

# ART REVIEW AS REFLECTED BY THE ROMANIAN PRESS (1900-1914)

## - Abstract -

The doctoral thesis is structured according to five major units: *Introduction*, the six central chapters, *Conclusions*, *References* and *Appendices*. The paper has a total of 260 pages, of which 216 pages are the text itself, with 891 footnotes.

In the *Introduction* I presented the reasons for choosing the subject of the paper, reminding the most important studies and research previously developed in the relevant historiography. Also, I mentioned the methods used and I listed the main cultural magazines analysed for the period between 1900 and 1914. The analysed Romanian press included both cultural magazines from the former kingdom (“Convorbiri literare”, “Noua Revistă Română”, “Sămănătorul”, “Viața Românească”, “Furnica”, “Flacăra”, etc.), as well as magazines from Transylvania (“Luceafărul”, “Transilvania”, “Țara Noastră”, “Telegraful Român”, etc.). On the other hand, I attempted a comparative analysis of the Romanian press and the western press in terms of art reviews. For this purpose I chose prestigious foreign art magazines of the time, consulted on the occasion of the mobility period spent in Italy, such as “Emporium”, “Vita d’arte”, “Il Giornale d’Italia”, “Il Marzocco”, “La Stampa”, etc. Also, I studied the funds of the International Exhibition in Rome in 1911, in which our country participated as well, the delegation of which was conducted by Al. Tzigara-Samurçaș, found in the central state archives in Rome.

The second part of the thesis includes the actual research, where Chapters 1-6 are the original contribution of the author. In I. *Social and Cultural Context in the Early Twentieth Century for the Romanian Elite* I presented briefly the cultural and social framework in which the Romanian artists lived, were educated and created, as reflected in the press. While in Romania they faced cruel social realities, which more often than not became sources of inspiration, as, for instance, the peasant uprising in 1907, in Transylvania the Romanian artists were up against political and economic difficulties, which prevented the proper development of plastic arts. Life was extremely difficult for artists on the Romanian territory a century ago, as they were often dependent on the commissions from the State or private collectors. For this reason the concept of *art for art*

was many times abandoned and that state of facts could only worry the lovers and critics of genuine art. Again, the cultural press, through the reviews and articles published, was the most credible witness of the events, faithfully reflecting the social upheavals and changes.

Chapter *II. Art Currents and Movements at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century* shortly presents the new achievements of European art (*Fauvism, German Expressionism, Cubism, Futurism, etc.*) during the studied period and, by extension, their perception in the Romanian art reviews. Educated in western art centres and academies, especially in Munich and Paris, the Romanian artists returned home with a changed mentality, which led, immediately after 1900, to emancipation from the tutelage of the official salons and the state and to a gradual, but certain, abandonment of the academic style. These modernising trends resulted in the establishment in 1901 of “Tinerimea artistică” society and the first exhibition in 1902, as well as in the increase of personal or collective exhibitions of Romanian plastic artists inside the country and of the more and more frequent participations in international exhibitions. Although the press, through the plastic reviewers, proved a good knowledge of the contemporary European art currents (*II.1. European Art*), the articles published (with few exceptions) reflected their rejection, favouring the styles of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

*Art Nouveau* architecture and the local version, called *neo-Romanian* or national style, the promoter of which was Ion Mincu and later his numerous followers, such as P. Antonescu, also sparked heated arguments among critics. Traditionalists such as Alexandru Tzigara-Samurçaș, E. M. Zagoritz advocated for the cautious use of folk art elements and condemned the tendency of artists of finding their inspiration in western art circles. Other reviewers, on the contrary, encouraged the modernisation of Romanian art and its connection to the western European development. These reviewers, among which are worth mentioning Apcar Baltazar (signing the reviews in “Viața Românească” under the pseudonym Spiridon Antonescu) in Romania or Otilia Cosmuța in the Transylvanian press, were fine connoisseurs of European modern art and plastic avant-garde (*II.2. Romanian Art*).

