

Abstract: *The present study focuses on the generation 2000 of the Romanian contemporary art and on one of the tendencies to be identified in its work, namely Neo-Pop. This generation's representatives are fine arts graduates from the late 1990s to at least 2005. The Neo-Pop direction, sometimes related to the Neo-Conceptual one, may be temporarily or partially developed by these young artists. Since the 1990s and increasingly, consumerism and media culture inspired and motivated the Neo-Pop option for artists who grew up in an urban context progressively responding to globalisation. Authors' attitudes include irony, playfulness, critical accents, they dismantle taboos of representation; the artists revisit Pop stylistic characteristics in painting, but they also work with ready-mades, installation, photography, video, they contribute to street art, they revitalize comics. The study shortly refers to a number of examples: artists of the generation 2000 and their works created along the first decade of the twenty one century.*

The present study refers to recent and even to on-going artistic developments/facts and situations, and to various aspects characteristic of Romanian visual culture. This very research is a *work in progress*: the author observes and expresses thoughts that reflect the current state of investigation; the opinions shared here are indeed working hypotheses. Young/emergent artists whose 'body of work' is still in the making are the focus of the research hence considerations are far from carrying a conclusive weight.

Moreover, the landmarks brought into discussion as a whole will not draw a firm, coherent profile of *Neo-Pop* as a trend noticeable in Romanian art during the past fifteen years or so; the author believes this is not how things work nowadays. However, such landmarks help identify a number of referential elements which in turn allow us to shed light on the way in which some artists temporarily or partially develop a

ON THE *GENERATION 2000* AND NEO-POP IN CONTEMPORARY ROMANIAN ART

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strategy/iconography/aesthetics whereby they update and rephrase, within particular contexts, the world of Pop art. Thus, the study refers primarily to a tendency rather than a trend. Little wonder that such an approach was/is promoted by artists who emerged after the fall of the communist system in Romania. Such artists were trained and caught the public's attention following the launch and energetic if chaotic (for a while) development of a local consumerist civilisation against the backdrop of a complex, sometimes convulsive, political and social 'transition' from a self-styled 'democratic' dictatorship to proper democracy. Let's say that following NATO and EU accession Romania entered a period of greater stability. The process, requirements and means to become aligned to *globalisation* with all its pros and cons, the nuanced reconsideration of the concept of *identity*, the emergence of '*glocal*' mentalities/behaviours sent important signals to the artists that came to the fore from the mid-1990s onwards – broadly speaking to the representatives of what we call the Romanian *generation 2000*. These artists are free from the 'local specificity' complex in its traditional sense; they begin primarily by asserting an individual cultural identity, beyond which broader levels of identity become manifest according to each artist's particular option.

Prevailing civilisation and media culture landmarks influence the artists' Neo-Pop 'discourse'. Graffiti and stencil as contemporary forms of art in public space are equally important for this study, as are the (still infrequent) culture jamming interventions and clubbing in the realm of entertainment, the latter easy to associate with dj-ing and vj-ing sound & image sessions. The internet 'explosion' as the quintessential means of communication acts as a linking factor for this generation; the system may lead to co-ordinated group reactions to certain circumstances, ensures the background against which projects are generated and promoted on a wider scale and current local and international artistic developments are being distributed through the 'network'. We are far from the island-state typical of the pre-1990s era, rather we are confronted with a wealth of data, stimuli and warnings generated by the global information framework.

It is a while since the *generation 2000* syntagm made its way into writings about visual arts and not only in literary criticism. For the time being the term *Neo-Pop* is used seldom. We dare say this study has, even if only in part, a pioneering character; only time will tell whether or not the terminology employed or the points of view included will gain a wider use than that of other types of discourse.

We assert that those who comprise *generation 2000* are fine arts graduates from the late 1990s to at least 2005. We suggest an interval of nearly ten years, in a manner similar to the one we used to frame the '80s generation (namely 1975-1985).¹ Meanwhile, the 'freshness' of some of the researched material makes it really difficult to close-up the time-limit. It is interesting to note that once again circumstances enable us to discuss about a *cultural generation* (as we did for the 'eighties' generation), the most recent one, given the fact that the syntagm in question, namely *generation 2000* can be easily traced in debates on literature and visual arts, that in both artistic realms new communication

typologies/types and means play a vital role for the young, that to them virtual communication is by no means less important than the actual one, and that both young writers and visual artists are preoccupied with the everyday life of this new millennium, its 'lights' and 'shadows' included...

In 2009 the '*twothousand*'-ist (a term frequently used in literature studies) Vlad Nancă characterised his generation, its position in the broader artistic context, its aims and strategies: "*I feel part of a generation that uses DIY practices for the production of art but also for building a small independent art scene, a generation that is somehow on the edge of the 'art world' but has a big enough connection to it to understand how it functions and is sure to make greater impact on it sooner or later.*"²

In an essay published in an important collective volume about post-1989 Romanian photography, Raluca Nestor refers to Cosmin Moldovan, who belongs to the "new '*new wave*'" in the following terms: "*Cosmin Moldovan... is a representative of a generation used to doing things on its own, expecting nothing from the UAP [The Fine Artists' Union] or any other structure, a generation of artists who are at one and the same time their own managers, curators and critics.*"³

In the above-mentioned volume Cosmin Moldovan writes about the series of graduates who are the focus of this essay and highlights their relationship with their forerunners: "*During the 1990s the contemporary art scene was dominated by artists of the '80s generation who had a major role in educating Generation 2000 [author's underlining]... Generation 2000 (or Generation 2020, if we use the name of the site administrated by the artist [Vlad Nancă, A.G. note], www.2020.ro, which aims to unite the young creative communities of Romania) is the first generation of Romanian artists that lays aside the autopsy of communism and the biopsy of the post-communist transition and*

starts casting a personal glance not only at the mutations, but also at the relentless aspects of everyday life in Romania, a country which is still confused, but where things become deep-seated very quickly."⁴

The generation 2000 is not only 'self-promoted'. Bucharest and Cluj play host to a number of private galleries which also promote its representatives. Some of the artists were supported at an early date by these galleries or even launched by them. Galleries such as H'art, Anaid, Galeria Posibilă, Andreiana Mihail, Ivan Gallery (Bucharest), Plan B (Cluj and Berlin) are actively developing programmes abroad. Some participate in international fairs, contribute to a more articulated art market at home and instill a more open attitude to contemporary art, primarily of the young generation. Some of its more emblematic/visible representatives already show their work in major art galleries in Western Europe and the US, their market value rising considerably.

