

THE PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGE BETWEEN PAST AND FUTURE





SALONUL DE PROIECTE & THE MIHAI OROVEANU IMAGE COLLECTION

Salonul de proiecte is a research and production-based project focused on Romanian contemporary art whose program involves exhibitions, publications, screenings, and ongoing debates positioned in dialogue within both regional and international contexts. Salonul de proiecte was founded in 2011 in the framework of Anexa: The National Museum of Contemporary Art in Bucharest, and since 2016, it has functioned as an independent art space located in Palatul Universul, Bucharest.



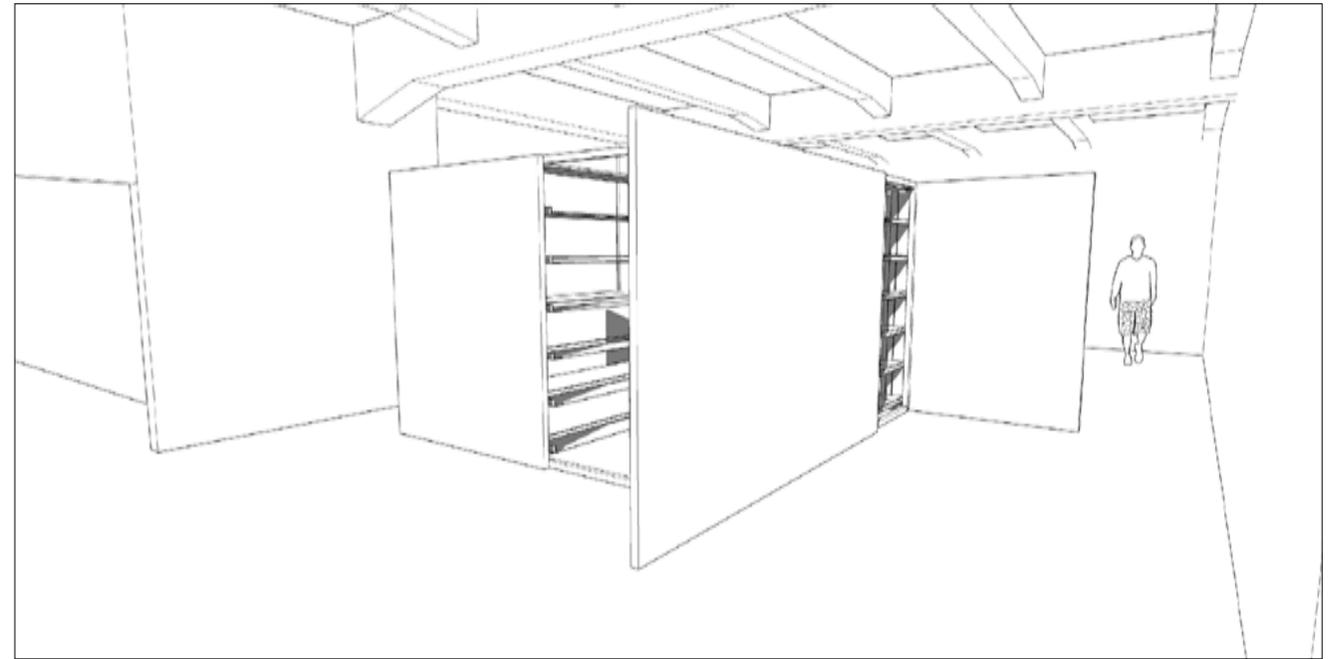
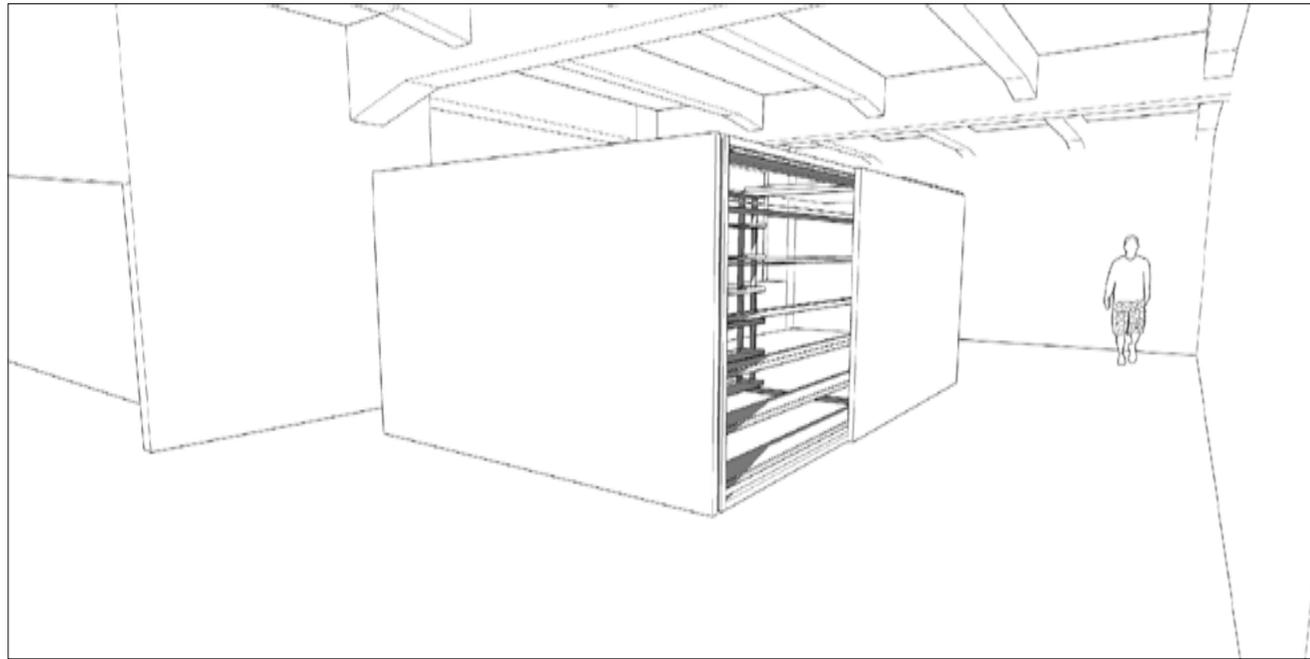
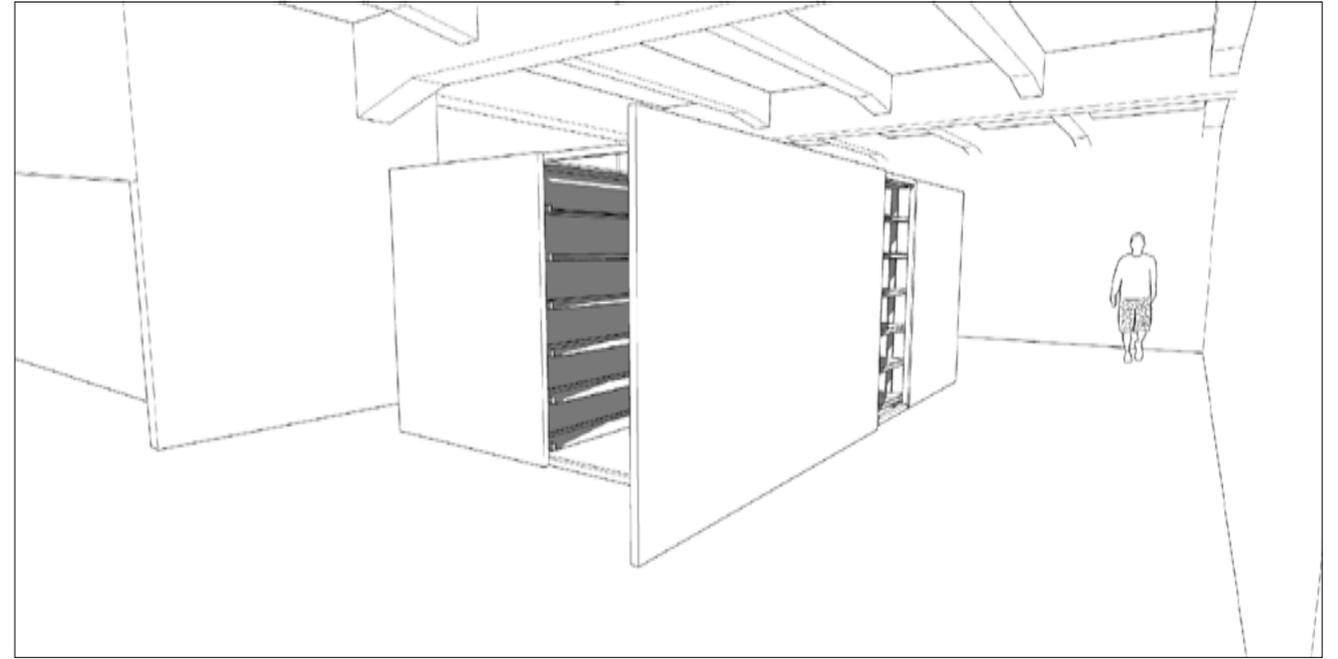
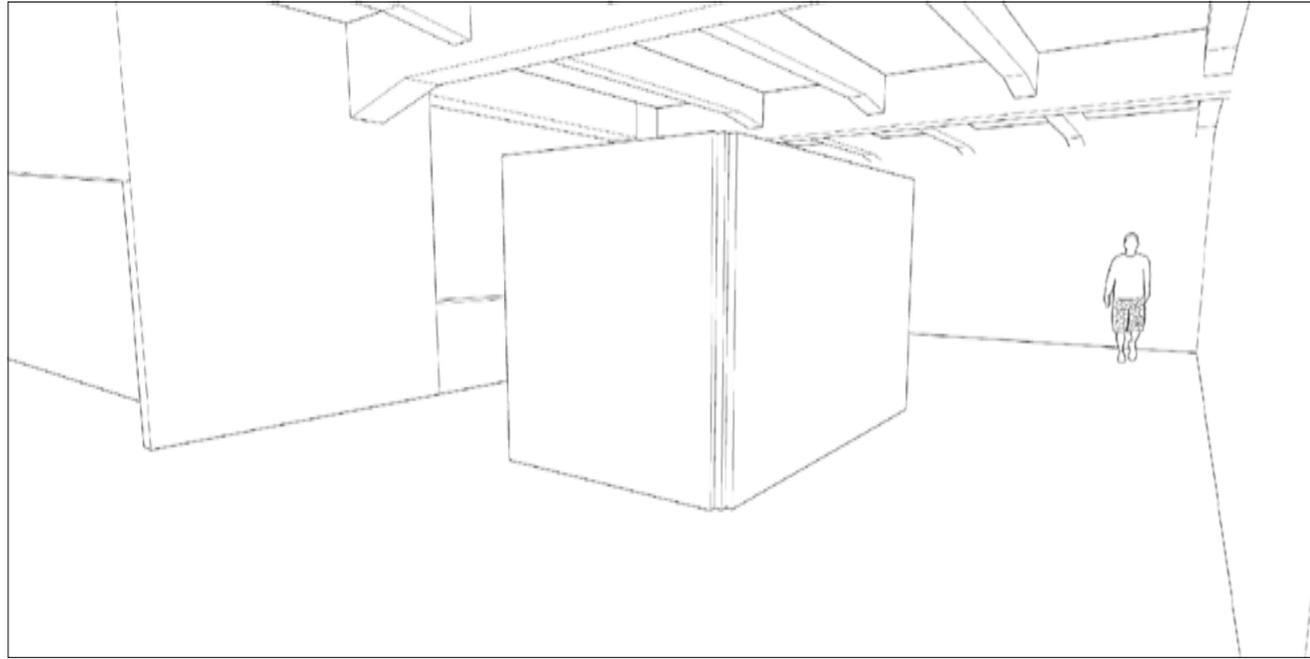
In 2018 Salonul de proiecte initiated a multidisciplinary research project on a subject relevant to the current debates about the role of images in understanding culture. Its starting point was the collection of photographic images and negatives gathered over the course of many decades by Mihai Oroveanu, art historian, photographer, and director of the National Museum of Contemporary Art from 2001 to 2013. In addition to his work as a photographer, Mihai Oroveanu developed a broader professional interest in the field of photography, in the hope of establishing an institution dedicated to the study of the image and photography as a medium. He was unable to fulfill this plan because of his premature death, but the archive he assembled has remained in the care of Anca Oroveanu, and this allows for initiatives to harness its potential. The impressive collection covers a period of more than 150 years and provides a basis for study of a vast range of cultural phenomena that can be analyzed from multiple angles.

