

*After Brancusi* conference

Abstracts (in order of presentation)

**Ruxandra Demetrescu** (Professor, National University of Arts, Bucharest), *L'artiste en héros, l'artiste en magicien*

The Image of Constantin Brancusi: Rereading his Biography using the Canonical Text of Otto Kurz and Otto Kris (1930) "Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of Artist".

**Alexandra Parigoris** (Visiting Research Fellow, University of Leeds), *Debating Brâncuși in Romania*

The recent donation of Barbu Brezianu's papers, following the new donation of Brancusi archives at the Centre Pompidou puts older art historians in the unenviable position of having to reconsider how they have received the story of Brancusi and his art. It is clear that 'Brancusi' in the twenty first century emerges as an artist whose work and persona were understood from a number of contradictory perspectives. But perhaps it is now possible to look again at his story and consider the question of how one story came to dominate another. This paper shall look at the debate that arose around the figure of Brancusi in Romania in the politically charged 1940s between Petre Comarnesco and Petre Pandrea. The terms used by both authors to make sense of their compatriot and his success in international circles will be examined by focusing on the question of perspective in historical narratives. The confounding example that Brancusi offered to both will be examined against the backdrop of his idiosyncratic self-fashioned persona in Paris and the developments in the history of his homeland.

**Cristian-Robert Velescu** (Professor, National University of Arts, Bucharest), *Brancusi: deux exemples de l'exégèse de la première heure. Benjamin Fondane et V. G. Paleolog à une nouvelle lecture*

À l'exception des exégèses que nous désignons sous le syntagme « de toute première heure », parues en Roumanie dans des revues telles que *Luceafărul* ou *L'Indépendance roumaine*, notre contribution vise les textes des années '20 et '30 du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, dus à deux amis du sculpteur : Benjamin Fondane et V. G. Paleolog. Quoique très différentes au point de

vue de la forme littéraire pour laquelle ces auteurs et amis de Brancusi avaient opté – le texte de Fondane se présente sous la forme d'un similiblancu manifeste avant-gardiste, tandis que ceux de Paleolog revêtent celle d'une monographie *in nuce* – les contributions des deux auteurs ont en commun une totale originalité et liberté d'esprit. Elles se séparent ainsi des autres contributions des années '20, y compris celle de Tristan Tzara. Écrivant à la suite des visites rendues au sculpteur, ces auteurs ont fini par accepter la « tutelle » du sculpteur, leur textes portant l'empreinte qui est à reconnaître dans les écrits autobiographiques de Brancusi, conservés au Centre Georges Pompidou.

**Virginia Barbu** (Researcher, Institute of Art History „G. Oprescu”), *"Brancusi dans les yeux des autres" - Barbu Brezianu and the Brancusian Studies in the 1970s*

Barbu Brezianu was the most dedicated Romanian scholar of Constantin Brancusi's art. He began to write his studies in the early '60s, when the first surveys of Brancusi's work and life appeared. Two waves of Brancusi's reception were marked by two events held in Bucharest: the International Conference in 1967, and the Centenary, celebration of his birth, 1976, a time which corresponds, in Romania, on a socio-political level to so-called „cultural liberation”. In this decade, Brezianu established the most important connections with well-known occidental art historians as Sidney Geist, Carola Giedion-Welcker, Sir Herbert Read, Friedrich Teja Bach, Ionel Jianou and many others, he wrote his major articles on Brancusi's beginnings and relations with his country, and elaborated his catalogue raisonnée „Brancusi in Romania”(1974), awarded by Romanian Academy, successively revised and republished (1976, 1998, 2005). His rigorous and refined historiographic approach can be read in the light of his formative years during the interwar period, inquiring their traces on his scholarly work within the context of Brancusian exegetic burst in the 1970's.

