

INTERVIEW:

“As a historian, I understood from the beginning that you cannot present the course of history without delving deeper into understanding the epoch, its people, their ideals, and without fully respecting them.” An Interview with Gheorghe Mândrescu

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In the new format of the *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai. Historia Artium* journal, the editors wish to provide a section dedicated to interviews with prominent representatives of our craft. It is aimed, on the one hand, to evoke the characteristics and evolution of the institutional framework in which art historians have operated, from museums to the various methods of training specialists in these institutions, and on the other hand, to underline the professional achievements and research interests of those interviewed. By evoking the more or less recent history of our specialization, we aim to reflect at the same time on the current challenges of Art History, in the

hope that presenting phenomena and issues faced by previous generations provides not only information related to the institutional or historiographical evolution of the discipline itself, but may also help younger generations in finding solutions to professional problems they are currently facing or will face in the future.

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You are part of a valuable generation of art historians active in Cluj in the last decades of the old regime, as well as during the period of major institutional changes, especially during the post-December 1989 period of freedom of expression. Furthermore, you are the one who launched the *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai. Historia Artium* journal in 2008, a journal that you then coordinated, with dedication and a great sense of responsibility, for 15 years. You are therefore the most suitable person to inaugurate the interview section of our journal. We want to thank you for your kindness in answering our questions about your early years of professional training, your research interests, the most important stages of your career, the editorial activity undertaken, and your view of the past, present, and future of the *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai. Historia Artium* journal.

You graduated from the Faculty of History and Philosophy at Babeş-Bolyai University between 1961–1966. What was the atmosphere like during your years as a student in Cluj? Who were the professors and what were the readings that influenced you in the early years of your education?

The years preceding my enrollment at the Faculty of History and Philosophy at Babeş-Bolyai University, my childhood and adolescence were decisive in choosing my field and the subsequent research. I grew up in a family where history, heritage, and the country's journey in the first half of the 20th century were constant topics of conversation. For my grandparents and parents, the historical events marked the course of life. I listened, understood, and absorbed information which formed the foundation of my future education.

I lived in Bistrița, a city with an exceptional cultural heritage. Every day, on my way to the imposing building of the high school, I passed by the great lutheran church, past the well-known *Sugălete*, through the passages leading to the medieval fortress walls, and past numerous details whose value I would discover over time.

It was here, alongside admirable teachers, that I had the chance to participate in a unique experiment proposed and competently supported by Professor Leon Titieni, a geographer and the school's director. Starting in the sixth grade, and for a period of five years, between July 1st and 18th, he led us on routes that covered the entire country, with its unique heritage. In a passenger train car, in compartments with six beds, and one carrier designated to food, a whole universe was created that nourished my love for heritage, irreplaceable. It was my first university, which I experienced with the emotion and fascination of an explorer.

I hoped to go through my university history studies by building on these exciting experiences and by deepening the information that would further explain the things I had already begun to know. I did enrich myself, but ideological

indoctrination and statistics took up a lot of time. The period between 1961 and 1966 was marked by restrictions, fears, ideological pressures, isolation and regrets, such as the prohibition of accessing Nicolae Iorga's books in the library on Napoca Street. We were being prepared to become agents of 'Rollerism', which was then in full growth. Let's not forget that the four volumes of the *Treaty of Romanian History* were published between 1960 and 1964. These were elaborated under the tutelage of Mihail Roller, a former student at the University of Moscow, who was sent in 1945 to rewrite and distort national history in school textbooks and impressive volumes.

In my third year of studies, after the first mentioned faculty, I had the opportunity to enroll in the Art History section, dominated by the personality of Professor Virgil Vătășianu. He had published his famous *Feudal Art History in the Romanian Lands* in 1959, which remains to this day the only comprehensive synthesis of that period. He opened the door to research for us, at a time when numerous monuments and testimonies of the past were beginning to disappear. His demeanor in the classroom and outside it visibly distanced him from official tendencies. Professor Virgil Vătășianu inspired me, guided my undergraduate and doctoral studies, and supports me with his aura to this day.

The readings were from the works of respected professors within the faculty like Francisc Pall and Virgil Vătășianu, but also those published by I.D. Ștefănescu. An extraordinary resource I discovered was the *Bulletin of the Historical Monuments Commission*, the famous periodical with uninterrupted appearances from 1908 to 1945 with four issues a year, unfortunately among the first to be banned after the Soviet occupation. It remains to this day an exceptional source for the knowledge and reevaluation of historical heritage, a trend that began in the era of King Carol the 1st.