THE PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGE BETWEEN PAST AND FUTURE PROJECT | 2020 – 2021

Over the course of *The Photographic Image Between Past and Future* project, financed with the support of EEA Grants 2014 – 2021 within the RO-CULTURE Programme, Salonul de proiecte's premises are transformed in a hybrid space, merging the functions of an institution dedicated to the study and exhibition of photography that combines the task of research and preservation—comprising scanning, cataloguing, indexing, and online publication—with the organisation of public events. The Mihai Oroveanu Image Collection, partly reorganised and systematised, is integrated into a structure specially conceived by skaarchitects, whose role is twofold: on the one hand, it hosts the archive materials, allowing the team's permanent access to them, and, on the other hand, it provides a display area for the presentation of images included in a series of exhibitions. Over the course of the project, three thematic exhibitions are scheduled, to make visible a number of areas that are extensively represented within the corpus of the archive; they focus on architecture and public space, representations of gender, and vernacular photography. Each display is accompanied by interventions conceived by contemporary artists, in relation with original materials from the archive and the researched themes. The overall number of visitors exceeded 1800 persons. This institutional format, compressed over the course of one and a half years, can be viewed as an anticipatory experiment—a pilot project for an institution to come—as well as a means of making transparent the typically invisible work of an already existing cultural institution that more often than not captures the public attention only through the perspective of “the event.”

The main aim of this project is to preserve and bring into public circulation an archive of photographs of enormous cultural and historical relevance, and, at the same time to organise around it contemporary art activities and training sessions for photography specialists. The activities are unfolding from June 2020 to November 2021, in partnership with Fotogalleriet Oslo, an institution that provides expertise in the field of curating and archiving photography and contributes to the selection of the Norwegian artists involved in the project. The total budget of the project is 170,000 Euros, of which the value of the non-refundable financial support is 152,000 Euros.





