

EXHIBITION REVIEW:

Renowned Artists of the Twentieth Century in Bucharest.

***The Picasso Effect*, Museum of Recent Art,
Bucharest. 27.09.2023–22.01.2024, Curator Erwin Kessler**

***The Universe of Salvador Dalí*, ARCUB,
Bucharest – Gabroveni Inn, 13.12.2023–12.05.2024,
Curator Jasmine Merli**



The exhibition at the MARE/Museum of Recent Art in Bucharest titled *The Picasso Effect* (September 27, 2023 – January 8, 2024), commemorates the 50th anniversary of Picasso's passing. It featured 46 invaluable works by Picasso alongside 65 pieces by 37 contemporary Romanian artists, profoundly influenced by Picasso's legacy. The exhibition comprises paintings, sculptures, video art, prints, and sketches both by Picasso and Romanian artists.



The space itself echoes the artist's life, exemplified by the striking contrast between the pink walls and the remarkable blue tint of the artworks, reminiscent of Picasso's pink and blue eras. Another interesting aspect of the space is the grouping of various themes or subjects from Picasso's life in different rooms of the museum.

The intriguing aspect lies in the dialogue between Picasso's artworks and the other 65 pieces by contemporary Romanian artists, whether part of the museum's permanent collection or temporary exhibitions. The Museum of Recent Art consistently fosters communication among artworks, drawing imaginary lines between them, a characteristic evident in this exhibition as well. What particularly resonated with me throughout the exhibition was the connection between the artwork *Sleeping Woman with Shutters* and the entire row of portraits by various Romanian artists. I appreciated both the thoughtful curation of the pieces and the aesthetics of the paneling. Another intriguing connection emerged between Picasso's *Femme à l'Oreiller* and Dumitru Gorzo's painting, *Lilith*. Following the gaze of the paintings, I discerned a pattern that indicated the specific order in which a visitor should view the artworks. Gorzo's *Bull* gazes over at Tincuța Marin's artwork *Untitled*, creating a compelling crossover between a painting and a sculpture. This interaction between the wood and the canvas helps create a strong dialogue between artworks across mediums and time. The interconnections established within space offer an authentic and universal perspective on Picasso's artistic universe.

Another correlation established by the Museum of Recent Art links Picasso with a specific Romanian artist, particularly concerning the central figure of Picasso's Pink Era, Harlequins, and a main figure in Corneliu Baba's paintings, exemplified by works such as the exhibited piece titled *Arlechin*. One connection that I truly appreciated, and I believe it was made with great taste, was the association between Picasso's overall Blue Era and Valeriu Mladin's artwork *The Blue Period*. The clever wordplay between Picasso's influential era that left its mark on art history and the title of Mladin's artwork, in my opinion, is both amusing and intelligent. If the blue era was emphasized not only through Valeriu Mladin's exhibit but also through other displays predominantly featuring blue pigments by artists such as Picasso and Romanian painters, the Pink Era, acknowledged to have occurred between 1904–1906, was delineated in the exhibition by the freshly painted walls of the museum in a very light shade of pink.

The oversight in addressing the exhibition design was noticeable, as there was a lack of deliberate manipulation of lighting and spatial arrangement. The absence of nuanced play with lights and spatial adjustments directed the entire focus solely on the artworks, missing an opportunity for a more immersive and engaging visiting experience. The decision not to direct spotlights onto the more impressive or iconic exhibits is regrettable. Thus, the attention is not focused

on those particular exhibits, creating a static atmosphere that fails to captivate the viewer's attention. Placing small artworks within the confined corridors generates a spatial inconvenience for spectators to adequately dedicate time to observing them, moreover, these corridors serve as thoroughfares, further diminishing the contemplative atmosphere, as they facilitate movement from one room to another.

In the meantime, Bucharest also hosts *The Universe of Salvador Dalí* (December 13, 2023 – May 12, 2024) located on Gabroveni Street, that celebrates the life and work of the great surrealist artist. It encapsulates 170 works from various fields of his activity: life-size sculptures, surrealist furniture, and other specially made works of art, in the creation of which materials such as glass, bronze, gold, and even diamonds are ingeniously used.

