

*Auch Gestern War Heute* (Yesterday Was Today Too / Si Ieri A Fost Azi). Daniel Stefanica's collection of current Romanian art

exhibition with ICR Berlin, 2015: Frankfurt am Main, Düsseldorf, Berlin.

Erwin Kessler, curator

Prior to 1989 there were no privately-owned, commercial art galleries in Romania. Art was sold either by the state or by the Artists' Association, a trade-union under the control of the regime. Developing one's own taste as art collector was not mediated by the common curatorial, archival, financial, and social work of the gallerists as we know it today. This was both good and bad for contemporary art collectors (and they were only but few, as mainstream art collecting in Romania was dedicated to pre-Communist, modern art of yore). It was bad because there was no transparent, professional management of the artists' careers and of their works. Nobody took care of systematically promoting the artists, of documenting their exhibitions or placing their works in art magazines, international events, art-fairs or collections. But it was also good, as the collectors' access to the artists and to the works themselves was not mediated, and was by far easier, and more substantial than today. Artists lived in the open. Collectors rambled around. Frequently, they didn't bear that name. They were friends, fans, aides, providers. They somehow credited and supported the artists' work, furnishing services, goods, and sometimes money. A barter-like economy of symbolic goods was reigning: artists illustrated books, writers wrote catalogues. Works of art sealed the deals. The studios, like in Courbet's *L'atelier du peintre*, were frequently packed with art amateurs, writers, philosophers, doctors, lawyers, diplomats, photographers, a pied gathering delineating a (not so) secretive milieu, either ignored or controlled by the regime, through secret police informers.

The very few art collections of the 1970s-1980s aggregated in that friendly/frustrating /pristine/naive milieu. Art collecting didn't have the social ends of today, the conspicuous display of power, knowledge and wealth. It also was not under the current financial pressure, when every acquired work is viewed, by most art collectors, as an investment, which, in future, should pay off. Further selling the collected works (the basis of normal secondary market), was almost unimaginable by that time. The collected artworks meant collected talks, sympathies, ideals, anxieties, hopes, a life or a way of living shared by both the artists and their collectors, frequently against the complete indifference or hostility of the society around them. The direct relationship with the artists in their studio, with their working habits and idiosyncratic employment of artistic means, and also with the original intentions ascribed to the works by the artists made that the small circle of contemporary art collectors of the 1970s and 1980s turned into almost professionals of the art milieus. They knew from the horse's mouth how the works were done, and what they meant. They were empirically cultivated in technical, biographic, and iconographic matters. As they were ever-present in the studios, they followed the pulse of each artist's work, comparing the ups and downs, and picking the best. This is the reason why the masterpieces of that time could be found in private hands, instead of museums.

Things were supposed to rapidly change after 1989, when the market economy was expected to regulate (or de-regulate) the paralyzed system. But it didn't happen so. At least, it didn't happen then, immediately after 1989. Throughout the 1990s, the fragile art market, instead of emerging and growing, had completely crumbled. The former intelligentsia and Communist middle-class of professionals either lost both their power and financial means, turning to being assisted by a crippled system hit by poverty and corruption, or they re-oriented toward more pragmatic, purely economic ends of getting rich quickly in the ensuing legislative and executive power vacuum. The artists' status and means dramatically altered in a very short time span. Before, despite the lacking liberty, they were provided with (cheap) ateliers, regular acquisitions

from the state, and stable, cultural circle of supporters. During the 1990s, dozens of artists' ateliers were lost by the Artists' Association, as well as exhibition halls, art magazines, shops, printing houses. Artists, as a whole, were severely affected by what was then called "the transition" period. They lost prestige, privileges, position, payments.

Higher art education institutions were no longer a target for students, as art seemed no longer asked for by the society. Expression got free, but was worth nothing. During the early 1990s art collecting was literally a void concept. Except for few foreign diplomats who collected local art as *curiosa et mirabilia* or out of calculated friendships, the living relationship established between the art of the day and the local amateur public was missing.

