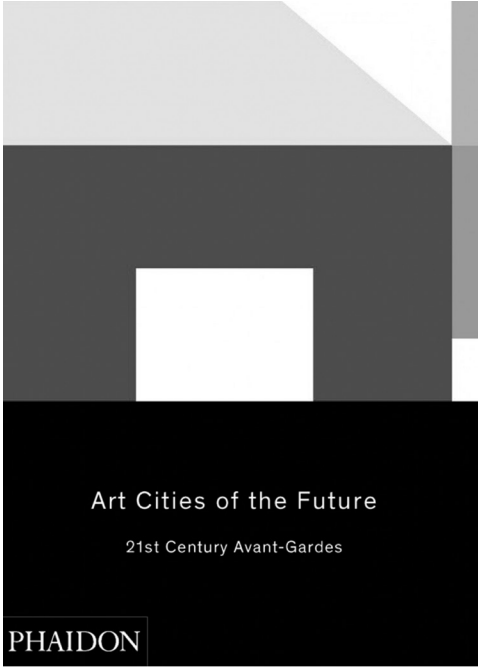


Artistic Identity and Hegemony in the Establishment of the Painting School of Cluj

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THE EMERGENCE of recognized talents in the context generated by the Painting School of Cluj has been discussed time and again over the past twenty years, nationally and internationally, and the artists in question have consolidated their reputation with the support of prestigious galleries, museums, biennales, and contemporary art fairs.

The School of Cluj became a local brand further internationalized in different ways and by numerous means, but the debate regarding its name and the people who relied on this terminology still remains present locally and has expanded internationally, among artists, critics, and art institutions, as well as within the academic institution where it started to develop. The situation is clear as long as the representatives of the school of painting constituted within the University of Art and Design of Cluj assimilate parts of the painting tradition they have followed, up to a certain point, or towards which



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they have taken a stand in key moments of their professional evolution.¹ The institutional structural paradigm of the Painting School of Cluj is connected both to the private initiatives of valorization and, implicitly, to the relationships between institutions of cultural and artistic education. The aim of this paper is to point out the noteworthy initiatives of the University of Art and Design, as well as those of other entities or cultural movements, viewed as hegemonic structures, together with the hegemony of painting—an autonomous form of expression in contemporary art.

Who Is Represented by the Painting School of Cluj?

WHAT HAS been written about the Painting School of Cluj can be observed in the way artists belonging to different generations, with a professional history fostered in Cluj, have come to be publicized (Aurel Ciupe, Ioan Sbârciu, Florin Maxa, Victor Ciato, Andor Kórnives, Nicolae Man, Ioan Aurel Mureşan, Cornel Brudaşcu, László Bence, Cristian Rusu, Adrian Ghenie, Şerban Savu, Victor Man, Mircea Suciuc, Ciprian Mureşan, Marius Bercea, Oana Fărcaş, and many others²), while participating in major contemporary art events (the Venice Biennale—the 56th edition 2015, the 59th edition 2019, the Prague Biennale—the third edition, in 2007, art fairs—Basel,³ Istanbul⁴), in international exhibitions and acquisitions in prestigious museums (Centre Pompidou,⁵ Tate Modern,⁶ San Francisco Museum of Modern Art,⁷ and others), or in sales records over the last ten years (Adrian Ghenie's success at Sotheby's,⁸ or other artists featured by galleries at important international art fairs). A special role was played by writings or interviews about artists and artistic movements and featured in publications such as *Flash Art*,⁹ *ARTnews*,¹⁰ or *Art Tribune*,¹¹ as part of personal exhibition catalogues, or museums (such as the Cluj-Napoca Art Museum) and art centers, or in the assertion of centers and art galleries, both locally or abroad (Pace Gallery, Thaddaeus Ropac, Blain Southern, David Nolan, Plan B, Art Center Hugo Voeten, Ron Mandos, and others)—as spaces that coordinate and propagate new avant-garde initiatives or reflections of the artistic tendencies of the present (Plan B Gallery in Cluj and in Berlin, The Paintbrush Factory,¹² and many others, which, in turn, host gallery headquarters, art residencies, exhibitions, and the artists' studios). The number of people promoted or self-promoted by such means fluctuates, Cluj becoming, in itself, due to the fame gained over the past ten years, a space for the propagation of the spectacle, of the artistic event, with the assumed role of recognition—and thus legitimization—of some groups of creators, gallerists,

curators, emerged within decision groups regarding the valuation of the artistic production associated with one or the other, as exponents of the School of Cluj. The mechanism is as natural as possible, considering the opening towards multiple possibilities of affirmation, opportunities, and the tendencies to seek profit from artistic success, be it short, medium, or long term. Cluj has been turning into a city of cultural tourism, and visits to the artists' studios paid by experts from Tate Modern or Pompidou have been guided by representatives of institutions with strong influence over the education and artistic training environments, in Cluj or elsewhere. These deciding structures become hegemonic forces, influencing what is perceived and appreciated as being a "product" of the School of Cluj.