Immediately after completing your studies in 1966, you were hired at the Art Museum in Cluj, which had just opened its exhibitions in the freshly restored Bánffy Palace a year earlier. You were a curator of this institution until 1999. How do you retrospectively view this period of your activity? What did it mean for your professional development? What were the main requirements and difficulties of a curator's work at that time?

In the summer of 1967, just returning from fulfilling my military service, I had the chance to be employed, temporarily, as a guide, replacing a colleague who was on maternity leave. Not long before, my former Art History professor, Mrs. Viorica Marica, was appointed director of the Cluj Art Museum. Soon after, I was permanently employed. It was an exceptional opportunity to work in the midst of organizing a new museum structure, benefiting from the experience of a

true museum professional, as Professor Viorica Marica came to Cluj after over ten years of work experience at the Museum in Arad. Everything involving the internal structure, the organization of sections and archives, our training as curators, the reorganization of the storage rooms and the main exhibition, acquisitions, the preparation of retrospective exhibitions, and exhibitions in general, as well as those itinerant exhibitions through which we got to know enterprises, tourist resorts, cultural centers in communal or urban centers throughout Transylvania, were based on her ideas born in the laboratory in Arad. All this was a remarkable complement to the courses at university. I recall spending the first three months at the Central University Library studying the interwar Cluj newspapers and gathering information from contemporary chronicles about exhibitions and artists whose works were in our storage rooms or news about the period, about important artists, useful for the work files of the future catalogues that were to accompany the collection or retrospective exhibitions which were planned. This was part of the foundation that every museum should have, in order to fully understand the treasures it has to protect. The lists of works, incomplete as they were, and the exhibition catalogues after the Great Union did not provide as rich information as we are accustomed to seeing today. Those were extraordinary apprenticeship years for me, during which I specialized in the knowledge of modern Romanian graphics and later in Romanian medieval art. All this information, plus the specialized readings, immediately served me for the guided tours I conducted with great pleasure in front of an unprepared audience (then as now), but eager to learn about the richness they saw during their visits.

The museum's storage rooms were full of works requisitioned during the war, and especially during the nationalizations of 1948 and afterwards. In order to illustrate a program presenting a chronological and artistic project, the museum would have needed a systematic acquisition campaign. The chronic underfunding did not allow the completion of the museum collections despite the timing being extremely favorable, as the monetary value of artistic heritage objects had dramatically decreased. Simultaneously, the museum suffered from the lack of specialists in conservation and restoration. Such laboratories did not exist for a long time, and when a few specialists in the field were finally employed, they could not rely on a true training structure in the country, not to mention the impossibility of specialization abroad, in centers benefiting from great progress in the use of new technologies and materials.

Beyond the museum's desired program, the only constant sources of enriching the storage rooms came from the contemporary acquisitions of the Committee for Socialist Culture and Education or from the allocations of the Ministry of Culture that followed the ideological program imposed by the Communist Party. And all this constrained atmosphere evolved on a deficient, I would say non-existent basis, considering the lack of Art History information in Romanian

schools and high schools. How could we talk to them about artistic values and exceptions, when the graduates did not have even the vaguest notions about the birth, journey, and role of national or universal art?

Museum work before 1989, but also today, is a type of Cinderella – a status determined by deficient museology (i.e., the relationship with politics, administration, and the educational system) that does not respect as it should the importance of cultural heritage.

