

## Secret Language

**Silvia Amancei & Bogdan Armanu, Sandor Bartha, Elijah Burgher, Cristina David, Irina Gheorghe, Iulia Toma, Jaro Varga, Mădălina Zaharia**

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*<< Drawing as medium and method for language construction, process documenting, representing the invisible, signalling absence, tracing critical scripts or fictional narratives. >>*

**Silvia Amancei & Bogdan Armanu** (s.a.b.a., Romanian, b. 1991, living in Iași) frequently employ drawing as a vehicle for critical scripts and stances in regards to the contemporary economic and social context, as well as towards the art world's institutions, strategies, and set of criteria. Their stylised, ironic and sequential sketches are often included in their video essays as props, scenery, meta-layers of visual language superimposed on the text-based narrative. In the video "Talking About the Future" (2017), their critical monologue on the (im)possibility of tracing and visualising future scripts or scripts about the future builds on the visual support of a series of comic strip-like-drawings, which render backwards a deconstructed plot. "Body of Work" (2013-2015) is a broader project creating through staged performative acts a fictional artistic endeavour attributed to the artist couple between 1979-1983, in the conceptualist line of the Eastern neo-avantgardes "discovered" and integrated inside the Western artistic canon after 1989. The sketches and scripts of these fictional performances are meant to strengthen the credibility of these practices, bearing upon themselves a straight-forward critique on the stereotypes and commonplaces of success and recognition at the level of the contemporary art scene.

**Sandor Bartha's** (Romanian/Hungarian, b. 1962, living in Budapest) drawings present a certain cartoonish, caricature-like quality, at the level of simplified aesthetics, as well as through the hijacked use of recognisable images and symbols. In the case of the "Eper, vanilia, pisztacia" [Strawberry, Vanilla, Pistachio] (2009) series of sketches, the visual metaphors are built on some iconic images from the birth place of the artist - Odorheiu-Secuiesc in Romania - constantly used in the extreme-nationalist rhetoric from Hungary (fir tree, mountain, cross). The drawing thus becomes a both playful and ironical protest towards the use of these symbols with political and manipulative aims. In his artistic practice, Sandor Bartha communicates personal reflections with a critical subtext in regards to the current socio-political context, be it national or international, through clever and inventive means. His works span different media, such as drawing, painting, installation or photography, employing mostly simple and common materials, scraps or fragments recycled into artistic configurations.

**Elijah Burgher's** (American, b. 1978, living in Berlin) artistic endeavour employs occult iconographies from different esoteric systems in creating his specific abstract language and his own formal and meaningful grammar of emblems and sigils, symbols of wishes and desires. His projects develop like rituals of enchantment with references from mysticism, literature, from art's history as well as his personal one. For these sigils - which are significant forms, abstractions imbued with language, desire, magic and mythology - Elijah Burgher follows a method devised by the early 20th century British artist and occultist Austin Osman Spare. The manner in which Burgher uses this mystical process in order to create a form-content unity relates to his interest in experiments with written text and language, such as Brion Gysin and William S. Burroughs's cut-ups, Henri Michaux's asemic writing, Lettrism.

Although video might be considered the medium favoured by **Cristina David** (Romanian, b. 1979, living in Bucharest), her experiments include photography, performance, installations of objects and text. Through drawing she documents events, travels or happenings from her life, gathered together in visual journals with sketches and accurate reproductions of bus tickets, entry tickets, bills, and receipts. Hand-written text often makes an appearance in the artist's conceptual installations, documenting mathematical statistics, performance-based distance measurements, or plots of narrative fiction. In 2016, Cristina David collaborated with the writer of Danish origin Mikkel Rosengård inside an artistic residency in Krems, a creative exchange resulting in "Savoir Vivre", a

documentary fiction shot in a five stars hotel about lifestyle and coded forms of social behaviour (video which can be viewed throughout the exhibition on Ivan Gallery's Vimeo platform), and the text-based installation "Letter from Ana Ivan", a fictional narrative on this experience, recounted by Cristina David's alter-ego - Ana Ivan, bringing forth questions of memory, cultural difference and social class. Also in 2016, Mikkel Rosengård published his debut novel, "The Invention of Ana", in which the main character, Ana Ivan, artist and mathematician, is strongly based on Cristina David's artistic practice and biography.