Cultural Hegemony

THE PRINCIPLE of cultural hegemony as conceptualized by Antonio Gramsci applies to the construction of mechanisms imposing the hybrid pictorial styles launched into the current artistic world by the fertile ground of the Painting School of Cluj. Several publications characterize the school of painting as a descendance moment of artistic establishment, individual or group. In this sense, the idea of cultural hegemony is associated with the recognition of the influence played by education, together with the institutions of cultural promotion, as determining factors in outlining the artistic profiles (reference is made here to artists, groups, movements, currents, styles).

Universities, crafts, media institutions, museums, among others, are part of the ensemble designating the forms of control over society. In complete agreement with this idea, the Australian sociologist Tony Bennett¹³ described the theory of the exhibitionary complex (museums, galleries, biennales) following Michel Foucault's theories regarding the system of disciplinary institutions which include modern society as well, in the form of a "confining" complex. Also, the exhibition itself became an extension of this principle, where the panopticon imagined by Foucault became the supreme control mechanism, a political instrument which assimilated the current mechanisms "of seeing without being seen," of watching over and guiding the actions in a joint space. In other words, the artistic phenomenon revealed to us is part of a more complex system involved in keeping the interest of the public, confined to the multiplied images of the architecture of the exhibitional space (described by Bennett), which takes the shape of the museum complex (*Exhibitionary apparatuses*¹⁴), respectively it becomes part of a civil society network, to which some hegemonic deciding groups are substi-

tuted. The assumed role of these groups is educational and becomes the driving force of a culture that is about to be “absorbed” into the public space.

Hegemonic Entities Involved in Promoting the Painting School of Cluj

THE REAFFIRMATION of a generation in an academic form, starting with the post-revolutionary period (the '90s), underpins the propagation initiatives of the artistic message coming from the Painting School of Cluj. The Adrian Ghenie “case” became a visible model of success in recognizing his artistic value within different mediums that promote the artistic object. As such, a new perspective regarding the promotion of the school of painting was set in place. With the insertion of the mechanisms of the art market, the training through artistic education started to interfere with the concrete means of exploiting the artistic processes, which inevitably intervened in the evaluation of the individual trajectory in the autonomous domain of painting as well. When the discussion regarding the work of art extends beyond the limits set by the act of creation and education in the artistic domain, where the art “play” occurs on unstable ground in the evolution of the art markets (the art market is not part of the scope of this paper), the phenomenon associated with the School of Cluj could be isolated from the very object of painting, and could lose some of the notoriety built year after year, with the assertion of the younger generations. Let us not forget that the recognition of the artistic merit is directly proportional to the work volume, reflected in the participation in national and international exhibitions, in the affirmation of talents as a contribution to national and global culture. The multiple possibilities of individual or collective achievement emerge with the introduction of modalities of artistic expression, self-imposed in relation with forms of pictorial traditions already known and implicitly covered, within the current image of art.

One such nucleus of forces was manifest before 2007, specifically when Giancarlo Politi addressed the relevance of the Painting School of Cluj and of the schools in Leipzig or Dresden.¹⁵ After the year 2000, with a complex activation of forces, the School set itself to become a first-rank institution of artistic education, creating contexts meant to connect the post-revolutionary cultural life to the global reality in the field. From 2002 until 2009, the “Europa Artium” Autumn Academy was hosted by the University of Art and Design at the initiative of painter and Professor Ioan Sbârciu (rector in 2002), promoter of the school of painting. The event was ample, unique in Romania at that time, and had as a purpose the integration of the city into the larger sphere of contemporary art

centers by drawing the attention upon a center of artistic forms that was in full expansion.¹⁶ A series of such events took place and many prestigious personalities were invited from Romania and from abroad, conferences were organized, as well as symposiums, exhibitions, and workshops, as such manifestations purposefully introduced, after all, a new concept to Romanian education, namely the opening towards different perspectives, curricular models, and approaches to art—in particular, painting. Such an opening involved the recognition and acceptance on behalf of University of Art and Design of visual research directions closely related to contemporary realities.

Important personalities, representatives of national and international culture, were invited, such as: Markus Lüpertz, Jean-Pierre Greff, Dan Hăulică, René Burri, Chris Wainwright, Hans-Peter Schwarz, John Butler, Robert Fleck, Dominique Auerbacher, Hermann Nitsch, Werner Meyer, Walter Smerling, Chantal De Smet, Catherine Millet, or Philip Rylands. Also, a component of this ensemble is represented by the personalities who received the title of Doctor Honoris Causa¹⁷ of the University of Art and Design: Bernard Blistène, Enzo Cucchi, Sabrina Grassi, and others.

