

14/01/07.03.2012



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 Domeniul major de intervenție 1.5 Programe doctorale și postdoctorale în sprijinul cercetării  
 Titlul proiectului: Științele socio-umaniste în contextul evoluției globalizate – dezvoltarea și implementarea programului de studii și cercetare postdoctorală  
 Contract: POSDRU 891.5/S/61104  
 Beneficiar: Academia Română

Mentor/ expert științific  
 Prof.univ.dr. Gheorghe Cliveti

Instituția coordonatoare de tematică: Academia Română – Filiala Iași  
 Tematica: Discurs literar-artistic și construcție identitară în secolele XVI-XX/ Literary-artistic discourse and the shaping of identity from the XVIIth to XXth century

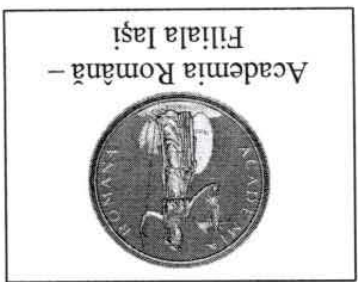
Numele și prenumele cercetătorului postdoctoral: Nistor Paul Octavian

Tema individuală de cercetare: Graphic Art and Ideology in Cold War Romania (1948-1964)

### Graphic Art and Ideology in Cold War Romania (1948-1964)

### Socialist Realism and Romania

Socialist Realism did not only exclude an aesthetic autonomy of art, it also pushed the artists towards an excessive militantivism. These artists were put in the special phalanxes of the revolutionaries and they were given responsibilities that were beyond their capabilities. The texts



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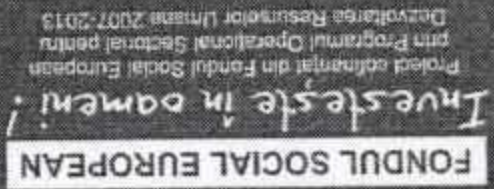
that ideologists presented at conferences about arts and at the plenary sessions of the Union of Plastic Artists (UAP) meant that the artist had to get involved in the construction of socialism and the education of the masses. The contribution of art, as a part of culture, had to be a clear one on the new regime's path to victory.

This article aims to analyse the relationship between Romanian artists and the environment they created in, at the beginning of Romanian communism. We will try to investigate in a detailed manner a couple of things from the world of art, the way things were organised, doctrines, ideologies, which managed to impose socialist realism in Romania in just a few years, after the complete instauration of communism in 1947. We will try to establish whether the obligations placed on the artists outweighed their benefits or not, when they accepted to collaborate with the regime. We will also state from the beginning that, for Romania, we do not believe that Miklos Haraszti's theory is entirely applicable. He speaks of a conspiracy between artists, censors and guards, and insists on the fact that the "persecuted" artists were actually not at all unhappy under communism, but that they rather enjoyed the advantages they received<sup>1</sup>.

The relationship the artists had with the communist regime has been looked at from different perspectives by everyone who analysed it: from a cultural and sociological perspective (Magda Cârneci<sup>2</sup>), political and ideological (Cristian Vasile<sup>3</sup>) or from the perspective of personal destiny (Mihael Pelin<sup>4</sup>). The ambiguity between art and politics was insisted upon as the artists were convinced, in different ways, to collaborate with the communists.

The adepts of socialist realism from the beginning of Romanian communism demanded the collaboration of painters, drawers or sculptors, by invoking the patriotism of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

<sup>1</sup> Miklos Haraszti, *The Velvet Prison. Artists Under State Socialism*, London, IB Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1987, p. 5-6.  
<sup>2</sup> Magda Cârneci, *Arte plastice in România (1945-1989)*(*Plastic Arts in Romania (1945-1989)*), București, Editura Meridiane, 2000.  
<sup>3</sup> Cristian Vasile, *Literatura și artele în România comunistă (1948-1953)* (*Literature and Arts in Communist Romania (1948-53)*), București, Editura Humanitas, 2010.  
<sup>4</sup> Mihael Pelin, *Deceniul prabușilor: 1940-1950. Viețile pictorilor, sculptorilor și arhitecților români între legionari și stalinisti*, (*The Decade of Collapse: 1940-1950. The lives of Romanian painters, sculptors and architects amongst legionaries and Stalinists*) București, Editura Compania, 2005.






artists. Nicolae Grigorescu and Sava Henția were given as examples of artists who served the people, "who with their sketch book in hand, gathered materials for the creations that were to immortalise the brave people of this nation in their fight for independence"<sup>5</sup>. The past was, however, also a burden for this side of the cultural world seeing as "this tradition of our classic artists was despised by the authorities of past regimes. The scorn of the middle classes and of the gentry for all of our valuable creations, their discouragement of the creators amongst the people, their servile bowing to the decadence of the West, called for the monstrous coalition to promote a completely different orientation in the plastic arts than that which Aman and Grigorescu, amongst others, started off on..."<sup>6</sup>. The present and the future promised to bring, however, a new mission for artists and, as the Romanian Communist Party (PCR) ideologists suggested, maybe even their comeback to a noble enterprise, that would be of use to the human race: "for us, in the fight we have for an art that is as related to life as possible, as capable as possible to mirror our reality back to us in the midst of this revolutionary transformation, the fight against the remains of the middle class' ideology, we also have this major aspect of redefining drawing in all its remarkable significance."<sup>7</sup>

In a country where Marxism had been continually refused by the masses and by the intellectuals and where the communist party was the smallest in the whole of Eastern Europe (800 members in 1944), there were no national traditions in art that could be considered real precursors of socialist realism. But, like in other areas, alongside the writers, historians, people of culture, the communists created and exaggerated the myths around some artists with huge social tendencies (who were then automatically included in the political left's sympathisers). Artists with real leftist tendencies can be found much closer to the Second World War, in the avant-garde

<sup>5</sup> Arhivele Naționale ale României (ANR)(Romanian National Archives), The Union of Plastic Artists' Fund (Fond Unirea Artiștilor Plastici), File 4/1950, f. 4.  
<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 5.  
<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*.

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period, and some of them would truly move to the side of the new regime (M.H. Maxy, Jules

Perahim, Hans Mattis-Teutsch).

The case of Romanian artists is different in a way, to other cases in Eastern Europe because it is generally considered that after a hard repression against nationalist and orthodox or liberal intellectuals, the other educated people in Romania showed too much passiveness (compared to the Hungarians or Poles) towards the instauration of the Communism come from the USSR<sup>8</sup>. Many of the elite of the interwar artists (Camil Ressu, Iosif Iser, Jean Al. Steriade, Borsi Caragea, Ion Jalea, Corneliu Medrea) wrote declarations of their acceptance of the new cultural mission imposed by the Romanian Communist Party, they went through a re-education program and a re-evaluation of their own works and principles, and finally they adopted socialist realism, and were given in exchange jobs, titles, positions, money and fame from the new leaders<sup>9</sup>.

Obviously, in all the speeches of that period, they underlined that the freeing of Romania by the "glorious soviet armies" had triggered the renaissance of painting, drawing and sculpture, and these could finally, after 1944, participate freely in the effort to enthrone socialism. Romanians could not be proud of a powerful and authentic revolutionary tradition amongst the artists. Throughout the history of Romania, we find rare, lone cases, but by no means tendencies or large groups of artists that desired to change society, as we can see in Russia or Germany in the period of the First World War<sup>10</sup>. There was no specific art that upheld individuals and socialism<sup>11</sup> but rather it served national ideals (the unity of Romanians, political independence). If this was the role of plastic arts generally speaking, graphics had their part of glory as much in the historic past as in the future the communists idealised. At a UAP plenary session, a

<sup>8</sup> Magda Cârneli, op. cit., p. 28-31.

<sup>9</sup> Cristian Vasile, op. cit., p. 131,137.

<sup>10</sup> Allan Carl Greenberg, *Artists and Revolution. Dada and Bauhaus 1917-1925*, Ann Arbor, Michigan, UMI Research Press, 1999, p. 155-157.

<sup>11</sup> Theda Shapiro, *Painters and Politics. The European Avant-garde (1900-1925)*, New York, Elsevier, 1976, p. 201-204.

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speaker said neither more nor less than: "Like the other branches of arts, Romanian graphics has an ancient tradition in the troubled past of our people. The artists had a healthy realistic conception... they left us hundreds of drawings and engravings, studies and sketches for albums, hundreds of examples in which their artistic skillfulness entwined itself with their deep knowledge of life."<sup>12</sup> Drawers (come from painters) who became examples for the communists – Th. Aman, N. Grigorescu, Sava Henția, Satmar, Iser, Ressu, Șirato – were appreciated for their civic involvement thanks to their "satirical drawings, aimed against the oppressors of the people"<sup>13</sup>. If in the previous decades, the "militancy of the drawings had helped the working class, by showing the true face of the governing authorities", the present had to be more luminous, as the artists had, it would seem, the freedom to cover up the socialist content of their art with a national form, a Romanian cover, which was truly useful for the people"<sup>14</sup>.

More sinister than this mission to re-educate the people and to support the new regime, was the internationalist direction which could be seen in Romanian art. Drawers and painters from Cluj, Iași or Bucharest received tasks with worldwide symbolic value, and had to participate actively in "revealing imperialists to be the enemies of peace" and to emphasise the "aspects of the dirty policies of Wall Street". These "revelations" came with the "presentation of the fight for the peace of the people" and the "helping of the Koreans"<sup>15</sup>. Caught up in so many worldwide responsibilities, with an almost dramatic flavour, burdened with internal tasks to uphold the communist regime; how much freedom, how much time and how many possibilities did the Romanian artist have left to work on his career or even, why not, a personal life?