Bridges can be drawn between marginal and mainstream, as artists are now ready to access both alternative and commercial mechanisms; they don't hesitate to show their art in either artist-run spaces, or at the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Bucharest (M.N.A.C.), they intervene in the public space, create comics, do *vj*-ing... These days everything moves fast, highlights change on the run and some mutations are difficult to perceive at first instance given the higher adaptability. Mobility as a key characteristic of the generation 2000 is the latter's answer to challenges set forth by the new millennium. This is a generation largely responsible for the emergence and development of the current stage of Romanian figurative painting; it is also the generation of the "new 'new wave'" (also comprising fresh BA and MA graduates) in photography, video and computer-based art. In the complex 'territory' marked (but not exclusively) by these two hard cores, Neo-Pop plays an important role, bearing the imprint of various factors.

It is not for this essay to refer strictly to events that can be integrated in the area of

Romanian Pop art prior to the last fifteen years or so, or to sketch, no matter how briefly, a history of the subject. It is not without interest however to note that the first signs of a closer relationship to Pop art appeared during the late 1960s and early 1970s, with the partial and temporary 'cultural liberalization' at the peak of the communist period. Artists were drawn to a 'New Realism' employing a Pop idiom (though by no means an 'epidemic' trend among fellow artists) due to its every-day appearance and synthetic representation patterns of great visual impact. This aesthetic direction was adopted not only as an attempt to launch an alternative realism to the official one that bore the scars of socialist realism, but also in answer to social commissions by artists who were no strangers to new Western developments. Most often we come across examples in painting and graphic art – particularly cultural posters – and more seldom in sculpture. We have to mention in this respect, Dorian and Lia Szasz, Ion Grigorescu, Corneliu Brudașcu, Ion Bitzan, Ion Stendl, Klara Tamas, Vladimir Șetran, Matei and Florina Lăzărescu, Doru Covrig.⁵ Certainly the motivation of Romanian artists differed from that of cultures in which Pop art originally flourished in answer to the aggressive development of a consumerist society characteristic of the 1950s and 1960s in the capitalistic world. To contextualize the previous assertion let us recall that between 1965 and 1975 Romanian society underwent a series of positive changes in economic mechanisms along with a greater freedom and opening towards the West which spun off some sort of prosperity. That is not to say Romania had reached a consumerist stage in any way close to that in US and Western Europe, merely the country had reached a degree of civilization, comfort, behavioural changes which enabled the fast-paced development of certain forms of culture that ranged from pop-rock music to the presence of Pop art through some of its stylistic pre-requisites. Following the same line of thought we

could say that the emergence of the first traces/signs of environments and performance art in Romania (practiced by artists such as Ilie Pavel, Paul Neagu, Mihai Olos, Ana Lupaș, the Sigma group, Ștefan Bertalan, Constantin Flondor, Ion Grigorescu) in the late '60s and early '70s, could be seen not only as the result of a more lax ideological regime leading to greater tolerance towards artistic experiments on the part of authorities but also as a means of exploring the real (as was the case with Pop imagery). This would encourage a parallel with the joint Pop art – happenings offensive which had taken place some ten years earlier in the US.

As Ceaușescu's dictatorial regime stiffened the rules and economic deprivation resulted into a life on the verge of survival during the '80s, difficult as it was *resistance through culture* was nevertheless a reality. National media culture was drastically diminished, ideologically controlled and dominated by the cult of personality. Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of popular culture perceived as a form of resistance was the production and dissemination of jokes particularly political ones. Double-speech made its way into TV, radio and theatrical entertainment shows. According to Petre Popovăț such tongue-in-cheek idiomatically called 'șopârlă' [lit. lizard] can be characterized as "*a rather trivial event or situation, apparently recounted without any devious meaning; however artistic means create an ambiguity that generates « subversive » undertones.*"⁶ At the time the *Cinematheque* [Romanian Film Institute] in Bucharest represented an oasis of visual culture for students and intellectuals. If we speak of film culture in a broader sense and its unofficial perception/reception in the '80s (meaning a specifically local distribution channel for a form of media/pop culture), we should mention the 'underground' dissemination of US and West-European motion pictures which never made it on the wide screen or on TV through video cassettes viewed amongst close friends at home... Though circumstances did not encourage reactivated Pop art forms, the 1980s did not

entirely miss out on them. Figurative painting and sculpture as practiced by the '80s generation (references to this decade's graduates are the author's choice) is marked primarily by the prevailing Neo-Expressionism which represents not only the artists' opening towards postmodernism but also the generation's answer in the terms of an alternative art to the official one to the pressures and trauma caused by the social and political environment. At the time the artistic output of artists such as Gheorghe Rasovszky, Ioana Bătrânu, Andrei Chintilă, Újvárossy László, Constantin Petrașchievici, Stela Lie included inspiration sources, iconographical and stylistic elements that originated in Pop art. These ranged from the music-film-visual arts relationship to the employment of everyday-life originated ready-mades, from the attention domestic kitsch enjoyed to a multi-layered approach to the urban environment; most often the Pop 'discourse' was associated with other trends and visions.⁷

During the 1990s, following the fall of the communist system, the consumerist civilization system flourished pervading every aspect of life at an incredibly fast pace, generating a new age of Pop art in Romania. Elements of a consistent media/pop culture had a far-reaching spread, which continued well into the present. This time use of the terms Pop/Neo-Pop is consistent with West-European/international usage though they are by no means devoid of 'local colour'.

The term Neo-Pop is preferred as it seems to better identify this new facet of Pop art that established itself during the 1990s and (particularly) the early years of the new century in Romania. The tendency emerged against the backdrop of earlier developments outlined above and of a new context on the one hand, and an international terminology 'upgrade' with regard to the 1980s and the ensuing period, on the other hand. As far as the '80s are concerned, Jeff Koons appears as the Neo-Pop referential figure whereas closer to us artists such as Damien Hirst, Matthew

Barney and Takashi Murakami spring to mind (with Hirst and Barney more readily approachable also from the angle of late Conceptual art, than Koons).⁸

Romanian Neo-Pop is best represented by the generation 2000, though artists from various other generations include Neo-Pop among their preoccupations. The approach often requires a Neo-Conceptual perspective too. Let us rephrase so as to emphasize the point: sometimes, a Neo-Conceptual approach can be structured employing a Neo-Pop 'vocabulary'. Having assimilated the postmodern abilities to revisit, recycle and combine (more or less) recent chapters in the history of art and culture, artists have grown accustomed to entertain a state of 'vigilance' whereby to this day, ideas remain at the core of the work's motivation and construction.