Chapter *III. Exhibition Reviews and Art Societies* is divided, in its turn, into three subchapters: *III.1. Reviews on Personal Exhibitions of Romanian Artists; III.2. Reviews*

*on Romanian Art Exhibitions Abroad* and *III.3. Role of Art Societies in the Evolution of Romanian Art*. The first subchapter is dedicated to art reviews on personal or collective exhibitions of Romanian plastic artists. The painting was predominant and among the artists noticed by the plastic critics in the abovementioned publications between 1900 and the beginning of the First World War several representative examples are worth mentioning: Băncilă (personal exhibition in 1900), Ștefan Popescu, Vermont and Grigorescu (personal exhibitions in 1901), Verona (1902), Luchian (1903), Steriadi (1906), Apcar Baltazar (1907), Kimon Loghi, Ștefan Luchian and Oscar Spaethe (collective exhibition in 1908), I. Neglies, N. Comănescu, Aslan-Petrescu, Al. Satmary, Ludovic Basarab, Petrescu Mogoș, Adela Jean, Gropeanu, Derain, Forain, Galanis, Iser Steriadi, Băncilă, Müntzner (personal and collective exhibitions in 1909), Eugenia and Ioan Iordănescu, Dărăscu (personal and collective exhibitions in 1909), Ressu and Sanielevici (collective exhibition in 1911), G. Petrașcu, Theodorescu-Sion, Iser and Pallady (1913), Băncilă, Luchian, Theodorescu-Sion (1914).

The reviewers of these art events, who published their reviews, opinions and observations regarding the painting and sculpture exhibitions in famous Romanian magazines, were: P. Bujor, George Dimitriu, S. Sterescu, Th. D. Sperantia, N. D. Cocea, Adrian Maniu (“*Noua Revistă Română*”), Izabela Sadoveanu-Evan, G. Murnu, Spiridon Antonescu (“*Viața Românească*”), V. Cioflec, A. Vlahuță, Delavrancea, Al. Tzigara-Samurcaș (“*Sămănătorul*”), Al. M. Zagoritz, Al. Tzigara-Samurcaș (“*Convorbiri literare*”), G. Galaction, N. Pora (“*Flacăra*”) Gh. Duma, O. C. Tăslăuanu (“*Luceafărul*”). Remarkable figures of the Romanian culture a century ago, they were exhibition reviewers, art lovers and collectors. The majority of those who undertook to art reviewing admired unconditionally the acclaimed Grigorescu and Luchian, but also understood that young artists needed to be encouraged as well (Dărăscu, Pallady, Iser, Petrașcu etc) at their debut on the Romanian art scene. Art criticism on exhibitions was generally positive, appreciative and constructive, but there were also exceptions exemplified in the thesis.

The second subchapter, *III.2. Reviews on Romanian Art Exhibitions Abroad* attempts an analysis, from the point of view of the magazines, of the participations of Romanian plastic arts in exhibitions abroad and the echo among Romanian and foreign

reviewers. Romania participated in many exhibitions where it was increasingly well received in the western press. Individual participations of Romanian plastic artists were quite numerous. Grigorescu, Luchian, Pallady, Steriadi, Petrașcu, Dărăscu, Tonitza, Elena Popea etc., in painting, and Iordănescu, Brâncuși, Pavelescu-Dimo, etc. in sculpture were at the top of the Romanian art displayed in the international exhibitions.

The foreign art critics who noticed and wrote in a positive manner about the works signed by the Romanian artists were M. Montandon, G. Kahn, G. Apollinaire, E. Bacaloglu, Robert dela Sizeranne, R. Fry, Giustiniano degli Azzi, W. Ritter, etc. The articles that subjected the Romanian artists to art criticism were published in prestigious journals, such as “Emporium”, “Gazette de Beaux-arts”, “L'art et les artistes”, “Vita d'arte”, and often the Romanian journals made reference and quoted the abovementioned magazines.

Another important aspect of this chapter is subchapter *III.3. Role of Art Societies in the Evolution of Romanian Art*. Around 1908 in București there were seven art societies. Another component was the mutual dependency between artists as art producers and the connoisseur buyers, dependency which justified the need for association. Perhaps the greatest impact on the art lovers and art reviews readers was produced by *III.3.1. Reviews on Annual Exhibitions of “Tinerimea artistică”*. “Tinerimea artistică” was founded in 1901, in response to the *Salonul Oficial* and to the obsolete academic style. The main purpose of the exhibitions of “Tinerimea artistică” was the promotion of *true* values in the Romanian art in order to be sufficiently known and appreciated at their real creative level. The main criterion for the participation of associations was unique, capitalising on quality, not quantity, as before. As time went by, “Tinerimea artistică” became elitist, being subjected to increasing demands from critics.