TRAINING SESSIONS

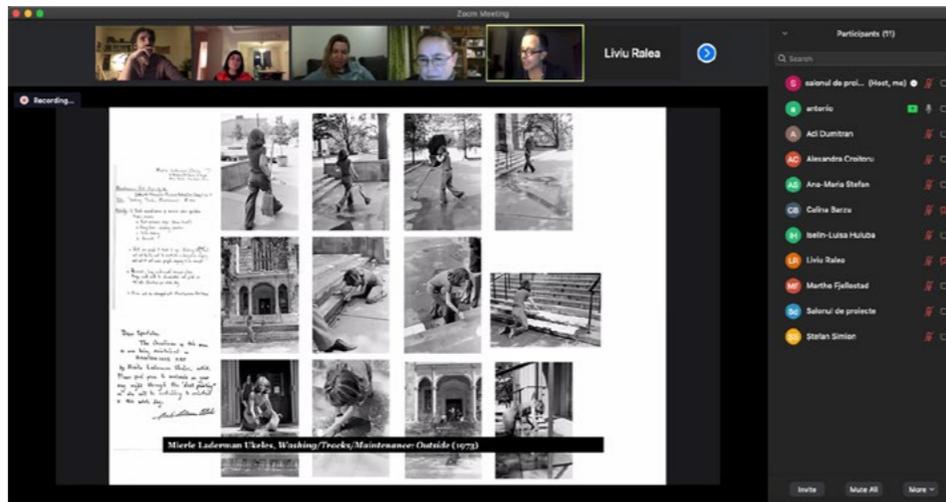
TRAINING WITH ANCA OROVEANU | JUNE - AUGUST 2020

This activity was vital for getting the project underway and for assessing the contents of the archive with a view to its public presentation at Salonul de proiecte. During weekly meetings, Anca Oroveanu, the owner of the Mihai Oroveanu Image Collection, guided the project team in gaining an understanding of how the collection is structured according to the categories laid down by its founder and in selecting and preparing the materials that would be transported and shown at Salonul de proiecte.



TRAINING WITH ANTONIO CATALDO | AUGUST 2020 – NOVEMBER 2021

Over the course of three training sessions, Antonio Cataldo, the artistic director of Fotogalleriet Oslo, provided an in-depth look at the curatorial practices devised by institutions that deal with the display and interrogation of photographs in particular and images in general. Cataldo discussed the working methods he chose when working with the institutional archive of Fotogalleriet; the challenges faced by cultural institutions during the pandemic and the ways in which his curatorial approach has adapted itself to the specifics of digital platforms; and the critical assessment of archive materials reflected in new publication formats. The training sessions were attended by the project team and students from the Faculty of Art History and Theory and the Photo-Video Department of the National University of the Arts, Bucharest.



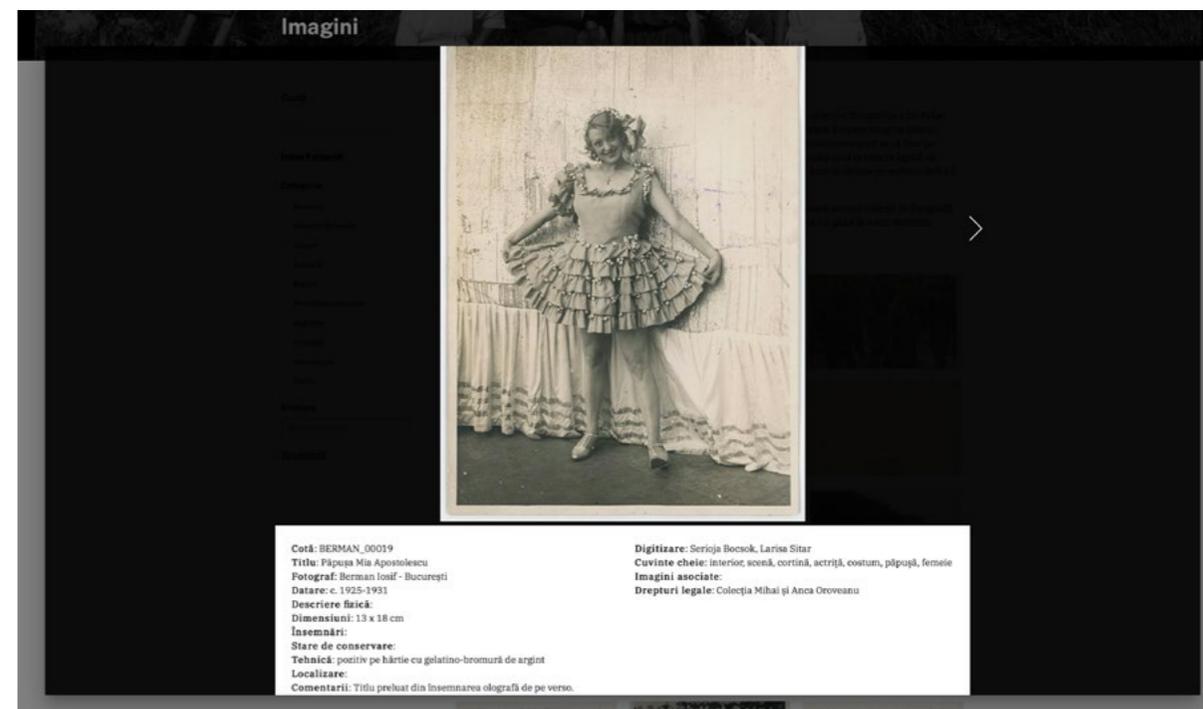
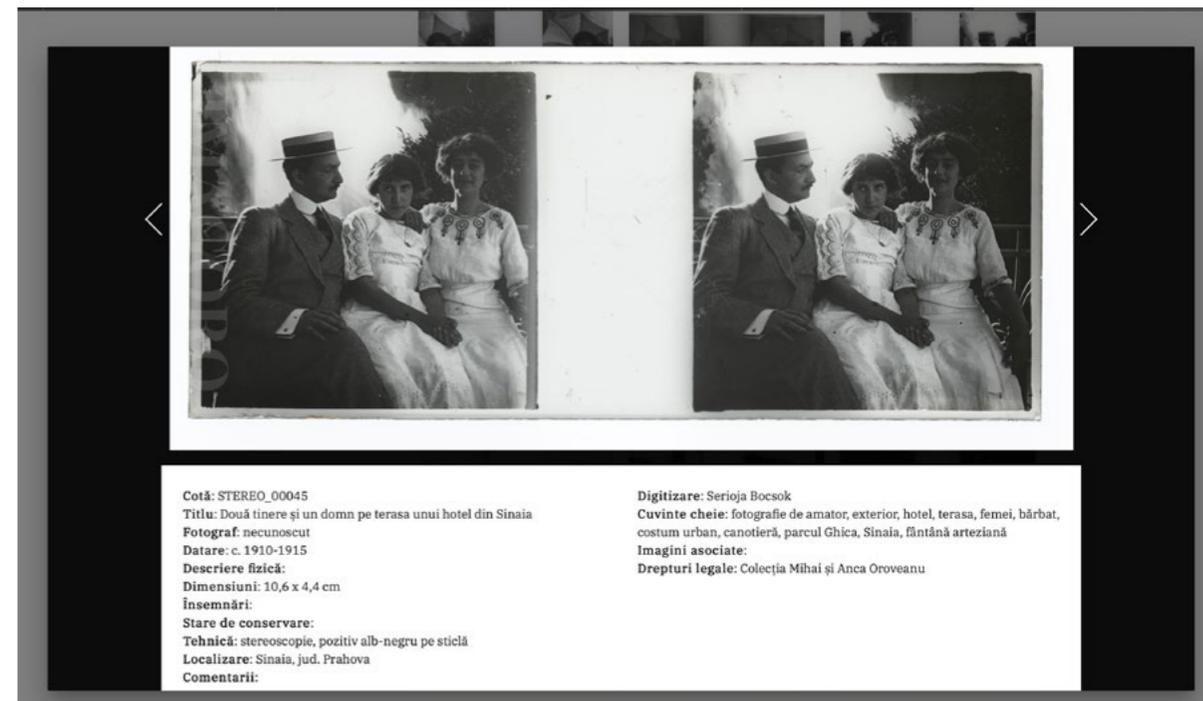
TRAINING WITH MARTHE TOLNES FJELLESTAD | AUGUST 2020 – MAY 2021

The three training sessions designed by Marthe Tolnes Fjellestad, curator at the Perspektiv Museum, Tromsø, reflected her collaboration with the Photographic Collection at the University of Bergen Library. Tolnes Fjellestad touched on various aspects relating to the physical organisation of that archive and the continuous improvements in its digitisation and online publishing system, as well as about the various steps that need to be taken when organising a travelling exhibition produced in collaboration with an international institution and the professional methods used in photo archiving. The training sessions were attended by the project team and students from the Faculty of Art History and Theory and the Photo-Video Department of the National University of Arts, Bucharest, as well as from the University of Bucharest's Centre of Excellence in the Study of the Image.



