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ARTICLE

Contemporary Art in Cluj

A Critical Overview



A collage of the 20 main representatives from the Cluj connection. Photo: C.A.I.

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Introduction — Status Quaestionis

Since the new millennium, there has been coming a lot of noise from the Transylvanian city of Cluj, Romania. This new hotspot of contemporary visual artistic production has been delivering exciting artists at an incredible pace.

When discussing this phenomenon in contemporary art, the term *Cluj School* – or *School of Cluj* – is used very often, with varying connotations and/or meaning. A term which is often – rightfully – contested or sometimes even detested. One thing is certain, the contemporary art scene in Cluj has been one of the of the most exciting phenomena of recent art history and continues to draw great interest to the *Mitteleuropean* city.

In this article, we will critically discuss the term Cluj School, sketch the historical context and the art scenes bounding factors, as well as the main representatives of the Cluj art scene, such as Adrian Ghenie (b. 1977), Mircea Cantor (b. 1977), Ciprian Mureșan (b. 1977), Victor Man (b. 1974), Alex Mirutziu (b. 1981), Mircea Suciu (b. 1978), Marius Bercea (b. 1979), Serban Savu (b. 1978), Gabriela Vanga (b. 1977), Oana Farcas (b. 1981), Mi Kafchin (b. 1986), Cristi Pogăcean (b. 1980), Teodora Axente (b. 1984), Mihai Iepure Gorski (b. 1982), Szabolcs Veres (b. 1983), Răzvan Botiș (b. 1984), Sergiu Toma (b. 1987), Robert Fekete (b. 1987), Ana Maria Micu (b. 1979) and Dan Maciuca (b. 1979).

Further, is the artistic mythical buzz of Cluj as a purveyor of art's new superstars over its peak? Does the new generation of Cluj artists fulfill the high expectations and standards set by their illustrious role models? Or is the artistic production in Cluj a hype of overrated, monotonous and predictable art?

S.n.: The reasoned selection of the main representatives is in no way to be interpreted as complete or absolute. The artistic landscape continuous to shift with artists climbing the ladder of succes every day while others see their exposure limited on a national scale. The critical overview which is presented in this article consists of an intersection of the main representatives over the past ten years.



Ciprian Mureșan at the Prague Biennale in 2007. Photo: Simona Nastac.

Terminology — What is the *Cluj School*?

Although the terminology is often contested, it is customary being used in various (international) artistic and academic circles. Generally speaking, the term *Cluj School* could be described or defined as;

An art historic phenomenon and group of contemporary artists from Cluj-Napoca, bound by the historical context of their generation, growing up in the aftermath of the Romanian Revolution in 1989, characterized by life in Post-Communist Romania and well-known by their dominant manifestation in the contemporary art scene.

The term exists since the Prague Biennale in 2007, where it was used for the first time to describe a group of emerging Romanian artists whom participated in the biennale.[1] The term Cluj School originates from the tradition of naming such local phenomena as 'schools'. Think of the *Barbizon School*, the *School of London* or more recently the *Neue Leipziger Schule (New Leipzig School)*.



Marius Bercea working in his studio. Photo: Widewalls.

Further, there is the *Art and Design University* of Cluj-Napoca where many of the main representatives have received their MA education and training. Some of these artists hated their passage at the University and found their traits after the University, others have manifested themselves as important figures for the future generation of artists from Cluj. Think of Marius Bercea, an internationally celebrated painter and professor at the University of Cluj-Napoca. However, one may not underestimate the importance of the forged alliances in the form of friendships back in the late 90s.

The term *Cluj School* is contested too, often by the representatives themselves. It is to say, the group of artists coming from Cluj may not be interpreted as a homogeneous group, rather as a number of different circles, styles and visions on contemporary art.[2] Adrian Ghenie:

"There's been a fair amount of tension at times between groups, which is natural. We might have different ideas about what constitutes "good" art, which can result in discord or fallings-out, but the one thing we've all come to realize is that we have to create a cultural platform in Cluj; we have to communicate to the world that something interesting is happening here. So we all turn up to each other's openings and initiatives and thereby support each other. The city is too small to excuse someone from simply not showing up."

[3]



Portrait of Adrian Ghenie working in his Berlin studio (2014). Photo: Oliver Mark

Further, these so-called schools are often used as an economic lever by galleries and other entities. By associating a certain artist with this school or 'movement', the connection is often used as a justification to profile the artists and his works as very valuable, pushing up the price tag. Although the new generation of young artists from Cluj is still in search for a distinctive style and may arguably be too rooted in the style of their successful predecessors,[4] gallerists continue to travel every year to Cluj to pick up graduates from the *Art and Design University* of Cluj-Napoca.

The key pitfall followed by its contestation and misconceptions concerning the term *Cluj School*, lies in the modernist approach, connotation and interpretation of any art historic school, movement, wave, group or phenomenon. The artists of the *Cluj School* are individuals, they do not share a revolutionary program or have written any manifesto's indicating they have a shared vision on art, the world, and how they'd like to change it as it was the case with more historical avant-garde movements and modernist schools of painters.[5]

There is also a quasi-direct association with the term *Cluj School* and painting. Since the introduction of the term, the main emphasis has been on painting. By times, it is even called the *Cluj School of Painting*. A logical association considering the incredible array of painters emanating from this local phenomenon, think of Adrian Ghenie, the aforementioned Marius Bercea, Victor Man, Mircea Suciuc and Serban Savu.

As a result, it often feels a bit deceitful when one categorizes or denominates a neo-conceptual artist such as Ciprian Mureşan or Mircea Cantor as a *Cluj School* representative, as one might argue the formal characteristics of their oeuvre are diametrically opposed to the body of works by the aforementioned Cluj painters. However, they are in fact strongly linked to their compatriots than to, for instance, Joseph Kosuth or Piero Manzoni. They share a common ground, rooted in their historical context and reflected in their subject matter (cf. infra).



Fabrica de Pensule. Photo: Fabrica de Pensule.

The *Paintbrush Factory* as a Cultural Hotbed

One of these cultural platforms in Cluj is the *Fabrica de Pensule* or the *Paintbrush Factory* which played a very important role in the rise of the contemporary art scene of Cluj. The brutalist former factory building found its new purpose back in 2009 as a hub for contemporary art, bringing together creative minds, galleries, producers, artists and other cultural organizations. This initiative was a reaction to the lack of space for exhibitions and artistic production.[6]

Ten years later in 2019, this initiative in its original form comes to a halt. It disintegrated while other actors took over the identity of the Factory by night.[7] However, the community and efflorescence of Cluj as a cultural hotbed isn't going anywhere, as different groups of different shapes continue to set course. Even more, although the Factory may have fallen apart, ideologically and as a collective, it remains a landmark in Cluj's recent (art) history without which things could not have gone further.[8]

One of the greatest success stories connected to the *Fabrica de Pensule* must be *Galeria Plan B* and its main artists whom became the art world's new superstars. The gallery, an exhibition and production space for contemporary art, opened in Cluj in 2005 followed by a second gallery, a permanent exhibition space, in Berlin in 2008.[9] Founded by Mihai Pop and Adrian Ghenie, the artist-run gallery became not only an inspiring story of success for other artists from Cluj, it also became a model or exemplum for other galleries. As a result, in 2009 Plan B were one of the main initiators of the *Paintbrush Factory* project bringing their international exposure to the wider art scene in Cluj.

Galeria Plan B seems to be a hit from the start. The genuine combination of New Figurative Painters and Neo-Conceptualists proved the art world that both spheres or disciplines aren't opposites at all, but work together establishing a synergetic relationship. Their opening show in 2005—presenting the works of Victor Man—was covered by the major art publication *Art in America* and in 2007 hosted the Romanian Pavilion at the 52nd Venice Biennale presenting Plan B's artists, followed in 2015 when Mihai Pop curated the Romanian Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale featuring a solo show of Adrian Ghenie. [10][11]



Galeria Plan B, Cluj. / Photo: Fabrica De Pensula.

Historical Context and Analysis

But what factors contributed to this series of successes? What aspects transformed Cluj into this thriving cultural hotspot? And what makes the artworks *an sich* produced in the Transylvanian capital relevant as such, taking the art world by storm and nesting in the highest tiers of art world and sustaining their presence?

As always, several factors come in to play. From a stylistic point of view, one can state the interest of Western galleries, curators and collectors around the new millennium is rooted in the distinctive figurative painting style by many Cluj artists. Figurative painting had been on the up in an exponential manner since the 80s and 90s with Neo-expressionism or the emergence of New European Painting.

A more important similarity than the distinctive visual language with New European Painting, is the strong affinity for historical issues, which is in my opinion the primary characteristic of the Cluj artists.[12] The so called *Cluj School* artists belong to a first post-communist generation. From a cultural and socio-political perspective, they were set to deal with a complex transition from a totalitarian regime to a democratic, capitalist organization of the new Romanian society, paired with difficulties and issues concerning internationalization and globalization.[13]

Jane Neal: "(...) Growing up during communism and witnessing its disintegration, followed by the rapid onslaught and effects of consumer culture on their society, has given them a unique perspective. It could be, as Romanian critic Mihnea Mircan proposes, that the artists have developed a kind of "allergy to Utopia" that has imbued them with a watchful detachment, a desire to deconstruct and uncover things for themselves." [14]

Main Representatives — A Critical Anthology

The following critical anthology consists of the twenty most important artists for the Cluj art scene's current generation and the so-called *Cluj School*. For instance, Miklos Onuscan (b. 1952) is one of the most important Romanian artists and is connected to Cluj. However, as he is part of a different generation, Onuscan is not included in this anthology as it is our aim the sketch the current generation's main representatives.

