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ABSTRACT

The paper „**The landscape – ego-space or personal mini-theatre**” conceived as a PhD thesis in visual arts started from the intention to look for landscape’s capacities in one’s own creation (nature has always been one of my main artistic interests, my investigations being focused on the diversity of it’s exterior features as well as on the laws which governs the birth of shapes).

A few years ago I had the opportunity to attend some educational animation training course in France, at the Contemporary Art Center „Le Creux de l’Enfèr” - Thiers, at the Contemporary Art Center „Pougues-les-Eaux” - Nevers, at the „Maurice Estève” Museum - Bourges. With this occasion, I visited, each time, the artist’s residences and contemporary art exhibitions, many of these approaching the landscape theme. The powerful impression that these training courses left me strengthened my belief that this subject, considered by several art critics anachronic, deserves to be approached in a PhD research.

The thesis structure has occurred gradually, in the same time with my own research meant to find a new nature’s plastic investigation individual system. Structured in four chapters between the two interfaces – **Introduction** and **Conclusions**, the work takes into account two different research dimensions (but complementary): a theoretic study and an artistic studio research. Each chapter includes a theoretic study (with examples from art history) and a presentation of my own studio research. The text is explained trough images (most of them photos I made myself during the documentation period in France and Austria). The theoretic studies create the frames for the core investigation, concerning the „landscape as *ego-space* or personal mini-theatre” and the last chapter „**Overview of my own creation**” – represent, in a way, these investigations - theoretical and practical.

The first chapter of the thesis, „**The concept of landscape in the visual arts**”, shows, from an integrative perspective (etymologic, historical, aesthetical), the polyphony of the approaches connected to the landscape in the visual arts.

The dictionaries define generally the landscape as visual aspect of a view, if it is chosen to be represented in a painting, being in the same time perception and representation. Augustin Berque considers that landscape painting appeared before the word, in the flemish art, around 1420. Jean Pierre Le Dantec assigns the first known classification of the term landscape in 1493, with the meaning of painting which represents a territory, to the french writer Jean Moulinet.¹ This term appears in France already in 1549, in the dictionary Robert Estienne, with a similar definition to those in the contemporary dictionaries: pictorial or graphic representation of a nature fragment, in which the nature has a major role and the other elements are just accessories. The term *landskap* appears in The Netherlands at the end of the XVth century and in Italy, *paesaggio*, coming from the french word *paysage*, is used by Giorgio Vasari only in the second edition, the one from 1568, of “The lives of the most famous painters, sculptors and architects”; in the first edition from 1551, the term *paese*² was used. For Anne Cauquelin, nature and landscape are defined by the same term, the landscape being not a metaphor of nature, but nature itself. In its major work, dedicated to the presence of nature in art, “The art of landscape”, Kenneth Clark considers that the only plastic expression of the nature’s feeling is landscape painting (in the XXth century, this kind of visual expression leaves the place to sculpture, installations, photography and all the possible combinations of these forms of art). The term “landscape painting” involves a representation relationship, of mimesis, term that knew a major crisis in the art of the XXth century, which caused probably, the lost for a period of time, of nature as a plastic art theme.

Modern artists were convinced for a long time that nature is not a major theme, interesting for them, considering landscape decaying, anachronic, romantic. During post-modernism they talked even about the death of landscape painting, as well as the death of painting, of ideology, of everything. This theme knew recently a growth in the social and cultural studies field, the contemporary artists being also interested in rewinding the nature subject in visual field, interest reflected in many quite recent exhibitions.

¹ Jean Pierre Le Dantec, *Jardins et paysages*, Larousse, Paris, 1996, p. 93.

Post-modernism is a controversial notion, which was defined in many ways, most of the time contradictory, its own origin being a subject of debates between art critic, literary critic and philosophy.

In the last fifteen years, the term post-modernism was used – with meanings from celebration to intense polemic – by sociologists, critics and literature historians, art critics, philosophers (Rolande Barthes, Douglas Davies, Rosalind Krauss, Guy Scarpetta, Michel Foucault, Claude Levi Strauss, Jaques Derrida, Henry Lacan, Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard). Among the opinions of post-modernism theorists we mention specially the ones of Rosalind Krauss, Daniels Charles and Charles Jenks.

Even a simple reviewing of the significations given to the term post-modernism stresses out their diversity, which goes till violent oppositions.

