

Recent and Radical: Excess, Absence, and Erasure in the Museum of Recent Art

Smaranda Ciubotaru

Independent Researcher, Romania

smaranda.ciubotaru@cultura.ro

Ciubotaru, Smaranda. 2021. "Recent and Radical: Excess, Absence, and Erasure in the Museum of Recent Art." *Martor* 26: 93-113.

ABSTRACT

Inaugurated in 2018, the Museum of Recent Art (MARE) in Bucharest has rapidly become one of the leading contemporary art institutions in Romania. Rivaling state-financed museums, MARE's approach to exhibiting contemporaneity is dialectical, exchanging the conventional, chronologically determined museological method for anachronism. This approach provides a framework through which the perpetual theoretical correspondence between past, present, and future artistic practices is facilitated. Focusing on art that circumvented the official visual discourses of the communist regime and on art that emerged after the Romanian Revolution of 1989, MARE's novel museological method has, however, been impaired by the museum's failure to fully account for the country's totalitarian history. The absence of context, an unethical silence that can be seen as a symptom of Romania's unresolved tension towards its communist past, underpins both the conception of the museum's building and that of its permanent collection. Impeding discussions of nationalization, coercive state mechanisms, and the imposition of Socialist Realism, MARE further limits the emergence of art historical narratives by reaffirming the traditional, hierarchical superiority attributed to fine art forms.

KEYWORDS

Postsocialism; nationalization; museology; dialectical contemporaneity; decorative art.



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Introduction

The increasing turn towards critical museology in the past decade has led to the reconsideration of a fundamental question regarding the discipline: what makes a museum radical? Whether the repudiation of a monolithic, teleological view of history or the refashioning of exhibit displays in order to circumvent the centrality of Western narratives, such reconfigurations of institutional discourse have attempted a dynamization of the museum, further dismantling its once phonetic and conceptual association to the

mausoleum (Adorno 1967). Within Eastern Europe, the fall of the region's dictatorial regimes and the ongoing process of transitional justice that ensued in its wake have generated the ideal context for the implementation of museological reform in previously ideologically subjugated, state-run institutions.¹ The emphasis placed on "decommunization" and the process of postcommunist reconciliation in Eastern Europe have aided in identifying the systemic remnants of the *ancien régime* (Stan and Tismăneanu 2015: 36). Warning against the creation of "new mythologies" regarding "a traumatic, violent and brutal past," scholars such as Vladimir Tismăneanu have urged for active national participation in seeking

both “historical and legal accountability” (2015: 24). If “dialogue and knowledge preempt the destructive force of silence,” as Stan and Tismăneanu (2015: 24) have argued, the museum can be seen as a crucial instrument for the reassessment of the recent communist past.

More than three decades after the Romanian Revolution of 1989, Bucharest remains one of the only capitals in Eastern Europe without a museum dedicated to its totalitarian past. Similarly, the subject remains absent from the permanent collection of the National Museum of Romanian History, while the city’s contested public monuments are often aimed at the sedimentation of alternative, state-led historical narratives that diverge from those pertaining to popular memory (Young and Light 2016). Due to the persistence of prerevolutionary administrative structures and the duplicitous public condemnation of the regime by a corrupt political class,

the communist past has become an anathema in Romania today, denounced as taboo or a mere historical syncope (Giordano and Kostova 2002: 78). As this tendency for suppression emerges, how do politics of erasure destabilize the ethics of exhibiting communism? Has the desire for historical elucidation not been sufficiently popularized or do particular factors favor the manifestation of *silence*? I will turn to a case study of the country’s first private art museum, Muzeul de Artă Recentă (Museum of Recent Art), in reading through such questions.

Inaugurated in 2018, the Museum of Recent Art (from here on MARE)² in Bucharest is a novel, much anticipated critical outlet in the field of postmodern and contemporary Romanian art (Figure 1). Situated in the residential neighborhood of the former communist *nomenklatura*, the Neo-Moorish villa that preceded the museum was forcibly expropriated during the nationalization

Figure 1: Museum of Recent Art, designed by Youssef Tohme Architects and Associates (YTAA). Photo credit: Smaranda Ciubotaru



process, subsequently becoming the home of the Foreign Minister Ana Pauker in the 1950s. Benefitting from a predominantly positive reception by international art publications (*Art Newspaper*), the museum, however, has been subject to mixed reviews in the Romanian media. Labeled “anticommunist” by one of the country’s primary art publications, *Revista ARTA*, MARE appears to have struck a problematic chord through its nearly exclusive focus on the diversity of artistic production operating outside of the socialist visual canon (Cioană 2018). While the museum’s scope is to present works that circumvented and subverted the paradigmatic dominance of Socialist Realism (alternatively named Humanist Realism during Nicolae Ceaușescu’s dictatorship), the erasure of ideological art from its curatorial discourse obscures context, thus posing an ethical dilemma. Reductive and dismissive, the “anticommunist” label that has been attributed to the museum fails to reflect the complex, multivalent nature of the Romanian transitional context following the 1989 Revolution. I will argue that MARE is symptomatic of Romania’s “unresolved tension” towards its totalitarian past, opting for complete obstruction when faced with the difficult task of exhibiting communist history (Ciobanu 2015: 260). This obstruction is twofold, occurring initially, through *excess* at an architectural level, and secondly, through *absence* within its permanent collection. In the first part of the study I will focus on the demolition of the once nationalized villa that preceded the museum. Opting for an architectural design that aims to preserve the memory of the old house, MARE, conversely, does little to contextualize the history of the neighborhood in which it is situated. Due to the amalgamation of old and new aesthetic elements in the current building, the novel may take precedence over the uninformed visitor, paradoxically causing the museum to become a *lieu d’oubli*, a place of forgetting as

defined by Maria Todorova (2010a). Working to revise a Western-centric perception of Eastern European art, while abandoning the linear chronology inherent to art history, the museum enacts a radical museological approach that I will analyze through Claire Bishop’s (2018) concept of *dialectical contemporaneity*. Lastly, I will address the absence of both socialist visual discourses and decorative art from the museum’s permanent collection as a significant impediment to an understanding of the historical context, as well as to the future diversification of curatorial narratives.

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Erasure through excess: Design and the non-material heritage of the museum building

The subject of MARE’s building has, perhaps more than any other aspect of the institution, been highly polemicized. Pertaining to a built heritage protection zone³ in Primăverii neighborhood (northern Bucharest), the Neo-Moorish villa that preceded the museum was constructed in 1939 during a period of intense architectural development in the area (Figures 2, 3, and 4). Interest in the neighborhood, however, spanned not only the 1930s. Following the formalization of the communist regime in 1948, the implementation of a nationalization process led to the abusive, widespread seizing of private property in Primăverii.⁴ The neighborhood’s central position and numerous gardens appealed to the communist *nomenklatura*. Emulating the Soviet model that saw the housing of all Party officials in one area, Primăverii soon became the residential quarter of the communist elite (Brucan 2019: 81–4). After the mass expropriations and forced evictions of the late 1940s and early 1950s, communist officials turned their focus to the increasing expansion and modernization of the neighborhood. As a result, Primăverii



remained the designated residential area of the *nomenklatura* until the 1989 Revolution and, in some cases, continues to house former officials of the regime due to the delay in the introduction of equitable property restitution policies in Romania.