The selection is based upon objective career facts, such as the artist's artifacts ranking, their presence in professional literature concerning the Cluj art scene over the past two decades, the gallery representation of the artist and participation in major shows, biennales or their presence in major public and private collections.

S.n.: The list is not to be interpreted as a ranking.

1/20: Adrian Ghenie (b. 1977)



Portrait of Adrian Ghenie. / Photo: Playtech Entertainment (Romania).

Adrian Ghenie is arguably the most prolific and most influential artist from the so-called *Cluj School*, most commonly illustrated by mind-boggling auction results such as the 7 million pound auction record at Christie's in 2016.

The Romanian superstar is born in 1977 in Baia Mare and currently resides and works in Berlin, Germany. Ghenie is known for his dynamic and collage-like compositions, marked by virtuoso *impastos*, strong contrasts and lively colors. In an eclectic manner, Ghenie

combines (art) historical references, humor and a critical mind by building hallucinative narratives in his paintings, often large in scale.[15]

To discover more, feel free to read our [artist spotlight on Adrian Ghenie](#) or our [exhibition review on Adrian Ghenie at Tim Van Laere Gallery](#), Antwerp (BE).

An anthology of Ghenie's oeuvre:



Adrian Ghenie, *The raft*, 2019. Oil on canvas – 230 x 360 cm. Courtesy of Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac.



Adrian Ghenie, *Vincent as old*, 2016. Oil on canvas – 203 x 204 cm. Courtesy of Galeria Plan B.



Adrian Ghenie, *Self-portrait as a monkey*, 2010. Oil on canvas – 145 x 84 cm. Courtesy of Philips.

2/20: Mircea Cantor (b. 1977)



Portrait of Mircea Cantor. Photo: Gazette Drouot.

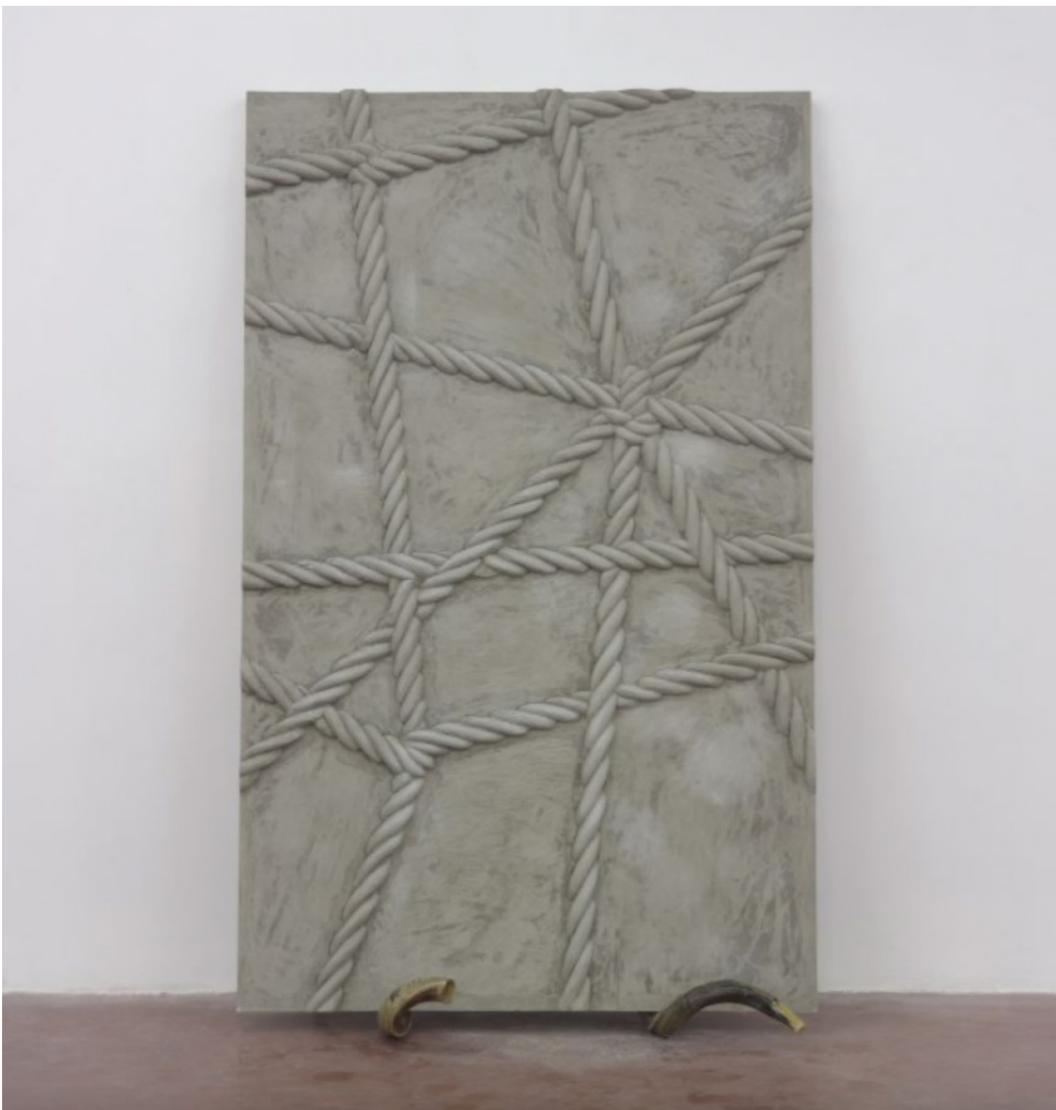
One of the first artists of his generation to achieve international praise is Mircea Cantor. Born in 1977, Cantor is known for his videos, photography and mixed-media installations.

The Marcel Duchamp Prize winner (2011) effectuates evocative and metaphorical works reflecting upon a broad world view examining concepts such as ideology, the self, the other and multivalence. As a true postmodernist, Cantor inflicts a multitude of meanings into his (found) objects, playing with language, categorization and interpretation.[16]

An anthology of Cantor's oeuvre:



Mircea Cantor, *Add Verticality To Your Seat (To Socrates)*, 2018. Cherry tree – 174 x 39 x 39 cm. Courtesy Magazzino, Rome.



Mircea Cantor, *Supposing I could hear that sound. Now*, 2015. Concrete and two shofars – 200 x 123 cm. Courtesy Dvir Gallery.



Mircea Cantor, *Sic Transit Gloria Mundi (video still)*, 2012. HD video, 4 mins. Courtesy Sydney Biennale.

3/20: Ciprian Mureșan (b. 1977)



Portrait of Ciprian Mureșan. / Photo: Kathmandu Triennale.

Also born in 1977, [Ciprian Mureșan](#) is a neo-conceptual artist living and working in Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

His oeuvre is marked by a multidisciplinary practice, encompassing installation, sculpture, video and drawing—although his drawings feel just as conceptual as his installations. Mureșan's postmodern and conceptual approach combines irony, a critical world view and a strong affinity for (art) history, resulting into subtle and smart commentaries on certain topics.[17]

Discover more by reading our [artist spotlight on Ciprian Mureșan](#).

An anthology of Mureșan's oeuvre:



Ciprian Mureșan, *Debandadă istorică*, 2019. Installation view. Courtesy of Nicodim Gallery.



Ciprian Mureșan, *Dead Weight*, 2013. Etchings, plywood, mahogany – 61 × 71.1 × 61 cm. Courtesy of David Nolan Gallery.



Ciprian Mureșan, *The end of a five-year plan*, 2004. Various media – variable dimensions. Courtesy of David Nolan Gallery.

