

Plantelor 58 Residency

FOTO-FOCUS

Orit Ishay

20th June - 21st July, 2018

Marta Ramos - Yzquierdo

3rd August - 27th August, 2018

ARAC
2018



Clouds at eye level #2, 2018, digigraphy, 30 x 40 cm, Ed. 5 + 2AP

Clouds at eye level #4, 2018, digigraphy, 40 x 70 cm, Ed. 5 + 2AP

There is A Lion Across The River

17th July - 25th August, 2018

Artist: Orit Ishay

Curator: Cristina Stoenescu

Anca Poterașu Gallery

58 Plantelor Street, Bucharest

Orit Ishay arrives in Bucharest at the end of June and almost immediately dives into exploring the streets of the city, especially the ones configured around the 58 Plantelor Street where her residency takes place, in an old inn-like building. Before leaving Tel-Aviv she begins a theoretical investigation into the area and finds out that Mihai Eminescu, also named “the national poet”, died at the address of Plantelor no.9. Of all the writers, he seems to unite complex symbols of national identity and ethos. A friend loans her a book of Eminescu poems with Romanian-Hebrew translations that she carries at hand as she looks for an angle, a detail, a space within a space of the real and of the symbolic.

The artist thinks of a map of her exploring which will not explain in true form her approach, which is in fact more interested in the interactions between people and places, the influences prevalent in the formation of identity and nationalism. During her stay in Bucharest, she walks out in the morning and sometimes in the evening, spending some of her time with people she meets in a few coffee shops and tea houses. They read together poems, *Dacă Ramuri...*, *La fereastra despre mare* and the people she meets become interested in her own views of the poet, they join in, bring objects for her to photograph, tell her about life-memories and their connections with Eminescu. Sometimes, they warn about the various interpretations of the writer’s nationalist views, bringing up the poet’s newspaper articles and other biographical details. Orit reads about his love stories, interprets his death because of heartbreak and leaves it at that ... This is not really about Eminescu. She asks the people she meets to imagine an object associated with the poems they choose, to find a visual connection to the poetic text to their every-day surroundings. In the exhibition space photographs of objects drape a whole wall alongside images of the pages from the poetry book.



The secret hideout of the Lions, 2018, digigraphy, 50 x 70 cm, Ed. 5 + 2AP
Partly Cloudy, 2018, B/W photography, digigraphy, 50 x 60 cm, Ed. 5 + 2AP

Many other days are spent with images, lines and perspectives, a walk at the Botanical garden where the concrete is left behind for an herbarium heterotopia - it fits perfectly for a collage. Fragments of worlds make place into a Lacanian Universe of another Real, planes intersect, and abstract images inform us of the surroundings in shifting perspectives. Photographical images transform into active visual fragments, peeling off the outer layers of the urban landscape least we discover more of its underlying network. Of how it binds and disrupts social frights, communities, built-in gates of access or intricate labyrinths.

Orit Ishay brings previous prints of her work into the exhibition space, uncannily connecting elements from different spaces: the ceiling fresco of the gallery mirroring darkly, another wall where a school for girls became the Musrara School of Photography and New Media. We see fragments of Israel, we see fragments of Bucharest from different years from her past visits to the city.

The artist films a video in the gallery space – it shows her sitting face-to-face to different interlocutors, reading the Romanian and Hebrew translations from the poetry book she brought with her. A confined environment, all white, all controlled, all translated back to us.

Through this continuous defragmentation of space, of identities and urban images, a stone lion meets us across a river unseen.

Orit Ishay (b. 1961) examines reality through images taken from her surroundings, whether direct photographs or processed images, either by working alone or collaborating with communities. Living and working in Tel Aviv, she is an active artist in stills and video photography, and photography lecturer. She has received numerous awards and scholarships for her work and has exhibited in museums and galleries around the world. Orit Ishay's works are included in various museum and private collections among which we mention MUMOK Museum of Modern Art, Vienna; MOCAP Museum of Contemporary Art Krakow; The Israel Museum, Jerusalem; America-Israel Cultural Foundation, Tel Aviv; CCA Tel Aviv Video Archive; The Video Archive of the Israeli Centre for Digital Art.





Exhibition Views / **There Is A Lion Across The River**, Anca Poterașu Gallery, 2018
Under The Black Blanket, 2018, 16' 21", film still

Marta Ramos - Yzquierdo

Residency

3rd August – 28th August, 2018

Anca Poteraşu Gallery

58 Plantelor Street, Bucharest

Cristina Stoenescu: What are the main focuses in your work as a curator?