The neighborhood's negative associations were also perpetuated in the ensuing postcommunist context as a result of the questionable, irregular, and unethical implementation of such policies.⁵ In 2001, at the insistence of the European Union, Parliament finally adopted legislation concerning the matter of "natural restitution," thus ending the tenant-owner dichotomy that had dominated the Romanian political arena of the 1990s.⁶ Despite the introduction of a new legislative framework that favors titled owners, successful restitution cases remain sparse, particularly in historically charged areas such as Primăverii. The restitution of the 1939 Neo-Moorish house that preceded MARE was one of these cases.

Nationalized in 1950, the house became the temporary residence of Foreign Minister Ana Pauker, one of Romania's most reviled communist political figures due to her hyperbolized association with the Stalinist regime and the harsh, oppressive, and extreme collectivization process carried out under Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej's leadership.⁷ Subsequently occupied by diverse tenants during the communist period, the house was sold following its restitution and torn down to enable the construction of MARE. Discussions surrounding the demolition of the house have either starkly criticized the museum for disregarding the preservation of architectural heritage (Cioană 2018), arguing that part of the building should have been integrated into the current structure, or have adopted a far less critical stance that opposed partial integration as a threat to "stylistic unity" (Ghenciulescu 2018). The latter viewpoint, posited by the architecture magazine *Zeppelin*, prioritized the *authenticity* of the building, the conservation of its visual

and material integrity.⁸ While a common practice internationally, the magazine argued, the conjoining of old and new architectural fabrics has often been carried out in problematic ways for the buildings of Bucharest.⁹ Rather than preserving a fragmented version of the building, whether through the reintegration of its facade or its decorations into a new structure, *Zeppelin* contended that demolition was proposed, perhaps, as the more drastic, yet "honest" approach (Ghenciulescu 2018). In spite of the divergent perspectives regarding the way in which the initial house should have been preserved, both positions attribute much significance to the *material aspect* of the former building and the fact that none of it remains. The nearly exclusive preoccupation for the *physical* preservation of heritage appears to dominate both perspectives, for both are focused on the demolition of the house as the singular source of concern. A brief mention of the building's "historic aura" in the *Zeppelin* article appears to be the only allusion to the issue of non-material heritage and the perpetuation of memory. Therefore, I would like to shift the discussion to the time following MARE's creation. While the destruction of the Neo-Moorish house is problematic, it is the inevident aesthetic quotation of the former house in the current museum building and the lack of information provided to the visitor that obscure the dissemination of its history and, implicitly, the collective memory of Primăverii's vast nationalization.

Preserving the shape of the old house, yet compressing its volumes, YTAA, the architectural firm that was commissioned for the project, opted for a black monochromatic exterior and the raising of the museum building in order to accommodate a spacious ground floor framed by glass panels. The underground floor, a former bunker, was likewise preserved and converted into an exhibition space. According to the firm, the eerie, phantasmal appearance of the museum is intentional, as the building



Figure 2:
The Neo-Moorish
house
that preceded
the museum.
Photo credit:
Adrian Bălteanu.
Courtesy of
Adrian Bălteanu.



Figure 3: Side view of the
former Neo-Moorish house.
Photo credit: Adrian Bălteanu (2010).
Courtesy of Adrian Bălteanu.



Figure 4:
Detail of the
Neo-Moorish
house that
preceded
the museum.
Photo credit:
Adrian Bălteanu
(2010).
Courtesy of
Adrian Bălteanu.

should evoke the disquieting history of the previous house and of Romania's totalitarian past.¹⁰ Contrary to its ghostly exterior, the interior is equipped with a gift shop, cafe, cinema, library, and outside sitting area, integrating the conventional *mise-en-scène* of the museum. As the visitor enters the building, the eerie facade is exchanged for a familiar, inviting setting. This is when the process of obstruction commences. The lack of signs or information regarding the history of the former house, its nationalization, Ana Pauker's stay, or the bunker-space that lays beneath it begs the question whether MARE assumes too much of the visitor's *a priori* knowledge of the venue and of Romania's communist past. Devoid of context, the museum as a site of memory is undermined and the building's efficacy in enabling recollection must be probed.

Maria Todorova's study (2010b) of the sudden destruction of the Georgi Dimitrov¹¹ mausoleum in Sofia offers an ideal theoretical backdrop for this analysis.

No longer a physical site, the Dimitrov mausoleum still qualifies "as a *lieu de mémoire*, or, rather, a *lieu de mémoire détruite*, a curious site of destroyed memory with the preserved memory of the destruction" (Todorova 2010b: 426). Todorova describes the persistence of the mausoleum's silhouette in the collective memory of Sofia's inhabitants, despite the absence of a material trace. The inhabitants that were accustomed to the mausoleum before its demolition in 1999 are reminded of the former structure upon seeing the green space that lies in its place, while those too young or born after 1999 have inherited the memory of the spatial signifier through its perpetual association

with the empty square.¹² Recall, Todorova explains, “does not need to be produced by a literal trace; recall itself, prompted by a context—a book, a discussion, a thought—can produce an image” (2010b: 428). Thus, rather than the lack of a physical artifact, it is the obstruction of context that can prevent recollection and the perpetuation of memory. By providing no verbal or textual information of its past within the museum space, MARE is inhibiting its history from being remembered or, prior to this, from fully materializing. This materialization of history is what Todorova defines as *retention*, a crucial element of the memory process that precedes the function of *recall* (Todorova 2010b). MARE, or rather YTAA, have contended that the structural quotation of the previous Neo-Moorish house within the design of the current building acts as a catalyst in concretizing its history. Yet, I would argue, it is the compressed shape of the former structure, the monochromatic shell of the museum and the addition of the glass curtain walls on the ground floor that, together, do not enable retention but rather an *erasure* of the past through an *excess*¹³ of components. Towards the end of the Dimitrov study, Todorova argues that a conversion of the mausoleum’s structure for any other purpose would have been an effective method to make of it a *lieu d’oubli*.¹⁴ Echoing Umberto Eco and Marilyn Migiel’s 1988 essay, *An Ars Oblivionalis? Forget It*, Todorova argues that deficient acts of remembrance result from a multiplied semiosis: “One forgets not by cancellation but by superimposition, not by producing absence but by multiplying presences” (Eco and Migiel 1988, quoted in Todorova 2010b: 430). As such, MARE’s referencing old architectural forms alongside the sleek, novel appearance of the contemporary art museum produces a surplus of signifiers. The discrepancy between what has been quoted and what is novel, however, *cannot* be established due to the lack of historical context provided by the museum. MARE’s building bears an *excess*

of *presences* that are homogenized under the guise of the new. Unlike designs that conjoin the old and new fabric of buildings, where the material remains of the previous edifices are still visible, the museum’s building hinders differentiation through the uniformity of its appearance. The visitor runs the risk of deeming everything novel for there is nothing to indicate which architectural elements were appropriated (or what their source was). The memory of the Neo-Moorish house, its nationalization and Ana Pauker’s stay, as well as of the post-totalitarian moment of restitution is effaced. Given that retention and recall are conditioned by the existence of context, the absence of information can potentially halt all processes of remembering, paradoxically making the museum a *lieu d’oubli*. In order to prevent the interpretation of MARE’s building as an *ex nihilo* creation, void of its communist past, more should be done to emphasize its history and the history of the area to which it pertains.