Let us recall some of the landmarks of this new post-1989 appetite for Pop art which preceded the emergence of generation 2000 and whose upper time limit stands indeed for Neo-Pop: paintings on tin by Marcel Bunea, an '80s generation artist who worked with formal and colour patterns of Pop origin; works by Stela Lie and Újvárossy László, which turn problematic different categories of *kitsch*. Valeriu Mladin, of the same '80s generation with the above, takes a critical stance vis-à-vis the tabloid offensive of sensuality and the commodification of the female body. Claudia Todor breaks everyday life into sequences and weaves, tongue in cheek, personal reactions to willy-nilly new iconic urban landmarks (such as the House of the People aka Ceaușescu's Palace). Elian, like Todor, is a representative of the late '80s generation; her painting, graphic art and installations wittily reference B-series movies and soap operas as well as the stylistic typology of comics.⁹ Some of the artists who emerged towards the mid-1990s (and thereby trained during the early years of that decade) along mostly Neo-Expressionist lines in a Trans-Avantgarde like version, have now reached a remarkably different vision: such is the

case of Francisc Chiuariu whose painting currently resorts to a Neo-Pop stylistic idiom doubled by art historical references while the artist's approach is symbolically encoded.¹⁰

The year 1990 marks the outbreak and rapid proliferation of private TV and radio broadcasting companies. Musical video spots are now being broadcasted and in 2002 MTV is launched in Romania¹¹; the channel organises major musical events that impact the Romanian music industry given MTV's huge young following. Romania will have its own 'MTV generation'. Written press multiplies and diversifies so as to cater for every taste. Online press, as an offspring of the many internet usages, takes precedence and increasingly threatens the position of printed press. Tabloids, some of them with a print run of hundreds of thousands even during a time of crisis, emerge as a strong contender in the media market. Malls turn out to be much more than just commercial structures emblematic for a consumerist society; going to the mall is part of a lifestyle embraced by increasingly more young (and not so young) people; these 'temples of merchandise' whose numbers rose dramatically in recent years abound in 'entertainment' areas comprising relax areas, food courts and cinema halls, are, to use Guy Debord's phrase, a concentrated expression of the '*société du spectacle*'. The number of earlier cinema halls dropped significantly, internet downloading and increasingly wider TV film distribution (with dedicated TV movie channels) counting among the lead causes. To put it differently, the audience became sedentary, preferring home comfort over cinema quality standards. Video games, a "cultural industry" product (for a critique of the phrase see Adorno and Horkheimer), developed rapidly to lure children and teenagers the world over into a fascinating virtual world whose mounting ambiguity between the real and the unreal became a major worrying factor. Musical life in Romania also took a new turn with the new

millennium: the number of concerts, tours, live broadcasts and recordings grew beyond imagination as did the quality of the musicians involved and the benefits of new technologies, ranging from live multimedia events to the on-going *You Tube* flow. A local form of popular music culture known as 'manele' [a particular type of ethno-music of powerful if simplistic melodic line and very strong language; translator's note], widely appreciated by a high percentage of the population and strongly rejected by another, is sometimes referred to by some as a sub-culture in its own right that needs to be studied rather than voluntarily ignored, whereas others blame it and rank it as a new category of kitsch. Advertisement became a remarkably complex phenomenon reaching far into media, business and the social realm. Working in advertising is widely spread among art graduates and students, their routine familiarity with this quintessential contemporary media culture¹² component acting as a catalyst in their choice of a Neo-Pop artistic vision. Obviously in some instances the creativity of the advertisement professional and that of the visual artist (as one and the same person) interact.

In 2006 Cosmin Costinaş (an art critic of the same generation 2000) published a text that serves the purpose of this study particularly well.¹³ Costinaş articulates an interesting thesis about what he calls the "Romanian Urban Pop". According to him, despite an increasingly important role played by the urban context after 1989, one fails to notice a closer linkage between the contemporary art scene and a local *entertainment* industry, different from the Western pop culture albeit "... sufficiently connected to the folklore of the rapidly urbanised social groups."¹⁴ The author continues: "*Taken over piece by piece, layer by layer, from Western urban subcultures to alternative fashion* [underlined by the author], *from cult* [underlined by the author] *references to music and forms of socialisation, Western pop culture has become a niche culture in*

Romania associated with the urban elites, with everything starting from and coming back to the young contemporary art scene. This particular situation, in which mass culture in Romania is rejected almost entirely by the visual arts scene, which in turn produces work similar to that of Western pop culture, is a relevant paradox in the modernization of Romanian society."¹⁵ Further more, according to him "The processes of Romanian «pop art» occur in the opposite direction to that of their original Western counterpart – that is, from «top» to «bottom», starting from the artistic domain that creates strategies of penetration into public space."¹⁶ Towards the end of the essay the author nuances: "At a strictly formal level, Romanian «pop art» is also beginning to look at – carefully taking over, assimilating and providing a new look to – elements of mass culture in Romania, from hip-hop to various items of the communist period, translated into a gallery and commercial Eastalgia [underlined by the author] (*nostalgia for the East*) [author's note]."¹⁷ Given the fact that the Romanian Neo-Pop associated as it is with urban civilisation developed in parallel to the country's gradual assimilation into the process of globalisation, one should not wonder at the emphatically Western tones, also visible in the media culture on which the new age of Pop art nourishes. As Cosmin Costinaş noticed back in 2006, artists began to turn their attention to other signs of local popular urban culture and its (often ironically taxed) peculiarities, and examples have multiplied ever since. The fact that Romanian urban society lacks the homogeneity of Western societies (its rural roots still active and lending it some of its vitality plays a part) along with our 'Balkan' location which lends it a regional tone should be factored in. The youngest generation which grew up in an urban environment developed along globalisation coordinates reacted promptly and naturally to the signs of this new age of which *mcdonaldisation* is one. The manner in which artists of the generation 2000 relate

to such contextual changes also includes critical tones.

By way of example we will focus below on several artists who belong to the generation 2000 and on their involvement with Neo-Pop. However we would like to stress once more that the Neo-Pop tendency is but one of the 'tracks' on which representatives of this generation 'run'; meanwhile this may well be only a temporary option. As already mentioned, the relationship between Neo-Pop and Neo-Conceptualism should sometimes be taken into consideration. For our study, we use the term Neo-Conceptualism instead of the term Post-Conceptualism, which is preferred by other authors.

