

EXHIBITION REVIEW:

Timișoara 2023 – Spring Vibes, 06.04.2023



Different Degrees of Freedom, Kunsthalle Bega, 17.03–13.08.2023, curator Diana Marincu, Artists: Andreea Albani (RO), Ștefania Becheanu (FR/RO), Andrei Bucovanu (RO), Mircea Cantor (FR/RO), Ștefan Curelici (RO), Judith Fegerl (AT), Adrian Ganea (RO), Marie-Claire Messouma Manlanbien (FR), Sebastian Moldovan (RO), Ciprian Mureșan (RO), Cristian Rusu (RO), Sinta Werner (DE), Anna Zvyagintseva (UA).

Chronic Desire, section Comenduirea Garnizoanei, 17.03–13.08.2023, curators Cosmina Goagea, Corina Oprea, Brîndușa Tudor, artists: Ana Adam, Leonor Antunes, Tarek Atoui, Matei Bejenaru, Anca Benera & Arnold Estefan, Irina Botea Bucan, Pavel Brăila, Anca Bucur, Dana Catona, Lia Dostlieva și Andrii Dostliev, Saskia Holmkvist, Shilpa Gupta, Joan Jonas, Hiwa K, Zhanna Kadyrova, Ana Kun & Noemi Hügel, Susanna Jablonski & Santiago Mostyn, Adriana Lucaciu, Silvia Moldovan, Harun Morrison, Dan Perjovschi, Agnieszka Polska, Renée Renard, Marinella Senatore, Alexa Szekeres, Slavs & Tatars, Mona Vătămanu & Florin Tudor, Rosa Whiteley, RomaMoMA (Ionela Mihaela Cîmpeanu & Sead Kazanxhiu).

Victor Brauner: Inventions and Magic, National Museum of Art Timișoara, 17.03–28.05.2023, curator Camile Morando.

Paul Neagu. O retrospectivă, National Museum of Art Timișoara, 16.12.2022–15.04.2023, curators Friedemann Malsch, Magda Radu, Georg Schöllhammer; Co-curator MNArT: Andreea Foanene, Display: Attila Kim Architects, display concept: Johannes Porsch.

The year of grace 2023 meant for Timișoara what Cluj hoped for itself, had it won the title of European Capital of Culture. Long story short, a pandemic later, in April 2023 two important artists could be seen in the National Art Museum of Timișoara: Paul Neagu and Victor Brauner. Two long-awaited, much-hyped



exhibitions, one even than the other, I'll let the reader guess which one. Before I got to the museum, I briefly checked the Kunsthalle Bega where I found an exhibition with a conceptual, interactive design, arranged from large objects to small ones, an art concept store scientifically "dotted" in places of architectural tension. Paintings, installations, textiles, and exotic names were gathered in the exhibition *Different Degrees of Freedom*, by curator Diana Marincu. Well-known names were present: Cantor, Cristian Rusu, Ciprian Mureșan. The exhibition is a glissando from creating an experience to the introspection *in situ* through the works. Then I went to see something that was supposed to be a grandiose exhibition at Comenduire, as part of the central exhibition *Chronic Desire*. This is a difficult space. A burdensome, decrepit space that needs to be converted with a lot of effort into a suitable location for contemporary art. It was in vogue when ex-industrial spaces became incubators for recent art, but to bet on it, in the context of a European Capital of Culture in 2023, is similar to wearing slouchy socks at Opera House. It's simply a poor and outdated type of display, it doesn't help anyone, much less the works which are lost between the cesspools and the musty air that surrounds the environmental installations. I will not comment on the bad idea of avoiding feminine or masculine pronouns from the labels because: "the Romanian language is predominantly masculine nominative and therefore oppressive", but I will say bluntly that the only work for which the entire experience was worth enduring belonged to the Ukrainian artist Zhanna Kadyrova, namely the installation *Palianytsia*.

On the ground floor of the Comenduire, there was a cumulative exhibition of the creation of the late artist/critic/curator known under the pseudonym Mircea Nicolae (1980-2020). A conceptual artist, he discreetly entered the world of art through the pores of art theory and left this world just as smoothly. We will never know to what conceptual dimensions he would have progressed, but we can understand the framework of his thinking as an artist. The exhibition at Comenduire develops from the work *Romanian Kiosk Company*, a capsule of symbols and references that constitute a segment for architecture, labor, and art.