The School of Painting of the University of Art and Design of Cluj has been, probably, one of the first such institutions in the former communist bloc to redirect its capacities beyond the role of training young talents. As a result of this opening towards the Western world, the university reassessed its institutional role in the complex network of art structures, starting with the analysis of the triangular relationship, artist–artistic higher education–contemporary art scene (“Europa Artium,” 2004). Likewise, before integrating in its structure a curriculum exclusively based on art theory, it aimed to analyze the artist–curator–gallerist relationship (“Europa Artium,” 2005), the role and the evolution of art in society, the authenticity of the traditional and contemporary media, or the instances of art legitimization and their influence upon artistic production (“Europa Artium,” 2006–2009).¹⁸

Moreover, the university directed its attention towards promoting young talents and outlining a critical perspective on the work of art. Thus, not only did it develop its own platform of artists within the institution, but it also organized projects and exhibitions at the Ataș Gallery, coordinated, starting with the year 2002, by Mihai Pop,¹⁹ a graduate of the Painting Department. He first proved himself as an artist alongside Adrian Ghenie, Victor Man, Cristian Rusu, and others, and he is now recognized as the most important Romanian curator and gallerist; he is the promoter of the independent artistic movements which placed Cluj on the world cultural map; he is, at the same time, commissioner of the Romanian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale (Victor Man, Cristi Pogăcean, Mona Vătămanu & Florin Tudor, *Low-Budget Monuments*, 2007), and curator of the same Pavilion (Adrian Ghenie, *Darwin’s Room*, 2015).²⁰

The Institutional Autonomy and Its Formative Role

IN LINE with the objectives imposed by the school of painting, under the artistic-managerial coordination of the former rector and current president of the University Senate, Professor Ioan Sbârciu, several exhibitions have been organized in collaboration with international artists over the last ten years: Markus Lüpertz, Hermann Nitsch, Enzo Cucchi, with gallerists and prestigious curators, and with personalities associated with this reputed school of painting. These cultural partners promoted an individual vision regarding the artistic phenomenon in Cluj, showcasing it in relation with their own preoccupations, aspects regarding painting styles, local cultural values, creative ideas, or a critical position adopted with respect to the present-day society.

From the perspective of personal artistic assertion, identity is assumed and understood as a sum of different historic periods of the autobiographic course (the communist and post-revolutionary periods marked by regime changes, contributions to the creation of a national conscience, social and economic cohesion, awareness of the accession to the European space, and connection to some global developments within multiple perspectives stemming from the local media, etc.), together with the professional training in different educational institutions, among the most relevant being the artistic education. Such an institution is meant to build bridges with acknowledged artistic styles and currents, with a focus on theoretical study and the assimilation of artistic influences within one's personal cultural development, from a perspective oriented towards the accumulation of experience. The practice of techniques and the development of a personal, critical perspective are important, together with the recognition of aesthetic and useful philosophical concepts, relevant and adaptable to our times. The curricular complexity is founded on the clear structure of the ideas and methods employed in the analysis and synthesis of the information associated with artistic theories, the institution of art aiming to correlate them with the imaginary arsenal of each student. In addition, the university encourages the self-promotion initiatives of young artists (participation to exhibitions, residencies, and contests) or those meant to deepen various specialized concepts, using the academic offer or the human and material resources mediated by partner institutions from abroad (Erasmus+ scholarships). Finally, the University of Art and Design can be seen as an accumulation and reactivation medium for the communication networks among art institutions (academies, prestigious universities, museums, art centers, galleries, etc.), or with various partners coming from other disciplinary areas (scientific and research institutions, private companies from the industrial and technological fields). Numerous examples can be mentioned in this sense; there is an annual project for the promotion of student

performance in partnership with other cultural institutions and private companies, which aims at the public voting on different projects of personal creation.²¹ There are diverse partnerships between the University of Art and Design and other institutions, based on projects, collaborations and sponsorships (providing work spaces for occasional activities or for exhibitions).²²

How the Painting School of Cluj Gets Worldwide Recognition

SPEAKING OF the power mechanisms that influence the artistic environment in Cluj and the frameworks of manifestation in promoting the artistic product and, implicitly, the “construction” of some currents, movements, or established names, reference can be made to a few examples promoted in the public space by art publications and some institutions, sharing the opinions of influencers regarding the Painting School of Cluj. It is important to mention this in regard to the separatist tendencies of the groups formed and coagulated in the same artistic-educational environment, specifically the University of Art and Design. We mention, thus, a tendency to separate and isolate the names of renowned artists, closely related to a specific artistic line, or to an ensemble of themes, which restricts, from a dialectic point of view, the complexity of conceptual directions and artistic approaches of interest for the art school.

