

**OBJECTS IN THE MIRROR ARE CLOSER THAN THEY APPEAR**

**Artists: Răzvan Anton, Bolcsó Bálint, Claudiu Cobilanschi, Kedves Csanád,  
Miklósi Dénes, Miklós Szilárd, Iulia Toma**

*Objects in the Mirror Are Closer Than They Appear* is an exhibition of new works by artists who engage with the *Minerva Press Photo Archive*, which contains images taken by photojournalists at the Cluj newspapers *Făclia* and *Igazság* between 1960 and 1990. The archive is hosted and managed by *Minerva Cultural Association* from Cluj.

The participating artists – visual artists Răzvan Anton, Claudiu Cobilanschi, Miklósi Dénes, Miklós Szilárd and Iulia Toma, alongside composers Bolcsó Bálint and Kedves Csanád - share an interest in the theme of memory and its relationship to history. Through visual arts, music and intellectual production, the project traces, problematizes and articulates a particular socio-political condition in Romania in the past. Spanning two gallery floors, it is the first exhibition of this scale in Bucharest to highlight the contemporary artistic research based on the *Minerva Press Photo Archive* and it tries to give back to art the political voice that has been taken away from it.

During the dismantling of the former photo lab of newspapers *Făclia* and *Igazság*, over 30.000 negatives of press photos taken between 1960 and 1990 were discovered. Only a small part of the images had been published in the two dailies, while the vast majority remained unknown. Following the discovery, a digital archiving project – the *Minerva Press Photo Archive* - gradually made public this remarkable collection of photography documenting the last three decades of the communist era. The exhibition *Objects in the Mirror Are Closer Than They Appear* can be understood in the line of the discourse present in the field of contemporary art in last decade in which institutions, artists and theoreticians are requisitioning the possibilities of the dissemination of the archive. Archives became more prominent than ever not only in artistic practices and theoretical discourses, but also in the context of institutions and galleries. Archiving methodologies alongside artistic rethinking of the medium can be integrated further within current discourses of art history, theory and practice, at a time when the concept of “archive” is both more widely known and less fixed in its meaning. The goal of the artists’ research presented in the exhibition is not to “discover” and historicize what could be nowadays seen as a “hidden treasure” of a totalitarian system and its fetishization. It is rather a call for re-examination which could point to the possibilities of reviving experiences that existed on the cultural, artistic and intellectual scene in Romania, from the contemporary standpoint of the post-revolution situation in the artistic and cultural production within the neo-liberal constellation.

Răzvan Anton developed his own visual research based on this resource. Through drawings, sun prints and videos, for which he uses the generic title of “studies”, the artist aims to capture the light, record it and reflect it while looking at the archival images. In the exhibition at Eastwards Prospectus, viewers will discover the three types of studies characteristic of Răzvan Anton’s practice: “tracing studies” - the drawings, “fading studies” - the sun prints, and “reflective studies” – the videos made with etched mirrors while capturing the sun light. “The movement is given just by the tree branches in front of my studio window”, explains the artist about the videos. “In a way, the motion is just an illusion which I think is linked to the illusion of formation of images and ‘objectivity’ of photography. In using these mirrors, I was thinking at rear-view devices like the car mirrors that help you look back. But in this case, it’s a rear-view device of poetic substance.”

Further explorations of the theme of memory and the relationship between past and present are evident in the work of Miklósi Dénes. For this exhibition, he selected from the archive several images showing workers in three Cluj factories and then handed the photos to people who used to work there, asking them to write their memories directly on the photos. The resulting prints continue in new ways the artist’s previous investigation of these issues.

In the exhibition at Eastwards Prospectus, Miklósi Dénes and Bolcsó Bálint will also debut a new sound work related to the same photo archive.

*Objects in the Mirror Are Closer Than They Appear* features two other results of a collaboration between artists: Miklós Szilárd (video) and Kedves Csanád (music). For *Recitativo/1:300*, Miklós Szilárd devised an architectural

model at the smallest scale in which plastic human figures are produced, in the size of 1:300. Incorporating photo negatives from the *Minerva Press Photo Archive* and a video camera, the system – and the resulting video - is meant to reflect on the centralized control in communist society “like a shopping mall of history”, while the music composed by Kedves Csanád is based on the sound of one piano key played in reverse. The two artists extended their collaboration for *Recitativo 2*, which features music composed for four instruments and a new video montage that reutilizes the photos from the previous video, but turning them from negatives into positives and thus underscoring their documentary value. Miklós Szilárd and Kedves Csanád will present this new piece as a live performance during the exhibition opening. It is also the first time that the two works will be presented together.

The exhibition setup continues with two works by Iulia Toma. Both in the installation *Festivitate* and in the video *Tensiune în fir*, the artist uses her main medium of artistic expression – textile – to address issues of social tensions and individual emotional conflicts generated by dictatorship and state propaganda. Toma's interventions represent a symbolical requisitioning of the archive that distances itself from the actual archival material but very precisely taking into consideration its specific socio-political condition. This presents the spectator with a question about the differences between different political ideologies and their mechanisms of manipulation. Above all, the work of Iulia Toma draws attention to the responsibility of the individual in relation to detecting contemporary social reality, the reality of historic memory and the establishment system of values.

The multiple functions of a visual archive are explored by Claudiu Cobilanschi in works like *cinecronica.ro* and *Adevărul – atelier cu presă*, both included in the exhibition. While the latter relates to what the artist calls „the social critic potential” of the images in the *Minerva Archive*, the former aims to document contemporary situations through recording, archiving and publishing of a series of image sequences and topics that are post-synonymous to those of the “cine-cronica” department of the former “Alexandru Sahia” Film Studio. Among other things, this department was the depository of footage that could no longer be used in the official press of the communist regime. „In 2018, *cinecronica.ro* takes on part of the position of that department and freely makes available contemporary imagery and topics less appealing for the media of the time”, says the artist.

*Objects in the Mirror Are Closer Than They Appear* gathers testimonies, memories and interpretations of the *Minerva Press Photo Archive* and brings into the light a more differentiated and complex picture of the socio-political panorama of Romania before the revolution. Far from being souvenirs of the “good old times”, the artworks depict the complex field of different practices, strategies and relations that can be found in the archive.

The conflicting and often conflictual interpretations also indicate political developments and shifting social positions that represent the stakes in today's games in the production of art and culture and in the broader battle for unified ideological discourse of the neo-liberal era. Today, in a time of prevalent social and political apathy, the artists' research and their recognizable visual language constitute a different view on 'heritage' while also proving the importance of socio-political agency that every one of us should have.

With the courtesy of Minerva Press Image Archive, Cluj  
<http://www.photoarchive.minerva.org.ro/>