

7. THE ART GALLERIES - PART OF THE CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL DYNAMICS IN THE CONTEMPORARY ARTISTIC SPACE OF IASI

Mirela Ștefănescu¹⁸²

Abstract: *This article brings into the discussion one of the important components of the cultural and educational infrastructure - the art gallery. In the paper, we will analyze the transformations that occurred in the offer of exhibition spaces in the contemporary artistic dynamics of Iasi. Along with an radiography of the Iași art galleries and the relational dimension they exercise, we will expose some of the comments of some Iași visual artists, on the side of this topic, extracted from the interviews which I realized in my doctoral research and which I published in the book *Ieșeni ai artei vizuale contemporane*. In shaping a dynamic artistic context, the art galleries constitute a factor of relational consolidation between the artist and the public, an aesthetic and active environment for the promotion of local, national and international artistic values. The space where visual artists exhibit their artistic projects either in personal, group or collective exhibitions is the place where a special connection is created, an aesthetic and educational means of communication between artists, critics and viewers, from the perspective of the dynamics of new structures, styles and forms of visual expression.*

Key words: *art Gallery, education, connection, communication, aesthetic means*

1. Introduction

The exhibition projects are usually organized in art galleries, art museums or in spaces of cultural institutions, specially designed for this purpose. On the other hand, the visual artists offer to the public various forms of plastic expression in collective or personal exhibitions also in unconventional public spaces. The art gallery, as an institution for exhibiting artworks, practically, creates the connection between the artist and the public. The role of an art gallery differs greatly from a commercial space. The art gallery is the space for the direct interaction of artworks with the public which is interested of painting, sculpture, graphics, textile arts, etc. In the same time, the art gallery promotes the creators of visual art, as well as local, national an international artistic values. All over the country there have been changes in the offer of exhibition spaces. Thus, alongside the art galleries of the Union of Plastic Artists from Romania, (U.A.P.R.) there are private art galleries or other non-conventional spaces where interesting artistic projects are promoted, appreciated by the general public which is open to national and international cultural values.

2. Synthetic analysis of Iași art galleries

The local artistic life is in a continuous creative effervescence, a fact supported by the numerous exhibitions of appreciated artists but also of the younger generation who exhibit a great diversity of styles and aesthetic visions. Thus, the visual artists are promoted through the art galleries in which their creations offering artistic events representative of the local cultural heritage, which increase the

¹⁸² Researcher III PhD., “George Enescu” National University of the Arts from Iași, România, email: mirela_stefanescu@yahoo.com

prestige of visual art from Iași in the context of the evolution of national culture. Among the most important art galleries from Iași that have hosted, over the time, numerous creations by artists from Iași (but also by artists from other localities), we mention: the Cupola art gallery, the Tonitza and Pallady galleries, the ArtIS gallery, the Art Museum within the Moldova National Museum Complex, the exhibition gallery of the Unirii Museum, the Aparte gallery of Faculty of Visual Arts and Design and the other former such as Victoria and Rotonda galleries.

Generous spaces were/are also made available at the French Cultural Institute in Romania from Iași and the German Cultural Center, Book's House (the 3rd floor, which is also a launching pad for young artists), the Emil Alexandrescu gallery within the Municipal House of Culture Iași Mihai Ursachi (a space also open to the artistic manifestations of the students of the Faculty of Visual Arts and Design or the learners of the Octav Băncilă National College), the Radio Studio in Iași, the exhibition hall of the Tătărași Athenaeum, the County Library Ghe. Asachi, the former Turkish Bath¹⁸³, the Hotel Traian and Europa Iași galleries, where numerous editions of the annual ArtIS Salon of the U.A.P.R. branch Iași were held.

The Pod Pogor Gallery, inaugurated in 2002¹⁸⁴, is a generous exhibition space which was designed to host various cultural events, bringing together poetry, visual arts, theater and music in the same artistic space. Also, the Ion Neagoe Art Gallery of the Spiru Haret Didactic House from Iași and the Art Galleries of the European Studies Center Iași was organized relevant exhibition events for the artistic space of Iași. It should also be noted that in many of these art galleries, currently, the exhibition events no longer take place, because some of them, for various reasons, have closed permanently¹⁸⁵, and others were no longer interested in this type of artistic events.