Marta Ramos - Yzquierdo: I think, at the end, all comes back to the question of what perception is and how it affects our relationship with the Other and with the world (reality?). Perception affects our understanding of time, and so it affects how we think of our past and how we project ourselves, here and now, as individuals but also as a community, involving issues such as history, identity and social and economic relationships. More specifically, my practice has focused on questioning the construction of the idea of History / stories. I am especially interested in the relationships formed in specific socio-economic systems and the knowledge we could reach through artistic researches to find ways to analyse and understand our contemporary behaviours and its potentialities, from the physical ones to the cultural ones, and questioning the peculiarities of the digital era. In this sense, my interest in the labour conditions of the artists allows me to go deeper in the

conception of artistic practices as sources of speculative knowledge and the perception that different social systems had and have of them and how they value and incorporate them (or on the contrary, how they do not achieve this, or only partially).

C.S.: How did the Bucharest Photo-Focus Residency relate to your themes of interest and what do you think are the most important outcomes?

M.R.: I would extend the conception of photography to moving image. Photo, film, video and nowadays, virtual simulations too, and how they can be part of and how they can be part of other wider ways of formalization. These are some of the major fields in which one can think about perception and memory, projection and imagina-

tion. This is the main reason for me to look for how artists relate with these practices in different contexts. The characteristics of the Romanian scene, at least the part I got to explore and was able to perceive, reveal both the singularities of a global art scene as the values of a conception of experimentation linked to the specificity of its context. Among them, I would say that the importance of everyday life as a field of research and action; the line that goes from the 60s until now, putting together the historical and metaphysical relationships with nature; and the revision of the recent past - and the idea of “failure of progress” - as a way to understand the possibilities of the future, could be the three most outstanding issues I found. I don’t know if I would talk about “outcomes” yet, but extremely good encounters. They for sure have enriched my practice and they will be the basis for future projects and collaborations with the artists I met.

C.S.: What were your expectations before travelling to Bucharest concerning the local art scene and how did they compare with what you explored on-site?

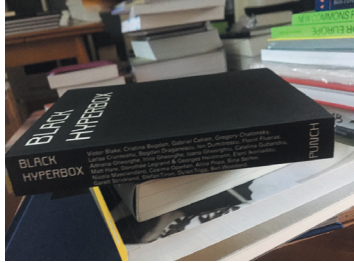
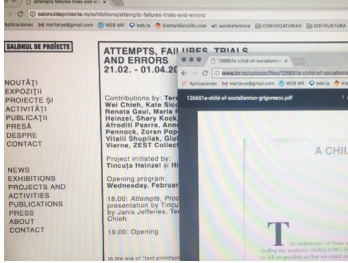
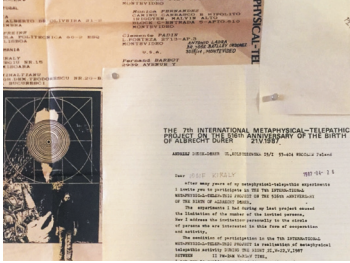
M.R.: Expectations are always a tricky thing. The best thing that can happen to you is that a travel changes them. Then you reinforce your ability to be surprised. There were of course some preconceived aspects – with different degrees of antagonistic perspectives that appeared. One of them was the status of the artist as a worker during the communist times and its legacy / influence nowadays. Another one was the production of art during a time where there was a lack of freedom and visibility, especially regarding the practices during the 60s and 70s. If the limitations of both facets were easily understandable, the projection was a confirmation of how narrow a foreign global vision on any context can be. I was honoured to have Ion Grigorescu spend three hours talking with me. I have seen some of his studio works before and I was connecting them with the hidden conditions of production and the body as the suffering and possibly unique field of work. It was a very materialistic point of view. After our conversation and knowing more about his work as restorer of paintings and above all about his interest in spirituality and transcendental theories of the body and the image, my vision of his practices is now wider than the idea I was projecting on the East Block. About the status of the artist, it has been a discovery to think about how the relationships among artists to produce in silence mixed with the idea of common and collective - I am thinking of Grigorescu shooting Geta Brătescu videos, or of the House pARTy experience initiated in 1987 by Nadina and Decebal Scriba, with Iosif Kiraly, Călin Dan or Dan Mihăltianu among others. I can see traces of their practices in the duo artist works of Anca Benera and Arnold Estefan, Mona Vătămanu and Florin Tudor, or some projects that Olivia Mihăltianu and Stoyan Dechev, her partner from Bulgaria, have developed together as well as collective projects as Sandwich, Tem-

plate, Bucharest Air Residency, or the collective garden at Tranzit.ro/bucharest, that reveals a feeling of the collective as a way of activation and sharing.

