

Under The Sign of the Great Union an Exhibition of contemporary Art from UAPR Constanța

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Abstract: *The purpose of this article is to celebrate through contemporary art the Great Union event of 1918, which meant a repositioning in Europe, through the new area and the number of inhabitants, through an economic and cultural boom. This fast moment in history has shown us that, despite the differences in education, character or ideologies that separated politicians of the time, we are able to work together. For the Dobrogean artists, the year 2018 representing the Centenary, was celebrated by organizing an exceptional exhibition made by the members of the Constanța branch of UAPR. Painting, decorative arts, mix media, collages, miniature details of icon on glass, watercolor, photomontage on glass in a mixed media assemblage, the technique made famous by the beautiful Roman portraits from Fayum, encaustics, even made by earth and straw, a beautiful metaphor of the Romanian constructions, the works of the artists from Constanța reminded us that the love for history does not exclude creativity or innovation.*

Key-words: *Contemporary Art Exhibition; UAPR; Art; Great Union; Symbolism*

1. Introduction

The union of Dobrogea with Romania took place after the war of independence from 1877-1878, and the Great Union of 1918 represented the union of all the historical provinces within the same national state, Romania. This event was preceded by the Union of Romanian Principalities in 1859 and the recognition of independence as a result of the war of 1877-1878.

The process of unifying Dobrogea with the other provinces contributed decisively to the solidarity of all Romanians around the common values, but it was also a good example of tolerance and acceptance of all other cultures.²

I think that beyond the conceptual positioning or the avant-garde pretensions of contemporary art, it still remains animated by people's aspiration to create connections and bridges of communication. Thus, "the artist, when exposing his work, raises the issue of a sharing with the other, tries to discern what from his experience might be intelligible, how his practice will be received, what effects it will have," said N. Bourriaud.

For Dobrogea artists, the year 2018 representing the Centenary, was celebrated by organizing an exceptional exhibition made by the members of the Constanța Branch of UAPR, an exhibition that could be admired in the four halls of the Constanța Art Museum, in December 2018 - January 2019.

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² Constantin Argetoianu. 1916 - 1918. *Memoirs. For tomorrow: memories from yesterday*, Volumes 03-05, Part V, Edition and index by Stelian Neagoe. Bucharest: Machiavelli Publishing House.

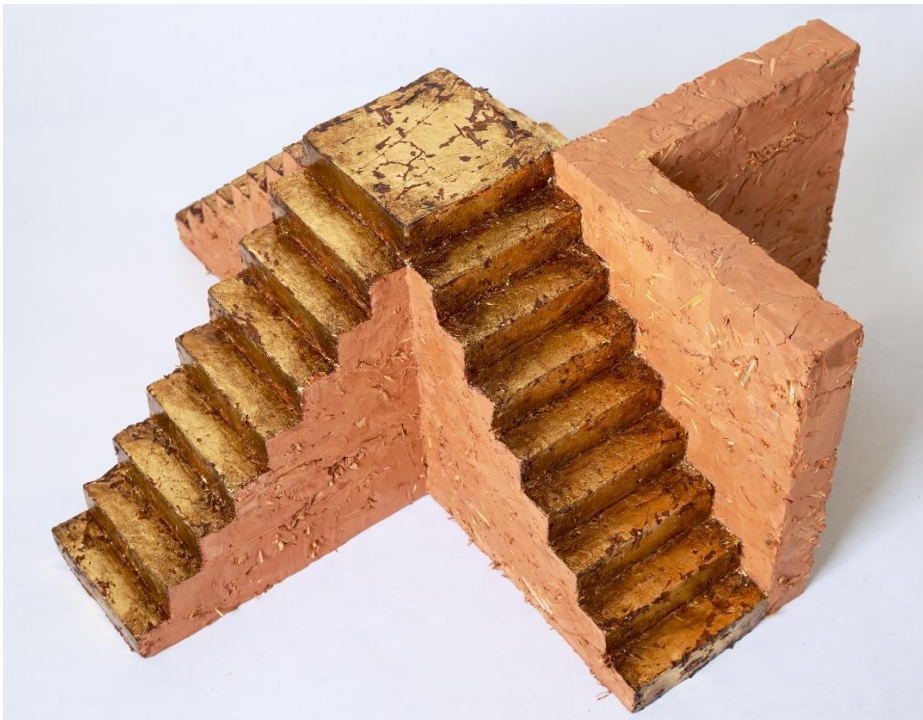


Fig. 1. Andreea Aprozianu, The Secret Way

2. Queen Mary, Balchic and the Fine Arts

The preface of the Book of the Semicentenary of the society *România Jună*, signed by Queen Maria herself, ends with her exhortation "May all Romanians confess that they have one and the same soul, that it comes out of a stem and sees in a light, the light of the magnified homeland". The artist queen felt that beauty results from this spiritual encounter of all people, from our spiritual reunion, in search of the feeling of being together or of feeling, at least for a moment, together.