In order to determine the correct signification of the term post-modernism and to dissipate the confusions which appear by using the ambiguous term in the artistic field, the theorists distinguished within the modern pluralism and eclectics two major complementary directions: a realistic one (parodic, neo-dada, kitsch, consumist) and the formalist one (abstract, spiritualist) subsumable in all their alternatives to an international transaesthetic one the way of emergence. Characteristic for post-modernism being also the reoccurrence of the interest for the traditional kinds (static nature, portrait, narrative painting and landscape). Artists and post-modernism subsumable styles mix actual elements with classic motives, filtered by a correlative sensibility.

The wide proposals and contemporary artistic experiments conglomerate based on nature's theme is analyzed in the subchapter „Actual meanings of landscape”.

The landscape as a traditional kind is radically transformed in the '60 when many artists stop representing landscapes and put their mark directly in the nature. The contradictory debates between nature - scene, nature – actor, background landscape - independent landscape, practiced by some landscape researchers, are not relevant anymore for contemporary landscape, which deals with new ways such as manipulating natural structures and bringing them in proper spaces, galleries, museums or direct

² Catherine Franceschi, „*Jardin de mots*”, *Critique, Jardins et paysages*, vol. LIV, nr. 613-614, June-July 1998, p.304-313.

interventions in *site*. With these new art forms we notice the occurrence of a big number of new sintagmas: Land Art, Earthworks, Environmental Art, Outdoors Art, Land Projects, Projects on Site. An important direction in approaching landscape coming from the Art in nature is ecological art.

Other types of landscape approach by post-modern artists using parody, or implicit allegory are analyzed in: „**Variations around the idea of canonic decoration**”, „**Reflex landscape**”, „**Simulated or indicated landscape**”, „**Antropomorfised landscape**”, „**Word landscape**”, „**Landscape and sound**”, „**Raving landscape**”, „**Urban landscape**”, „**Landscape given to itself**”.

The involvement of the landscape theme in a personal research program led to the approach of conceptual essence ways, of structural analysis of visual expression, of formal analysis, permanent research in the field of structures and natural textures. Such a closeness to nature determined me to go beyond the studio's borders, in order to propose some interventions *in situ* (in The Făget Forest), within an international land-art camp, issue analyzed in subchapter „**Landscape as ego-space or personal mini-theatre**”.

My nature interventions have nothing in common with the american artists' actions from the Land Art group (Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer), marked by a nature which is devastated by humankind (their works are made in desert landscapes or on abandoned areas because of industry). My interventions are neither connected with to the romantic point of view, sometimes ecological, of Nils Udo, nor to the one of the artist Andy Goldsworthy.

My works which were realized in nature are existence ways or action ways within the existing reality. As an artist, I use places, surroundings which nature offers me. The work is not a side effect of composition anymore, but an active principle of a signs, objects, gestures, forms ongoing path. The form of the paintings is growing beyond the material form: it is a link element, a principle of dynamic agglutination. These nature interventions are under the directing sign and the establishing of a harmonious relationship between artificial and natural, in a duality and complementarity's game: the natural ephemeral is transferred in the space of the artistic ephemeral.

The thesis is elaborated in accumulating-progressive manner, because the subject of a chapter opens the field of investigation for the next one. Thus, the explanation of the term landscape, of the post-modern context, with the variety of approaches of the landscape theme in the visual arts field, requires a supplementary closer look in the second chapter – **„Actual landscape, counter point of the ideal landscape”**, with the subchapters: **„Nature, source of inspiration for the artists”**, **„Nature and actual landscape”**, **„Ideal landscape – actual landscape”** and **„Nature in the personal landscapes”**.

Nature, with its endless repertory of forms, is always a source of inspiration for artists. Every form in the nature can be converted in plastic construction operative means: lines, surfaces, volumes, colors. While contemplating, the artist's thought is performing associations, is reading forms, is exploring their accidents, is entering inside them. The artist discovers a universe in the stones drawing, in the calm and organic outline of the hills, in the monumentality of a mountain, trying to catch the intimate's harmony of the relief forms tectonics and their compensation balance.