DIGITIZATION

The Salonul de proiecte team selected thematic categories corresponding to the individual lines of research encompassed by the project. Ten thousand images were scanned and inventoried in the exhibition space over the course of the project, with the design of the space having been configured to accommodate this activity. A part of the scanned images – 4,000 items – was indexed and published online via the project website, mirroring the categories of the collection established by its founder Mihai Oroveanu. An index of photographers and photographic studios active within the territory of what is now Romania forms a separate category, providing an important resource for the future study of the history of photography in Romania. The project website has in itself garnered considerable public attention, with numerous published images providing useful source materials for historical and cultural investigations pursued by other researchers.





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AGFA

Cotă: BUC_CULT_00214

Titlu: Sală de cataloage și referințe la Biblioteca Academiei Române

Fotograf: necunoscut

Datare: c. 1950-1960

Descriere fizică:

Dimensiuni: 17,7 x 12,9 cm

Însemnări:

Stare de conservare:

Tehnică: negativ alb-negru pe sticlă

Localizare: București

Comentarii:

Digitizare: Serioja Bocsok, Larisa Sitar

Cuvinte cheie: interior, bibliotecă, sală, cataloage, fișiere, rafturi, cărți, referințe, cititori, femei, bărbați, costum urban

Imagini asociate:

Drepturi legale: Colecția Mihai și Anca Oroveanu

EXHIBITIONS | SELECTIONS FROM THE MIHAI OROVEANU IMAGE COLLECTION



EXPO_01_BUC_ARH_SP.PUBLIC | OCTOBER 2, 2020 – JANUARY 31, 2021

The first exhibition imagines an elliptic journey through various layers of Bucharest's architecture, suggesting a more comprehensive understanding of the public space, of which single buildings represent only a small part. This decision was dictated by our own emplacement, as well as by the vast presence of images on this topic within the collection; the selection has been guided by the intention to construct a wide-ranging view—however fragmentary—of an urban space in transformation. These instantiations of urban history, many of them insufficiently known, aim to foster the perception that the past life of the city is never static and frozen in time, never restricted to the interwar “golden age,” when the framework within which the urban élites and the bourgeoisie evolved, frequently depicted in photographs, created the lasting and almost unequivocal impression of a modern city and a prosperous society. The series of exhibited photographs seek to be at odds with various stereotypes of representation, to move away from the centre toward the margins, to make visible broader social categories, and to bring to attention the network of public services that make up the metropolis's hidden “nervous system.” An eclectic, multifaceted city, impossible to integrate in a uniformly totalizing view, Bucharest shows that the narratives of progress—exemplified, for example, by the pre-war modernist architecture, or by the functionalist modernisation of the socialist period—have always been paradoxical because they suppressed pre-existing urban layers or eliminated others from the historical discourse and from public awareness. It is significant that photography can suspend and deconstruct the monolithic architectural imaginary of a historical period through its capacity to freeze moments of transformation, intermediary stages, construction sites, demolitions, evictions and destruction caused by earthquakes and bombing.

The collective memory is often constructed by recourse to photographs, through the manner in which they are disseminated, charged with meaning, mythologised through the intersection of the socio-political and cultural conditioning they impose on the present. It has been our intention to also bring to light through this project the ways in which the image and politics of representation of a city or nation has also been time and again mediated by recourse to architecture. Certain series of photographs bring to attention the wide-ranging exhibition projects of the interwar period, whose purpose was to promote the history and development of the city through ambitious deployments of forces in which the joint rhetoric of exhibition, architecture and photography reflected and reinforced each other. Beyond the remembrance of episodes of recent history that signal to us that cultural policies could have grander aspirations, such examples might also prompt a recalibration of our relationship with the city, the activation of a “civic,” critical, and responsible view of past and present in equal measure.

EXHIBITIONS | SELECTIONS FROM THE MIHAI OROVEANU IMAGE COLLECTION



EXPO_02_GENDER | MARCH 3 – JULY 4, 2021

The second exhibition brings together a wide range of techniques that shed light on the evolution of the photographic medium, from glass plates and film negatives, now scanned for the most part for the first time, to original prints made by photographic studios active in Romania between the late-nineteenth century and the mid-twentieth century, from carefully choreographed official photographs that control the manner in which their subjects are presented to vernacular improvisations in which the freedom of movement in front of the camera is incomparably greater. The selection unfolds like a montage, which brings together themes and typologies linked by visualisation via photography of the gender question, while on the other hand, putting forward unexpected juxtapositions that confound expectations, destabilise meanings that are culturally embedded, and stimulate the interpretative mechanism of each individual viewer.

The exhibition explores the various forms of performativity—and of the performance of gender—involved in studio photography, the social status of the subjects captured in photographs, the codes, the limits, but also the transgressions that can be occasionally detected in such circumstances. Emphasis is also placed on the propaganda image as conceived in close connection with issues to do with the representation and division of labour according to gender norms—undoubtedly a rhetorical trope, but one that grants female figures a prominent role within society, placing them in the foreground of a vision of the country's modernisation. By contrast, another dimension of the exhibition explores the way in which the male gaze is articulated through photography, the objectification and erotisation of the female body, as well as the stubborn perpetuation of such a dominant viewpoint, regardless of context or period. In assembling this complex montage of representational types and differing modes of employing photography, the angle of the reading is deliberately feminist. It critically interrogates stereotypes of gender figuration and at the same time attempts to counteract gaps and discriminations that are still deeply ingrained, by choosing to re-read the past through the lens of the ideas of equality and social equity.

Obliquely, the selection of images in the exhibition tackles the very question of representation, highlighting the fact that almost every photographic construct is filtered by a wide range of norms and conventions that are of greater or lesser prevalence. Thus, apart from inventorying positions, situations, moments that might be perceived in close connection with the socio-political dynamic in Romania or with the tenor of private life, the exhibition seeks to reveal above all the way in which the mechanisms of representation operate when the category of gender is scrutinized. One such approach is based on the conviction that photography, the image, the mirroring of the past in the wider sense, must be revised and interpreted from the perspective of wider historical narratives, while nonetheless recognising that in certain instances they have the power to transcend numerous types of normativity and to reveal excluded subjectivities, rare forms of autonomy, also recalling “vast regions of those who remain unrecognised,” unknown, invisible.

EXHIBITIONS | SELECTIONS FROM THE MIHAI OROVEANU IMAGE COLLECTION



EXPO_03_VERNACULAR | AUGUST 4 – NOVEMBER 28, 2021

The third exhibition focuses on a genre of photography that has enjoyed much attention in recent decades and which goes hand in hand with the effort to expand the range of approaches and methods of the history of photography. Vernacular photography is situated at the margins of established, standardised representations, with regard both to its image content and the freedom it takes with its nonchalant attitude towards the medium, making room for clumsiness and for the unpredictable, and activating a type of creativity akin to that of popular culture or elicits deeply personal and unique forms of expression.