Fig. 1. Galeria de Artă Cupola

The Cupola art galleries have an important history in the cultural life of Iași, numerous exhibitions of visual arts, personal, group or collective, have been organized here. After a period of renovation and consolidation, Braunstein Palace¹⁸⁶ was inaugurated in 2022, a four-level building where cultural events, exhibitions, conferences, etc. are held. The Victoria Art Gallery, a lavish exhibition space was

¹⁸³ There is a project of the Iași City Hall with European funds, through which Baia Turcească will become an International Center of Contemporary Art, which can host various exhibition events – *Curierul de Iași*, Iași, 15.11.2016 – <http://www.primaria-iasi.ro/portal-iasi/stiri-si-noutati-din-iasi/fonduri-europene-pentru-doua-monumente-iesene/3768/stiri-din-iasi>, 29.02.2017.

¹⁸⁴ It was a period of renovation, but now artistic events can be organized.

¹⁸⁵ The case of the Victoria art galleries - which was inaugurated in the 60s, or ArtIS, etc..

¹⁸⁶ The Cupola Art Galleries were located on the ground floor of Braunstein Palace.

closed for a long time, but when it reopened it was only a third of the original space, but in 2022 the space closed for rehabilitation. However, several local institutions have looked for different solutions for setting up other exhibition spaces, creating a beneficial environment for the development of artistic life.



Fig. 2. Galeria de Artă Cupola¹⁸⁷

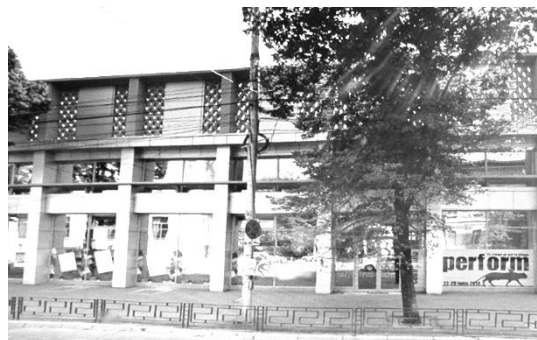


Fig. 3. Imagine fosta locație a galeria de artă Victoria

In this sense, we highlight the Municipality Art Gallery of Iași, which opened to the public in October 2012, the curator of the gallery being the painter and teacher Eugen Mircea. It should be noted that this gallery has hosted numerous personal or collective exhibitions by artists from Iași Bucharest, Sibiu, Baia Mare as well as from abroad.



Fig. 4. Galeriile de Artă ale Municipiului Iași

In this cultural context, also were created the ApArte and Universitas Art Galleries which belong to the George Enescu National University of Arts from Iași. Having generous exhibition spaces, they promote the initiatives of the students from the Faculty of Visual Arts and Design, being also intended for contact with the Iași public regarding the university's artistic and educational activity. Among the most important exhibitions held at the Universitas Galleries were the events of the Euroinvent International Conferences and the International Inventica Symposiums, between 2013- 2022 editions, being one of the exhibition spaces of the 2015, 2017 International Engraving Biennale, as well as other artistic events aimed at contributing to the cultural value of our city.



Fig. 5. Galeria Universitas



Fig. 6. Galeria ApArte

¹⁸⁷ <https://zilestinopti.ro/locuri/galeria-de-arta-cupola/> - 18.10.2022

On the same note, we also emphasize the relevance of the exhibition space set up at the Lost Steps Hall¹⁸⁸ within the Al. I. Cuza University from Iași, a space which is dedicated to exhibition events, book launches, etc. At the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine within the Ion Ionescu de la Brad University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Iasi¹⁸⁹ was also inaugurated the Marble Hall for various artistic events.