On her first visit to Balchik, on August 3, 1915, Queen Mary, accompanied by Princes Carol and Elizabeth, only observed, visibly delighted, a few picturesque aspects of the modest sea town.³

The second times he arrives in Balchik with Prince Nicholas, on October 9, 1924, when the city is truly revealed to her, enslaving her: "Forgetting the fatigue we hurried, attracted by a place that seemed to me from afar a green oasis, which it rolled to the sea. Here the coast was cut by a narrow hollow, at the bottom of which a talking waterfall extended in frothy waves of the river. Willows and poplars had grown in shady groups over this water, and suddenly some old Turkish mills, incredibly attractive, were climbing the coast. Wide, low, with the roofs passing over the walls and made of cylindrical tile, characteristic of this region, with their huge wheels, changing into white smoke the water that rolled noisily in them, no more picturesque construction could be imagined. Beyond the mills, above a dilapidated stone wall, a kind of terrace on which grew vines; a few steps further, a second crooked and shorter terrace, at the end of which rises a giant poplar, bent over the water, irresistibly attracted - as it were - by the song of the sea. [...]"

³ L. Boia, 2014. *Balchik. The Little Paradise of Greater Romania*, Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House, p. 34.

This corner was charming! And you had the strange feeling of looking for it all your life and finally find it. A dream place, guarded by this old, old tree. You put me in his shadow and I looked in the water, as he had probably been watching for more than a century. He was silent for a long time. The charm of that beauty penetrated deeper and deeper into my heart. Then turning to Nicolae I said: Oh! Nicky, this place must be Mine! I feel like I'm back to something that always belonged to me. And indeed, this dream place became mine. On it we built a modest white house with a flat roof, in harmony with the surrounding oriental atmosphere. And I called it Tenha-Juvah, which means Turkish: The Lonely Nest.⁴ ” For the queen, it is the ideal refuge, the place loved with passion, which reminded Malta, in its oriental version of her childhood: "I come here when I am tired, to refresh myself with vigor, when life seems difficult to me [...]"⁵

"Balchik is the town that attracts more and more artists, writers and intellectuals. No resort in our country had the power of attraction of Balchik. Eager for a quiet and bright nature in settlements with patriarchal life, our artists found here the richest chromatic of nature. The Silver Coast of the Black Sea, with its rich chromatic views, with discreet miniature corners, having as a background the sea, all this capricious nature in its sublime can be said to be a discovery of our painters, who loved Balchik [...] In summer, our painters, young or old, formed an ever-increasing colony, an artistic family with a warm and simple atmosphere, as in civilized countries with a great artistic past, where painters make the nobility of a locality and the pride of the locals and the authorities. They created the atmosphere for both their compatriots and foreigners.

In Balchik, our painters wander all day in the sun that transfigures everything, to find a reason, and the population, of exemplary honor and a calm demeanor, knows, respects and loves them as old friends; because the painters were the first visitors to Balchik, they poses them for their paintings, and this means a great favor.

The beauty of these places also invited M. S. Queen Maria to build a palace, to give them more grandeur and royal splendor. Now Balchik has also become a place of contemporary history, following the fact that two kings met - King Charles II and King Alexander of Yugoslavia, with members of the royal family and the head of the House of Hohenzollern present. All these events and conjunctures have led to the flourishing of the locality ”.⁶

3. Signs and symbols of the great union in the creation of contemporary artists

Made of earth and straw - (what a beautiful metaphor of the Romanian construction!), Andreea Aprozianu's work represents a ziggurat, whose steps are polished with gold, because, as the author states: "The road to the Union, difficult and hardly paid by those who preceded us (I keep the present tense in expression because the whole has a temporal dimension), is symbolized in my works by polishing, as a sign of appreciation. For me, United Romania is not a given moment, but a continuous process to which we are all obliged to contribute in order to preserve it, to add another step towards what we can be. ”

Loretta Băluță chooses to paint in the work *Joy of Life*, from the multitude of symbols that appear in the Oltenian barks, some anthropomorphic figures but also zoomorphic, floral and geometric motifs, bringing in her composition the idea of universality of plastic signs. The

⁴ Queen Maria. 1927. *How I got to Tenha Juvah, in the Annals of Dobrogea*, VIII, Cernăuți: Institute of Graphic Arts and Glasul Bucovinei Publishing House, pp. 1-4.