Over the years, between 1902 and 1914, the reviewers of the exhibitions of “Tinerimea artistică” were Al. Tzigara-Samurcaș, contributor of “Sămănătorul” and “Convorbiri literare”, Virgil Cioflec, correspondent of the Transylvanian magazine “Luceafărul”, Spiridon Antonescu writing for “Viața Românească” in Iași, Leo Bachelin, who signed reviews published in “Noua Revistă Română”, Nicolae Pora for “Calendarul Minervei” and “Flacăra”, Al. M. Zagoritz with “Convorbiri literare”.

Most of these reviewers objectively presented their opinions on the works displayed, but some of them formulated a discourse from traditionalist standpoints, blaming the temptation of the Romanian artists to imitate the styles in Western Europe, where they had studied the painters and sculptors exhibiting at “Tinerimea artistică”. On the opposite side of the spectrum, the modernist reviewers are mentioned, such as Spiridon Antonescu and Leo Bachelin. What is really important is that art critics and reviewers were able to “train” their writing skills, as they benefited from an annual exhibition that generally gathered valuable artists of Romania and sometimes Transylvania.

Chapter *IV. Art Reviews as Reflected by Romanian Press* is also divided into several subchapters: *IV.1. Beginnings of Art Reviews in Romanian Press*, *IV.2. Art Review in the Capital City* and *IV.3. Art Review in Iași*.

Referring to the press with articles on art, the main publications after 1900 and before the outbreak of the First World War were: “Literatură și Artă Română”, with its subtitle “Idea – feeling – form”; “Arta Românească”, established in Iași and having the subtitle “Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Music, Drama and Literature Magazine”, which changed its title in March 1908 to “Arta română”, but kept its subtitle; “Facla”, which published the art reviews of critics in the know, such as N. D. Cocea and Tudor Arghezi; the painter P. Bulgăraș wrote articles on art for “Ilustrațiunea Națională”, while Jean Al. Steriadi worked with “Ilustrațiunea Română”; “Arta”, literary, art and drama magazine; “Buletinul Societății Arhitecților Români” and “Curierul Artistic”; “Flacăra”, with its suggestive subtitle “literary, art, social” magazine, gathered valuable reviewers, such as G. Galaction or N. Pora. From this list the magazines “Convorbiri literare”, “Noua Revistă Română”, “Sămănătorul”, “Furnica”, “Viața Românească”, “Luceafărul” and “Transilvania” are left out, but they are thoroughly analysed in this study. Between 1900 and 1914, art review was a topic tackled by a wide range of publishers with different theoretical training, from historians to art collectors, plastic artists and even poets. A special category is that of the plastic artists (Apcar Baltazat or Ipolit Strîmbulescu), perhaps the most entitled, and sometimes subjective in their reviews. Each publication attempted an approach to art from objective standpoints and, more often than not, they succeeded, due to the fact that some plastic art reviewers

expressed their art opinions and published at the same time in various cultural magazines. Despite these goals and having divergent doctrinal points of view, some magazines tried to justify their own trend or ideology, in a broader sense, through art.

In the first magazine, “Convorbiri literare”, art reviews were characterised by objectivity, originality and diversity. Up until 1906, plastic arts did not benefit from any special attention from the editorial office, but immediately thereafter, when S. Mehedinți became manager, the articles dedicated to this field increased considerably. The critics who published articles were Al. Tzigara-Samurcaș, author of “Cronica artistică” for a long time, Apcar Baltazar, painter and art critic, Al. M. Zagoritz, architect and art historian, and I. D. Ștefănescu, art historian and Byzantinologist. The level of art criticism grew steadily and thus “Convorbirile literare” also added “art” to its sphere of interest. A negative aspect was the rigidity and conservatism of these publications with reference to the Romanian modern plastic arts and the style transformations taking place in Europe.