An example is the Artsy virtual page (www.artsy.net), a platform for art promotion, which aims to contribute to the expansion of the art market and, in this sense, to promote successful artists. The School is presented through a relevant selection of names, but this is not conclusive enough. The representativeness of these names could become the foundation for a dispute among other successful painters, who could recognize their own work in the cursory, ambiguous description found on this platform, the names mentioned being representative from the perspective of specific galleries:

*A group of painters who coalesced in Cluj-Napoca (the unofficial capital of the historic Transylvania region of Romania) after the 1989 Romanian Revolution. Their style is characterized by the loose application of paint—often with dark, sultry palettes—and the presentation of vignettes illustrating the uncertainty and banality of life after the fall of communism.*²³

The abovementioned statement is of limited accuracy, as it derives from placing the work and the artist close to the moment of the fall of communism in Romania, at any cost, without being aware of the fact that some of these artists were

born as the regime was falling, without having a clear and assumed reference regarding the period of the communist dictatorship of that time. Therefore, the perspective with reference to the “banality of life” reflects a reality not necessarily shared by all the referential artists, rather untouched by the utopia of socialism. In exchange, “a banality of life”—an idea reiterated at another lecture which had as a topic the School of Cluj²⁴—is formulated in such a manner so as to coagulate a so-called movement characterized by everyday scenes, marked by the idea of a consumerist society, by social realism (opposed to socialist realism, on the ruins of which the nostalgic works of Șerban Savu were created), or by a manifest capitalist tint, with strident color infusions (Marius Bercea); these thematic approaches complete—in an ostentatious way—the dark palette in the inherited pictorial traditions, together with the landscape, the static nature, the scenes, and characters of complex compositions, along the lines of Ion Andreescu or Ștefan Luchian’s artistic genre. The examples and the charts²⁵ are numerous and the focus is on the image built around each painter emerged from the Painting School of Cluj. Still, the themes tackled by them are rather integrated in the development of an individual style, with a valid artistic identity, affirmed in more or less isolated groups, but which could be easily identified as being part of the new “wave” of painting already acknowledged internationally.

The school of painting represents “a fertile soil” for the formation of identities, as it is equally prepared to engage in a “fertile” dialogue with established identities of modern and contemporary painting. In this sense, there were numerous frameworks meant to connect the Cluj painting with well-known artistic movements and trends, such as German expressionism, Viennese actionism, abstractionism, and many others, concomitantly launching new means of expression in the formation of painting styles. This was made possible by displaying the artists trained by the School in Cluj alongside names such as R. A. Penk, Arnulf Rainer, Hermann Nitsch, Markus Lüpertz, Antonio Vedova, Kazuo Shiraga, Enzo Cucchi, and many others, in private collections.²⁶ An essential role was played by the painter Ioan Sbârciu, through his collaborative initiatives with institutions of art, in creating exhibition projects, in order to coagulate and coordinate the teams and the groups of artists, who were offered the possibility to engage in a dialogue with internationally successful names in the field. The continuity of Professor Ioan Sbârciu’s pictorial language, prolific in the sense of the significance that could be attributed to him, within each artistic project (the *Don Quijote* cycles, *The Rape of Europe*, *The Cinder Forest*, and others), reveals a work with content perfectly adaptable to the contemporary movement, bearing the visible mark of conceptualism. The expressionist-romantic note is reflected in his work in abstract and figurative notes, in the gestural sensualism which merges the spectacular, immanent effect of color with the nostalgia of a timeless landscape; the ancestral space becoming a fantastic one, foreshadowing

the primordial essence of genesis, under the indispensable effect of light.²⁷ Ioan Sbârciu's painting and the relationship between, on one hand, the pictorial process and, on the other, the traditions, the historical trends, and the series of contemporary manifest-projects²⁸ ensure the continuous assimilation of his work into the current artistic tendencies. This is highlighted even more as the numerous possibilities of artistic self-assertion and the relevance of the educational-artistic process have been emphasized in the development of contemporary artistic discourses.

Reality and Fiction in Artistic Creation: The Hegemony of Painting

THE REFERENCE to the history of painting in Cluj is related to the pictorial tradition, on one hand, but also to a vision closely tied to the cult of personality built around the Ceaușescu family, to which many painters had conformed²⁹ throughout their career. From among them, a good example of contemporary success is the artist Cornel Brudașcu, who has constantly managed to adapt to his time, bringing into his work outstanding elements of Romanian socio-political life, respectively elements particular to the local community of Cluj. In Brudașcu's painting, the so-called repression carried out by the dictatorial regime in Romania was transformed, for those times, into post-modern themes. Not accidentally, what has been written about his art, which was highly mediatised at the Tate of London, namely, that he had deviated from the faded chromatics of socialist realism, innovating the local artistic movement of the School of Cluj in a sort of pop art genre,³⁰ gradually became a success story, built around a work which depended upon a kind of thematic "sensuality" constructed around the masculine sexuality.³¹ A kind of subtleness of details and chromatic association which go hand in hand nowadays with the innovative approaches in painting, with the introduction of the monoprint and of the solarized image, signal a separation from the academic direction outlined in the school of painting where the artist was trained.