Between nature real perception and its aesthetic valuing, the artist follows a certain way: in the first step he admires the sight, then the visual information is understood, he becomes aware of it and it is enriched with new imaginative elements, according to the data that already exist in the sensitivity and cultural background of the artist. The image perceived in nature receives this way a particular meaning, of landscape – *ego-space* or personal mini-theatre, kind of landscape which differs from the natural sight. Compared to this one, the landscape includes the emotions weight, the representations and the memories, without ignoring the universal cultural accumulation background, with which any artist is in a natural connection, on the basis of his historical and social existence. Looking at a picture representing a landscape, we have in front of us an open space, unlimited, which can potentially continue in any direction, including us in this potential enveloping. „The landscape – *ego-space* or personal mini-theatre” concerns landscape as an image which has just been formed by the action of the spectator's look, becoming the theatre of a meeting of human (artist and spectator) with himself.

Because of the pollution, the technical progress and the industrialization, nature is nowadays, exposed to a continuous degradation. In front of this tremendous nature, the artist can, either protest by his works, or try to harmonize the natural sight with the industrial one. Every artist is facing the world personally, some aspects of the reality, (objective, constructive, associative) being selected, analyzed and enriched subjectively. Some artists prefer a constant representation of the perceived fact, while in the creations of other artists, the reality is transformed, essentialized or sublimated. The actuality of the ideal landscape can be explained by the fact that it materializes the specific human need of emancipation from under the ward of a nature perceived as insensitive or even aggressive. Art is not the direct reflex of this ideology, is not content with the expression and with showing the relation of the artist with nature, but also the intervention of his imagination. The landscapes of the contemporary art which send to an ideal nature, do not show an origin landscape, but a subjective one, which slips toward an *ego-space*, the liberty and the spontaneity of these landscapes being in the opposite part of the rigorous constructions from the idealized landscapes from the **XVIIth** century painting (Nicolas Poussin, Claude Lorrain).

As a painter, I join the artists who transfigured the objective reality in order to transmit an imaginative experience. Sensitive observer of reality, I let myself conquered by the novelty of the natural sights, by the vegetal exuberance, the relief forms tenseness, by the rhythms of the city. All these nature's aspects do not function as picturesque attractions, but become a reason for some studies of chromatic assent, with a plastic formal construction. Reality is submitted to an abstractization that looks forward to discover the essential, in a formula which synthesizes the intellectual approach and the sensorial one through the picture appeal. The introspective road is uncovering, but is also hiding under the successive "masques" strata, each landscape including the one who watches in a game, by some kind of illusionist exercise. The association of images with the natural sight is a seductive appearance, but deceptive: the sight becomes a landscape reason and this one motive for an invitation to an imagination exercise.

From the point of view of the plastic means used to realize these imaginative landscapes, I am not „calling” the classic or romantic “instruments” and I am not using,

like other contemporary artists new media (video, art-computer), but the canvas painting technique realized in two steps according to distinct levels of creation: the first level, the one of texturing the support layer with relief paste (to express the vast compositional fields) over which comes the color, in a translucent aquatint. The second level, the one of the representation with paintings means featuring the forms of the main elements which fill the scene: lakes, rivers, trees, fulfills the image. There is no staggering of plans from the bottom to the top (like in the traditional landscapes, in which the color registers are succeeding themselves on the vertical way from the earth substance to the rarefaction of the pale skies) but a chancy seeming distribution of the colors.

In the ensemble structure of my paintings, the dynamic of the chromatic impression and the poetry of the states it generates are dominant. Even though from the plastic point of view there are similarities with the formula of the lyrical expressionism, the message transmitted opens the way to a personal vision. By confronting the two impulses - cerebral and sentimental, a logic and strong articulation of the color registers which present a condensation of the compositional elements in supple vertical architectures is born, in the same time with an abstractization which synthetics is not canceling the vibration, but is sustaining it. Vaguely perceptible, the testimonies of the inspiration associate formula suggested by nature with marked compositional axes.

In a dialectic of the oppositions between unlimited and limited, open and closed, accessible and inaccessible – given under their sensitive aspects: thickness and fluidity, opacity-transparence, lusterless-brightness, the imaginary landscape, without limits and contours, is offered to the sight as a poetic suggestion, counter pointed to the daily torment.