From the analysis of the reviews of critics publishing in “Convorbiri literare” I managed to decipher the *ideology* on art that this magazine promoted: in architecture, it was believed that the aspect of a building had to be consistent with its end use (a modern principle) and that the national style had to be used with caution; in sculpture, I noticed, on the one hand, the highly critical position concerning the Romanian artists influenced by foreign trends and, on the other hand, the position of the participants in the official salons, while in painting the “harmfulness” of the influence of foreign art on Romanian artists was blamed. The readers of the magazine could discover through Alexandru Tzigara-Samurcaș’s art reviews interesting aspects related to personalities of art history and European art in general.

In “Sămănătorul”, art criticism was the prerogative of less informed, but extremely art-loving, figures such as Delavrancea, Al. Vlahuță, N. Iorga, Gh. Murgoci, A. Mirea (pseudonym used by the poets D. Anghel and Șt. O. Iosif) and perhaps the most competent in this field, the collector V. Cioflec and the painter Ipolit Strîmbulescu. The painting prevailed and Grigorescu was the artistic standard for these publicists, because in his works he summed up the idyllic rural trend promoted by the magazine – the so-called “Sămănătorism”. Luchian, K. Loghi or Verona were also appreciated in the pages of this journal. Although the leaders of the publication set out to “sow” the love for

beauty in the hearts of the readers. E. Lovinescu criticised in “Flacăra” in 1915 the activity conducted by “Sămănătorul” in the field of art. Although he acknowledged the undeniable merits of Iorga’s “Sămănătorul” in the “wider” field of culture, he nevertheless maintained his reservations regarding art because the magazine claimed that it also “sowed beauties”.

“Noua Revistă Română” was founded on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1900 and had the subtitle “for Policy, Literature, Science and Art”. The art critics, art reviewers and art lovers of this journal, managed by C. Rădulescu-Motru, were L. Bachelin, P. Bujor, Izabela Sadoveanu, C. Ionescu, Ulpiu Traian Mihaiu, Kean (under the pseudonym N. Vaschide), Timon, Al. Tzigara-Samurçaş, V. Cioflec, N. D. Cocea, the sculptor G. Dimitriu, A. Maniu, Th. D. Speranția, Lazăr Cozma, S. Sterescu, V. V. Haneş, Margareta Dem. Theodorescu. Although the main goal of the editorial office was not necessarily to promote the plastic arts and most of the reviewers were only occasional art critics, it managed to gather true art opinion-makers, such as Leo Bachelin, V. Cioflec or Al. Tzigara-Samurçaş.

In art criticism it did not aim at promoting its own line, maybe because the authors of the reviews were not the followers of a uniform current and many times they had different opinions on the same topic, while generally the publication’s views ranged from moderate traditionalism to temperate modernism. Art reviews were written starting from international, national or even local art events. Through its rhetoric “Noua Revistă Română” encouraged the specificity of each Romanian artist who organised an exhibition inside the country or abroad and was different from “Sămănătorul” because it proved to be somewhat open to modernism and did not attempt to justify its preference for a cultural model using the propagandistic role of art, but was also similar through its constant appeal to tradition.

“Furnica” was first published in 1904 and most of its articles were written under numerous pseudonyms by the two editors, G. Ranetti and N. D. Țăranu, who also undertook to write plastic art reviews. The magazine was a breath of air to the Romanian press, illustrating a *different* kind of art criticism (criticism on art criticism), which was not in the know and unorthodox, but often was consistent with its time.

The “targets” of art reviews were the personal exhibitions of Romanian plastic artists, the exhibitions of “Tinerimea artistică” or the official exhibitions organised by the State. Starting from the premise that Romanians were born poets, not painters, publicists vehemently raised their voice in criticism in the first decade when the national art was developed. The example of “Furnica” was not the only one in Europe, as it rather fitted a contemporary pattern (in Italy the magazines “Fantasio”, “Bianco e nero: giornale settimanale d'arte” were published, France had “Les Hommes du jour”, and the capital of Bavaria had the “Simplizissimus”).