Within heritage studies, “the intangible value of the site” has become an increasing area of interest for scholars, while the growing use of *interpretation* as a mechanism for the mitigation of destroyed cultural heritage sites also attests to this (Cameron 2009: 133).¹⁵ Implemented through the employment of personal (tours, reenactments) or non-personal devices (such as signs, multimedia displays, photographs), the interpretation of a site secures the perpetuation of its historical narratives.¹⁶ Thus, interpretation could also prove a useful tool in aiding MARE disseminate the history of the former Neo-Moorish house, the collective memory of the neighborhood’s nationalization process, and the latter takeover of Primăverii by the communist *nomenklatura*. In its current state, the museum’s building not only fails to enable retention, but it nearly erases its past. This poses an ethical dilemma that is further amplified by the absence of Socialist Realism from the museum’s collection, another form



of silence to which I will turn later. If cultural institutions such as MARE fail to provoke discussions about Romania's communist history, this could potentially lead to a larger phenomenon of "mis-memory"—a distortion of the memory of communism as a result of insufficient acknowledgement and critical analysis within the public sphere (Stan and Tismăneanu 2015: 32). The very brief historical outline of the building that can be found on MARE's website is insufficient, signaling the need for a more thorough exploration of the topic, while further problematizing the lack of information within the physical space of the museum. If not supplemented by interpretation, the museum's limited, online recognition of its past, rather than its integration into a larger museological discourse, can pass off as a mere commercialization of communist history in the attempt to capitalize on it (Creed 2010: 39–41). As the postsocialist city has shifted from the constructive excess of the Left to that of the Right, the preservation of architectural heritage, be it through tangible or non-material means, remains a crucial tool in counteracting oblivion. MARE's shortcomings in bridging the historical and the contemporary at an architectural level are not, however, reflected in its museological approach where the contrary can be seen. I will discuss this in the following section.

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Dialectical contemporaneity and transition to a radical museological framework

Before the comprehensive analysis of MARE's museological approach, a brief outline of its permanent collection and the interior structure of the museum is warranted. MARE's current collection has resulted from the collaborative efforts of Lebanese investor and founder, Roger Akoury, and MARE's general director and acclaimed

art historian, Erwin Kessler. What began as Akoury's private collection gradually expanded with the purpose of becoming a museum. Kessler's active involvement in the collecting process, often reflective of his own research interests and theories of recent Romanian art, has generated an alternative to chronologically systematized art museums such as the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Bucharest (MNAC).

MARE has taken 1965, a year of great sociopolitical and artistic vicissitudes, as a point of departure in constituting its collection. Marking the death of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and, as a result, an ensuing period of liberalization that had been anticipated by the thaw of 1963–1964, 1965 would see a definite repudiation of Soviet power and the progressive turn towards national identity in Romania (Verdery 1991: 116–134). Elected as the new secretary general of the Communist Party, Nicolae Ceaușescu served as the driving force of the liberalization period until 1971 when his *July Theses* indicated a complete reversal of the political and cultural openness exhibited following 1965 (Verdery 1991: 116–134). Ceaușescu's propensity for nationalism and his denunciation of Soviet ideological imports led to a revival of artistic production. Condemning "any tendency towards exclusivism or rigidity," alluding thus to the dominance of Socialist Realism before the liberalization period, Ceaușescu called for "stylistic diversity," urging the cultural sphere to stray away from a Soviet-imposed canon while remaining "responsible" in the selection of subject matter.¹⁷ The call for aesthetic diversification coincided with the opening of Ion Țuculescu's seminal retrospective at Sala Dalles in Bucharest. An expressionist artist influenced by Romanian folklore, Țuculescu had been recently historically rehabilitated through the efforts of *Arta Plastică* magazine, as the pre-1965 imposition of the Socialist Realist dogma had marginalized all the work that did not adhere to it (Cârneli



2013: 73–4). In the latter years of the 1960s, the perpetuation of artistic momentum through the frequent and desired exchange with Western culture likewise contributed to the greater aesthetic separation from Socialist Realism.¹⁸ Short-lived yet fruitful, the period of liberalization was replaced in the 1970s and 1980s by Ceaușescu's cult of personality and the preference for a rebranded "Humanist Realism." For this reason, alternative visual approaches were forced to go *underground*¹⁹ until 1989. One of MARE's objectives is to recover such visual discourses while combatting "mis-memory" and removing the ideological filter set forth by the art historical narratives of the latter communist period. Contrary to the design of its building, the museum's collection better enacts the logic of preservation, even if doing so partially (for a complete exclusion of the regime's aesthetic canon, which I will discuss in the next section, is evident).

In keeping with the significance of 1965, MARE has not, however, opted for a museological method determined by a linear, chronological succession of events akin to that found in state-administrated museums such as MNAC. Furthermore, the vertical, rather than horizontal, conception of the museum obscures a fixed starting point, as the visitor is free to choose where to begin. The underground and last floors are used for temporary exhibitions of Romanian art, while the first and second floors leading up from the ground floor house the museum's permanent collection. The sinuous structure of the museum, bearing multiple corridors that link the rooms on each floor, both evokes the domestic function of the preceding building and breaks with the conventional vast gallery space of the White Cube format. The staircases connecting each floor create spatial interstices that are designated for the display of Western artists. Rather than clearly delimiting each section of the museum, separating temporary exhibitions spaces from the permanent collection, MARE has interwoven them in order to

make its visitors alert to possible thematic connections. Even the permanent collection of the museum is subject to change every two years, underscoring the need for curatorial dynamism and the perpetual revision and addition of art historical narratives. As such, while MARE does indicate its museological approach, it does not impose the narratives of its current display as the sole perspective, thus favoring narrative polyvalence. I will return to MARE's stimulation of narrative multiplicity, following a discussion of its museological approach and the anachronic model of contemporaneity that it employs.

Referring to the permanent collection catalog, the visitor might choose to start on the second floor with the room illustrating the "stylistic diversity" of the mid 1960s where works by Ion Țuculescu, Horia Bernea, Andrei Cadere, and Napoleon Tiron are exhibited. Passing through one of the corridors, the visitor then reaches a second room that focuses on the subversive art of the 1970s and 1980s (such as Constantin Flondor, Paul Gherasim, and Paul Neagu) (see Kessler 2018). The two parallel corridors of the second floor are also used to display the main visual discourses of the period: that of the neo-Orthodox group *Prolog* and that of the neo-Constructivist group *Sigma*, as well as the artwork of artist Florin Mitroi (see Kessler 2018). Descending to the first floor, the visitor is met with the theme of stylistic diversity again, now seen through the lens of contemporary art. The corridors are similarly used, displaying a series of cardboard paintings by Nicolae Comănescu (*Rostopasca* group) on one side and works by conceptual artists and photographers (Vlad Nancă) on the other. Breaking with a conventional, chronologically determined curatorial approach, MARE has inserted contemporary artists such as Bogdan Vlăduță (influenced by the *Prolog* group) or Mircea Roman (juxtaposed with Napoleon Tiron) in its second-floor display, provoking dialog between temporal frames. This is also achieved through the presence of artists

such as Florin Mitroi or Ion Grigorescu on both floors. Further, the very structural layout of the permanent collection can be used to discern thematic and aesthetic continuity. An example is the vertical juxtaposition of the *Prolog* group and Nicolae Comănescu corridors, situated on a diagonal. The works are linked through their subversive nature—the former in relation to the communist regime and the latter to its remnants following the 1989 Revolution. As such, Comănescu's use of profanity, bright industrial paint, and cheap everyday materials can be thought of as an “inverted echo” of *Prolog*'s proclivity for religious symbolism and muted colors (Kessler 2018). On the first floor, MARE's director Erwin Kessler, points to Grigorescu's work *Geniul și epoca* (The Genius and the Epoch) as a metaphor for the curatorial approach of the museum. A Socialist Realist painting “begun” in 1950 by Hrandt Avakian and “completed” in 1990 by Grigorescu through the addition of a contorted corpse in the foreground, the work serves as an analogy for the artist's ability to exhume the past (Kessler 2018). What is illustrated is “an assertion of multiple, overlapping temporalities” (Bishop 2018: 19) and consequently, the source of MARE's radical museological strategy: an anachronic perception of contemporaneity.