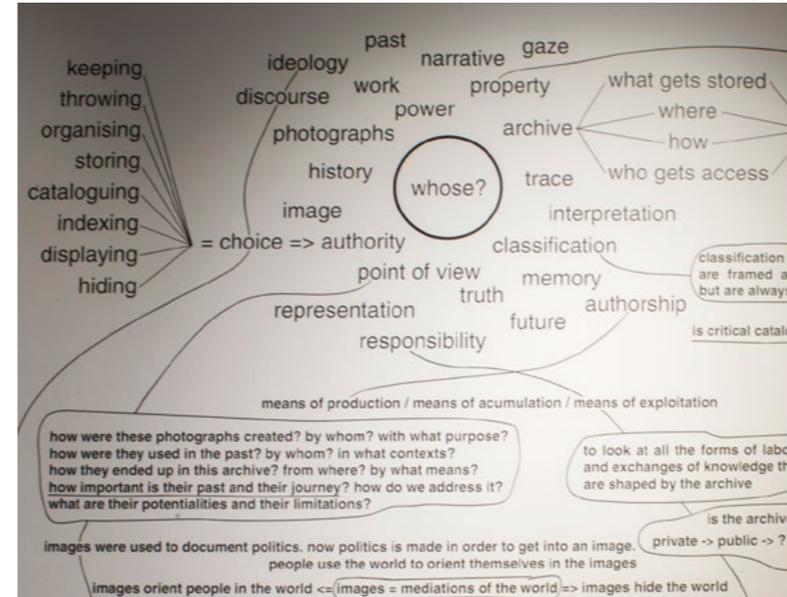
The term “vernacular” itself is imprecise, diffuse, open to countless nuances and interpretations. The vernacular is above all linked to the private register, which accounts for the fact that the authors of photographs classified in this way imagine their dissemination within small, private, family circles. Vernacular photography is therefore not a media image aimed at wide audiences, rather it is precisely its private/personal character that causes it to be produced prolifically within family circles or closed communities, a phenomenon that arose after the invention of the Kodak portable camera at the end of the nineteenth century. The production of vernacular photography in Romania was likewise significant and gained momentum starting with the first decades of the twentieth century.

Countless examples of such images can be identified within the Mihai Oroveanu Image Collection, and the exhibition tries to capture the prolixity of the vernacular as part of a complex exploration of both the encounter with photography, and with the image in a broader understanding, in contemporary society. There are multiple points that contribute to the linking of different regimes of visibility, past and present, once the vernacular is interpellated, one of them being the tendency toward self-expression by means of photography, which constitutes an inescapable feature of our present social and everyday world. But unlike the standardisation of present-day self-representations and the way in which they circulate along strictly monitored and controlled digital paths, the vernacular photography of the past entails an incomparably larger inventiveness (albeit frequently one unacknowledged by its maker) when it comes to the construction of personal narratives. Besides a rich selection of individual photographs, which make up various instantiations of what can be classified under the heading of the vernacular, the exhibition also presents a series of photo albums that trace the lives of people and families or of spatiotemporally circumscribed events (travel albums, for example), bringing into sharp focus the way in which the subjective dimension is interwoven with the socio-political context or the often idiosyncratic entangling between personal and collective memory.

ARTISTIC INTERVENTIONS & ARTIST TALKS

ANDREI NACU: WHOSE?

ARTISTIC INTERVENTION IN THE EXPO_01_BUC_ARH_SP.PUBLIC EXHIBITION & ARTIST TALK NOVEMBER 4 – 29, 2020

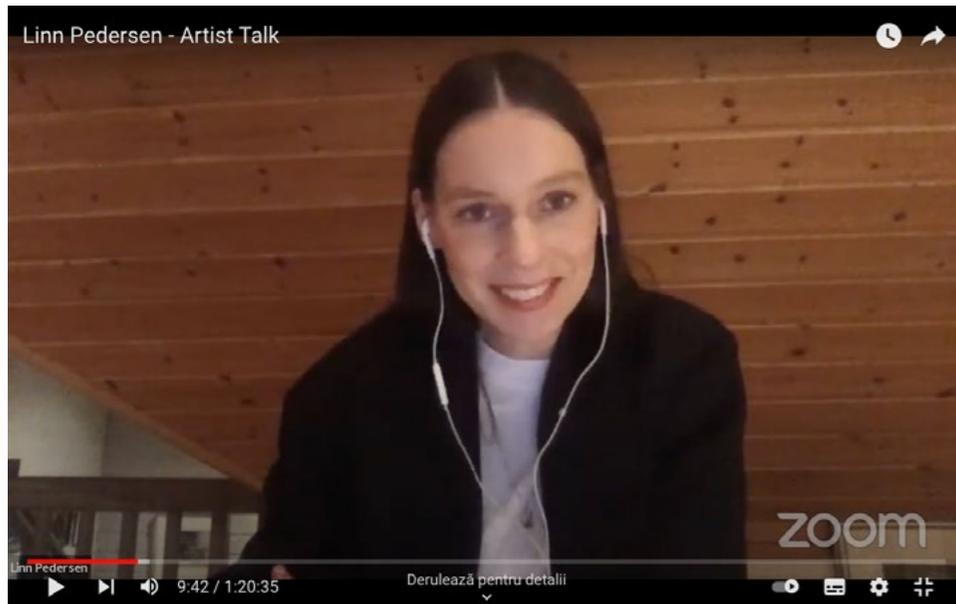


The intervention of Andrei Nacu within the Mihai Oroveanu Image Collection entails the inclusion of new photographs in the archive, without specifying which they are. Nacu thereby extrapolates his own experience as a collector of photographs, as an artist who in his practice employs archive materials, and, not least, as a collaborator of the Royal Anthropological Institute, London, an institution that houses a vast collection of images. His action gives rise to multiple questions and creates the premises for debates on the politics of the image, revealing the complex and at the same time problematic character of the relationship between image and property. The construction of narratives proceeding from the archive constructed by Mihai Oroveanu is at an incipient stage, and the political charge of the situation should not be ignored. Its potential, which also entails a great responsibility for the research team, is all the more obvious given that the archive itself is in the midst of a process of formatting, in a context defined by the culture and circulation of the image.

This invisible intervention—opaque even to the project team—is completed by a diagram inserted into the exhibition space, whose aim is to bring into discussion a series of questions that extend the task of researching the images, siting it in a (self-)interrogative zone: Who took the photographs? When? In what context? What was their purpose? What journey have they made? Who owns the photographs now? Who uses them? To what end? What part does the viewer/user play and how is she interpellated by such questions? Can the archive be a public space? By the fact that they are visible to visitors and users, such questions are intended to stimulate ongoing debate about the role of the image, bringing critical reflection to the space of the archive.