4/20: Victor Man (b. 1974)



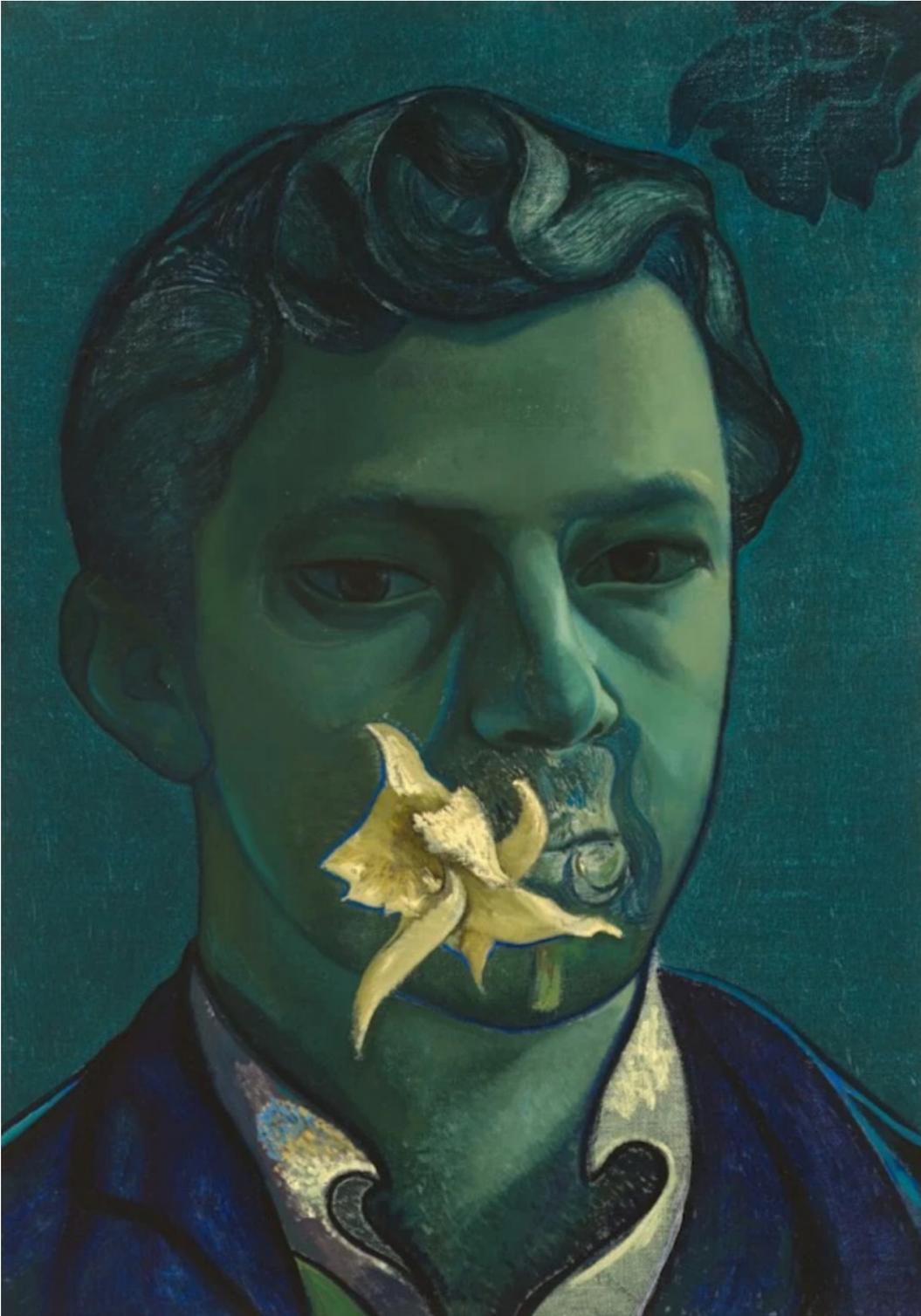
Portrait of Victor Man. / Photo: JBH reports.

Further, we have the enigmatic paintings by Victor Man. Born in 1974 in Cluj, Man is a contemporary painter living and working in Cluj, Romania and Rome, Italy.

What distinguishes Man from other paintings is the spiritual aura and nocturnal character residing in his works. His styled figurative imagery is build upon an art historical dialogue, using darker tones and mysterious compositions.[18]

For further reading on Man, feel free to have a look at our [artist spotlight dedicated to Victor Man's](#) unique painted oeuvre.

An anthology of Man's oeuvre:



Victor Man, *Self-Portrait at Father's Death*, 2016. Oil on canvas mounted on wood – 27 x 19 cm. Courtesy of Gladstone Gallery.

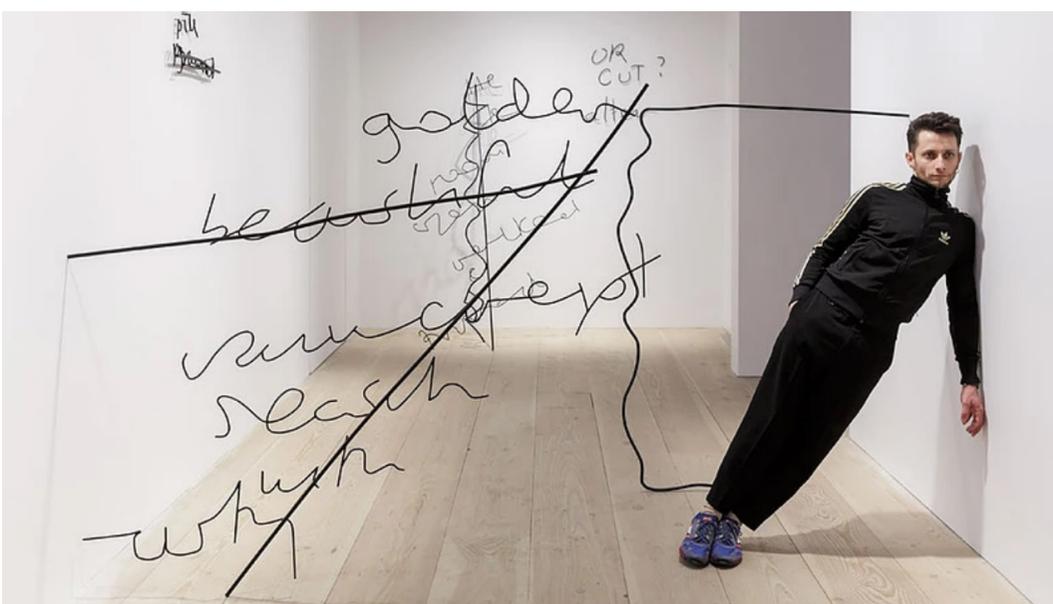


Victor Man, *Untitled (Connaissez-vous des Esseintes?)*, 2015. Oil on canvas – 101.1 x 70.9 cm. Courtesy of Gladstone Gallery.



Victor Man, *The Chandler*, 2013. Oil on cardboard – 101 x 72 cm. Courtesy of Gladstone Gallery.

5/20: Alex Mirutziu (b. 1981)

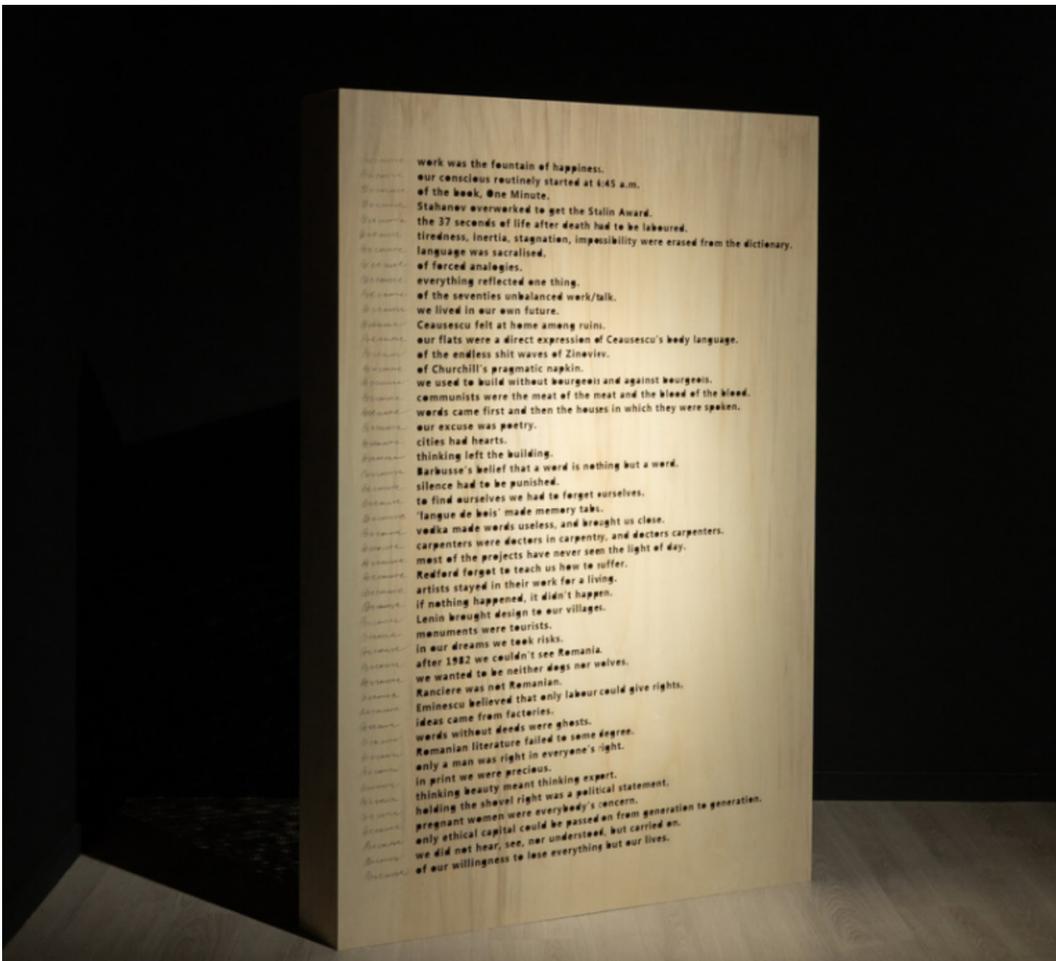


Portrait of Alex Mirutziu. Photo: Studio International.