Claire Bishop has signaled this model of contemporaneity as one which abandons the presentation of contemporary art as a static continuation of postmodernity. It turns instead towards “a plural and disjunctive relationship to temporality” that breaks with the idea of the linear historical progression (Bishop 2018: 18–9).²⁰ Further, by opting to refer to its collection as one of *recent art*, MARE has similarly circumvented the direct allusion to postmodernism or contemporaneity in its nomenclature, hence abandoning “Western hegemonic categories” (Bishop 2018). The peripheral quality often attributed to Eastern European art and the difficulties in exhibiting it result from the attempt to match it to a

conventional, linear Western art historical model.²¹ Works such as that of Grigorescu challenge this model through their recursive temporality, avoidance of clear categorization, and resistance to historical sedimentation. Further, by exhibiting Grigorescu's work on both floors of the permanent collection, MARE problematizes the explicit chronological positioning of the artist. The anachronic model that underscores its museological approach gives way to what Bishop has termed *dialectical contemporaneity*, a “navigation of multiple temporalities,” and the questioning of their reoccurrence during “specific historical moments” (2018: 23). Framed by this, the alignment of the “stylistic diversity” room on the second floor to the one on the first floor dispels the apparent relativist pluralism of the more recent counterpart. A parallel can be drawn between the liberalization period of 1965 and that ensuing after the fall of the communist regime in 1989. In both instances the diversification of artistic production is propelled by the disappearance, be it even temporary, of a dominant, politically imposed visual discourse. Within the rooms, the juxtaposition of works such as those of Teodor Graur and Ioana Bătrânu connect the use of political critique in pre- and postsocialist contexts. The piece of pork meat positioned centrally in Graur's painting, reminiscent of Orthodox icons in size and composition, draws upon the scarcity of food during the 1980s in Romania. Graur's work was initially exhibited at the experimental gallery *Atelier 35* at the height of Ceaușescu's totalitarian manifestations (1983–1984). Bătrânu's painting *Porcii noștrii* (Our Pigs, 2002) depicts an exhausted sow feeding her numerous piglets, an allegory for the desolate state of postcommunist Romania and the many “political mouths” it has to feed. Drawing upon the theme of chronic lack, the Graur-Bătrânu pairing points to the recurring fact of an ignorant political class, concerned with personal economic gain rather than the well-being of



citizens. Through the means of *dialectical contemporaneity*, art reveals the systemic remnants of the *ancien régime* and the dangers of concealing how they operate. Recalling the metaphor of Grigorescu's painting *Geniul și epoca*, history becomes a corpse that we cannot bury as it is subject to perpetual exhumation and reiteration.

In addition to the anachronic model of contemporaneity that lies at the basis of its permanent collection, MARE's radical museological approach can also be attributed to the aforementioned stimulation of narrative multiplicity. The museum opens up and facilitates the polyvalent production of narrative. Its anachronic underworkings further amplify this, as the museum is no longer governed by a strict chronology, thus also allowing for the application of multiple alternate methodologies transhistorically. The visitor can follow the museum's parallels or simply generate her own reading (based on other discourses). In a state of permanent narrative mutability, the dynamism of MARE's collection is further amplified through organized tours given by artists, film directors, and other personalities of the Romanian cultural sphere. The viewing experience is activated, as, with each new curator, the visitor experiences the museum through a different lens. Given that the tours are not scripted, one has the possibility to interact and challenge the narrative presented rather than simply act as a passive listener. An alternative to the written text, MARE has chosen to animate and diversify the curatorial voices that narrate its collection. By letting artists give tours to visitors, the museum not only enables a confluence of the past and the present, by way of its anachronic display, it similarly sets the ground for connections with future series of works. No longer a mausoleum or site of ruins (Douglas Crimp 1980), the museum is activated, becoming a space of living interaction and dialectical encounters. Through its radical museological approach, MARE proposes an alternative to the Western-

centric model of the static, contemporary art museum. The small spaces it allocates to exhibiting non-Romanian art can be taken as an ironic reversal of the marginal importance conventionally attributed to Eastern European art. "Thinking the center and the periphery together" Rothberg (2013: 82), MARE reasserts the importance of exchanging an East-West dichotomy for a model which sees the development of Romanian artistic production on par with that of Western countries.²² However, it is perhaps this desire to be considered of equal importance to Western art that has led to the same problem that the museum's building poses: decontextualization and, therefore, an erasure of the past and the creation of "mis-memory." The absence of Socialist Realism or Ceaușescu's later Humanist Realism from MARE's collection, albeit a conscious curatorial choice, obscures the communist regime's oppressive imposition of a dominant visual discourse both before 1965 and after 1971, while treating the communist period as a historical syncope to be forgotten or remembered selectively. The significance of the liberalization period or the subversive acts of the *Prolog* group are, hence, deprived of their full meaning, while the symbolic violence inflicted by state-led structures, such as the Romanian Artists' Union (UAP), is minimized. The next sections will focus on *absence* within the collection and the potential distortion of *dialectical contemporaneity* and narrative multiplicity. While adopting a novel museological approach, MARE has not paid attention to the ethical complications of fragmenting the past.

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Erasure through absence: Socialist Realism and subsequent derivatives

The Romanian publication *Revista ARTA* has taken the most deprecatory stance towards MARE, generating a highly controversial

review of the institution following its opening in 2018. Emphasizing the “anticommunist sentiment” of the museum, the publication has largely justified this observation by pointing to the destruction of the previous Neo-Moorish house and to a statement made by MARE’s director regarding the absence of avant-garde artist Geta Brătescu from the permanent collection (Cioană 2018). According to the director, Brătescu’s work was not selected for the museum due to her “historic affiliation with the communist regime,” her appurtenance to the state-led Romanian Artists’ Union, and her participation in the Romanian pavilion of the 1960s Venice Biennale with Socialist Realist works (McGivern 2018). *Revista ARTA*’s review goes on to signal the lack of context provided in the permanent collection, while condemning the “nationalist discourse” that lies behind the museum’s missing comparison of Western and Romanian art (Cioană 2018). I would argue that the focus on Romania rather than Western tangents is not the result of an underlying nationalist sentiment, but an attempt at demarcating a local context that is often overlooked when exhibiting most Eastern European art internationally (Piotrowski 2009: 11–29). Museums such as the Tate Modern that have included Eastern European artists in their permanent collections have, however, selected those artists that have been assimilated by a Western art historical canon as a result of predominantly working in Western countries.²³ By dismantling the primacy of the “center,” MARE has simply allowed for the recuperation of the “periphery” through a change of focus.