On this backdrop, a new generation of noisy, rebellious artists emerged during the second half of the 1990s. A leader of that generation was Nicolae Comanescu, one of the founders of *Rostopasca* group (1998-2001), a neo-Dada outburst from the Bucharest Art Academy. *Rostopasca* succeeded to revive artistic impetus through scandal, street interventions, aggressive promotion, excessive, Stakhanovist art-making, and dazzling innovation, collapsing painting, performance, video, criticism and politics into a vivid, energetic activity.

A law student, Daniel Stefanica was friend of Nicolae Comanescu. He was not an art collector properly, but an artist's collector, an artist's sponsor, like most of the art collectors of the 1970s and 1980s. Daniel Stefanica instinctually supported the visual interface of the time and place he lived in. The present at hand. He provided various goods sustaining the art of Nicolae Comanescu, at the beginning, and then the art of other members of *Rostopasca*: Dumitru Gorzo, Florin Tudor (Floie), Alina Buga, Angela Bontas. The effect of approaching a larger circle of artists was a further increasing of the circle and the further deepening in the *compulsive collecting syndrome* (CCS), the beneficial disease of writing the text of one's own history by means of others' visual textures.

Daniel Stefanica was an early and typical collector of a turbulent present, a frustrating yet artistically fertile one. Furthering the *forma mentis* of the earlier art collectors, he kept close to the artists, to their ateliers and proper works, diffident towards the emerging galleries, art institutions and art fairs. He only trusted his understanding and feeling of the superposition between the social phenomena and their visual reflection, transferred through the funnel of his own cultural idiosyncrasies. No socially-imposed criteria and no financially-driven interests guided his collecting. Stefanica collected in a riskier, prospective way, mapping the visuality around him. He collected not only on his own, but he decisively collected only "his own" art, the kind of art he could internalize for his proper psychological dealings in a homeopathic way. In those years, by the end of the 1990s, when the success of the socially engaged art (be it left-wing political criticism or right-wing, neo-Orthodoxist missionarism) was overwhelming, Daniel Stefanica refused to collect anything linked to overt political options. There are neither crosses nor stars in his collection. Poster-like belief of any kind was alien to him, as he was always looking for the confused, searchful, touching presence of an individual next to him, not of a general message addressed to abstract subjects. This is why irony, madness, pain, lyricism, excesses of every kind abound in the works collected by Stefanica.

In a time of oblivion of painting, more than a decade ago, Daniel Stefanica acquired figurative painting. He was a pioneer among art collectors. It's not precisely the realism as such which interested him, but rather the politically incorrect and readable counter-positioning of the artists facing their times, as they jubilated against the distressing realities or, later on, as they mourned the consumerist glee. His collection is polarized between the contrasting impulses of humorously transparent, colorful exhilaration, and the bleak rendering of dispirited, depressive moods. Between the clamorous elation and the gloomy introspection, Daniel Stefanica's collection reveals not only the contrasting moves of his own mind, but the perplexing

disparities of an erratic society too.

Bugetul expozitiilor trebuie sa contina:

1. ambalare, transport, asigurare pentru circa 40 de lucrari.
2. conceptie si tiparire catalog bilingv germana/engleza, circa 120 de pagini (onorariu text si conceptie, onorariu lay-out, costuri tiparire).
3. montarea expozitiilor si deschidere: onorariu curator, transport si cazare curator (sint necesare cite 3 zile de deplasare pentru panotarea fiecarei expozitii), transport si cazare colectionar (prezent la vernisaje, deplasarea sa facindu-se pentru cel putin o zi la fiecare dintre cele 3 locatii), eventuale cheltuieli pentru montare (materiale, instrumente, ajutoare, in cazul in care nu sint furnizate de catre partenerii care vor gazdui expozitiile).
4. promovarea expozitiilor: afis, invitatii, tratatie vernisaje.