The drama of the national patrimony accentuated in the recent period, an evolution that has as key moment the events of December 1, 1977 – ironically, nowadays the National Day – with the abolition of the Historical Monuments Commission. What followed Nicolae Ceaușescu's decree, issued a few months after the earthquake of March 4, 1977, is not hard to imagine. Moreover, a policy of selective destruction and marginalization of the cultural heritage was defined in 1972, when Romania refused to join the UNESCO Convention on the protection of monuments and natural reserves (see Gheorghe Mândrescu, *Sacred Heritage*, Cluj Napoca: Cluj University Press, 2020, p. 226). For the autonomy and development programs of the museums, the decisive blow came with the National Cultural Heritage Law no. 63/1974, practically blocking the scientific and cultural valorization paths: "Only one interest persisted – that regarding heritage coming from private property – and towards which the communist authorities have often practised abuse, blatantly violating human rights" (Gheorghe Mândrescu, *loc. cit.* p. 227). As far as the public was concerned, a sincere dialogue could not be established. The owner of cultural heritage assets, instead of being protected by the state to preserve his values, felt suspected and in danger of having his assets taken away. What sort of collaboration could we possibly have with these people? Could we hope they would become potential donors, as Virgil Cioflec did when he offered his unique collection to the University of Cluj in 1933? His generous donation is up to this day the nucleus of the main exhibition of the National Art Museum in Cluj-Napoca. The lack of respect for the owner, donor, and the value of his gesture made it impossible for us for many years to mention on the paintings' labels the ownership, the provenance of the works, namely the Virgil Cioflec donation (Gheorghe Mândrescu, *loc. cit.*, p. 263–266).

For decades, we requested to be officially recognized as researchers in museums, as we were the closest to the artworks and were practically obliged to permanently deepen our knowledge of them. From the Committee for Socialist Culture and Education as well as from the local and superior leadership of the Communist Party, we were always told (I cite from memory): "...stop making these requests, you are propagandists of the Party and you must spread its message among the numerous visitors you guide."

Filed trips for medieval art, documenting churches, icons, books, etc., also constituted a painful chapter, showing the disaster that began with the measures of the 1970s when everything was dismantled, frozen, and started being destroyed. I keep as a reference point the image of the church in Tărpiu – Bistrița, where Professor Vasile Drăguț, the last director of the Historical Monuments Directorate in the autumn of 1977, decided to erect a veritable forest of tree trunks to save an exceptional Gothic vault. That's how that saving intervention remained until post-1989, protecting an outstanding monument. How many disappeared in the same interval is impossible to say. I saw hundreds of Agricultural Production Cooperatives or State Agricultural Enterprises that had administrative headquarters in valuable buildings, with the movable inventory gone. Others became institutions for disabled children. Those buildings, although degraded, at least kept their roofs, but, alas, after 1989 many remained without an owner, completing the list of losses even today (although some are restored now and admired by visitors from Romania and abroad). I experienced the helplessness of saving this civilization subjected to a barbaric ideology. The village people were persuaded not to cherish their roots, which deserved to be respected. For this reason and many others, I agree with Theodor Paleologu, Minister of Culture at that time, who, on the evening of February 14, 2009, when asked on national television to characterize the state of national heritage with a single word, said unequivocally: catastrophic (Gheorghe Mândrescu, *loc. cit.*, p. 574–576).

Beyond the experience as a curator, a pivotal role in your formation was played by a series of scholarships you received at Italian universities. Indeed, they were reflected in some of the research topics you subsequently addressed. What memories do you have of your early Italian experience? What influence did these internships have on a young art historian from the communist bloc?

The scholarship at the International University of Art in Florence, offered by the Italian state, focused on museology and museography and complemented what I had begun in Cluj through Mrs. Viorica Marica's program. University courses, seminars, and practical work in conservation and restoration laboratories, along with practical examples in interacting with the public at the Uffizi Gallery, offered me unique opportunities. Concurrently, the trips across the peninsula, tracing the incomparable Renaissance heritage, marked my decision to specialize in the study of the transition from Gothic to Renaissance, beginning with my undergraduate thesis on *Secular Architecture in Bistrița*. This led me to further elaborate my doctoral thesis on *Renaissance Architecture in Bistrița*.

I was a high school student who had not received any information about Art History; a university student who, through Professor Virgil Vătășianu's book, *The History of Feudal Art in the Romanian Lands*, published in 1959, learned surprising information from my favorite teacher about a heritage fallen into disgrace and which I had seen with my own eyes in the train journeys imagined by Professor Leon Titieni; a curator who was more than a qualified guardian front of a treasure that needed to be preserved for an audience searching for its message.

In comparing the two systems, communist and capitalist, one dominated by ideology, destructive, slow in innovation, suspicious, and refusing the specialist's initiative, and the other open, in step with technological and intellectual revolution, the shock of a Romanian curator encountering Italian reality was only natural. Everything happened by seeing the interest and openness encountered in classes, in front of television shows led by specialist commentators, in front of the queues at the entrance of the Uffizi Gallery, in front of the reactions of a large public that highlighted interest and preparation at high school level, through normal courses in Art History, not optional or facultative ones (as proposed even today in our country).