*IV.3. Art Reviews in Iași* were written in a publication highly appreciated by a large part of the Romanian elite, namely *IV.3.1. “Viața Românească”*. The rhetoric of this journal with respect to the plastic arts was mainly modernist, while art criticism was dominated by a competent critic, the painter Apar Baltazar (under the pseudonym Spiridon Antonescu). Al. Tzigara-Samurçaș, the painter Ip. Strîmbulescu, Al. Vlahuță were also very prolific reviewers and signed articles published in this magazine, dedicated to art events in Romania, such as the exhibitions of “Tinerimea artistică” or the personal exhibitions.

For “Viața Românească”, unlike “Sămănătorul”, Grigorescu was a *modern* painter, but the reviews on his work still had a common denominator given by two essential attributes: “light” and “harmony”. Nevertheless, in the tendency towards modernism, the European plastic arts were reflected in “Viața Românească” in the form of articles on some of the most important western art events – the “Annual salons in Paris” and the “Art Exhibitions in Munich”. The correspondent H. E. Kromer used to write his opinions on art events in the capital of Bavaria. Despite this trend and the extensive knowledge, the reviewers of the magazine made little reference to avant-garde currents and when they did, they proved to be extremely sceptical.

The end of this chapter analyses the role of the Romanian cultural press before the war in the former kingdom (*IV.4. Press – Promoter of Aesthetic Education and Culture*). Reviewers’ opinion on the importance of aesthetic education of readers varied. I concluded that the press in Romania played a vital role in popularising the cultural and artistic ideals, favouring the circulation of aesthetic ideas simultaneously with the founding of journals with different trends and orientations, but having the status of

standards for the readers: “Convorbiri literare”, “Noua Revistă Română”, “Sămănătorul”, and “Viața Românească”.

V. *Art Review and Criticism as Reflected in Transylvanian Press* had a shy start in the Romanian cultural magazines. This column was optional and directly dependent on the few art events that took place in Transylvania. Plastic references and an incipient art review were achieved in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in newspapers such as “Telegraful Român”, “Amiculu Familiei”, “Revașul” “Albina Carpaților”, “Cosînzeana”, “Familia”, “Tribuna”. But one cannot talk about specialised art reviews in these publications.

After 1900, art criticism tended to become more competent and skilled in magazines like “Transilvania” and “Luceafărul”. Thus, in V.2.1. “*Transilvania*” magazine art reviews were published, dedicated to Romanian artists from Transylvania or across the mountains (e.g. *Painter Gh. Mateiu, Sculptor C. Medrea, Grigorescu appreciated abroad*), to extensive art events (e.g. *Arta românească in the exhibition in Munich, exhibition of young artists*) or studies on regional art history (e.g. *Istoria artei din Ardeal*), and alongside with the apparition of the review column, the articles on art were increasingly frequent.

In V.2.2. “*Luceafărul*” magazine (1902-1914) I mentioned the data regarding V.2.2.1. *Founding and Stages of the Magazine*. At first there was V.2.2.2. “*Luceafărul*” in Budapest (1902-1906) and the plastic art reviews in this magazine failed to excel; of the few articles I analysed the ones signed by the poet O. Goga, O. C. Tăslăuanu, Delvrancea and Virgil Cioflec. The most important reviewed artists were Grigorescu, Luchian, Șt. Popescu, Smigelschi or the sculptor Liuba. Therefore, in the first years of the magazine in Budapest, specialised art review did not experience a significant development in accordance with the aspirations of art lovers.

During the second stage, V.2.2.3. “*Luceafărul*” in Sibiu (1906-1914), plastic arts gradually became a topic more and more frequent in the pages of the “Luceafărul” magazine. In the plastic art criticism dedicated to Transylvanian artists, articles were focused on Elena Popea, O. Smigelschi, Carol Popp de Satmary, Antonino Zeiler, Mișu Pop, Gheorghe A. Matheiu, the sculptor Cornel Medrea. Plastic arts in the former kingdom benefited from special attention, considering that some of the contributors and

correspondents in Bucharest had in-depth knowledge in this field. Art lovers in Transylvania thus had the opportunity to discover artists such as the sculptors Constantin Brâncuși and Oscar Spaethe and famous painters such as Aman, Grigorescu, Luchian, Petrașcu, Theodorescu-Sion, etc.

