

Real Body

Geta Brătescu, Florina Coulin, Ion Grigorescu, Paul Neagu, Lia Perjovschi

31 March - 08 May 2021

We are delighted to announce the opening of our new gallery space with the group show “Real Body”, inside **Atelierele Malmaison (Malmaison Studios)**, a new Bucharest venue, a shared space of various artistic initiatives: artists studios, galleries, artist-run, project spaces, etc. The Malmaison Studios project organically and independently took shape through the self-organising effort of a mixed group of artists and organisations active in different areas of the Bucharest contemporary art scene.

2020 has been a tough year for everybody and it has strongly affected artistic communities worldwide. Inside our deeply divided Romanian cultural landscape, 2020 has marked also new attempts at working on common grounds in Bucharest towards collaboration and cohabitation inside the same larger space. Malmaison started from the young artists’ need of studio spaces and it has come to provide the potential of shaping into a genuine artistic community, of which we are happy to be part as a private gallery.

In this context we bring forth and make visible the difficult and heavy history of the building, Malmaison, built as a garrison in the 19th century by the first ruler of the United Romanian Principalities, later on turned into a military prison, and after WW2 into the infamous Communist detention and interrogation centre for the anticommunist bourgeoisie elites and intellectuals. Through our future exhibitions and programs we in no way seek to involuntarily contribute to artwashing this history, which we fully acknowledge and integrate inside Malmaison Studios’ process of reintroducing the building in the live circuit of the city.

For our first exhibition in this new gallery space we curated a selection of works by the more mature and established artists from the gallery’s portfolio - Geta Brătescu, Florina Coulin, Paul Neagu and Lia Perjovschi - alongside our most recent program entry, the Romanian artist Ion Grigorescu, with whom the gallery has developed in time a relationship of friendship and collaboration.

The main topic of the exhibition is the body, the physical, real, flesh and blood, breathing, sweating, living human body, this human body that has kept us so concerned about its well-being and health during the past year, these human bodies that we distance and isolate ourselves from. The human body that we tend to neglect and forget about while captive in the digital realm of blue screens, this transient body that longs for real touch and connection.

“Automatism” by **Geta Brătescu** (b. 1926 - d. 2018) starts from a screenplay written by the artist in 1974 and filmed only in 2017 (directed by Ștefan Sava and performed by Manuel Pelmuș) in the context of the artist’s participation in Documenta 14 Kassel. “Automatism” refers to the dehumanised body, void of human consciousness and discernment, mechanised by the actions of repetitive existence and routine, ruled by external control: “Automatism. We open with the action of a man. He walks with even steps. After a number of steps, an uneven number, let’s say five, he comes to a screen. He pierces it with a dagger, which he has been holding ready to strike, and passes through the breach. After another five steps, another screen. The action is repeated with the same numerical factors, the same insertion of the action. It results that the point (moment) at which we first saw this man contained not only a future but also a past identity. Let us name the unit that contains the man, the five steps, the knife, the screen, the stab, using an architectural term: *span*. When we “opened,” the man was in span n ; he continues on his way, realizing a very large number of spans, $n + 1$, $n + 2$, $n + 3$, $n + 99$. Span $n + 100$ repeats the elements of the previous spans, but the screen is replaced with another man. The blood gushes, floods (let the direction of writing, from left to right, be adhered to in all these actions).” (Geta Brătescu, *Atelier continuu (Continuous Studio)*, Editura Cartea Românească, Bucharest, 1985)

In **Florina Coulin's** (b. 1947) case, the views on the body vary according to her artistic biography: from the body liberated in the seaside landscape of the works created in the '70s in Romania before definitely leaving the country and moving to Germany in 1977, to the subsequent period of adjusting to a new social and cultural reality while trying to reach different artistic paths. From those times we present in the exhibition the drawing "Eucharistic Breakfast", 1981, a meditation on the sacredness of daily moments and gestures, such as preparing food and eating, which becomes actual once more in the context of the pandemic isolation, together with the photographic series "Brotlaib", 1980, documenting the preparation of the dough for the bread, a simple, ancestral and useful action for the biological body that acquires here ritualic, ceremonial meanings. The human body and shape are to be found again in the artist's 2020 artistic endeavours, manifesting as human states and impressions, inner apparitions precisely rendered in watercolour.

For **Ion Grigorescu** (b. 1945), a true Romanian body-art pioneer, the body is both subject and object of artistic practice, as a complex biological organism with its own life, impulses and activities that interact in unpredictable ways with the subconscious mind and the soul. The artist's works from the '70s are marked by his references from psychoanalysis, mysticism or oriental medicine (from Buddhism, Kabala, acupuncture), integrating the geography of energetic centres, of the body's "gates" and meridians in the composition and meaning of his private, photographically documented, body-art actions: "Bathing", "Washing Gestures", "Bathing with Light", etc. The act of washing is internalized, ritualic, through which the subtle, energetic body is purified altogether with the physical one, the two being intimately connected from the perspective of analytic psychology and religious thought likewise, equally practiced by Ion Grigorescu. The filmed actions of his own body as well as other corporeal representations in various techniques are to be found throughout Ion Grigorescu's entire artistic practice, in video works such as "Sleep" from 2008, screened inside the exhibition, or in the ceramic sculptures recently created in 2021.

In **Paul Neagu's** (b. 1938 - d. 2004) plural artistic practice the human body bears a geometric structure made of rectangular cells that contain each in themselves the wholeness and mirror back correspondently the structure of society and of the universe. This perspective has been conceptualized by Neagu starting from the '60s in the symbol-image "Anthropocosmos", which overlaps the organic outline of a human body to a geometric grid, reflecting the dynamic coexistence between human subjectivity, the subconscious realm of primordial impulses and instincts ("Blind Bite", the stage of human existence symbolised by the triangle), and the ordered network of reason, cartesian civilisation and disciplined society ("Horizontal Rain" - the rectangle). When the structural constraint becomes too strong, the body frees itself through movement, through jump and spin, through the cyclic and transcendental effect of the tornado state ("Going Tornado" - the sphere), which culminates the cycle of human development while absorbing and alchemising in itself elements from the previous stages.

Lia Perjovschi's (b. 1961) works selected for the exhibition speak about the balance between the individual's body and the social body, about alterity, the self and the others. In the private performances photographed in her own apartment in 1988-1989 ("The Test of Sleep", "Annulment"), the body is either exposed, either occulted, subsequently becoming an organic backdrop for drawings applied directly on the skin, then, on another instance, a hidden organism, tied up, bandaged, healed. In "The Magic of the Gesture (Laces)", an action conducted in November 1989 by the artist - back then a student at the present National University of Arts in Bucharest -, Lia Perjovschi tied together through strings 12 students placed in a circle, as a collective experiment on the report between freedom and connectivity, between interdependence and constraint. In 2020 Lia Perjovschi has reintegrated the corporeal representations into her works, reacting in real time to the context of "lockdown", the pandemic crisis and the online turn in people's activity, affects and emotions.

The exhibition can be visited in Ivan Gallery's space on Calea Plevnei 137 C, B side, 1st floor, until May 08 2021, by previous appointment only. Due to the context generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the gallery visit will be according to the rules established by the Ministerial Order applicable at the time of the visit.

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