

ABSTRACT  
of the thesis

## THE STUDY OF INTERIOR SPACES IN VISUAL ART AND CULTURE



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## Abstract of the thesis named

### **THE STUDY OF INTERIOR SPACES IN VISUAL ART AND CULTURE**

The summary of the doctoral thesis titled *The Study of Interior Spaces in Visual Art and Culture* begins with a defense of the proposed topic under investigation, the theme of finite, bounded space. Although the choice of topic may seem archaically familiar, *the study of interior space* can be justified through its use as a method of reconnection with one's self, due to its implied recognition of boundaries. Thus, throughout this thesis, the mechanism of limitation is seen from a perspective that is under the influence of contemporary times. Viewed through this lens, the mechanism appears to change its initial structure, if not physically, then at least in the author's perception.

The title of the thesis is visibly presented in reference to a broad understanding of two separate directions that are nonetheless equivalent to two complementary sides comprising the same whole, *interior* and *space*. It is only through an assimilation of the two terms that the apparent distinctions between them can be brought to the surface. The phrase *interior space* is therefore proposed as a result of the author's intention to research both terms' point of intersection and overlap. Under the heading of this description, it seems that the title of the current paper is given an explanatory meaning, right from the point of revealing the two terms. In order to better comprehend their use, the terms will be succinctly showcased in turn, by using the same dual conception presented above, throughout the remainder of the introductory pages of this paper. Furthermore, this process will emphasize the need for making use of skills in personal interpretative deduction and debate, for justifying the purpose of opting for the title phrase. Moreover, the title's connotation and symbolism within the artistic field, at both a practical and theoretical level, will also be discussed.

Taken separately, the notions of *space* and *interior* are extensively debated throughout the research, in order to precisely define the exact meaning of the terms comprising the proposed title. Therefore, the general title of the thesis alludes to one of the author's personal lines of interest, in relation to the subjectivity of the creative context, that of its positioning in the realm of transcendence and the uninterrupted movement characteristic of contemporary times. In addition, the current research can also be discussed in relation to the identification of any artist's personal values with ingenuity, but especially in relation to the presentation of all

manners in which cultural and visual arts, and the creative and scientific fields approach the concept of interior space. From a more general point of view, space can be seen as the place where the work of art is displayed in relation to its requirements, defining and developing it according to its attributes.

The space in which life unfolds includes the spatial delimitation of art as one of its subordinated domains as well, due to its variability and plasticity. Perhaps this may seem odd, but there are numerous frameworks, including a rational one, that view the elements of artistic space in a manner resembling life itself. However, a process such as this would involve much more rigor, which is why it would also require making an effort in admitting as valid tools in understanding spatiality, all those elements which elude its laws.

The current theoretical research project is made on the basis of two opposing directions; starting from a wider perspective progressing towards the detail (so starting from the concrete, palpable reality moving forward in a deductive manner) and vice-versa. The latter entails the analysis of those conditions that nurture an imaginative and productive reflection responsible for producing the design, the blueprint, the project, and finally, the concrete reality of the interior space. Therefore, a distinction will be made between the plastically illustrated interior painting which reproduces natural, real, artificial or imaginary realities on canvas and the paintings of architectural interior spaces such as frescoes. These will of course be accompanied by representations of the inner world of the human psyche (psychological or self-referential) and those of overland and subterranean living spaces, all of which will be brought to the surface in the current research.

**Chapter 1 - Embodiments of Interior Space in Art and Culture** depicts in detail the symbolism of space and its understanding under different guises. This shall be indicated by the names given to the pages of these subchapters as well, the names directing the current chapter in four different directions: *The Study of Creative Space*, *The History and Classification of Interior Space and Furniture Design*, *Painting in Interior Spaces - Frescoes* and *Interior Spaces in Fine Arts - Artistic References*.