Alex Mirutziu, born in 1981 in Sibiu, Romania, resides and works in Cluj-Napoca, Romania and London, England, United Kingdom. Mirutziu is known for his performance-, installation-, and object-based practice and body of works.

The Romanian multidisciplinary artist is occupied with the body, misunderstanding, fault or correction, examining topics such as self-familiarization, mediation, interaction, social processes and more. The main concept dominating his artistic practice is his own body and autobiography, using it as a vehicular medium and tool from which the artwork is navigated.[19]

An anthology of Mirutziu's oeuvre:



Alex Mirutziu, *Because*, 2019. Wooden object, cutout text – 190 × 130 × 20 cm. Courtesy Art Encounters Foundation.



Alex Mirutziu, *I can do mornings*, 2012. Archival print – 70 × 93.5 cm. Edition 1/3 + 2AP. Courtesy Sabot, Cluj-Napoca.



Alex Mirutziu, *Sock Face*, 2010. Light box. Courtesy Art Encounters Foundation.

6/20: Mircea Suci (b. 1978)



Portrait of Mircea Suci. Photo: Modernism.ro.

Mircea Suci, born in 1978 in Baia Mara, Romania, resides and works in Cluj, Romania. The Romanian artist is known for his mixed media paintings and his drawings, combining materials and techniques to achieve his characteristic figurative imagery.

It is to say, Suci implements the monoprint technique into his painterly practice. Photographic material is transferred onto the canvas, often creating a grid-like effect when working on a larger scale, from which he tackles the transferred image with oil and acrylic paint. The topics and subject matter of the paintings are often dominated by socio-political themes or psychological aspects examining concepts such as (psychological) pain, metaphysics, mass identity or even philosophical questions.[20]

An anthology of Suci's oeuvre:



Mircea Suci, *Still Life with Lemon*, 2019. Oil, acrylic, monoprint on linen – 13 4/5 × 13 4/5 in / 35 × 35 cm. Courtesy Zeno X Gallery.



Mircea Suci, *Wicked*, 2018. Oil, acrylic and monoprint on linen – 75 3/5 x 43 3/10 in / 192 x 110 cm. Courtesy Zeno X Gallery.



Mircea Suci, *Study for The iron curtain (3)*, 2014. Oil, monoprint, acryl, linen – 70 1/10 x 78 in / 178 x 198 cm. Courtesy of Zeno X Gallery.

7/20: Marius Bercea (b. 1979)



Portrait of Marius Bercea. Photo: Alchetron.

Born in 1979 in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, Marius Bercea lives and works in Cluj, Romania. Bercea is known for his – often large in scale – paintings filled with colour, contrast, objects and an almost *horror vacui* setting.

Based on photographs and from memory, Bercea depicts post-communist Romania in an early-capitalist state. Certain objects and in particular the vivid colours feel as if exotic Romania is not so different from Los Angeles. Bercea depicts figures in these settings, mostly in a state of leisure or engaged in a collective activity.[21]

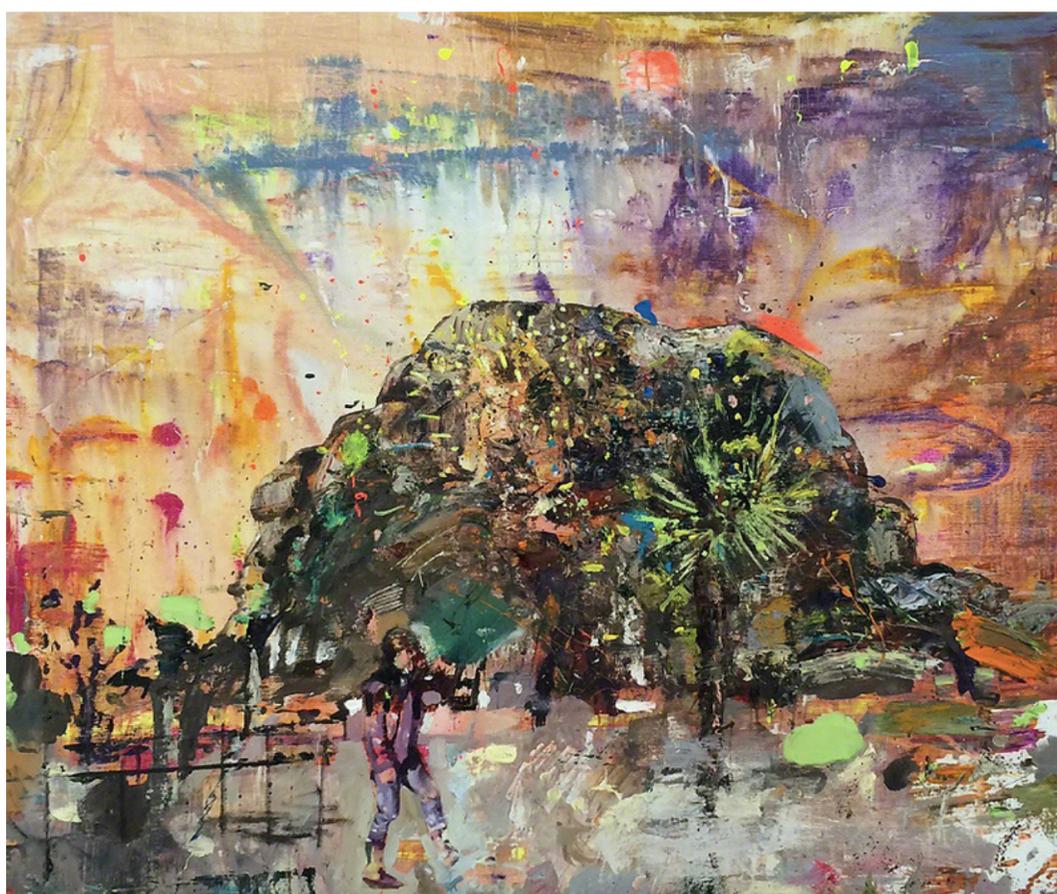
An anthology of Bercea's oeuvre:



Marius Bercea, *Semantic Pair*, 2020. Oil on canvas – 76.2 x 61 cm. Courtesy François Ghelaby, Los Angeles.



Marius Bercea, *Untitled*, 2015. Oil on canvas – 50.2 x 40 cm. Courtesy MAKI.



Marius Bercea, *Mr Echo*, 2014. Oil on canvas – 140 x 160 cm. Courtesy Harper Deyong, London.

8/20: Serban Savu (b. 1978)

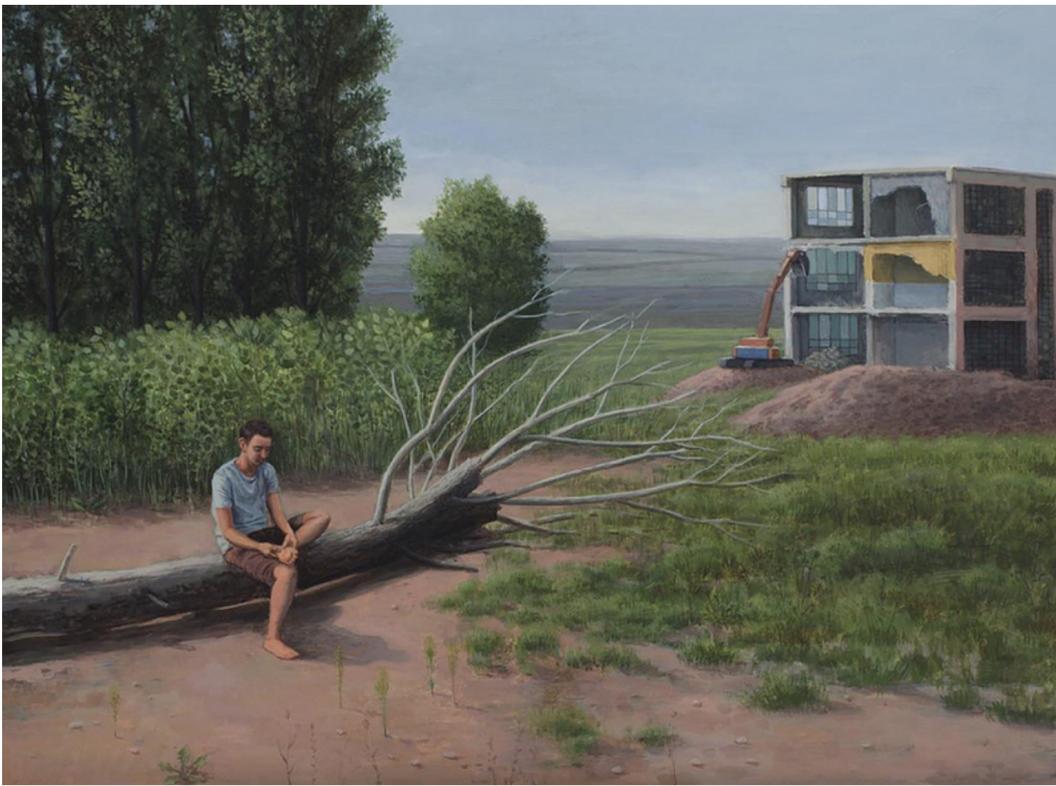


Portrait of Serban Savu in his studio. Photo: Scena9.

