series *Istorie personala*—

Personal History, *Istoria oficiala*—The Official History, Great Expectations, *Marea Distilare*—The Great Distillation, a.o.)

1992: Iosif Kiraly participates in the Internationale Foto Triennale Esslingen.

1993: Calin Dan, editor of the *Arta* magazine, grants ample space for the promotion of the new media, photography included.

-Emilian Savescu and Andrei Pandele inaugurate at the French Cultural Institute the exhibition called Romanian Photographers in France.

-Peter Jacobi exhibits large-scale photos (cultural quotations and parodic interpretations) at ONDEA, Sculpture-Photography.

-Mihai Oroveanu and Ruxandra Balaci establish the GAD photo gallery - it is underground, improvised in a corridor at Artexpo, suggesting by its very location and improvisatory nature the difficult status of photography in Romania. Its purpose is to promote photography and photo installations. Later, the promotion of photography is extended in the ONDE exhibitions (over 30 Romanian and foreign photo shows in three years.)

-beginning that year, annual participation in the Photography Month in Bratislava is guaranteed (organized by Ruxandra Balaci.)

1993: Some Trends in Romanian Contemporary Photography (catalogue).

1994: one man shows: Emilian Savescu—Signs, Vlad Iacob—Puzzle of Myself (catalogue).

1995: The Artistic Ego and the Dilemmas of the Post Communist Age (catalogue)—Ion Grigorescu, Mihai Oroveanu, Iosif Kiraly, Radu Igaszag, Gheorghe Rasovszky, Vlad Iacob, Lia and Dan Perjovschi.

1993-1994: Ruxandra Trestioreanu *Eu, en, ich (Me)*—photo installation with self-portraits.

1994: GAD - Trends in the Romanian Contemporary Photography shown in Bratislava and again in Bucharest. The following are invited to participate with several works: Ion Grigorescu, Mihai Oroveanu, Radu Igaszag, Iosif Kiraly, Emilian Savescu, Dan Dinescu, Andrei Pandele, Radu Sighet, Adrian Popescu, Vlad Iacob, Virgil Codarcea, Dorel Gaina, Aniko Gerendi.

GAD - The Conversation: Gheorghe Rasovszky uses photography and painting as equivalent and interconnected (in installation) means, expressing an iconography of his personal mythology, influenced by punk and the new age; it shows “real dreams” (with nostalgia and memory landmarks), or signs of “the other reality” (in Castanedas’s sense.)

GAD - Dan and Lia Perjovschi create a photo installation, It’s Your Turn, using contact copies from documentary photos of the *22* magazine archives.

-Iosif Kiraly - one man show at the Hungarian Cultural Center; he exhibits large-scale photos with painting interventions during the development process. The icons pertain to his personal mythology, which is a symptom of the way the artist-society relationship evolves after 1989.

-Contemporary Romanian Art exhibition at the National Art Museum and the National Exhibition Office (commissioners Ruxandra Balaci, Mihai Oroveanu); some of the artists participate with photos or photo installations (Kiraly, subREAL, Valer Mladin, a.o.)

-Iosif Kiraly is invited to contribute with photos to the international exhibition called Europa-Europa in Bonn.

-Art Unlimited, Ltd. (Arad, curator Iudit Angel) includes photos and photo installations.

-Dan Perjovschi: the exhibition entitled *Tara de hartie* (Country of Paper) at the Art Museum in Arad.

-Romanian participation at the Biennial in Sao Paulo with a joint photo installation Meta-Nomadic (catalogue), a project coordinated by Calin Dan, Ion Grigorescu, Iosif Kiraly, Radu Igaszag, Teodor Graur, Calin Man, Dorel Gaina.

-the annual Soros 01010101 exhibition (curator Calin Dan) involves the new media (several projects make use of photography, for example Iosif Kiraly—video film, Polaroid action—Wish You Were Here.)

1995: GAD, Vlad Iacob, Puzzle of Myself (photo installation, kitsch features, poverism on display, a.o.)

-GAD, Another Conversation (photo installation) Gheorghe Rasovszky, Iulian Mereuta, Ruxandra Balaci.