Curious to see how the relationship with the public at the Uffizi Gallery developed, I discussed it with Mrs. Maria Fossi Todorow, who led the Didactic Section in 1970. She confessed to me that there was a need for young people from the outskirts of the great Italian cultural center, and not only, to deepen their knowledge of the message of art, heritage values, and the diversity of models. She stated: "...we do not want to offer you a history of art but only to teach you to look at the beautiful things we have around us." She also noted that for many young people, visiting the monuments in the city center and the museum was equivalent to a great discovery. All these factors determined them to get involved. In agreement with the municipality, they arranged for a bus to provide transportation to and from school for a two-hour visit. Then they launched correspondence with the 250 schools in the area to see their preferences and establish a schedule of visits by hours, days, weeks, and months. School teachers were to be involved in preparing the visits in class beforehand. Once arrived at the Uffizi, the students would be greeted by a museum guide, with whose help they would cement their knowledge in the end. The dialogue was supposed to encourage them to return to the museum with their parents or relatives and to behave like true guides. For this purpose, they were also to be offered two free tickets. All schools responded to the museum's invitation. The Uffizi Gallery also published a 76-page didactic guide, that was offered to teachers and contained useful questions and relevant comments. The success of the initiative was conspicuous and furthermore, schools asked for a continuation, a more in-depth exercise. The museum responded by proposing the formation of research groups to which they offered a catalogue on a specific theme. This was to be filled in by glueing illustrations in sections

surrounded by only a border and had only the author and the title of the image underneath. The illustrations were then made available at all tourist attractions in Florence – museums and churches. Occasionally, in the pages of this veritable album, there were references to contemporary political disputes and cultural movements related to the work, because a work of art is not something that randomly appears from an artist's imagination, but it is always connected to life, to the problems and way of thinking of the time and place where the artist lives – as Mrs. Todorow remarked. She offered me a copy of the didactic guide when I left, a model for the research group, and another one completed with all the requested images. The first theme with which the project was launched was *Art in Florence in the 13th–15th centuries*. I carefully kept them to bring them back to my country.

Upon returning to Cluj, I thought about replicating the Florence experiment. I appreciated at the time that it would be good to address the Communist Youth Union – the municipal organization, to help me obtain a bus for transporting students. I was listened to and viewed as a peculiar curiosity, while my proposal had no echo or response whatsoever. Simultaneously, I insisted on obtaining the addresses of the schools in the city and the outskirts. To my surprise and disappointment, none of the invitations written according to the Italian model ever received a response. This lack of reaction from teachers and schools was the biggest disillusionment. I would have liked to propose to the students as the first research and illustration theme the Collection donated by Virgil Cioflec at the Art Museum in Cluj, a unique treasure, unknown then and now, which enriched the young University of Cluj after the Great Union.

This first scholarship and those that followed after 1989 provided me with countless examples and made me understand how seriously were treated abroad issues of preserving and getting to know the cultural heritage, how the professional training was in balance with the needs of civil society and how much respect there was for the specialist's initiatives in a democratic society, while in our case, the balance was dominated by the dictatorship of aggressive dilettantism. I always kept alive the power of the professional example offered by the period spent in Italy. It served as a support for me to try, even in the communist system, which became increasingly totalitarian, to propose ideas and to try solutions beyond the rigidity imposed by embarrassing actions and characters. In any case, the terms of comparison resulting from these experiences served me in creating my own universe, and my own convictions (even if they remained only theoretical). With such a handicap and without an educational program based on revealing the true path to meritocracy, supported by the state and especially by civil society, how could we be able to recover from the damages with repercussions in the economy, culture, tourism, and quality of life in general within the framework of the European Union?

One of the main concerns throughout your career has been the Renaissance architecture of the city of Bistrița. How did you choose this topic and what were the stages of research culminating in the publication, in 1999, of the monograph dedicated to the subject? Do you consider that there are aspects you have not been able to exploit or new research directions which could be continued in the future? How do you appreciate the recent restoration works in Bistrița?