According to many observers, the set up of the *Rostopasca*¹⁸ group and its activities from 1998 until 2001 were a starting point for the generation 2000, and, to a certain extent, I would argue, for the inclusion of Neo-Pop among the generation's artistic options. The full group comprised Angela Bontaș, Alina Buga, Nicolae Comănescu, Dumitru Gorzo, Alina Pențac, Florin Tudor, Mona Vătămanu. In a discussion this author had with *Rostopasca* group members in November 1999 (published in *Arta – new series* magazine no. 01/2000) Florin Tudor mentions *Rostopasca*'s orientation and perhaps even sympathy for the Young British Artists (whose leader was Damien Hirst). This sympathy can be sensed among many representatives of the generation 2000 during the early part of their formation and launching period mentioned at the beginning of this study. *"I'd say our tendencies are Post-Conceptualist. We blend painting and installation and performance art... Right now our strategy is similar, one might say, to that of British artists a decade ago – this is my opinion."*¹⁹ These young rebels (against the 'quiet/settled' type of art practiced by representatives of the academic milieu or against some 'oriented' groups) aimed at a lively, polymorphic type of art, complementing and inspired by an increasingly dynamic urban environment

which already included hip-hop and graffiti, playfulness being an essential element in all of *Rostopasca*'s interventions.

Nicolae Comănescu's painting is quintessentially urban: it is constructed stage by stage, as made obvious by the artist's most recent and ample exhibition at the National Museum of Contemporary Art (Bucharest, May-July 2011). Called *Berceni*, the name of a Bucharest district, the exhibition included apart from a couple of rather Neo-Expressionist examples from the *Rostopasca* period, works made throughout the better part of the previous decade. The latter bear the imprint of pleasantly surprising meetings of Neo-Pop (as in up-to-date Pop) iconography and style, with Photo-Realism as well as some Neo-Expressionist overtones; such meetings are distinctively marked by the realist-fantastic blend of representation levels, in exuberantly colourful images inspired primarily by the internet. Another section of the exhibition comprises recent works defined through a relatively 'tamed' realism: landscapes from Bucharest's Berceni district, where the artist lives. The very rich colour paste employed (applied in vivid brushstrokes) renders the character of the place as well as everyday life, containing: "Berceni earth right from the forefront of the block of flats where I live"²⁰, "dust collected in Bucharest, in the Berceni district", mustard flour, cinders, "cigarette ash from Ota's bar", "lime blossom powder from trees on Olteniței chausee", "brick powder from Assan's Mill"....²¹

As far as **Dumitru Gorzo** is concerned, it is mainly through his street art interventions such as stencils and the famous painted plaster object *Cocoon*, copies of which were applied on the walls of a number of Bucharest buildings, that one can speak of him in terms of Neo-Pop.²² 'Hot' magazines employed as iconographic sources in some of Gorzo's paintings that helped dismantle the taboo of erotic representations in recent Romanian art equally contribute to this. His work also

tackles socio-political issues, unfolds a contemporary epic of his native village Ieud, recycles mythology and visual culture, and sometimes sparks high-profile media debates and controversies.

Suzana Dan became visible during the early 2000, her work contributing consistently to the growth of Neo-Pop. *Suzi's universe* are paintings that collect and process personal stories, breaking into various other directions; at times the poetic, nostalgic atmosphere exudes glamorous overtones, the real subtly changes into dreamlike, sensuousness and the picturesque live together. Her painting clearly displays formal and chromatic Pop features: lightly modeled flat brushwork, clear-cut surfaces, a decorative use of colour. Manipulated kitsch ingredients show up both in Suzana Dan's painting, objects and in her installations; the latter spectacularly structure space and lend it a particular character sometimes integrating political satire. In her work the artist references with equal interest and strength both the private and the public realms, those of people and animals. Humour, wit, grotesque, the dramatic, and the intimate all feature in her rich and endearing imagery which acts as a prompter for reflection.²³

In the first half of the previous decade **Simona Cristea's** paintings were clearly grounded in reactivated Pop art iconography and style, remindful of Allen Jones or James Rosenquist. Having first approached Pop from a bookish angle, the artist openly declared her allegiance (Andy Warhol had been her favourite artist for a while); she was equally fascinated by the imagery of advertisements. Cristea drew her inspiration from pictures in popular magazines to construct an urban world populated by male and mostly female characters according to a typology that had been used in British and American Pop art in the '50s and '60s, updated to conform to the current fashion 'idiom'.²⁴

Roman Tolici's painting covers a wide spectrum of means of expression, ranging from Photo-Realism to Surrealism. Pictures

inspired by daily life sometimes draw on the metaphysical and miracle can descend onto the street. His experience in advertisement may well contribute to what one might call 'image charm'. There is also a different facet to Tolici's work as a comics author. His is the first author volume in the *Hardcomics* series and contains themed taboo-breaking representations. Miloš Jovanović had a capital contribution in kick-starting and continuing the series which acted as a catalyst in re-launching the interest of Romanian artists and (initially small) audiences for comics in a broader thematic sense; however the young, always in a hurry and, like us all, drawn into a world where image reigns supreme, prove highly interested in this type of image-based literature in which text is scarce.²⁵

Ana Bănică made her debut during the first half of the 2000s. She explores the female universe and that of the couple, also touching on Romanian gay-community issues. She analyses more than one category of local kitsch, starting with the domestic one. From this perspective Bănică comes close to the Neo-Pop universe with her embroidered images which technically allude to traditional wall textiles whereas their iconography and textual support resort to emancipated erotic representations and expressive patterns inspired by popular urban idioms (works dated 2007 to 2009). The imagery of her earlier paintings on plastic canvas (as in kitchen table fabrics) matches the support employed. Ana Bănică references the realm of kitsch in association with trivial objects which recur in her atmosphere-generating installations with a touch of irony.²⁶

Emanuel Borcescu is an artist who approaches another 'hot' spot, namely the construction of the media myth and its stars, heroes from the world of television, film, music, sports, politics, business and culture – see for instance the series of tempera on paper works produced in 2005. These paintings frame the characters using some sort of kitsch heraldry. Characters

have become brands, enjoy public attention and are subject to various reactions; the series under discussion has a dosage of irony and wit which seems to take us back to Ion Luca Caragiale, the nineteenth-century drama writer whose plays and short stories synthetically and lucidly make up a gallery of contemporary Romanian mental and behavioural profiles. A number of recurrent themes seem to emerge quite naturally.²⁷

In time **Anca Benera**'s essentially Neo-Conceptual art developed along different lines, her quest involving both ideas and the means of expression. Installations, *objets trouvés* or created, video, painting or graphic art were/are just as many idioms with and through which the artist communicates freely. Her inclusion in this investigation of Neo-Pop is justified by the graphic art and painting Benera produced in the mid-2000s inspired by *manga*: this was perhaps used also as a platform to shed light on the female condition from a new vantage point. Another series that comes to mind is that of objects created from food gelatin as well as her 2008 exhibition *Collecting Collectors* (Galeria Nouă/The New Gallery, Bucharest).²⁸

Representatives of what is currently referred to as the "Cluj School" are prominent members of the generation 2000; they had a substantial contribution to bringing figurative painting back into the lime light while lending it a novel outlook. The realism they cultivate is rooted in a restricted number of models (among them Luc Tuymans) which then branch off in different variants. Every-day life makes for an important source of inspiration for these artists while photography is essentially used to record a visual diary. Such elements bring them closer to Neo-Pop though one cannot speak of proper adherence to Pop aesthetics. Mounting historical and cultural references in their art render it ever more complex, its richness underscored by themes such as introspection and the human condition. I would mention here **Victor Man, Șerban Savu, Marius Bercea, Mircea Suci, Adrian Ghenie**.²⁹ In recent

years artists like them have come to enjoy remarkable international exposure, their market value rising significantly.

