

The Romanian Participation at the
57th International Art Exhibition
La Biennale di Venezia



Geta Brătescu

Apparitions

Preview 10–12 May 2017

Opening 11 May, 5:15 p.m. Romanian Pavilion, Giardini della Biennale
12 May, 7:00 p.m. New Gallery of the Romanian Institute
for Culture and Humanistic Research

Exhibition 13 May – 26 November 2017

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THE ROMANIAN PAVILION, GIARDINI DELLA BIENNALE

Geta Brătescu has had a rich career as an artist, working extensively since the 1960s. She draws on a series of procedures from the visual and conceptual arsenal of modernism, but also modulates and transforms this legacy, while at the same time advancing toward contemporary modes of expressing and conceptualizing the artistic act, with an emphasis on performance, process, self-representation, and the serial.

Brătescu studied both art and literature, and this dual background is essential to understanding her career. Brătescu's participation in the Venice Biennale representing Romania emphasizes her combination of artistic media, revealing the mobile, open, performative nature of her art; as well as the proliferation of ideas, the overflow of imagination, and the freedom of manifestation that go hand in hand with the creativity specific to her as an artist.

The exhibition in the Romanian Pavilion is conceived around two major themes: **the studio**, which is central to Brătescu's career as an artist, and **reflection on female subjectivity** through various modes of conceptualizing the feminine.

The collage *The Demoness* (1981), a hieratic-Expressionist representation of a female figure, visible from outside the Pavilion, provides the starting point of the exhibition. *The Demoness* articulates a central issue of the exhibition discourse – reflection on female subjectivity, while the



Daimoneasa [The Demoness], 1981
Drawing and collage on paper, 52.5 × 42.5 cm



Jocul formelor [Game of Forms], 2013
Series of five drawings on paper, 35.5 × 43 cm each



Faust [Faust], 1981-82
Series of 31 drawings, tempera, collage on paper,
51 × 67.6 cm each



Doamna Oliver în costum de călătorie
[Lady Oliver in Traveling Costume], 1980-2012
B/w photograph, 38.9 × 39.5 cm

film *The Line* (2014), screened in the antechamber, places us in proximity to the artist and her working process.

Entering the heart of the exhibition, we encounter the disconcerting diversity of the studio, whose multiple hypostases are brought together. The current physiognomy of Brătescu's studio is transposed, with the walls of the exhibition space papered with recent collages that provide countless conjugations of "drawing with scissors."

In proximity to this profusion of forms, which make up a self-contained game, can be found the "mental studio," represented by the *Faust* (1981) series, one of Brătescu's most complex works. It is a visual interpretation of Goethe's tragedy, which was translated into Romanian by Ștefan Augustin Doinaș at the time. The hieratism, esotericism, and abstract nature of the transposition of the individual episodes correspond with a penetrating analysis of the literary text and with a movement around what Brătescu calls "the snail-shell spiral of culture."

In many situations Brătescu makes use of readymade materials, which she incorporates into other works. Personal objects, each with its own history, throng the space of the studio, and they are incorporated into narratives such as *Mrs. Oliver in Traveling Costume* (1980). The Oliver typewriter belonged to the artist's mother, and Brătescu photographs herself in a symbiotic union with the object. The memory of her parents also imbues other works, either directly, as in the *My Father's Spectacles* (2005) ensemble, or as a trace, a vestige, as in the cut-out disks of paper that are incorporated into the collages. But the most extensive use of this personal mythology can be found in the book object *Thonet*:

Voici ton maître (1992), which includes a number of the artist's experiments with objects handed down in the family.

In Brătescu's practice, the real, physical space meshes with the inner, intimate space and becomes part of the sphere of art. Through gradual restriction of her relationship with the world around her and, at the same time, through reduction of art's instruments to the one ultimate, indispensable element, Brătescu inevitably ends up exploring – phenomenologically, psychologically, artistically – her own hands, as in the *Hands* series (1974–76).

Setting out from the core of the exhibition, the visual journey branches off in two directions. On the one hand, there is a transition toward aspects addressing the physical space of the studio, and, on the other hand, the way opens up to an introspective zone of visions and “apparitions,” which reveal the tension between the representable and the nonrepresentable.