"Expanded Painting," the theme of the second Prague Biennale (2005), places Victor Man, a figure originating from the School of Cluj, among the promoters of European painters from different regions of influence. He is compared to Balthus, Cézanne, and Piero della Francesca³² and the artistic profile displays its originality by translating in a tenebrous baroque manner traditional schemes and the atmosphere imposed onto the Romanian art by Ceaușescu's regime. Victor Man, in his imagistic arsenal, calls upon a collective memory genre to which he opposes a committed evasion, inspired by literature, mythology, or

cinematography, with subtle notes of irony on the human condition in general. This “alienation” from the local content of the image marks practically a subversive attitude by surpassing the limits of what the Romanian artistic space represented together with his anonymity in the global artistic context.

In a dialogue published in *Flash Art*, the co-founder of the Prague Art Biennale, Helena Kontova, debates with her colleague, the us editor for *Flash Art*, Nicola Trezzi, the new “frontiers” of contemporary painting, expanding the horizons of this artistic form in related domains, such as video-installation, photography, performance, and others.³³ The School of Cluj is an example of expansion beyond the limits that the painting as a phenomenon can overcome, due to the multiple directions followed by exponential artists in this space, as long as their artistic process can be “enriched” by exceeding a specific type of mentality and the conceptual limits associated with traditions and with prejudices; this is made possible by the connection to an academic network which experienced periods of censorship and was able to connect, in a very short period of time, to the actual artistic reality, succeeding, after all, in reaching a privileged status, which conferred to the image supersaturated by the perfection of the photographic detail, the emergence—and why not—the salvation from the banality of the digitalized mechanisms continuously perfected by the technological evolution.

Following the same line of interest regarding the future of painting, Alison M. Gingeras’ article seeks a solution that aims to salvage and rehabilitate this highly exploited artistic domain, in the era of the mechanical and facile reproduction of the image. “The mnemonic function of the painted image”³⁴ reflects the relevance of painting as a medium of retention of an entire arsenal of images, highly complex, with its own history and autonomy, induced by the ability to order and correlate, by the imaginative and sensorial functions manifested by the artist in his work, in close relation with the individual human nature, with the intimate history, and with the assimilation into the work of art of the elements recognizable from the collective memory.

Also, the painter Albert Oehlen pleads in favor of the liberty of the senses and the autonomy of painting, a phenomenon independent of any other categories: “[The artists] speak about clarity: the more schematic their work becomes, the more they believe that they achieved more clarity. They lead this moment of clarity, this sum of decisions and rejections towards the point they call ‘autonomy,’ although it can be equally called ‘negation’ or ‘negativity.’”³⁵

This way, a revitalization of painting is fulfilled from a continuous new perspective on art in general, at the confluence of traditional media (painting included) and new, experimental media under the auspices of the latest technologies of the digital era.

The Painting School of Cluj represents a relevant example in the assertion of painting as a phenomenon, together with some important names associated with

it, starting with the idea that the educational-artistic media ensure an enlarged framework of knowledge regarding the artistic techniques and the aesthetic and philosophical ideas and principles, which lead, after all, to the much-awaited result—self-knowledge—so necessary in the practice, evaluation, and valorization of art. The hegemony of painting as a phenomenon of artistic expression is propagated into the contemporary visual media, concurrently with other hegemonies, such as the institutional one, be it educational, cultural or economic, becoming thus more poignant and receiving more visibility—as the artistic personality explicitly reclaimed an active role in gaining knowledge of the world in the form of a vivid and unique creative act.



