

**Seven days of “Curators’ Network” in Sibiu, Romania, at the Contemporary Art Gallery of the National Brukenthal Museum**

*By Daria Ghiu*

The second meeting within the Curators’ Network took place in Sibiu, at the Contemporary Art Gallery of the National Brukenthal Museum, from the 18th to the 24th of June 2012. The newly tied relationships, the visual displays offered by the artists and the excessively hot summer were all to the participants’ full satisfaction.

The portfolios of 20 Romanian artists – selected by a competent jury – were evaluated in the course of three days, in one-on-one, colloquial, but professional meetings. The visual artist Dan Perjovschi, with his gaze widely open upon the contemporary art scene in Romania, was invited as a special guest. At the same time, some of the invited curators presented their work in progress and discussed their projects with artists and cultural agents. The artist Lia Perjovschi, representing [tranzit.ro/Sibiu](http://tranzit.ro/Sibiu), organised a meeting titled brainstorming nr. 1/the responsible cultural agent, dealing with her “knowledge archive”, a long-term project that sparked a lively discussion about the problems of contemporary art institutions, compromises, responsibilities and the motivations for the curatorial act.

The karaoke night staged by the curator Raluca Voinea worked as a catalyst – one artist remarked that one is defined by the choices one makes even in such contexts. The participants visited the Brukenthal Museum in Sibiu, and the last two days were dedicated to conveying to the curators some understanding of the Romanian contemporary art scene and its diversity. They also visited

Bucharest and various kinds of artistic spaces: The National Museum for Contemporary Art, the Bucharest Biennale, the Anca Poterasu Gallery as well as the Project Salon (Salonul de proiecte). On the last day, they travelled to Cluj, an important centre for contemporary art, where they toured the galleries and artist workshops of the Paintbrush Factory (Fabrica de Pensule).

The Curators' Network meeting of June 2012 in Sibiu succeeded in bringing together not only artists and curators, but also the participants' personal and professional experiences.

The participating artists of this session of the Curators' Network were: Maria-Luiza Alecsandru; Apparatus 22; Dragoş Bădiţă; Zoltan Bela; Alexandra Bodea; Irina Botea; Ştefan Botez; Simion Cernica; Radu Cioca; Coate-Goale; Cristina Curcan; Carmen Dobre; Mirela Ivanciu; Olivia Mihălţianu; Sebastian Moldovan; Sorin Oncu; Daniela Pălimariu; Lea Rasovszky; Arnold Schlachter; Mircea Stănescu.

Having been invited, as a journalist, to participate in the Curators' Network meeting in Sibiu, I had the privilege to act as an external observer and thus witness the one-on-one-meetings between the curators and the selected Romanian artists. Although I was familiar with the activity of some of these artists, I did not know their latest projects. Others I met for the first time. What did I observe? The artists each have their own way of approaching their artwork. Each makes use of a narrative structure and refers mostly to his or her practice, to the way the respective project was constructed. On the one hand, they are at times highly theoretical and sometimes run the risk of falling into stereotypes, which are subsequently difficult to shake off: They do their own labelling, in an attempt at excessive objectivity, they create a "safety area" for themselves, from which they can no longer escape.

On the other hand, of course, each of the curators has their own take on the individual artists: some of them are keen to establish the context that the respective artist comes from (the environment in which s/he lives, his or her background, the institutions where s/he has exhibited and with which s/he identifies), and only subsequently do they want to find out more about the works themselves, while others immediately want to see as much as possible.

I was surprised to see that without exception, the discussions went very fluently, without any blockages. Some of them were profound – despite the pressure of the quarter of an hour –, others remained frustratingly superficial. Many of the meetings drifted towards counselling. What kind of advice was given? To continue work with certain media; to read particular books; to pursue a certain project that is worth exploring more profoundly; suggestions of collaboration with particular institutions; emphasizing the necessity of theoretically outlining an artistic project. After these meetings, I talked to both “parts”. The curators were interested in some of the artists, with whom they are already thinking of working within concrete projects. Two examples referring to Hilde de Bruijn’s (Cobra Museum) intentions: She would like to invite Irina Botea to participate in the exhibition she will curate for the Young Artists Biennale in Bucharest, this October. Also, she wants to involve Lea Rasovszky and Alexandra Bodea in future projects. The artists told me that at times the meetings worked as a laboratory in which one manages to detach from one’s own work and look at it under the microscope: One answers incalculable questions, is surprisingly associated with artists one has never heard of, there are technical suggestions, one identifies more fully with the practice of some curators (and with their curatorial programmes).

The precisely kept fifteen minutes seem to me to be an ideal time interval: It is an initial sampling

of the subject. Each curator officially visits the artist's "mobile workshop" (a table and a laptop). When the meeting is over, there is all the time in the world for informal communication, for further viewing, for further questions. From a bird's eye view, the large exhibition hall of the Contemporary Art Gallery of the National Brukenthal Museum, with all the artists and curators working in it, is the best expression of what the Curators' Network aims at. Remember the story of Pepe, the emerging artist isolated on an island... Such meetings succeeded in opening up one's perspective, in casting away doubts or creating new ones, in confirming or contradicting ideas and beliefs.

Dan Perjovschi (invited artist): "For a few days we were an international community"

"The young artists, dwelling on their emerging careers, received a multivision of what they are doing, so that they can position themselves more accurately. When one is encouraged or criticised every fifteen minutes, one can acquire an outside view of oneself. (Although I think that half an hour would have been better), I like this formula, because I can see things happening inside the youngsters' heads, I can divine their questions and preoccupations. And, conversely, through the discussion with them, I rethink some of my own beliefs or assumptions.

I cannot formulate any conclusions, but the "art market" and the "gallery" have slightly reformatted the way in which art and the artistic project are being constructed today by the young artist. The situation is better formally than conceptually. The effect of the study leaves and master studies conducted abroad, the freedom of movement and the exchange of ideas are all manifest – we are no longer 'end of the pier'. Initially, I enthuse. Then I take fright at the fact that there are no institutions and platforms to absorb such creativity... I consider what unequal competition lies before us and how many of the young people I talked to will still be part of the artistic scene in ten

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years...

The meeting was useful for me because I was able to see new things and meet new people, I saw and listened to the preoccupations of Romanian artists and European curators. For a few days, we were an international community...

But let us not forget that the exhibition of works by Sorin Vreme (which should have taken place in the very space where this international community came together) was impeded by the conditions that in Romania are generally allocated to contemporary art. This, too, is reality, and I never forget this whenever I talk to an artist who has two exhibitions listed in his CV..."



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