The first direction focuses on two works in which the studio can be visualized: *No to Violence!* and *The Studio*. The series of photographs conjoined with the installation *No to Violence!*, first conceived in 1974, record a happening in the studio, during which the artist represents herself with a huddled body, in a posture of fragility, near a sculptural assemblage that evokes the idea of war and bodily trauma, but also



Ochelarii tatălui meu [My Father's Spectacles], 2005
Assemblage, spectacles, paper, 42 × 32.5 cm



Mâini [Hands], 1974–76
Series of 20 drawings on paper, mounted
on ten cardboard plates,
67.3 × 49.3 cm each plate

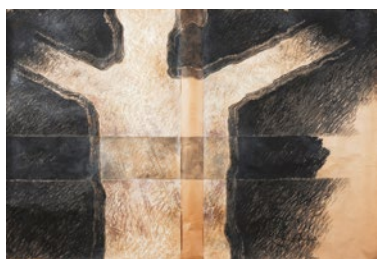
Nu violentei! [No to Violence!], 1974

Series of four b/w photographs, 30 x 30 cm each



Mutter Courage [Mother Courage], 1965

Series of seven lithographs, 33.7 x 37 cm each



Desen pre-medic [Pre-Medic Drawing], 1978

Charcoal and pastel drawing on paper, 100 x 140 cm



Atelierul [The Studio], 1978

8mm-film transferred onto DVD, 4:3, no sound, b/w, 17:45 min, camera: Ion Grigorescu

healing. To the same constellation of associations can also be added the famous protagonist of Brecht's *Mutter Courage* [Mother Courage], to whom the artist dedicated a series of lithographs and engravings in 1965. Mother Courage, an embodiment of strong femininity, endowed with the strength to shape her own destiny, "is a symbolic character of the contemporary world, with the stature of figures from Greek mythology," as the artist herself noted in connection with the work.

The film *The Studio* (1978) summarizes and condenses Brătescu's poetics. The film is comprised of three parts: Sleep, Waking, and Play. In the first segment, the camera captures the studio and the objects therein, while the artist, sleeping stretched out on a chair, presents herself as an object no different from the others. In the second section, she marks out a framework of action, schematically configuring a three-dimensional space within which the artistic act/action becomes possible. The third sequence depicts a game that is unleashed with the objects in the studio.



Mume [Mothers], 1997
Collage, tempera and ink on paper, triptych,
104.5 × 104.3 cm, 103.8 × 76.3 cm and
103.8 × 76.3 cm



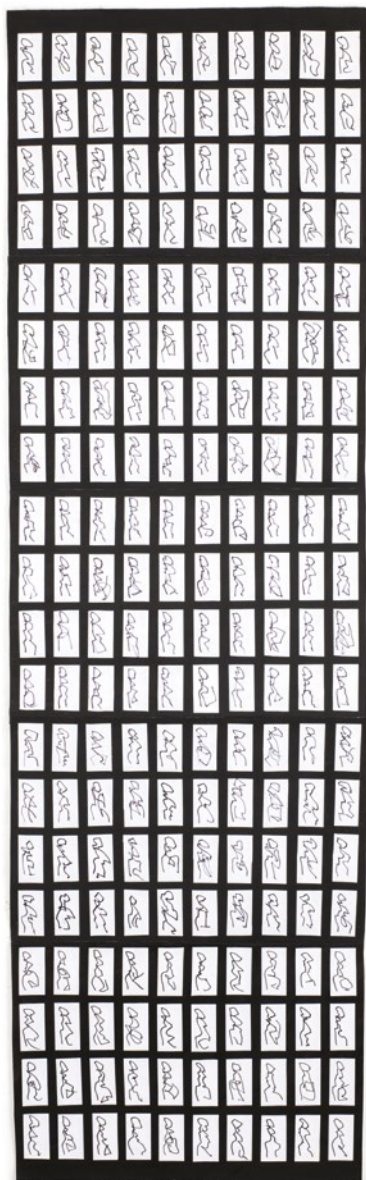
Eu și pasărea Bird [Myself and the Bird Bird], 1993
Drawings with the eyes closed and collage on paper,
117 × 90.5 cm

The second direction branching off from the core of the exhibition focuses on the artist's preoccupation with interiority and self-contemplation, against the backdrop of a multifaceted reflection on femininity. *Apparitions* (1997) is a series of drawings the artist made partly with her eyes closed, and it is part of a wider series of similar drawing experiments. The humor and pleasure of the act of drawing are immediately apparent, and so too is the delicate balance between chance, improvisation, and control. *Apparitions* is a prominent series because it reveals the crucial contribution of inner vision and automatism to the creative process – the repeated invocation of the “apparition” of mental images that the hand seeks to convey through the lines of the drawing.

Also akin to the practice of drawing are the works in the *Mothers* (1997) series, which repeat a theme from *Faust* that has intensely preoccupied Brătescu. The mothers are the pattern of feminine creative identity, and the artist associates the “domain of the mothers” with the Mediterranean, as a “female apparition of the cosmos” whence emerge “the germs of diverse forms.”

The form of the female body is declined more schematically as text through the compulsive act of drawing in the montage *Women* (2007). The transition to a personal, intimate register, which corresponds to a discrete tonality in the economy of the exhibition, is realized through another serial work, *Myself and the Bird Bird* (1993), which has been Brătescu's constant companion in the studio. Here, the bird functions as the alter ego of the woman in general, as well as the alter ego of the artist in particular.