Born in Sighișoara, Romania, in 1978, Serban Savu lives and works in Cluj, Romania. The graduate from the *University of Art and Design* in Cluj is known for his skillfully rendered paintings depicting the daily existence of Romanians and Romania today.[22]

In a Courbet-Manet manner, Socialist Realism is a central topic throughout his oeuvre. This realist approach is combined with a touch of melancholy, showing abandoned factories, structures or old cars, but also figures and nature.

An anthology of Savu's oeuvre:



Serban Savu, *The Thorn*, 2020. Acrylic on board – 62 x 84.5 cm. Courtesy Galeria Plan B.



Serban Savu, *Satyr and Nymph at Schlachtensee*, 2016. Oil on canvas – 121.9 x 158.8 cm. Courtesy David Nolan Gallery.



Serban Savu, *Homeless*, 2014. Oil on board – 30 x 26 cm. Courtesy David Nolan Gallery.

9/20: Gabriela Vanga (b. 1977)



Gabriela Vanga. Photo: Art Encounters.

Gabriela Vanga, born in 1977 in Târgu-Mureș, Romania, lives and work in Paris, France and Târgu-Mureș, Romania. Vanga is known for her intriguing sculptures and installations and has been extremely influential in Cluj and beyond for her multimedia practice.

Vanga is married to Mircea Cantor and together with Ciprian Mureșan they launched the artist-run magazine *Version*, which is still up to now a very important initiative for the Cluj art scene.[23]

An anthology of Vanga's oeuvre:



Gabriela Vanga, *Candle Clock*, 2015. Candles and steel – 171 x 171 x 21 cm. Courtesy Galeria Plan B.



Gabriela Vanga, *Mirare*, 2015. Wood ladder, 2 mirrors – variable dimensions. Courtesy Art Encounters Foundation.



Gabriela Vanga, *Pavel*, 2006. Glass and white sand – variable dimensions. Courtesy Galeria Plan B.

10/20: Oana Farcas (b. 1981)

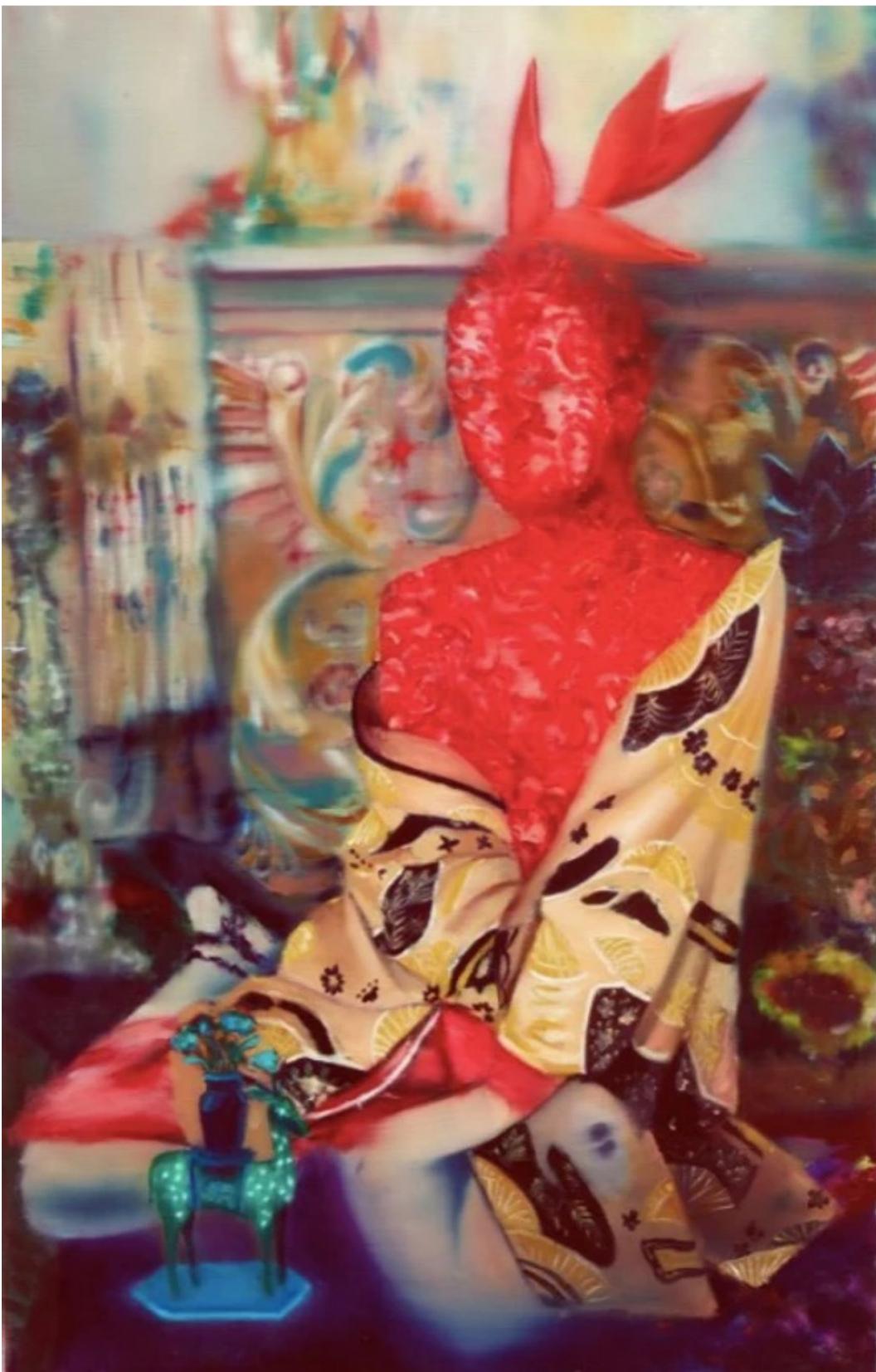


Oana Farcas in her studio. Photo: Getty images.

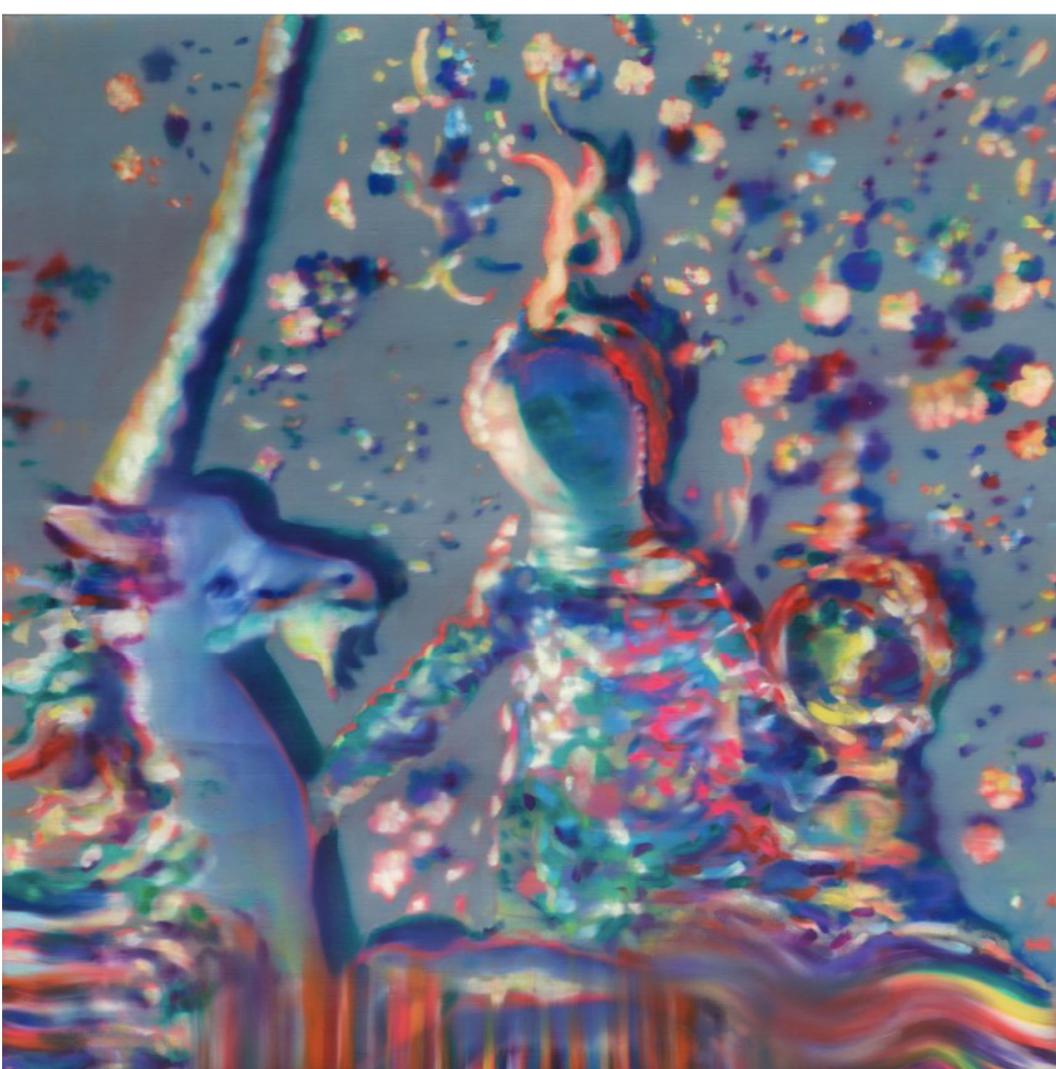
Oana Farcas, born in 1981 in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, lives and works in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Farcas is known for her colourful paintings marked by a distinctive figurative language.