### The Problems of Romanian Art and Artists

<sup>12</sup> ANR, The Union of Plastic Artists' Fund, File 22/1950, f. 133.  
<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem.*  
<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem.*  
<sup>15</sup> ANR, The Union of Plastic Artists' Fund, File 20/1950, f. 266.



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The new leaders changed from the foundations the rules of professional promotion in art, and whoever did not wish to become a pariah in his field was obliged to conform to all the organized forms that could bring him fame through the approval of the State Party. Thus an important part of the professional life of an artist was having access to the state exhibitions. These exhibitions offered visibility and, symbolically speaking, a certificate of quality to those who were chosen to exhibit their works. But the rules of admission to such an exhibition were amongst some of the harshest and those artists who did not adapt to socialist realism had almost no chances of passing the severe evaluations. Ideological terror, difficult on the one hand, eliminated, on the other hand, the commercial difficulties of the artists, who, in a free society would have had to adapt themselves to the market<sup>16</sup>. In Communist Romania, adopting socialist nationalism was a guarantee of an almost certain material stability for artists.

First of all, in 1948, the Rules of organising exhibitions were changed, the one held in 1935 having been declared incongruous with the new objectives of plastic arts. Two changes were important. The jury was no longer made up of artists, because it was decided that the old components were "bound to promote an aesthetic art, detached from reality and life, aimed at those so-called elite and initiated people, who are able to stop the fights of the working class and of the people for a superior lifestyle"<sup>17</sup>. The new jury had to mirror the interest of the whole of the people for socialist art and was made up out of representatives of the Ministry of Art and Information (who were not necessarily artists), from art critics recommended by USASZ (Union of the Artists', Writers' and Journalists' Syndicate) and two members of the General Confederation of Work. In other words, apart from artists, the jury for state exhibitions could also be made up of political counsellors sent by the party, unionists with no artistic background and, probably, indoctrinated artists: "thus the jury of the exhibition will be animated by a healthy spirit, able to respect both the quality of the plastic arts, without, however, isolating them from the major effort of the reconstruction of the country, without isolating them either from the understanding and

<sup>16</sup> Michele H. Bogart, *Artists, Advertising and the Borders of Art*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 10.  
<sup>17</sup> ANR, The Ministry of Art and Information's Fund (Fond Ministerul Artelor și Informațiilor), File 158/1948, f. 25.





aspirations of the wider public"<sup>18</sup>. From reading these new rules, it is clear what would be the effects of such an exhibition, organised only with the agreement of the socialist current: "its criteria have as their goal a) to promote an art that is realist in its form and content; b) to make sure there are no decadent formalist influences able to destroy the importance of art and to quash the fight of our people for the raising of their standard of life; c) to keep our works of art at a high level of artistic expression"<sup>19</sup>.

What does such a jury look like, designed to decide upon the destiny of Romanian artists?

We find out from a decree from the Ministry of Art and Information, decided upon shortly after Decree Nb. 9.317, published in the Monitorul Oficial Nb. 259 on the 6<sup>th</sup> November 1948 (regarding the organisation of the Yearly State Exhibition of Plastic Arts and Graphic Artists). The president was Zaharia Stancu, from the Ministry of Arts – the director M.T. Vlad and the inspector Radu Bogdan, K. H. Zambaccian and Sorin Toma – art critics (recommended by USASZ), the painter Alexandru Ciurencu and the sculptor Boris Caragea, recommended by the Syndicate of Fine Arts, and Comănici Tudor and Zaharia Ivan, representatives of the General Confederation of Work<sup>20</sup>.

These judges agreed on paintings, sculptures, drawings, engravings, posters, that were in line with a couple of strict themes. The artists were not allowed paintings, sculptures, etc of their own personal inspiration, but the works had to be adapted to an important theme, taken from the communist doctrines. In this context, we can verify the hypothesis that under totalitarianism, we find the first external intervention in art since Christianity<sup>21</sup>, when guidelines were given from outside the world of the artists.

The favourite themes of socialist realism were the following: Portraits (specifically portraits of the political and cultural leaders of the time), Leaders of the PCR amongst the people, the

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, f. 26.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, f. 25.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, f. 32.

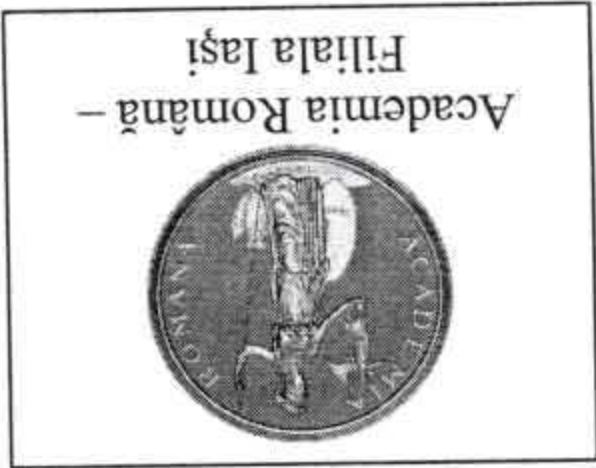
<sup>21</sup> Miklos Haraszti, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

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Friendship with the USSR, the Fight for Peace, the Fight to free the People, the Illegal Fight of the Party, Notions of Industry, Notions of Agriculture, Electricity, Historical-Political Moments, the Army in the RPR (People's Republic of Romania), Aspects of cultural life, Sport, Mass Organisations, Buildings, the Mining and Petrol industry<sup>22</sup>. The themes were not properly thought through straight after the war, but towards 1950, they were much better expressed and explained. Socialist realism was in a tight relationship with the regime and desired to present not an ordinary world but the reality of a world in the middle of a revolutionary development. The artists, through their message, participated in the ideological campaigns launched by the party, in different levels of society<sup>23</sup>.

Let us take a look at the artistic masterpieces that were in line with such themes, and maybe, just by reading the titles, we can form an image of their educational role, or of the message their creators passed on to the public. Arăstorescu Alexandru – *Villagers Volunteering*, Bălăcescu Dem. Lucia – *Captain Costake – The People's Executioner (1848)*, Crăciun Violeta – *The Villager's Counsel*, Costin M. Sofia – *Women Brigadiers Working in the Fields*, Andreescu Valentina – *Alphabetisation*, Catargi George – *A Specialist Grinder*<sup>24</sup>. There are also a series of portraits (Stalin, Bodnăraş, Gh. Apostol, Dej, Nicolae Bălcescu), historical scenes about Avram Iancu, Horia, Cloşca and Crişan, the 1848 Revolution and a large amount of works with important titles – *The Fisherman, The Seamstress, The Miner, The Welder, The Blacksmith, The Washerwoman*<sup>25</sup>. Amidst this brutal avalanche of socialist realism, only one shady area – Landscapes – allowed a way of expression for those who refused to cooperate with the themes of the epoch.

In the juries who decided on the works of art to be exhibited, we meet other people with the power of decisions over those times: Jules Perahim, Maximilian Schulman, Stefan Szöny,

<sup>22</sup> ANR, The Union of Plastic Artists' Fund, File 20/1950, f. 190-197.

<sup>23</sup> Gleb Prochorov, *Art under Socialism Realism. Soviet Painting, 1930-1950*, Roseville East Craftsman House, 1995, p. 28.

<sup>24</sup> ANR, The Ministry of Art and Information's Fund, File 158/1948, f. 3-7.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*.

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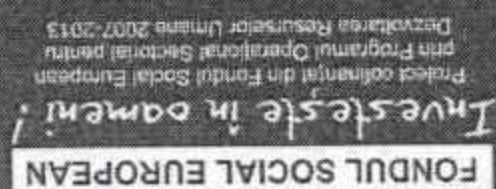


Nicolae Popa, Pericle Negoescu (The president of the Graphic Art Union), Mihail Roșianu (from the section of Education and Culture of the CCM) and the unavoidable M. T. Viad and Radu Bogdan, from the Ministry of Art and Information<sup>26</sup>.

The "life" of a State Exhibition went through ideologised speeches, small day-to-day organisational details, selections of works of art and was finalised by launching some artists up to a higher career. The Annual Exhibition of Graphic Art, opened in June 1949, started with the preoccupation of the room layout (in the room that used to belong to the Exhibition of Romanian-Soviet Economical Collaboration, on Bulevardul Magheru), ensuring the facilities were working, sending out 1000 invitations for the vernissage and even the request for a guard to be set up, with three shifts, a request based on the value of the works that were to be exhibited. The drawings, caricatures, posters and engravings were also within the themes outlined above (although, this time, there were no exact specifications), and so the public was shown portraits of leaders or scenes that were considered representative of reality: School, Work, Agriculture, Imperialists and the Soviets.

The great caricature artists of the epoch were present here, especially those who ironised the West – Cik Damadian – *The Vatican, A Romance, USA and West Germany*, Nell Cobar – *The Parrot, Newsmongers*, I. H. Doru – *Blum the Socialist, How Tito is moving towards Socialism, Ankara Radio*. There were also mobilising posters, meant to show the enthusiasm of the Romanian nation on the path of Socialism: Nicolae Popescu – *More coal, Alexe Șandor – Miners, go forth!*, Nazarie Pavlin – *Pioneers*, Eugeniu Duiculescu – *In the Fight for Peace*, Lipa Alămaru – *More iron, more bread*. If the selections for posters and caricatures were relatively few, the majority of artists presented drawings, in charcoal or pen, engravings, aquarels, gouaches. This is where we see, in fact, the titles that are the most representative of Socialist realism: Belu Corina – *Hardworking Peasants catching the Kulak Saboteur, The Russian Intellectual Timireazev*

<sup>26</sup> ANR, The Ministry of Art and Information's Fund, File 166/1949, f. 29; The Ministry of Art and Information's Fund, File 13/1948-1949, f. 179.





talking to the Labourers, Brateş Irina – Comrade Irina studying, Cerbu Eva – Pouring out the milk at home, Dăscălescu Mihaia – Ploughing at Night to accomplish the plan<sup>27</sup>.

