

A P P A R I T I O N S

G E T A B R Ă T E S C U

The Romanian Participation at the
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La Biennale di Venezia

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CONTENTS

Geta Brătescu – <i>Apparitions</i> . Journal of an Exhibition	7
Between Venice and the Studio: An Introduction to Geta Brătescu's Books	19
Excerpts from <i>De la Veneția la Veneția</i> [From Venice to Venice]	27
Excerpts from <i>Atelier continuu</i> [Continuous Studio]	61
Excerpts from <i>Atelier vagabond</i> [Wandering Studio]	127
Excerpts from <i>A.R.: Roman</i> [A.R.: Novel]	161
Excerpts from <i>Copacul din curtea vecină</i> [The Tree from the Neighboring Courtyard]	181
Excerpts from <i>Jurnal în Zigzag</i> [Diary in Zigzag]	225
Biography	245
List of illustrations	256
Colophon	261

**GETA BRĂTESCU – APPARITIONS.
JOURNAL OF AN EXHIBITION.**

Magda Radu

The Romanian Pavilion

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. Her career deserves both a nuanced reception in the context of the global history of art and the endeavor to gain a panoramic view of contemporary art, which aims to revise the canons not only by reinterpreting them from the standpoint of genre, but also by dismantling the western cultural hegemony which until recently constituted them.

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.

I have conceived the exhibition in the Romanian Pavilion 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 studio has multiple meanings and instantiations, and for the artist it is both a physical and a mental space. The exhibition captures the studio's various phases and transformations over the course of time, ranging from the way it is currently invaded by series of collages, caught up in the whirl of an inexhaustible "play of forms"; to representations of it in film or photography. The studio is an autonomous realm of creative expansion, but it is also a space appropriate for concentration, introspection, and associative thinking. Drawing on her rich visual and literary background, Brătescu interprets classic texts from literature – assimilated through fertile contact with the multidisciplinary environment of the *Secolul 20* (now *Secolul 21*) editorial office, where she has worked for many decades as a graphic designer – constructing veritable visual philosophies, shot through with meditations on the feminine, understood as a generative agent of artistic creativity. Overcoming "biological servitude," woman attains to the condition of creator of forms; as an artist Brătescu extrapolates this condition through self-exploration, sometimes drawing upon a rich inventory of references from mythology, in both the broader and the personal sense.

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. The film *The Line* (2014), screened in the antechamber, places us in proximity to the artist and her working process. For Brătescu, art is essentially performance regardless of

the medium, and drawing stands out as a signifier of every form of artistic thought and exteriorization.

Entering the heart of the exhibition, we encounter the disconcerting diversity of the studio, whose multiple hypostases are brought together. On the one hand, 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." This is the freest and most abstract of the artist's collage procedures, practiced in this form for more than a decade. The forms call to each other, summon each other; remnants of materials used in other compositions are incorporated into ever-renewed configurations. The process is cumulative, and through exhibition/montage, the fragments of paper – sometimes placed in dialog with lines or small objects from the everyday world – can be read as a series, as interconnecting from one series to the next, forming a "world" that the artist likens to a musical composition, where every form is akin to a separate note.

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." She undertakes a vast exploration of a world of symbols and visual motifs from various periods in the history of art and adopts elements of Goethe's theory of colors in order to invent formal-conceptual molds and

superimpositions and juxtapositions of materials that make up a “visionary world,” sufficient unto itself and functioning autonomously from the text of the tragedy, while at the same time in communication with it.

In Brătescu’s vision, culture accumulates within a vast mental territory, where the fields of knowledge (visual and literary) freely communicate between themselves and can be activated according to the laws of the imagination and the whims of subjectivity. At the center of the meditation occasioned by her work on *Faust* are the two female characters Margareta and Elena, two hypostases of the feminine that in fact merge, like Medea, in “the rudimentary and form-generating figures of Goethe’s mothers.” The feminine moves beyond the identity conferred by sex and gender to become a matrix that gives birth to forms.

In many situations Brătescu makes use of readymade materials, which she incorporates into other works. She employs an arsenal of objects from her family’s history, using them to imagine characters caught up in various narrative situations. 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. Her 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. The disks are outlines of the small weights that Brătescu’s father, the proprietor of a pharmacy in Ploiești, worked with in his laboratory, weights that are always to be found on the artist’s worktable and accompany her in

her working process. 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. These bibelots, pieces of furniture, and toiletries come to life; they become characters and interact among themselves in miniature vaudeville sketches. This is what happens with the elegant Thonet chair, which becomes the Cavalier Thonet and enters into various intrigues and amorous games with Mrs. Oliver.

In Brătescu’s practice, the real, physical space meshes with the inner, intimate space and becomes part of sphere of art. In certain cases, the artist reflects on the sphere of art in an almost literal way, producing works that investigate the conventions, instruments, and framework of art, as well as her own involvement in this process. Not only the space of the studio as such, and the objects, shelves and worktable therein, figure as elements that acquire visibility within reflection on the possibilities of the existence of art, as well as on the artist’s body, which analyzes itself in an attempt to generate “expression.” 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, which crystallizes a vision of the studio, 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. But Brătescu’s approach does not establish a dividing line between these seemingly divergent directions. Rather, they coexist and feed upon one another.

The first direction focuses on two works in which the studio can be visualized. The series of photographs conjoined with the installation *No to Violence!*, first conceived in 1974, reveals the extent to which the configuration of a work is dictated by the physical limits of the space. The photographs record a happening in the studio, during which the artist represents herself with huddled body, in a posture of fragility, near a sculptural assemblage that evokes the idea of war and bodily trauma, but also healing. This disjointed assemblage provides an abstract, synthetic, and, at the same time, lifelike (almost palpable) transposition of memory as montage. The artist’s memory of the war, of the smell of blood from the period when she was a schoolgirl in Ploiești reading books to wounded soldiers with her classmates, combines with the reference image of a military convoy from a film frame and the “contemplative archaeology” of the materials that the image evokes: the military cape, the straw mattress, the wooden crutches, the plaster cast. 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 also combines with a text (translated in the exhibition catalog) describing its subject; perhaps more than that, the text is an extension of the film, a supplement. What is thereby highlighted is meaning’s astonishing power of modulation via plays of signifiers that constantly slide toward and into each other. 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. These include the chair, folded and unfolded during the game, upon whose oval surface two photographic cut-outs of the artist’s eyes are pasted at one point in the action. This is in keeping with the idea of anthropomorphizing and personalizing the objects around her. The objects are invested with their own dynamism, and their structures, which are mobile and flexible to greater or lesser degrees, contribute to highlighting the permeability between subject and object.

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 shut, 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.

The sexualized female bodies seem to crystallize small narrative episodes or to embrace the identity of characters, but their representation and interrelatedness remain unelucidated. *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.” In this rendering, the mothers are hieratic apparitions, which break away from the limitations laid down by genre. The artist cites C. G. Jung, embracing his interpretation of these protean figures; the mothers are “free of opposites,” and their eroticism is a form of pure love capable of procreation.

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 woman in general, as well as the alter ego of the artist in particular. The bird is also a metaphor for the freedom of thought that “takes flight.” The quarrel, the tense relationship between woman and bird, conveys the conflict between the contrary impulses that structure the

artist’s subjectivity, as well as the dialectical relationship between form and the amorphous in the practice of drawing.

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. Episodes and moments from the artist’s childhood – the dove wrapped in a napkin that her grandfather gave to her; the white lamb; an imaginary friend who went everywhere with her – cannot be distinguished from the integument of fiction in which the “epiphanies” of memory become enclosed over the course of time. The effort of extracting 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. The collage of black paper on black constitutes a counterpoint to the colored, expansive world of the “game of forms” cycle. Here, the invocation of memory does not produce any representational effect. 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 of Culture and Humanistic Research

The New Gallery of the Romanian Institute of Culture and Humanistic Research in Venice is an important space for

familiarizing the broader public with the work of Geta Brătescu. The New Gallery exhibition complements the display in the Romanian Pavilion. 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 catalog and other materials relevant to Brătescu's artistic and intellectual career, and a concentrated exhibition, whose theme is the artist's creative process.

Here I have chosen to present two emblematic works by Brătescu: 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 to 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 albums contain numerous images and notes. Connected to the book *From Venice to Venice*, translated excerpts of which are included in this catalog, the following question appears in one of them: "Venice, beginning and end, when will I see you again?"

The superimposition of artistic and cultural references and the contribution made by personal memory converge in the manner in which the artist visually approaches a literary text, a myth, a "sign" such as *Medea*. For the artist, the "sign" is characterized not only by its semiotic complexity, but also by the ability of contrary impulses to coexist within it, while ultimately remaining opaque, impervious to interpretative elucidations. Here, the same as in

other situations, the theme of *Medea* is conjugated in a plurality of media, from drawing to tapestry, from lithographs to flax traced on cloth using a sewing machine. For Brătescu, *Medea* is an inexhaustible sign, but at the same time *Medea* is contained within a formal pattern, repeated as an incantation, as if the artist were serially performing the tragic destiny of the character to the rhythm of creation. *Medea* embodies, she says, woman as a "territory of birth and death ... the maternal 'I' is reflected terrifyingly, hysterically." As the *Mediterranean* documentation shows, the *Medea* pattern comprises an "ensemble of forms." The outline of *Medea* is based on the image of an island viewed from above, which, when turned around, becomes a portrait. But the archetypal symbol of *Medea* is multiform, labyrinthine. Likewise we can see in the interpenetration of striated ovoid forms an X-ray of the mother's womb. Certain hypostases of the series allow us to divine in schematic form the slain children.

In the experimental film *The Hand of My Body*, the artist's hand works at or rather dances above the worktable, absorbed in its own choreography. Brătescu calls the worktable her "field of action," and over its expanse her hands come into contact with the "outskirts of objects," taking possession of them one by one, before quickly abandoning them. The imagination transforms the objects into characters, and the surface of the table becomes a landscape, so that it is not at all out of place to compare the worktable with a playground. Everything is both serious and ludic. There is something serious about the game, because the hands' actions seem to remind us that we are witness to an act of creation. For Brătescu, the febrile, aimless game, as a stage preliminary to the work, becomes an artistic act in itself and corresponds to an attitude that

(partly) abandons the pride of creation, but which never abandons faith in form, understood as “form that possesses – and makes us party to – the consciousness of its own formation,” to quote Jean-Luc Nancy, an author whose commentaries have accompanied Brătescu’s reflections on art.