Packed with historical and/or art historic references, her oeuvre communicates an aura of mystery. Dreamy and surreal elements create a complex narrative, filled with strange objects, subjects and poses.[24]

An anthology of Farcas's oeuvre:



Oana Farcas, *Untitled* , 2016. Oil on canvas – 80 × 51 cm. Courtesy Galleria Doris Ghetta.



Oana Farcas, *The lady and the unicorn* , 2015. Oil on canvas – 80.5 × 80.5 cm. Courtesy Galleria Doris Ghetta.



Oana Farcas, *Untitled nr.6*, 2014. Oil on canvas – 54.5 × 44.5 cm. Courtesy Galleria Doris Ghetta.

11/20: Mi Kafchin (b. 1986)



Portrait of Mihut Boscu Kafchin. Photo: Steven Kohlstock.

Mi Kafchin, born in 1986 in Galati, Romania, lives and works in Cluj, Romania and Berlin, Germany. Mi Kafchin was formerly known as Mihut Boscu Kafchin.

Kafchin, the former studio assistant of Adrian Ghenie, is known for an array of paintings and multimedia installations, resulting in an international reputation. The emerging artist is best known for surreal figurative paintings combining concepts such as time, cosmology, Eastern philosophy and dystopia into contemporary masterpieces.[25]

An anthology of Kafchin's oeuvre:



Mihut Boscu Kafchin, *Political Alchemy*, 2016. Oil on canvas – 184 x 214 cm. Courtesy Galeria Plan B.



Mihut Boscu Kafchin, *Quarrel at the Fountain of Youth*, 2016. Oil on canvas – 90 x 142 cm. Courtesy Galeria Plan B.



Mihut Boscu Kafchin, *TV that lives alone*, 2015. Oil on styrofoam – 37 x 37 cm. Courtesy Galeria Plan B.

12/20: Cristi Pogăcean (b. 1980)



Portrait of Cristi Pogăcean. Photo: Art Encounters.

Cristi Pogăcean, born in 1980 in Târgu-Mureș, Romania, lives and works in Târgu-Mureș, Romania. Pogăcean is known for his experimental artistic approach, defying the academic tradition of Romanian artistic education.

Pogăcean achieved international recognition effectuated by a wide variety of methods and media. Encompassing sculpture, drawing, painting and installation, the neo-conceptual artist defies categorization with his multimedia practice. Drawing inspiration from every day life and mass media, he searches for objects, images and ideas which he artistically tackles with irony, wit and ingenuity as his weapons of choice.[26]

An anthology of Pogăcean's oeuvre:



Cristi Pogăcean, *Screenshot Memorial*, 2016-2017. Oil on canvas – 197 x 350 cm. Courtesy Galeria Plan B.



Cristi Pogăcean, *Temporary Self-Portrait / Because of you*, 2015. Courtesy Galeria Plan B.



Cristi Pogăcean, *Lead*, 2006. Cast lead – variable dimensions. Courtesy Galeria Plan B.

13/20: Teodora Axente (b. 1984)



Portrait of Teodora Axente in her studio. Photo: Transilvania Reporter.

Teodora Axente, born in 1984 in Sibiu, Romania, lives and works in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Axente is a visual artist known for her figurative paintings filled with fabrics, surreal elements and virtuosity.

Exploring states of internal crisis, Axente depicts human figures constricted and constructed with various objects, fabrics and materials. These collaged figures present juxtapositions between the material and the spiritual. This dualistic approach encompasses concepts such as human emotion, human desire, individuality and modern society.[27]

An anthology of Axente's oeuvre:



Teodora Axente, *Pietà*, 2019. Oil on board – 29 x 24 cm. Courtesy Rosenfeld, London.



Teodora Axente, *John the Baptist II*, 2015. Oil on canvas – 40 x 22 cm. Courtesy Galleria Doris Ghetta.



Teodora Axente, *Charles III*, 2017. Oil on canvas – 214 × 147 cm. Courtesy Rosenfeld, London.

14/20: Mihai Iepure Gorski (b. 1982)



Portrait of Mihai Iepure Gorski. Photo: Twitter.

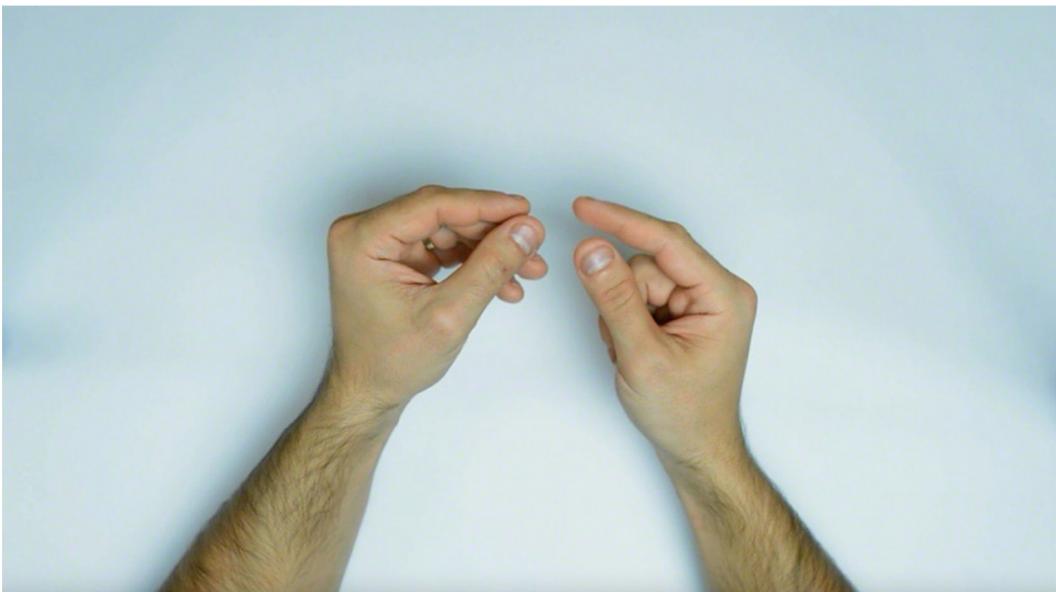
Mihai Iepure Gorski, born in 1982 in Alba-Iulia, Romania, resides and works in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Iepure Gorski is a visual artist known for his installations, photography, stills and video art.

The Romanian artist graduated from the University of Art and Design in Cluj-Napoca in 2007, obtaining his master degree in arts. A varied artistic oeuvre followed, rooted in a post-conceptual tradition.

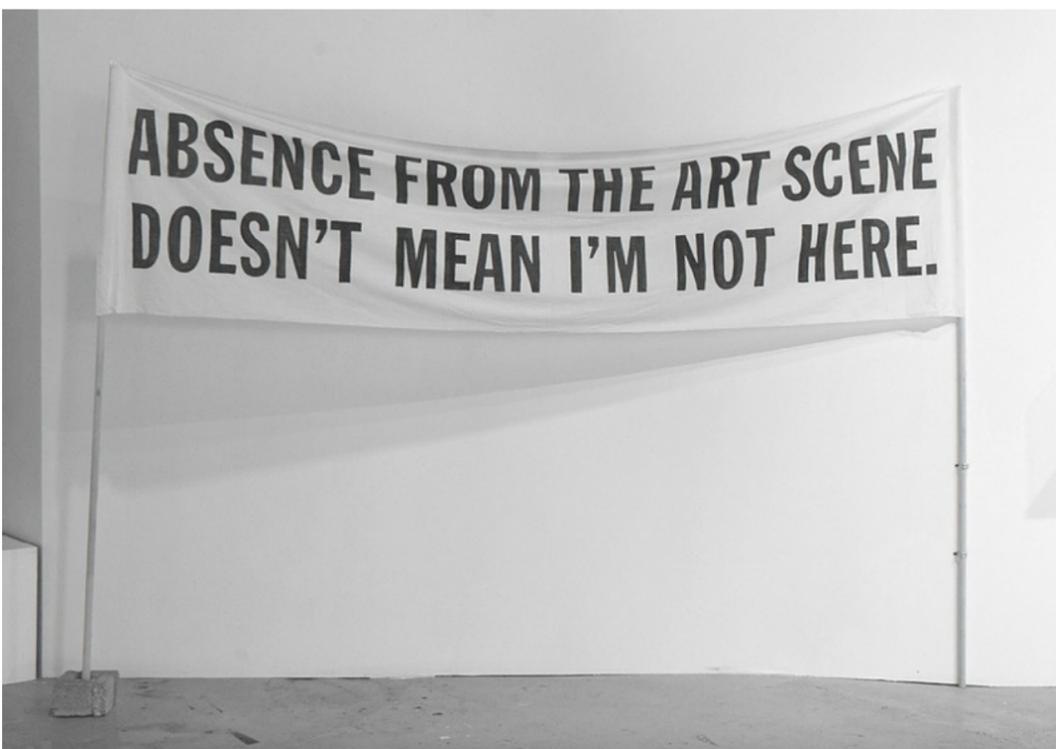
An anthology of Iepure Gorski's oeuvre:



Mihai Iepure Gorski, *Souvenir*, 2014. Four dried plum trees – variable dimensions. Courtesy Art Encounters Foundation.