**Doina Lemny** (Attachée de conservation, Musée National d'Art Moderne - Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris), « *Chez Rodin, je traîne tous les jours...* » *Lettre à des amis de Craïova*

Après avoir parcouru l'ensemble du fonds Brancusi conservé à la Bibliothèque Kandinsky du Centre Pompidou, nous avons très rarement eu la chance de retrouver un document inédit de la main de l'artiste. Nous

regardons avec circonspection toute nouvelle « découverte », parce que les nombreux dessins, sculptures et même documents écrits qui sortent sur le marché nous réservent de mauvaises surprises. Mais récemment, un collectionneur roumain nous a envoyé pour identification une lettre de quatre pages, datée 1907, que nous souhaitons présenter ici, en soulignant des informations précieuses pour la chronologie et pour la création du sculpteur.

**Ruxanda Beldiman** (Researcher, Institute of Art History „G. Oprescu”),  
*Teaching Sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts and the School of Arts and Crafts in Bucharest at the End of the 19th Century*

In 1898 when Brancusi starts studying sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bucharest, the department celebrates thirty-four years of existence. The ministry and the teachers implement several new laws and a different, more consistent teaching approach. Artists like Wladimir Hegel, professor to Brancusi as well, both a sculpture and professor, starts to teach at this department, owning a rich professional experience. He became a solid example for students.

**Adriana Șotropa** (Maître de conference, Université Michel de Montaigne Bordeaux 3), *Une esthétique de la suggestion: réception critique de l'œuvre de Brancusi avant 1910*

Cette communication s'attachera à analyser la réception critique de la production de Constantin Brancusi de la première décennie du XXe siècle et ses liens avec le Symbolisme. Si à partir de 1907 la taille directe de la pierre remplace le modelage et la sculpture de Brancusi rompt tout lien notamment avec la tradition rodinienne, une partie de la critique continue à associer cette production à la notion de suggestion, voire de Symbolisme. C'est devant l'une de ses têtes d'enfants, par exemple, que le poète Ion Minulescu s'exclamait en 1909 : « Et si on disait que Brancusi modèle les âmes et non pas les formes ? » Le critique Theodor Cornel, quant à lui, n'hésitait pas à voir dans l'œuvre de Brancusi un « accomplissement idéiste » (1910). Des lectures symbolistes de cette production continuent à être données – Edward-Lucie Smith en 1972, Marina Vanci-Perahim en 1986 ou Ann Temkin en 2002 – mais ce rattachement appelle au débat et mérite d'être reconsidéré.

**Jonathan Wood** (Research Curator, Henry Moore Institute, Leeds), *The Studio after Reconstruction: L'Atelier Brancusi as Model*

Brancusi's studio occupies a crucial position within the history of the artist's studio in the twentieth century. As we all know, it has been visited, talked about, written about, photographed, restaged and reconstructed perhaps more than the studio of any other modern artist. It is, one might say, the 'atelier d'artiste' *par excellence*, with a rich and complicated history that runs across much of the last century (and beyond) from its beginnings in 1916, through to its second reconstruction in 1997. This can be charted from its first location at 8 Impasse Ronsin, and a move in 1927 to 11 impasse Ronsin, through to three posthumous relocations (Palais de Tokyo in 1961, Pompidou in 1977 and the Renzo Piano reconstruction, again outside the Pompidou, of 1997). The story of Brancusi's studio - its fate, its rise and fall and 'rebirth', its reinventions and incarnations – tells us much about how the artist's studio has been conceived of and been evaluated over the last century. Brancusi's studio might be seen a barometer or benchmark - a resonant case study - reminding us of the changing ways in which the status and function of studio has been thought about over time. There was however never, of course, just one single 'Brancusi studio'. Each location and staging comes with its own mood, identity and strategy of display and representation (whether staged by Brancusi or reconceived and customized by curators subsequently) and each talks to a particular period and set of attitudes. In this paper, I will look closely at how the post-1997 reconstructed studio - 'L'Atelier Brancusi' - though a fiction - is an elegant museological construct that has informed the ways in which a number of contemporary artists have envisaged the studio for the last fifteen years, investing it with new meaning and potential. I will look at how the reconstructed studio, far from ossifying the studio, has generated intriguing new ways of envisaging it and of articulating the possible experience of the studio today.