The concern and admiration for the architectural heritage I passed by daily on my way to school emerged early on. I noticed its uniqueness from the beginning. For years, I saw houses and details deteriorating, inhabited by families who obviously showed no attention to maintenance. Throughout the old town, one could notice the same disaster. It was known that they lived crowded into apartments meant for one family, from which the Saxon tenants had been evicted. The dramas resulting from this mismanagement could not be hidden; people talked about them, and the destruction caused by the tenants, often driven by the need to live in cramped conditions, was well known. In an apartment meant for one family, two to three families were forced to coexist. The Administration and Surveillance House of Enemy Assets, a sinister institution conceived after the establishment of the Soviet communist occupation, which functioned between 1945 and 1947, parallel with the Housing Fund Service of the municipality, were the executors of the aforementioned situation. Enemy Property (sic) in the case of Bistrița was a heritage built over centuries by its Saxon community. The atrocious fate reserved for this typically European heritage was evident in the incredible name itself. The only monument that survived relatively unscathed was the monumental Lutheran Church.

The proposal made to me by Professor Virgil Vătășianu to choose the *Secular Architecture in Bistrița in the 15th-16th Centuries* as the topic of my thesis, stemmed from his knowledge of the local realities, observed in field trips during the drafting of his well-known work, *The History of Feudal Art in the Romanian Lands*, published by the Academy in 1959. He then considered that the subject required in-depth analysis. The thorough research I conducted into every component of civil architecture was crucial for the knowledge I have today about this heritage. Entering every house, every apartment, every room, I found details of immeasurable value starting from the Gothic style that emerged in Transylvania through the contribution of the Cistercians monk from the Cârța Monastery (Făgăraș) as early as the 13th century. Thanks to them, this limit of the spread of Gothic in Eastern Europe was established. In the 15th century, following the fashion of the time, buildings constructed from durable materials, replacing those

of wood, blend late Central European Gothic with details from the new Renaissance style that emerged in the Italian space, which the Catholic monks naturally frequented. Researching these connections provided me with information about the movement of builders around the towns of Como and Lugano, discovering routes that reached Poland (Krakow) and present-day Ukraine (Lviv), in constant connection with Bistrița. I especially documented the life and activity of the builder Petrus Italus de Lugano between 1560–1563, mentioned in the inscription on the portal of the lutheran church. The phenomenon of transition from Gothic to Renaissance is richly represented in Bistrița, not just by the lutheran church, but also in the surrounding constructions, which convinced me that a true workshop of builders had worked in the city in the epoch. Data gathered from the documents of the time required expanding the research to the neighboring region as well, namely medieval Moldavia, which benefited from Bistrița's urban development and the existence of numerous stonemasons, known thanks to various commercial and political connections. This resulted in a fascinating exploration, which continues to this day (and I hope to publish it soon), relying mainly on visual material, a work that will contribute to a better understanding for as wide an audience as possible.

The events of May 12, 13, and 14, 2023 in Bistrița, on the occasion of the completion of the restoration works at the lutheran church, after the disastrous fire on June 11, 2008, represent a special moment in my life as a specialist concerned with the research, conservation, restoration, and valorization of national heritage. I was overwhelmed by the manifestation, interest, and appreciation of tens of thousands of visitors, most of whom had not known the monument for the past 70 years and now consider it a symbol of their own, even though it is an exclusive creation of the Saxon settlers. On the evening of June 11, 2008, Mihai Tatulici, a TV reporter present in front of the burning tower, was talking to an older Romanian lady. When asked, "Why are you crying, madam?", she answered: "How can I not cry when our symbol is disappearing?" It was then that I understood that something was changing in the mentality of the over 80,000 inhabitants, newcomers to the town. For comparison, during my school days, Bistrița had about 20,000 inhabitants, mostly Saxons.

The restoration of the lutheran church in Bistrița is a great success for our generation.

Beginning in 2001, you also taught Art History at the Faculty of History and Philosophy at Babeș-Bolyai University. How did your teaching experience fulfill you professionally? What challenges did you encounter over time?

In what areas have you tried to pass on your professional experience to the new generations? What advice would you give to young people who choose the Art History specialization today?

I have always enjoyed the teaching experience. During my long museum career, I found guidance to be a way to exercise my relationship with those who listened to me. Presenting artistic creation, the miraculous phenomenon of creation, requires a connection with the complexity of historical evolution, with the world that shapes the existence of painters, sculptors, builders, and stonemasons, with the ideas and philosophies that accompany human existence.