Fig. 7. *Sala pașilor pierduți*¹⁹⁰ Fig. 8. Galeria de artă *Sala de Marmură*, Facultatea de Medicină Veterinară, Iași

We also recall the importance of unconventional exhibition spaces, thus, the alternative art galleries (Vector and Tranzit Galleries) have made a considerable contribution to shaping an artistic life, promoting both Iași artists and artists from the country or abroad, by organizing numerous exhibitions, debates, book launches, being a support framework for local cultural values. The alternative art gallery Vector is the first independent space from Iasi for the promotion of contemporary visual arts, supporting the idea of an alternative to the current system of galleries. The projects of the Vector gallery consist in the presentation of exhibitions, the organization of workshops, documentary meetings, conferences, alternative cultural events, with invited local, national and international creators.

The Vector Gallery appeared in 2003 as a result of the establishment of the Vector Association in 2001, being known as the organizer of the Peripheral Contemporary Art Festival. The existence of the Vector gallery was sprinkled with numerous cultural events attended by visual artists from Iași, Cluj, Bucharest, Timișoara, but also from abroad such as Italy, Slovenia, Holland, Great Britain, etc. becoming visible in the European artistic environments.



Fig. 9. Spațiul expozițional *Palas Mall*

For its part, Asociația transit.ro has dedicated a more unusual formal

¹⁸⁸ One of the most impressive halls of the University "Al. I. Cuza", where Sabin Bălașa has 19 paintings.

¹⁸⁹ Now "Ion Ionescu de la Brad" University of Life Sciences from Iași.

¹⁹⁰ On the right side, are exhibited the art works of the professors from the Faculty of Visual Arts, UNAGE Iași.

framework of artistic expression to alternative¹⁹¹ exhibition manifestations. Also malls from Iasi¹⁹² are trying to rally to the contemporary cultural scale. Tus in the commercial areas have been set up spaces dedicated for exhibition events which provide a framework for various individual and collective exhibitions.



Fig.10, 11. Galeria Dana din str. Cujbă¹⁹³

Among the private galleries, we mention the Dana Art Gallery, established in 2006. The gallery managed to combine exhibition events with editorial projects, becoming a benchmark for visual art from Iasi. In the more than 15 years of existence of this gallery, have exhibited numerous important artists from Iași and from other localities in the country and abroad. From the series of original galleries, can also be noted the open-air exhibition space Galeria La Gard in Copou Park, which is a place appreciated by both artists and the public who immediately accepted this form of communication.



Fig. 12. Galeria de Artă La Gard din Parcul Copou¹⁹⁴ Fig. 13. Casa de Cultură „Mihai Ursachi” Galeria Labirint

The Mihai Ursachi Cultural House (located in Copou Park) organizes various cultural events, theater and film shows, music, visual arts exhibitions, literature, etc., which are important for the community from Iași and for the cultural and tourist circuit (by participating in cultural projects and artistic), but also for the promotion of younger artists from Iași. Along with this radiography of the art galleries from Iași and the relational dimension which they exercise, we will present short comments on this topic by some of visual artists and publicists from Iași (Ivona Aramă, Jenö Bartoș, Grigore Iliesei, Dragoș Pătrașcu, Mircea Ștefănescu and Constantin Tofan), which are extracted from the interviews that I have conducted in my doctoral research and which I published in the book *Ieșeni ai artei vizuale contemporane*, at the Artes Publishing House from Iași in 2020.

„In past years, the most important exhibition space was the Victoria Art

¹⁹¹ Cultural events were organized there in collaboration with Vector Association, UAPR Iași branch, etc.