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 of the New Gallery into a “continuous studio” for every visitor.

BETWEEN VENICE AND THE STUDIO: AN INTRODUCTION TO GETA BRĂTESCU’S BOOKS

Diana Ursan

Geta Brătescu published her first book in 1970. Providentially titled *From Venice to Venice*,¹ her literary debut is a subjective art and travel journal documenting her 1966 and 1967 trips to Italy. They are the artist’s first live encounters with the Italian artistic, social, and geographical landscapes, brought together in a narrative itinerary starting from Venice and spreading throughout the country: passing through Florence, Siena, Urbino, Arezzo, Assisi, Lucca, Pisa, Rome, Vatican, Naples, Pompeii, Milan, and Venice again, where it ends only to return repeatedly – at least through memory and imagination. These travels weren’t the usual tourist explorations of new territories and foreign cultures, but genuine research trips that, like most of her travels, Brătescu organized and planned with the utmost stringence and care to cover the majority of targeted cultural and historical landmarks.² Besides insightful literary sketches of spaces, artworks, and people seen along the journeys, the book unveils the artist’s personal and

¹ Geta Brătescu, *De la Veneția la Veneția* [From Venice to Venice], Meridiane, Bucharest, 1970.

² Brătescu gathered the plans and mementoes from her trips (keepsakes, documents, photographs) in custom-made travel notebooks, with handwritten notes and maps retracing the itinerary. They are exhibited as part of the *Apparitions* project in the space of the New Gallery of the Romanian Institute of Culture and Humanistic Research in Venice.

refined writing style, her rich cultural background and keen spirit of observation, and her ability to visually render abstract or figurative-descriptive images in words coming either from her inner stream of consciousness or from the realm of material, exterior things. All of these elements came to distinguish her subsequent writings as well.

The actual plot of this travel journal is Brătescu's direct and physical confrontation with the canon of the Italian art – mainly that of the Renaissance and antiquity – recounted in skilful *ek-phrases* of various (master)pieces, selected on the criteria of affinity and admiration, which reveal her art-historical knowledge, her artistic training, and the thorough understanding of the medium of painting and traditional artistic techniques in relation to the context provided by the cultural history of their time. Moreover, they are approached through the filter of the artist's (post)modern eye, able to connect the classical past to the contemporary artistic practice while at the same time being capable of thinking and working with and beyond it.³ This book and its journeys establish the origins of Brătescu's enduring love story with Italy, Venice, and the overall Mediterranean intellectual, cultural, and physical space.

Also in 1970, the artist started a series of exhibitions essential to her artistic practice, conceptualized around the key subject

³ Such is also the case with the themes the artist extracted from classic literature, such as Aesop and Medea, that came to play a special part in her artistic practice and became motifs, tools, and symbols for extensive artistic explorations.

of the studio.⁴ Drawing and writing, image and text, visual and literary expression represent the two complementary paths in Brătescu's personality and practice.⁵ Their entwined emergence, development, and symbiosis can be traced to her early training, the artist having studied simultaneously at the Academy of Fine Arts Bucharest and at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy. An avid and savvy reader, Brătescu's approach to writing is similar to the process of drawing: it displays persistence, constancy, continuity; sometimes following a prescribed script or a deliberate structure, other times allowing the free flow of the subconscious and memory in automatic gestures. Daily notes, travel logs, recounted dreams, and quotes from her readings are meticulously and chronologically written, documented, and gathered in handwritten, then typewritten notebooks – the raw material of her eight published books and dozens of articles, the literary version of her life and art captured, fixed, and relived through words. Though Brătescu's visual oeuvre is far more renowned and well-known than her written one, they are not to be distinctly and neatly separated. They mingle, intertwine, and dissolve one into another,

⁴ *Atelier* [Studio], solo show at Galeria Orizont, Bucharest, 1970–71; followed by *Atelier II* [Studio II] in 1972 and *Atelier III* [Studio III] in 1976.

⁵ “When I draw I get the feeling of writing – I write an image, I write a form, I write a design. Using the letters of the alphabet I can give life to the image, to form, to the design, by describing them. [...] In the periods when I don't draw, I have to write; and vice versa.” Geta Brătescu, *Copacul din curtea vecină* [The Tree From the Neighboring Courtyard], Fundația Culturală Secolul 21, Bucharest, 2009, pp. 162–163.

ordered by the same inherent energy: the drawing, the mental *disegno*, always present in her travels and in her continuous studio, “that is, a unique inner space that you carry around with you.”⁶

In the present publication, the selection of excerpts from Brătescu’s books resembles the process at the foundation of her collages: an act of cutting, deciding, and discriminating that brings together clusters of fragments, literary images, and traces of existence. The logic of the array follows the fragments most intimately related to the artist’s various characters, themes, and motifs; to specific series of works or general reflections on art, such as those on drawing and the line; the *ars poetica* of a multilayered artistic practice. They are just bits and pieces of a much wider mental space, bringing forth the voice of an artist who manages to put her inner states and individual mechanisms so well into words.

In both Brătescu’s art and writing, the studio is a main character and a peculiar domain. Her second book, *Continuous Studio*, is a collection of essays published in 1985 with texts written throughout the 1970s.⁷ Among autobiographical episodes narrated in the flickering flow of memory, alongside an extensive and profound commentary on Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*, the reader can discover many inward paths to paramount chapters from Brătescu’s artistic practice: the genesis and conception of the *Faust* series – more interpretations and dialogs with Goethe’s masterpiece than

⁶ Geta Brătescu, *Atelier vagabond* [Wandering Studio], Cartea Românească, Bucharest, 1994, p. 138.

⁷ Geta Brătescu, *Atelier continuu* [Continuous Studio], Cartea Românească, Bucharest, 1985.

illustrations of the text – the substance of the character *Aesop* and the detailed written script of her seminal 8 mm film *The Studio* (1978). The journey continues inside and outside the studio in *Wandering Studio*, a book published in 1994 with texts from the 1980s.⁸ Here one can learn more about Brătescu’s series of *Circles*,⁹ the *Portraits of Medea*, about her artistic emergence, and her travels to Paris and Denmark, the last in a distinct extensive chapter. The book also contains wonderfully written thoughts on Kurt Schwitters’s Dadaist collages, Marcel Duchamp’s *The Large Glass* and *Fountain*, or Charlie Chaplin’s movies.¹⁰

Not all of Brătescu’s books are diaries or essay collections, yet they always seem to bear that certainly discernible autobiographical, self-referential touch. Such is the case with the *A.R.* novel from 2000,¹¹ which blends reflections on (her) art, fictionalized episodes from her personal life, and depictions from the studio into a

⁸ Geta Brătescu, *Atelier vagabond* [Wandering Studio], op. cit.

⁹ The circle is an important theme, almost a character in Brătescu’s body of works, an alchemical melting pot of shapes and meanings explored through various series, such as *Vestigii* [Vestiges] from 1982 or *Regula cercului, regula jocului* [The Rule of the Circle, The Rule of the Game] from 1985.

¹⁰ *Atelier vagabond* [Wandering Studio] also features interdisciplinary essays by Brătescu about artworks from different times and media, such as *The Lady and the Unicorn* tapestries from the Musée national du Moyen Âge in Paris, Velázquez’s *Philip IV of Spain in Brown and Silver* from the National Gallery, London, Giotto’s fresco compositions, or Miloš Forman’s cinematic oeuvre, not included in the present publication.

¹¹ Geta Brătescu, *A.R.: Roman* [A.R.: Novel], Fundația Culturală Secolul 21, Bucharest, 2000.

deliberate fragmentary literary structure marked by the ambiguous alternation of first-person and third-person narration.¹² Not coincidentally, the novel itself is followed by an interview titled “Personal Mythology,”¹³ in which Brătescu acknowledges the mystification inherent to each autobiography, the heroine *A.R.*¹⁴ thus being just one of the many masks created and tried on by the artist.

The most recent books by Brătescu – *The Tree From the Neighboring Courtyard*¹⁵ and *Diary in Zigzag*¹⁶ – shed even more understanding onto her artistic processes, especially those regarding her views on femininity and the subconscious, on drawing, drawing with the eyes closed, on geometry, the line, the abundant practice of collage and last but not least on the action of writing itself. It is from these pages that the artist’s steadfast daily studio activity,

12 This is not the case with Brătescu’s only book of short stories, *Peisaj cu om* [Landscape with Human], Fundația Culturală Secolul 21, Bucharest, 2002. The 33 visually charged stories vary from dense capsules to more elaborate sketches which show her artistry in literary rendering different psychologies, plausible events or somewhat absurd incidents, the majority of them with a dire end.

13 “Mitologie personală. De vorbă cu Aurelia Mocanu [Personal Mythology. In conversation with Aurelia Mocanu],” in: Geta Brătescu, *A.R.*, pp. 163–184.

14 *A.R.* is phonetically pronounced in Romanian *aer* [air].

15 Geta Brătescu, *Copacul din curtea vecină* [The Tree From the Neighboring Courtyard], op. cit.

16 Geta Brătescu, *Jurnal în zigzag* [Diary in Zigzag], Fundația Culturală Secolul 21, Bucharest, 2015.

her discipline, and her drive to work, create, and write radiate best, allowing her deepest parts to reach expression.