Subchapter *1.1 The Study of Creative Space* includes an extensive discussion on the topic of embodied forms specific to creative space, the following being taken into account: *Plastic Space*, *Space as Linguistic Expression*, *Space as Visual Representation*, *Cultural Space*, *The Mythical and Ritualistic Space*, *The Poetic and Artistic Space*, *The Metaphysical Space* and *Sacred Space*. What will also be presented are: *The Space of Pragmatic Experiences*, *The Image-Space*, *The Topological Space*, *Infinite Space or the Space of*

*Continuous Flux*. The following categories also emerge: *Byzantine Space*, *Gothic Space*, *Renaissance and The Space of Perspective*, and *Baroque Space*. Lastly, space is analyzed from these perspectives as well: *Fictional or Surrealist Space*, *Futurist Space or the Space of Movement*, *Abstractionist or Devised Space*, *The Vanished Space - Conceptual Art*, *Natural Space as Art - Land Art*, *The Literary Space*, *The Mathematical Space* and *The Philosophical Space*.

Subchapter **1.2 *The History and Classification of Interior Space and Furniture Design*** performs an in-depth analysis of interior design, as well as a presentation of its most important styles, in addition to a description of styles in furniture design. Therefore, themes such as: *The Historical Evolution of Interior Styles and Furniture* (starting from *The Primitive Era*, *Antiquity*, and reaching *The Middle Ages*, *The Capitalist Era*, *Contemporary Times*) and *Elements of Decor in the Development of Interior Design and Home Architecture* (light, lighting and decor, bichromism, screens, paneling, mosaics, curtains/blinds, carpets, tapestries, decorative objects and ornaments).

Subchapter **1.3 *Painting in Interior Spaces - Frescoes*** showcases interior paintings or frescoes that define not only the period of time during which they were executed, but also bring to the surface countless explanations of the culture, mentality, habits and moments lived by the illustrated representatives of those times.

Subchapter **1.4 *Interior Space in Fine Arts - Artistic References*** approaches the theme of interior space from a perspective that encapsulates it within the narrower theme of the various works of art created by artists. Two distinct categories emerge: *Interior Space in Traditional and Old Romanian Painting* and *Interior Space in Contemporary National and International Painting*.

## **Chapter 2 - Subjective Space and Self-referential Study**

The notion of *subjective space* includes both the idea of imaginary space, as well as the artist's real inhabited space, coinciding with that of the present author's space. In light of the author's practices and experimentation, the space that belongs to her usual activities, doubled by the space where the work of art is created and finalized is also exemplified. The phrase „self-referential“ is illustrated in specialist literature and in film as symbolizing the moment in which an art creator references their own body of work within the boundaries of a personal art piece.

Subchapter **2.1 *Private Space v. Public Space*** emphasizes:



*Private space* is a notion that constitutes, by definition, the reality of a singular human society, strongly connected to the individual and his private life. On the other hand, *Public space* is built as the expression of society and the individuals comprising it. Thus, it brings into the limelight those aspects pertaining to the historical, cultural, political and societal aspects of a community, which are expressed through a specific mode of living that are relevant for that community. The architectural dimension of public space can be viewed as grounds for arguing in favor of the opportunities and attitudes directing the organization of its physical quality. The link between the two categories is similar to relationships established between private and public life; their harmonious inflection, alongside the transformative dimension and gradual becoming of experience are expressed in the quality and comfort of individuals' lives, as well as the groups they belong to.

Subchapter **2.2 *The Perceptual-Visual Context of Interior Space*** is named as such due to illustrating the notion of space, from a self-referential view of the artist. However, this perception is not architectural in nature, territorially situated and destined for utilitarian purposes, but it is one that establishes the concept of space in the realm of the arts, be it the artist's imaginary space or the space of the viewer. Within this subchapter the following will be included: *Public Space becoming Private Space* (digital artistic spaces in which the majority of activities take place from inside a private space towards an open public one) and *Private Space becoming Location* (including private properties turned into public art galleries).

Furthermore, in the pages of this subchapter what shall also be included is a debate on some aspects pertaining to the elements of interior space, such as: *the relationship between composition/image and background, embossing, windows, overlapping and transparency, deformation and gradient*. These will constitute arguments in favor of German theorist Rudolf Arnheim's concepts (1904 - 2007).