Notes

1. “Cluj: School or Artistic Center,” a round table organized by the Art Museum of Cluj, a debate opportunity among artists, gallerists, professors, and art critics, such as: Teodor Botiș, Victor Ciato, Negoită Lăptoiu, Mihai Pop, Ioan Sbârciu, Călin Stegorean, from among the debated themes one could mention the status of the artists before and after 1989 and the role played by the artistic higher education system in the case of well-known artists trained at the School of Cluj. <https://www.ziarde-cluj.ro/scoala-de-arta-de-la-cluj-intre-nostalgii-dupa-comunism-si-internet>, accessed 17 August 2019.
2. The list of internationally recognized painters is very long, with the inevitable risk of omitting representatives of different generations of alumni of the School, such as Dan Măciucă, Szabolcs Veres, Andrei Cămpan, Aurelian Piroșcă, Cristian Lăpușan, István Kudor Duka, and others. Their names, together with the ones belonging to newer generations, are linked to individual and group participations to different artistic manifestations in the country and abroad. Many of them also carry out their professional activity in educational-artistic systems or in various research groups (doctorate, independent artistic groups, private galleries, etc.).
3. <https://www.artbasel.com/catalog/artist/15670/Adrian-Ghenie>; <https://www.artbasel.com/catalog/artwork/58831/Ciprian-Muresan-Palimpsest-Artforum-April-2008>; <https://www.artbasel.com/catalog/gallery/1426/Galeria-Plan-B>, accessed 7 August 2019.
4. <https://www.artribune.com/dal-mondo/2018/09/fiera-contemporary-istanbul/>, accessed 8 August 2019.
5. The most recent event, The Romania–France Season, 2019, https://www.centre-pompidou.fr/cpv/agenda/event.action?param.id=FR_R-42f02a98aca69d563bd4ef57af7a1a68¶m.idSource=FR_E-42f02a98aca69d563bd4ef57af7a1a68, accessed 17 August 2019.
6. <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/ey-exhibition-world-goes-pop/artist-interview/cornel-brudascu>, accessed 17 August 2019.

7. <https://www.sfmoma.org/artwork/2014.26/>, accessed 8 September 2019.
8. <https://www.sothebys.com/en/artists/adrian-ghenie?locale=en>, accessed 16 August 2019.
9. <https://flash---art.com/article/serban-savu/>, accessed 16 August 2019.
10. <http://www.artnews.com/?s=romanian+artists&cx=0&cy=0>, accessed 8 September 2019.
11. <https://www.artribune.com/?s=pittura+cluj>, accessed 8 September 2019.
12. The Paintbrush Factory was set as an expositional and artistic production space around Plan B Gallery, with headquarters in Cluj-Napoca and in Berlin, having as protagonists a series of artists who gained international reputation after the year 2000, and their names have been associated with the initiator of this movement, Mihai Pop, founder, visual artist, gallerist, and curator.
13. Tony Bennet, "The Exhibitionary Complex," *New Formations Journal* 4 (1988): 73–102, accessed 18 September 2019, <https://www.lwbooks.co.uk/new-formations/4/the-exhibitionary-complex>; id., "The Exhibitionary Complex," in *Representing the Nation: A Reader: Histories, Heritage and Museums*, eds. David Boswell and Jessica Evans (London–New York: Routledge, 1999), 339.
14. The concept of cultural hegemony was introduced by Antonio Gramsci, with applicability in the work of Oliver Marchart, philosopher and theoretician. The concept developed by Gramsci has been transposed in the form of an ample installation by the architect Alfredo Jaar (*Cella infinita*, Lia Rumma Gallery, Milan, 2004, <http://www.liarumma.it/exhibitions/alfredo-jaar-2004/>, accessed 8 September 2019).
15. The expression belongs to the art critic and founder of *Flash Art*, and co-founder of the Prague Art Biennale. Together with Helena Kontova, Giancarlo Politi devised the program of the biennale held on the territory of former Czechoslovakia, succeeding, in 2007, in organizing an edition which brought together different perspectives of artists from Central Europe and the Balkans, in what was defined to be a multicultural synesthesia, by virtue of destroying an overall globalized culture. "Glocal," as a new concept, refers to this distinction, where the dialectic confrontation takes place between local and universal realities; at the third edition of the biennale, the concept was meant to connect global cultures with territorial artistic movements, the latter representing sequences of what was intended to be perceived as a whole. <https://art-map.com/praguebiennale/exhibition/3rd-prague-biennale-2007-2007>, accessed 16 August 2019. Regarding the Cluj School of Painting, it has already been assimilated to the western vision of higher education institutions in the artistic domain. "There will be a special focus on the 'School of Cluj' in Romania, which, after Leipzig and Dresden, is proving to be a veritable goldmine of contemporary painters," <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/40450/announcing-the-prague-biennale-3/>, accessed 16 August 2019.
16. http://www.uad.ro/noutati/evenimente/europa_artium/%20index.htm, accessed 17 August 2019.
17. http://www.uad.ro/noutati/evenimente/honoris_causa/, accessed 17 August 2019.
18. http://www.uad.ro/noutati/evenimente/europa_artium/%20index.htm, accessed 17 August 2019.
19. <http://www.humanitas.ro/mihai-pop-ed>, accessed 6 September 2019.