In almost every book by Brătescu a recurrent topic is the journey, be it physical or mental, the exterior and interior movements of the body and the spirit. The heroine *A.R.* is always packing her baggage, preparing for a departure that may never take place, more likely driven by wanderlust than by a real intention to leave. Alongside these journeys Venice emerges as a motif, a mythical space prone to artifice and illusion, a relaxed state of mind to which the artist fantasizes to return or from which she has never really left in the first place: “Venice has to be lost in order to then be found. Each time I left it behind with the certainty of a final departure. Then I again find a knot in my net through which I glimpse a possible path to Venice; for a day or two, for a few hours. If I lingered more in that city, I would forget myself, I would lie looking at the window, I would lie down on the steps close to the water or seated with a Campari at Florian; maybe in the end I would be overcome by an irremediable, blissful numbness.”¹⁷

17 Geta Brătescu, *Atelier continuu* [Continuous Studio], op. cit., p. 21.



ALBUM DE CĂLĂTORIE ÎN ITALIA [TRAVEL ALBUM OF THE TRIP TO ITALY], 1966–67

EXCERPTS FROM *DE LA VENEȚIA LA VENEȚIA* [FROM VENICE TO VENICE]*

p. 7

I

January 1966

Venice is an empty stage. Modern people with their simple garb and unselfconscious body language are out of place in this setting appropriate to brocade and ritual gestures.

p. 8

The spirit of Venice, a phantom whose troubling presence testifies to its alchemical essence: East and West produced a violent reaction in this small crucible of lagoons. Venice is like an ark encrusted in filigree and enamel; its colors, no matter how dark (Venetian red), exude a precious light from within.

p. 14

I saw Venice encapsulated inside a globe of silvery glass: in unreal silence, the sparkling lagoon, merging with a sky evenly covered with clouds just as sparkling, stretched roundly into the distance.

* Editura Meridiane, Bucharest, 1970

Giorgione, Titian's teacher, lends Venetian painting its defining style: that inner reverberation of the paint, in which silk, gold, and lagoon combine. They say that he ended up applying pigment directly to the canvas, so that drawing was thereby absorbed into chromatic feeling.

At the Accademia, in front of a famous painting titled *The Tempest*, I write as if urged by dictation:

The fat vegetation
embraces the woman and child
the way the yellowish-green and black
skin of an overripe fruit
embraces the fertile kernel.

The white canvas:
an integument furled around white
thighs.

The round mouth
of the child
receives milk from the round fruit
of the breast.

The shepherd stands aloof, leaning on a staff;
his smile and his gaze,
his brown face,
melting into the dense foliage.

The white shirt flashes against cloak's red, thick green,
like lightning,
a white whip against the dark sky:



the darkness of the blue and green,
the living darkness.
The white whip lashes the rooftops,
casting its white there too.
The darkness of the sky,
blue-green,
passes beneath the houses
and joins,
quieter but deeper,
the river on whose bank sits the woman,

on whose bank stand trunks of white marble.
The open bridge beneath the clouds is deserted.
The woman, the shepherd, the trees
wait on each side,
quietly,
until the storm has passed between them
as if through a gate.

p. 17

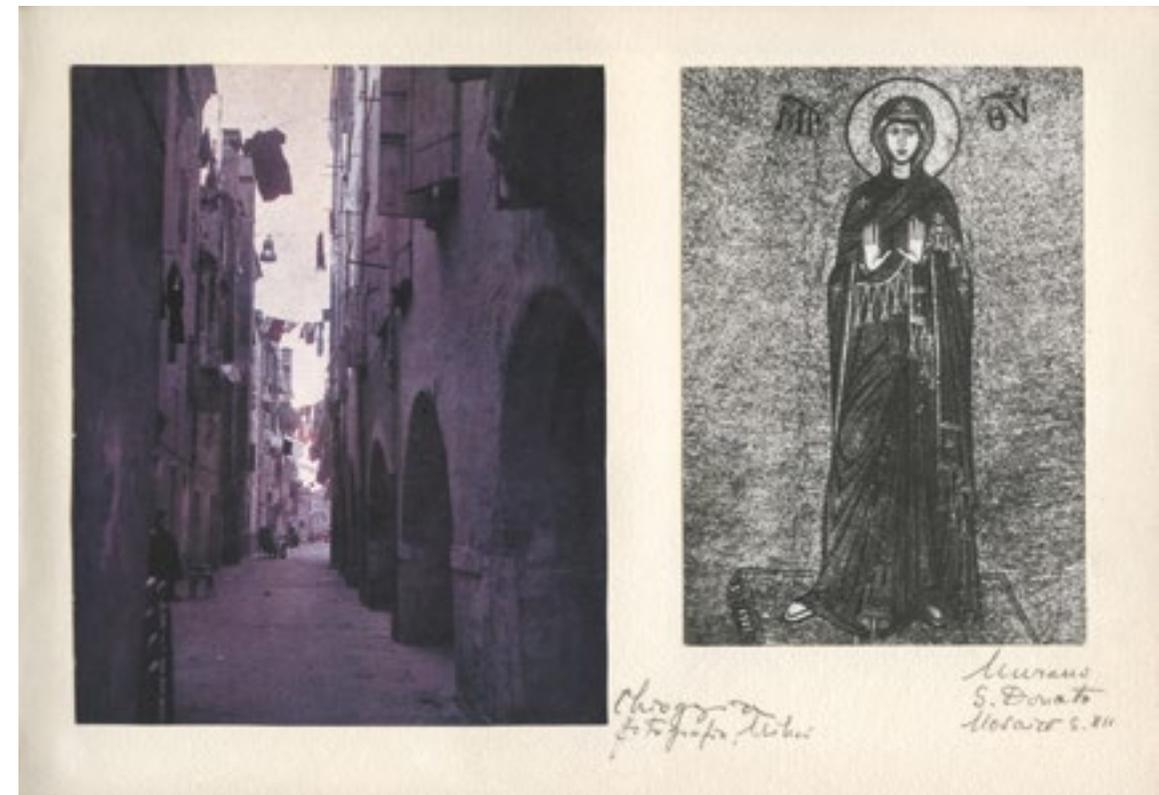
II

January 1966

PADUA. Cold. Snow. Misty morning. I am staying near the Basilica del Santo, an imposing Romanesque-Gothic structure. In 1447, in front of the basilica, Donatello erected the equestrian statue of *condottiere* Erasmo da Narni, nicknamed Gattamelata (honeyed cat).

p. 18

Cappella degli Scrovegni (named after the founder) or Madonna dell'Arena (because the church was built on the site of the arena of an ancient amphitheater): a small rectangular nave. Here, Giotto (1266–1337) tells the story of the life of Jesus and the Virgin. Against an azure background, the tenderly colored, slightly plump figures, the rounded backs stand out with poetic simplicity. The painter has illustrated the biblical story with humility and fervor. Looking at Giotto's fresco, I understand the excitement and surprise with which



Diego Rivera discovered here the correspondence with the natural forms of his own world. The same women on whose faces every feeling is expressed with infinite sweetness (what poetry and what revolt!); their bridal eyes shine gently and wisely above the relief of their cheekbones. From the full shoulders the white drapery tumbles in quiet folds down to the thighs. The same men have hands, torsoes, legs held captive in the controlled strength of the short muscles. The round chin and slightly chubby face preserve in outline the memory of maternal kindness. Giotto! By affinity, Rivera chose him as his teacher and fertilized Mexican art with the genius of the great Italian.

January 1966

FLORENCE. The chromatic whole unravels. From the Piazza della Signoria, or viewed through the arcades of Vasari's gallery, above the Arno, Florence looks like a complicated piece of terracotta, whose interstices have a greenish-black patina, and whose relief is ruddy-ochre, sometimes whitish. Florence revealed itself as a whole when I was ascending the hairpin bends that lead to Fiesole. The cold afternoon still preserved something of the serene morning light. In the valley, the walls and roofs of Florence composed a pictorial surface through its infinite and interpenetrating shifts of the same color. In the middle, the Duomo, the Campanile, and the Baptistery completed the white brilliance. Here, the days, no matter how many, are not enough.

p. 21

At the end of the Michelangelo gallery in the Accademia, the artist's posthumous studio, I encounter the testament to his ideal: *David*. On this column of marble (5.5 meters in height), the artist's hand worked to the point of total consummation of the creative act. A profession of faith, *David* is a symptom of the power whereby the universe is conquered in its entirety. In attitude it expresses classic grandeur; in its anatomical arabesque it enunciates the luxuriance of mannerism.

David: I look at the ideal way in which the fingernails are implanted, at the snaking of the veins over the back of the hands, at

the graceful but virile bunching of the thighs, at the magnificently tensed tendons of the neck, at the jagged contour of the pursed lips, at the bundle of vertical folds from which emerges the pure line of the nose, at the fleshy ear between coiled locks of hair that resemble acanthus leaves, at the strong, delicate articulation of the knee. The entire figure lives calmly, consisting of forms in dialog. The large volumes do not disintegrate under the burden of the details, which are like waves that cannot break up the surface of the ocean when we view it from on high.

p. 24

I am in the New Sacristy at San Lorenzo, where Michelangelo Buonarroti built the funeral monument to the Medicis. I witness the materialization of a strange dream: inextricably snared in the architecture, the excessive anatomical systems, the machine-bodies, emanate concepts. *Night*: from the torso, as powerful and abstract as a cuirass, hang the extraneous breasts, knobbly quinces, emblems of autumnal weariness.

Faced with such expressions Brancusi turned away uncomprehending

I visit the Galleria degli Uffizi. I keep returning to the rooms where the art of the "primitives" is on display. Looking at the "expressionless" Madonnas, depicted in recurring calligraphy, I detect the delicate musicality of the preclassical artists: gold, red, green; pink, gold, blue; green, gold, pink; red, gold, blue. The hands of the virgins, held roundly toward the body, complete the mystery of the spiral. Like limestone whorls, scientifically chiseled by nature in a hidden laboratory, these painting-icons are striking

for the ineffability of the craftsmanship. As part of a materially palpable surface, the color is liberated from its ground; it becomes flight, sound.

pp. 30–31

I visit the museum of the San Marco monastery, where numerous works by Fra Giovanni are kept.

All the usual props of the time can be found within the world painted by Fra Angelico and his school. Festive wings, colored shingles, are attached to the back of the angel, a young man with feminine features. Behold the miracle: in fact the conviction that the impossible manifests itself in the world of the possible, taking currently perceptible forms and guiding itself by natural laws!