### Subchapter **2.3 *The Interior Space of the Human Psyche***

The human psyche includes the inner world of the artist in the analysis, in addition to its architectural dimension. This fact is evident by way of directly taking into account the various subjects which "already are, are in the process of becoming, or will be part" of building a so-called emotional archive of the artist, extending an approach to the artist's psychological repertoire from a general point of view.

Subchapter **2.4 *Identity and Otherness*** emphasizes the preoccupation of the current study with the notion of the self. In this subchapter, the factors responsible for determining an understanding of the origin and creation of the work will be thoroughly analyzed, by bringing

forth arguments related to the concept of the self. Subchapter *2.5 Consciousness and Unconsciousness* focuses on understanding how the conscious mind is formed, as well as its counterpart, the unconscious, references being of course made to analyses of works of art. Art itself is to be seen from a bisociative point related to the dynamics of its perceptual organization.

Subchapter *2.6 Artistic References to Subjective Space and Self-referential Study* aims to bring to the surface artistic references related to those artists' works that capture the images of interior space, especially the images of the artist's own inner workspace. In other words, by illustrating artists' self-portraits, an analysis of the self-referential and subjective nature of the artist is thus made. Further illustrations pertaining to the in-depth study of self-referentiality will be displayed, especially the depictions belonging to Belgian artist René Magritte (1898 - 1967), famous for his works on this particular topic and the work of famous contemporary Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama (born in 1929).

### **Chapter 3 - The History, Classification and Use of Architectural Interior Space**

Subchapter *3.1 The History and Architectural Classification of Interior Space* is titled in this manner to allude to the history of the architecture of interior space, following its evolution from the first living spaces built in: *Prehistory, Antiquity, the Classical Period, in Asia, Africa and Islam*, as well as in *American Pre-Columbian times*. What follow are: *the Viking era, the Paleochristian era, The Middle Ages, the Byzantine era, Romanticism, the Gothic era, The Renaissance and The Baroque. The Neoclassical era, the Industrial Age, modern times, totalitarian times, postmodernity* and lastly, *the contemporary era* are also added to the list.

#### **Subchapter 3.2 Contemporary Architectural Reutilizations**

The utility of commonly shared interior spaces from the past makes a direct reference to the history of industrial spaces during the communist era, when locations such as these had a productive utility for the collective. The same spaces are used nowadays by individuals, this change implicitly entailing the tendency of local management to adopt these spaces in ruin, which often times succeeds to do so with the purpose of "turning" them into places exclusively designed for individual interests (ranging from private ateliers to companies of a similar fashion). Thus, the issue of *Reclaimed Decommissioned Spaces and Artistic Projects in Decommissioned Spaces* will also be discussed.

## **Chapter 4 - The Depths of Underground Space**

This chapter will showcase the interweaving of all limited, enclosed types of subterranean spaces, by referencing the breadth of their physical, palpable surface, as well as the psychological, emotional, spiritual and rational depths of the human psyche. The profundity of deep spaces brings forth references to the origins of human existence and thus manages to cover a wide range of problems that man has had to face, from the beginning of history up until today's times. By taking into account underground space in our analysis, we are also highlighting the great importance and impact of this apparently "unseen" world, at both a physical and spiritual level. Subterranean spaces exert their survival power despite the permanent competition with naturally bright spaces.

Subchapter **4.1 *General Aspects and Historico-social Context*** emphasizes the definition and trademark characteristics of underground space. These are discussed in the subdivisions titled *Definition and Characteristics of Underground Space* and *The History of Subterranean Space Use*. In these pages other forms of underground spaces will also be included, such as: *caves, burial grounds, catacombs* and *underground cities*.

Subchapter **4.2 *The Underground in Art/ Art in the Underground - from Traditional to Contemporary*** includes that type of art which is found in or inspired from the underground. Thus, it becomes evident that an extensive palette of this specific type of art will be displayed in the following parts by discussing: underground art galleries (national and international), visual images of the underground captured in artists' works, styles of decor and underground design (passageways or decorated metro stops), as well as works of art that belong to the realm of the subterranean but are showcased overland. In this manner, a presentation of *The Underground as a Cultural Value, Cave Paintings, Sacred and Sepulchral Art - Contemporary Aspects*, in which underground artistic projects and art galleries are displayed, followed by *Art in Metro Stops around the World*, will also be discussed.