**Ileana Pintilie** (Professor, West University, Timișoara), *The Paradigm of the Studio - A Place to Live and Work. Paul Neagu's Studio in London*

Constantin Brancuși is a challenge for most 20th century sculptors, even more so for the Romanian artists, who have looked up admiringly at Brancuși's figure, a collective feeling encouraged by his „canonization” by the communist regime, ever since the mid-1960s. Trained rather as a conceptual artist, expressing himself via mixed-media, Paul Neagu discovers Brancuși during the same period. It is possible that, given his

migration to Great Britain, this discovery of Brancuși might have stimulated him: the correct understanding of the „father” of modern sculpture occurring as a result of „dissecting” a series of motifs characteristic of Brancuși’s art. But Brancuși’s model gains momentum after 1977, when Paul Neagu starts focusing systematically on sculpture, with the series entitled *Hyphen*. In 1995, when, returning to the country he had left as a young man, he can announce his presence in the Romanian cultural space, he organizes a „catalytical sculpture” seminar, entitled „Table of Silence”, capitalizing, as the name suggests, on Brancuși’s artistic heritage. Paul Neagu’s first studio in London, on Shafetsbury Avenue, was open to friends and a small, specialized public, being transformed into an experimental space and even a gallery, named the Generative Art Gallery; this was where he organized an exhibition for Joseph Beuys in 1976. Later, when he moved to Jackson Road, in a house with a small garden, this venue enabled him to live with his artworks continually, in a space transformed into a permanent studio.

**Corina Teacă** (Researcher, Institute of Art History „G. Oprescu”), *Interpreting Brancusi: Romanian Sculpture 1960-1989*

My contribution is a survey of the Romanian sculpture during the last three decades of communist regime, stretching out the way Brancusi’s artistic approach influenced it. The art historian Magda Cârnecki in her book *Artele plastice în România 1945-1989* drew a chronology within the Romanian art, underlining the sociological and political background. A significant part of contemporary bibliography – articles and studies – comes from Barbu Brezianu’s archive but also from „Arta” magazine and other art publications. The present paper, without ignoring the context, follows the changes of artistic vision beginning with 1960s. The visual and theoretical sources of this refreshing process will also be discussed.

**Magda Predescu** (Archivist, National Museum of Contemporary Art, Bucharest), *L’architecture et l’art monumental sur le littoral roumain dans la période communiste. L’expériment Costinești (1970-1971)*

Le dégel politique dans la Roumanie des années 1960 a entraîné le développement du tourisme international estimé par le pouvoir politique comme importante source de financement, fait qui a impliqué un considérable effort de modernisation et d’extension des espaces de logement pour répondre aux besoins d’un touriste arrivant assez souvent d’Occident. Bénéficiant d’une ample campagne publicitaire, le littoral

roumain a été décoré dans cette période-là avec des oeuvres d'art monumental appelées à amplifier la propagande touristique et idéologique. S'échappant partiellement au contrôle politique, l'architecte Ion Mircea Enescu a réalisé à Costinești (1970-1972) un projet architectural moderniste, fonctionnaliste et minimaliste valorisé par des travaux d'art plastique. Créées pour accomplir à la fois des besoins esthétiques et fonctionnels (protection solaire, éolienne, lieux de socialisation), les oeuvres de Costinești dépassent la définition traditionnelle de la sculpture par l'intégration dans les structures utilitaires et par l'utilisation d'un élément inédit : le béton.

**Magda Radu** (Curator, National Museum of Contemporary Art, Bucharest), *From Body to Sculpture: Contextualizing Early Works of Paul Neagu*

In my paper I want to address Paul Neagu's early experimental practice. Right from the beginning, Neagu has expressed a holistic conception of the artistic act, devising an artistic system with metaphysical implications. Reprising the avant-garde goal of transforming art and society, of merging art and life, combining ideas taken from Malevich with the Duchampian goal of producing non-retinal art, Neagu worked at the crossroads of Fluxus and conceptual art, but neither of these categories can be invoked in his case without certain reservations or further explanations.