The painter imprints an air of suspension on the figures and objects; he captures movement in the key moment of its consequences. I think that every artist fervently lends his works a definitive and defining air. In the compositions of Braque objects are placed within an unshakeable order, bringing cosmic coherence to the surface of a table. The play of forms in Matisse is apodeictic and the objects in Cézanne's paintings express, in their fixity, the force of nature stunned by man's investigative power.

p. 35

Masaccio, Cappella Brancacci, Santa Maria del Carmine. In the presence of the great works, time and space fall away, liberating the spirit. Surprising relationships form, reversals, unpredictable ascents and descents. The prompt reaction of subjectivity can

be contested, but it nonetheless remains the purest link between artist and audience. In the presence of Masaccio I think of Rembrandt. I remember *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, the composition in the Hermitage. I again see the stooped back of the repentant son and his calloused feet, the face of the father and his hands placed forgivingly on the son's bowed neck. Perhaps it is the neophyte in Masaccio's fresco that now summons those distant images.

pp. 38–39

IV

January 1966

Red is the dominant color of medieval SIENA; a red rich in a quality to which earth, water, and fire contribute: the walls of terracotta (a thin, well-burnt brick) gleam, imbued with the humidity of the season.

August 1967

From Florence to Siena the highway passes over and among the hills of Tuscany. The forms are traced simply and characteristically in the limpidness of the air; they seem to me to be "symbols of nature" rather than nature itself, from which we have detached ourselves that we might admire it in disorder. The olive trees with their rotund, whitish canopies, lined up at equal distances on the terraces cut from the hillsides, create an upward, hieratic ballet. Here too is the temple of Bacchus: the orderly columns (trunks



coiling around the vine props) hold up the compact ceiling (a horizontal fabric of branches and leaves) from which depend translucent lamps (fat bunches of white grapes).

Curtains of cypresses separate the plantations, rather watercolor-like expanses: green, ochre, or brown. The verticality of these heavy black curtains, hanging from the sky, emphasizes the restful curves of the earth. Or: in the low masses of the forests, the cypresses appear here and there, long accents, black ink left by the sure, rapid stroke of a soft brush. Perhaps this is why in Italian painting the separate landscape features each appear with

the precision of a “sign,” and in this way, together they compose a cryptic language. In any event, at the beginning of this century, in Italy the movements (Surrealism, metaphysical painting) frequently practiced the hyperbole of limpidity (De Chirico, Carlo Carrà, Morandi).

pp. 43-44

It is noon. There is still time before the Palazzo Pubblico opens. A cold drizzle forces me to keep my head lowered. Crusts of ice

crackle beneath my feet. I reach the Piazza del Campo. I hastily enter a trattoria. I sit down next to the window. Having found shelter and warmth at last, I am able to relax and look around me. Through the wide window I see the Palazzo Pubblico from which I am separated by the Piazza del Campo. The surface area of the plaza slopes, providing the gaze with a restful declivity stretching toward the palace. The shape of the plaza: a wide-open fan.

White, radial ribs converge at the point of an obtuse angle, the sides of whose wide span almost form a diameter. This quasi-diameter runs parallel with the façade of the public palace. The place where I find myself is determined in a geometrically natural way. Thus, my eye becomes the point from which one of the rays of the semicircle descends toward the center. The fact that I am a so clearly determined geometric point in so vast a space gives me an extraordinary feeling of peace. Rigor, therefore beauty, in urban planning contributes to people's happiness.

In the trattoria a few young people are sitting at the tables, some in groups, some on their own. They know each other, but the signals between them are discreet. A kind of hieratic attitude, arising from bashfulness and, at the same time, from youthful rebelliousness, lends them a noble air. They are accompanied by a woman; her large eyes, as bright as the sky, are dominated by the brown aggression of a fringe that falls to her eyebrows. She wears an ostentatiously cocked beret and a black coat very tight against her plump body. Her round throat and chin are reminiscent of a dove's crop. The smooth, olive skin is slightly bluish around the eyes, as if infused by their color. She is like a queen bee among solitary males, each of them focused on his own being. They are exceptionally handsome; a few are very brown and their elongated

faces, their eyes tapering toward their temples, their straight, narrow noses are strangely evocative of the Asian type, although in fact they are descended from the ancient Etruscans. I will encounter such faces in the Etruscan frescoes and tombs of Tarquinia. Others have light chestnut hair, round heads, strong chins, round eye sockets and seem to be descendants of the Roman rulers. The walls of the trattoria are of rough stone. The floor tiles are of waxed red terracotta. A jukebox plays slow music. The steam of the tea condenses in thick droplets on the front window. Time comes to a stop, suspended in the grey sky, high above people, objects, and the urban landscape with its stone fan spreading before the red palace. Here, in Italy, I experience the egress from time that only here, in Italy, have I achieved with such precision.

pp. 48–49

It is very hard to encompass on a wall or on a canvas, as if within a full day, everything that the earth or the sky in one or another season shows us, everything that man achieves within that time in town or country. To succeed in such an undertaking, knowledge of great complexity is demanded of the painter, including a host of notations about the world, mastery of drawing and composition, confidence in the use of color, and above all poetic exercise by means of contemplation. A fellow artist once scorned those painters who work quickly, since painting to him necessarily meant tortured labor. It can be that, too. The phenomenon is disturbing in Cézanne, since in his work the awkwardness springs from the manifestation of a Cartesian genius which, in order to believe, always reworks everything in a constant and hostile confrontation

with nature. All great artists compete with nature in one way or another, even when they wish to ignore it. But Cézanne's competition is all the more terrible in its obstinacy the more the artist dons the heavy armor of classical discipline. The myth of the artist who paints "in heavy throes" finds his opposite in the Italian fresco painters (including Lorenzetti), admirable guildsmen who left behind them a huge quantity of art, solving the most complicated problems of composition, drawing, and color. The poetry of these works, and sometimes their drama (Masaccio), speaks of the rich inner life of painters who, like Dante, like Boccaccio, like Petrarch, lived their epoch intensely. But when you look at the Italian frescoes, you are certain that the artist as a man, fully preserving the complexity of his different sides, was summed up in the artist as a craftsman. This abandonment of the "I" in the work becomes in itself a lyrical factor, lending stateliness to the art of the Trecento and Quattrocento.

Ambrogio Lorenzetti's fresco led me to the above thoughts.

pp. 54-55

January 1966

I set off for Arezzo, Sansepolcro, and Monterchi, the towns where Piero della Francesca lived and worked. Piero della Francesca is the opposite of Masaccio, the same as Vermeer was the opposite of Rembrandt and later, in France, Ingres was the opposite of Delacroix.



The art of Piero conveys tranquillity, even when it depicts the tumult of battle. Like the music of Bach, it signifies total praise: praise of the universe.

In Arezzo, in the church of San Francesco, can be found the most important fresco left by Piero della Francesca: *The Legend of the Cross*. The curved lines flow from each other, elegantly describing the bodies. The same undulation is found in the contours of the hills against the background of the sky. The folds of the garments flow along each other. The women's foreheads are luminous convex apses. The prismatic structure of the

cityscape encapsulated within the landscape is set against these round forms.

Thanks to its specifics, when the artist masters it with brilliance, the fresco is miraculous. The smooth, matte wall has the abstract quality of a (geometric) plane. The color absorbed by the plaster does not constitute a material in itself, but rather an emanation of the pigments from the mass of the wall. Any mimetic pictorial structuration therefore seems impossible. But despite this, in its plane the fresco of a great artist – Piero della Francesca – reproduces the softness of flesh, the hard gleam of armor, the cold smoothness of marble, the velvety quality of velour and the rigid harshness of fabrics made with gold thread: the wispy transparency of the veils; the waxiness of the olive leaves and the rugosity of the tree bark; the rough, heavy soil, the light, transparent sky; the air that circulates among the objects.

pp. 57–58

On the way back to Arezzo I turned off the road and went down to the village of Ville, where the highway leads off to Monterchi. I made my way on foot. The landscape continues the streaked hills. Here and there are old stone houses in the old Roman style, small fortresses on the hilltops. Sun. At rare intervals a car passes, a whistling fireball trailing the present behind it. Silence; I am in the old Italy of the Tuscan master.

Monterchi, a town perched on a hilltop. The bells are ringing. A funeral procession slowly climbs the hill: the black of the earth in the black of the clothes, the white of the snow in the white of the sacerdotal vestments. The banners sway rhythmically. The voices

of the children's choir, ascending amid the day's brilliance, are the pure likeness of the line that contours earthly nature against the translucent sky. I head to the old cemetery at the foot of the hill. A path flanked by cypresses leads to the chapel of the Madonna del Parto. Through the open door, before crossing the threshold of the small room, the Madonna greets me. She is on the wall opposite the door; she holds her right hand above her womb, where the too tight blue vestment has come undone against the roundness of the pregnancy. The delicate, childlike face has a grave expression. Two angels open the drapery of the tent beneath which the Virgin has taken shelter. The angel on the right of Mary has green robes and red boots, the one on the left has red robes and green boots. Piero della Francesca painted this fresco above the tomb of his mother.

pp. 59–60

VI

January 1966

ASSISI. I set out on foot, cutting across the hairpin bends that wind between the orchards and farms. From a distance, in the morning air, the town looms against the skirts of Mount Subasio, pink-hued and with the smoothness of a fresco. The Franciscan monastery ascends, implanting its levels in the slopes. I glimpse only the upper basilica and the campanile; the lower basilica appears only when I reach the precincts above.