As we can see from these titles, the paintings of the epoch went by the theory that art should not reflect reality but should transform it. The paintings we are talking about represent therefore an attempt of visual colonisation and of ideological travesty of the universe: they separate the globe judging by Andrei Jdanov's dogmas, giving to one part of the world negative attributes and to the other only positive ones. The most interesting works were those in which the fight of bad vs. good was brutally presented (the kulak vs. the labourer, the Bourgeois vs. the communist) and the public often appreciated these scenes, with clear delimitations between the classes and human typology, being educated in the way of permanently using the moral of dichotomies<sup>28</sup>.

The exhibition was open to all categories of public, from pupils and students to groups of workers, and the promoting of the event was done in the following manner: "The Works exhibited show aspects of work in factories, plants and fields, to fulfil the Plans of the State, mirroring at the same time the fight against the class' enemy and those who would incite us to unrest"<sup>29</sup>. A request from the organisers to the Army's Superior Political Department shows that even the military were targeted, by the party or by the artists, as a group that needed education through art. They insisted that they wanted to be visited by as many different military units as possible, this meant several thousand people. The argument brought by the organisers to the leaders of the army was irrefutable: "Visiting the exhibition is a way of educating the wider masses, showing the efforts of the plastic artists in our fight to construct socialism in our country"<sup>30</sup>. Using as much as they could

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, f. 31-38.

<sup>28</sup> Karl-Ludwig Selig and Elizabeth Sears, *The Verbal and the Visual, Essays in Honour of William Sebastian*

*Heckscher*, New York, Italica Press, 1990, p. 23-25.

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, f. 43.

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem.

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the inheritance of the past and taking on board a lot from the European revolutionary currents, socialist art claimed for itself a superior role of educating and inspiring the masses<sup>31</sup>.

An event of such magnitude, held over a couple of months, could not happen without having an effect on those who exhibited. This is demonstrated by a letter, come from the magazine *Urzica* – “The fortnightly magazine of satire and humour”, which asked the Ministry of the Arts to take out of the exhibition several works that were to be reproduced by zincography, to be printed in the pages of the magazine. They wanted the following posters: *Let us get rid of the weeds* (Ion Drugă), *A Story without Words* (Gheorghe Popescu) and the following caricatures: *The Vatican* (Cik), *In the Storm* (Nell Cobar), *Procession to the Vatican* (Rik A.), *The Proverb* (A. Lucaci)<sup>32</sup>.

Getting past the aesthetic and ideological censoring of Communism was not, however, the only problem for the artists of that time. For their finished product to be able to be exhibited, they needed a work space. Unfortunately, after the war, it was hard to find a house, let alone an art studio, where inspiration could freely come. The party and the art syndicates did support the valued artists, who expressed understanding for the new regime. Although it was in political captivity, art was a privileged area under communism and this is why, in the whole of Eastern Europe, care was taken to ensure that there were important spaces and beautiful houses set aside as art studios<sup>33</sup>. From 1948 to 1949, they drew up charts of musicians, artists, writers who needed homes. One such chart showed Alexandru Ciucurencu's need for four rooms (his family had four members), Mihael Beniuc – 2 rooms, the painters George Barbieri, Gh. Anghel, Stelian Borteanu etc., 2 or 3 rooms<sup>34</sup>. It seems that not only did some of these have houses that were not their own, but some did not have a house at all. A new list with 52 names, shows us that the regime was prepared to support the cultural world. On this list we find writers (Eugen Jebelianu,

<sup>31</sup> Boris Groys, *Art Power*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2008, p. 145.  
<sup>32</sup> ANR, The Ministry of Art and Information's Fund, File 166/1949, f. 48.  
<sup>33</sup> Miklos Haraszti, *op. cit.*, p. 50.  
<sup>34</sup> ANR, The Ministry of Art and Information's Fund, File 13/1948-1949, f. 118-119.





Dan Deşliu, Petre Stetcu, Victor Kernbach), musicians (Ion Voicu, Martiian Negrea, Vasile Popovici, Lucian Calotă) or plastic artists (Gh. Saru, Maximilian Schulman, Eugen Profeta, Ela Siegler, Nicolae Furdescu)<sup>35</sup>.

The "fight" for these spaces in which to create took place as a collision of the ministries after, at the end of 1948 and beginning of 1949, the Ministry of Arts and Information were informed that the Rental Offices from the Ministry of Interior had sent letters to the members of the artists' syndicate to "evacuate the extra room that they own for their professional activities at home"<sup>36</sup>. It would seem that, after a statement from the government, they were requesting the limitation of the living space of citizens and were urgently requesting the evacuation of free rooms. The ideologist N. Moraru, however, who in other situations ruled over the artists with a rod of iron, spoke to the Interior Ministry to protect the people under him. He also insisted on mentioning that the problem was being looked at by the regime and that "at the Protection of Artistic Works, they were currently working on charts which would be sent to the Rental Offices in order to receive clean houses, that were adequate for the needs of creative work for a number of artists, writers, composers and painters"<sup>37</sup>. The problem was known to the leaders of the party and communism did not contest the magical role of the art studio<sup>38</sup>. This place had to help the artist be inspired and produce magnificent works of art for Socialist Realism.

The Art institutions were not much better off in that epoch. Exhibitions, art universities, clubs and the headquarters of the Union of Plastic Arts were not to be found in houses that offered extraordinary conditions. Instead, an atmosphere of ruin and darkness floated over all Romanian art. Thus a report drawn up about the places the Bucharest Art Institute used talks about buildings that needed overall repairs. Many of them had fallen into disrepair because of the bombings or the lack of renovations. The building at Calea Griviței number 22, where a part of the

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 180-181.

<sup>36</sup> ANR, The Ministry of Art and Information's Fund, File 15/1949, f. 11.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 12.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Peppatt, Alice Bellony-Rewald, *Imagination's chamber: Artists and their Studios*, London, Gordon Fraser, 1983, p. 201.

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University of Plastic Arts and the Dean's Office were "needs immediate and radical repairs. We wish to mention that the electric wiring changed in 1941 because of the war and at that date, due to lack of materials, it was done with poor quality materials, which meant that the Communal Plant only authorised it for 3 years... That was 8 years ago. This is why the wires often catch fire in the tubes and this presents a permanent possibility of a fire"<sup>39</sup>. Another building, at Intrarea Iulia Hasdeu number 3, received the following characterisation: "the building is very old and completely deteriorated. It has not been repaired for over 21 years, so since 1928. The improper character of the rooms is made worse by the fact that the damp and lack of light are a permanent danger to the health of those who work in this place"<sup>40</sup>. Unfortunately, such situations were not exceptions, but rather the "normality" in which the new learners of socialist realism had to work. Although the material conditions offered to the universities and colleges of Art, at the beginning of Communism were not very good, they were as good as could be in a country just out of the war, as the state assumed the role of a generous patron for artists. It was a treacherous patronage, however, as it established at the same time a monopoly over artistic education in the country"<sup>41</sup>.

In the same way, we see many irregularities at the yearly Exhibition of Graphic Arts in June 1949. Due to the state the rooms were in, the Service of Museums and Exhibitions of the Ministry of the Arts demanded that the Electric Society take measures to re-do and change the electrical installations. Then, several days after the vernissage, running water was stopped. An urgent request was made to the Communal factories in Bucharest, to turn the water back on, promising that the Ministry of the Arts would pay all the expenses"<sup>42</sup>. Thus we see that organisation obstacles were not small ones in those times and, of course, they made life and the possibilities of the artists to aspire to fame much more difficult.

<sup>39</sup> ANR, The Ministry of Art and Information's Fund, File 15/1949, f. 135.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>41</sup> Miklos Haraszti, *op. cit.*, p. 132

<sup>42</sup> ANR, The Ministry of Art and Information's Fund, File 166/1949, f. 27-55.

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## Temptations and Incentives offered to Romanian Artists

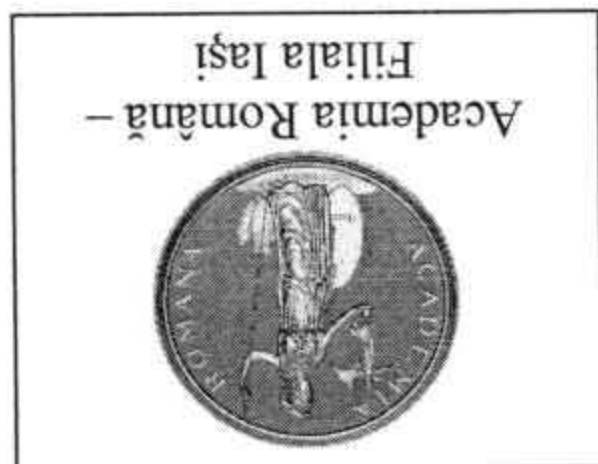
There were, however, many incentives which could reward the services offered for art and

generous orders from the State were just a few of the methods with which the party-state could attract the artists' attention and "corrupt" them to follow an ideologised/politicised art. For 1948-49, we found a "Chart of students who will go to study in the USSR". The list of 41 names contained students from Bucharest, Cluj and Timișoara, who had different specialties: Theatre, Music, and Plastic Arts. In the field we are interested in, there were: Claretta Wachter, Labocz Laszlo, Freiberg Gheorghe, Hora Coriolan, Kadar Francis and Tolan Ion<sup>43</sup>. The mature artists were also interested in jobs in education, at universities and colleges, which meant a real possibility of rounding up their income and progressing with their career. A chart with the members of UAP suggested for jobs in education shows us not only important names like Alexandru Ciucurencu, Constantin Baraschi, Cornel Medrea, M. H. Maxy, Corneliu Baba, but also other artists that found it easier to walk up those steps to glory. Amongst them were most of the elite caricaturists (Ion Doru, Cik Damadian, Nell Cobar, Rik Auerbach, Eugen Taru), but also other painters and drawers, who we find in other places as being "noticed" in those years (Adina Moscu, Gheorghe Ivancenco, Nazarie Pavlin, Vasile Kazar, Eva Cerbu, Eugen Popa etc.)<sup>44</sup>.