C.S.: Your ongoing research focuses also on artist labour in contemporary times - during the short time you spent in Bucharest and partly in Iasi, are there any specificities of the art scene here that you can briefly describe?

M.R.: The labour conditions for me are a way to approach how society values art, so it used to be a little complicated and usually problematic. In the end, trying to focus on the positive aspects, it is a way to understand how to deal, negotiate and go beyond the structures, limitations and opportunities we live with, in order to risk and to be able to develop the work. Between the circumstances of having a salary, but a rather supervised work environment and the uncertainty of a self-promoted activity there is a great amount of degrees of experiences. The market for me includes artists, galleries, private collectors but also public institutions, critics, theorists and independent spaces as they are all related and connected, sharing information and fluxes of resources. There has to be a balance and the actors should be respectful with one another, but especially careful in regard to the freedom of the artist. This is a very complicated balance, and it is impossible to maintain properly if not all the involved parts are strong enough – for example, the galleries are growing up, but there aren't so many committed collectors. The ways the artists have negotiated in the last decades in Romania has several sides. A good source of information was reading the book *The State Artist in Romania and Eastern Europe. The Role of the Creative Unions*, edited by Caterina Preda, where I could learn about the youth Atelier 35 of artists as places of experimentation and decentralization during the 70s. The before mentioned lonely studio practice as ways of resistance and also the work within a group or with the community expression of joy in the same sense. I learned about the exhibition opportunities created in the early 90s and 2000s, created and still furthered nowadays by the artists (such examples include Matei Bejenaru in Iasi, Aurora Király in Bucharest, the Salonul de Proiecte, and the already mentioned Sandwich or Template). A part of the scene is also surviving due to the personal tenacities of the people working in the field. Worth mentioning is the editorial work by PUNCH and the opportunities found for the performative artists, as artist Adriana Gheorghe told me.

I could also find the links and controversial feelings with the Union of Visual Artists in Romania, an institution that had to undergo the transition between its communist past and the nowadays post-communist art scene. Some artists see them as a useless organization nowadays while some have studios in its rented spaces. I am thinking at Combinatul Fondului Plastic. With all its limitations, it is at the same time becoming one of the more active hubs, mixing commercial and non-profit projects together.



Train from Maramures to Iasi - Template project, Tamás Kaszás installation opening in 6 Dimitrie Cantemir Boulevard, Bucharest - Museum of Contemporary Art entrance with unidentified model, with the construction of the new Cathedral in the back - Ion Grigorescu in his studio - Tineretului subway station - Museum of the Romanian Peasant facade - "One monument later" exhibition view - Iosif Király exhibition at MNAC, detail of the mail art archive display - Marta Ramos-Yzquierdo's laptop screen while preparing her residency in Bucharest - PUNCH editing house - Anca Benera and Arnold Estefan's studio - Readings during the residency - National History Museum of Romania display.

The Union is not involved in their activities, but I think it is clever of them to be able to negotiate with them to have the spaces and experiments there.

Another point I would outline is how to deal with the international attention during the 90s and 2000s and the feeling of being absorbed by a global context as part of a commercial strategy, or maybe just as a romantic projection on Eastern Europe after the fall of the Communist regime and the links created with the fast arriving of Capitalism. It was very interesting to discuss these perspectives with artists Matei Bejenaru, founder of Periferic Biennial in Iași, or Mircea Nicolae, finalist of the 1st Future Generation Art Prize in 2010. Both artists have a practice that reflects on the concept of work in a wider sense that is also part of my research. You could follow different approaches to understand what “work” means in this debatable political and economic moment in Matei Bejenaru’s long term documentation of labour examples in Romania, and in Mircea Nicolae’s actions, developed in a more ironic way, taking in other job experiences, such as baking bread or analysing water and applying them into art.

C.S.: You have experience with curating exhibitions in Latin American cities and have also worked on “History in display (WT)” which was a collaborative project with contemporary artists on critical insertion in Brazilian museums. More recently, we have talked about an increasing interest in your practice on Eastern Europe as well. What links do you see between these two large conceptual areas we can define as Latin America and Eastern Europe in terms of art scenes and artists, if there are any links at all?