Although **Vlad Nancă** works mainly from a Neo-Conceptual perspective the identification of certain Neo-Pop elements is possible; he resorts to photography, objects, installations, uses stencils to get out into the public space; more recently he did some performance works and researched the evolution of graffiti as a means of expression in Romania. Together with **Ștefan Tiron** he was instrumental in setting up '*Începem*' [We begin], an internet forum and a fanzine; he also turned his Bucharest flat into an artist-run space open to fellow artists of his own generation. Nancă processes his personal history along with every-day reality, searches flea-markets for trivial and even kitsch objects which he employs in installations that meet us in various exhibition spaces. His approach is critical, ironic but at times equally nostalgic, his photographs sometimes surprisingly and emphatically preoccupied with aesthetics.³⁰

The painting of **Florin Ciulache** consists primarily of an extremely rich paste, his brushwork at times expressionistically nervous; the artist came to the fore some six or seven years ago first and foremost due to his novel iconography albeit cut from the flow of media culture (logos of TV broadcasts). These were joined by 'portraits' of common objects. A few years ago he enlarged his repertory of motifs through the addition of stills from weather broadcasts. Paradoxically, visual signs defined through traditional means (painting), can revitalize an atrophied cliché-driven (motion) imagery.³¹

Gili Mocanu's oeuvre already reflects a strong personality: the result of strenuous work, it often takes onlookers by surprise through its meandering. However, at the heart of it remains painting, as complex as the entire body of his work. By virtue of a vision that singled out Mocanu on the local young art scene a coherent world of shapes and colours was structured, blending in

Neo-Pop elements, a 'primitive' type of construction, Minimalist synthesis and serial work (as in pieces produced throughout the first decade of the new century). Cityscapes and urban objects are humorously yet detachedly rendered in paintings in which motifs are clearly cut against a background of simple planes or compact surfaces.³²

Roughly half-way between 2000 and 2010, **Alexandra Croitoru**'s photographs questioned the stereotypes of power from an ironical-feminist perspective as well as identity over-simplifications along international tourism routes. Closer still to a Neo-Pop photo grid manipulated to ends converging with those bordering on sociological study, is the ample series of images shown at Galeria Nouă in 2005 which 'document' the dressing options of countless girls eagerly seeking success and visibility.³³

The photo-collages and staged photographs made by **Ștefan Cosma** ironically speak of contemporary Pop culture in a playful manner. In 2007 the artist published a book that brings together his own photographs and testimonies of various players active in the cultural arena; the volume³⁴ speaks of Cosma's genuine attachment to the spirit of Bucharest, to everything it stands for in terms of a layered/recently established civilisation, a conglomerate of destinies and spirituality.

Alina Samoschi analyses women's condition from a contemporary perspective, including not only the erotic component but also the aggression of a repetitive daily job routine on any human being integrated in the social system at the beginning of this new millennium. She resorts to drawing, photography (digitally processed if need be), a juxtaposition of the two, object and installation, and conjecturally performance. Her sensitivity to the urban pulse in tone with a personal story is characteristic of the artist's Neo-Pop approach.³⁵

One of the youngest representatives of the generation 2000, **Florea Mihai** is thoroughly attached to Neo-Pop.³⁶ He explores the world of advertising and the

attraction exerted by the feminine universe in this context. The artist paints and builds installations in this order of ideas, his work resonating with the mature Pop art of half a century ago, which visually still holds its strength – the young Romanian's work maintaining its power of seduction under today's new contextual circumstances.

Other artists merit our attention. For lack of space let us just briefly mention **Olivia Mihălțianu, Daniel Gontz, Luminița Mihai, Sabina Spătariu, Dragoș Burlacu, Bogdan Mateiaș, Lea Rasovszky** among others.

This selective Neo-Pop survey would not be complete if we had not mentioned the recent establishment of Romanian comics. In 2010 comics finally got a study worth of them mainly due to **Alexandru Ciubotariu**'s efforts³⁷ (Ciubotariu is the creator of the "Square Cat" in the world of local *graffiti*) and stimulated by the continued publication of *Hardcomics*. One should not forget to add **Matei Branea**, one of the most important comic-book illustrators and animators in Romania today.

Finally, we would like to underline the importance of one publication, *Omagiu – Remix Culture Magazine*, published between 2005 and 2009. The magazine, in whose genesis **Ștefan Cosma** played a seminal role, brings together in the most inspired, representative, even seductive manner elements that define Neo-Pop art and the new media/pop culture in Romania. "This platform wishes to remain open to the most unexpected collaborations. What you hold in your hands is already a communal work that branches off into design, graphic art, music, fashion, architecture, contemporary art, street art, and mass culture."³⁸ So far the magazine's editorial team led by **Ioana Isopescu** brought together young critics, artists and enthusiastic graphic designers such as **Miloš Jovanović, Ștefan Tiron, Mihnea Mircan, Vlad Nancă, Maria Guță** (her drawing style, close to comics typology, displays a realism and synthetic character that match those of Neo-Pop), and **Mihaela Popa** among others.



Fig. 1 – Nicolae Comănescu, *Another Wrong Mirror*, 2006, acrylic on canvas, 90x120cm, private collection.



