

## **SUMMARY**

### **Argument**

The work entitled *A Plastic Discourse on Consumerism. The sculpture as a metaphor*, which I present as a result of the research carried out during my doctoral studies, I conceived as a hybrid theoretical material, based on theories of consumerism and individualism, where consumerism refers to an aspect of everyday consumption unified in the sphere of social life, practiced by an individual to fulfill his own desires and pleasures, and individualism, a moral attitude. I investigated the latter from the socio-economic perspective as a promoter of individual interests and whose main goal is self-development and direction towards pleasure and hedonism. Consumerism is also approached as a place and form of manifestation of the abuses specific to modern and contemporary society, where art and the artist have the role of signaling them and initiating awareness actions, offering the public, through the art object, moments of reflection. The plastic (visual) discourse includes references to artists and groups of artists, but also to one's own artistic practice, which has the mission of reflecting on the alienation of the individual and the goods produced by him in contemporary society, as well as on the conceptions of some social categories, the works of sculpture becoming circumscribed visual comments on the theme. The work of art under the influence of society's myths can be studied through the lens of ideologies targeted by art criticism when the creation is considered a positive or negative commentary on the living environment in which it was produced.

### **The purpose of the research**

The doctoral research aimed to find new forms of visual representation necessary for the evolution and development of personal creation in the field of sculpture and related genres such as installation or assemblage.

## **The hypothesis**

I believe that socially engaged artistic practice is meant to reflect on the forces of society, and the artist has the power and the means to record them and present them to the public through a declarative-open or metaphorical visual discourse. In my case, the visual discourse manifests itself through sculpture, often adopting irony as a form of plastic expression and at the same time relating to society, things and myself.

## **The questions answered by the research:**

- How can the field of co-participation offered by the installation, perceived as a staging, be appreciated?
- How can one qualify this place of experiencing a new spatiality that is different from that of the interaction between a viewer and a sculpture?
- What is the nature of this new spatiality and the relationship between body and object?
- What are the perceptual mechanisms at work in an immersive installation?
- Can we call this space "critical" for defining the boundary between art and reality?
- Can contemporary art help us to (re)connect to a certain place, in a certain period of time?

## **Objectives:**

- To decipher the myths of the consumer society;
- To understand the mechanisms involved in this social and economic system, not from the point of view of the scientist, but of the plastic artist and the individual who faces the effects of the consumer society;
- To investigate the readings of philosophers, anthropologists, sociologists, aestheticians who have analyzed and theorized a number of problems related to the subject;
- To analyze the basic ideas represented by the artists, more or less established, in their works;

- To investigate fundamental problems: the alienation of the individual in the consumer society, the human subject as a commodity or the residues of the consumer society;
- To relate the superficial and chaotic side of consumerism with personal creation by experimenting with ephemeral, perishable or innovative materials, such as: soap, 3D printer filament and synthetic resins;
- To use the method of assemblage, incorporating altered materials, sometimes even things literally left on the side of the road, according to the customs instituted by the "overproduction machinery" of the abundance economy;
- To assign them a conceptual and compositional role;
- To create metaphorical images that summarize the researched subjects through anthropomorphic or zoomorphic plastic structures;
- To associate architectural elements with established styles and the artificial nature of objects of industrial origin;
- To ensure that the works reflect the affiliation of the masses of people, of consumers to lifestyles that falsely give them a "surrogate" identity;
- To surprise the public who are only looking for entertainment in art;
- To reinterpret the iconic and transform it into a plastic, object sign;
- To gravitate artistic practice to the perimeter of installation art;
- To follow directly, within the created manifestations, the behavior of the public in the exhibition space;
- To position the viewer in the situation to linger and think about some problems extracted from real life;

## **Methods**

The twinning of the theoretical study with the hermeneutic and structural-morphological analysis focused on the plastic creations of other artists and personal ones, in order to

identify and demonstrate the hypothesis according to which the phenomenon of consumerism that characterizes developed or developing capitalist societies has also captured the territory of visual arts.