However, returning to the reference exhibitions held in the first part of the exceptional year 2023, I visited to the National Art Museum of Timișoara. Paul Neagu – an impressive artist, an artist with vision, with method, with a mental and artistic plan, all anchored in perfect creative skills. The first time I encountered his works was in 2005 at MNAC, in an exhibition signed by Mircea Oroveanu. At that time, curatorship was not completely mastered as the works were exhibited on the floor or on stands, slightly cramped and without an implicit red thread. In spite of the obvious progress in the field of exhibition design meanwhile, unfortunately Neagu was better represented in 2005 than in the exhibition of 2023, which benefited from serious funding. It is difficult to explain

why Paul Neagu was exhibited in several constricting rooms within the palace. Such a choice left the impression that whoever had on their hands an impressive amount of this artist's work did not really know what to do with them. Somehow, they succumbed to the pressure of the moment. Too bad! It could have been Paul Neagu's moment.

He was an enormous artist, yet not perceived as a star of the art world, as his museum colleague Victor Brauner. This is rather unfair, given that Neagu is much more complex than Brauner. Perhaps I am forcing a parallel that a fair critic would not accept. However, it must be said that Paul Neagu did not stand on the crest of an artistic current conceived by a famous essayist, but created his own current, his own system of creation and artistic concepts. And he did it in such a serious and meaningful way, that Anish Kapoor and Anthony Gormley acknowledged him as their mentor. It's not a small thing, but it still didn't motivate the curatorial team from Timișoara to rise up to the level of this heritage. Works exhibited at different heights, without a specific explanation, large, bulky objects crammed between the walls, podiums on which one difficulty turned around and which abound with objects of different sizes and types that need to be seen in detail. Of course, Neagu exhibited relatively large objects in small spaces with that kind of simultaneous presentation in mind, but this does not work in a retrospective show. Here, the exhibition was mounted for connoisseurs, but organized by non-connoisseurs. Setting objects on walls, supported by visible nails does not seem like something made on purpose according to some requirements of the artist. Regardless, as long as one was familiar with Neagu's personality and the period in which he created, it was still possible to enjoy the opportunity to see so much of his creation and to overlook the shortcomings of the exhibition.

However, this availability disappeared irretrievably when, from between Neagu's dense objects, I ended up inexplicably surrounded by Baba's paintings in an oppressive room, with a sordid pink and an unsuitable lighting system for oil painting. Unfortunately, this forced proximity between two different artists working in almost opposite techniques and paradigms did not enhance the understanding of either of them. The "finish line" of the Paul Neagu exhibition was under no circumstances supposed to be shipwrecked in the Baba hall.

Finally, I finished viewing the Paul Neagu halls and headed upstairs to immerse myself in the surreal world. The sign of the revival of interest in this current was set by the Venice Biennale: *The Milk of Dreams*. Victor Brauner was widely presented in Timișoara and the display followed all the exhibition clichés of the moment: diffuse light and spotlights just a little above the object, grey walls, paneled walls... The expensive effort, however, missed the perfect scenography. Halos of light form concentric shapes around the works. Basically, that far too well-defined luminous halo entered into dialogue with the shapes gathered in the

compositions of the works. Instead of revealing, the light unnecessarily competed with the compositions. In other passages of the exhibition, some veneer walls reminded me of the texture and shapes of modernist furniture. I still don't understand why the organizers resorted to the installation of these walls, which in some places embedded works. Maybe they relied on a certain type of contrast, maybe the wall alone seemed too rough. Hard to tell, but the result left the feeling of props, of scenography in excess within a space that was not generous in size. The exhibited works, however, marked the entire course of the artist's activity. This would not have been possible without the collaboration with Center Pompidou. Such an effort is honorable, and the exhibition remains memorable! A collaboration in the field of painting is rare in Romania and must be all the more appreciated. Thus, Victor Brauner received a well-deserved introduction and insertion into the consciousness of older generations. Yes, I dare to say that young people are acquainted with surrealist art more than the 60+ generation. Where, when and how could our grandparents have heard about the feats of surrealism? Even though Tristan Tzara was better known, Victor Brauner might have been a bit far from the trending artists before '89.

In conclusion, despite particular concerns, these two exhibitions at the National Art Museum of Timișoara deserved all the attention! It's a pity that they lasted so little. It would be nice to always have at hand such a consistent collection of art created by our compatriots, at an international level. This could seriously matter for young generations in the long run!

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