Fig. 2 – Suzana Dan, *Barbie, the one eaten by the dogs and wept by the dwarfs*, 2010, installation, painted cement statues and terrariums, dimensions variable, courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 3 – Simona Cristea, *Loving D*, 2004, acrylic on canvas, 50x70cm, private collection

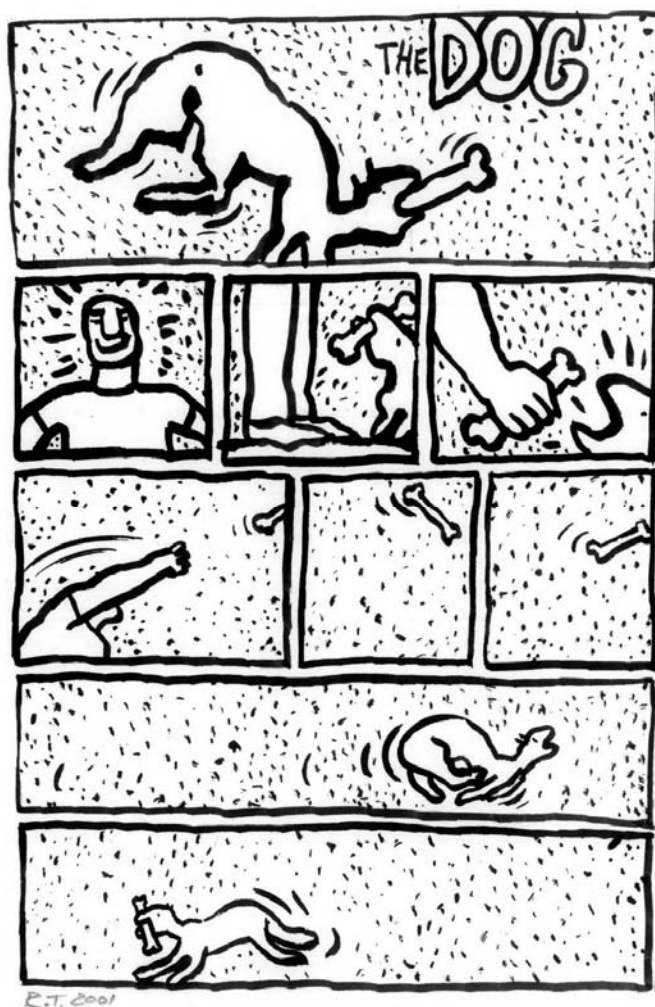


Fig. 4 – Roman Tolici, *The Dog*, 2001, from *Aaargh!!!*, *Hardcomics* no. 1, Bucharest 2002.



Fig. 5 – Ana Bănică, *Waiting in the car park to kiss you with passion*, 2007, embroidery on canvas, 59x93cm, courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 6 – Emanuel Borcescu, *The Show Hero*, 2005, tempera on paper, 100x150cm, courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 7 – Anca Benera, *One fingered glove*, 2003, strawberry gelatin, Kalinderu media lab, courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 8 – Vlad Nancă, *Queue*, 2009, installation, porcelain animal figurines placed in order of height, dimensions variable.

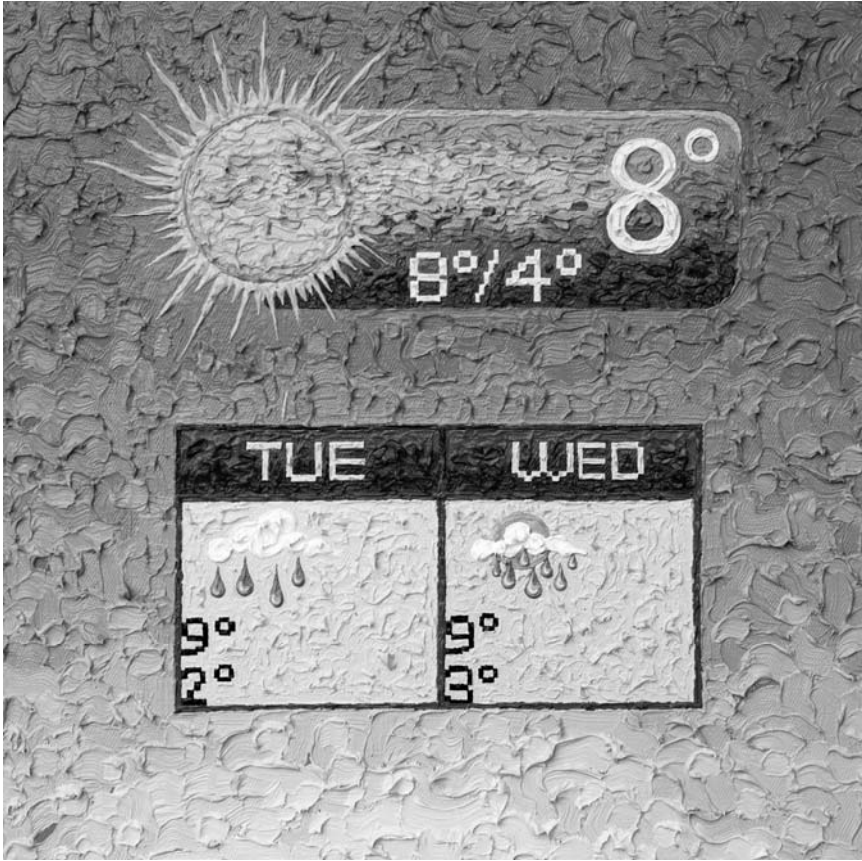


Fig. 9 – Florin Ciulache, *Apocalypse Postponed 3*, 2008, oil on canvas, 45x45cm, courtesy of the artist.

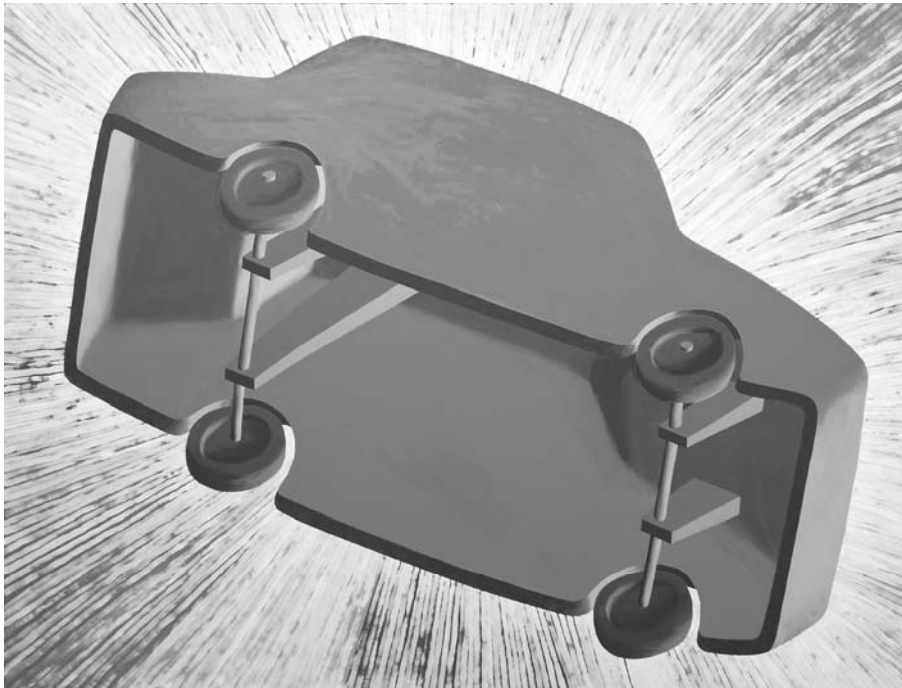


Fig. 10 – Gili Mocanu, *The Car*, 2005, acrylic and oil on canvas, 150x200cm, courtesy of the artist.