It was generally these same people who fought over the prizes and medals given out by

the Communist State. Between 1948-1951 these favours were bestowed on 29 artists. The yearly prizes or the ones awarded at exhibitions were given to: Cik Damadian, Marcela Cordescu, Tech Francisc, Dan Hatmanu, Kraus Tiberiu, Bordy Andrei, Eugen Popa, Saru Gheorghe, Moscu Adina, Eugen Taru, Lelia Zuat. A minority of the elite received the order of Work: Al. Ciucurencu – Order of Work Class I, Iosif Iser – Class I, Ligia Macovei – Class II, Boris Caragea – Class III, Vida Gheza – Class II, Zoe Baicoianu – Class III. There were other distinctions that the artists worked towards: Work Merit, the Work Medal, the RPR Star, and the Andreescu Award. The

<sup>43</sup> ANR, The Ministry of Art and Information's Fund, File 13/1948-1949, f. 154-155.  
<sup>44</sup> ANR, The Union of Plastic Artists' Fund, File 17/1950, f. 171-172.



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<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 132.  
<sup>46</sup> ANR, The Ministry of Art and Information's Fund, File 15/1949, f. 225-227.  
<sup>47</sup> Hans Abbing, *Why are Artists poor? The Exceptional Economy of the Arts*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2002, p. 82.

younger ones were happy with an honourable mention<sup>45</sup>. Let us have a look at the "remarkable" works these prizes were given for. The titles are telling and give us the degree of ideological alignment but they do not exclude the professional abilities of the artists: Gheorghe Saru – the painting *Ilie Pintilie*; Paul Atanasiu – the painting *The Fights of the Tudor Vladimirescu Division at Debrețin*; Jean Steriade – *Portrait of the poet A. Toma*; Nicolae Popescu – the poster *Bread*; Eugen Taru – his illustrations for the volume *Moments and Sketches* by I. L. Caragiale; Ligia Macovei – the painting *Women of Lidice*; Cîk Damadian – the caricatures *The Schumann Plan*, *The Imperialist Press*. It was not only the Romanian topics that were awarded, but also those inspired by foreign parts: Csorvassy Ștefan – *Korean Partisans* – sculpture; Dario Lazăr – the sculpture *I. V. Stalin*; Constantin Baraschi – the sculpture: *Lenin and Stalin at Smolnit*<sup>46</sup>. From those examples, we draw the conclusion that strong scenes, with a powerful impact were the most appreciated. The Communist hero type, a model for all the generations that had to suffer the Marxist metamorphosis was at the top of the list for appreciations. A different type of art that pleased the critics of the time was the pictures of group heroism (military, historic, social) and different aspects of human pain – as long as the pain was transformed into a victorious sacrifice. In many cases there was the manichaeist antithesis of physical perfection, strength of character and will of iron of the leaders or the proletarian masses with the occidental treachery, diabolical minds of the western heads of state and the plagued bodies of the small Romanian capitalists. The triumph of the new man over the old one had to seem complete. All of a sudden, we can see that the artists were actually doing better for themselves under communism than in a free economy. And seeing as the artists' prosperity depended on rewards and appreciations coming from the outside, there was a way to get money and fame even then<sup>47</sup>. Individual selfishness could be fed with what the regime offered.






Amongst these artists there were some well-known ones (Alexandru Ciucurencu, Corneliu Baba, Dan Hatmanu) who had a good career in Romania. They did not, however, become public voices with large impact like Rockwell Kent<sup>48</sup> or Carl Andre<sup>49</sup> did in the West, artists who made their life's purpose to express their leftist opinions.

Painters, sculptors and drawers were offered certain trips, national and international ones. If the international ones were given as a reward, trips to different areas of the country, to keep in touch with socialist reality, were given on a case to case basis. Thus, in May 1951, the Graphics department of the UAP debated about these national trips which had to inspire the artists to produce relevant works of art. Where could the artists go to not be isolated from Socialist realism? Some went to study electrification at Bicaș or in Hunedoara, others chose an industrial inspiration in Reșița, Hunedoara, Ghelar or Bucharest; they did not neglect either the mines at Lupeni, Petroșani or Anina, whilst those who were agricultural adepts, travelled to the rural villages<sup>50</sup>.

There were also many opportunities for Romanian Artists to participate in different international fairs and exhibitions, in the East or the West. Until 1951, Romanian artists went to events in Vienna, Plovdiv, Prague, Milan, Rome, Paris, Athens, Budapest, Poznan, Moscow, Berlin, Beijing, Stockholm, London or Marseilles. Most of these events were not specifically artistic, but they encouraged the artists' participation. Many of them were economic sample fairs or Exhibitions of the Cooperative and others, events with very different themes: *The Romanian-Soviet Collaboration, The Partisans, I.V. Stalin, The USSR Heading the Fight for Peace, Books and the Press, Folk Art*<sup>51</sup>. The participation of Romanian painters, drawers or sculptors was not only considered a patriotic act, as it promoted Romania in the international space, but it also added something to the artist's biography, who could then be better known in his trade. The artists, therefore, played the game and became a part of the political elite and a part of the state's

<sup>48</sup> Paul Cummings, *Artists in their own words*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1976, p. 8.  
<sup>49</sup> *Talking Art. Interviews with Artists since 1976*, edited by Patricia Bickers and Andrew Wilson, Art Monthly Ridinghouse, 2007, p. 82.  
<sup>50</sup> ANR, The Union of Plastic Artists' Fund, File 20/1950, f. 116-117.  
<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, File 17/1950, f. 138.

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mechanism. They were influenced by the factors of the environment in which they evolved, they were interested in survival but also in fame, they had professional motivations but also material ones for their activities, even if this made them become complete slaves to the State<sup>52</sup>.

Once the international trips started, art was also used to promote Bucharest's image abroad. It seems that this strategy was inherited, in some ways, from the preceding regime, but after 1947 the artists themselves had insisted that their works be placed in the embassies of communist Romania or to be a part of the presents offered to the hosting countries. In a very critical report, called *Comments on some problems in our relationships with foreign countries and suggestions for improvements*, an (unnamed) artist took a harsh X-ray of the superficial use of art works by the diplomats of the People's Republic of Romania<sup>53</sup>. He had visited almost all the representatives of Romania in communist capitals, "in none of them was there a trace of our plastic arts (although it is true that in China there were a couple of very poor works which I could not call works of art). No classic art, no contemporary art is shown at our embassies. There are no beautiful objects of applied or folk art in our embassies"<sup>54</sup>.

The author of this report mentions that other states knew how to cleverly display their art (the comparison with Bulgaria is repeated many times, to our disadvantage) and that only Romanian diplomats offer kitsch objects instead of representative arts ("horrible wooden bowls from the uncontrolled production of what used to be Romanian Export or from the uncontrolled production of the cooperatives"). At that time there were very few good quality Romanian art magazines abroad and others were of a doubtful quality ("In Germany they have a couple of numbers of *Uzica* that have been printed in terrible quality" although Romanian caricaturists seemed to be the most appreciated in the east, after the Soviet ones)<sup>55</sup>.

<sup>52</sup> Mark Rothko, *The Artist's Reality. Philosophies of Art*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2004, p. 15-16.

<sup>53</sup> ANR, The Union of Plastic Artists' Fund, File 20/1950, f. 21-25.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 21.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 22.

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To remedy the situation, there were a couple of daring suggestions: to promote folk art outside the country, for the embassies to have good quality copies of the most important art works created after 1945, for the UAP to offer paintings for external propaganda, to increase the number of copies of art magazines so that they can be sent all over the world, for the diplomatic representatives to be sent albums with photos of Romania and caricature albums (which were the most successful), for them to open art shops abroad with folk and applied art.<sup>56</sup>

### Political cartoons as a source for the History

The Cold War, that became visible especially through the political crisis, diplomatic tensions and arms race, was carried on with refined weapons who, even though were used in the background, had a remarkable efficiency. The battles held in military, political and economic field were accompanied by propaganda, where the Eastern and Western ideologists could afford experiments and mind games in order to gain the trust of the targeted audience. However, this dimension also used strong strategies as those in high-politics areas, and the use of white propaganda, black propaganda and sub-propaganda served to create confusion by distorting the truth and by highlighting some relative realities<sup>57</sup>.

In this landscape of political and ideological rivalry, the use of humour as a subspecies of propaganda had its advantages for its initiators. Being able to provide interesting nuances, from grotesque to extravagant, the comic proved that it had complex social functions and managed to impose, in an easier way, the shaping of people's attitudes and beliefs rather than through brutal methods associated with the debasement of the human mind. Propaganda through humour took a somewhat human form in a dark age, so as to be easily accepted by the different social segments<sup>58</sup>. By somehow eluding the political animosities, the comic was using its playful function in an efficient way, imposing pseudo-values, feelings and fake models.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 23.