However, far more problematic than the missing East-West parallel are the *selective* presentations of the Romanian context and the museum’s supposed “anticommunist sentiments,” issues that *Revista ARTA* only touched but not expanded on. As MARE’s focus is the presentation of visual discourses that circumvented and resisted the official state-dictated canon of the communist

regime, the museum has opted not to display any Socialist Realist or Humanist Realist art. In doing so, MARE has once more assumed too much about the visitors’ *a priori* knowledge and their ability to infer a juxtaposition with the official art of the former regime. As the gap increases between generations who have directly experienced communism and those who have “no memory of it or understanding of its mechanisms” (Popescu-Sandu 2010: 118–9) museums play a crucial role in explaining Romania’s totalitarian history and the different modes through which its system of oppression operated. Increasingly unstable, this past is “vanishing or completely absent,” restricted to individual memory or archival materials that have not sufficiently protruded into the public sphere (Popescu-Sandu 2010: 118–9). Oana Popescu-Sandu writes that “Discussions of communism as a shaping agent” are regularly “avoided, skipped over and effaced” (2010: 119). In the absence of discussion, the identification of communist forms (mental or institutional) that persist within the postcommunist context can be impeded. This can potentially render MARE’s enactment of *dialectical contemporaneity* unsuccessful as the recognition of the past within the present and the cause of resurgent thematic threads is conditioned by prior historical knowledge. Hence, the lacunae within MARE’s illustration of artistic production during the communist regime can lead to the decontextualization of works created both *before* and *after* the 1989 Revolution. While the omission of the regime’s official visual language can be considered a product of “anticommunist sentiment,” I would argue against the adoption of such terms, or rather stances, due to their categorical and simplifying nature. *Revista ARTA*’s perspective trivializes the complexity of confronting and exhibiting Romania’s totalitarian past during the ongoing, arduous process of transitional justice. MARE’s fragmented display is a symptom of the tense, unresolved



character of Romania's communist history. Gestures such as the public justification of Brătescu's exclusion from the museum can be interpreted as an attempt to gain "moral capital," for MARE's permanent collection features numerous artists that had either adhered to the Romanian Artists' Union, were affiliated with the regime, or carried out state commissions (Georgescu 2010: 159).

The term *anticommunist* implies a binary, whereas the delimitation of the ethical from the unethical within discussions of the regime *cannot* be so clear-cut. The coercive power of the secret services (the Securitate), as well as the great difficulty in living outside of state structures, rendered many unable to bypass insertion within the communist public sphere. Recently, a great amount of scholarly attention has been paid to the role of the Romanian Artists' Union in constituting a preferential system that exclusively benefited individuals who created in line with the state canon (Mocănescu 2011; Drăghia 2017; Predescu 2017; Lăcătușu 2017; Preda 2015). This led to an unbalanced distribution of commissions based on an internal hierarchy of ideologically resonant artists. A centralized power controlling all artistic activity, the Union proliferated the aesthetic guidelines of the regime, rewarding those who abided by them through the sale and display of artworks, as well as the possibility to travel abroad on cultural exchange programs (see above). Functioning as an ideological rather than a professional organization, the Romanian Artists' Union served as a "velvet prison" (Haraszti 1987), an administrative apparatus whose aid was conditioned by one's willingness to compromise (Enache 2017). MARE acknowledges this as it continues to exhibit artists such as Ion Grigorescu or Constantin Flondor that were forced, either directly or as a result of circumstances, to create for or collaborate with the regime. There is a grey area that prevents the adoption of any radical, dismissive binaries (such as the aforementioned communist vs.

anticommunist binary). Sensitive to the issues of state coercion and constraint, the museum has not been categorical (with the exception of Brătescu) about any of its artists' pasts, yet it does little to explain why this is so. If not contextualized by the presence of an official socialist visual canon, MARE risks not only a distortion of *dialectical contemporaneity*, but the minimization of the coercive power of the Romanian Artists' Union and a reduction of the impact generated by subversive art. Groups such as the neo-Orthodox *Prolog* used Christian symbolism within their work in order to counteract the heightened ideological ban on religious practice in the 1980s (Dumitrescu 2017). Discredited by Marxist-Leninist thought and referred to as an "opiate of the masses," religion similarly posed a threat to Nicolae Ceaușescu for it rivaled the expansion of the dictator's cult of personality.²⁴ Positioning *Prolog's* visual discourse against the backdrop of Ceaușescu's Humanist Realism (an adaptation of Socialist Realism that saw the dictator as its protagonist) would help emphasize the reactive nature of the group's artistic approach. By not placing the group within the frame of the Romanian totalitarian milieu of the 1980s, MARE has obstructed the source of *Prolog's* subversiveness. Yet another crucial point where a socialist visual canon can be used for contextualization is the earlier 1965 period of liberalization. As the museum has placed much emphasis on this timeframe, it is important to stress the historical circumstances that allowed for the diversification of artistic production in the late 1960s. The inclusion of both Socialist and Humanist Realism would also facilitate the comparison between the "stylistic diversity" that followed Gheorghiu-Dej's death and that emerging after the 1989 Revolution. Further still, the display of official communist artwork could also exemplify MARE's focus on visual discourses that circumvented the regime through works that did not evade but, conversely, attempted



to work within the canon. State commissions such as Ion Grigorescu's *Portrait of Nicolae Ceaușescu* (1979), while seemingly ideologically correct, were rejected upon evaluation due to the subversive substratum they were deemed to possess (Pintilie 2017: 407). Using TV broadcasts as the referent for the work, Grigorescu's painting shows three depictions of the dictator arguing over a model of Casa Poporului (the House of the People, now Palace of the Parliament) (Pintilie 2017: 407). The realistic, aged (and thus, not idealized) appearance of the dictator and the ambiguous composition of the work prompted its refusal. A similar case that was, however, accepted by the communist officialdom was Ion Bitzan's *Homage to Nicolae Ceaușescu*, a singular, unflattering depiction of the dictator surrounded by a foggy blue background (Tanta 2017: 244). Many such state commissions also disguised a particular irony, serving as a double entendre. Valeriu Mladin's 1987 painting *Ceaușescu-Romania*, while intending to depict the idyllic image of the dictator guarding over a crowd of running school children, could likewise be interpreted as a crowd fleeing away from the despotic leader (Pintilie 2017: 407).

By erasing the presence of visual discourses imposed by the communist regime from its collection, MARE has succumbed to the same unethical silence that it has assumed vis-à-vis the presentation of its building's history. Choosing to obscure rather than to attempt a discussion of the regime's oppressive mechanisms proves problematic as it decontextualizes the art within the museum, impedes transhistorical connections, and minimizes the effects of systemic coercion. MARE's museological approach has created a fecund setting for the analysis of Romania's recent history through the prism of art, yet it fails to take into account how much knowledge the visitor possesses about the topic. Fraught with tension, the understanding of the country's communist past continues to make

many uneasy. Museums should facilitate the alleviation of such sentiments through continuous reflective action. In order to do so, the consideration of all aspects, negative and positive, must be assessed. I finally turn to the absence of decorative art from MARE's collection in order to signal a blocking of narratives through the lack of medium diversity and the further creation of "mis-memory" through selectivity. Predominantly housing painting and sculpture, the museum reinstates an art historical model that regards "fine art" as hierarchically superior to other art forms. MARE's director considers painting the domain of recent Romanian art that has been subject to the most aesthetic innovation. I will argue against this, using the revival of tapestry in the 1970s and 1980s as a case study and counterexample, while pointing to the art historical distortions that can occur as a result of such generalizations. Failing to illustrate diversity outside of the category of fine art, the museum obstructs the remembrance of phenomena such as the Fondul Plastic (Artistic Fund) stores or of narratives pertaining to the overlap of art and industrial production (that was once mediated by textile and ceramic artists).