**Cristian Nae** (Assistant Professor, "G. Enescu" University of Arts, Iași), *The Peasant and the Grid: Brancusi's Mythologies of Displacement.*

As authors such as Michael Baxandall, Ernst van Alphen or Mieke Bal have compellingly shown, concepts of linear causality and *influence* in art history may be complicated by acknowledging the retrospective influence later art may bring upon what is retrospectively considered to be its source of origin. In turn, according to Bal, the notion of author(ship) is itself a textual and narrative construct, which may be used in various discursive ways. The intention of the article is to question and contrast several readings of Brancusi that take into account the relation between sculpture and the pedestal. I intend to show how such a preposterous historical reading informs Krauss's reading of Brancusi as read through the latter works of minimal and post-minimal art (particularly by Carl Andre, Donald Judd and Richard Serra) and to question some of its ideological underpinnings. As authoritarian as it may have become in providing a certain narrative of modern art, Krauss's reading may thus

also be “provincialized”, exposing the cultural prejudices pertaining to the specific historical location she speaks from. By taking a closer look at Rosalind Krauss’s narrative and her reading of Brancusi’s alteration of the pedestal as a first step towards the neo-avant-garde’s spatial expansion of sculpture postulated as a crux of modernism, linked to both abstraction and objecthood. I would also like to show how Krauss’s reading is at the same time dependent on several presuppositions active not only in Alfred Barr’s schemata and Greenberg’s narrative against which it is directed, but also concerning the positioning of American neo-avant-gardes in relation to the European avant-gardes. These ideological underpinnings may become clearer when contrasted to another series of ethnographic readings practiced in Romanian scholarship in the 70s and 80s, insisting upon the formalist features of Brancusi’s authenticity, which place the pedestal not in a certain narrative of spatial displacement, but to a cultural sense of “locality” inserted in a nationalist historical narrative.

**Olivia Nițiș** (Researcher, Institute of Art History „G. Oprescu”), *The Rhetoric of Space: from the Endless Column of Brancusi to the Inverted Plinth of Rachel Whiteread*

The utopian spaces of modernism, the *heterotopia* as Michel Foucault described the non-hegemonic nature of spaces taken over by post-modernism and post-structuralism in a process of double authority - rejecting the past as well as adopting it – represents a key concept in understanding the rhetoric of space from a cultural as well as a political dominance perspective. In my paper I will analyze the cultural shift from modernism to minimalism focusing on two representative sculptures – the Endless Column of Brancusi and the Inverted Plinth of Rachel Whiteread, as two poles in the rhetoric of space, taking under consideration Foucault’s theory of utopian space from its cultural and socio-political meaning as well as Anna Chave’s perspective on minimalism seen as ideologically connected with “occupying”, “oppression” and creating discomfort for the viewer. I will offer a counterargument to this idea underlining the contextual importance of the relation between minimalism and domination/modernism and domination, as well as the conceptual dynamics in the ongoing examination of the physical body’s contact with the space it occupies and the objects it comes across, relevant today not only in the Western analysis, but also in the post-socialist one.

**Alexandru Calcatinge** (Architect, Teaching Assistant, University of Architecture and Urbanism „Ion Mincu”, Bucharest), *The Sculpture of Brancusi and Modern Architecture*

Both sculpture and architecture are three-dimensional arts that structure our space. The well-known architect Octav Doicescu called the great artist Constantin Brâncuși “an architect”, as he represents the very synthesis of arts. Benjamin Fondane considered Brâncuși an artist that didn’t want to make just art, he only loved his work without carrying for anything else. He was a creator, that could create anything, and he would have been a great artist to change the shape of our streets. In this respect, we will propose a theoretical study on the relation between modern architecture and the creation of an artist without rules, that was Brâncuși, the artist out of (his) time. His friendship with the architect Octav Doicescu, one of the most famous architects of those times will also be subject of our research, thus trying to theorize between an architecture of modern theory and the art without theory as part of a special human nature that characterized the works of Constantin Brâncuși and Octav Doicescu respectively. More, the study will create a theoretical framework that will challenge the important role of knowledge, innovation and creativity in a time when different rules are set as the basis of our existence, and how do these create new “responsibilities” for the creator (as sculptor or architect) and how does its human nature will reflect his dedication and his professionalism.

