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## PLASTIC EXPERIMENTS IN THE MOLDAVIAN FIGURATIVE PAINTING SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE 1970S

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**Abstract.** The present article reflects the evolutionary changes of the Moldovan figurative painting in the first half of the 1970s. Since that period the figurative painting has tended to overrun the previous plastic and semantic possibilities initiating a cosmopolitan approach of the universal pictorial image. The plastic formula of the Moldovan figurative painting implements new structural and constructive concepts, which tend towards superficiality of the decorative shapes, being concerned with the structural and textural combinations and associations. The semantic content, at the same time, brings a message of establishing the contemporary reality, life values and patriotic consciousness.

**Keywords:** *figurative, procedure, composition, structure, unfigurative, bifigurative, multifigurative.*

### I. Introduction

The plastic character of figurative representation of the 70s, reveals an increase in austere plastic searching, which was initiated in the early 60s, being motivated by the contradictions between the artists' official ideology and creative trends. The official strategies "enhance the ideology and politicising the artistic creation" [1, p. 34], insisting continuously on a thorough study of the realistic-socialist manner and active involvement of the artists in the propaganda of "educating the masses in a spirit of conviction and communist conscience" [2, p. 5]. The thematic area of the works is highly adapted to pre-determined subjects: "The advancement of the socialist economy and industry"; "Science and culture"; "Our country's transformed image"; "The Soviet way of life and the workers' free time"; "Physical culture and sports in drawing"; "Soviet army watching the peace"; "The struggle for peace all over the world" [3, p. 30-45], following a unique formula for the representation of the painting of the Soviet countries. In this context, the Moldavian figurative painting manages to manifest a tendency of plastic and expressive modernization, finding some compromises in the interpretation of the proposed subjects. A process of "revealing some values of spiritual essence" [1, p. 34] is reflected in the content of the paintings, "the goal of which is the private life of the individual" with the "direct entourage of man" [4, p. 35]. The process acquires similarities with the experimental innovations from the painting of the neighboring countries, through the "taking over of the

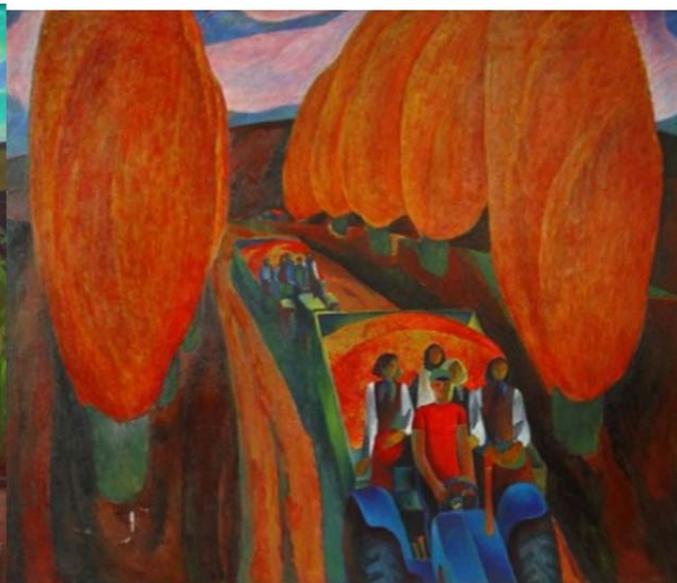
European avant-garde" [5, p. 96], or by the gradual replacement of the "artistic truth" with the "conventional" through highly geometrized and decorative sketchy solutions [3, p. 105].

## II. Structural-plastic solutions

The figurative painting, through its form, describes two modes of plastic approach, both interested in superficial decorativeness, schematism and conventionalism, differentiated by the plastic modeling and character. In some works, it values the plasticity of the soft lines and the gracefulness of formal-color character, printed to an "exceptional" image, as in the paintings "Copii și sportul" (1971), "Lunobilul" (1971), "Glie și oameni" (1975) by V. Russu-



**Figure 1.** Vieru Igor, „Schimbul de noapte”, 1971, oil/canvas, 114x114 cm., NMMA.



**Figure 2.** Iancu Damian, „De la muncă”, 1972, oil/canvas, 113x138 cm., NMMA.



**Figure 3.** Vieru Igor, „Noapte de iulie”, 1971, oil/canvas, 161x201 cm., NMMA.



**Figure 4.** Rusu-Ciobanu Valentina, „Copii și sportul”, 1971, oil/canvas, 247x160 cm., NMMA.

Ciobanu; "Maria Bieșu" (1971) by V. Zazerscaia; "Noapte de iulie" (1971) by I. Vieru; "Sportivi sovietici în Italia" (1971) by M. Grecu and others. In others, it strengthens the image of the form through a geometric "architectonic" structure with harsh, monumentalized rigid modeling, as in the paintings: "Jurământ la altitudinea Lomachin" (1970), by N. Bahcevan; "De la muncă" (1972), "La Enisei" (1972) by Damian Iancu; "Compozitorul Eugen Doga" (1972), "Schimbul de noapte" (1971) by I. Vieru and others.