It was here that Cimabue the Florentine worked with his pupils, innovating within the “Greek manner,” and then the Romans,

the school of Cavallini, Rusuti, and Torriti. Giotto – Cimabue’s pupil (according to legend) and a man familiar with the Roman fresco painters – worked here; from all the others he took as much as was required in order to support a new art. The school of Giotto also painted here. The Siennese masters (followers of the refined Duccio), Simone Martini, brothers Pietro and Ambrogio Lorenzetti also painted here

And so here, in synoptic form, is an entire epoch (Duecento to Trecento), perhaps the most exciting in Italian culture. The spirit of Italy seethes in a process of crystallization. Italian, the vulgate, is acknowledged as “the language of art.”

pp. 64–65

I step out onto the upper platform of the Saint Francis Basilica, from where Assisi is visible all the way down the valley. My eyes, having become accustomed to the miserly filter of the stained glass windows, are now struck by the blinding light against the stone walls. Gradually the impact turns to color and warm pink floods the landscape. I ascend and descend stone lanes, narrow flights of steps; I view the stone cataract of the buildings. I compare the color of the town with the vibrant coloration of St. Jacques seashells, in whose striations yellowish white combines with pink-ochre, rosy gray, sienna tinged with ochre, sometimes filmed with gray froth. From Venice to here, to Assisi, the seashell recurs as a metaphor. Its rigorous form, enriched by delicate indentations, its inexhaustible coloration within felicitous limits, the chalky material, a small wall inside which the pigments range from the greatest concentration to extremely diluted tones, all these evoke the stone of Italy,

the towns, the architecture, the frescoes, the landscape precisely drawn in the pure air, the equilibrium of the art that springs from here, art in which Color and Line, the Monumental and the Decorative, Geometry and Poetry, do not vie for supremacy.

p. 67

Situated among the routes that traverse the Mediterranean, Italy receives art from all and gives art to all. The genius of the peninsula, a genius which, in a naïve way, seems to me to be identical with its light and its air, purifies and reconciles; forms acquire a tranquil inclusion in space.

pp. 72–73

VIII

January 1966

PISA. Coming along the Via Santa Maria from Arno, after you admire the little church of Santa Maria della Spina on the right by the bridge, richly decorated with Pisan sculpture, a broad space suddenly opens up at the end of the street: lawns crisscrossed by lanes (a smooth, colored place) in the middle of which stand the three buildings, the Baptistery, the Duomo, and the Tower, like three chess pieces. Exhibited like that in the middle of a large expanse, akin in their material (marble) and style (Romano-Pisan), the three edifices are all the more individualized by their volumes: each rests under the sign of a different geometric formula,

acquires a different meaning as part of the same game. As if in an ideal phase of the game, they are placed in a line almost equidistant from each other, thereby creating a more loftily conceived relationship.

The wall of the cemetery (Campo Santo) creates a backdrop to the Baptistery and Duomo. In the mid- and late fourteenth century, numerous fresco painters came to work here: Taddeo Gaddi, Andrea da Firenze, Piero di Puccio, Antonio Veneziano, Andrea Bonaiuto, Spinello Aretino, Benozzo Gozzoli. The compositions illustrating the Old and New Testaments covered – probably without interruption – the four sides of the gallery. Damaged by bombs in 1944, then removed for restoration, the fresco liberated the preparatory drawings beneath it. Now, the sinoper and the painting corresponding to it rest side by side on the same wall. You experience the revelation of procedure; beneath your very eyes you see the phases of the composition, in the same hand. The two modes of plane expression can be compared: line and color. When painted, the same volumes, the same movement, the same details seem the incarnation of their conceptual state: the drawing.

p. 76

IX

January 1966

ROME. Above all else it means the place where the intuition of time is altered. Before Rome I constantly floated outside time; the liberated “I” merged present with past centuries; simultaneously

old and young it moved within the poetry of forms and spaces. It was in Siena that this state took shape with the greatest precision, in the small trattoria in Piazza del Campo. In Rome time weighs on me in the fullness of its energy. Present and past have been positioned according to the law of Chronos; I find myself once more contemplating the world from our own century’s theater box. The epochs autonomously display their beauty, rubbing shoulders with each other in troubling intimacy. Past the squat cylinder of the Colosseum speed elegant motorcars, ephemeral insects with shining carapaces. The tires swish, leaving an ever-changing spider’s web of smoky streaks. Ribbons of light, forms springing from movement, in continuous movement.

pp. 83

In Rome I visit numerous churches with mosaics and, adding to the Roman mosaics of the Vatican the memory of the mosaics of Venice, Ravenna, and Florence, I can divine the fate of this technique over the course of the centuries, I observe its emancipation from painting, which, in the beginning, it imitated. In Hellenistic and Roman art, the mosaic excels by its mimetic virtuosity, so much so that from a certain distance it can easily be confused with mural painting, thereby extending, over the surface of the floor, the walls’ palpable pictoriality. But the mosaic really comes to life in Byzantine art, whose Oriental frontality and hieraticism are appropriate to it. The tessera of colored glass, a beautiful object in itself, shines from tranquil surfaces, and the pictorial effect arises more from the juxtapositions of pure tones than from gradations within the same tone. Drawing gains the ascendant; it intervenes



ALBUM DE CĂLĂTORIE ÎN ITALIA [TRAVEL ALBUM OF THE TRIP TO ITALY], 1977

simply and energetically, indicating by means of line what was once achieved through gradation of color.

p. 84

I visit the Basilica of Saint Peter, built on the site of Nero's circus, where the apostle was martyred. The worn marble steps are on the verge of melting away. The cupola is more spectacular when viewed from afar, from Monte Pincio; its towering silvery form

crowns the city. In the basilica, it is emptied like a goblet, pouring space down on people's heads.

pp. 85-86

Before arriving in the Sistine Chapel, I admire Raphael's engravings, the sweep of the compositions and the beauty of the portraits. But the place for reflection and the same time the decisive preliminary moment understanding the Sistine frescoes is the Chapel of Nicholas V, painted in its entirety by Fra Angelico (1450). This return to the ambience of an art of calm contemplation, where form and color are the expression of a reconciled imagination, makes contact with the Sistine Chapel frescoes terrifying. *The Last Judgement*: what vision and what painting! It is not painting. The (altered) color "does not exist" (the "coloring" of the scenes painted on the ceiling clashes). The plasticity of the anatomies, elsewhere a quality in itself, is also absorbed by the cosmic tumult, becomes an element of the cataclysm. All the visual techniques are articulations within a poetic system so complex and boundless, so powerful, that after a given point the material that gives it being becomes necessarily protean: the boundaries between life, literature, music, philosophy, painting disappear. Such works contain the extreme limits of all nature; they arise from mankind's accumulations. In such works the tension of knowledge creates poetic tension. Prophetic clairvoyance, or rather knowledge, the experience of destiny before it comes to pass – this is the power of *The Last Judgement*.

X

January 1966

NAPLES. I arrive in the morning. The station: a concrete spider between whose legs the people are moving. The people (the exceptions pass unobserved) are cast in the same mold. Such anatomical solidarity is amusing. The Neapolitans are small, very brown, and hairy; the young women are plump, the older women fat. They have large chests; low, round hips; squat waists. The Neapolitans talk loudly and a lot, gesticulating excessively, poking the air or their interlocutor's chest with their fingers. The intersections are choked with clots of motorcars, so snarled up that any movement seems in vain. Vehicle quarrels with vehicle, blowing their horns, driver quarrels with driver, swearing through their open windows. The traders display their wares in front of their shops and stalls, stridently, volubly soliciting trade.

From Capodimonte I view Naples descending around the blue gulf. From up here, the city looks attractive, tenderly colored, gleaming nacreous. By contrast, I remember the stark, angular panorama of Assisi. The palace in the middle of the park houses the Pinacothèque. Titian and Bruegel greet me.

Titian occupies a whole room. The paintings, of great thematic diversity, betray the painter's multiple moods. It seems to me that more than any other painter of his time, he comes close to the temperament of the modern artist, so supple, responding tirelessly to heteroclit demands, moving with such ease from poetry to

polemic. In the work of Titian, within his practiced eye, here critical, here contemplative, a heavy pulley draws forth the poetry of forms. The portraits, and above all the women's bodies, which are either the core of the composition or set against dark backgrounds, give rise to the whole of nature from their broad curves, they give the whole of nature light from the light of their flesh. The sun can be found in the gleam of a golden thigh.

January 1966

POMPEII. From the station, past orange groves, I arrive at the Villa dei Misteri. I see how the solar pigments in the rind of the fruits and the blood of the living creatures gathers in cohorts, moving from the outside to the inside of the building, a wave that crashes against the walls, enters them, creating surfaces of unimaginable coloristic luminosity. Pompeii red, a continuous background, flickering inside like glowing coals, and at the same time diffused over vast surfaces, produces euphoria. In a series of scenes the painter has fluently depicted the ritual whereby a young woman is initiated into the Dionysian mysteries. The mistress of the house seems to have been the priestess of this rite; her portrait commences the fresco: the thick-limbed matron sitting on a throne watches the celebration unfold. The level from which the fresco begins (elevated toward the middle of the wall) and the generous drawing cancel out the real size of the figures; they look monumental. This mural summons a host of other images, thereby forming an open universe.

I find myself on a vast terrace. I am sitting in an armchair, contemplating the moon. It is a clear, quiet night. My dream stretches so far, stretches with such sharpness to the brilliant, shimmering moon that I know all that can be known about the earth's satellite. With an idle hand I move the eyepiece of the telescope toward me and look. Have I done something petty, have I rejected the dream for the sake of the explicit image? No! To me, the telescope itself is an element of a funambulist dream, with its row of eyes gaping at the stars. If I place it between myself and the sky, I play with the sky. My eyes' dream is confirmed by finding itself in the new image, which is the same and nonetheless different, distinct precisely because of the strengthening and detailing of the characters that I recognize to be the same. Picasso's eye is a modern optical lens. That lens captures existing forms (natural or created forms), it offers them to us in a precise hyperbole, a terrible hyperbole, without hostility: the joy of unlimited availability, the free play between Present and Past, between Near and Far, the universal carousel revolving the millennia into moments.

My mind returns and I find myself in the the Villa, the House of Mysteries, once more. I look at the fresco and see how its forms take on a strange existence, growing beyond the limits of their perfection, I see how ever-expanding waves burst from the wall, carrying away the image, spatially dilating the forms contained in the plane of the image; with each vibration, the forms are constantly different, born of each other, twinned. From this game, the parameters of a world that is no longer a world of pictorial images, but a continent, domineeringly erupt.

XIII

January 1966

MILAN. The traffic is heavy, the same as in Rome, but more orderly. An active, preoccupied world. The modern buildings display new materials and daring lines. I am staying by the Grattacielo Pirelli, near the station. The building's tall blade is a landmark for me; it plays tricks on me, hiding its upper half in the clouds. Bad weather, fog.