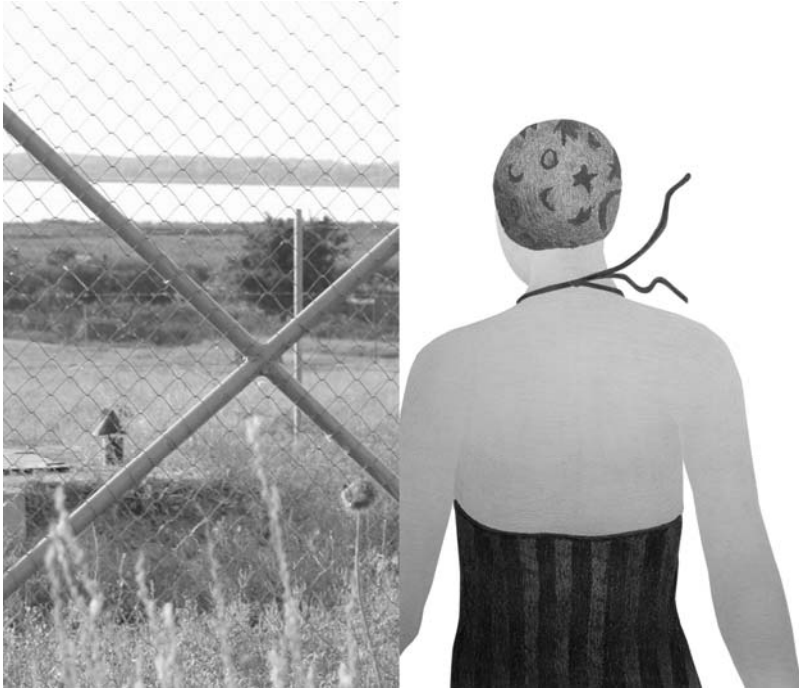


Fig. 11 – Alina Samoschi, from the series *Plastik*, 2007, collage (drawing and photography) on computer, digital print, 80x110cm, courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 12 – Florea Mihai, *Candy Eyes issue no.5*, oil on canvas, 35x26cm, 2010, courtesy of the artist.

To contemporary Romanian art the generation 2000 and the Neo-Pop tendency are still open books. This essay is merely an introduction, a brief analysis of the above-

mentioned topics awaiting new developments and studies.

English version Codruța Cruceanu

¹ Adrian Guță, *Generația '80 în artele vizuale* [The '80s Generation in Visual Arts], Paralela 45, Pitești 2008, "Introduction – The '80s generation in visual arts – identity landmarks", pp. 29-35.

² Vlad Nancă in answer to questions asked by Robert Marshall in *100 To Watch. A Directory of New Romanian Creative Talent*, published with the financial support of the Romanian Cultural Institute, Bucharest 2009, p. 360. See also www.100towatch.ro. The volume, which makes for an ample and useful reading for all those interested in young culture in Romania (visual arts, literature, film, music, theatre, fashion design, comics and street art, as well as curating), is structured by a series of interviews and is richly illustrated. The cultural generation 2000 dominates the selection of artists in this book. According to Vlad Nancă the generation resorts to "DIY practices" for all the above-mentioned purposes; the generation's entrepreneurship and initiative, including self-promotion, is remindful of the famous Young British Artists (YBAs) two decades ago.

³ Raluca Nestor, "Un nou nou val/Another new new wave" in Aurora Király (ed.), *Fotografia în arta contemporană. Tendințe în România, după 1989/Photography in Contemporary Art. Trends in Romania, after 1989*, Asociația Galeria Nouă/UNARTE, Bucharest 2006, p. 45.

⁴ Cosmin Moldovan, "Vlad Nancă" in Aurora Király (ed.), *Fotografia în arta contemporană. Tendințe în România, după 1989/Photography in Contemporary Art. Trends in Romania, after 1989*, Asociația Galeria Nouă/ UNARTE, Bucharest, 2006, pp. 183-184.

⁵ See also Magda Cârnecci, *Artele plastice în România 1945-1989 [Fine Arts in Romania 1945-1989]*, Meridiane, Bucharest 2000, chapter II: "Liberalizarea culturală: 1965-1974" [Cultural liberalisation: 1965 to 1974].

⁶ Romanian Peasant Museum, *LXXX Mărturii orale. Anii '80 și bucureștenii* [LXXX Oral Testimonies. The Eighties and Bucharest], Paideia Publishing House, Bucharest 2003, p. 307.

⁷ For references and remarks in this paragraph see also Adrian Guță, *Generația '80 în artele vizuale*, Paralela 45, Pitești 2008, chapters II and IV; Adrian Guță (coord.), *Andrei Chintilă*, Bucharest 2010 (with an introduction by the volume coordinator).

⁸ See <http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/famous-artists/jeff-koons.htm>; <http://www.arthistoryarchive.com/arthistory/popart/Neo-Pop-Art.html>; Edward Lucie-Smith, *Movements in Art since 1945* (new edition), Thames & Hudson,

2001, Ch. 12: "Post-Pop blues"; Sarah Thornton, *Seven Days in the Art World*, W. W. Norton and Company, New York, London 2009, Ch. 6: "The Studio Visit" (the chapter's main hero is Japanese artist Takashi Murakami, an admirer of Andy Warhol who also completes Pop art's final attempt to bridge the gap between high and low culture – turning some of his unique pieces in multipliable products that make it onto the commercial circuit); Michael Archer, *Art Since 1960*, Thames and Hudson, London 1997, Ch. Five: "Assimilations".

⁹ For these landmarks see also Adrian Guță, *Generația '80 în artele vizuale*, Paralela 45, Pitești 2008.

¹⁰ See also Mihai Plămădeală, "O incursiune în pictura anilor '90: atunci și acum" [An Incursion in the '90s Painting: Then and Now], exhibition catalogue *10 pentru deceniul X* [Ten for the Tenth decade], Elite Art Gallery, Bucharest 2010.