M.R.: There are two main subjects that I can see that they are linked. Firstly, some countries in Latin America such as Brazil, Venezuela or Mexico especially, have a tradition in modernist architecture. The examples built during the 50s and 60s, especially if we think on the new plant capital Brasilia, the University City in Caracas or the Barragán’s proposal in Mexico, respond to the same principals of the brutalist complexes that you can find in Romania. There are amazing examples in Bucharest, and I saw the pictures of the holidays hotels for employees on the coast of the Black Sea that I hope to visit in the future. The idea of the human rationality as a unique measure and its application in social projects are the same, no matter if they are associated to Communism or to social democracy governments. It is the heritage of the Bauhaus, the Constructivism and the diaspora of thinkers during and after War World II. Behind all of them there was a confidence in the progress as a way to build an equal society... the failure of this model is the reality that we are living today, which includes the new neoliberal colonialism. The works by Mona Vătămanu and Florin Tudor, Anca Benera and Arnold Estefan, Vlad Nancă, the very young Roberta Curcă or the German artist based in Bucharest, Kristin Wenzel, are really good examples of this reflection. Also, they have a relation

with fiction as the place to explore this past and thinking of the idea of future that I really appreciate - it was one of the central points of discussion we had in "History in display (WT)".

The second point illustrated another aspect of the rejection to anthropocentrism and focus on the apparent irrationality that nature and an old understanding of its energies can show us. I found the works by Nona Inescu to be very impressive as well as the project that Vlad Bateanu is starting. In that sense the ideas of perspectivism and pre-Columbian cultures understanding of time, space and nature, are similar.

Some of them have worked or collaborated in projects in South America. I would like to mention a very good text by Alina Popa I read during my residency in Bucharest, part of Black Hyperbox (PUNCH, Bucharest, 2016). In "X Horizon: The Black Box and the Amazonian Forest" the experience of the Brazilian Amazon becomes a new land of understanding the performative practice and perception of time and space.

C.S.: Your recent show in Belgrade, "WE from in betWEen" (Hestia Gallery, Belgrade) which happened just after your residency in Bucharest, dealt with matters of artistical archive, both as a process and a subject for diSTRUKTURA, formed by Milica Milićević (1979) and Milan Bosnić (1969). We have talked about a wave of archive-digging and artist-revivals in Romania and you yourself wanted to know more about the "historical" artists such as Ion Grigorescu, Geta Brătescu or Decebal Scriba who are part of this ongoing wave of 70s-80s re-discoveries. How do you relate as a curator to this growing interest towards 'archives' and how interesting did you find this phenomenon of artist-revivals to be in Romania, for your own practice?

M.R.: The work with diSTRUKTURA was based on the work the artists are developing for the last five years employing the situationism drifts to analyse the contemporary migrations and the ways to adapt to the city. In their walks they created diverse forms of documentation: videos, photographs, frottages, drawings... all together are a huge archive of the experience. In this case, my work as curator was to join them to surf on it, trying to keep the conceptual reference of resistance of the IS and at the same time showing the multiple ways to read a story. It was not a revival, but a reinterpretation of the strategies, and there wasn't a historical archive, but rather created an ex-professo as part of the artists' process. I think I am interested in archives because they are a formalization of memory, be it an individual or collective one, and in this sense, it is important to think about how to conserve it. The problem is how to keep the archive alive and not fixed, manipulated or enclosed in a unique way of access / reading. In the artistic field, the documentation and the archive became fundamental keys of the work in the 60s and therefore, paradoxically, of the dematerialization of the work of art. I was very lucky and I worked with several artists that started their careers at that

