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## **Evolution after 1898: Official Art's Legacy in Romania and Other ex-Communist States**

A picture is worth a thousand words, or so they say. This time “World View II – The Great World View” does that, and Ralf Winkler, better known under the pseudonym of A.R. Penck, is responsible for representing in 1965 the duality that he felt. The division was even more visible in GDR, half-a-country that had to mobilize itself behind the newly erected Berlin Wall. Using his simplified human figures, Penck, or should we call him Winkler, depicts the partition that is no longer local, but global.

Following the logic of powerful images, the topic of my PhD dissertation casts its main focus over Realist Socialism and “official art” ramifications mainly on Romanian, Polish, Czechoslovakian and East German art history from 1989 onwards. “Evolution After 1898: Official Art's Legacy in Romania and other ex-Communist States” allows me to evaluate the present transition state from communist censorship to artistic liberty of expression.

In order to do this, I set as my objective that of answering a series of questions: could the past be left behind questioning in one way or another this inheritance? Is there any reference left to “official art” in visual representation and themes in artistic creations after 1989? If there are still indications of this sort, what is the motivation behind them? And what are the means used by artists to make such references?

At this point in my study, two observations lead both the main body of the work as well as the case studies. Firstly, in conceiving their works, artists from ex-Communist states rapidly took advantage of artistic liberty of expression and of the newly opened channels of communication with their peers worldwide in the early years following the fall of the totalitarian regime. Secondly, in contemporary artwork, artists often find it necessary to resort to retrospection by choosing visual representations and themes allusive to Realist Socialism and “official art”.

From a methodological point of view, I plan to support these observations with written sources dealing with artwork and art practices from the Communist period (i.e. Golomstock, Igor; Grancelli, Bruno; Groys, Boris; Hopkins, David; Pintilie, Ileana; Piotrowski, Piotr; Robin, Régine etc.) as well as major catalogues of exhibitions organized

after 1989 in Europe that will partly help me in choosing case studies (i.e. “Body and the East: From the 1960s to the Present”, Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana, 1998; “After the Wall: Art and Culture in post-Communist Europe”, Museum of Modern Art, Stockholm, 1999; “Les promesses du passé: une histoire discontinue de l'art dans l'ex-Europe de l'Est”, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2010 etc.).

I will not be able to reach some conclusions without relying in important ways on synthesis, comparison and a large number of carefully chosen examples. The conclusions of this dissertation should be able to cast a bird's eye view over the end of Communism and its impact on the art production in the spaces enumerated earlier. To achieve this, an entire range of historic factors must be taken into consideration, factors that ultimately led to the varied topography corresponding to different art productions and different responses to the “official doctrine”, even after 1989.

As stated earlier, examples will constitute an important step in reaching answers and conclusions at the end of the study. In order to better illustrate the purpose of this work, I am adding below a few examples of contemporary artwork, some of them very recent, of various sorts (installations and paintings) that are making reference to “official art”, proof that the past is not completely left behind at present.

Iosif Király, Dan Mihălțianu and Călin Dan joined in 1990 and became known as “subREAL”. „East-West Avenue” is one of their works that was installed in the public place, on today's “Unirii Boulevard” (Bucharest). It comprised 120 metal plaques that bore names of people, written in chalk, who died during the construction of the “People's House”. This building, still standing today, was the pearl of the crown for dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu. It was meant to match the grandeur synonymous with cult of personality. Fig. no. 1 shows the name of one of the victims: “Emil glass-cutter, R.I.P.”.

One year later, the same group came up with another installation: “Alimentara” (see fig. no. 2). Through this, they managed to capture some of the food shortages during the Communist period. The kinds of food displayed in this installation were common before 1989, and one can see how limited the choice was.

Șerban Savu (b. 1978) studied after the fall of the Communism, between 1996 – 2001 at the University of Art and Design, Cluj, Romania. Still, his recent works show traces of Realist Socialism intrusion. “Summer Kitchen” and “Unveiling the New Furniture” (fig. no. 3 and 4) retrace the suburban neighborhood. These blocks of flats are products of the Communist era and socialist architecture and nothing in this composition has been updated. It is populated with old cars, old furniture as well as old habits – playing cards and renovating

outside.

Teodor Graur (b. 1953) consciously chooses to gather decorative objects typical for a Communist home into a recent installation. He then puts them together in an installation evoking the past, the '80s.

Marina Albu (b. 1984) is yet another important example. In a recent installation (fig. no. 7), she evokes one of her most pregnant childhood memories – no electricity at the end of the day. The atmosphere is recreated through the use of numerous candles and gas lamps, but also through scarce furniture or the complete lack of decoration.

I believe that the examples above and many others paint a clear picture that “pre-1989 formulas” still weigh thematically and in terms of representation as inspiration in contemporary art. Not only senior artists, but also younger ones, who lived only a few years during the Communist regime, evoke traces that lead us before 1989.