<sup>57</sup> Garth S. Jowett, Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion* (Newbury Park, London: Sage Publications Inc., 1992), 8-10.

<sup>58</sup> *Umorul. Cea mai ieftină terapie* (Humor, the cheapest therapy) (Timișoara: Eurobit, 2008), 40-43.





The caricatures were successfully used, at first, in order to discredit the political rivalries in different countries, as shown by the famous cases of political battles<sup>59</sup>. Then, it was considered that they should be equally useful in case of international conflicts or adversities between civilizations<sup>60</sup>. The enemy was presented as barbarian, cruel and dreadful and it was preferable that he would inspire hatred and not amusement<sup>61</sup>. It was important that the opponent was identified in a foreign area, as part of evil, an evil that demanded to be exorcised. The imposing of this image provided a legitimization of violence since the presence of evil automatically meant the necessity of its extermination<sup>62</sup>.

Here, one can observe the insidious development of the Eastern European communist propaganda that invented rivals, sketched them into details, even when they did not exist. The political leaders have used people's need for an outside enemy in order to mobilize the masses<sup>63</sup> and to conserve the potential of national hostility, but also for the transfer of hatred from old enemies (Germany) to the new enemies - the Westerners<sup>64</sup>.

Obviously, the external threat was always presented through coarse stereotypes and the enemy was viewed only as a whole, without any good traits, without any human side<sup>65</sup>. However, he was generating violence and aggression, he was immoral but, on the other hand, the

<sup>59</sup> Isabel Simeral Johnson, "Cartoons", *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 3, July 1937, 38-42; Chang-Tai Hung, "The Fuming Image: Cartoons and Public Opinion in Late Republican China, 1945 to 1949", *Comparatives Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 36, No. 1, January 1994, 123.

<sup>60</sup> Eberhard Demm, "Propaganda and Caricature in the First World War", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 28, No. 1, January 1993; Petra Kuppinger, "Review", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 4, November 2000.

<sup>61</sup> Eberhard Demm, "Propaganda and Caricature...", 185.

<sup>62</sup> Mark Poindexter, "ABC's The Path to 9/11, Terror-Management Theory and the American Monomyth", *Film & History*, July, 1, 2008, 57.


<sup>63</sup> Shoon Kathleen Murray, Jason Meyers, "Do People Need Foreign Enemies?", *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 43, No. 5, October 1999, 555-556.

<sup>64</sup> Rune Ottosen, "Enemy Images and the Journalistic Process", *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 32, No. 1, February 1995, 99.

<sup>65</sup> Paul Coman, "Reading about Enemy: School Textbook Representation of Germany's Role in the War with Britain during the Period from April 1940 to May 1941", *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 1996, 333.

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Easterners – as the “good heroes” were allowed to threaten, because it was done in the name of

justice (international justice)<sup>66</sup>.

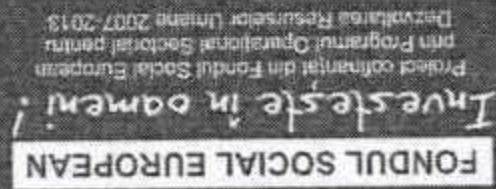
In such a violent imagery, peace and war were the main themes of those cartoons with a propagandistic role. Most times in the history of humanity the artists were relating to these themes only to emphasize the cruelty and cynicism<sup>67</sup> and rarely did they achieve a philosophy of visual morality<sup>68</sup>. The effect of the message of war graphics had to be rough, simple and straightforward and this was also the case of the Romanian cartoons. One camp “wanted” peace, another one “worked” for a war that could’ve brought a capitalist profit.

Focusing many visual symbols in a super symbol, the political cartoons and graphics have easily imposed over ethnic and linguistic boundaries, delivering clear messages, often even brutal, but rapidly understood by all the receivers, from common people to national elites.

The Soviet masters Efimov, Gant, Eliseev were real role models for the Romanian cartoonists - Ioan Doru, Nell Cobar, Eugen Taru, Cik Damandian, Rik Auerbach – who copied the themes and also the brutality of the Soviet message<sup>69</sup>. The propagandistic mission extended to the Romanian political cartoons was also seen in the decision taken by the communist to group in albums and exhibitions the most representative works. They received explanations as texts written in English and French, thus allowing everybody to understand that they targeted, as influence, and external environment<sup>70</sup>.

### **How we decipher the ideologized images, used in a propagandistic manner by the Romanian Communist Party**

<sup>66</sup> David R. Spencer, “Visions of Violence. A Cartoon Study of America and War”, *American Journalism*, 21(2), 47-48, Spring 2004, 52-55.  
<sup>67</sup> Brian Keith-Smith, “Review”, *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 99, No. 3, July 2004, 858.  
<sup>68</sup> Chang-Tai Hung, “War and Peace in Feng Zikai’s Wartime Cartoons”, *Modern China*, Vol. 16, No. 1, January 1990.  
<sup>69</sup> Virgil Tărau, “Caricatură și politică externă. România anilor 1950-1951” (“Cartoons and foreign policy. Romania during 1950-1951”), *România și relațiile internaționale în secolul XX (Romania and international relations in the 20th century)*, eds. Liviu Tărau and Virgil Tărau, (Cluj Napoca: Clusium Publishing house, 2000), 220.  
<sup>70</sup> Virgil Tărau, “Cartoons and foreign...”.







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In order to determine what was the contribution of graphics in shaping national identities in the Romanian post-war imagery, we've chosen approximately 100 caricatures (mainly) and political graphics from "Scânteia" newspaper, the Romanian Communist Party official newspaper. The images have been selected from the period 1950-1955 and relate to political and social issues which comprised the core of visual propaganda of the communist regime. I intend to follow several directions of analysis: how many images (percentage) were of the enemy and if real or symbolic characters representing Romania, USSR or the Eastern bloc were caricatured, to what extent positive cartoons presenting Romania's Western rivals appeared, what were the major themes addressed in the visual propaganda from "Scânteia" newspaper, what characters/countries were preeminent in images and which was the aggressiveness dose induced by the images loaded with ideological symbolism. Equally important is to establish the details that helped in providing different shades to the various national identities, local particularities and representative characters for certain nations. This are going to interpreted with the support of specialized literature, after patterns already offered by the cases analyzed by the Western or Romanian researchers who had previously conducted similar studies on related topics.

The political cartoons and graphics from "Scânteia" newspaper of the '50s were systematically used as tools that could've drawn a new national identity within the young communist state. Almost mandatory, the socialist identity elements, visually presented, combined tradition, from the background already known by the people, with the new directions imposed by Dej regime. Thus, the Romanian strength of the peasants and workers was perfectly corresponding with those details insisting on the idea of work, peace, self-confidence, confidence in the future, optimism, progress and building of a new society.

On the European scale, we have enough examples of national images, reasonably built, on the basis of some popular stereotypes or, on the contrary, as a result of ideological orders. A nation seen through other nations' eyes may be sometimes hilarious, or it may be uploaded with gravity in certain situations. Thus, the Irish seen by the Americans or British appeared as





uneducated people, drinkers and needy, having miserable jobs - cooks, maids, bricklayers<sup>71</sup>. The

Americans were portrayed as dominators by the British<sup>72</sup>, racists and abusers by the Mexicans<sup>73</sup>


and their image in the Soviet newspapers, in the first stage of the Cold War, was condensed in the most detrimental symbols: Ku Klux Klan, gangsters, militarists, greedy capitalists<sup>74</sup>. We

understand from these examples that when a nation wants to maculate the image of another nation, it acts brutally by reducing the characteristics of that nation only to its vices and elementary flaws. This was done in the Romanian case also, when the communists sought to "reveal" to the common people the "hideous" personality of the Western nations.


While identity and alterity are intrinsically linked, PCR's ideology aimed to present what was abroad as aggressive and dangerous, foreign countries that were also shaping new post-war forms, but extremely different and opposed to the socialist identities who were now flourishing. Moreover, in antithesis with the Western features, rather than through explicit tags, to the Romanians, in particular, and Easterners in general, were given those elements of positive personality.

The images were used in a different way for political manipulation, for generating attitudes and shaping national or group identities. While the negative features of the Western nations and alliances were exaggerated and hyperbolized in the political cartoons - much more efficient weapons for the creation of a sort of an evil symbolic prestige, the Eastern and Romanian virtues were displayed exclusively through drawings, sketches and graphics loaded with seriousness that kept distance from the caricature and mockery. In addition, the images of the enemy were greatly outnumbering those of the "socialist concentration camp", therefore it created the impression that the Western evil is omnipresent and incessantly putting pressures on a peaceful Eastern state.


<sup>71</sup> Jennifer K. Hardy, "The Caricature Of The Irish In British And U.S. Comic Art", *The Historian*, Vol. 54, Issue 2, December 1992.  
<sup>72</sup> Allen McLaurin, "America Through British Eyes. Dominance and subordination in British political cartoons of the 1940s", *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 5, 2007.  
<sup>73</sup> Stephen D. Morris, "Exploring Mexican Images of the United States", *Mexican Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 1, Winter 2000.  
<sup>74</sup> Alexander Dalling, "America Through Soviet Eyes", *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 1, Spring 1947.




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## The enemy – popular images and false identities

The ideologized graphical art, inserted in "Scânteia" newspaper, during 1950-1955, hasn't had too many references to the national identity of those involved in the rivalries of the Cold War. There were preferences to other details and it might be observed a translation of attention from the national identities to group or class identities. However, in many cases, elements of national colour that helped readers distinguish between Western and Eastern European nations are easy to identify.