## **Bibliography**

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## **Presentation of content**

The four chapters of the doctoral study contain references to certain models of thought that examine consumerism and the visual from different perspectives that I have identified, analyzed and used, on the one hand in relation to established art forms and on the other hand, with visual expressions of some young artists or present in personal creation.

In the first chapter I treated the "consumer society" as a place for the manifestation of new forms of art through the lens of the studies of some authors who deal with the fundamental problems of the consumerist capitalist society and the multiple relationships established in this context: Mike Featherstone, Guy Debord, Jean Baudrillard, Zygmunt Bauman, Gerog Lukács, Gilles Lipovetsky, Fredric Jameson. Researching their studies, we only focused on those aspects that we considered relevant and consonant with the approaches of artists

active in the 20th century and the first decades of the 21st century, such as: Meret Oppenheim, Richard Estes, Andy Warhol, Duane Hanson, Barbara Kruger, Robert Rauschenberg, Hank Willis Thomas. In the first part of the first chapter, entitled ***Consumer Society. Theoretical preliminaries and artistic replicas***, the research started from framing consumerisms in a cultural ideology, due to its foundation on the imperative of consumption, noting that the term is also used as a synonym for the meaning of the verbs to destroy, use, waste, exhaust. To present the subject from the perspective of a socio-economic system, I studied the logic of the market which is based on the needs of the subjects, because it strives to impose the commodity as the only referent, the imperative being that everything becomes a commodity, is represented, signified and function as a commodity. Due to the spectacle generated by advertising, the trend of psycho-social modeling of the individual is increasingly present in the practice of marketers who function as social architects of desires in an industry of dreams, as desired by the consumer society. In the second part of the chapter, I investigated the artistic manifestations that discuss the fundamental problems of capitalist society. The "colonization of desires" is transferred to psychoanalytical processes, and the presence of some works subsumed under the surrealist style, for example, illustrates the process also based on the fetishization of some artifacts with commodity status. Analogously, we can talk about the fetishization of certain sculptures or the fetishization of the image of the woman as an object of desire when the nude is "delivered" in forms of commercial art. Artists like René Magritte, Andy Warhol, Don Eddy, Richard Estes and Duane Hanson simulate a world of consumption in which the fetish object and the sign object proliferate endlessly. Two types of absences structure the field of aesthetic experience at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. The first type can be described as the absence of reality itself, as it retreats behind the phantasmagorical screen of the mass media, as if sucked into the vacuum tube of a television monitor. A second type defines the invisibility of institutions and prefabricated languages, an absence - apparent behind which power works, an absence that artists, starting with Barbara Kruger, Cindy Sherman to Hans Haacke, Daniel Buren and Richard Serra, try to highlight, because the life of the subjects "mass-produced" by the consumer society becomes a succession of false aspirations to a perpetual dream world, which determines the compulsive collection of goods consumed and quickly abandoned.

In the second chapter I presented the context of globalization in which the contemporary artist models the artistic practice according to the terms of consumerism, terms which, at present, question the approach of aestheticizing the world through which the myths of the consumer society are caught in the aesthetic dimension of consumption in general and the consumption and production of art in particular, in which, as Madalina Surducan states, "against the global economic expansion of the market, the aesthetic dimension infiltrates all spheres of activity as a response to the imperative of the market: it is about the aestheticization of the everyday world. The second chapter, called ***Attitude of the contemporary artist towards consumerism. Globalization and Aestheticization***, includes an analysis of "artistic capitalism" presenting the aestheticization of the world which is based on the unification of space, time and the individual. The starting point of the investigation was the research of the studies of sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, because they treat the aestheticization of the world within the consumer society and focus on the processes of creativity, imagination and pleasure. This theoretical route was completed with the theses of Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy for an extended definition of aestheticization on everyday life. Since the features that characterize the market of consumer society reflect on the artistic production, I presented the role of the contemporary artist in the position in which he juggles the spectacle, capital and the image, and I analyzed the work of several artists and groups of artists after the Second World War and until now. Following the activity and participation of some generation colleagues (Cătălin Bătrânu, Ion Toderașcu, Dona Arnakis, Alexandra Asaftei, Lera Kelemen, Bogdan Matei, Iulian Cristea), I was able to spot a sample of artists who undertake a practice that resonates with a series of trends found on the international scene of contemporary art. Their creations contain themes, subjects, visions or ways of working in which we have identified echoes of consumerism or positions towards this phenomenon.

