

MARTOR



Title: "Let's Be Happy!"

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How to cite this article: Drogeanu, Paul. 2008. "Let's Be Happy!". *Martor* 13: 153-156.

Published by: *Editura MARTOR* (MARTOR Publishing House), *Muzeul Țăranului Român* (The Museum of the Romanian Peasant)

URL: <http://martor.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/archive/martor-13-2008/>

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Let's Be Happy!

Paul Drogeanu

Fifteen years after it was opened as a museum of arts and traditions, MȚR (the Romanian Peasant Museum) can also show us its last permanent exhibition room. As always, we visualise the concept (whether we talk about the opening of an exhibition or about the launch of a bibliophile printed work) offered to us with the elegance, simplicity and solemnity of a celebrating gesture made on a feast day. „The Cross“ Exhibition was inaugurated on Easter Monday (1993) whereas „The Nourishment that Binds“ was inaugurated on Sts. Peter and Paul's Day (2008). It is not by chance that this is one of the greatest feasts of the year preceded by the Great Lent.

Unlike the other rooms, the last one had not only to reveal (as an unveiled monument does) a conceptual-patrimonial kind of truth, but also to prove stylistic and emotional compatibility with the other visual testimonies displayed by another two exhibitions, „Life Customs“ or „Christian Law“. The inaugural addresses were made in the last but one room, in „The Home within a Home“ Room, an overwhelming next-door location where any other new site for patrimonial capitalization can be built, especially because the mandatory design solution was another strong central location with minimal wall exposure!

There have been many other challenges and bets to which the answer could not possibly be a

solution meant to ensure continuity, but only successes that should not obliterate any of the multiple elements (methods, images, procedures, emotions, thoughts, etc.) that made up the unmistakable core of MȚR's being so much endangered in 2004-2005.

The new management had to prove, especially on this occasion, that it won a dispute over ideas rather than a dispute over power (actually, one of the few disputes in post-1990 Romanian culture that polarised a large audience). It also had to prove that it was worth reintroducing ethnological research and graphic creativity in a programme meant to show the public a huge patrimonial treasure in the form of emotionally and conceptually tense expositions, not in the form of didactic, explanatory-oriented exhibitions.

The next step was to try to fulfil some older dreams of the founding fathers.

The strong core (the Nourishment exhibition) of the MȚR's project (which joins visual anthropology with ethnological patrimony and cultural anthropology with political and urban anthropology) had to be unostentatiously surrounded by the wide range of gestures made by MȚR, translated as street acts, economic, leisure or life-styling valorisation. All this is consciously done because *finis coronat opus* or it can

definitely fail to make the work complete. I suppose that the tension created two or three years ago has always been heightened until the day before the opening, that the last night brought forth some of the safest touches (for instance, I am thinking of Lila Passima's fireplace).

This Sunday morning we can see (say) the following:

Initiated under the sign of the Cross, the museum proposes a discourse and a journey through Romanians' village culture that prevails up to the end in the image of the Tree of Life.

Beauty (as a means of conveying and affirming the truth), **Happiness** (as an agent for stimulating understanding), *The Prevailing Visual* (as a sign of the contemporary way in which valorisation is done) are a few working methods imagined by Horia Bernea (see the 1994 notes) and used for this purpose in order to finally obtain a symbolically efficient *Installation* (to quote again some of Horia Bernea's thoughts on the museum, on quantities, materiality and crossing, printed by MTR in 2001: „the result is an ensemble that I would rather call a contemporary art installation, to the extent to which the church altar is an „Installation“). Visitors take a spiral journey of initiation that puts together the different alchemies of essential nourishments, thus becoming an Installation. It is also a *spira mirabilis* and a *via crucis*. Like many labyrinths on the cathedral floor, this installation can be symbolically covered by the visitor (pilgrim) up to a core that stands for the heavenly Jerusalem. The funeral candle is such a ceremonially symbolical and strongly significant installation in the Romanian tradition. It is the spiral ritual wax that is put on dead people's chest and is as long as their physical size which burns together with their souls, embodying a poetic model.

The dungeon-like verticality and the cathedral-like height of the installation are underpinned by the small area of this room. The prevailing rhythmic access to the exhibits reinforces the idea of paradigms represented by signs and nutritional processes. The museum brings forth

a prominently ethnological discourse that characterises the nourishment that binds. We are shown essences of nourishment and of the nourishing process. Ceremonial nourishment does not only depend on rituals, but also on the cultural aspect of life. The visitor who participates in this exhibition has the impression that we learn something about manna food and fruit, the fruit-yielding blessing and its holiness (manna is a word of Greek origin, 'hrana' (nourishment) comes from the old Slavic language, 'bucate' (food), 'grine' (grain) and 'merinde' (victuals) come from Latin). Manna is not only the food that God dropped every morning from the sky in order to feed the Israelites during their travels in the desert, nor is it involved in setting weekly feast days. It is the good nourishment, the yielding food crops that can be stolen or can run out just like luck. To use a term so much used in the artistic explorations of the 1980s, the central scaffolding is a kind of „nourishment as deed and metaphor“ (more or less conceptualist collective exhibition projects like *Place – deed and metaphor* or the *Fireplace – deed and metaphor*, which do not accidentally take the Village Museum as their exhibition context).

Apart from the permanent exhibition, the temporary one is also open as a variation on the same theme. Or maybe not, maybe it rather speaks about food and victuals, about the opulence, eclecticism and picturesque of the topic. The space is horizontally-oriented here. Therefore both the journey and the sight cover straight lines that end with a huge, long, food-abounding Great Table. We deal with a crafty combination of syntagms that are joined according to an ethnographic pattern.

The permanent exhibition mirroring the temporary one, the paradigmatic axis mirroring the syntagmatic one, anthropological visualisation and patrimonial capitalisation mirroring ethnographic illustration not only sustain the exhibited theme, but also have the great merit of

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purifying the past acts of violence, of turning them into dialogue.

The contexts in which the two museum exhibitions are placed include other illuminating facts related to *The Nourishment that Binds*, to rare or ordinary feasting occasions. What I mean is that the written version of the project, strengthened by the joy of the nicely edited words, was launched at the opening. The discourse of this cultural anthropology album meets the expectations we dream of when we share the achievements of the Hainard-Kerr exhibition model in Neuchatel.

There are another three recent achievements that are part of „small anthropology“, also called applied anthropology, which have always been in line with MTR's style. It is a kind of direct ethnology which is important for the urban lifestyle. These are the Peasant Club (the compulsory meeting point of Bucharest conviviality), the Peasant Fair, a reinvention of the ambulant market of direct producers that the urban buyer had wanted to meet again for such a long time, and the Summer Garden restored under a bunch of trees in the museum yard, under the alert eyes of the classics of dialectic materialism.

Let's be happy!