ARTISTIC INTERVENTIONS & ARTIST TALKS

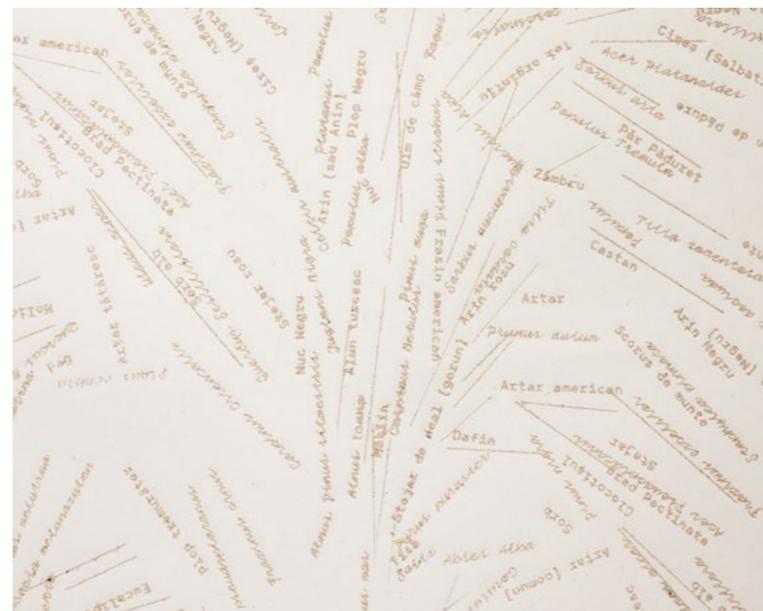


LINN PEDERSEN: DRIFTERS

ARTISTIC INTERVENTION IN THE EXPO_01_BUC_ARH_SP.PUBLIC EXHIBITION & ARTIST TALK DECEMBER 9, 2020 – JANUARY 10, 2021

Linn Pedersen's contribution to the exhibition is composed of two collages based on a series of five photographs of dirigibles that flew over the territory of Bessarabia in 1919, shortly after the First World War and the unification of Bessarabia with the Kingdom of Romania. Information regarding the time and place of these flights is handwritten on the surface of the photographs. From August to November, the dirigibles serenely crossed the airspace, although sometimes they encountered "wind and heavy weather." The predominant impression that these images convey is one of tranquillity, although we may easily sense the enthusiasm and euphoria with which groups of people greeted the dirigibles when they landed, as the bustle of minuscule figures is captured in two of the frames. But Linn Pedersen is not interested in the nature of the event or the specific circumstances of those flights, exceptional for their time, so much as she is interested in the meeting of two techniques: photography and aviation, both of which were at a relatively early stage, at least when viewed from the perspective of their subsequent rapid development. The two digital collages Linn Pedersen has created eliminate the human presence and the land, preserving only the multiplied outlines of the dirigibles, peacefully adrift against the backdrop of the pastel sky. It is as if this innovative, early-twentieth-century technology had never been employed for destruction; it is as if history were temporarily suspended, before epochal events such as the Hindenburg disaster, before the century resumed its blood-stained course.

ARTISTIC INTERVENTIONS & ARTIST TALKS



SUSANNE KRIEMANN: FOREST, FRST, T, LIKE TEAMWORK

ARTISTIC INTERVENTION IN THE EXPO_01_BUC_ARH_SP.PUBLIC EXHIBITION & ARTIST TALK JANUARY 13 – FEBRUARY 07, 2021

The third artistic intervention in the EXPO_01_BUC_ARH_SP.PUBLIC exhibition proposes a critical approach to the phenomenon of deforestation, from the viewpoint of artist Susanne Kriemann. For this occasion, she has realised a visual essay that will be distributed to the public free of charge, produced by means of silk screen printing, which in this case employs a pigment extracted from fragments of discarded Ikea furniture. The essay combines information from various sources: lines from poems and folk rituals interspersed with quotations from local and international press and academic articles, which discuss the future prospects of Romania's virgin forests in the European context. The texts are accompanied by a selection of images from the Mihai Oroveanu Image Collection, which present idyllic forests untouched by human hand and, by contrast, the lumber industry in Romania at the beginning of the twentieth century. These photographs point to a connection with the current situation, in which we are witnessing large-scale illegal logging over vast forested areas of the Carpathian Mountains, a process driven by the European market's demand for raw lumber, a market dominated by the economic interests of giants such as the Inter Ikea Group.

In this project, Susanne Kriemann continues her complex investigations analysing the effects of industrial exploitation on the natural environment, while at the same time inventing sophisticated means of producing images capable of conveying the microclimatic and geological transformations of areas subjected to processes of readaptation and re-sedimentation of their constituent materials. Kriemann is interested in the interconnected phenomena of the global economy, which have a profoundly destructive knock-on effect at various vulnerable points, but she is equally concerned with drawing attention to multimillennial natural areas, which once stretched over vast transnational territories and which are now greatly diminished and at risk of complete destruction. Such is the case of the Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians, Europe's last virgin forests, which also survive within the borders of Romania, an environment that nurtures us humans as well as an incredible variety of plants and animals.

ARTISTIC INTERVENTIONS & ARTIST TALKS



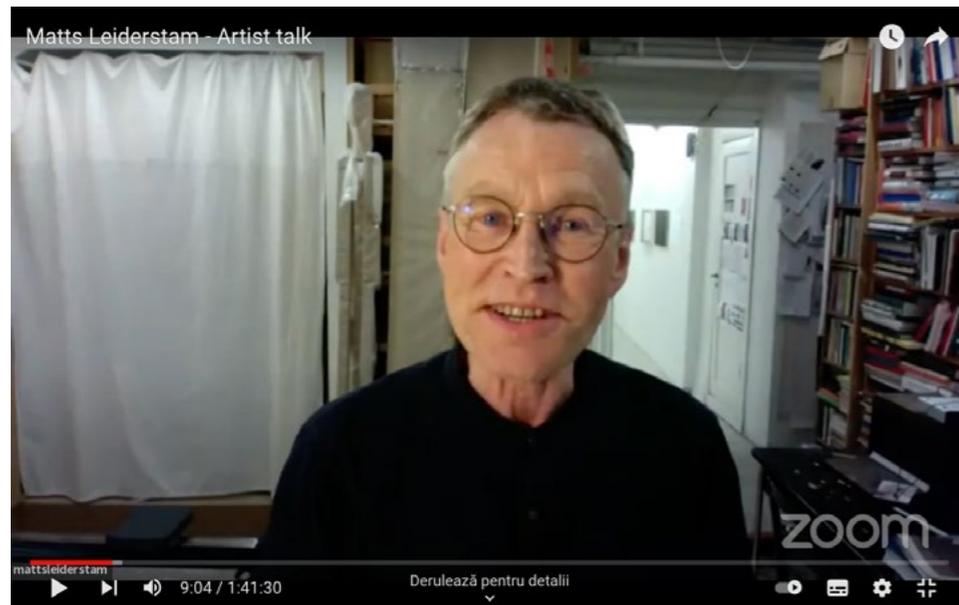
MİHAİ MİHALCEA: FAMILY ALBUM

ARTISTIC INTERVENTION IN THE EXPO_02_GENDER EXHIBITION & ARTIST TALK APRIL 7 – MAY 9, 2021

The first artistic intervention in the EXPO_02_GENDER exhibition is a collective-participative video work conceived by Mihai Mihalcea and entitled *Family Album*. In this particular instance, the source is a 1920s–1930s album of nude photographs representing various female figures in poses that avoid the forced eroticisation and objectification of bodies that we usually find in such situations. The inventory of poses and gestures that are constructed in relation to the camera conveys an impression of relaxation, naturalness, and a ludic spirit, and points to a type of acceptance that reveals vulnerabilities, but also subtle ways of asserting the power and subjectivity of the women captured in the photographs.

