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Cyclicity in creation: from drawing to memory, from memory to drawing

Abstract: This study provides a wider view over Romanian contemporary painting from the two national poles of art: Iasi, located in the north-east part of the country and Timisoara, representing the west side of Romania. It is focused on fusing painting and drawing, with an array of works on paper such as drawings, watercolor, altered photographs and mixed media by Smaranda Moldovan and mixed media portraits on canvas by Ioana Palamar. Both study cases present a microcosmos of the intangible cultural heritage with roots in memory, not a collective one, but an individual one – a long term memory and an iconic memory of landscapes from Romania and France. The study shows the importance of memory in contemporary art, even if it was nominated as *a cliche*. The authors believe that memory has still not been sufficiently offered as an empirical art research method and that memory combined with the two genders, painting and drawing, can produce a new and unique repository of imagery.

Keywords: painting, avantgarde, contemporary painting, ready-made, memory, iconic, drawing, monochrome, mixed media, Iasi, Timisoara, Romania.

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Ciclicitatea în creaţia artistică: de la desen la memorie, de la memorie la desen

Rezumat: Acest studiu oferă o imagine de ansamblu asupra picturii contemporane româneşti din prisma celor doi poli naţionali ai artei: Iaşi, situat în partea de nord-est a ţării, şi Timişoara, reprezentând partea de vest a României. Articolul subliniază conexiunea dintre pictură şi desen, prin ilustrarea unei serii de lucrări aparţinând Smarandei Moldovan, realizate pe hârtie în creion, acuarelă, intervenţii pe fotografie şi tehnici mixte, precum şi a unei serii de portrete pe pânză realizate în tehnici mixte care îi aparţin Ioanei Palamar. Ambele studii de caz prezintă un microcosmos al patrimoniului cultural imaterial adânc înrădăcinat în memoria individuală, şi nu în cea colectivă – o memorie de lungă durată şi o memorie iconică a peisajelor din România şi din Franţa. Studiul ilustrează importanţa memoriei în arta contemporană, chiar dacă este considerat ca fiind un clişeu. Autorii consideră că memoria nu a fost încă

suficient de mult explorată ca metodă de cercetare empirică a artei şi că memoria combinată cu cele două modalităţi de exprimare vizuală, pictura şi desenul, poate da naştere unei arhive vizuale unice.

Cuvinte cheie: pictură, avangardă, pictură contemporană, ready-made, memorie, iconic, desen, monocromie, tehnici mixte, Iaşi, Timişoara, România.

Introduction

Humankind has always been interested in capturing specific daily scenes, beloved persons or simple moments, by immortalizing them at the beginning of times in a spontaneous and intuitive way starting working on: cave walls, stone, bones, parchments and continuing afterwards with papers, wood panels and eventually with canvases; their working instruments varied too from: flints, sticks, feathers to brushes in the end. It must be mentioned that gradually, art began developing throughout history in a more conscious way and this desire of fighting against time, by immortalizing a glimpse of visual experiences reached the highest level in the 20th century when photography appeared which was the starting point of the technological era. The strong desire to memorize specific empirical situations was in fact the real motivation of human beings to fight against implacable time. Despite all these development levels within art history, drawing is considered to be the queen of visual arts, "the father of the three visual arts – architecture, sculpture and painting", according to Giorgio Vasari (*Stendl, 2004:25*). In Renaissance drawing became an independent art and its importance for a an artist's growth was recognised also by the artists from 16th, 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries such as: Peter Paul Rubens, Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn, Jean-Antoine Watteau, Francisco de Goya, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres and many others. At the beginning of 20th century, modern painters gave a high importance to drawing which also became abstract like painting, Wassilly Kandinsky being one of the most representative artists whose artworks stand for nonrepresentational line. Artists like Pierre Soulages and Hans Hartung considered line and implicitly drawing as being a primary manifestation of form (*The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica*). Contemporary artists like: Zhang Xiaogang, Anselm Kiefer, Peter Doing and others, engage with memory and collective history expressed either through a figurative or an abstract style, drawing being in a natural way the basis of their artworks.

David Hockney (*Hockney, 2007:14*) makes various comparisons between the line used by Ingres and that of Warhol, Pain and Caravaggio, Velázquez and Cranach and concluded that memory was not used in the design of various rudimentary optical devices such as the darkroom.

According to UNESCO, "intangible cultural heritage" (ICH) is important in safeguarding cultural diversity in the age of globalization. It is "transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity." (*Cabrero, 2021*).

Iconic memory is the repository of sensory information of sight. It comes from the term *icon* that names shape, an involuntary image that involves duplicating the image recorded on the retina. According to the researcher A.O. Dick (1974) "The view is developed that iconic memory is postretinal but uncoded; nor is it influenced directly by strategies or subsequent mechanisms."