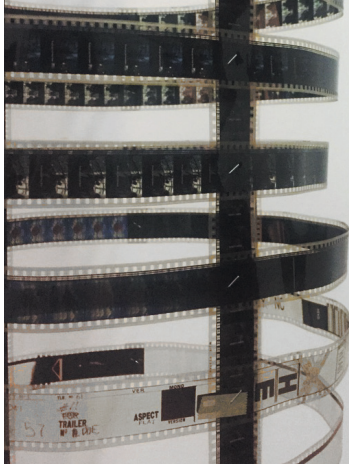
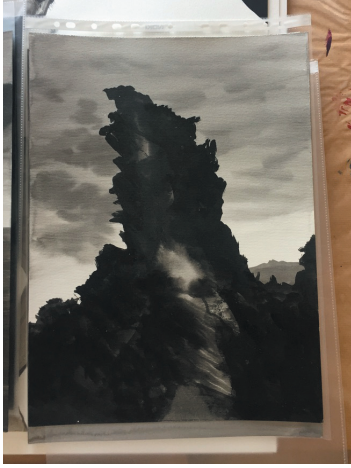
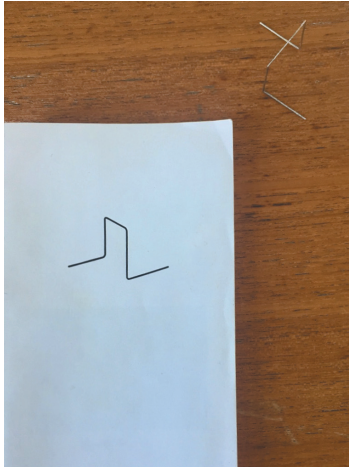
time. The strongest relationship was with the Mexican artist Felipe Ehrenberg. This experience is what guides me to in talking with this generation. The most important thing to me is to be able to have these conversations, to understand the approaches and changes that they have regarding their own works... it was not about the piece of paper with some quotations or instructions but about the concept that it transmits, still very alive in them. My point is, I see no problems with archives or the conceptually conscientious re-enactments by these artists. The problem is how they are put in value for commercial reasons or how they are inserted in the culture of the event, totally against the principles on which they were created. It is complicated, because at the same time these artists used to have very hard lives and now they receive good payments that could solve their financial situations and give them a sort of relief. The question would be how to create a perdurable recognition of their works beyond fashion waves of the commercial market? How can we apply this to nowadays practices?

C.S.: You moved recently to Rome, receiving a grant at Real Academia de España, Roma, Italia. What are the next projects for you?

M.R.: I am very proud that the RAER has selected my project to be developed during this year at Rome. It is based on a curatorial research that joins on one hand the historical research on the relationships between the Operaismo (Workerism) movements in Italy in the 60s and 70s and one of their main proposals, the abolition of work- and the artists. On the other hand, it is also about the actualization of those debates and the concept of labour and thinking about new economies through the artistic work. The last part will be formalized in a seminar, and then I am planning to make a publication as a summarisation e of the whole project.

I am also working on an exhibition about who creates the image, in a comparison of the analogue and the digital world, with two artists, one from Catalonia and the other one from Romania. I hope we will have news very soon!

Marta Ramos-Yzquierdo (b. 1975) is an art historian from the UCM, Madrid, MA in Cultural Management from Instituto Ortega y Gasset, and she is part as curator of the ICI New York (Bogotá, 2013). After five years living in Chile, in 2009 she moved to Brazil where she was director of Galeria Baró. Between August 2012 and July 2013 she was appointed director of the independent art centre Pivô. Back in Spain, she has run the LOOP Fair 2017. She has recently been awarded a research grant at Real Academia de España in Rome, doing a curatorial study on the Operaismo during the 1960s-1970s in Italy. She also writes for magazines such as *Arte al día*, *arthishock*, *El Cultural* and *a-desk.org*.



Nona Inescu explaining her practice - Vlad Nancă's book and earring - Display in the Geological Museum of Bucharest - Dragoș Bădiță's studio - Olivia Mihălțianu new works detail - Marta in Maramureș - The building of the Union of Visual Artists in Romania - Sandwich entrance at Combinatul complex - Transit.org garden with Olivia Mihălțianu's and Stoyan Dechev's *Garden Mechanics* installation.

Plantelor 58 Artist Residency

The program was initiated in 2015 and it aims to introduce international artists and curators to the Romanian cultural environment. For this year's edition ARAC developed a Photo Focus open-call for a special project co-financed by The National Administration of Cultural Funds. From out of over 100 candidates, the selected artist, Orit Ishay and curator, Marta Ramos - Yzquierdo were encouraged to take as much inspiration as possible from the local context and work within the artistic medium of photography. We are very happy to present the results of Orit Ishay's residency through a photo-documentation of the exhibition *There Is A Lion Across The River*, and an interview with Marta Ramos - Yzquierdo, revealing some of her insights about the Romanian art-scene.

Asociația Română de Artă Contemporană

Artworks by Orit Ishay

Texts and interview: Cristina Stoenescu and Marta Ramos - Yzquierdo

Design and DTP: Olivia Mihălțianu

Exhibition documentation by Diana Elena

Project manager: Anca Poterașu

Printed at: Fabrik

www.arac.ro

2018

Bucharest, Romania

ISBN 978-973-0-28264-1

Cultural project co-financed by The Administration of the National Cultural Fund

The project does not necessarily represent the official position of the Administration of the National Cultural Fund. AFCN shall not be held liable for the project's content of any use to which the project outcome might be put. These are the sole responsibility of the beneficiary of the funding.

PROIECT CO-FINANȚAT DE:



ARAC

ANCA POTERASU GALLERY

ancapoterasu.com