Mihai Mihalcea has chosen to transpose this album in a video format that brings together the communities of people to which he is attached in various ways, in a period when lack of contact with others, isolation, and loneliness have affected everybody's life. The original photograph album thereby becomes a point of reference and "travels" through various contexts, spaces, and bodies, having the potential to become a vehicle to preserve for the future the network of Mihalcea's friends and acquaintances who make up his extended family: friends, colleagues, cultural workers, artists, members of the queer community, collaborators. The participants were invited to use their bodies to recreate within the domestic space a particular photograph selected from the original album, but rather than static images, the method chosen was interpretation via brief video sequences. These unpretentious film vignettes, which were not directed or controlled by the author of the proposal, are put together in a video montage that filters the material very little or not at all. Adapting an album-type format to today's conditions aims not only to produce a time capsule of the present day, the way memory used to be preserved in photographs, but also to make visible the tension, so defining of the present moment, between the powerlessness of each of us—"nakedness" also signifies defencelessness in the face of the pandemic—and the need to be together by resorting to corporeality, as the body is both a major factor of vulnerability and an agent of imagination and communication against all odds.

ARTISTIC INTERVENTIONS & ARTIST TALKS



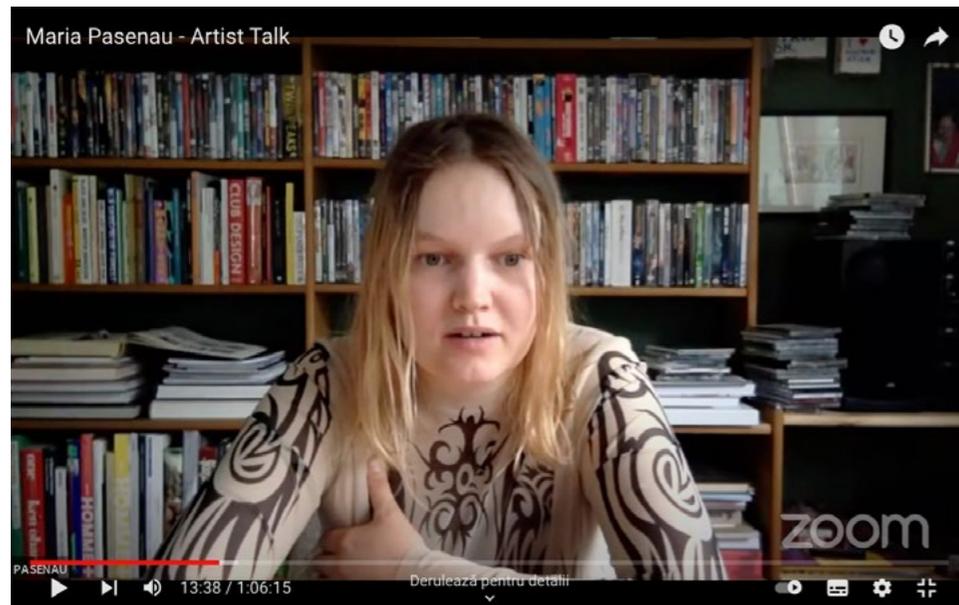
MATTS LEIDERSTAM: MIRRORED – SEEING IS BELIEVING

ARTISTIC INTERVENTION IN THE EXPO_02_GENDER EXHIBITION & ARTIST TALK MAY 12 – JUNE 6, 2021

Matts Leiderstam's intervention, created specially for Salonul de proiecte's space, focuses on a single image from the collection, to be found in the "Fashion" category. Searching through the files of scanned photographs placed at his disposal, Leiderstam identified this particular image in two versions: two mirror-image scans of the same negative. He decided to use both versions in order to highlight the geometric composition that results from combining them. Laying a grid over the photographs, he reveals the structure of the image, but at the same time makes us conscious that the camera viewfinder itself imprints a grid on the world. He thereby links the pictorial to the photographic device and emphasises the fact that today we have all become image editors on our telephones and laptops. The more intensely a photographic image is subjected to processes of transfer, archiving and interpretation, the greater the distance between us and the context of its production. The crucial elements connected with the moment of its production become increasingly diffuse or are completely erased, while new events and circumstances gain ground and generate yet further interpretations and speculations.

Leiderstam's contribution consists of a series of drawings on printed images accompanied by a text that sets out from the few items of information that he has been able to discover about the image in question. When viewed together, text and photograph, having been subjected to the multiple analytic interventions of the grid that scores its surface, merely heighten the enigma of the original moment of production, without in any way being able to discover the vectors that converge on that event or point of encounter that constitutes the photograph. Rather than making anything explicit, the few contextual data create yet further puzzled questions as to the female character found in the image, the public sculpture in her immediate vicinity, the subsequent fate of the work, the author of the photograph. The visual mechanism of knowing and controlling the world, the foundation of modern representation by means of the image in Western culture—the grid—thereby reveals the illusory ability to reach the truth.

ARTISTIC INTERVENTIONS & ARTIST TALKS



MARIA PASENAU: THE GENDER ORCHESTRA

ARTISTIC INTERVENTION IN THE EXPO_02_GENDER EXHIBITION & ARTIST TALK JUNE 9 – JULY 4, 2021

Maria Pasenau is the guest artist who will be creating the final artistic intervention in the EXPO_02_GENDER exhibition. Her practice most often includes photography as part of a cumulation of other media—text, performance, film—composing profoundly idiosyncratic and contradictory narratives in which her own subjectivity, the world around her, and interactions with people close to her are constantly subjected to processes of re-signification. Even if her life and her body more often than not constitute the favourite sources on which she draws as an artist in order to produce images, they are metamorphosed within a supra-personal register, without it being possible to distinguish precisely how the junction with our own screenplays and imaginary projections is achieved or even what exactly it is. Part of Norway's youngest generation of artists, Maria Pasenau is fully aware of the omnipresent spectrum of the images circulated by social networks, of the role they play in shaping subjectivities, of the constant pressure to perform identities in order to lend validity to and reinforce the social or professional status of those who adopt them. Although she represents herself and her life, Pasenau moves in the radically opposite direction, however: she does not “glamourise” her life and body, but exposes them in an unfiltered way, as differently as possible to the aesthetic standards or acceptability that we encounter on Instagram, for example. The residues of feeding oneself and everyday life, queer friends whom she photographs in humorous ad hoc scenarios, toys and objects that seem hijacked from their innocuous functions and abruptly become something completely different: all these form a network of beings, materials, and objects, which are simultaneously interconnected and autonomous, imbued with an unmistakable, deeply disquieting and ludic aura.

For her contribution to the exhibition, Maria Pasenau has chosen to create a number of montages in which photographs from the Mihai Oroveanu Image Collection are juxtaposed with images from her personal archive. “Browsing” the historical archive that she was able to access only in its digital version, and which was therefore available only in an incomplete form, she opted for a distanced and at the same time disconnected interaction, which resonated with the informal and direct style that Pasenau adopts in her art. From juxtapositions based on formal or typological similarities to contrasting juxtapositions that might even give rise to a certain perplexity, the resulting combinations bring to light the effortless and ingeniousness of these associations, while at the same time granting a special place to frames and situations that are seemingly insignificant, frivolous and easy to overlook, situated in the margin of the narratives that the archive, in the classical/normative sense, has aimed to construct.