In the third chapter I presented the diffusion of the animal image identified in contemporary art in which artistic creation explores the realm of identity and nature in a way in which the image of animals is used as a substitute/metaphor/symbol/vehicle to transpose philosophical, anthropological and aesthetic ideas. In the third chapter, ***Animalier in contemporary art***, we based our research on a series of aesthetic-philosophical benchmarks

debated and consolidated by Jacques Derrida, Steve Baker and Giovanni Aloï. These poststructuralist studies focused on aspects of human identity offered an imaginative reassessment of the role of animals from the perspective of the "critical aesthetics" of consumerism. The matters taken into consideration were not interpreted through the frames of ecological activism which, in some respects, can be implied or which exist in the analyzed artistic practices, but rather we related them to the set of features specific to the consumer society (ethos). For this purpose, I followed a series of artists aware of the influence of modern man in shaping the present who used zoomorphic forms or even animals in their creations. The emergence of taxidermy in contemporary art sharpens the current problematization of materiality, gender, ethics and aesthetics emerging in postmodernism, while trying to adequately address the ecopolitical crises that characterize the current phase of the Anthropocene.

The fourth chapter, ***Sculpture as a tool of critical visual discourse. The last show and other personal projects*** relate their own explorations and technical-artistic experiences. He joins the implementation of ideas and presents the professional path developed in recent years, materialized in group exhibition participations, the organization of three personal exhibitions (*Boujee Room*, 2019, made in collaboration with Emanuela Hrițcu; *Trip*, 2021; *Last show*, 2021 ). The installations and sculptures exhibited involved the development of aesthetic models through which sculptural practices can be understood as tools of social criticism or metaphors of everyday life. We intended that through the works, be they sculptures or installations, we would make a series of critical, visual comments on capitalist economies, collection and museum display practices or sales strategies practiced by advertising, stores and shopping networks. Given the way in which these exhibitions question various conventions and modes of display, it might seem that the works are reduced to being tools of 'materialist' criticism. Our intention was to give them a hermeneutic opening in which the viewer can operate both with the aesthetic or cognitive conventions they know, as well as with concepts stated or deduced by using certain components as key elements in deciphering the meanings of the work. Despite the spatial expansion of these types of creative manifestation (works, exhibitions), we followed the exploitation of the installation as an aesthetic means, noting that in recent years the art of installations has come to outline an area dictated more and more by the need to capture

the eye through the created performance, to induce states of relaxation or playful atmosphere, to build immersive, participatory spaces or to inoculate the feeling of monumentality, all of which are designed to induce states stimulated by perceptual novelty, amused passivity or amazement in front of technology. Another aspect targeted was the psychology of accumulation, manifested by emotional dislocation, the pleasure of luxury or pathologized hoarding behavior. In this sense, we used the precedent of object assemblage as a counterpart to the behaviors of compulsive and uncontrolled consumerism.

The research undertaken at the expense of the installation led to the conceptualization of a new plastic space. This is located on the border between plastic space and everyday space. It takes its source from the pictorial space and tends towards an architectural space. I am situated between the abstract space, developed by scientific thinking and internalized in everyday life, and the space absolutely reduced to the intimate sphere. It is not a medium between two extremes because it tends towards absolute space and is a critique of abstract space. These spaces are intimately woven. Abstract space has a special role in this interweaving, as it tries to dominate others by compressing the whole to the extreme. Starting from the pictorial space of the classical perspective, the plastic space annexed the theatricality of the performing arts in order to sensibly make a space until now framed within fixed and predetermined limits. It took the first half of the 20th century to free the plastic space from the picture frame or plinth. The installation is the product of this liberation and in a certain way the result of it. In this way, she creates an original plastic space that borrows its qualities from pictorial space, theatrical space and architectural space. It combines the Dadaist concepts of pop art and environments, rethought through the filter of in situ movement. We find that the installation is an object construction specially developed for a specific place, from the private space of an art gallery to the public space, any other space or expanse selected by the artist with the aim of programming an impact on the public.