As a historian, I understood from the beginning that you cannot present the course of history without delving deeper into understanding the epoch, its people, their ideals, and without fully respecting them. It was difficult to do this in a world that demanded referring to the past with the vision of the totalitarian regime, thus eliminating essential paths and even falsifying them, as was done by Roller and his school of thinking. From my teaching experience, I have concluded that, as a result of prolonged misinformation, we do not emphasize enough the presence of a unique feature that the art in Romania possesses. It concerns the Christian encounter, the extraordinary coexistence of artistic models specific to Orthodox Christians, Catholics, Greek Catholics, and Protestants. The effects of this multifaceted encounter, rare in the rest of Europe, are valuable and can be found in a multitude of references that need to be analyzed beyond the tendencies of opposition, of destruction that my generation experienced fully in the era of national communism. The religious coexistence we experience in Romania is a treasure, and I would recommend to young people aspiring to become art historians to enrich their knowledge with the necessary readings in this regard. Referring to the representative models that naturally emerged in our past, we must rebuild the bond with this past, whose importance has been diminished in the fifty years of constant attempts to move away from our roots. These were aspects that I felt even during my student years. I remember that at seminars on medieval art, I asked at one point to have presentations about the biblical characters encountered in the examples from the lectures. It is not difficult to imagine that we were not answered at all. We also lived in the constant aggression that propagated "the transformation of nature." Today's tendency towards balance was then totally overturned. Speaking about Gothic – the style of light, as I like to call it, or about religiosity, about the voluntary collective effort in the extraordinary construction of medieval monuments, was not recommended. As if the Church, the main sponsor of the Gothic style, and the world that admired it then and now did not exist.

For the Museum Studies course, my experience of over thirty years at the National Art Museum in Cluj and the innovative perspective offered by my Italian studies have helped tremendously. The Museology part was made more difficult by the late effects of the unnatural relationship between politics, administration, and education imposed in totalitarianism, that did not protect or enhance the extraordinary baggage of cultural heritage. I tried to stimulate volunteering to overcome the inherited indifference towards this heritage. For over a decade, I was involved in fieldwork with the students, consisting in trips in Bistrița Năsăud county that could only be arranged with the help of extraordinary friends. On the background of constant losses and degradation of the monuments, the connection with the territory, with its history, gave me the chance to ask for their involvement in volunteering, to find solutions for the future, even if the official program had not yet changed. The reactions of the students were the most pleasant teaching experience. I believe that breaking out of the *status quo* and forming groups and associations aimed at protecting cultural heritage will increase the number of students interested in Art History. A decade of practice with the help of the Bistrița City Hall and of passionate friends proved to me that it is possible.

I can advise young people eager to study this discipline to defend it vigorously, stimulating volunteering wherever they are. They should be proud because they represent a top field, an elite product towards which all others converge. The way cultural heritage is preserved in monuments and museums reflects the general state of society.

Parallel to your university teaching activity, you also launched the *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai. Historia Artium* journal, which you directly managed for 15 years. What were the main motivations and objectives behind this initiative? What editorial program did you follow? Looking back, how does it reflect in the successive 15 issues of the publication coordinated by you? What is the mission of a journal dedicated to the study of cultural heritage and Art History today?

In 2002, I was responsible for the editing of the 3rd issue of *Studia Universitatis. Historia*, which was thus dedicated to art historical studies. Over the years, art historians active in Cluj felt the need for their own journal, in an attempt to establish the coherence of the group after the 1960s revival of the field under the authority of Professor Virgil Vătășianu. We wanted to focus more on a cultural heritage that, even though well represented in the pages of one of the most valuable interwar periodicals – the *Bulletin of the Historical Monuments*

Commission, had suffered from neglect for over 50 years of communism. The editorial program aimed primarily to valorize research on forgotten or deteriorating monuments, to underline their value, and to become a place where our graduates and collaborators could develop and consolidate an academic style specific to art history. The emphasis on Transylvanian values was natural, and I believe that throughout its existence so far, the journal has contributed to the formation of specialists who, slowly, perhaps too slowly, are involved in the revitalization of conservation and restoration.

I believe that the 15 years of our publication marked the beginning of the path proposed by our editorial program, and many unknown or long-dormant themes for 50 years have become relevant again, at least for specialists in our field. The professional profile of young art historians has also been consolidated meanwhile, some of them continuing the mission of our journal today.