The theme of memory is explicitly tackled in the final section of the exhibition, which presents the series *Childhood Memories* (1975–78) and *Memory* (1990). Although Brătescu does not dwell on autobiographical confessions in her texts, snatches of autobiography inevitably occur, precisely because the labor of memory and that of imagination function in constant communication with each other. *Childhood Memories* captures this ambiguity of the process of recollection. The effort of extracting



Femei [Women], 2007
Collage of 200 drawings on paper with the eyes closed, 172 × 51 cm

Apariții [Apparitions], 1997

Series of six drawings in ink on parchment paper, 52 × 42 cm each



Amintiri din copilărie [Childhood Memories], 1975–78

Series of seven drawings, watercolour on paper, 44 × 56 cm each



Autoportret în oglindă
[Self-portrait in the Mirror], 2001
Object, mirror, wood, photo collage, 21 × 15 cm



Memorie [Memory], 1990
Series of 40 collages on paper, 62 × 36.5 cm each

representations from these nebulous figments leads to results that lie at the limit of the visible. The *Memory* cycle provides an ending to this complex journey. Here, memory is obliteration and repetition; it can be understood as automatism and as a process devoid of finality, which, the same as art, pulsates via the pure movement of the spirit.

THE NEW GALLERY OF THE ROMANIAN INSTITUTE FOR CULTURE AND HUMANISTIC RESEARCH

The New Gallery of the Romanian Institute for Culture and Humanistic Research in Venice is an important space for familiarizing the broader public with the work of Geta Brătescu. Two coordinates define the identity of this space in the given equation: it is both a place for study, providing conditions for readers to immerse themselves in the exhibition catalogue and other materials relevant to Brătescu's artistic and intellectual career, and a concentrated exhibition, whose theme is the artist's creative process.

Here, two emblematic works by Brătescu are presented: the *Medea* (1980–81) series of lithographs, along with the series' preliminary

documentation (*The Mediterranean*), and the film *The Hand of My Body* (1977). *Medea* is a complex series which, like *Faust*, highlights a perfect agreement between strength of intellect and artistic mastery, and *The Hand of My Body*, a film of vital importance to Brătescu's career, makes us witness the act of creation.

In keeping with the focus on the working process and artistic research, the exhibition is rounded off with a number of Brătescu's travel albums, which document her trips to Italy in 1966–67 and 1977.

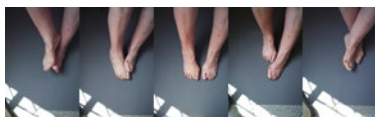
The consistency, integrity, and aesthetic and intellectual quality of Geta Brătescu's art, as well as the artist's incredible presence – revealed in both the works in which she represents herself, and in the female characters she invokes – transforms the Romanian Pavilion and the New Gallery into a “continuous studio” for every visitor.



Alteritate [Alterity], 2002–2011
Series of nine b/w photographs, 50 × 50 cm each



Piatra care naște [The Stone that Gives Birth], 1960s
River-stone, tempera, sharpening knives base,
26 × 30 × 30 cm



Legs in the Morning, 2009
Five colour photographs mounted on paper,
30 × 75 cm

Geta Brătescu (*1926, Ploiești) has been a central figure of Romanian contemporary art since the 1960s. An artist with a rich and long career, Brătescu developed a complex body of work that comprises drawing, collage, engraving, tapestry, object, photography, experimental film, video, and performance. She studied at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy and concurrently at the Fine Arts Academy in Bucharest and worked as an artistic director for the magazine *Secolul 20* [20th Century], renamed *Secolul 21* at the turn of the millennium. In 2016, Hamburger Kunsthalle mounted an extensive retrospective exhibition on Brătescu's work.

The artist's recent exhibitions include a solo show at Tate Liverpool in 2015; *MATRIX 254 / Geta Brătescu*, a solo show at Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive in 2014; as well as participations in *The Encyclopedic Palace*, La Biennale di Venezia in 2013; La Triennale, Paris, Palais de Tokyo, in 2012; and the 12th Istanbul Biennial in 2011. Brătescu's works are in important collections such as MoMA, New York; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Tate Modern, London; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw; The National Museum of Contemporary Art, Bucharest; МУМОК, Vienna; Kontakt Collection, Vienna; Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana; and FRAC Lorraine, Metz. In 2017, Brătescu takes part in Documenta 14, Athens and Kassel, and has a solo exhibition at the Camden Arts Centre, curated by Jenni Lomax.

Romanian Pavilion, Giardini della Biennale

Sestiere Castello, 30122 Venezia

New Gallery of the Romanian Institute for Culture and Humanistic Research

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