Erasure through absence: Decorative art and reinstated dichotomies

The absence of decorative art from MARE's permanent collection is starkly augmented by the presentation of a single embroidery on the first floor: Ana Bănică's *Ochii tăi iubitul meu, mă aproprie de D-zeu* (*Your eyes my love, bring me closer to God*). In contrast with this absence, one of the museum's recent temporary exhibitions *Marginalized, Isolated, and Excluded from Romanian Art* boasts an unprecedented diversity of medium, encapsulating painting, drawing, and sculpture as well as ceramics, textiles, and ready-mades (Kessler 2020: 19). This

diversity of medium, while a positive form of complementing the lacunae in the permanent collection, begs the question of why such an issue is not of primary but of merely supplemental importance. Having placed much emphasis on the plurality of art forms in the introduction of the exhibition's catalog, MARE has, inversely, associated those media that do not appear in its collection to notions of marginality, isolation, and exclusion. Paired with the lack of diversity in the museum's permanent display this can generate the interpretation that domains such as textiles and ceramics have seen little development and hold a peripheral significance in comparison to painting or sculpture, an interpretation that the director of the institution frequently champions.²⁵ Further, the emphasis on the unique quality of the artists included in the *Marginalized, Isolated, and Excluded* exhibition has been done at the expense of much generalization regarding artistic production in Romania during the communist regime. I will use

the example of tapestry to highlight and problematize some of the generalizations that appear in the exhibition catalog.

In the chapter about textile artist Constantin Petraşchievici, curator Ioana Şerban refers to the small dimensions of his works and their embracing of "string ends, pieces, patches, weaving and material *per se*" as an alternate direction to that of the conventional, imposing, monolithic wall tapestry (2020: 82). Şerban goes on to summarize the great interest in tapestry that commenced in the 1970s in Romania, as "tapestries were meant to decorate monumental surfaces (in the equally monumental, oversized and overstated spaces of communism)" (Şerban 2020: 82). The medium is then contextualized through the exacerbated nationalism of Ceauşescu's dictatorship and the use of large state-commissioned tapestries to glorify the country's protochronist history (Şerban 2020: 82). Şerban also signals the propensity for large dimensions among abstract

Figure 5: Adriana Nicodim: *Apa* [Water]. Sisal twine, 1973. Tapestry, mixed techniques. Photo credit: Adriana Nicodim.

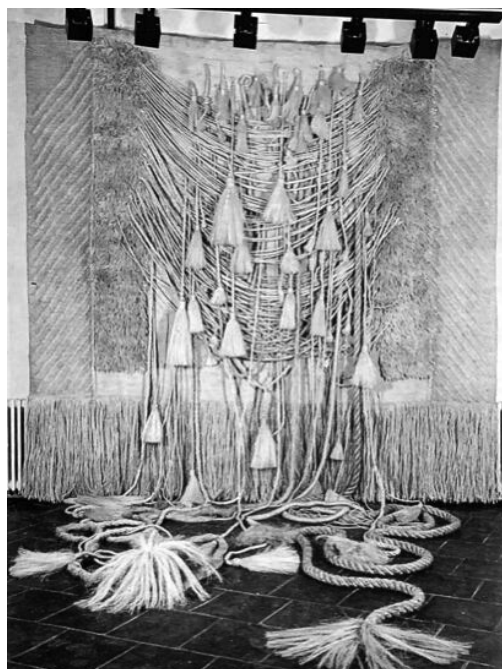


Figure 6: Teodora Stendl: *Fluture* [Butterfly], 1971. Wool. Tapestry, mixed techniques. Collection of the Museum of Visual Arts (Galaţi, Romania). Photo credit: Teodora Moisescu-Stendl and Ion Stendl.

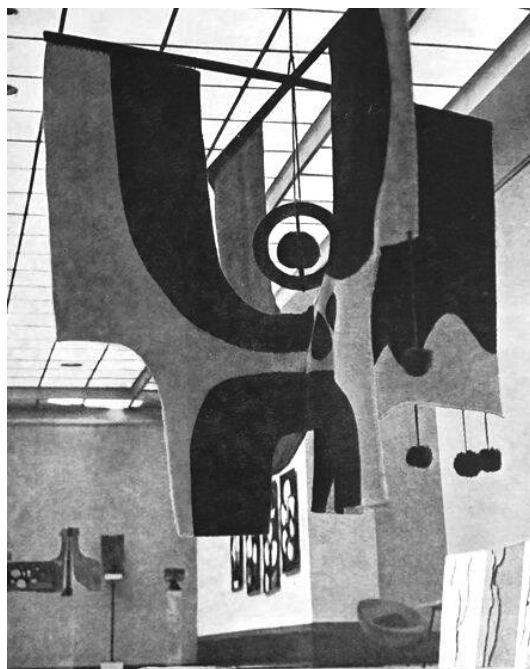




Figure 7: Elena Haschke-Marinescu: *Metamorfoză* [Metamorphosis]. Soft sculpture, mixed technique. Goar hair, metal, wool. Exhibited at Sala Dalles in 1984. Photo credit: Elena Haschke-Marinescu.



Figure 8: Elena Haschke-Marinescu: Detail of *Metamorfoză* [Metamorphosis], 1984. Soft sculpture, mixed technique. Goar hair, metal, wool. Exhibited at Sala Dalles in 1984. Collection of the Museum of Art (Bacău, Romania). Photo credit: Elena Haschke-Marinescu.

textile artists such as Ritzi Jacobi. Such arguments, while effective in individualizing Petraşchievici's work, conflate all other textile artists under the same dimensional paradigm, while disregarding stylistic diversity and innovational pluralism. The 1970s and 1980s marked a prolific period in the history of tapestry making, both in Romania and internationally. Artists such as Elena Haschke-Marinescu, Ariana Nicodim, Ion Stendl, Teodora Stendl, and Ana Lupaş drew upon the fecund tradition of vernacular textiles and the concept of intermediality in order to push the inherent, ontological properties of the medium.²⁶ Questioning the historical subordination of tapestry to a pictorial referent, to figurative depictions, and to the structural space of the wall, Romanian textile artists began to break with the two-dimensional conventions of the medium (see Buşneag 1976; Grozdea 1982). In Ariana Nicodim's work *Apa* (Water, 1973) the rows of overlaid ropes emerging from the tapestry's plane protrude into the space of the viewer, cascading to the ground to occupy both the space of the wall and that of the floor (Figure 5). Teodora Stendl's 1971 kinetic tapestry *Fluture* (Butterfly) entirely escapes the wall and two-dimensionality by hanging instead from the ceiling, mounted on a cross-shaped wooden structure that matches the four "wings" of the work

(Figure 6). Elena Haschke-Marinescu's *Metamorfoză* (Metamorphosis, 1984), a sequence of seven three-dimensional cubes that progressively open, displays an intermedial confluence of sculpture and tapestry as the sixth cube of the progression is entirely floor bound (Figures 7 and 8). The aforementioned works, while varying in size (discussed from large to small), reflect the multiplicity of approaches to textile art within the Romanian context of the 1970s and 1980s that occurred outside of the regime's ideological impositions. Petraşchievici's attention to material, pieces, patches, and weaving can also be observed in the works of Mariana Oloier and Teodora Stendl's who used naturally colored wool, traditional weaving techniques, and modular formats for their tapestries (Buşneag 1976: 12–4). Petraşchievici's small, sculptural conception of textile works is similarly integral to the practice of artists such as Haschke-Marinescu (Figures 9 and 10). Thus, generalizations such as Şerban's do not hold up when juxtaposed with the polyvalent nature of tapestry production during the last two decades of the communist regime in Romania. Moreover, such diversity contradicts the assertion that fine art forms saw the most progress and attention during this timeframe.