The Duomo. I am at the opposite end of the plaza, the outline of the Duomo looms mysteriously through the fog. This is the Italian landscape's first romantic allusion. For centuries they have been adding to it, at a geological pace (1386–1809). I see not the architecture, but an infinity of crowded, competing vertical elements: a gray coral. All of a sudden hundreds of pieces erupt, forming a dark, heavy flock above the plaza, close to the tops of the heads of passersby. The Duomo, weary of itself, burst into the air for an instant; then the pieces retracted and vanished into the matrix structure all at the same time. The fog, scattered by the pigeons' flight, has now reformed into a homogenous mass.

XIV

August 1967

What is ITALY if not the supreme artifice, the golden frame in which man, having entered, is confronted with the surprise of his own nature? Delaying his departure from Venice, the sober Professor Aschenbach discovers himself among the retinue of Pan, burning with desire and jealousy for Hyacinth, like Apollo for Zephyr (or, at another level, like Socrates for Phaedrus); he discovers in himself a passionate young man and surrenders his old age to the will of Eros in order to make himself pleasing to the ephebe Tadzio. What is Italy if not a stage on which Time loses its identity or, contrariwise, reveals itself in all its evidence? I go from Vicenza, from Palladio's Colonnade, to Paestum, in the south, 27 centuries old, among archaic temples. For Leonardo an emblem: the flayed lizard, fastened beneath multiple rows of foci, baring the order of its construction, preserves the mystery in the eye's tiny bulb. Paestum: the lizards spurt from the cracks of the column, from between drums and slabs; they proclaim nature's right to these yellow stones by the green fulguration of their movement, by their startled stops. Nevertheless, with domineering numerical presence, the columns allow the blue of the sea, the carmine of the shrubbery to pass through; they receive the fruitful cactus alongside, they lend thought to space, shadow, and light. What is Italy if not all that has been grafted onto these temples, if not infinite, reconciled diversification? The Venetian Gothic is perceived as

a southern luxury that takes advantage of nature's whimsy. The marbles extend from the palace of the Doge: Adam and Eve, drunken Noah, they lead to Paestum and the Bacchic celebrations. The ornamentation of the lagoon city grows from water, mineralized vegetation, white, fragile tendrils lending shape to the lintel, the windowsill, the loggias, emphasizing simple rhythms on the façades in whose proportion and square or rectangular wholeness persists the ancient Mediterranean construction. Whoever says Italy is a museum is mistaken. Italy is memory. Each element seems to have been added in time to the others, in order to create a décor continuous with man. Chance itself verges on meditation. The pines, spiky platforms, spreading over the Via Appia, shading the torrid plane here and there; the tombs, shards that show the sculpted visage of the deceased among dry grasses; Naples, vital, exuberant, and then the tragic necropolis, Pompeii. After Pompeii, the Amalfi coast, with white towns encrusted vertically onto the rocks, with exotic vegetation invading the Moorish columns, Chio-stro Paradiso; with tall platforms from where the narrow beach can be seen below, huts, umbrellas, and multicolored boats, the tops of the palm trees and the azure waters bringing closer the rock of the deep. The farther south you advance, the mountain shrinks. Salerno opens the section of vast shore. Rushes, green islands in the sands. Paestum. Pompeii and Paestum, two fossils between which the coast of the Tyrrhenian Sea unfurls, as intense as a postcard. That which is nature becomes a construction, either through the actual construction of nature – crops laid out with compass and ruler, powdered, shaded, molded – or through nature's participation in what is so categorically constructed alongside it. Décor.

In Venice, one morning, I walk behind the boy who delivers brioches and rolls to the day bars. Short and slender, swathed in an overall and white apron, carrying a large tray on top of his white beret, taking large, elastic strides, his knees always bent, he passes with ease over the bridges, through the *callette*. He sings. I follow him wishing to listen to the fashionable *canzona* “*ti amo, amore mio.*” Undeveloped, but intrepid, his voice, with its fine blade, slices the morning mist. The same diffidence in the gesture that lends balance to the tray on top of his head. Whenever he delivers his goods, the boy dissolves his song in a broad smile: then come the heartily shouted words, every time, always the same.

pp. 114–115

XV

August 1967

VENICE, this time the last stop before returning to Romania.

I visit the International Gallery of Modern Art in Ca' Pesaro. In a black room, a work by Max Ernst, an enormous chessboard (the only thing illumined in the tenebrous ambience) with enormous pieces made of Murano glass, some of them blue, some of them orange. Only vaguely reminiscent of the familiar forms, the king, queen, knights, castles, and pawns are sooner strange carnival hoods.

Pomp and a mortuary air, color and black enamel, commotion and silence.

Nocturnal Venice; the voices of dreadful prima donnas and doubtful tenors intersect above the so heavy water of the canal; with a director's flourish the lights reveal the red façades.

The Procuratie arcades have bunched their white curtains into an agitated, Baroque crumple; the smoky pink translucent globes emanate a soft light. I sit at the Florian café: salons with mirrors and old-fashioned paintings, under the portico small, round, black, rotating conjurer's tables, black benches (wood and leather) leaning against the peeling wall. Outside, metal tables in the midst of the “spectacle” which, in the evening, comes alive in San Marco square. The orchestras begin their duel, passodobles, and waltzes. Promenade. Minor elegance, but all the more striking for that. With gaiters and cane, the gentleman crosses and enters beneath Procuratie arcade as if entering the wings of a stage. A single couple dance; their opened arms and legs scatter the crowd. San Marco, the mosaics, the gilded horses, the cupolas shine in the artificial light: Oriental operetta décor.

Morning. The lagoon has slightly flooded the Piazzetta and the Piazza San Marco. Barefoot, the people tread delightedly in the warm shallow water.

I climb to the roof of the church, next to the antique horses. Very far away, down below, the multicolored seethe is visible. The sumptuous festivals of old have been replaced by a spontaneous and continuous festival. Between sun and water, a Babylonian carnival. It is the summer reunion of all the nations that come here, in the full memory of mankind.

Le scriam ocolata...

Profalonut in uefla aripile
feste fatada Basilei sau llano.
Vevote, inceput n sferat, and
te vi mai uoba?

Socla

Le departe mult de mine insuveni,
ce departe ma' oflea de toate
si cit mult de duplinitata de minea
mea ce m' toat! Aici, cind
spatul fixic confirma departarea,
cind tot el o infirma, dai darul
mi s-a stucurat medarit in suflet,
aici as dai pa' ce intruple cora,
sa fie cora sare pa' docida' asupra-mi,
pa' daa carne purgata' li' mele;
dar ⁱⁿ ~~mult~~ ~~acesta~~ ~~spatul~~ s-ar putea in
eliberarea mea de uine, nu in
punctele diverse ale distactelor s-a

Incheaga suparava mea cu uine si
diminose de cure punct fixe, dirona
de invelisul meu piodar, in golul
deus al sufletului meu ~~faci in~~

13/ Sub Torre Velasca s-a aduvar din
non, ca in fiecare s'ubota multitudi
de tineri; stugile, topicele scandate
cintecel lor se ridica' p'ora de aici
la fercastia ^{mea} struina.

In uniforma optuveni lor, in aruvenu din
^{copon american}
~~sa~~ ~~franga~~ "blue" mutata pe trupul
lor asexual, arginte, ~~si lustrata~~
pe pulpe, ~~ca s' aruveni~~, cu
pauel lung ^{list} in punte, cu p'ina
terua, ei vor p'oni in solonua
deasa, ratie priata Donului, si apo
in natura de t'antari strada
tariva.

O detunata' si, ~~ca in aruvenu~~
~~pepita~~ ar s' aruvenat lichidul ei

BIOGRAPHY

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 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; MUMOK, Vienna; Kontakt Collection, Vienna; Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana; and FRAC Lorraine, Metz. In 2017, the Camden Arts Centre, London, will present a solo exhibition of works by Brătescu, curated by Jenni Lomax.

- 1926, May 4 Geta Comănescu (Brătescu's maiden name) is born in Ploiești, Romania, as the only child in a family of pharmacists.
- 1937–1943 She attends high school in Ploiești and Bucharest. She develops a strong interest in drawing, literature, and theater.
- 1944 One drawing by Comănescu is exhibited in an exhibition hosted by The School of Architecture in Bucharest. Petru Comarnescu (1905–1970) writes about this drawing (in “Cronica plastică,” *Revista Fundațiilor Regale*, year XII, no. 8, August 1945).
- 1945–1949 The artist enrolls in the Bucharest Faculty of Letters and Philosophy (from 1948 called Faculty of Philology) and in the Bucharest School of Fine Arts. Her professors are George Călinescu (1899–1965), a central personality of the interwar literary criticism, and painter Camil Ressu (1880–1962). Both Călinescu and Ressu left their marks on Brătescu's intellectual development, cultivating her taste for the literary scenario, for theatrical sequentialism, and for her focus on the line and its relation to space.
- 1946 The artist debuts at *Salonul Oficial de Alb-Negru* [White-Black Official Salon], Dalles Hall, Bucharest, with a coal drawing.
- 1947 Her first solo show is presented at the Căminul Artei Gallery, Bucharest, a space coordinated by art critic Ionel Jianu.
- 1948–1949 The artist is expelled from the Bucharest School of Fine Arts, due to what was considered “unhealthy social origins.”
- 1951 She marries Mihai Brătescu, designer of thermal installations, who becomes the main supporter of the artist's activity.
- 1954 Tudor, son of Geta and Mihai Brătescu, is born.
- 1957 Brătescu becomes a member of the Romanian Artists' Union.
- 1957–1971 Brătescu enters a period of intense activity as a book illustrator. She works for Cartea Românească Publishing House and *Urzica* magazine. While working for the children's magazine *Arici Pogonici*, she meets art critic Anca Arghir, one of the most important interpreters of Brătescu's work.
- 1959 Brătescu travels to the USSR within an exchange between the Romanian and Soviet Creative Unions. In the 1950s and the 1960s the artist is strongly involved in documentary drawing, resulting in two solo exhibitions: in 1960 at The Galateea Gallery in Bucharest with drawings made in the Danube Delta; and in 1963 at the Simeza Gallery in Bucharest with drawings made at the Grivița Plants.
- 1960 She participates in the Romanian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, in a group exhibition curated by Jules Perahim.
- 1961 Brătescu takes a documentary trip to Hungary.
- 1963 The artist becomes a member of the editorial team of the magazine *Secolul 20* [20th Century], founded in 1961. She is the magazine's graphic designer until 1983, when she quits due to a change in the editorial direction. She returns after 1990 and is currently a member of the *Secolul 21* board.
- 1965 She works on series of lithographs illustrating Bertolt Brecht's *Mutter Courage* [Mother Courage]. She receives the Award for Decorative Arts from the Romanian Artists' Union.
- 1965, 1969 The artist participates in the Lausanne International Tapestry Biennial (2nd and 4th editions).
- 1967 Brătescu travels to Italy for the first time. In 1970 her volume *De la Veneția la Veneția* [From Venice to Venice] will be published. Solo show at Dalles Hall, Bucharest, within the *Brançusi Colloquy*.
- 1968 She takes part in an international book illustration exhibition in Belgrade.
- 1967–1969 She works as cartoonist at Animafilm Studios in Bucharest. One of her animated movies is *Plimbarea lui Aesop* [Aesop's Walk], 1967. Aesop is to become a central theme in Brătescu's work.
- 1969–1971 She resumes her studies at the Institute of Fine Arts “Nicolae Grigorescu” and takes her diploma examination in 1971.
- 1968–1974 She takes part in the Bologna Biennial for book illustration.