## **Chapter 5 - Reflections on the Author's Personal Works**

The current presentation on the theoretical background of the research entails navigating a process of deep introspection in regards to the previously mentioned subjects. This journey shall start from the very beginnings of art, reaching the point of contemporary artistic expression, especially that which is closely linked to the field of visual arts. The author's personal production of artistic work encompasses elements of plasticity, as well as elements of a theoretical dimension, which have been developed throughout the course of the research, by emphasizing some of the elements part of the final stages of artistic production.

Some of these elements include: *composition* (used to reveal the tangible, the real actualizations of memory, and the artist's memories in particular, in the background of illustrations exclusively encapsulating the concepts of perspective and graphic design); *originality* (which is revealed through the choice of subject and the practical execution of the artwork); *technique* (at times, mixed) and *color* (predominating in warm, pastel hues.).

## Chapter 6 - Personal Projects

This chapter focuses on the presentation of all personal projects developed over the course of the three years of doctoral research, in which the author has continuously tackled and taken the field of contemporary art in new directions. A quote from artist Lawrence Weiner (born in 1942) is fitting in these pages. He claims, in relation to the contemporary artist and his work, that "The meaning of a work of art does not reside in its origins, but in its destination. The representation must be born at the expense of the painter."<sup>1</sup>

Thus, in the pages of this chapter, apart from the research activity described so far, what will also be highlighted is the experimental evolution of the atelier work that has ultimately incarnated in an exhibition of the finalized works of art. Eight projects (the last one being developed during an artistic residency in Luxembourg) have been exhibited to display both the conceptual and the compositional dimensions of the research project.

The works are titled as follows: *InterFace - The Inner and Outer Faces of Consciousness*, *Self-referential Atelier*, *Sinidisis*, *Introspectapet*, *Underground within*, *Accumulated Templates/Șabloane acumulate*, *Interior Construction and Deconstruction*, *Recessed in Transparent Interiors*.

## Chapter 7 - General Conclusions

The present doctoral research has tackled, from both a theoretical and a practical standpoint, the analysis of the works of art created during atelier hours. The research has also documented this process as it was taking place inside an architectural environment, where the artistic activity and the artist's emotions were created and disposed of simultaneously.

Within the pages of this doctoral research the theme of *interior space* has been developed over the course of seven chapters. This was accomplished in the background field of visual arts, including all aspects pertaining to the work itself, the artist and the receiving

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<sup>1</sup>Lawrence Weiner, Millet Catherine, *Arta contemporană. Istorie și geografie*, Ed. Vellant, 2017, București, p. 47.

public. Starting from the *overland* display of space presented in: Chapter 1- Embodiments of Interior Space in Art and Culture, Chapter 2 - Subjective Space and Self-referential Study and Chapter 3 - The History, Classification and Use of Architectural Interior Space, the contextual subfields of *conventional/unconventional* and *relative/liminal* interior space have been analyzed. The latter's name is owed to the content presented in subchapter *1.3 Painting in Interior Spaces - Frescoes*, where the theme of the enclosed framework in interior paintings, such as frescoes has been investigated.

In regards to researching the inner world of the human psyche, or in other words, the space of inner feelings, the space of our archival memories and that of the artist's subjectivity and self-referentiality of workspace, have all been discussed in the pages of Chapter 2. This was followed by arriving at the last stage of analysis, the stage dedicated to *underground* interior space, tackled in Chapter 4 - The Depths of Underground Space. Chapters 5 - Reflections on the Author's Personal Works and 6 - Personal Projects have created the suitable environment for exemplifying the theoretical and practical applications of the research project. Moreover, the works also highlight the author's alternative involvement in socio-professional endeavours with the purpose of revealing the actual results of her work over the course of the three year long doctoral study. Evidently, the content presented in the pages of the thesis has been closely monitored and exemplified in numerous images acting as arguments in favor of supporting the author's perspective on the topic. This was achieved by showcasing the numerous artists that have undertaken the same theme in their work as well, their efforts constituting the referential annexes necessary for each chapter in turn.

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