The structural, architectural and plastic implementations give the figurative painting a concise and well-defined character, which is associated with the "rational" spirit of the contemporary society. These clues appear significantly in the figurative image of the painting "Schimbul de noapte" (1971), (Fig.1) by Igor Vieru. The compositional structure of the work is deliberately limited to extremely simple gestures and configures that perceptibly leave the rational universe of man and the ambiance of the contemporary social environment. The lyrical, romantic and emotional data of the figures remain at a secondary level to the rational approach, which sounds resonant in the semantic content of the painting, suggesting reflections on the responsibilities and worries of everyday life.

The figurative image of "De la muncă"(1972), (Fig. 2.) by Damian Iancu (1932) is shown by a rough, geometric and intensely decorated structure, which transforms the actual sequence into a schematic configuration deduced from spots and rhythmically and dynamically arranged colors. The plasticity of the image reproduces the sensory perception of the real motif, bringing an amplification of the lyrical-romantic spirituality and rational beliefs of society. These are grasped by: the symphony of linear simplicity, the analogue combination of the forms, the contrast of dimensions and colors, the rhythmic ordering, the robustness and the strictness of the figurative positions. The experimental character gives the figurative scene a slightly dramatic connotation that combines lyrical-romantic notes with refined sensitivity, infiltrating and some light "exceptional" romantic notes.

The paintings of Valentina Russu-Ciobanu (1920), which tend to have a surrealist and linear plasticity extremely flexible to a mystical-fantastic character, perfectly fit in the field of the works interested in the "exceptional" interpretation of everyday beauty. The figurative image of the work "Copii și sportul" (1971), (Fig. 3), created according to the thematic idea "Cultura fizică și sportul în arta plastică", uses an exaggerated sinuous calligraphy that imitates hyper-realistically the objective data [4, p. 35]. The neoobjectivism is subtly combined with the fantastic, so it suggests the idea of the real reason in a unique way that excels through exceptional qualities.

The wonderful, lyric-romantic and poetical scene of the figurative character of the painting "Noapte de iulie" (1971) by I. Vieru (presented at the republican exhibition "Earth and Men" from 1971-72) presents an unusual interpretation of the contemporary ambition. The figurative scene is captured in a rendering attached to real neoobjectivism, but idealized to a sublime expression, fueled by the extraordinary beauty of linear drawing, arabesque, and chromatic contrasts that incite the spiritual-emotional and emotional sensibility of the figures. The figurative image is captured over the most actively lighted spots of the background, through a contre-jour effect, by the legendary and relaxed "from work" movement, which reveals an idyllic sense of satisfaction, harmony, peace and progress. The spiritual-emotional qualities contain a profound rational subtext, ascertained by the correctness of ordering the actions and activities of the people. The figures enliven the spatial image through a modest, distant and non-impacted intervention, apparently

noticed out of the scenic "curtain", in a "departure" intention, but which, through the image left behind, suggests the result of its rational work and capacities.

In other works, the "exceptional" expression of the figurative image comes from the intention of "deepening the imaginary-constitutive content" and "internationalizing it" [6, p. 107], through schematic decorativism, which reduces the proper data of reality to symbolic or metaphoric essence.

This strategy obtains an experimental character in the figurative image of Mihai Grecu's "Sportivi sovietici în Italia" (1971), (Fig. 5), completely refusing the proper description of the spatial reality, where "the shape of the object can be sometimes highlighted volumetrically and sometimes it may disappear completely" [7, p. 6], in favor of creating meaningful suggestions that complement the idea of the subject. The artist arranges the scene of the figures through a picture derived from the illusionist or imaginary area, thus creating a symbiosis between contemporaneity, the values of ancient culture, art history, philosophy and classical models of the figurative beauty. The significant suggestions of spatial factuality and constructiveness of the sculptural monument with David's athletic figure, or the plastic schematism of the figurative group in the foreground, reveal the semantic depth of the message. Being structurally organized in a rhythm of vertical shapes, the athletes' figures are isolated or detached from the space ambiance, leaving only a formal pretext that trains the concept which refers to ideas.

### III. Semantic Interpretations

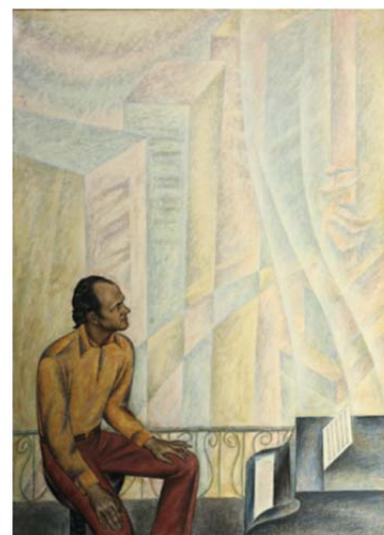
The intentions of the formally-imaging organization of the paintings, show a different approach to the content of the theme. The figurative motifs acquire a powerful poetic breeze that combines lyrical-romantic or philosophical valences. These persist in both multifigurative and unfigurative compositions. The interpersonal mode is managed by the artist's imagination, perception and sensibility toward the represented character. Thus, in the portrait of "Maria Bieșu" (1971), (Fig.6) by Vilhemina Zazerscaia (1927), a plastic symbiosis is created from the artist's scenic image (remarked as "Cio-Cio-San") and the Japanese culture involved in a decorative show, allusive to "exceptional" qualities or values.