Correspondents and reviewers of the magazine in Bucharest in this period were V. Cioflec, G. Murnu, D. Iov, G. Bogdan-Duică and O. Zimbru. From the point of view of the art criticism, only the first two authors could be considered to be profound analysts of the Romanian plastic phenomenon, while the last authors could only be deemed to be faithful chroniclers of art events. The criticism of European modern art was performed by a thorough connoisseur of the life of artists in Paris – Otilia Cosmuța.

The favourite artists of “Luceafărul”, such as the Transylvanian Octavian Smigelschi or the Romanian Nicolae Grigorescu, became in time genuine standards of the national aesthetics in Transylvania in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Art criticism, often wrong and aggressive at first in terms of avant-garde currents, proved to be more and more informed and competent, but influenced by the spirit of the nationalism. Although it orbited around “Sămănătorul” for a while and preferred, more often than not, classic art, in the field of art criticism “Luceafărul” differed from the same by promoting a European current, unlike the artistic conservatism of the former journal.

*VI. Plastic Art Reviewers and Critics in Romanian Cultural Press* are separately analysed in the last chapter of the second part of the thesis. Thus, the painter *VI.1. Apcar Baltazar (Spiridon Antonescu) (1880-1909)* through his remarkable ability to objectively characterise works of art and to discriminate between an underachieving artist and a valuable one did not remain unnoticed by the Romanian modern art lovers, as the assessment criteria of an artist were, according to the reviewer of “Viața Românească”, “the talent”, “the originality” and “the courage”. The art historian and defender of the Romanian folk art, *VI.2. Al. Tzigara-Samurcaș (1872-1951)*, worked with various publications. He advocated in favour of folklorism and traditionalism, and was disputed by the art reviews of Apcar Baltazar and Cecilia Cuțescu-Storck. He was a critic who loved the Romanian artists of the beginning of the last century and, with a certain taste, he noticed both their specificity and values, as well as their shortcomings, where appropriate.

Another valuable critic of the time was VI.3. *Virgil Cioflec (1876-1948)*. He published in numerous cultural publications and he was “sanctioned” many times for his extremism in the appreciation of art works, because he was too harsh on less talented artists and too laudatory on those whom he deemed to be valuable. Nevertheless he was in the know and was able to appreciate an original artistic creation, which was why he was so acid when he analysed a poor work of art.

The other publicists who took up art reviewing in the Romanian press, between 1900 and 1914, analysed in Chapter VI, were VI.4. *Octavian C. Tăslăuanu (1876-1942)*, VI.5. *Otilia Cosmuța (1873-1951)*, VI.6. *Octavian Goga (1881-1938)*, VI.7. *G. Bogdan-Duică (1865-1934)*, VI.8. *Adrian Maniu (1891-1968)*, VI.9. *Ipolit Strâmbulescu (Strâmbu 1871-1934)*, VI.10. *Nicolae Pora (1881-1941)*, VI.11. *Nicolae Iorga (1871-1940)* and VI.12. *George Murnu (1868-1957)*. Sometimes unskilfully, but often quite capable of expressing and assessing or analysing a work of art, they all contributed to the development of the Romanian plastic arts.

Part VII, *Conclusions*, is structured according to two points of reference: 1) *historical* and 2) *art criticism*. From the historical standpoint, the period between 1900 and 1914 was marked by social, political, cultural and artistic unrest, reflected in the Romanian press. From the art criticism standpoint, I emphasised the specialisation of publicists in formulating their art reviews. In the former kingdom there was a gradual transition from merely recording the impressions on exhibitions to reviewing in an informed and competent manner, reviewing which was performed by fine connoisseurs of the Romanian and European art realities. The Romanian newspapers in Romania and Transylvania thus kept alive the attachment to local cultural and artistic values, made the European trends and ideas popular in accordance with the specificity of the time and substantially contributed to the creation of aesthetic, correct and coherent education of individuals.

The last major units, *VIII References* and *IX Appendices* complete the thesis and support the statements made by means of the list of publications consulted and by a series of illustrations referring directly to the Romanian plastic artists. These photocopies were taken from the magazines studied, both in the Romanian press, as well as in the press a century ago.

Key words: art criticism, arts, art currents, exhibitions, plastic art reviews, Romanian artists, architecture, sculpture, painting, press, cultural magazines.

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