Mihai Iepure Gorski, *Untitled*, 2014. Digital video. Editions 1-5 of 5 + 2AP. Courtesy BARIL, Cluj-Napoca.



Mihai Iepure Gorski, *Absence From the Art Scene Doesn't Mean I'm Not Here*, 2009. Text on fabric – 285 x 70 cm. Courtesy BARIL, Cluj-Napoca.

15/20: Szabolcs Veres (b. 1983)



Portrait of Szabolcs Veres in his studio. Photo: Christie's.

Szabolcs Veres, born in 1983 in Satu Mare, Romania, lives and works in Cluj, Romania. Veres is a contemporary painter marked by strong impastos and collage-like compositions.

His vivid palette and loose brushwork is often in the tradition of portraiture and figure painting. Veres' approach towards painting denies the traditional aesthetic intention, resulting in unsettling images encompassing concepts such as beauty, a tension between reality, idealized figures and the grotesque.[28]

An anthology of Veres' oeuvre:



Szabolcs Veres, *Bedroom*, 2016. Oil on canvas – 32.5 × 40 cm. Courtesy of Spencer Brownstone Gallery, New York.



Szabolcs Veres, *Herpes 13*, 2014. Oil on canvas – 24 × 18 cm. Courtesy of Spencer Brownstone Gallery, New York.



Szabolcs Veres, *Studies for a Hunt 9*, 2008. Oil on canvas – 150 x 120 cm. Courtesy of Spencer Brownstone Gallery, New York.

16/20: Răzvan Botiș (b. 1984)



Răzvan Botiș in his studio. Photo: Instagram.

Born in 1984 in Brașov, Romania, Răzvan Botiș currently lives and works in Cluj, Romania. Botiș is known for his conceptual installations and body of work.

Encompassing sculpture and installation in the tradition of Duchamp, Botiș uses ready-mades and found objects to sculpt his works, or, ceramics to give form to his conceptual ideas.

An anthology of Botiș' oeuvre:



Răzvan Botiș, *The Ceramist (installation view)*, 2019. Courtesy the artist and SABOT, Cluj-Napoca. Photo: YAP Studio.



Răzvan Botiș, *Voltaire street*, 2016. Courtesy the artist and SABOT, Cluj-Napoca.



Răzvan Botiș, *Wash & Go*, 2008. Wood, leather, broomcorn – 20 x 29 x 15 cm. Edition 3/3 + 2AP. Courtesy the artist and SABOT, Cluj-Napoca.

17/20: Sergiu Toma (b. 1987)



Portrait of Sergiu Toma. Photo: Galleria Doris Ghetta.

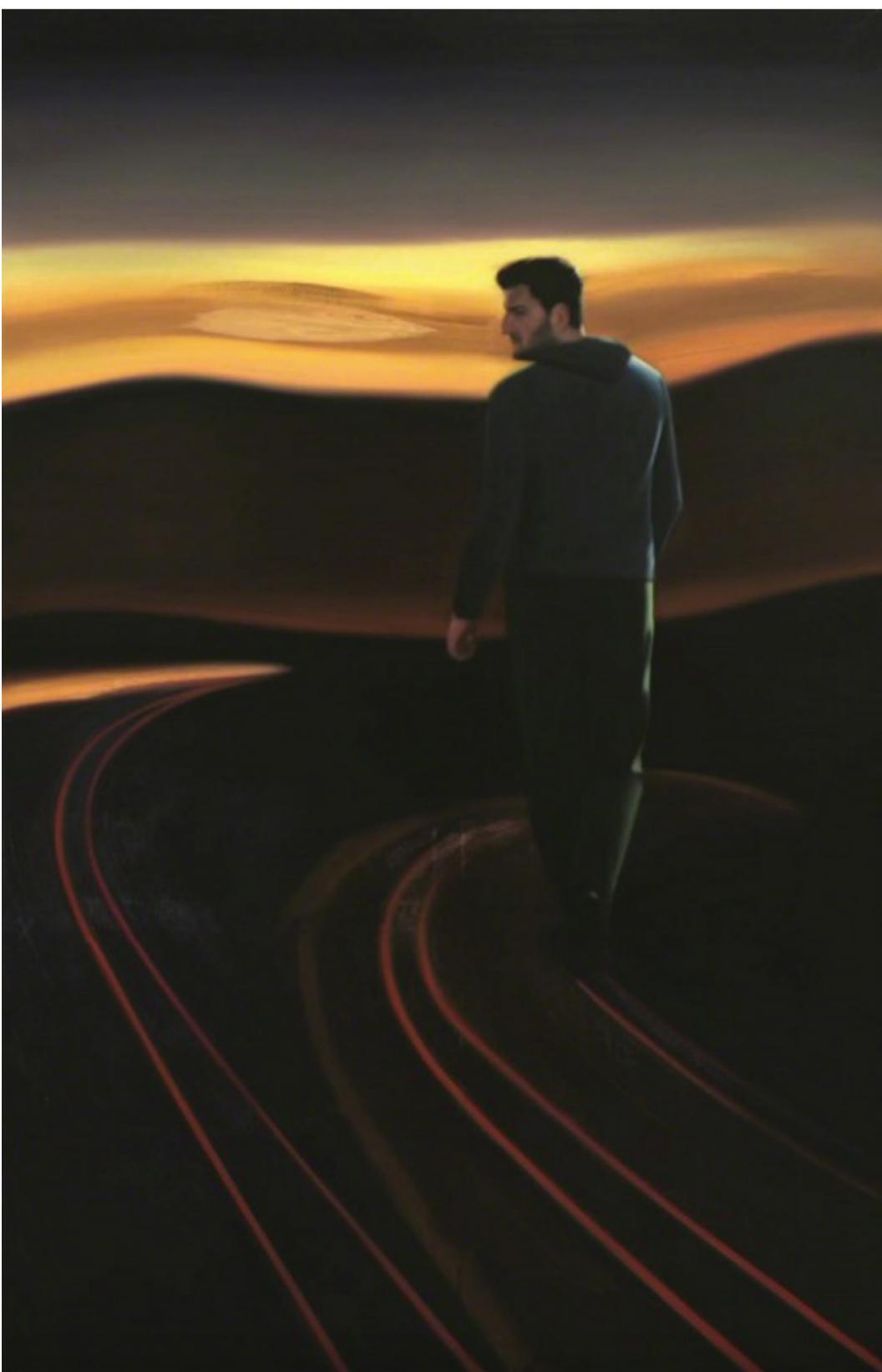
Sergiu Toma, born in 1987 in Baia-Mare, Romania, resides and works in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Toma is a contemporary painter known for his distinctive figurative style with a mysterious character.

Inspired by Renaissance, Baroque and theatricality, Toma explores painting as a medium *an sich*. The expressive potential of painting, guided by light and shadow inflicts a playful and free approach resulting in a mysterious and dynamic imagery.[29]

An anthology of Toma's oeuvre:



Sergiu Toma, *untitled*, 2018. Oil on canvas – 60 × 60 cm. Courtesy Galleria Doris Ghetta.



Sergiu Toma, *Walk with Me*, 2017. Oil on canvas – 200 × 130 cm. Courtesy Tajan ArtStudio.



Sergiu Toma, *The Wormhole*, 2016. Oil on canvas – 200 x 200 cm. Courtesy Galleria Doris Ghetta.