- 1970 The exhibition *Atelier I* [Studio I] opens at The Orizont Gallery in Bucharest. It is the first show in a series of three exhibitions centered on the artist's studio as a thematic and conceptual motif. The other two that followed are *Atelier II* [Studio II] (1972, The Apollo Galleries in Bucharest) and *Atelier III – Către alb* [Studio III – Toward White] (1976–77, The Galateea Gallery in Bucharest and Accademia di Romania in Rome). She receives the *Arta* magazine's award.
- 1971 Brătescu performs in her studio the *Către alb* [Toward White] action, photographed by Mihai Brătescu.
- 1972 Solo show at Dalles Hall, Bucharest, as part of the Aesthetics International Congress.
- 1974 *The Magnets* are exhibited for the first time, in the group exhibition *Artă și energie* [Art and Energy] from Galeria Nouă [the New Gallery] in Bucharest, with the title *Magneți. Utopie a unui monument activ* [Magnets. Utopia of an Active Monument]; she also writes a "Magnets manifesto," which will be published much later in 1990, in *Arta* magazine.
- 1975 She organizes and takes part in the group exhibition *Corpul uman* [The Human Body] at the University of Medicine in Bucharest. Group show *Arta și orașul. Repere* [The Art and the City. Landmarks], Galeria Nouă [the New Gallery] in Bucharest.
- 1975–1976 She presents the solo show *Lucrul, imaginea, semnul* [the Work, the Image, the Sign] at Galeria Nouă [the New Gallery] in Bucharest, 1975, featuring seminal works such as *Electro-magneți* [Electromagnets], *Athanor*, *Tipografie* [Printing Press] and the installation *Nu violenței!* [No to Violence!]. She travels to Poland for two consecutive years as a participant in the International Engraving Biennial, Krakow. She meets Tadeusz Kantor, who invites her to his studio. In Krakow she attended one of the performances of *La classe morte* [The Dead Class] at the Theatre Cricot 2. Brătescu's photo-performative works *Către alb* [Toward White] (1975), *Autoportret. Către alb* [Self-Portrait. Toward White] and *De la negru la alb* [From Black to White] are loosely based on sequences of a theatrical play.
- 1977 She produces the *Pre-Medeic Forms* lithographs at the Grafico Uno Studio, Milan. With Ion Grigorescu she shoots *Mâna trupului meu* [The Hand of My Body], a b/w film on 8 mm, followed the next year by *Atelierul* [The Studio], a film produced in the same medium. She takes part in the International Engraving Biennial in Espinal, Colombia.
- 1978 She exhibits in the group exhibitions *Fotografii făcute de artiști plastici* [Photographs Taken by Plastic Artists] and *Artiștii plastici fotografiază* [Plastic Artists Take Photographs], 1982, organized by Ion Grigorescu at the Friedrich Schiller House of Culture in Bucharest. She also takes part in the group exhibition *Studiul I* [Study I] at Bastion Galleries, Timișoara, organized by artists Paul Gherasim, Ion Grigorescu, and art critic Coriolan Babeți.
- 1980 She mounts a solo show called *Mythology* at Sammlung Michael Winter, Hamburg, Germany. She takes part in the *Salonul de gravură* [The Engraving Salon], Museum of Art, Tulcea, Romania.
- 1981 Brătescu's solo show *Portrete ale Medeei* [Portraits of Medea] opens at Simeza Gallery, Bucharest. She takes part in the group exhibition *Contemporary Painting in Eastern Europe and Japan*, Osaka and Yokohama, Japan.
- 1983 The series *Vestigii* [Vestiges] is exhibited in a solo show at the Simeza Gallery, Bucharest. *Faust* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe is published at Univers Publishing House, translated by Ștefan Augustin Doinaș, with 31 drawings by Brătescu.
- 1984 She presents the solo show *Am desenat pentru 'Faust'* [I have drawn for 'Faust'] in the Friedrich Schiller House of Culture in Bucharest, Romania. She takes part in the International Engraving Biennial in Fredrikstad, Norway.

1985 She is granted a documentation scholarship in the United Kingdom by the British Council. She travels to Denmark for a solo show at Lyngby Kunstforening in Lyngby. She presents a solo show at Căminul Artei Gallery, Bucharest. *Atelier continuu* [Continuous Studio], her book of essays is published at Cartea Românească Publishing House.

1983, 1987 She exhibits in the São Paulo Biennial, Brazil.

1987 Brătescu presents a solo show at Căminul Artei in Bucharest.

1988 She mounts solo shows at Galeriile de Artă, Timișoara; Galeriile de Artă, Arad; and Muzeul Țării Crișurilor in Oradea, Romania. The group show *Litografia* [The Lithography] is presented at Căminul Artei Gallery, Bucharest.

1990 A solo show is presented at Galerie Arnold-Jotzu in Bad Homburg, Germany.

1991 She exhibits in the *Cartea obiect* [Object-Book] group exhibition at The Museum of Art Collections in Bucharest. She exhibits the film *Mâini* [Hands] (1977) and collages in *Stare fără titlu* [Untitled Mood], the first major group exhibition to take place in Timișoara after 1989. She exhibits the works *Doamna Oliver și Cavalierul Thonet* [Lady Oliver and Cavalier Thonet], the book object *Thonet: Voici ton maître* within the exhibition *Sexul lui Mozart* [Mozart's Gender] opened by The Soros Center for Contemporary Art at Etaj ¾ Gallery (The National Theatre, Bucharest). She exhibits in the group show *Art in the Open: Six Romanian Artists* at the Narrow Water Gallery, Warren Point, Northern Ireland, alongside Horia Bernea, Sorin Dumitrescu, Vasile Gorduz, Ion Gheorghiu, and Napoleon Tiron.

1992 The solo show *The Myths and Stories of Geta Brătescu* opens at The Museum of Art and Archeology of the Missouri University, Columbia, USA. Within this exhibition was presented the film *Atelier continuu* [Continuous Studio]. She presents the film

1993 *Earthcake* (1992, VHS) – shot by Alexandru Solomon – at the intermedia event *Pământul* [The Earth] in Timișoara, Romania. The artist mounts solo shows at the Museum of Engraving in Bistrița, Romania, at the French Institute in Bucharest, and the solo show *The Garden* at Simeza Gallery in Bucharest. She presents the film *Cocktail Automatic* (also a result of the collaboration with Alexandru Solomon), as well as *2 × 5* (1993) at the Zona Festival in Timișoara, curated by Ileana Pintilie; and at the *OSTRANENIE. Shattered Myths – New Realities*, an international video festival in Bauhaus Dessau. She exhibits in the group show *De la obiect la gravură* [From Object to Engraving], in the Artists' Union's Engraving Workshop's Gallery, Bucharest. She takes part in the group exhibition dedicated to video art *Ex Oriente Lux*, The Soros Center for Contemporary Art, Dalles Hall, Bucharest, curated by Călin Dan; and in the group exhibition *Object-Books Made by Romanian Artists*, in Amersfoort, The Netherlands, with a joint publication *CARTE. Object-Books Made by Romanian Artists*. Brătescu receives the Ion Andreescu Award from the Romanian Academy, and the Artists' Union Award.

1994 She is invited to the *Art Unlimited SRL* exhibition at the Art Museum in Arad, curated by Judit Angel, one of the primary exponents of a new type of curatorial discourse in Romania. Brătescu participates in the project *Europa, Europa. Das Jahrhundert der Avantgarde in Mittel und Osteuropa* [The Avant-Garde Century in Middle and Eastern Europe], Kunst und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in Bonn.

1996 The artist takes part in the exhibition *Experiment in the Romanian Art since 1960* at the Etaj ¾ Gallery, Bucharest, organized by The Soros Center for Contemporary Art and curated by Alexandra Titu; and in two group exhibitions dedicated to Tristan Tzara, in Bucharest and Paris.