Visual iconic memory is the most complete and closely related to all the senses. It records all the information on the retina involuntarily and can only be used for a split second. The retina

itself is considered the center of iconic memory. Unlike the memory of images after a long time, characteristic of eidetic people, the use of this memory is not voluntary. In order for information to pass through higher processes in the brain and be stored in the center of memory, it must capture our attention. Also in the study from 1974 *Iconic memory and its relation to perceptual processing and other memory mechanisms*, experiments show that the luminance can influence the icon to be captured on the retina.

Thus, the memory process continues after recording the image on the retina, by taking over the duplicate, decomposing in a very short time into another visual image and correlating it with another memory, which can be tactile, olfactory, gustatory, visual, auditory.

Other memories involved in the vast process of visual memory are: visual declarative memory and retrospective autobiographical memory. Visual declarative memory or explicit memory is divided into two categories: the episodic memory contains memories in time and space, and the semantic memory, which I use mainly, stores general information regardless of the source of the information.

The semantic declarative report concerns the facts without taking this context into account. It contributes to the achievement of the goals of this research of personal creation by encoding abstract information about the environment. Retrospective autobiographical memory, on the other hand, contributes visually to the storage of important information about visual experiences. This type of memory is important in the artistic approach because memory is constantly updated by recognizing and reproducing information. Recognition is based on the original information. Reproduction is made in the absence of the original information. It always bears the experience and the autobiographical imprint of the subject, being of a subjective and unique order.

Long term memory is based on a self-investigation that is a complex inner journey in unconsciousness, which means digging in oneself in order to reveal the true self which becomes possible when the appearance is removed and things get deeper, according to Adrian Guţă's statement: "The penetration into the forms of appearance throws us inside among the objects of our thoughts, generating forms of spiritual meditation that provoke the awakening and vision of our own SELF (s.a.) and of the worlds we are going through" (*Guţă, 2008:143*).

People have always been interested in exploring themselves also through the others considered to be the mirror of their own selves, by drawing and painting (self) portraits, which originally used to be a symbol of people's social status and of their physical features authenticity, but later on this genre became a real way of expressing their personality characteristics, emotions and feelings, which was an evidence of a higher intellectual level. Taking into consideration that a painter "borrows" pieces of his temper and of his inner states of mind when creating an artwork, then a portrait can be considered a self-portrait, because each artistic creation is nothing but a reflection of an artist's soul. There is no real boundary between an author and his artwork, which means that this transition from portrait to self-portrait is just a beautiful conceptual confusion. And a (self-) portrait becomes the object of one's own retrospective autobiographical memory which is certainly based on personal past experiences of which recollection is usually codified and distorted (*Freud and Memory: An Exchange, 1995*). The visual expression of this psychological aspect becomes the result of defragmented portraits which are strongly related to the tactile memory, because of some specific painting textures which can be easily noticed at the

surface of the canvas. Even if we are talking about a figurative or an abstract style, an artwork becomes the expression of either an iconic or a long term visual memory.

Methods

The research methods used in this article are based on empirical experiments and study cases. The modus operandi was chosen because the intangible cultural heritage of performing arts such as painting is closely connected to both memory and drawing.

In this article, following an art based research methodology based on different artistic methods of treating the drawing (conceptual and visual), We proposed the study of two situations: the first from memory to drawing, and the second from drawing to memory.

The two study cases exposed are regarding the artworks:

- The first case is from artist and assistant professor Ioana Palamar' artworks *Deepness*, 100/100 cm, mixed technique on canvas, 2022 and *Wounded child*, drawing on paper, A5 size, 2022 under the title *From drawing to memory*.

- The second case involves the artworks from the post doctoral studies of artist assistant professor Smaranda-Sabina Moldovan. The second case is presented under the title *From memory to* drawing.

From drawing to memory

Ioana Palamar is interested in revealing these aspects by representing a series of eyes, portraits, but also distorted facial features which are a metaphor of her moral structure that needs to be harmonized. Thus, she developed her interest in searching for her own identity and for (self-)knowledge, by transcending her own physical limits in order to discover some inner truths and to find herself. Once a specific spiritual level is reached, a big price is paid: loneliness, which can degrade the human soul sometimes, but the spiritual balance can be reached by gaining a peaceful state of mind she is craving for and the connection with the others can make this possible. She is exploring this complex concept by using mixed techniques on various materials which offer her a great freedom (*Fig. 1*).

The methodology itself betrays a specific tensioned state of mind, due to the gestualist brushstrokes and drawing lines, but also due to the overlapped layers of colors, some of them being spontaneous and others controlled. This fact reveals a thin border between figurative and abstraction, but also a border between color and drawing based on the used mixed technique (charcoal, oil color and enamel paint). The character's distorted eyes show a lack of moral balance, an inner conflict which is amplified by the black and white contrast that creates a dramatic atmosphere (*Fig. 2*).