**Figure 5.** Grecu Mihai, „Sportivi sovietici în Italia”, 1971, oil/canvas, 150x125 cm., NMMA.



**Figure 6.** Zazerscaia Vilhelmina, „Maria Bieșu”, 1971, oil/canvas, 210x153 cm., NMMA.



**Figure 7.** Jancov Gheorghe, „Compozitorul Eugen Doga”, 1972, oil/canvas, 130x100 cm., NMMA.

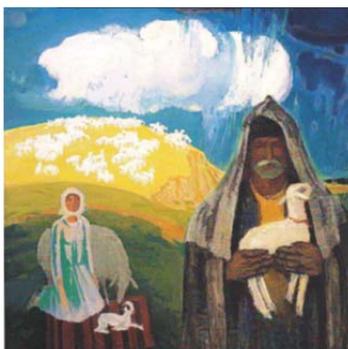
The plastic formula shows "in a unilateral treatment the artistic and psychological universe" [8, p. 15] of the figure, suggesting a "restraint" of personal-emotional qualities [6, p. 108] and their superficiality, highlighting the stage profile to be reconcilable to the general public.

A representative image of the creation and creator expresses the unfigurative composition of "Compozitorului Eugen Doga" (1972), (Fig. 7) by Gheorghe Jancov (1921-1984), which assembles the characteristic essences of the character through combinations of illusionist and fantastic shapes and colors. They do not come from the perceptual tangible reality, but from the artist's imagination and sensitivity to the portrayed person, emphasizing through this process an incursion into the "significant world of derived images" [7, p. 6].

In the painting "Glie și oameni" (1975), (Fig. 8) by V. Russu-Ciobanu, the figurative image initially describes the thematic idea of the "progress of socialist labor", after which the surrealist rendering of the forms suggests an illustrative and oneiric image full of mysticism and ambiguity. These qualities are strongly felt in the illusionist background behind the three central white-faced figures, which are plastic-color isolated from the rest of the entourage, showing graceful gestures, while betraying a slightly artificially theatrical appearance. By over-idealizing and emphasizing the "happy" aspect of hardworking workers, the image becomes a grotesque fable, perceived as a critique of the social ideology of those times.



**Figure 8.** Rusu-Ciobanu Valentina, „Glie și oameni”, 1975, oil/canvas, 130x185 cm., NMMA.



**Figure 9.** Vieru Igor, „Griji de primăvară”, 1975, oil/canvas, personal collection.



**Figure 10.** Vieru Igor, „Mărțișor”, 1975, oil/canvas, 100,6x103,3 cm., NMMA.

The figurative image of the painting "Griji de primăvară" (1975), (Fig. 9) by I. Vieru (hung in the same exhibition from 1975) starts from the theme of work, but evolves to profoundly axiological reflections. The figurative image assumes all responsibility for the management of the signs in the plastic image, consciously neglecting the perseverance of the objective data within the real frame, in order to substantiate the significant suggestions in rendering the typology with the moral-spiritual values of the figures. All these are expressively processed up to a symbolic metaphor of the national figurative face. The created image combines the lyrical-poetic, epic-ballads and bucolic-pastoral features of national origin.

In a symbolic image representing the national figure, the figurative is depicted in the "Mărțișor" painting (1975), (Fig. 10) by I. Vieru, manifested in a "cleaned", "chipped" and intensely stylized form, so that through the simple image of the young woman in the

traditional costume, to describe the full extent of the national character. By the suggestive data of the figure there is a message that festively and solemnly "sings" the beauty of the Moldavian country with the popular spirit full of volition, optimism and kindness. In the content of this image, the real-world information data are gently emphasized and promoted through symbolic signs, which traditionally represent the traditional ethno-folkloric face.

### Conclusions

In general, the plastic searching of the figurative in the first half of the 1970s, calls for multiple combinations and experimental solutions to form a laconic and concise image of the contemporary national character. The plastic forms tend to generalize and stylize the image, so as to look at the characteristic essence of the figures, which were representative of time and space of existence. At the same time, the semantic content of the paintings tends to impress profound emotional and sentimental experiences, emphasizing the rational side of the society and the cultural-artistic spirit, the environment and the living conditions. The content of the figurative images in the Moldovan painting redefines the character of the ambient spirit of the daily environment, modifying the simple interpretation of the prophetic themes through rhetorical, critical and ethno-folkloric suggestions, penetrated by poetic lyricism and symbolic meanings.

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