Excluding decorative art from its





Figure 9: Elena Haschke-Marinescu: *Untitled*. Twine and ceramic tiles.
Photo credit: Elena Haschke-Marinescu.
Courtesy of the Marinescu family personal archive.



Figure 10: Elena Haschke-Marinescu: *Untitled*. Felt and string.
Photo credit: Elena Haschke-Marinescu.
Courtesy of the Marinescu family personal archive.

permanent collection and reducing its impact to the work of a few artists in temporary exhibitions (as is the case with tapestry), MARE distorts reality to fit its narratives. By minimizing the evolution of decorative art to a few isolated instances, the museum manages to reinstate the hierarchical superiority of fine art, a notion that has been vigorously combatted since the 1970s by scholars and decorative arts movements such as the American Pattern and Decoration (Goldin and Kushner 2012; Swartz 2007). Much like the Romanian textile artists of the 1970s and 1980s, these movements sought to undo the conventionally negative connotations attributed to decoration throughout art history.²⁷ In addition to the historical association of decoration to decadence, kitsch, or even crime,²⁸ the utilitarian function inherent to ceramics or textiles has also been used to argue against the aesthetic and semantic values of such objects.²⁹ Traditionally, the artwork invites for contemplation and an evaluation of the discourse that frames its conception. Objects with practical functions have, thus,

been largely excluded from the category of 'Art' due to an elitism derived from the "Cartesian heritage of mind-body dualism" that prioritizes cognitive processes (Markowitz 1994: 68). Thus, the dismantling of a dichotomy between fine art and decorative art in the 1970s can be seen as an invalidation of the Cartesian logic, a logic that MARE problematically reiterates by placing nearly all of the emphasis on innovations in painting. Alongside the Socialist Realism lacunae in its permanent collection that threatens decontextualization, the lack of medium diversity in the museum can lead to a severe restriction of the narratives that the institution can generate. In the case of decorative art, two significant themes can emerge if the current collection is supplemented: the overlap of art and industrial production and the intersection of art and life. I will briefly turn to the realm of textiles once more in order to illustrate a possible exploration of such themes.

Following the completion of higher education programs, graduating textile artists would be distributed to factories

or other state-owned enterprises in order to secure the workforce required for the upkeep of socialist industry. Textile factories such as the *Dacia Textile Enterprise* employed artists to create designs and establish the distinct color schemes of mass-produced fabrics (Figure 11). Consequently, in addition to an individual practice, artists contributed to bridging the gap between art and industry. Given the interdependence of craft and decorative art in Romania, numerous textile artists (as well as ceramicists, metal workers, and glass workers) were also given the opportunity to work for the Central Union of Craftwork Manufacturers (UCECOM) to produce artisanal objects inspired by Romanian ethnology.³⁰ These objects were subsequently exported for international consumption leading to a popularization of Romanian culture in the 1970s, particularly through the reinterpreted variants of traditional garments created by UCECOM's textile artists.³¹ Within the country, Fondul Plastic stores created a space for artists to sell handmade objects ranging from holiday cards to neckties. Administered by the institution that provided loans, studio spaces, and pensions for artists, such stores constituted not only an additional source of revenue, but allowed for art to protrude into the everyday by way of diverse items.³² As the phenomenon of Fondul Plastic stores remains within the collective memory of artists that worked during the regime, the little literature that exists on the topic invites museums to look back and attempt its recuperation.

When venturing to redeem artists, MARE should pay greater attention to the unethical nature of art historical generalizations, particularly with regards to art forms that have been minimally represented within its own collection. By augmenting the importance of a particular oeuvre, juxtaposing it to a unidirectional perception of other artistic productions, the museum's narrative works to diminish the complexity of a medium. In the case of textile art,



Figure 11: Elena Haschke-Marinescu with her colleague Ileana Dăscălescu checking the quality of the printed fabric produced at the Dacia Textile Enterprise in Bucharest. Courtesy of the Marinescu family personal archive.

Petrașchievici's work is presented as an innovation against the monolithic backdrop of monumental, socialist commissions and limited artistic inquiry outside of state-led art production. Here, erasure does not occur in an outright form, but is veiled by an attempted retrieval of marginalized, isolated, and excluded art that, however, is framed through a curatorial discourse that prioritizes individualization to the detriment of a more accurate, holistic view. While the museum cannot point to and fill all lacunae within its collection at once, it is important that such curatorial endeavors do not confound *contextualization* and *generalization*, for while the former aims to engender knowledge, the latter obscures it through omission.





In the current climate of critical, or even radical museology, cultural institutions must be held accountable for the histories they are either directly or indirectly refusing to acknowledge. Like museums of former colonial powers that are gradually unearthing “uncomfortable truths” within their permanent collections, the postsocialist context of transitional justice commands the same of Eastern European institutions tasked with remembering the recent and traumatic communist history of the region. Within countries such as Romania, the systemic perpetuation of communist structures has made the recognition of its totalitarian past and the breadth of its oppressive mechanisms, a slow, arduous, and ongoing process. Treating socialism much like a historical error, the country has refrained from fully confronting its history by minimizing the discussions about the topic in the public sphere, thus delaying the natural turn towards decommunization. The lack of a normalized discourse regarding communism poses a great problem for future generations whose direct access to primary sources, such as individual experience, will have eroded. As such, museums must assume a restorative role in the process of combatting historical amnesia and “mis-memory” by perpetually bringing the past within the contemporary, by revealing and dissecting the latent systemic remnants of the *ancien régime* towards the larger scope of the *tabula rasa*, the “clean slate” which enables progress, rather than the “slate wiped clean” of sociopolitical antecedence.³³

while similarly activating the museum display through tours provided by artists, MARE has created an optimal space for the dialectical encounter of past, present, and future. However, one of its museological faults lies in the constitution of the display based on an *a priori* assumption of the visitor's holistic knowledge regarding Romania's communist history and its unethical silence vis-à-vis the topic due to its tense, unresolved nature. The museum has obscured the presence of the former regime both through the *excess* of elements incorporated into its building's architecture and through the *absence* of Socialist Realism within the permanent collection. These curatorial choices function in tandem with an active erasure of the past, as discussions about traumatic collective events (collectivization, nationalization) or those regarding the coercive power of state-led apparatuses, such as the Romanian Artists' Union, are silenced. Recuperating artists that circumvented the socialist canon, the museum does much to salvage works that operated outside of the communist regime's ideological parameters. Regardless, in the grander scheme of Bucharest's museums, MARE fails to deviate from the discursive obscurity that governs other such institutions with regards to this topic. As a result of its private ownership, the museum is, conversely, free of the burden that is the state-imposed narrative and its curatorial application. Not dependent on government funding, its self-sufficiency allows for critical distance and a positioning outside of a politicized cultural sphere. In order for the museological novelty of MARE's approach to not be undermined, more attention has to be paid to contextualization and the reversal of art historical hierarchies. The decorative art lacunae in its collection, while also impeding the potential formation of new narratives, points to the questionable prioritization of fine art forms as the only exemplars of innovation within recent Romanian art history. As MARE uses the term *museum*,