In the current context, the visual arts are interested in everything that is specific to the performing arts, namely ephemerality, processuality and the event. The installation created the possibility for visitors to become part of the artwork through their physical presence or through tactile or virtual interaction with the proposed ensemble. Heir to minimalist art, in terms of attention to the context and the viewer's body, and conceptual art in terms of



questioning the concept of art through its relationship with reality, this genre legitimizes itself by integrating the surrounding space and constantly questioning the status of the work of art. Between the viewer and the work there is no longer any distance or boundaries; the viewer is in the artwork.

I believe that the installation in its immersive form is a major event in the history of art and in society and represents the emergence of a new plastic space on the border between art and reality. This border is the engine of an artistic device through which the visitor experiences a different perception of space. The reception of the work is no longer based on a subject-object opposition, but on a project that generates another type of spatiality, enriched by the receiver's perceptions. This additional spatiality conferred by the presence of the installation is located at the intersection of visual arts, performing arts and architecture. The spatial limit of classical art made space visible. The medium of modern and postmodern art made spatiality visible. Along with the installation, contemporary art expands the limit of the work of art and creates at the border between art and life a semantically enriched perimeter, complementary to the form, a place for the propagation of mental constructions resulting from the co-participative act. The notion of immersion appears to us as a paradigm of the contemporary man's aesthetic relationship with the art space and the urban space.

Contemporary art dramatizes the work of art and makes the border between art and life a populous and sometimes livable space. In the installations, the full and the empty are intimately linked so that the spaces created, accessible and become spaces of mobility and immersion of the visitor, challenging not only his senses, but also his imagination. The installation is, in this aspect, an experimental laboratory. The fusion between the plastic space and the scenic space (location) allows the work of art to make the transition from the real space to the symbolic or virtual space - reflexively, so that later, loaded with a new experience, it allows the visitor to return to the real world. Penetration into the physical and symbolic field of objects is the condition for perceiving a dynamic, active space that opposes the neutral, often routine space of everyday life. The installation becomes, in my creation, the place of anchoring, of reconnecting with the world. Participatory art space becomes place. And the place becomes an important point of fixation of our existence in a space whose infinity we feel today. Our connection with place is changing radically. We are

increasingly in transit not only between places but also between worlds. Previous generations could "live in a place", we must learn to live in a space. Places have the power to structure spatiality so that it becomes "existential." Globalization is not only the geographical context of economic expansion, but also of cultural expansion. The acceleration of phenomena in all sectors of human activity due to cutting-edge technologies and cybernetization, through digitization and the substitution of the real space with the virtual one, also produces major transformations in the field of art. One of the effects is dematerialization, a process at the opposite pole of consumerist materialism, and another, physical and mental uprooting by moving to another spatio-temporal dimension, marked by the unification of space, time and the individual.

In conclusion, plastic discourse proves to be a relational process focused on the cultivation of human relationships with sensitive and tangible goals by intensifying the invention of new forms and signs. I have demonstrated how in everyday life we are willing to believe in the mystical forms of objects-products registered in our subconscious as existential landmarks. Taking into account these aspects, the product of artistic work, once extracted from these particularities, represents a perceptible form that even sums up our presence in a certain space. Thus, for the field of arts, our presence in a certain space becomes an event. The plastic space until the end of the 19th century was a space in the form of a border, which visibly separated the space intended for works of art from the real space, namely the frame of the painting and the plinth of the sculpture. This boundary between real space and plastic space was a guarantee of the distinction between the profane world and the sacred world, between the real world and the imaginary world, between the visible and the invisible. With the discovery of perspective in the Renaissance, the spatial limit based on the perspective system constituted a globalizing vision of the world that represents man's will to dominate and control the environment through a distancing and a miniaturization of it.

The deepening of the subject facilitated the development and visibility of personal work on the scene of Romanian contemporary arts. The continuous impulses to learn about new concepts with the aim of building new artistic representations were the main engine that guided me.