ARTISTIC INTERVENTIONS & ARTIST TALKS



BJARNE BARE: ANAMNESIS

ARTISTIC INTERVENTION IN THE EXPO_03_VERNACULAR EXHIBITION & ARTIST TALK

SEPTEMBER 1 – OCTOBER 3, 2021

The first artistic intervention in the *EXPO_03_VERNACULAR* exhibition is by Bjarne Bare, an artist interested in the status and potentiality of photography in the context of the media pressure to which images are subject in the present day. The artist's encounter with the Mihai Oroveanu Image Collection brings about a synthesis between his own method of practising photography, on the one hand, and the flux of memory unleashed by the archive images, on the other. But the memory invoked by Bjarne Bare has more to do with imaginative-collective wellsprings sited on the boundary between the personal and supra-personal. The photographs by Bjarne Bare included in the installation conceived especially for this occasion are mysterious and striking in their presence; they are as monumental as the fragments of urban architecture that they capture – delocalised and ubiquitous, abstract in their texture and fragmentation, while at the same time evoking a vague historicity. Their aura of melancholy partly derives from the emptiness, alienation and suspended temporality that contemporaneity often conjugates. However, their absolute stillness situates them at the opposite pole to the hectic, high-speed visuality to which the contemporary gaze is inured. Everyday narrative and flux are voided from this type of photographic construct, which thereby places itself at odds with precisely the “didactic expectations” imposed on the medium. Alongside the two photographs authored by him, the installation also includes a slide carousel, whose motion projects a series of images from the Oroveanu collection, in an approach that brings into close proximity the historical narrative, perceived from the perspective of personal memory. Born in Poland, Bare discovers a sense of familiarity in frames that capture places of recreation, forms of relaxation and casual socialisation, choosing to counterpose totalising discourses about the nation with a seemingly minor mode of activating the process of fixing a country's culture in the memory, focusing on the moments of humour and optimism provided by the archive.

ARTISTIC INTERVENTIONS & ARTIST TALKS

YASMINE EID-SABBAGH IN COLLABORATION WITH THE ARAB IMAGE FOUNDATION: ACCESSING AFFECT/AFFECTING ACCESS

ARTISTIC INTERVENTION IN THE EXPO_03_VERNACULAR EXHIBITION & ARTIST TALK OCTOBER 6 – 31, 2021



Yasmine Eid-Sabbagh's intervention involves the juxtaposition of photographs from the Mihai Oroveanu Image Collection with images from the Arab Image Foundation, one of the largest photographic collections, based in Beirut, whose archives are drawn from a transnational cultural space that spans the Middle East, North Africa, and the Arab diaspora. The project is connected to the current Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the specific context of Beirut, a city which last year was struck by a catastrophic explosion, and which is now faced with a dramatic situation, with the whole country suffering shortages of basic necessities, including water, electricity, and fuel. One effect of the rapid decline in living conditions is a no less damaging deterioration in mental health and a general sense of wellbeing, which cannot be remedied by any emergency intervention at the infrastructure level. Against this backdrop, Yasmine Eid-Sabbagh became interested in identifying within the Mihai Oroveanu Image Collection photographs capable of conveying an optimistic, hopeful message, to counterbalance the difficult reality and the collective trauma we are all going through nowadays. The archive was therefore navigated using affective criteria; photographs that capture leisure situations or simply depicting moments of joy and lightness resonated for her far more intensely in the present sorely trying context.

At the same time, this exploration was also transformed into an exercise in methodological reflection, which revealed the fact that the process of digitally cataloguing image collections more often than not eliminates the subjective-affective dimension, given the way in which information appended to documented "specimens" is compiled. In the Arab Image Foundation archive available online searches for keywords such as "joy", "emotion", "dancing", "fun" produced surprisingly few results, while a search of the Mihai Oroveanu Image Collection came up with amusing mismatches when the keyword "fun" returned images having to do with "functionaries", "functions" or "funerals". A wider implication is that the standardisation of any metadata variant is counterproductive, and the descriptions attached to the images ought to be based on a team effort and a type of multidisciplinary expertise that should be granted the necessary time. Through the lens of her intense preoccupation with critically interrogating the archives, Yasmine Eid-Sabbagh also insists on paying an indirect tribute to the essential—but more often than not ignored, underfunded and invisible—labour of digital cataloguing, without which research and the knowledge to be derived from the study of archives would be impossible.

ARTISTIC INTERVENTIONS & ARTIST TALKS

ADRIAN GHENIE: UNTITLED

ARTISTIC INTERVENTION IN THE EXPO_03_VERNACULAR EXHIBITION & ARTIST TALK NOVEMBER 10 – 28, 2021



The last intervention to be featured in this project is by Adrian Ghenie, an artist whose work has always shown an interest in the historical construct, in the way in which history is constructed via images, in memory's substantial contribution to the sedimentation of representations of people or historical narratives. To a large extent, in his reflections on history Ghenie is not motivated by the presumption that he is able to capture a past event or situation in paintings, drawings, collages, or installations, rather he is interested in revealing the difficulty of extracting from collective memory and perception the endless series of screens and filters through which history reaches us. The Mihai Oroveanu Image Collection is an important resource for anybody interested in Romania's recent history in its process of modernization, in the ideological clashes that marked the country's involvement in the Second World War, in the heterogeneous physiognomies of the decades of communist rule.

In this context, Adrian Ghenie's attention is focused on a prominent figure of the post-war period, Ana Pauker, but he is above all inclined to explore the ways in which the archive photograph that aroused his interest enter into friction with the widely circulated representations of Pauker in the public discourse and, from a certain viewpoint, with his own imaginary repertoire. A photograph is never simply an illustration of something or somebody, even if it conveys the presence of a public figure; the photographic image has its own autonomy beyond the subject or referent to which it is ineluctably connected, its own power of persuasion, and at the same time, its own share of mystery and opaqueness. The same as in other situations, Ghenie is fascinated by the entire range of elements that lend particularity to an image: the atmosphere created by the scenography of an interior, the way the light contributes to the configuration of the visual field, the succession of planes, the part played by particular details, such as everyday objects, which, in a partly fictionalized reading, give a different dimension to the meaning of the frame in question. All these idiosyncrasies work together to transpose into the medium of drawing various and contradictory hypostases of the historic figure by aggregating disparate strata of ideological, cultural, and personal perception, in which the level of the recognizable is blurred, the details acquire a larger scale, and, through its very complexity, the visual language articulates the evidence of an impossible resolution.

GUIDED TOURS

Over the course of the project, a number of guided tours for the general public were given, allowing for close discussion of images shown in the exhibition, as well as presentation of materials from the collection that are not normally accessible to the visitors. In addition, the Salonul de proiecte team organised specialist guided tours for students of the Photo-Video Department of the National University of Arts, Bucharest, and of the Visual Studies and Society M.A. programme taught at the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest. Other tours were organised for various organisations that had expressed an interest in the exhibition topics, including I.W.A. (International Women's Association, Bucharest), or in the subjects addressed by the contemporary artists in their interventions, including Agent Green and Greenpeace Romania.



Project team

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Adina Marincea – communication
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Carina Dulea, Alice Feraru – custodian

This project is financed with the support of EEA Grants 2014 – 2021 within the RO-CULTURE Programme

The EEA Grants represent the contribution of Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway towards a green, competitive and inclusive Europe. There are two overall objectives: reduction of economic and social disparities in Europe, and to strengthen bilateral relations between the donor countries and 15 EU countries in Central and Southern Europe and the Baltics. The three donor countries cooperate closely with the EU through the Agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA). The donors have provided €3.3 billion through consecutive grant schemes between 1994 and 2014. For the period 2014-2021, the EEA Grants amount to €1.55 billion. Further information available here: www.eeagrants.org and www.eeagrants.ro

RO-CULTURE is implemented in Romania by the Ministry of Culture through the Project Management Unit. The Programme aims at strengthening social and economic development through cultural cooperation, cultural entrepreneurship and cultural heritage management. The total budget amounts to almost 34 million EUR. For more details: www.ro-cultura.ro

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