and not *collection*, in its nomenclature, this suggests that a more neutral and inclusive perspective should have been adopted when building its permanent display. Radical, both in its positive and negative aspects, oscillating between novel (*dialectical contemporaneity*) and antiquated (Cartesian

dualism) notions, it could be that MARE will find balance in one of its future permutations. Given that a change in its permanent collection is due soon, it remains to be seen if such a radical institution is capable of implementing even more radical change.



NOTES

1. For more on the concept of transitional justice in postcommunist countries, refer to Lavinia Stan (2009).
2. The name of the museum will be discussed further on in the paper.
3. The original term in Romanian is *zonă construită protejată*. Such areas can be identified on the Bucharest City Hall website.
4. For more on the process of nationalization, see Tismăneanu (2003).
5. The issues of restitution and confiscated housing as a financial asset are discussed in Stan (2006); Demeter (2018).
6. During 1990s, politicians of the National Salvation Front advocated for the right of tenants to continue inhabiting nationalized housing, while the opposition proposed restitution as the only ethical solution. Warning against an impending housing crisis, the Salvation Front (comprised of former communist officials) implemented policies that permitted tenants to buy the nationalized homes to which they had been relocated during the regime. In areas such as Primăverii, these policies benefited former members or descendants of the *nomenklatura*, allowing them to purchase properties that had been abusively seized (see Stan 2006: 190–5).
7. During Gheorghiu-Dej's period of de-Stalinization (late 1950s), Ana Pauker's involvement in the violent collectivization process carried out by Dej's regime was amplified as a justification for the purging of Soviet communist officials from Romanian central administration. While Pauker was famously opposed to forced collectivization, the mythology surrounding her persona continued to be propagated throughout Ceaușescu's regime and persists within popular culture today (see Kligman and Verdery 2011: 105–210).
8. For more on the concept of authenticity, see the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) Nara Document on Authenticity (1994).
9. The integration of old architectural elements into new designs rarely pays attention to proper conservation practices in Bucharest. Documents such as the ICOMOS Venice Charter (1964) do not forbid the repurposing of built heritage for other social functions, however, they forbid demolitions or modifications "which would alter relations of mass and color." Often, such architectural fusions are done by simply adding a discrepant, modern structure to an old, existing one with no intention of reconciling the two elements. An excellent example of this is the headquarters of the Romanian Architect's Union in central Bucharest where a glass office building simply emerges out of the remaining French Renaissance facade of the Păulescu villa that previously served as the Austro-Hungarian Embassy in the nineteenth century.
10. For more information on the building project see the YTAA website (<http://ytaa.co/projects/museum-of-modern-art>).
11. Bulgaria's first communist leader, who was at the head of Bulgaria from 1946 until his death in 1949. His mausoleum, located in Battenberg Square, was demolished without notice by the Bulgarian authorities in 1999.
12. The location is now a popular meeting place in Sofia, which is still referred to as the Dimitrov mausoleum.
13. One can forget on "account not of defect but of excess," see Eco and Migiel (1988).
14. The conversion of the mausoleum into a theatre was proposed. See Todorova (2010a: 430).
15. See also Kalman (2017); Kaufman (2009); Smith (2006).
16. Kalman (2017: 548).
17. *Scântea Newspaper* (July 20, 1965) quoted in Cârnelci (2013: 68).
18. Two of the most notable exhibitions organized in Romania during the liberalization period were the 1968 Paris School exhibition and the American Abstract Expressionism exhibition of 1969 (Cârnelci 2013: 74).
19. The Romanian term *artă de sertar* (drawer art) became a colloquial form of referring to art that could not be exhibited due to its subversive nature.
20. Bishop also refers to the perpetuation of "postmodernism's post-historical deadlock" as a second, more conven-

tional model of exhibiting contemporaneity. This model sees contemporary art as a mere chronological perpetuation of postmodernism's pluralism and referential nature, thus upholding its dependence on the historicity of modernism. Bishop argues in favor of the anachronic model for its "generative" rather than static nature, its ability to operate solely through the logic of postmodernism and produce the "new" by "collapsing a past and future into an expanded present" (2018: 19).

21. Both Bishop (2018) and Piotrowski (2000: 12) have signaled the difficulty of adapting Eastern European art to the static, chronologically bound Western framework as a result of its multiple temporalities.

22. This model exchanges the conception of Europe as geographically split, as bearing a center and a periphery, for an integrative conception that embraces multiplicity and points of confluence.

23. An example is sculptor Paul Neagu who lived and worked in the United Kingdom after having permanently left Romania in 1970. Neagu had limited contact with the Romanian art scene of the 1970s and 1980s, exhibiting and teaching in Scotland for most of his life.

24. Karl Marx's critique of religion in Marx (1970, originally published in 1844).

25. Erwin Kessler (director, Museum of Recent Art), in a discussion with the author, Bucharest, August 20, 2020.

26. Fluxus artist Dick Higgins introduced the concept of intermedial art as work that evaded belonging to one medium. Intermedial art is liminal, mediating, and confounding distinct art forms. See Higgins (1967).

27. For an overview of this, see Jaudon and Kozloff (1978).

28. Here I am referring to Adolf Loos's moralizing essay *Ornament and Crime* (1908) that deplored the appeal for excessive decoration, considering it an impediment in the cultural evolution of society.

29. Semantic values refer to the "possibility or necessity of interpreting the work," while aesthetic values are "beauty, its formal unity or its evocativeness" and the capacity of the work to produce a reaction or invite contemplation. See Markowitz (1994: 56–7).

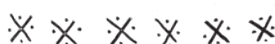
30. Olga Horșia (former director of UCECOM), in a discussion with the author, Bucharest, June 24, 2020.

31. Ibid.

32. Anamaria Smigelschi and Silvia Colfescu, "Despre boema românească din anii '70 - '80" [About the Romanian Bohemia from the 1970s–1980s], discussion at the Stories of Bucharest Conference, National Theatre of Romania, December 8, 2019.

33. Anamaria Smigelschi and Silvia Colfescu, "Despre boema românească din anii '70 - '80" [About the Romanian Bohemia from the 1970s–1980s], discussion at the Stories of Bucharest Conference, National Theatre of Romania, December 8, 2019.

34. MARE's director, Erwin Kessler, is often invited by the Ministry of Culture to participate in discussions regarding the elaboration of policy for the funding of the contemporary art sector. The museum has recently gained the attention of deputy Prime Minister Raluca Turcan who applauded the institution's support of contemporary artists through acquisition programs, as well as its innovative approach to exhibiting Romanian art. For more information, see the website of the Romanian Ministry of Culture (www.cultura.ro).



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