20. <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/29852/adrian-ghenie-to-represent-romania-at-the-56th-venice-biennale/>, <https://www.modernism.ro/2017/08/10/history-of-romanian-participations-at-venice-biennale/>, accessed 10 August 2019.
21. The Expo Maraton Competition, an annual University of Art and Design project, from 2011 until the present, <http://www.expomaraton.ro/>, accessed 11 August 2019.
22. Examples: exhibitions abroad with partner art institutions: the Art Museum of Cluj, the Romanian Cultural Institute New York, RIVAA Gallery New York, the exhibition *L'art s'invite dans l'industrie*, organized by University of Art and Design at the Energom Company (Gonzales Group) of Cluj-Napoca, with support from the Francophone Business Center; the exhibition marked the debut of the Energom sponsorship project for University of Art and Design and consisted in offering a venue for students and professors from the Painting Department. <https://ro.ambafrance.org/Inaugurarea-expozi%C8%9Biei-de-arta-intitulata-Arta-se-invita-in-industrie>, accessed 11 August 2019.
23. <https://www.artsy.net/gene/cluj-school>, accessed 18 August 2019.
24. Introduction to the conference with the title “Between Melancholy and the Art Market: A Short History of an Immense Success: ‘The Painting School’ of Cluj” attended by the art historian and curator Horea Avram, at Gateway Art Center New York, Columbia Gallery, with the support of the Romanian Cultural Institute in New York: “Beyond the market and institutional success, the artists of the group of Cluj recommend and legitimate themselves through their authentic artistic value, their conceptual solidity, to their aesthetic suppleness and visual force of their works. The works of the most rally around a kind of magic realism referring to melancholy, memory, politics or the trivial everyday life,” <https://www.icr.ro/pagini/de-la-cluj>, accessed 19 August 2019.
25. <http://www.modernedition.com/art-articles/romanian-art/contemporary-art-romania.html>, accessed 8 September 2019.
26. Group exhibitions were organized in partnership with IAGA Contemporary Art Gallery in Cluj, Zero Gallery in Milan, the Museum of Art in Cluj, the Bistrița-Năsăud Museum Complex: *Il movimento delle cose & Times and Genesis* (2017), catalogue for two collective exhibitions at the Museum of Art in Cluj (2016), published by IAGA Contemporary Art, with works of the artists Carla Accardi, Sam Francis, Emilio Scanavino, Ioan Sbârciu, Victor Vasarely, Emilio Vedova, Penck, Bruno Munari, Arnulf Rainer, Keith Haring, Dadamaino, Gino De Dominicis, Kazuo Shiraga, Manfredo Massironi, César Baldaccini (*Il movimento delle cose*), respectively Liu Bolin, Angela Corti, Franco Fontana, Alexandra Mureșan, Sabina Elena Dragomir, Francesco Arecco, Giorgio Tentolini, Silvia Inselvini, Marcello De Angelis, Maurizio Galimberti, Gabriela Elena David, Mihai Vrabies, Mimmo Iacopino, Marcello Gobbi, Nicola Vinci (*Times and Genesis*). *Sottobosco (Ioan Sbârciu & Enzo Cucchi, special guest: Markus Lüpertz)*, catalogue for the *Sottobosco* exhibition, 2018, multimedia, the Museum of Art Cluj-Napoca, exhibitional trilogy, curator Antonello Tolve; artists: Ioan Sbârciu, Enzo Cucchi (“The Trembling of the Forest and of the Wind”), Georgeta-Olimpia Bera, István Kudor Duka, Cristian Lăpușan, Anca Bodea Mureșan, Andrea Salvino (“On the Reddish Background of the Sky”), Veronica Bisesti, Botond Gagyi, Dario Carratta, Giovanni de Cataldo, Luca Grechi, Mihai