An essential part of the exhibition concept is the incorporation of technological elements that help the public connect with the dreamlike state associated with the surrealist movement. Throughout the entire exhibition, the sound effects and images projected on the walls help the visitors immerse themselves in a truly surreal experience. Another element that contributes to the fantasy feel is the stunning historical building in which the exhibition is placed.

When it comes to the way the exhibition is organized, I considered it to be very coherent, even if the space of the historic building which hosted it is not a unitary whole. There were numerous ways for the organizers to ensure that visitors followed the course of the exhibition, without restricting free movement and ruining the enjoyment of admiring the exhibition at one's own pace. The exhibits were spread over several rooms and floors, containing themed rooms or displays of different pieces. Especially the first room made a strong impression on me, most of it being filled with large feminine figures that made Dalí's profound reverence for women easy to notice. My favorite piece from this part of the exhibition had to be *Woman with the Head of Roses*. This golden sculpture expresses a strange grace despite being held up with the help of two crutches. This object is also one of Dalí's favorite symbols, being often used for emotional and physical support in his artworks.

Another aspect that I really enjoyed was the numerous lesser-known works that were on display, especially in the graphics category. They familiarize the viewer with the fascinating mind of the Spanish artist, especially considering the fact that the surrealist art movement can be pretty hard to conceptualize for a large part of the population. The diversity of the pieces is impressive, a fact that shows how versatile Salvador Dalí truly was. For the people who are not necessarily deeply interested in art and only know the artist through his 2D works, this will be a pleasant surprise, allowing them to revel in a multitude of artistic mediums they might not expect.

Regarding the dosage of information that was provided, I believe it was very well thought out, the exhibition being sprinkled with countless explanatory texts, which help the inexperienced viewer understand the concept behind the exhibition. I believe that, especially in the case of a surrealist display, such written passages are necessary considering that often modern art must be accompanied by an explanatory text, so as to understand the artist's intentions. In addition to the information about the artworks themselves, they also briefly present the artist's life and all it entails, enriching the public's general knowledge and providing precious context for when the pieces were created. Aspect-wise, they were easy to read and tastefully designed, not disrupting the space in which they were placed.

The surreal feeling was enhanced through the use of various contemporary techniques. For instance, in the exhibition's basement, visitors can participate in a unique phantasmagorical experience through a set of virtual reality glasses. This was one of my favorite parts. I think this kind of experience complements the surrealist style perfectly, giving the visitor the feeling of actually being in a dream. Both the visual and auditory parts perfectly express the basics of the surrealist movement; otherwise, all the technological inserts had their place and served their purpose.

This lovely exhibition stands out from other artistic manifestations that try to familiarize the general population with the works of Salvador Dalí by including in the discussion a lesser-known area of his work, sculpture. The physical presence that this artistic medium has in this space is undeniable. There have been previous cultural events that focused on the Spanish artist; his presence was felt before in our country through exhibitions like *The Unexpected Dalí* or his appearance in Art Safari. In those cases, the presence of lithography, engraving, and generally 2D pieces was definitely more prominent. *Dalí's Universe*, on the other hand, with the considerable amount of large bronze sculptures, tiny golden bejeweled pieces, glass sculptures, and even furniture that it displayed, helps encourage the visitors to get familiar with this more obscure but not less impressive part of Dalí's work. This particular characteristic makes the exhibition a staple that promotes cultural and artistic interest and entices the public to dig deeper into the minds of their favorite artists, ready to be delighted by what they are about to discover.

In conclusion, through these exhibitions, *The Picasso Effect* at the MARE/ Museum of Recent Art and *The Universe of Salvadore Dalí*, Bucharest pays a profound tribute to two legendary artists. The Museum of Recent Art exhibition showcases Picasso's masterpieces with the works of contemporary Romanian artists, creating a rich dialogue that transcends time and cultural boundaries. While the exhibition effectively forges compelling connections between Picasso's works and those of Romanian artists, one aspect requiring enhancement is the

overall design. Meanwhile, *The Universe of Salvador Dalí* exhibition is one of the firsts for the Romanian public, by sheer size as well as subject and the impressive volume of pieces, where the viewer gets acquainted with the surrealist movement and the famed genius of Salvador Dalí. The hard work and positive intentions behind both shows are evident and visiting them should be compulsory for any art lover. Both experiences were surprises in terms of cultural experiences in the past year and through their presence, they enriched the cosmopolitan air of the Romanian capital city.

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