¹⁹² Iulius Mall și Palas Mall

¹⁹³ <https://www.google.ro/search?q=galeria+de+arta+dana+iasi>, 29.02.2017

¹⁹⁴ <https://www.google.ro/search?biw=1680&bih=895&tbm=isch&sa=1&q=expozitia+de+pe+gardul+parculuicopou>, 29.02.2017

Gallery. But in Iași were many offers as spaces for exhibitions, I mean the space at Revista Cronica, Rotonda U.M.F., Cupola, there was a space at Policlinica Mare and even at Casa Universitarilor. I found in the artists' catalogs these exhibition spaces where many artists exhibited their art works with various important themes. Of course, I would make a mention the visual artists should claim the Victoria Gallery as it was the most generous exhibition space. Of course, the Art Museum, at that time, had proposed an extra floor of this space, also to establish an art material store and become a kind of cultural center, but equally, to be a place where the students could come to activate in various cultural projects. We have to keep in mind that many years ago, there, the Moldova Museum Complex, the Palace of Culture, organized many exhibitions with heritage works, there were European Art exhibitions, there were thematic exhibitions of the Art Museum, the Museum of Ethnography, there were some interesting exhibitions for the public and was a much visited place".¹⁹⁵

3. Results

„There was and is still today a problem of art galleries. Despite the fact that they are insufficient, is good that the existing ones are visited, either by a "local" audience or by the random one. The U.A.P.R Iasi branch has always had one or two permanent art galleries, which ensured the presence and stability of the visual arts in Iasi. The two U.A.P.R Iasi branch galleries in Lăpușneanu Street and the Municipal Gallery are constantly in demand, along with other art galleries (with unstable operating terms). A great opportunity of the '90s was the appearance of the private galleries of art collectors Mihai Pascal and Emil Stratan.

At the same time, alternative galleries and exhibitions in non-conventional spaces also operate, locations often preferred to traditional ones, with a positive effect on the relationship between the creator and the public, but also on the cultural life of the city.”¹⁹⁶ „Obviously, for a city like Iașul with over 400,000 inhabitants, there are few galleries, including those of the U.A.P.R Iasi branch, of the The Art Museum has been inactive for a long time and from this point of view we can talk about a flattening, a lowering of the rhythm and variety. I remember the exhibitions, and they weren't full rooms, from the Rotonda at University of Medicine and Pharmacy from Iasi (UMF), it was a room that had extraordinary light and very good quality exhibitions could be held. We have very few galleries and that's a loss for artists to come out to the public. I understand that they want to turn the space at Baia Turceasca into a cultural center, where there will also be exhibition halls. The building is gorgeous and must be preserved, filming was done there, for example a film that created an era, a very powerful film by Mircea Danieliuc, who is from Iași by birth and was a colleague of mine at the university.”¹⁹⁷

„The Cupola, the most famous art gallery in Iasi, will undergo a prolonged renovation, after which (as we were promised) it will return to the Union of Visual

¹⁹⁵ Ivona Arană in the interview published in Ieseni of contemporary visual art, Mirela Ștefănescu, Editura Artes, Iași, 2020, p.21

¹⁹⁶ Jenő Bartoš in the interview published in Ieseni of contemporary visual art, Mirela Ștefănescu, Editura Artes, Iași, 2020, p.35

¹⁹⁷ Grigore Ilisei in the interview published in Ieseni of contemporary visual art, Mirela Ștefănescu, Editura Artes, Iași, 2020, p.78

Artists. Meanwhile a miracle happened. The city hall returned to us (after 27 years) the Victoria Gallery, once considered the best gallery in Iași. (...) The ApArte Gallery of the Faculty of Visual Arts and Design in Iasi remains the only one and the closest to the White Cube concept. It has already become highly requested, both by students and by the professors - artists from the University. What Iași is acutely lacking at the moment is a Center for Contemporary Arts accompanied by appropriate funding. It's a dream that has haunted me for years, aware that it seems almost unattainable now.”¹⁹⁸

„The Iasi city did not have many art galleries, it even lost one of the most beautiful ones, the Victoria Hall, which was a very suitable space, where a large-scale exhibition could be held, such as the Annual Salon of the Iași branch of U.A.P.R. Iasi branch (...) The Theodor Pallady Gallery is also beautiful, which has medium dimensions and is equipped with spotlights necessary for an exhibition space. Unfortunately, the Cupola Gallery is under renovation; we will see if it will have the same destination as in the past. Many editions of the annual Salons of the U.A.P.R. Iasi branch were also organized at Hotel Europa, where there was a generous space, but on levels; there were also several editions that were organized at the Palace of Culture, where there was a generous space in which large-scale exhibition events could be held.