Despite the difficulties encountered, the last three decades have shown a growing interest in cultural heritage. I think that a wide horizon opens up. Our specialists, hopefully more and more numerous, naturally need to relate in their analyses to the work of museum professionals, architects, restorers, builders, and other types of culture professionals. Investigating the documentation provided by archives and old publications, engaging in interdisciplinary studies, and fostering collaboration with foreign specialists can diversify and enrich the perspectives of connecting Romanian Art History research with its European counterpart. Thus, the wounds caused by the painful hiatus of communism might heal.

Your entire professional activity is closely linked to cultural heritage, whether museum collections or the research, preservation, and valorization of our country's built or movable heritage. In your opinion, what is the fate of this heritage nowadays? How do you see its future?

Seeing the political class's immobility and the inefficiency of using heritage in education, in understanding our specificity, and in tourism, I regret its fate today. The involvement of specialists in forming volunteers can save something, in a society with many dilettante tendencies, the successor of a sad period. Without a compulsory permanent course in the school curriculum and without a transformed local administration that would support private property, hopes are minimal faced with the avalanche of destruction or the inefficiency of conservation measures. I believe it's good for graduates of Art History departments to get involved in the local administration, as well as in county councils, since their contribution to making correct decisions concerning patrimony can be essential.

I would give the example of our former student, Vasile Duda, PhD whom I am glad to have recommended to the Bistrița municipality where he is employed as an art historian. His work is noteworthy for the image the city has today.

Much empty talk and the programmatic constant destruction of cultural heritage were characteristic of the education and measures propagated by the communist system. Today, we need the opposite direction, but also a new generation, with a different vision, that would be able to rebalance a national system distorted by past propaganda. Following the example of our colleagues from the European Union is a way to accomplish this. Without a lustration law which has failed from the beginning, mentalities have not had a chance of being quickly changed. Without a full implication of professionals, undesirable results are seen everywhere, in this strange coexistence where evil and destruction are all too present.

Last but not least, what is your message towards those who will now continue your editorial work? What are your wishes for the journal?

Thank you to the new editorial team of *Studia. Historia Artium* for the idea of conducting this interview. I represent a generation that had to go through an unwanted, imposed experience, with numerous losses for valuable heritage.

I believe that the program we have proposed should be continued and diversified. The focus should be on intense volunteer work in high schools. In the absence of a true program for the study of Art History, through conferences and debates with the new generation, on-site presentations, and the involvement of the new generation in protecting local values, professionals, as many as they may be, cannot hope for the emergence of a solid basis among young people that will help change attitudes towards cultural heritage. Presenting the journal's issues and debating its arguments in front of potential collaborators would lead to the assessment of the current challenges and to the coagulation of a new movement.

This will be a starting point to increase the number of students through which the importance of our field will be strengthened. The inclusion of more specialists is required not only at the school level, but also in the management of cultural heritage, which can no longer remain under the shadow of uncertainty and hazard. Let us remember that in the 1950s–1960s, even in a hostile period, Art History courses attracted students, filling amphitheatres with students from other disciplines as well. The phenomenon disappeared meanwhile due to indifference and dilettantism, but I see no reason why it couldn't be revived. In the beginnings, after the Great Union, Art History was an important discipline at the University of Cluj, thanks to the appreciated activity of professors such as Coriolan Petranu and

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Virgil Vătășianu, both well acquainted with the state of the art in the international research. Different from the situation of that time, in the last 34 years, the political class and administration have not evolved towards a professionally sustained form and structure, and the authorities responsible for education have not shown the desire to approach the European realities, where investments in the knowledge and protection of heritage often brought spectacular results.

For a real understanding of the efforts and difficulties in this dramatic journey of the last century, I would propose the opening of a new column in the journal, one dedicated to reviews of high-quality studies published in the interwar period and published between 1908 and 1945 in the *Bulletin of the Historical Monuments Commission* (it is highly relevant that this publication was among the first to be closed down under the Soviet regime). The reviews could be written by Art History students who, starting from the analyses of professionals from those years, could observe the current state of the monuments and add, where appropriate, the conclusions of later studies. The work of our predecessors would be appreciated, and the damage suffered during the dictatorship period could be noted, thus enriching the horizon of as many as possible, which were denied knowledge of the roots that gave substance to the nation.

Thank you and I wish you the best of luck!

Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Translated from Romanian by Voica Pușcașiu