⁵ Queen Mary of Romania, 1917. *My Country*, English translation by N. Iorga, part I. Iași: State Printing House, pp. 13-14.

⁶ Oscar Han. 1933. "Balchik and Basabuzucul", *Curentul*, VI, no. 2042, October 8, p. 1.

figures at the base of the painting refer both to the secret geometry of the human body and to the Romanian folk dance represented by a human chain that seems to evoke the spirit of the Great Union.

Even if the Union of Dobrogea with the country takes place 40 years earlier than the Great Union, we can say that this space fascinated both the artists of those times and, equally, the contemporary ones. The proof is the work of Eugenia Leca Botezatu, *Landscape from Dobrogea*. Hardworking and tireless in her creative journeys, it makes us partakers of the rustle of the wind in the dwarf grass of the area, of the enchanted clouds in the sky, of a certain light and atmosphere that is so specific to the land between the waters. And all this seems natural, familiar, just for the fact that Eugenia Botezatu is a perfect master of her artistic craft, and the design, color and composition have no secrets for her.

With an acid irony, Aurelian Broască attacks in the work "Naive Travelers", the methods and passions of contemporary society, confessing that he sees his characters as "Simple people, like travelers through life, without historical, political, philosophical culture and even of any kind, bewildered by everyday problems, who find themselves caught in various events that they have no chance to discern, but which they believe they owe to support." His paintings carry on as if the verve of the characters, the wide brushstrokes and the unpredictable surfaces are opposed by his portraits, true studies of expression that make up an amalgam of contradictory states and feelings.

Being part of a project of the Faculty of Arts from Constanța, respectively Mail Art Centenar, Mihaela Ciuştea's envelopes bring to our attention Crombs from Romania, miniature details of an icon on glass, old maps and even grass leaves. With a lot of delicacy, she gathers all these wonders and makes them travel the world, like a message of love with the scent of the last century.

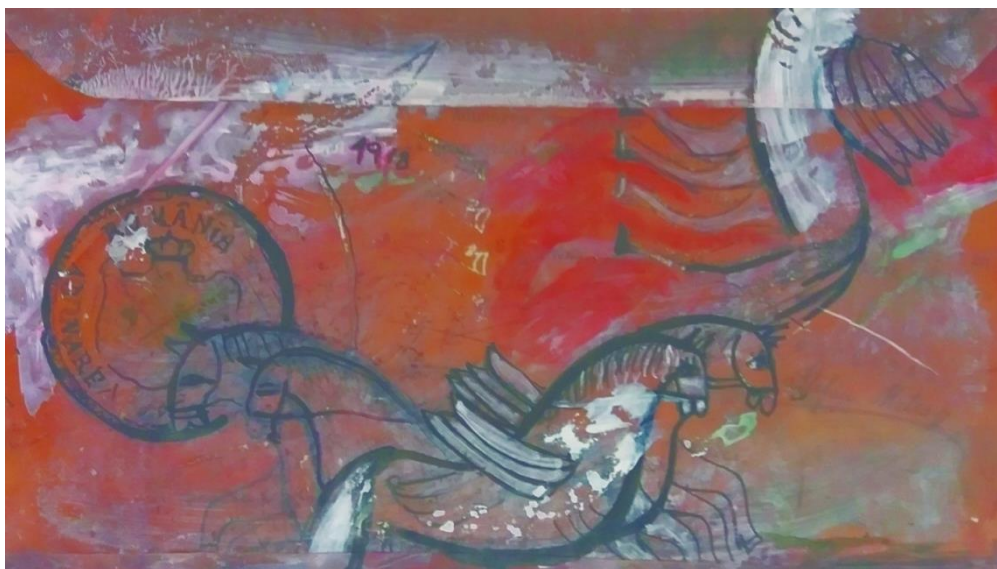


Fig. 2. Mihaela Ciuştea, Crombs from Romania

Constanța Dănilă refers to traditions and consecrated effigies in her Popular Universe, in which the symbol of early Christianity, the dove, joins the most used, of the cross, in a composition in which the fabric has pictorial touches. This colorful, agitated, expressive paste, found in most of the artist's works, predisposes to successive overlaps of the layers of paint that ultimately form true intimate geographies.