Therefore, the exhibition spaces are appropriate, but much reduced compared to the possibilities that Iasi has. As for the unconventional spaces, they are a solution, but they leave the impression of improvisation, of being temporary. Thus, the space at Baia Turceasca was used for specific artistic events, although it had a different destination. A "more poetic" parallel can be made with the space of the public bathroom, in the sense that art also has a catharsis of its own, which purifies you, you try to evolve spiritually, but it is still under the sign of the temporary. As an unconventional space, the Drossu Gallery was opened, but I emphasize that the value of exhibition spaces, whether they are galleries dedicated to fine arts, or that they are unconventional spaces equipped with spotlights that put the artwork in a different light, is given by the quality artistic events.”¹⁹⁹ „The U.A.P.R Iasi branch art galleries (N. N. Tonitza and Th. Pallady) are available to all artists, and exhibitions are by appointment. ApArte Gallery now is the most beautiful and well-equipped, lit, entered the exhibition circuit, but it is in a rather secluded area, although it is Copou, it should be better promoted. Then, each gallery has its audience, if an audience will be created there at the ApArte gallery to visit the exhibitions, it will be extraordinary.”²⁰⁰

4. Conclusions

In this context, we point out the events generated by the Annual Salons²⁰¹, Moldavian Art Salons, National Contemporary Art Salons, Symposiums, exhibitions on various current topics, personal, retrospective, anniversary

¹⁹⁸ Dragoș Pătrașcu in the interview published in *Ieseni of contemporary visual art*, Mirela Ștefănescu, Editura Artes, Iași, 2020, p.101

¹⁹⁹ Mircea Ștefănescu in the interview published in *Ieseni of contemporary visual art*, Mirela Ștefănescu, Editura Artes, Iași, 2020, p.178

²⁰⁰ Constantin Tofan, in the interview published in *Ieseni of contemporary visual art*, Mirela Ștefănescu, Editura Artes, Iași, 2020, p.194

²⁰¹ Organized by UAPR - Iasi branch

exhibitions, which deeply marked the evolution of contemporary visual arts from Iași, with local and national relevance. Although the artists continue to exhibit their creations in art galleries or non-conventional spaces, in the current context, the need for a large contemporary art gallery, equipped with international standards, which can host large-scale visual arts exhibitions, thus contributing, to a greater visibility of art from Iași in the country and abroad.

In conclusion, we consider the presence of art galleries (traditional or alternative, state or private) as cultural factors that provide dynamism and professionalism to the institutional context in which they operate, encouraging the increase in the number of artistic projects in the cultural field from Iasi.

Acknowledgements:

The article was accomplished with the support of the Institute for Multidisciplinary Research in Art from George Enescu National Arts University Iași, within the project „Optimization of the production capacity and dissemination of artistic research within UNAGE Iași through the development of the Institute for Multidisciplinary Research in Art" (code CNFIS-FDI-2022-0352).

References

1. Arnheim Rudolf, (2016), *Arta și percepția vizuală*, Ed. Polirom, Iași
2. Bejan Petru, (2012), *Amurgul frumosului*, Ed. Fundației Academice Axis, Iași
3. Cârneli Madga, (2000), *Artele plastice în România 1945-1989*, Ed. Meridiane, București
4. Castells Manuel, (2000), *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, UK
5. Guță Adrian, (2008), *Generația '80 în artele vizuale*, Ed. Paralela 45, Pitești
6. Sânc Preda Marilena, (2008), *Arta urbană contemporană*, Ed. UNARTE, București
7. Ștefănescu Mirela, (2020), *Ieșeni ai artei vizuale contemporane*, Editura Artes, Iași
8. Zaharia D.N., (2000), *Iașul Vernisajelor*, vol. II, Ed. Dosoftei, Iași
9. Malița Mircea, (1998), *Zece mii de culturi, o singură civilizație*, Ed. Nemira, București