Focusing first on the political cartoons, we may assert that the Romanian artists preferred to ridicule the political and military leaders of the West. After all, the heads of states and governments were meant to embody a whole nation and their personality features were skilfully linked to the features of the nations. Truman represented the entire United States, Churchill - United Kingdom, Adenauer - Germany, Plăstiras - Greece<sup>75</sup>. Metonymy was intelligently forced and all the vices and negative features of the leaders were transferred to those countries, thus decaying in the eyes of the Romanian public<sup>76</sup>.

On a simplistic view, we can assert that the images were actively participating in the creation of national identities through over-sizing some unique virtues, or by simplifying and distorting other features<sup>77</sup>. Obviously, the images of the foreigners have deep roots, perhaps even historic, in a society, but they are constantly changing. In our case, positive or neutral images were converted into negative symbols<sup>78</sup> through the exacerbation of hatred towards certain nations or their symbolic linking to contemporary criminals<sup>79</sup>. We shouldn't be surprised by this visual violence because the masses, to which the cartoons were addressed to, needed

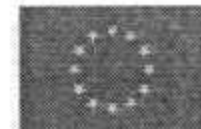
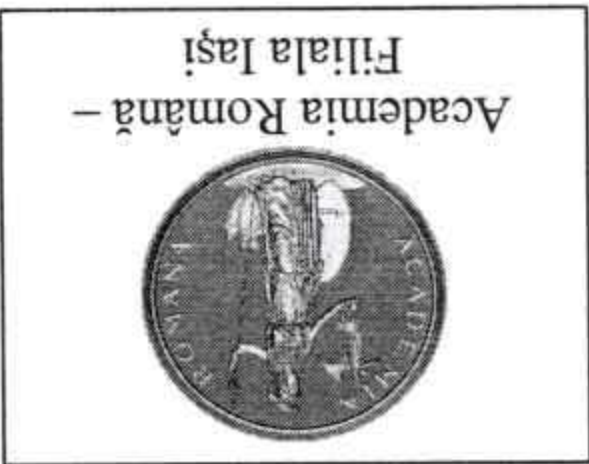
<sup>75</sup> Scânteia, September 9, 1950, March 16, 1951, October 24, 1951, July 9, 1952.

<sup>76</sup> Brian Keith-Smith, "Review...", 858.

<sup>77</sup> Christina Michelmore, "Old Pictures in New Frames. Images of Islam and Muslims in Post World War II American Political Cartoons", *Journal of American and comparative cultures*, January, 1, 2000, 37; Sidney Tarrow, "Paradigm Warriors: Regress and Progress in the Study of Contentious Politics", *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 14, No. 1, March 1999, 73.

<sup>78</sup> Rune Ottosen, "Enemy Images...", 98.

<sup>79</sup> Scânteia, January 24, 1951, January 14, 1954.






nationalism and a rudimentary alterity<sup>80</sup>. Subsequently, just as in the cases of individuals or groups who build their identity through stereotypes and the activation of hostility and fear towards the enemies, the nations use the same impulses, but with more refined instruments - media, language, discourses<sup>81</sup>. Even in the case we studied, we can state that the history of caricature excels in racial, identity and religious discrimination, almost always stressing the superiority of one nation over others<sup>82</sup>.

The perceptions of the enemy have a huge importance. Negative perceptions may arise from misinterpretation or deliberate distortions<sup>83</sup>. An open country that comes in contact with its rivals may change its opinion about them but, on the other hand, a closed country is able to better conserve the images that terrify the masses. Although for some decades it has been told that these perceptions of enemies matter greatly upon the decisions of a nation, by the end of the twentieth century some researchers have established that the image of the enemy is less important and, on the contrary, other details - social and cultural - are important in a fundamental way<sup>84</sup>. Then, not always the opponents' negative alterities and stereotypes were a problem in itself, but only when they were accompanied by a certain level of insecurity perceived by those who felt threatened, in a real or fictional way, from outside the borders<sup>85</sup>.

The national identity of the protagonists of the political caricature was rendered through several efficient details: clothing items such as folk costumes or national fashion garments, crafts and activities that got into the general imaginary as having a local or regional character and even

- <sup>80</sup> Rhys Jones, "Relocating nationalism: On the Geographies of Reproducing Nations", *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Vol. 33, Issue 3, July 2008, 325.  
<sup>81</sup> Judith A. Howard, "Social Psychology of Identities", *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 26, 2000, 371-372.  
<sup>82</sup> David Keane, "Cartoon Violence and Freedom of Expression", *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 4, November 2008.  
<sup>83</sup> Noel Kaplowitz, "National Self-Images, Perception of Enemies, and Conflict Strategies: Psychopolitical Dimensions of International Relations", *Political Psychology*, Vol. 11, No. 1, March 1990, 54-55.  
<sup>84</sup> Michele G. Alexander, Shana Levin, P.J. Henry, "Image Theory, Social Identity, and Social Dominance: Structural Characteristics and Individual Motives Underlying International Images", *Political Psychology*, Vol. 26, No. 1, February 2005, 27-29.  
<sup>85</sup> Mark Schafer, "Cooperative and Confictual Policy Preferences: The Effect of Identity, Security, and Image of the Other", *Political Psychology*, Vol. 20, No. 4, December 1999.



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- 86 Scanteia, March 22, 1951, June 5, 1951, October 10, 1952.
- 87 Scanteia, December 11, 1952, April 15, 1953.
- 88 Scanteia, July 9, 1952, December 11, 1952.
- 89 Scanteia, March 25, 1951, July 22, 1952, September 22, 1953.
- 90 Scanteia, February 6, 1950, June 4, 1950, April 15, 1951, October 2, 1953.
- 91 Thomas C. Davis, "Revisiting Group Attachment: Ethnic and National Identity", *Political Psychology*, Vol. 20, No. 1, March 1999, 26.

In the development and evolution of images related to identity, we truly see the implementation of the idea according to which nations are imagined communities, and the national connections - a social construct - are predisposed to constant change<sup>91</sup>. Thus, the communists allowed themselves to do social engineering to restore local identities, on the one hand, and to change the Westerners' identities in the Eastern imagery, on the other hand. The new identities of the communist nations were forged through discourse and images, which were appealing directly to feelings and emotions, patriotic and class affiliation. Especially in times of international turmoil, when enemies were invented, the Romania's new political leaders knew that

As for the activities and characters that defined certain nations, the most frequently appearances were those of the American business man and banker, and quite seldom the Balkan bourgeoisie<sup>89</sup>. The Western business men were presented in exclusively negative circumstances, such as almost always funding illegal activities against the East or against the world peace. Frequently, their images were accompanied by the Dollar signs, banks, and even blood that was cynically placed near money and profit<sup>90</sup>.

In the first category were included, mainly, the American, English and French traditional national symbols, which, evidently, the most of them were treated with disdain. The Balkan nations, allies of the West, provided greater opportunities for the Romanian cartoonist in order to reproduce the local exoticism. Thus, the Turkish politicians appeared dressed with shalwars and yemenis, wearing loose clothing and fezzes<sup>87</sup>, the Greeks were presented in their national costumes - with fustanella (skirt), segoumi (embroidered vest) gonatares (feet garters) and tsarouhia (shoes with tassels)<sup>88</sup>.





attachment to other nations might be manipulated in a positive manner. There was a direct relationship between ethnic identity and self-esteem<sup>92</sup> and the leaders of the Romanian Communist Party were trying to provide real or imaginary reasons to increase the national prestige by relating to the foreigners.

The national symbols were also present, but lacking any substance or even with a distorted symbols. The British and American flags were the equivalent of imperialism, flaunting everywhere and stigmatizing any attempt towards normality<sup>93</sup>. Through thoughtful suggestions, these flags were both symbols of imperialism and colonialism. Then the British lion appeared especially in ridiculous roles, humiliated by the Americans. Scrawny, stanch and wounded, the British lion was just the shadow of the glorious times of Albion and it was relentlessly devoted to "Uncle Sam"<sup>94</sup>. "Uncle Sam" represented the United States of America, but his face was not as ruthless and grave as during the World War I but grotesque, Machiavellian, machinating intrigues and triggering wars.

A constant action of the Easterner cartoonist was to discredit the national symbols of the Western nations: flags, emblems, historical characters<sup>95</sup>. They represented the national identity in its most widely accepted sense, and casted the image of a nation to the whole world. By directly hitting the modern totems of the nations it equated with the dishonouring of the enemies and the mockery of their national symbols.

Instead, curiously, the Romanian cartoonists restored the dignity to France, after the Parliament of Paris opposed the American plan of a European Defense Community (European Army). France was personified as Delacroix's "Liberty Leading the People", a strong young


<sup>92</sup> Judith A. Howard, "Social Psychology...", 375.

<sup>93</sup> Scanteia, October 10, 1952, September 1, 1951, October 11, 1952, October 26, 1952.

<sup>94</sup> Scanteia, February 6, 1950, January 10, 1953.

<sup>95</sup> Karen A. Cerulo, "Symbols and the World System: National Anthems and Flags", *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 8, No. 2, June 1993.

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woman, wearing the Phrygian cap, a sign of the tendency towards autonomy<sup>96</sup>. Often, French as a woman was having a disagreement with an Adenauer wearing the Nazi helmet. In order to compromise the new Germans, almost all the West German ministers were portrayed as wearing a swastika or hiding behind a military helmet - the symbol of Wehrmacht<sup>97</sup>. These national symbols, from a distant or recent past, were probably easily recognizable by the Romanian readers. But they only receive a negative load even though some of them have had a different reputation in the Romanian society.

The ideological dispute of the Cold War hadn't highlighted, however, the national differences but preferred a confrontation on behalf of group identity - West versus East, or class identity - workers and peasants versus businessmen and bankers. By taking to background the national identities, it represented an advantage for the propaganda machines because, at least in the diverse forms of graphic art, class and group identities were just emerging and therefore it allowed the creation of almost unrestricted configurations of features of the enemy who was to be abolished in the eyes of humanity and as a symbolic prestige.