In opposition to the pictoriality of this artist, Florin Ferendino in his *Winter in Constanța* captures through wide, juxtaposed, colored surfaces a geography easily recognizable for the lovers of the Constanța landscape. It is a fragment of the shore of the peninsula, painted with the certainty of one who has been doing this for a lifetime.

Although he has a solid training as a designer, which implies a certain pedantry in plastic expression, Constantin Grigoruță makes over time an arc of nervous touches, closer to those of an expressionist painter than those of a colleague, alluding to the tension and the burden of the historical moment.

With the work *Dobrogea landscape*, Iolanda Manolescu proves once again that the light and color of the Danube realms have definitely captured her interest. Made with the speed and safety of the artist who often works in plain-air, in the idyllic setting of the Topalu camps, his painting seems to capture the moment when summer and autumn dispute its primacy over the color palette.

As usual, Niță Manolescu paints *The Casino from Constanța* in the harmonies of refined grays, adding, from her own and sentimental perspective, the brilliance that this forgotten monument of our city once had. Also as a reverence for the past, Tudor Mirescu chooses to paint a landscape of the island where Queen Maria grew up, a queen whose role in achieving the Great Union is today unanimously accepted.

Specially designed for this exhibition, Sînziana Romanescu's work, *In memoriam*, consists of a series of small paintings, but which together form a monumental ensemble. Using her beloved technique, namely watercolor, she starts from the cross as a symbol of sacrifice and imagines a panel through which she pays her own homage to the victims of the war.



Fig. 3. Sînziana Romanescu, *In memoriam*

The technique made famous by the beautiful Roman portraits from Fayum, encaustics, is for Doina Misian an opportunity to experience this surprising method of work. Made up of the play of spontaneous spots of color and made at medium and high temperatures, by melting the waxy colors, her painting starts from the idea of her own rebirth, like a bunch of flowers that symbolizes hope for Nicu Morărescu, the Dobrogea landscape is the reason he returns to whenever he feels the need for balance. Under the strong sun, the palette heats up and the shapes lose their contour, and the chromatic harmony becomes the center of interest. The cycle entitled *Uroboros*, by Ioana Predescu, recently presented in the halls of the Art Museum of Constanța, has as its starting point the mythical snake, a symbol of the universe, of creation and destruction alike. His figure, represented by a circle, can acquire the force of a universal union, which transcends time and space.

My work, entitled *Imaginary Maps*, is a tribute to Romanians everywhere, whether they live inside or outside the country's borders. Recently made, it is the result of the searches and experiments I do starting from the expressiveness of the manual paper.



Fig. 4. Lelia Rus Pîrvan, *Imaginary maps*

With a young spirit and always open to understanding the deep meaning of things, Laura Seniuc proves in the work *Vert-Straturi* not only the capacity for synthesis, but also the perfect mastery of the means of transmitting the message. Alexandru Șerbănescu is also in the area of the experiment with his work *Româncuță*. Conceived as a photomontage on glass in a mixed technique, this is a reinterpretation of interwar photographs, but in a contemporary key.

4. Conclusion

Ignat Stefanov has long been a presence on the Constanta simes that no longer needs any introduction. His works confirm a native talent as a colorist, but are also doubled by the science of composition. In fact, their beauty results from ambivalence: both sincere and elaborate, strong and sensitive, they are revealed in all their complexity at a glance. But once understood, they will become landmarks in the poetic imagination of each of us. Finally, FilizVelula, which has been under the fascination of the assemblage for a long time, produces with the accuracy of a watchmaker the most unexpected and complex shapes, combining acrylic colors, volume paste, plastic elements, metal or wood, fragments from various removed household items. Beyond their apparent uselessness, the mechanisms created by Filiz remind us that we are all small wheels, interconnected, connected by invisible wires, which are part of a larger organism, and the proper functioning of each of us depends on the health of the whole. And this symbol could even be that of the Union, right?⁷

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⁷ Lelia Rus Pîrvan. 2018. *Under the sign of the Great Union, Exhibition Catalog of the Constanța Branch of UAPR*, Ex Ponto Publishing House.