- Guleș, Andrei Ispas, Tincuța Marin, Alexandra Mureșan, Oana Năstăsache, Emma Păvăloaia, Jacopo Pinelli, Lucian Popăilă, Marcel Rusu, Andrei Scifos (“In the Clear Freshness of the Morning”); *17 Reasons* (2018), collective exhibition of the University of Art and Design Cluj professors at the Museum of Art in Cluj and *Portrait from Memory* (2018), collective exhibition at the Bistrița-Năsăud Museum Complex, with works from IAGA Contemporary Art collection (Ioan Sbârciu, Emilio Vedova, Markus Lüpertz, Hermann Nitsch, Mimmo Paladino and others). *Semni (di) Segni: Ioan Sbârciu in Dialogue with Masters of Modern Art* (Alighiero Boetti, Arnulf Rainer, Hermann Nitsch, Emilio Scanavino, A. R. Penck, Bruno Munari, Emilio Vedova, and César), IAGA Gallery, Cluj-Napoca.
27. In exhibitions such as: *The Labyrinth Landscape* (2017), Sector 1 Gallery, Bucharest (curator Mihai Pop); *Illato Lumine* (2017), Fondazione Menna, Rome (curators Antonello Tolve and Olimpia Bera), *Transylvanian Lights* (2015), Hugo Voeten Art Center, Herentals (Belgium); *The Cinder Forest* (2013), the Art Museum, Cluj-Napoca.
 28. Group exhibitions, which explore selected works of different generations of artists coming from the School of Cluj, such as: *The Wanderers* (2017), collective exhibition, curator Maria Rus Bojan, Richard Taittinger Gallery New York, with different generations of artists coming from the School of Cluj: Cornel Brudașcu (1937), Ioan Sbârciu (1948), Victor Răcățău (1967), Aurelian Piroșcă (1973), Marius Bercea (1979), Oana Fărcaș (1981), Alin Bozbiciu (1989), Robert Fekete (1987), and Sergiu Toma (1987), <https://www.artrabbit.com/events/the-wanderers-contemporary-painting-from-cluj>, last accessed 7 September 2019, *Con-front East* (2017), a collective exhibition, RIVAA Gallery New York, artists: Ioan Sbârciu, Ioana Olăhuț, Andrei Ciurdărescu, Anca Bodea, Olimpia Bera, Cristian Lăpușan, István Kudor Duka.
 29. <http://divus.cc/praha/en/article/not-that-painting-the-other-one>, accessed 7 September 2019.
 30. <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/ey-exhibition-world-goes-pop/artist-interview/cornel-brudascu>, accessed 3 September 2019.
 31. <https://www.calvertjournal.com/features/show/9720/being-lgbtq-cornel-brudascu>, accessed 3 September 2019.
 32. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/man-untitled-connaissiez-vous-des-esseintes-t14776>, accessed 7 September 2019.
 33. “Expanded Painting, according to the idea that we present at the Prague Biennale, is not painting that steps necessarily out from the canvas, but is painting at 360 degrees. Any artwork that has pictorial qualities is expanded painting for us. It can be a photograph, an installation, a video. It is anything that uses painting or pictorial means . . . there are many very interesting artists today who use painting in very traditional ways, as many as important artists from the past (Gerhard Richter, Marcel Broodthaers), and you could even exchange their work with an old master or with historical modernist work. Very good examples of this tendency are painters from the Dresden school or from Cluj, who have had good academic training in terms of painting history and tradition. We thought this kind of painting was particularly appropriate to be shown in the Prague Biennale, because of the active academic paint-

- ing tradition in that part of the world, which has been connected for a long time with the constrictions of the communist regime, but has become revitalized by contemporary culture.” <https://flash---art.com/article/hestekur/>, accessed 28 August 2019.
34. “Once threatened by the advent of photomechanical devices, painting has struggled against slipping into irrelevancy, in the same way that human beings grapple with the possibility of being forgotten. Yet since the contemporary viewer has become so saturated with camera-made images, hyperrealistic forms such as photography and film have become banal and ineffective. Painting has regained a privileged status. The medium’s tactility, uniqueness, mythology and inherent ambiguities has allowed painting to become an open-ended vehicle for both artist and viewer to evoke personal recollections, to embody collective experience and reflect upon its own history in the age of mechanical reproduction.” <https://www.saatchigallery.com/art/essays.htm>, accessed 28 August 2019.
35. “They talk about clarity: the more schematic their work becomes, the more clarity they think they’ve gained. I direct this moment of clarity, this subtotal of decisions and rejections, toward the point I call ‘autonomy,’ though you could also call it ‘negation’ or ‘negativity.’” Fragment from the interview with the artist Albert Oehlen, published in *Artforum* (1994), created by Diedrich Diedrichsen, <https://farticulate.wordpress.com/2010/11/08/8-november-2010-albert-oehlen-selected-paintings-interview/>, accessed 8 September 2019.

Abstract

Artistic Identity and Hegemony in the Establishment of the Painting School of Cluj

The present article discusses the evolution and the recognition of the School of Painting established after the year 2000 within the University of Art and Design in Cluj-Napoca, with an activity involving both private initiatives and the relations between cultural and artistic educational institutions. It also highlights the various developments occurred inside and outside the university, namely cultural initiatives involving museums, private galleries, art portals, biennales and art fairs, teams of curators, and art historians, which continuously brought their contribution to the establishment and recognition of this school of painting, quite unique in Eastern Europe. Generations of painters asserted themselves in the framework of Cluj artistic higher education, their names being recognized internationally on the art market, in private museum collections, or in the great galleries of the world. Their success, on the one hand, maintained the reputation of this school of painting, and on the other, generated a gradual construction, based on concrete institutional actions, which outlined some acknowledged directions in contemporary art. Cultural hegemony is generally applied to the construction of the mechanisms that contribute to the formation of the hybrid pictorial styles required by the Cluj School of Painting. From this perspective, the hegemony of art education significantly determines the formation of a series of recognizable artistic profiles. Besides, painting as a phenomenon becomes an ever complex entity, constantly reinventing itself and living its own history in the digitalized era of mechanical re-production.

Keywords

contemporary painting, art galleries, museums, higher education, art institution, university of art, Romanian painters, cultural hegemony, art fair, artistic education