Class or group identities, regarding the Westerners, were almost circumscribed to the Evil and were permanently in antithesis to those related to the Good, the Easterners. In almost all the fields a binomial was created, where Evil was the tagged to the Westerners and the Good was an Easterner constant feature. Thus, pacifism is opposed to militarism and violence<sup>98</sup>, the peaceful construction is the opposite of destruction, crime and aggression were mirrored by labour and education<sup>99</sup>. Such brutal metaphors interrupted from forceful drawings, and the reader was left without any options from which to choose. Often, however, the message was not refined and complex but rough and aggressive. The communist doctrinarians and cartoonists were not concerned with finesse of the interpretation but only sought to persuade the public through an

<sup>96</sup> Scanteia, September 29, 1953, July 9, 1954, September 2, 1954.  
<sup>97</sup> Scanteia, October 2, 1952, July 9, 1954, September 5, 1954, March 25, 1955.  
<sup>98</sup> Scanteia, March 8, 1950, September 16, 1950, March 13, 1951, March 1, 1952.  
<sup>99</sup> Scanteia, April 7, 1951, December 31, 1951, November 21, 1952.

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avalanche of rude but extremely powerful messages.

In this picture, the Americans, French, British, Yugoslavs or Greeks received the same

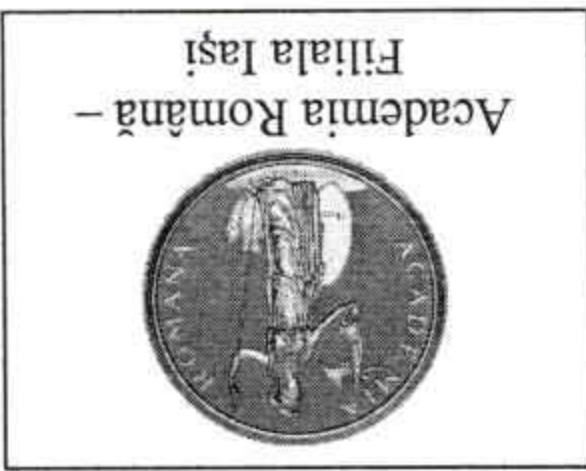
character features. There is little differentiation, and they were present mainly in those images which illustrated the Americans or those dedicated to Tito<sup>100</sup>; these characters were placed on the top of a hierarchy of repulsion drawn by the Eastern artists. Thus, the central ideas regarding the "personalities" of the Westerners were: aggression, violence, crime, perfidiousness, cupidity, immorality, cruelty and cynicism. Additionally, the Americans appeared as dominators, financing the West, humiliating even their allies, plotting bloody plans and cynical capitalists who armed the aggressors worldwide<sup>101</sup>. Tito, in turn, nicknamed the "Executioner", was always accompanied by an axe dripping with blood and he is shown as a traitor of his voyage fellows<sup>102</sup>.

The shaping of a new and powerful national-communist identity was serving not only the regimes but also individuals. According to J. Phinney<sup>103</sup>, commitment to a strong ethnic identity was correlated with a high self-esteem and was satisfying at least three fundamental human needs, as J.E. Mock emphasized: sense of belonging, a concern for survival and a preoccupation for the sense of values<sup>104</sup>. In various studies on the role of identities and the differences in the international relations specialists such as De Lameter, Katz, Kelman, Terhune, Brewer, Kowalski, Wolfe, analyzed the types of attachment and commitment that keep the individuals tied to their nations. Thus, the relation of the individual with the national community is valued in different ways: emotional, personal, legal, covering a wide range that extends from labour/family/country/places of recollection, to issues of social involvement and professional careers<sup>105</sup>.

The body metaphor and the human figure were also exploited in order to enhance the negative effect of caricature. Most of the times, the Westerners' bodies are often distorted, as to

- 100 Scantia, February 12, 1950, June 4, 1950.  
 101 Scantia, March 8, 1950, February 10, 1951, March 13, 1951, July 31, 1954.  
 102 Scantia, February 18, 1951, April 12, 1952.  
 103 Judith A. Howard, "Social Psychology...", 375.  
 104 Thomas C. Davis, "Revisiting Group Attachment...", 29.  
 105 Thomas C. Davis, "Revisiting Group Attachment...", 29-32.

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- 106 Scanteia, March 16, 1951, December 31, 1952, June 1, 1955.
- 107 Scanteia, March 4, 1951, March 18, 1951, December 31, 1954, December 29, 1955.
- 108 Scanteia, February 8, 1950, February 14, 1950, January 11, 1951, December 31, 1952.
- 109 Scanteia, December 29, 1951, January 4, 1952, January 3, 1953, October 31, 1954.
- 110 Scanteia, March 31, 1951, January 5, 1952, February 30, 1952, February 2, 1952, March 19, 1955.

With a great frequency were illustrated certain human typologies and social strata: the forces of nature<sup>110</sup>.

When referring to the images representing the Romanian or the communist countries, we find that they initially avoided the caricature area and are only simple drawings with a serious load. Those who had signed these graphics are not unknown... Not everyone could've drawn the winners and the "new people" of the East, but only the artists who were specifically agreed by the regime such as Adina Paula Moscu and Jules Perahim. The communist states were not represented by political or military leaders, as in the case of the capitalist countries, but by common people, often unknown, with whom the people should've identified themselves<sup>109</sup>. The scenes depicting the "new people" are not randomly chosen, but they were saying something through themselves. Thus, we observe the Romanians in the centre of paintings depicting labour, or egalitarian debate, sometimes they are shown while celebrating the party or facing the blind

**Romanians – the ideological creation of a communist identity**

transmit the idea that they were scrawny, petty and full of vices people. Reduced or thinned compared to the usual size, their bodies wore the marks of sin: humps, warts and bumps<sup>106</sup>. Only when they were presented as aggressive warriors, the Westerners or Tito became mighty giants, a hyperbole of the evil within. The figures of the enemies of the socialist camp were also immersed in the darkest wounds of the soul, denoting wickedness, malice, avarice and cruelty. As a counterweight, the Easterners always had bright faces and serene look, with mobilizing and winning attitudes, radiating optimism and self-confidence<sup>107</sup>. Thus, the propagandistic war was totally unequal and, at least in Romania, the Westerners lost any chance of being included in a natural human registry. In association with various animals that arouse repulsion (frogs, snakes, rats, owls) the rivals of the East were transferred in the soiled area of subhuman<sup>108</sup>.





hero, the activist, the parent, the worker, the peasant, the miner. Propaganda was pushed to a limit where, through the flag of the Romanian Communist Party, the family was united and a mother who held her child in her arms, as a symbol of the future, explained to the entire country how to vote at the polls<sup>111</sup>. Individuals were often accompanied by items suggesting labour and the building of a new society: the hammer, tractors, lathes, loom and harvester.

The women and the peasants wore traditional Romanian costumes or worker uniforms. Thus, the overalls were next the embroidered peasant shirt ("ie"), the head kerchief ("maramă"), Romanian peasant caps and men plain shirts<sup>112</sup>. The national costumes, simple but decent, became a virtue when compared to the tail coats and the military uniforms in which the Westerners were dressed by the communist cartoonists. It is interesting that in these images the Romanian educated social categories do not appear, but only the members of the strata on which the Romanian Communist Party was founded. By using common people, it is quite obvious to who this kind of simplistic propaganda was quite easily addressed to, through its clearly expressed messages.

The features of the Easterners were exclusively positive: the accessibility and labour enthusiasm, honesty, dialogue, kindness, diligence, desire for peace, winner attitude. These people were depicted in special stances: always optimistic, energetic, in a continuous mobilization, with maximum self-confidence. The socialist Good was accomplished through circumstances that ennobled: resourceful labour, education that illuminated the masses, struggle for peace, building yards. The Romanian faces were serene and radiated a complete inner happiness. The body metaphor also rendered the superiority of the individual living in a communist regime compared to the unhappiness of those living in capitalism. Their bodies were harmonious and well-built, their arms - a symbol of labour and activity, were strong and untiring,

111 Scanteia, December 20, 1953.  
 112 Scanteia, March 4, 1951, January 5 1952, April 30, 1953, October 31, 1954, May 6, 1955.





eyes - intelligent, high forehead and the individual attitude - almost always triumphant<sup>113</sup>. Hillarious

said, even the deceased individuals from these drawings were aware of the "noble" mission they

had and the "glorious" times they were passing through.

We find clear data regarding self images of a nation or the perception of the enemy in the communist visual propaganda, details that influence the conflict strategies. This imaginary structure, a result of the revaluation of cognitive and depth psychology, interpreted in a behavioural manner, leads us to the idea that political attitudes may arise from needs, emotions, perceptions, beliefs and even from the environment in which we are evolving. Moreover, thus appears the idea of an extended self and begins from the individual and includes the nation and national symbols<sup>114</sup>. Therefore, automatically, an improvement of the national image, leads to the increase of self-esteem and not only to the strengthening of the political prestige of the regime of that time.


Nations' self images have, without doubt, a cultural dimension and are often given by community's perceptions of their own history. There is a tendency to look on the outside to the others in order to define our own behaviour, but at the same time, it matters how people see their history, what lessons they learned, what are their aspirations, what they think about national goals and about their own powers and limitations<sup>115</sup>. Not infrequently, the improvement of self-images requires a long term strategy that uses moral images (virtues, the desire for peace, claiming the truth) so as to increase the perceived prestige and to chase away the fear of humiliation in international relations<sup>116</sup>.