18/20: Robert Fekete (b. 1987)

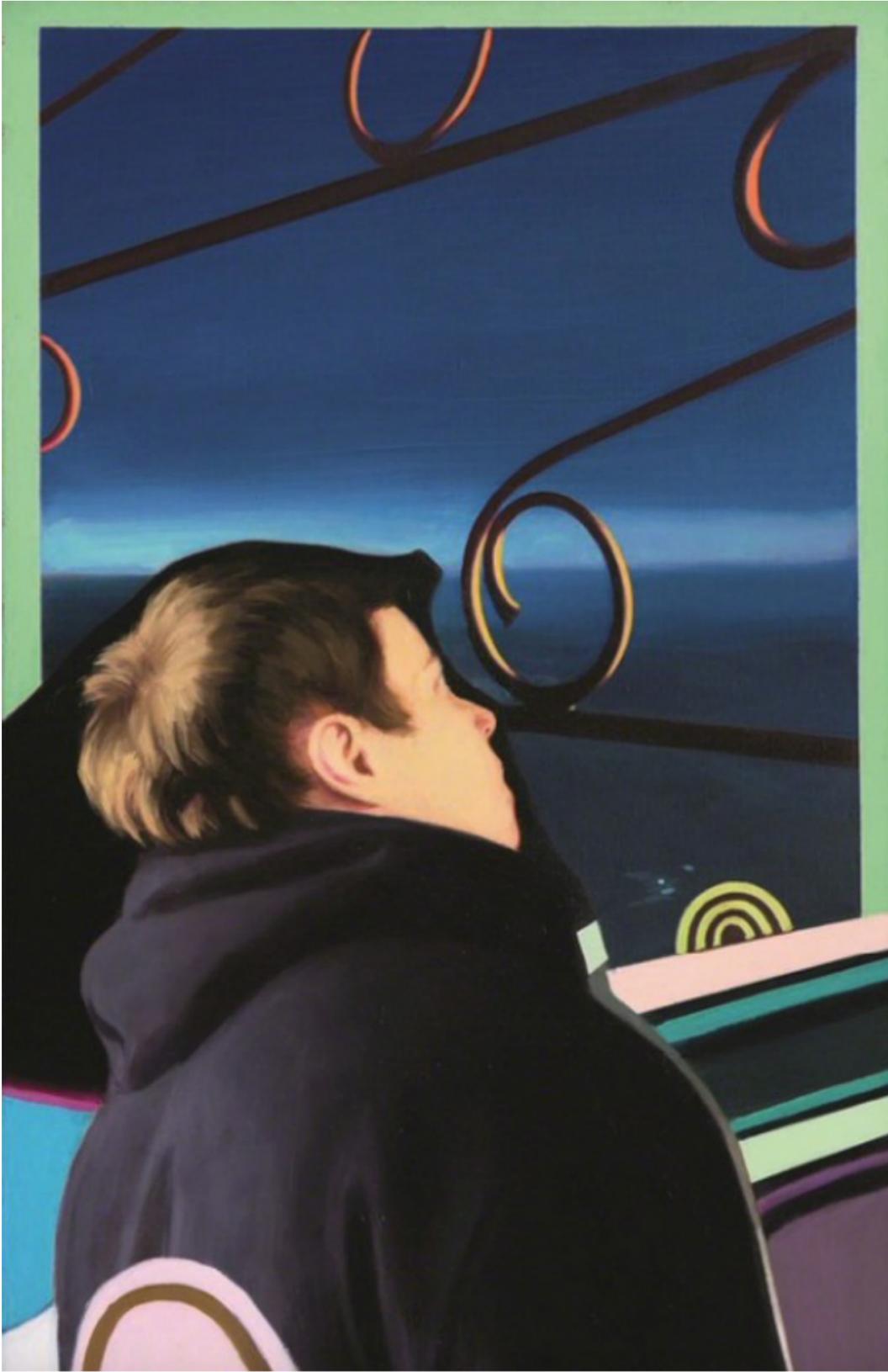


Portrait of Robert Fekete. Photo: Art-3000.

Robert Fekete, born in 1987 in Satu Mare, is a visual artist primarily known as a painter residing and working in Cluj, Romania.

Fekete's oeuvre is marked by colour, figuration, contrast and a certain playfulness. He fragments images, using photographic source material of friends, objects, newspapers, film frames, landscapes and more, and reassembles them in an ambiguous and amalgam entity.

An anthology of Fekete's oeuvre:



Robert Fekete, *The Bound 2*, 2017. Oil on canvas – 116 × 74 cm. Courtesy Tajan ArtStudio, Paris.



Robert Fekete, *Not Dark Yet*, 2017. Oil on canvas – 180 × 137 cm. Courtesy Tajan ArtStudio, Paris.



Robert Fekete, *I Came With the Sun*, 2017. Acrylic and oil on canvas – 145 x 86 cm. Courtesy Tajan ArtStudio, Paris.

19/20: Ana Maria Micu (b. 1979)



Portrait of Ana Maria Micu. Photo: Saatchi.

Ana Maria Micu, born in 1979 in Botoșani, Romania, lives and works in Botoșani, Romania. The Art and Design University of Cluj-Napoca graduate studied painting, resulting in a figurative body of work.

Micu's oeuvre explores many ideas and concepts, functioning as a continuum throughout her career. Body language, portraiture, self-portraiture, interiors, personal spaces and more are some of the main issues addressed and examined by the Romanian artist.[30]

An anthology of Micu's oeuvre:



Ana Maria Micu, *By crowds, all sorts of... He was granted an audience*, 2019. Oil on linen – 157 x 185 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Ana Maria Micu, *The intrusion of chance and... Pleasures*, 2018. Oil and acrylic on canvas – 82 x 117 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Ana Maria Micu, *Finishes, trim and ... All surfaces must be*, 2018. Oil on canvas – 187 x 124 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

20/20: Dan Maciuca (b. 1979)



Dan Maciuca in his studio. Photo: Hassium.

Dan Maciuca, born in 1979 in Craiova, Romania, lives and works in Cluj, Romania. Maciuca is a neo-expressionist painter hovering between figuration and abstraction, inflicted by sheer expressive strokes of paint.

Using geometric or figurative elements as backdrops, Maciuca creates a certain space in his paintings which he then populates with thick impastos. Doing so, he examines and explores the uncertainty through utopian urban landscapes, opposing the geometric with the organic, the figuration with the abstraction and the smooth surface with the raw texture of the impasto.[31]

An anthology of Maciuca's oeuvre:



Dan Maciuca, *Wind Movement*, 2020. Oil on canvas – 100 x 100 cm. Courtesy Zorzini F Gallery.



Dan Maciuca, *Peripheral Landscape*, 2015. Oil on canvas – 150 x 200 cm. Courtesy Zorzini F Gallery.



Dan Maciuca, *Storm*, 2020. Oil on canvas – 120 × 130 cm. Courtesy Zorzini F Gallery.

Conclusion — Peroration

Concerning contemporary art in Cluj since the new millennium, there are many conclusions possible. First and foremost, a phenomenon on itself is the vast amount of (successful) artists in such a small era and area. As a result, Cluj is currently one of the most exciting cities and a leading artistic scene. However, due to this success, there are many pitfalls for art critics, gallerists, collectors and even for the Cluj artists themselves.

The generation of artists born roughly around 1975-1985 (cf. supra; Main Representatives) can be considered as the established and historical generation of artists putting the Transylvanian city of Cluj on the map of contemporary art. Their impact on the international artistic landscape will remain visible for the years to come, nesting themselves into the canon of the 21st century.

Even more, their impact for today's generation of artists remains very noticeable. As they've given Cluj an international visibility, the world is currently watching Cluj with suspicious eyes and a magnifying glass. A positive, for young artists in Cluj to have a platform with international interest to make a name for themselves. But at the same time a threat, for the artists to follow too closely in the footsteps of their predecessors. Or, for the collectors, critics and gallerists, to lose their unprejudiced attitude and objectivity when approaching new art from the Transylvanian capital.

When talking with other art critics or when reading the recent literature on Cluj and the Cluj School, the opinions are very divided. To be blunt, there are two tendencies. A first, declaring everything which comes from Cluj to be great art and very promising. A second, declaring all the art coming from Cluj is overhyped crap.

In fact, according to my humble opinion, both tendencies are equally wrong and the truth is to be found in the middle ground, as often. In any case, Cluj remains one of the most interesting art scenes. One may argue the Transylvanian city is over its peak, as the new generation is wrestling with the illustrious legacy of Ghenie and consorts, this issue in itself combined with the thriving artistic dynamic urging through the city remains an utmost intriguing development. As always, the same principles remain with art pleading for a critical approach in which every artist is a different case study, as is every group, movement, wave or scene.

Edited and written by Julien Delagrance
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Notes:

[1] Richard Unwin, "City Report: Cluj" in *Frieze Blog*.

[2] Jane Neal, "Cluj" in *Art Cities of the Future : 21st century Avant-Garde*. (London: Phaidon, 2013), p. 63.

[3] Quote from Adrian Ghenie via e-mail correspondence with the author Jane Neal in December 2011. Jane Neal, "Cluj" in *Art Cities of the Future : 21st century Avant-Garde*. (London: Phaidon, 2013), p. 63.

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[8] Ibidem.

[9] Galeria Plan B, *About* at <https://www.plan-b.ro/info> consulted 4/01/2021.

[10] Ibidem note 2, p. 64.

[11] Ibidem note 9.

[12] Judit Angel, *European Travellers. Art from Cluj Today*. (Budapest: Kunsthalle Budapest, 2015), p. 92-99.

[13] Bogdan Teodor Iacob, "The Cluj School of Painting: Main representatives of a contemporary art phenomenon" in *Brukenthal. Acta Mvsei*, XII.2 (2017): p. 440.

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- [19] Artsy, *Alex Mirutziu* at <https://www.artsy.net/artist/alex-mirutziu> consulted 12/01/2021.
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