**Irina Gheorghe's** (Romanian, b. 1981, living in Berlin and Dublin) installation "Scores for First Contact" is part of the long term project "Foreign Language for Beginners", exploring the history of attempted communication with extraterrestrial intelligence and the idea of an abstract, universal language which might enable such an exchange. While the performance enacts the moment of first contact through speech, sound, and movement, the installation engages the question of a cosmic language through drawings, written notes and tape collages, collected in a selection of notebooks and a series of photographs. The notion of the score is central to the installation, both as a document of a performance studio practice and as a set of instructions for yet to be realised, unspecified actions. The role of drawing as a central instrument in this enquiry ranges from that of a notation system which stabilises the workings of an ephemeral performance to a visual code whose significance might or might not be decipherable. Thus, the visual vocabularies of geometric abstraction, experimental music and concrete poetry become tools for interstellar communication.

For **Iulia Toma** (Romanian, b. 1974, living in Bucharest), the textile material is most often the support for drawing, manually or with the sewing machine embroidered with social iconographies from the critical realities of the present context, or from the history of Feminism, among other. The series of „Untitled” (2018) textile collages on fabric, with drawn drawing, presents a different kind of research, on various types of fabric threads or textile fibres - such as wool, cotton, silk. The artist takes as a starting point the abstracted shape of the microscopic section through a string of fabric fibre in creating these sequential minimalist compositions, a coded message on the composition of textile material. Iulia Toma thus creates a new set of signs, a writing based on the vocabulary specific to working with threads and fabrics.

The collection of drawings "Topography of Lost Books" by the artist **Jaro Varga** (Slovak, b. 1982, living in Prague), employs frottage in order to record traces of absence: covers of discarded books found by the artist in urban spaces during various travels or artistic residencies between 2013-2018. This act of documenting estranged books does not aim at recovering them - the artist later returning the books to the place he found them - but a process of extending their existence, reincarnated in a new state, translated from the textual realm to that of image. This endeavour is typical to Jaro Varga's larger pursuits, a self-proclaimed "commentator on creation and destruction", who explores more than just one field of study. His range of interest encompasses geopolitical topography, the production and archiving of knowledge, social faux pas, and forgotten moments in history. He illustrates the various interconnections between objects, moments, situations, or places that he finds or consciously seeks out by working with both their form and content.

**Mădălina Zaharia's** (Romanian, b. 1985, living in London) letter "Dear P" is a new version of a site-specific project conceived in 2018 at Ivan Gallery's invitation to propose a project in relation to the artistic figure and practice of the artist Paul Neagu (1938-2004). An anachronistic dialogue between two artists of Romanian origin from different times and generations, with a parallel biographical path, both having emigrated to Great Britain and settled to London - 40 years apart -, to which Mădălina Zaharia chooses to react by highlighting the impossibility of communicating in a visible, legible, discursive manner. In exchange, the artist traces the simulation of writing a letter in front of white sheets of paper, the real communication between the two taking place on the level of artistic processes specific to each other. Mădălina Zaharia's digital drawings transferred directly on the wall make reference to Paul Neagu's frequent schemes, diagrams and charts to be found in his graphic compositions. If in Neagu's case these connecting elements are used to revisit and restructure his own concepts and subjects, Mădălina Zaharia's vocabulary of signs is rather tributary to asemic writing, disclosing a certain scenography resulted from the interaction with the space-context coordinates of the project.

The exhibition can be visited in Ivan Gallery's space inside Atelierele Malmaison on Calea Plevnei 137 C, B side, 1st floor, until July 10 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.