An artist can not ignore models, his forerunner's creations or the ones of his contemporaries, a complex relationship which makes the object of the IIIrd chapter, **“Traditional and actual in landscape's approach”**, with the subchapters **“An incursion in landscapes' history”** and **“Some elements specifics for the landscape practice”**. We present here shortly the occurrence of the first elements of vegetation drawn in the antique art, passing trough the Middle Age and the panoramic landscapes of the artists of the Quattrocento, to arrive to the real biography of landscape, which begins at the end of the XVth century, in graphics, with the admirable aquarelles of

Albrecht Dürer, and in the easel paintings, in the XVIth and XVIIth centuries, with the structural reinvention of landscape realized in the studios of: Jan Van Goyen, Jacob van Ruysdael, Philips Koninck, Meindert Hobbema, Albert Cuyp, who's art will influence, two hundred years after, the Barbizon School and the whole realistic landscape from the XIXth century. The autonomous landscape goes through the painting of the XVIIIth french century (with the works of Antoine Watteau and Jean-Honoré Fragonard), the english painting of the XVIIIth century and of the first decades of the XIXth century (with the landscapes of John Constable and William Turner), gaining its authority through Camille Corot, Gustave Courbet and Barbizon School. In the same time with the impressionism, with the pointillism of Georges Seurat, with the constructivism of Paul Cézanne and specially once with the first trials of the currents in the first quarter of the XXth century (cubism, futurism, surrealism) a radical change occurs of the painters attitude versus the landscape. The denial of the depth and of the reproduction of the appearances of the visible world to leave the place to a sign game which synthesize the balance between spirit and nature is characteristic for the abstract landscapes (of Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Piet Mondrian, Maria-Elena Vieira da Silva, Nicolas de Staël, Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Olivier Debré, Zao Wo-Ki), taking the landscape in a space "of the inside".

Further on, we focused on some constitutive elements of the landscape which are in our opinion essential for the field of landscape: „**Mimesis**”, „**Space**”, „**The window**”, „**The road**”, „**The horizon line**”, and „**The tree**”.

My whole creative path, which is deeply analyzed in the last chapter „**A look over my own creation**”, is a careful search in the network of the different possibilities certified during time by art's approaches. I am not contenting myself to undertake the results of the investigations of the other artists from different currents, but I rebuilt an itinerary which I follow "on my own": the attraction for abstract, the appetite for composition exercises, the work on the painting material and exploring of materiality and also the extension of these to the space of subjectivity offered me marks which helped me to discover my own way. In other words, my personal artistic approach is connected to models of image configuration, of media and consecrate means of tradition actualized in a post-modern vision.

In painting as well as in my interventions *in situ* there is a tendency of serializing, cycles can be identified, which represents studies on the balance of full-empty, color – form, texture – structure.

By replacing the traditional palette with materials belonging to the site (in a very different vision compared to the overwhelming experiences of the american artists reunified under the name of Land Art) I am working with a fragile medium which I transform, and then, giving back to time the works. For these interventions the work is not receiving its form, only from a single point of view: the traditional frontality imposed by photography.

Compared to the american artists who monumentally undertake their works in the landscape, my personal interventions are minimum. The tracks, compositions of elements found *in situ*, are arranged without using complicated techniques.

Even though the doctoral research led me to the experience of new techniques, I think that my most representative works are found in the canvas painting field. In my personal painting there is a sustained preoccupation for the expressive part of materials, which aims to value the internal states. The balance of the forms in the surface, the chromatic harmony, based first of all on the contrast warm-cold, are characteristic to all my personal works. The geometric structures make the rhythm in compositions perceptible, and the surfaces finely textured add a tactile suggestion. The plastic expression is conceived on vast surfaces, and the energy which supports it suppose the inside energy of the painting material itself, of the forms and texture rhythms. The color, sometimes translucent, sometimes rough or similar to a lace, has an introspective value and shows a wide variety of emotional states. There are paintings in which the temptation of warm colors becomes irradiant, some others in which the ways of using the warm-cold palette interlace the expressive resources and eliminate the peril of slipping trough the decorative.

Textures, structures, configurations: the initial elements given in homogeny fields are organized by accumulations. The form is looked for either among the random ways of the watery color, or on the basis of the sketches, the composition is developing and the tensions can find their solution by consuming the work's means. No matter which technique has been used, the material is treated in harmony.