¹¹ "Istoria muzicii din ultimii 25 de ani se scrie la MTV" ["MTV writes the history of music during the past 25 years"] (source: 4 ACE / published on 2006-08-01), http://www.iqads.ro/a_5518/istoria_muzicii_din_ultimii_25_de_ani_se_scrie_la_mtv.html

¹² To define the realm of media culture I resort to Douglas Kellner's view point; see Douglas Kellner, *Media Culture*, Routledge, London and New York 1995. Romanian version: Teodora Ghiviriză and Liliana Scărlătescu (trans.), *Cultura media* (preface by Adrian Dinu Rachieru), Institutul European, Iași 2001, "Introducere/Introduction", pp. 13-14. The author draws our attention to the fact that media culture is subsumed to techno-culture; information offered by him should therefore be updated accordingly.

¹³ Cosmin Costinaș, "«Romanian Urban Pop» în era reproducerii mondiale a sistemului artei contemporane" ["«Romanian Urban Pop» in the Age of the World Reproduction of the Contemporary Art System"], in *Fotografia în arta contemporană. Tendințe în România, după 1989/Photography in Contemporary Art. Trends in Romania, after 1989* (ed. Aurora Király), Asociația Galeria Nouă/ UNARTE, Bucharest 2006, pp. 8-21.

¹⁴ Cosmin Costinaș, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁸ Adrian Guță, "Fragmente dintr-o discuție-fluviu cu grupul ROSTOPASCA" [Fragments from an epic discussion with the ROSTOPASCA group] in *Arta-serie nouă*, no.01/2000, pp. 16-17; the grouping

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“ROSTOPASCA featuring R.B. The Ekillers – killing kute, little animals”, in *Transitionland Romania 2000* (exh.cat.), a project by Ruxandra Balaci, National Museum of Art of Romania, Bucharest, December 2000-February 2001, pp. 98-107.

¹⁹ Florin Tudor in *Arta-serie nouă*, no. 01/2000, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

²⁰ As phrased by the artist in the list of works that accompanies the exhibition.

²¹ About Nicolae Comănescu's painting see also Mihnea Mircan in Dan Popescu (ed.), *32 Romanian Painters*, H'art Gallery, 2005, p. 127; Adrian Guță, “Peisaj urban și mentalitate citadină în pictura românească recentă” [Urban landscape and urban mentality in recent Romanian painting] in Ana Maria Zahariade and Anca Oroveanu (volume coord.), *Spațiul public și reinserția socială a proiectului artistic și arhitectural (2)* [Public space and the social reinsertion of the artistic and architectural project (2)] (“Artă, Comunități urbane, Mobilizare/Art, urban Communities, Mobilisation”, CNCSIS-Consortium grant no. 23/2006, 2nd year 2007), Ion Mincu University, Bucharest 2007, pp. 180-189.

²² http://www.2020.ro/resources/files/gorzo_coconi.htm; Ștefan Tiron, in *INV./0026-0955. Arta contemporană românească – noua generație* [Romanian Contemporary Art – The New Generation], Galeria Posibilă, Bucharest 2003, p. 46.

²³ See interview by Adrian Guță in *100 To Watch...*, *op. cit.*, p. 322; Ina Cazan, in *INV./0026-0955. Arta contemporană românească – noua generație* [Romanian Contemporary Art – The New Generation], Galeria Posibilă, Bucharest 2003, p. 108.

²⁴ Mihnea Mircan, in Dan Popescu (ed.), *32 Romanian Painters*, H'art Gallery, 2005, p. 219; Ina Cazan, in *INV./0026-0955. Arta contemporană românească – noua generație* [Romanian Contemporary Art – The New Generation], Galeria Posibilă, Bucharest 2003, p. 104.

²⁵ Roman Tolici, *Aaargh!!!, Hardcomics* series, with an introduction by Vladimir Bulat, Bucharest 2002; Ștefan Tiron, in *INV./0026-0955. Arta contemporană românească – noua generație*, [Romanian Contemporary Art – The New Generation], Galeria Posibilă, Bucharest 2003, p. 85.

²⁶ See interview by Adrian Guță in *100 To Watch...*, *op. cit.*, p.32

²⁷ See also Cosmin Costinaș, in Dan Popescu (ed.), *32 Romanian Painters*, H'art Gallery, 2005, p.239.

²⁸ Useful texts by Oana Tănase in *INV./0026-0955. Arta contemporană românească – noua generație* [Romanian Contemporary Art – The New Generation], Galeria Posibilă, Bucharest 2003, p. 38; Ștefan Tiron in Dan Popescu (ed.), *32 Romanian Painters*, H'art Gallery, 2005, p. 103.

²⁹ See Dan Popescu (ed.), *32 Romanian Painters*, H'art Gallery, 2005; *100 To Watch...*, *op. cit.*, for the above-mentioned artists.

³⁰ For Vlad Nancă's work and thoughts on art go to www.vladnanca.blogspot.com and the interview by Robert Marshall, in *100 To Watch...*, *op. cit.*, p. 360.

³¹ See also Mihnea Mircan in Dan Popescu (ed.), *32 Romanian Painters*, H'art Gallery, 2005, p. 15.

³² For Gili Mocanu, see also Cosmin Costinaș in Dan Popescu (ed.), *32 Romanian Painters*, H'art Gallery, 2005, p. 161.

³³ See also Mihnea Mircan, “Alexandra Croitoru”, in Aurora Király (ed.), *Fotografia în arta contemporană. Tendințe în România, după 1989/Photography in Contemporary Art. Trends in Romania, after 1989*, Asociația Galeria Nouă/UNARTE, Bucharest 2006, pp. 82, 83, and 86.

³⁴ Ștefan Cosma, *100% București*, Bucharest 2007. See also www.comsicosma.com; Raluca Ionescu, “Ștefan Cosma”, in Aurora Király (ed.), *Fotografia în arta contemporană. Tendințe în România, după 1989/Photography in Contemporary Art. Trends in Romania, after 1989*, Asociația Galeria Nouă/UNARTE, Bucharest 2006, pp. 76, 78-81.

³⁵ See also <http://alinasamoschi.blogspot.com/>; <http://clubulilustratorilor.blogspot.com/2006/10/samoschi-alina.html>.

³⁶ See also Florea Mihai *Eye Candy* (exh. cat. and press release), Anaid Gallery, Bucharest, February-March 2011 (curator Diana Dochia).

³⁷ Dodo Niță and Alexandru Ciubotariu, *Istoria benzii desenate românești, 1891-2010* [History of Romanian Comics, 1891-2010], Vellant, Bucharest 2010.

³⁸ “Edit”, *Omagiu*, “Fals/Fake”, Bucharest, August-September-October 2005. See also www.omagiu.com.