**Christian Fuhrmeister** (Research Project Manager, Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, München), *War Memorials and Public Sculpture after World War II: Formal and Biographical Continuities and Ruptures*

Art (and architecture) was and is used for remembering fallen soldiers and commemorating war victims. Similarly, sculptural works in the public sphere decorate, console, invigorate, and glorify (not only, but also the war dead). My interest covers the time span between the mid-1930s and mid-1950s, rotating around 1945, looking at two decades. In particular, I am interested in both biographical continuities and ruptures or breaks (looking at sculptors that received official commissions before and after 1945) and formal issues, notably the common distinction between figurative art and abstract art. By including examples from Germany, Italy, Great Britain and other countries, which were characterized by rather different stylistic trends (before and after 1945), the paper will try to blur established categories and classifications and



thus challenge the historiography of the postwar period.

**Irina Cărăbaș** (Assistant Professor, National University of Arts, Bucharest), *Commemoration without Shores. Celebrating Constantin Brancusi in post-Stalinist Romania*

When it occurred in Romania during the 1960s, the ideological “thaw” encouraged, in a similar manner to other socialist countries, the recovery of modernist tradition shaped before WWII. The desire to regain a supposedly discontinued history created a breach for cultural myths, and, consequently, a certain number of modernist artists and writers gained the status of almost absolute models for the contemporary culture. Within this context, Constantin Brancusi became such a prominent figure, able to rebuild the gap between past and present, despite the fact that the reception of his work was rather equivocal in Romania not only during the first decade of the communist regime, but during the interwar period as well. Almost immediately after his death, articles of all types and genres were published, the research around his sculpture expanded, the contemporary sculptors proclaimed him their mentor, and the regime absorbed his figure into its own cultural policies. The paper explores the commemoration events dedicated to Brancusi in Romania within a decade spanning from 1967 (ten years from Brancusi’s death and the first international conference on his life and work held in Bucharest) to 1976 (the centenary of his birth). Through its different expressions, the act of commemoration boosted the institution of a local cult of the artist. Furthermore, such events crisscrossed by their very nature between different channels of reception and appropriation and between politics and art history.

**Ioana Vlasiu** (Senior Researcher, Institute of Art History „G. Oprescu”), *Public Art in Romania during Carol II’s Dictatorial Reign*

Brancusi’s *Endless Column*, dedicated to the heroes of WWI, fallen during the fights on the border of river Jiu, is inaugurated in October 1938 in Targu-Jiu, *I.I.C. Bratianu’s* statue, important liberal political figure, by the Croatian sculptor Ivan Mestrovic, in November same year. The equestrian statues of *King Carol I* and *King Ferdinand*, author Ivan Mestrovic, are erected in Bucharest in May 1939 and May 1940. Close in time, Brancusi’s and Mestrovic’s works are discrepant in many ways. I will look for the circumstances of these very important commissions of public monuments in the political climate of the fourth decade, a time of economic crisis and rise of right wing forces, of the royal dictatorship of

Carol II. After WWI, the politics of celebration of the heroes of the war and of the Great Union resulted in the proliferation of memorials and commemorative sculpture all over the country. After the Restoration in 1930, the royal dictatorship established step by step by Carol II, turned more and more public art to an opportunity for celebrating his ancestors and his personal power. Constantin Baraschi's monument *Modura's Fountain*, erected in 1939, is a celebration of Carol's mythitized coming back in 1930 from his exile. In this context of political radicalization, Brancusi's and Mestrovic's commemorative works appear as two opposites attitudes of staging history by means of figurative language of two contemporary sculptors who ignored one another, although some evident similarities between their biographies. I am interested to follow how Brancusi's „shrewdness”, called so by Rosalind Krauss works in order to avoid the propagandistic imperatives to whom public art was subjected.