The filters of memory select the aspects of reality reinterpreting them easily, in a lyrical and playful way. All my painting explore trials, within the doctoral research concern a wider theme, the one of the landscape as an „ego-space or personal mini-theatre”. The paintings, refined, without ostentation and lyrical without sentimentalism, are images which are mentally united, are getting one over the other, are unexpected expressive variations, chromatic reasons. Transposed in different chromatic screens, the fragments of lace original insertion, which leaves only traces on the painting’s surface, the natural structures, the trees impressions become suggestively concrete a subjective landscape, like a challenge for the viewer to discover the correspondences from the real world using his own imagination. A similar approach with the one of a theatre show, so that the juxtaposition landscape – theatre is perfectly motivated. The scripts of my visual shows, thematically related, but diverse as an inside landscape, construct a plastic approach which is developing in works series („Mirages”, „Subjective landscapes”, „No chlorophyl”), in which the materials and the execution manner are different, the painting act being permanent, a priority. The image easiness to be read is connected with a certain desire of expression, as well as with the choice of the material and of the working technique.

Paintings born from chaos, by chance, in which forms are depending on some technical characteristics (fluidity or painting density) compose a coherent ensemble, in which the evocation of the mountains, lakes and trees are dominating; the landscapes are opening to a sort of delusional suggestion and, in the same time, are disintegrating. The viewer is in a place in which the activity is the one of „weaving” and „unraveling” successively the place he watches.

The appetite for the abstract, as well as for a certain state of show, in which almost all the approached themes in my personal painting are getting on, is included in a special emotional register, in which the meditative reflection and intense inside emotions coexist.

If the preoccupation for the expressive organization of surface by texturing the canvas is obvious in the paintings from the series „Mirages” and „Subjective landscapes”, lately, the tendency to overcome the step of tactile painting by purging the surface becomes more obvious. A dematerialization of forms is realized, in the same

time with quitting the laces of the relief, looking for an essentialized structure, not schematic of the visible. An option modification is also present – toward the city nature, as well as a translucent link to nature's evolution, within which the preoccupation for the ecological problems is distinguished (the painting series „No chlorophyl”). In these paintings, the world explored is the one of the close reality, from which I extract moments – sequences, taking pictures of them and which I recreate in order to give them back to nature. The main source of inspiration is now the city nature, polluted, without leaves, wrapped in fog, with a lack of vital pith, CHLOROPHYL. We are talking about nature surrounding our own habitat, in its situation of shadow projected on the room's walls.

The testimony photo, with a special interest for a certain photographic frame represents the motive for the creation of some paintings which try to decrypt the poetry of the sleeping city nature. In the studio I try to reflect it, under the impression of my own emotions, using discrete value variations of a thin palette of grey. Reality is transfigured, passed through a register in which suggestions and plastic allusions come first, shaping the *ego-space*. A series of compositions, marked with powerful lines, getting unwitting through the canvas surface, develops possible configurations of vegetal. They have as an origin a dialogue with natural frames with a lack of picturesque, discovered by the eye and reconstructed on the canvas surface, with a wish of concentrating the expression; this is realized also by using the new method of treating color: limiting the palette to the grey and brown area subtly tinted.

As a whole, the paintings realized on the theme „Landscape as an *ego-space* or personal mini-theatre”, concentrate the results of a research program in the field of visual arts, within reality is perceived and understood – but not with a mimetic reproduction –,converted in a special synthesis between nature and *ego-space*, lead to abstract.

In the „**Final conclusions**”, we mention that the originality of the doctorate program consists in the construction of a vocabulary and a personal visual grammar, starting from the natural elements; this allowed us a *sui generis* approach of the landscape theme in my own creation. In order to do this, I used several methods: the investigation of the natural universe by research, analysis, selection, comparison and

transformation; filtering sensations and emotions in direct contact with nature; studying the way and the possibilities of composing according to the balance plastic theme-subject and plastic arts' laws; studying textures and natural structures which can be transferred in an artistic language; studying and an experiment of the techniques of approaching landscape in the artistic field by using the traditional and direct techniques of nature intervention; the selection of adequate techniques and working media for the practice transposition of the ideas.

The choice of the theme, it's development in a practice and consequent study, theoretically explained, is within some of my preoccupations which became actual again not only in art, but also in the daily life. The contemporary ecological movements are opening the frame of the interests for the origin forms, for the materials' expressive functions, interests connected, on one hand, with the complex experience of nature and on the other hand, with a certain social, cultural and personal experience. In this context, the personal artistic approach is ongoing naturally from the real form to an imagined work, from sight to landscape, in the *ego-space* or personal mini-theatre situation.