From memory to drawing

Smaranda Moldovan research is based on associating some already existing concepts from philosophy regarding the object. Her studies not only approach the object in different currents and periods of art history but also the direct observation and interpretation of the near space. She selects for the elements with which we interact in everyday life and essentializes them by abstracting them. The choice of the object is random and without having a linearity, nor a system of selection. Her recents study involves the study of the natural landscape.

After her visit in France, Pigerolles, she started her drawing series. Observing the French landscape at an altitude of about 1000 meters with plants specific to the area led the artist to an area of colourful drawing. The linearity is quantitatively superior to the color most of the time. The line, although coloured, remains dominant over the chromatic. Spots and transparent areas appear, but even these do not quantitatively equal the surface area of the line. The conglomeration of the line appears, its concentration in order to highlight areas of primary and secondary interest, but also as compositional reinforcement. The water technique most often produces passage areas, the connection between the linear aggregates that derives from the reduction of the image of nature in the respective area. From a conceptual point of view, the representation of a raw object takes over from the natural frame and its replacement in an abstracted form. Interobjective connections that appear in nature as elements such as air, water, or soil are rendered in the same simplified manner by surfaces or spots of colour (*Fig. 3*).

She does not use memory as afterimage, nor the landscape study in her works. The direct observation is ephemeral. The basis of the works is memory, especially iconic memory. Thus, the studies are continued in specific painting techniques, such as oil painting. The oil on canvas entitled *Internal landscape* (Photo 4) is a result of the drawing made in Pigerolles, France after the intangible cultural heritage of the area, the barely untouched landscape. It is based on the iconic elements that the retina has sensed in the environment, the translation in abstract composition of lines, as drawings. It has evolved further in a sort of drawing on canvas in the medium of oil colours.

Results

The result of the two case studies, marks both the closest encounter of the artist with its inner self by memory and the inauguration of new concepts that are a response of the processes of iconic and long term formal memory, concerning processes related to memory issues such as: erosion, succession, continuity and modification

In Smaranda Moldovans work it can be seen a clear interrelation between the landscape, as physical location and the imaginative projection. The result is a self-constructed panoramic extension of image and effect of her memories, which are further refracted into paintings, with minimal elements on colourfields. Her results are an incorporation of time and travel, as a cumulative effect of now and recent past.

Ioana Palamar, instead, sees drawing as just an extension of painting, being a way of synthesizing specific emotions, by revealing fragments of portrait, like eyes, and covering other parts, like mouth, for expressing the idea of observing the inwardness within a frame of silence (*Fig. 5*).

Conclusion. A cyclity in creation

In the contemporary art scene, memory is still playing an important role in creation. The recent works of the two artists show the creation of images in which facts and fictions have merged in fitful types of memory. The cyclity in creations is not only from the memory to the result as drawing, as in the study case presented by Ioana Palamar with *Wounded child,* but also from the drawing to the memory as in the *Internal landscape* by Smaranda Moldovan.

By the cyclity of memory – drawing – memory of the intangible cultural heritage we receive a sense of our identity that makes us part of a community, or of an international society. The concept of identity comprises the uniqueness of ourselves, due to the action of archiving personal experiences during our lifetime which shape our personality and reflects or temper. Identity is what defines us as human beings, it's the essence of our culture heritage.

About the authors

Ioana Palamar is interested in exploring her memories from her childhood period and their strong influence upon her adulthood. According to Sigmund Freud's theories, mental processes and motivations are outside our awareness and during our development they are pushed into unconsciousness. Ioana is using art as a therapy in order to bring into her consciousness specific wounds that strongly affected her in the past so that she can heal them and gain afterwards a certain level of balance. She is mainly focused on facial expressions that are represented in mixed and experimental painting techniques.

Smaranda-Sabina Moldovan artworks represent a small universe of collective iconic memory of objects that she has interacted with during everyday life. It is like an encapsulating diary of ordinary life, with accents of cultural and philosophical allusions of *the object*, – from Platon and Plotin to Barry Smith. Her main research is concentrated on defining, yet at the same time, crossing and blurring the borders between traditional painting and objects seen as assemblage, installations and sculpture.

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Appendix

Figure 1. Ioana Palamar, Deepness, 100/100 cm, mixed technique on canvas, 2022

Figure 2. Ioana Palamar, Wounded child, drawing on paper, A5 size, 2022

Figure 3. Study of relations of trees and humans, mixed media on paper, 50/70 cm, 2021. Photograph from artist personal archive

Figure 4. Study of relations of trees and humans, mixed media on paper, 50/70 cm, 2021. Photograph from artist personal archive

Figure 5. Ioana Palamar, Eye, mixed
technique on paper, A5 size, 2022