-the INTER(N) exhibition in Arad (curator Iudit Angel) and MEdiA Culpa (the annual Soros exhibition) include photo installations.

-Dan and Lia Perjovschi exhibit the Visual Archives of Survival and Mass Mixed Media at the Wolfgang Ries House.

-Dan Perjovschi, Accumulation, a one man show at the National Art Museum, includes a photo installation.

-Marilena Preda-Sanc, Inside the Living (The National Art Museum) and About Old Age (GAD), based on photo installations (curator Ruxandra Balaci).

-at the Biennial in Istanbul the Euroartist group (Teodor Graur, Olimpiu Bandalac) exhibit the work The Hero of the Carpathians (photo), with suggestions of the sub-cultural, the human, parody-kitsch, etc.

-East-European countries begin to co-edit a magazine, *Imago. Other European Photography* (issued in Bratislava once in six months. Ruxandra Balaci in the managing board.)

1996: *Le corps humain dans la photographie*, international exhibition under the aegis of FRAC Alsace (commissioner for the Romanian department, Ruxandra Balaci; the selection includes Mihai Oroveanu, Ion Grigorescu, Horia Bernea, Peter Jacobi, Marilena Preda-Sanc, Valer Mladin, Carmen Paiu, Gheorghe Rasovszky, Iosif Kiraly, Vlad Iacob, Dan Mihaltianu, Lia Perjovschi (catalogue).

-Manifesta, Rotterdam, first show representing Romania, subREAL exhibit a photo installation entitled Data Corridor of the AHN (Art History Nights) series, several exhibitions at Kunstlerhouse Bethanien, Berlin, in 1995-1996.

1990-1993 the chair of photo-video is established at the Art Academy of Cluj (Dorel Gaina).

-During the same period, efforts are made to set up a similar chair in Bucharest, and it officially comes into being in 1995 (Igaszag, Kiraly, Calin Dan, Valentin Popescu, and others.)

Brief synthesis of the typology of using photography (interconnected categories):

-as a system (as an exclusive or prevailing means of expression in one's own artistic system) - Mihai Oroveanu, Emilian Savescu, Ion Grigorescu, Iosif Kiraly, subREAL (especially in the latest productions of 1995-1996) and installations of the Art History Night series at Kunstlerhouse, Bethanien.

-photography and painting become equivalent, permeating each other (mixed media): Gheorghe Rasovszky, Vlad Iacob, Andrei Chintila.

-photography plays a major role in other fields: installations, performance, happening, video, subREAL: Dan Mihaltianu, Gheorghe Rasovszky, Teodor Graur, Marilena Preda-Sanc, Valer Mladin, Carmen Paiu, Dan and Lia Perjovschi, Radu Igaszag, Geta Bratescu, Laszlo Ujvarossy, Roxana Trestioreanu, Dorel Gaina, Ion Grigorescu.

-use of historical photography as a reference to the past and as a post-modern cultural quotation: Vlad Iacob, Gheorghe Rasovszky, Ion Grigorescu (competing with the old techniques), Dan Mihaltianu (integration of old *cartes postales*), Radu Igaszag (interpretation of old photos), Oroveanu (collection, sentimental archives), subREAL (re-reading of the photographic archives), a.o.

NOTES

*This period includes the officially accepted photographic activity, represented by the Association of Artist Photographers (AAP), an amateur movement that sought to create art; however, there have been some interesting exceptions among its members (Iarovici, Mihailopol, Miclea.)

**see catalogue *Creatie si sincronism european* (Creation and European Synchronism), Timisoara, 1991, coordinated by Ileana Pintilie.

***some of these images will be included in 1996 in the international show called *Le corps humain dans la photographie* (FRAC Alsace).

****see Decebal Scriba, *Mihai Oroveanu. Note pentru o posibila fisa personala* (Mihai Oroveanu. Notes for a Possible Personal Record) in *Arta*, no. 198 and Ruxandra Balaci, Trends in Contemporary Romanian Photography (International Biennial of Photography, Skopelos, Greece.)

*****leaves group in 1993.