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Art Collecting in Romanian Interwar Space, A Symptom of Modernity

Subject

The Romanian interwar art collecting seems to be a modern-wise collecting, a symptom of Western modernity, outlined on the one hand, by the collector's identity through aesthetic and applied taste, and by the option for eclecticism and historicism specific to the nineteenth century European, and on the other hand, by the identity of the collection given by the great Western models visible in themes and architecture. This research is focused on the art collectors' museum-houses, whose particular specificity seems to frame a cultural, artistic and museum discourse that places the phenomenon of Romanian art collecting in the direct descent of the Western model.

Moreover, the enthralled trace of the creator, the historic museum-house is today one of the most sought after museum structures, by the visitors who transform the meeting with the museum and the exhibition into a lifestyle and a social fact. However, the interest for the interwar art collecting in the Romanian Kingdom was limited to a few articles and studies related to certain works of art and oriented to the problematization of their authenticity and provenance in their great majority, or with the figures of some collectors considered to be emblematic for the phenomenon. About the interwar art collecting *per se* has not been written yet. So, my research aims at filling a significant gap in the study of East European museum discourse.

Main Question

Since the mid-nineteenth century, the arts in the Romanian space have been fully exposed to the quickening pace of general intellectual change. For the Romanian cultural construct, the interwar period still appears as a real, intellectual flourishing (the short period of existence of Greater Romania with its largest ever frontiers, and its only economic boom to date). Moreover, the birth of the national states in Central Europe seems to have created the political conditions and the cultural framework for a particular discourse on national identity and destiny, not only in Romanian Kingdom, but all over Europe.

The Romanian art collectors¹ had little in common with either tendency. In a sense, they point to a cultural destiny that surpasses the local one. The idea of conceiving a museum-like house that could attain, after their disappearance, the official status of a Museum, reflects a common approach among the greatest European collectors of the time.

¹ Anastase Simu (1854-1935), Frederic Storck (1872-1942), Virgil Cioflec (1874-1948), Octavian Goga (1881-1938), Aristide Blank (1886-1960), Leon Laserson (1887-1946), Krikor H. Zambaccian (1889-1962), Victor Eftimiu (1889-1972) etc.

Therefore, which are the local particularities of this symptom of Modernity, and when, and in what context, did modern reflection on art, on collecting, on artist, on patronage, begin in Romanian Kingdom? Moreover, how did the Romanian arts and art collecting linked to Western tradition?

Methodology & Analytical approach

My research is precisely in this archiving of a sensitive experience, summarizing and justifying the collector's personal memory and the cultural and artistic model to which the collection itself aspired. The thesis is conceived around two major notions of collecting: the concept of individual (biographical approach), and identity of the collection, that makes the invisible (of history) visible (the artistic heritage) using formalism as methodological tool for verifying the applicability of the Western modernity model to the artistic heritage of the Romanian art collections.

Problems and questions

The following questions are conceived in order to offer a more nuanced portrayal of modern conceptualizations of Romanian art collecting. My goal is to interrogate the means or, better yet, the cultural meaning of collecting, by which collectors are becoming creators of institutions.

1. Does the interwar art collecting provide a similar experience with the entrance in a space of European modernity?
2. Modern collectors like Gertrude Stein, Galka Scheyer, Wilhelm Uhde, Gabriele d'Annunzio, Jatta family from Ruovo di Puglia offer a model for Romanian art collectors?
3. Does the art collection reflect a privileged eye, the individual taste, and/or the personality of the collector?
4. Does interwar collecting provide access not only to the individual works of art but also to the atmosphere they create together?
5. Do the art collections mirror specific artistic movements?