**Final considerations – Art subordinated to the Single-Party**

<sup>113</sup> Scanteia, December 22, 1951, January 4, 1952, January 3, 1953, April 30, 1953, October 31, 1954, March 19, 1955.  
<sup>114</sup> Noel Kaplowitz, "National Self-Images...", 42-43.  
<sup>115</sup> Noel Kaplowitz, "National Self-Images...", 47.  
<sup>116</sup> Noel Kaplowitz, "National Self-Images...", 48-50.

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In terms of Cold War tensions, a special relationship between images, cartoons, national attitudes and political strategies was created. Starting from popular understandings and simplistic perceptions, the humorous graphics intensively helped to outline the image of the Western countries in the imaginary of the Eastern nations. The considerable visual impact of these propaganda products led, probably, to the articulation, over political and language boundaries, of opinions about the Western rivals. The message of these images claimed the revealing of truth and, in addition to the mobilizing role of art, we observe the manner in which the nationalist formulas were articulated, combined with the rejection of the Western patterns of modernization.

The recurrent themes were greatly used in images, precisely in order to better set certain negative "features" of the Westerners<sup>117</sup>. Thus, themes such as: the Western domination, peace and war, aggressive capitalism, American militarism, false Western democracy and so on, were heavily used. Of these, the anti-Americanism made a distinct mark<sup>118</sup>, becoming not only an ideology but a permanent hallmark of hatred. In order to shape as good as possible the image of the aggressor, Uncle Sam was chosen from all the American emblems and exploited in a registry of evil, of a disordered mind that permanently machinated plots. The East-West dispute can be pursued -indirectly- also on the split/fissure between modernization and economic and social stagnation, as seen in other cases of clashes between civilizations (Islam-Occident)<sup>119</sup>. The East was described as conservative, cautious to the assault of money, banks, capitalist industry, being satisfied to maintain a prudent circumspection to the modernization proposed by the West.

The analysis of this type of political graphic leads to the idea that alterity was brought to front only through different tactics of cultural violence. It is understandable that these cartoons organized and directed the hostility of the masses, creating illusions and forging national

<sup>117</sup> Yeshayahu Nir, "U.S. Involvement in the Middle East Conflict in Soviet Cartoons", *Journalism Quarterly*, Vol. 54, No. 4, Winter 1977, 700-702.  
<sup>118</sup> David Ryan, "Americanisation and anti-Americanism at the periphery. Nicaragua and the Sandinistas", *European Journal of American Culture*, Vol. 23, No. 2, 2004, 112.  
<sup>119</sup> Petra Kuppinger, "Review", 572.







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To ensure the collaboration of the artists, the PCR ideologists invented, being inspired by the soviet model, a treacherous system in which coercion mixed with incentives and with the illusion of the official support for all the areas of culture. On one hand, all of the public artistic manifestations were strictly controlled, by a series of biased criteria and judges that had more to

When the communist government took over in Romania after the war, the world of art became more and more strictly controlled, and in the end, completely subordinated to the political interests of the new totalitarian regime. The PCR ideologists, some of them from soviet roots, became coordinators and decision-makers over the Romanian artists, who had once been so bohemian and full of life. In the name of the new social order, even in a pretence of progress, the painters, drawers or sculptors were asked to adhere to socialist realism and to abandon other art movements, which were declared decadent and formalist with shameful middle-class roots. In only a couple of years, art lost its aesthetic autonomy and also the liberty to choose themes and subjects that inspired its creators. With a maximum brutality, they decreed that art now served the proletarian masses and the extreme left party and had new functions in that regimental society. In an era of proletarianism, art had to reflect the realities that were changing after 1945, art had to educate the masses in the Marxist-Leninist spirit and had as its mission to actively support the victory of Socialism in Romania.

### Artists in Communist Romania - Conclusions

that either dignified or, on the contrary, depreciated. virtuous qualities. The national identities were filled, chaotically, with social or character features were full of defects and vices, real or invented, and the Romanians were awarded with the most repulsion of certain social strata in certain nations. In this way, the Western ethnics and nations details with the ethnical ones, the communist propagandistic cartoon translated the hatred and the launching of false national, professional or "class" stereotypes. By combining the social Romanian imaginary, ideologically strengthened, allowed the demonization of the foreigners and and others", where the others were portrayed in an entirely negative registry. The violence of the psychosis. In order to display their superiority, the Romanians used ample distinctions such as "us



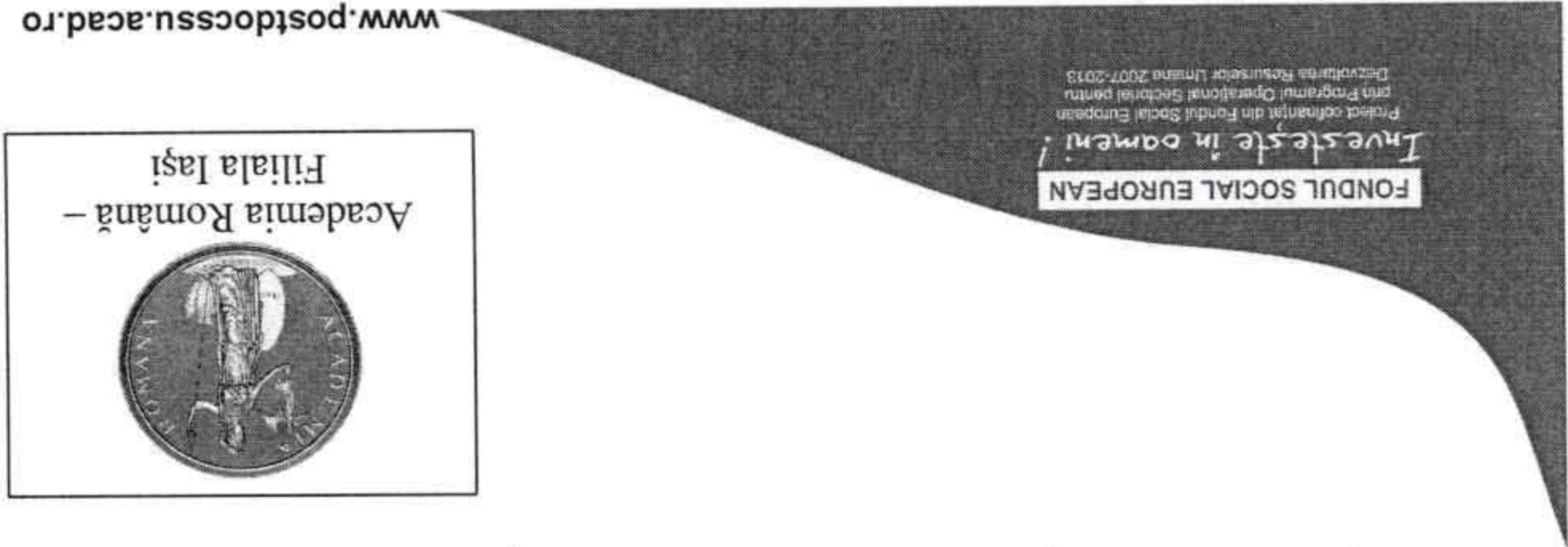


do with the regime than they did with plastic arts. At the state exhibitions, official art rooms and in public art, only those who accepted and respected the strict rules of socialist realism were accepted. Most of the time no career could be built without the access to these exhibitions, therefore the artists were forced to forget their own convictions, or to model some new ones, to survive and to continue in their jobs.

This practical aspect was accompanied by a constant political aggression, and the world of art was constantly asked to increase its knowledge and ideological vigilance, bringing into that symbolic space all the new social realities. The beginning of Party education, reworking certain soviet articles and theories of art, laying out some clear directions for action and even imposing entirely Marxist themes managed to completely disfigure the Romanian world of art in only a couple of years. Furthermore, material problems that came from the general poverty from after the war could be used as a constant method of blackmail and the party did not shy away from this means. Artists were given houses and studios, they were given jobs in education, but only if they proved their submission to the new regime. Additionally, the founding of an organisational set-up, controlled by the PCR – with the Plastic Fund and the Union of Plastic Artists – limited the artists' autonomy and led them to dependence of the ideologists. Socialism proclaimed a victory over the freedom of art and the liberation of artists. The dictators boasted about promoting a "free" art that showed the new social realities. But the autonomy of artistic expression was completely lost<sup>120</sup>.

On the other hand, the incentives offered by the communists were not few and they could tempt anyone, especially people at the beginning of their career, or those already half-way there, who needed a title. Young people were given scholarships to study in the USSR, the older ones were placed at the top of institutions and art organisations. They all had the possibility of receiving prizes and medals, which also meant important amounts of money, if they played the doctrine in game. There were also very well paid orders from the State or incentives to participate in exhibitions abroad. More concrete offers were studios, houses or jobs. In these conditions, it was

<sup>120</sup> Dawn Ades, *Art and Power: Europe Under the Dictators 1930-1945*, Hayward Gallery, 1995, p. 32.





clear that those who worked with the regime could advance very fast in their career and gain

advantages of every kind.

This is how an "elite" of Romanian artists was created, an "elite" that replaced the party in art circles and that controlled the professional lives of all the art creators. Individuals from the favoured group, although sometimes talented, resourceful and discerning, imposed a strict tutorage of the group, imposing and keeping up strict rules for art and the artists. In the shadow of this group of elite artists, there must have hidden many anonymous destinies of creators, suffocated and marginalised by the Marxist objectives that were forced upon the arts. Unfortunately, the first years of communism in Romania were years in which, through brutality, socialist realism triumphed almost completely, changing for a long time the face of Romanian art.

Iasi  
29.02.2012

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