



THE ROMANIAN ACADEMY

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The Artistic Youth Society. A cultural history 1901 – 1941

DOCTORAL THESIS ABSTRACT

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The present paper aims to bring to the fore the activity of the Artistic Youth Society, which was founded at the end of 1901 by twelve Romanian artists, some of them having foreign origins, namely: Kimon Loghi, Ipolit Strâmbulescu, Ștefan Luchian, Arthur Verona, Nicolae Vermont, Constantin Artachino, Nicolae Grant, Oscar Spaethe, Dimitrie D. Mirea, Gheorghe Petrașcu, Ștefan Popescu and Frederic Storck. This artistic group arose on the ruins of the "Ileana" Society, whose founder was the collector Alexandru Bogdan-Pitești. The short-lived group included three of the founding members of the Artistic Youth, namely Nicolae Vermont, Ștefan Luchian and Constantin Artachino.

The young founders felt the need to establish an artistic group that would allow them to exhibit whatever they wanted, without the constraint of the stiff rules enforced by the Official Salon that mainly accepted academic art. Furthermore, they felt discriminated against by the members of the jury of this salon, due to the antipathies of Constantin I. Stăncescu, who was the organizer of the official exhibitions and a former teacher of many of them.

Another aspect that formed the basis of the Artistic Youth was the desire to free artists from the chains of official art, closely controlled by C. I. Stăncescu who wanted to monopolize the path of Romanian art.

Both their confidence in the quality of the art they produced and the desire to promote Romania at an European level, led them to exhibit abroad, in Athens in 1903 on the occasion of the International Exhibition and in 1906 in Munich, at the 9th International Exhibition. The diversity of the themes addressed as well as the styles they used helped the artists to endure over time and attract supporters among collectors such as Alexandru Bogdan-Pitești, Krikor Zambaccian, Iosif Dona and others. The three major directions that the artists of the Youth followed were realism, impressionism and secessionism. On the other hand, female artists were also attracted by avant-garde currents such as cubism or expressionism.

Very little has been written about this subject, Petre Oprea was the only one who went into more details, but not enough, which is why we have felt the need to elaborate on this subject starting from new sources found in Bucharest archives such as: National Archives of Romania, the Archive of Bucharest, the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Archive of Plastic

Artists kept at the Library of the Romanian Academy and the Manuscripts collection of the Library of the Romanian Academy. We have also made use of the testimonies written by the founding members of the Artistic Youth, such as letters addressed to each other or to some of their family members, as well as the exhibition catalogues published regularly, following artistic events. To all this, the press of the time is added, among which we mention the magazines, “Literatura și Arta Română”, “Boabe de Grâu”, “Revista idealistă. Literatură, Artă, Știință, Sociologie” and newspapers “Mișcarea”, “Neamul Românesc”, “Scânteia”, “Gazeta Bucureștilor” and others. The later periodicals, “Arta Plastică” and “Studii și cercetări de Istoria Artelor (SCIA)” were also useful. Last but not least, the primary sources proved to be very useful, such as the memoirs of Queen Marie of Romania, who patronized the artistic group from its beginning until her death in the summer of 1938, as well as the autobiographical volumes written by Cecilia Cuțescu-Storck, *Fresca unei vieți și O viață dăruită artei*, Camil Ressu's *Însemnările* and the book *Dălți și pensule* written by Oscar Han. We used as a source of information the artists' monographs written by various authors, as well as the exhibition chronicles published in the press of the time, many of which were collected by Lidia Trăușan-Matu and published in two volumes entitled *Cronica de artă: despre pictori și tablouri în paginile gazetelor românești din veacul al XIX-lea: 1860-1900*.

The Artistic Youth Society was a long-lived one. Its actual activity transpired from 1902, when the first exhibition took place, until 1947, when it was dissolved due to the abolition of the monarchy and the establishment of the new political regime. However, we have decided to focus our attention on the 1901-1941 period because that is when Romanian art was in full bloom, since Romania's entry into the Second World War led to a series of changes that made it difficult to carry out the activities of the Artistic Youth. Their work registered more of a regression than a progress, given that four of the founding members had passed away by that time, and the others had aged and failed to promote the innovation in art. These aspects contributed to the loss of the spirit of the cultural-artistic group.

This paper is divided into six chapters in order to cover as wide a range of aspects as possible that were the basis for the creation of the Artistic Youth Society and helped it become successful in the artistic world of Bucharest. The first chapter is *The professional body: origin, studies, personal and collective exhibitions, artistic evolution, cultural contribution* and aims to showcase the life of each artist among the twelve founders, the studies they followed, which

were mostly the same - the School of Fine Arts in Bucharest, a training internship in Munich, often within the Royal Academy of Fine Arts and another internship in Paris, of course there are also exceptions. We also wanted to mention that some of the artists benefited from a state-funded scholarship, others received private scholarships or had to manage on their own. In addition to the collective exhibitions, we also wished to list the personal exhibitions, most of them being hosted in the halls of the Romanian Athenaeum. We emphasized their artistic merits as well, either in the creation of public works (painting some churches or decorating the royal palace on Calea Victoriei, as well as erecting some public monuments in the capital's parks or squares, but also in the cemetery Bellu from Bucharest), or in the training of other artists, as some of the founders also worked as teachers at the School of Fine Arts in Bucharest or in Iași. In this chapter, we have also presented data related to the biography and artistic activity of the artists Ion Theodorescu-Sion, Iosif Iser, Dimitrie Paciurea, Samuel Mütznner, Rudolf Schweitzer-Cumpăna, Jean Alexandru Steriadi, as associated members of the Youth and artists who have increased the prestige of the Society, namely Nicolae Grigorescu and Constantin Brâncuși who displayed in the first exhibitions in order to encourage young artists.

The second chapter focuses on the patronage offered to the Artistic Youth by Princess Marie of Romania, who was herself a plastic artist, having a talent for watercolor flowers, designing furniture items and even pyro-engraving them. We presented the important moments from her artistic activity, which also included the literary side, writing numerous stories for children, novels or books with the aim of promoting Romania, especially amid the Great War. We have not forgotten her collaboration with Queen Elisabeth of Romania, known under the literary-artistic alias Carmen Sylva, a collaboration that was reflected in the quality of the first exhibitions of the Youth. The collaboration also contributed to the new group ingratiating itself to King Carol I, as the sovereign preferred official art and had a hard time adapting to the innovation brought by young enthusiasts.

Chapter three brings to the fore the role of female artists in the development of Romanian art. They were accepted in the Artistic Youth exhibitions due to their talent and also to family ties, as was the case with Cecilia Cuțescu-Storck who married Frederic Storck or the teacher-student relationship, as Nicolae Vermont trained two artists, Rodica Maniu and Nina Arbore. In this chapter, we will see that the young ladies followed the same path of artistic training, they only did so in all-girls schools, and they constantly tried to prove that they were as talented as

men and that they could embrace this profession that had been until then reserved only for representatives of the male sex. In addition to the traditional easel works, they also managed to create murals, for example *Istoria negoțului românesc* made by Cecilia Cuțescu-Storck in the auditorium of the Academy of Economic Studies in Bucharest or the frescoes of Nina Arbore on the walls of the Church of Saint Ilie Tesviteanul in Sinaia. At the same time, many of them were able to combine both the traditional role of wives and mothers with the modern role of a professional in the artistic field.

The next chapter considers the description of the annual exhibitions organized at the Romanian Athenaeum until 1909 and the one organized twice a year, in spring and autumn 1910 when the Artistic Youth benefited from its own exhibition space in the building of the former Panorama Grivița, located in the center of Bucharest, near the University and held until 1916. During the war, this headquarter was demolished, and after the First World War the artists returned to the cramped rooms of the Romanian Athenaeum, once again settling for one exhibition per year. In the pages of this chapter, we also revealed the new artistic stage assumed by the members of the Youth in the interwar period, at the moment of the discovery of Balchik, also called the Silver Coast. That was the small territory on the shore of the Black Sea, gained after the First War and lost at the beginning of the World War II, a place where Queen Marie built her Quiet Nest. It is the moment when the chromatic palette of the artists becomes brighter, and the subjects addressed are either the landscape, or portraits of the locals, mostly Turks, as well as indoor scenes, some even from the homes that some artists built in this city by the sea.

The chapter number five is closely related to the First World War when many artists were mobilized within the army in order to create war scenes that would make up the collection of a future military museum, which would have been established after the war. The war was a turning point in the activity of the Artistic Youth, as the artists split into two, some of them went to Iași, and the others stayed in Bucharest. Those from Iași founded a new artistic group called “Arta Română”, and those from Bucharest, in order to organize their annual exhibitions, resorted to the help of their enemies, the Germans, who had occupied the capital city. Fortunately, after the war, the members reunited and managed to overcome their differences. However, many expressive drawings and paintings have been preserved from this period of struggle that reveal the efforts made by Romanian soldiers and the hard life of prisoners in foreign camps, as was the case of the painter Tonitza, who fell ill with malaria and rheumatism in the camp. However, he found the

strength to bring out a unique magazine that would lift the spirits of the prisoners and comfort them.

The thesis ends with the dissolution of the Artistic Youth Society which, after the death of Queen Marie, changed its patron twice, so that from 1938 to 1940 it had King Carol II, and from 1940 to 1947, King Mihai. It should be noted that neither of the two kings was involved in the activity of the artistic group, they only had honorary roles, as a sign of homage to their mother, respectively grandmother.

This paper will be completed by a series of images with works of the artists who founded the Artistic Youth Society as well as the associated members in order to mark a stylistic and cultural evolution that will help us realize the important role that this Society had in the development and promotion of young talents and in the culturalization of the public.

The annexes will contain images of documents that belonged to the artists, namely: academic records, letters, requests for renting exhibition rooms, payrolls for providing some judging hours in various exhibitions or for teaching hours within the School of Fine Arts in Bucharest or Iași.

This paper is intended to be a tribute to the Artistic Youth Society and to all those who have contributed to the development of Romanian art, thus marking the courage of these young people to connect to the new Western world by renouncing the academic strictness imposed by the teachers of the Schools of Fine Arts in Bucharest and Iași.

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