- 1997 She resumes working as an artistic director for *Secolul 20* magazine (now *Secolul 21*; the artist is still on its board.)
- 1998 She takes part in the *Object-Books* group exhibition at the International Book Fair in Leipzig, Germany.
- 1999–2000 She mounts a retrospective exhibition at The National Museum of Art in Bucharest, Contemporary Art Department, curated by Ruxandra Balaci, with a catalog edited by the International Center for Contemporary Art, Bucharest. Also in 1999, The National Museum of Art in Bucharest awards her the Margareta Sterian Award.
- 2000 *Argos Project 2000*, Vevey, Switzerland. She participates in the *In Full Dress* exhibition (Brukenthal Museum, Sibiu), curated by Liviana Dan and focused on ten female artists. With the film *Cocktail Automatic*, she participates in the exhibition *Transition-land* in the National Museum of Art in Bucharest. *Secolul 21* Foundation publishes Brătescu's novel *A.R.*
- 2001 She participates in the group exhibition *Autoportretul în arta contemporană* [The Self-portrait in Contemporary Art], Timișoara Art Museum, Romania.
- 2000–2002 Brătescu's works are included by various international curators in exhibitions dedicated to the newly (re)discovered visual territory of Eastern Europe: *Arteast 2000+ International Collection: the Art of Eastern Europe in Dialogue with the West* at Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana, 2000, and *In Search of Balkania* at Neue Galerie, Graz, 2002. The script of the film *Atelierul* [The Studio] is published in Laura J. Hoptman, Tomáš Pospiszyl (eds.), *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s*, Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 2002 Brătescu's book *Peisaj cu om. Proză scurtă* [Landscape with Human Being. Short Stories] is published by the *Secolul 21* Foundation.
- 2003 She presents *Atelier 4*, a solo show at the International Center for Contemporary Art, Bucharest.
- 2004 The artist collaborates with Ion Grigorescu for the film *Ludus*. Brătescu's book *Ziua și noaptea* [Day and Night] is published by *Secolul 21* Foundation.
- 2006 She mounts a solo show at *HT003*, an independent art space in Bucharest, curated by Teodor Graur.
- 2007 *Resurse* [Resources] exhibition (with Ion Grigorescu) at The National Museum of Contemporary Art in Bucharest. Participation in the group exhibition *Social Cooking Romania* at *NGBK* Berlin.
- 2008 Solo shows are presented at *Galerie im Taxispalais*, Innsbruck, curated by Silvia Eiblmayr and Alina Șerban; and *Ivan Gallery*, Bucharest (*Collages-Drawings 1971–2006*). She receives the National Award for Visual Arts and was awarded the title Doctor Honoris Causa from The National University of Arts, Bucharest, for her contribution to the development of contemporary Romanian art.
- 2009 Brătescu's book *Copacul din curtea vecină* [The Tree from the Neighboring Courtyard] is published by *Secolul 21* Foundation. Solo shows include *Capricii* [Whims] at Rüdiger Schöttle Gallery, Munich, and *Spații* [Spaces] at *Ivan Gallery*, Bucharest. Group exhibitions include *Gender Check. Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern European* at *MUMOK – Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien*, Vienna.
- 2010 She presents a solo show *Alteritate* [Alterity] at *Galerie Mezzanin*, Vienna, Austria. Group exhibitions: *Image at Work* at *Index – The Swedish Contemporary Art Foundation*, Stockholm and *The Economy of the Gift* at *A Foundation*, Liverpool.
- 2011 Solo shows are *Geta Brătescu. In the Printing Press* at *Ivan Gallery*, Bucharest, Romania; *Alteritate* [Alterity] at *Galerie Barbara Weiss*, Berlin. Group exhibitions include the 12th *Istanbul Biennial*, Istanbul; *Museum der Wünsche* at *MUMOK – Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien*, Vienna;

A Complicated Relation – Part 1 at Kalmar Konstmuseum, Sweden; *Ostalgi* at the New Museum, New York; and *L'Internationale* at MACBA – Museu D'Art Contemporani de Barcelona.

2012 Solo shows are *Geta Brătescu: Atelierele artistului* [The Artist's Studios] at Salonul de proiecte, Bucharest; *Geta Brătescu* at Galeria Luisa Strina, São Paulo; Group shows: *Intense Proximity* at La Triennale Paris 2012, Palais de Tokyo and other venues; *A Bigger Splash: Painting after Performance* at Tate Modern, London.

2013 Solo shows are *Geta Brătescu: The Artist's Studios* at MUSAC, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León, Spain, curated by Magda Radu; *Geta Brătescu and Paul Neagu* at Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin. Group exhibitions: *Happy Birthday! 20 Jahre Sammlung Goetz* at Sammlung Goetz, Munich; *DECORUM: Carpets and Tapestries by Artists* at Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; 5th Moscow Biennial of Contemporary Art; *The Encyclopedic Palace*, La Biennale di Venezia; *In The Heart of the Country. The Collection of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw* at The Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw.

2014 Solo shows are *MATRIX 254 / Geta Brătescu* at BAM/PFA – Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, USA; *Atelier Continuu* at Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin; *Jocul formelor* [Game of Forms] at Ivan Gallery, Bucharest. Group exhibitions: *Straight to Camera: Performance for Film*, Modern Art Oxford; *artevida* at ENDORA Arte Producoes Ltda., Rio de Janeiro; and *A World of Its Own: Photographic Practices in the Studio* at MoMA, New York.

2015 Solo shows are *Geta Brătescu: Drawings with the Eyes Closed* at CAMSTL – Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis; *Geta Brătescu* at Tate Liverpool; *Invocarea desenului* [Invocation of the Drawing] at Ivan Gallery, Bucharest; Group exhibitions: Vienna Biennale 2015 at MAK, Vienna; *Thirty One* at National Gallery of Kosovo; the first edition of Timișoara ArtEncounters, Romania;

and *Transmissions: Art in Eastern Europe and Latin America, 1960–1980* at MoMA, New York. Brătescu's most recent book, *Jurnal în zigzag* [Diary in Zigzag] is published by the Secolul 21 Foundation, with a foreword by Ion Vianu.

2015–2016 Group shows include *Apparitions: Frottages and Rubbings from 1860 to Now* at The Menil Collection, Houston; and *The School of Kyiv: Karlsruhe Class* at Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe, in cooperation with *The School of Kyiv – Kyiv Biennial 2015*.

2016 The artist presents the solo shows *Geta Brătescu. Retrospektive*, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg; and *Geta Brătescu: Collages and Drawings*, Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin; Group shows: *The Ruler of Justice*, Heidelberg Kunstverein, Heidelberg; *A Matter of Contemplation and Discontent*, Vargas Museum, Manila; and *What's The Riddle*, Pi Artworks, London.

2016–17 Group exhibition *My Sweet Little Lamb* (works from the Kontakt Collection, Vienna), is on view at Gallery Nova, Zagreb, Croatia.

2017 She presents a solo show at Camden Arts Centre, London, April–June; Group show: *Entangled: Threads and Making*, Turner Contemporary, Margate, UK.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Unless otherwise stated, all photo credits:
Ștefan Sava

p. 26, 29, 31, 36, 37, 41, 48, 58, 59
Travel albums of the trips Italy, 1966–67, 1977
Albums with postcards, photographs, prints,
handwritten notes
Courtesy of the artist

p. 60 *Desen pre–medeic* [Pre–Medeic
Drawing], 1978
Charcoal and pastel drawing on paper
100 × 140 cm
Courtesy of the artist and
Ivan Gallery, Bucharest

p. 65, 66 *Esop* [Aesop], 1967
Series of 12 lithographs on paper
28 × 43.5 cm each
Courtesy of the artist and
Ivan Gallery, Bucharest

p. 71 *Tipografie* [Printing Press], 1974
Series of four b/w photographs
73 × 80 cm each
Collection de Bruin-Heijn

p. 72 *Tipografie* [Printing Press], 1974
Series of four b/w photographs
73 × 80 cm each
Collection of Deedie Rose, Dallas, USA

p. 74 *Andruck* [Andruck], 1974
Collage on paper
70 × 50 cm

Courtesy of the artist and
Ivan Gallery, Bucharest

p. 75 *Andruck* [Andruck], 1974
Collage on paper
70 × 50 cm

Courtesy of the artist and
Ivan Gallery, Bucharest

p. 79 *Studii de nud* [Nude Studies], 1975
Drawing, ink on paper
39 × 49 cm
Courtesy of the artist and
Ivan Gallery, Bucharest

p. 80 *Studii de nud* [Nude Studies], 1975
Drawing, ink on paper
39 × 49 cm
Collection of Instituto Inhotim, Belo
Horizonte, Brazil

p. 83 *Către alb* [Toward White], 1975
Nine b/w photographs
81 × 81 cm

Courtesy of the artist and
Ivan Gallery, Bucharest
Photographs by Mihai Brătescu

p. 84 *Mâini* [Hands], 1974–76
Series of 20 drawings on paper, mounted on
ten cardboard plates
67.3 × 49.3 cm each plate
Collection of The National Museum of Art
of Romania

p. 87 *Portretele Medeei* [Portraits of
Medea], 1979
Series of ten colored lithographs
59 × 45 cm each
Courtesy of the artist, Ivan Gallery,
Bucharest, and Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin

p. 88 *Philemon și Baucis* [Philemon and
Baucis], 1980–81
Drawing on paper, research for *Faust*
Courtesy of the artist and
Ivan Gallery, Bucharest

p. 90 *Acrobații* [The Acrobats], 1980–81
Drawing and collage on paper,
research for *Faust*
Courtesy of the artist and
Ivan Gallery, Bucharest

p. 93 *Faust. „La început – scriu singur – era
Fapta”* [Faust. “At the beginning – I write by
myself – there was the Deed”], 1981–82
Series of 31 drawings, tempera, collage on
paper (detail)
51 × 67.6 cm each
Collection of The National Museum of Art
of Romania

p. 94 *Faust. Margareta și prefigurarea
Elenei* [Faust. Margaret and Helen’s
Prefiguration], 1981–82
Series of 31 drawings, tempera,
collage on paper
51 × 67.6 cm each
Collection of The National Museum of Art
of Romania

p. 95 *Faust. Embleme ale Eternului feminine
(cu un citat din Cranach)* [Faust. Emblems
of the Eternal Feminine (with a quote from
Cranach)], 1981–82
Series of 31 drawings, tempera,
collage on paper
51 × 67.6 cm each
Collection of The National Museum of Art
of Romania

p. 109 *Amintiri din copilărie* [Childhood
Memories], 1975–78
Series of seven drawings,
watercolor on paper
43 × 34 cm
Courtesy of the artist and
Ivan Gallery, Bucharest

p. 110 *Amintiri din copilărie* [Childhood
Memories], 1975–78
Series of seven drawings,
watercolor on paper
44 × 56 cm
Courtesy of the artist and
Ivan Gallery, Bucharest

- p. 113 *Atelierul* [The Studio], 1978
8 mm film transferred onto DVD, 4:3, b/w,
17:45 min, film stills
Camera: Ion Grigorescu
Courtesy of the artist and
Ivan Gallery, Bucharest
- p. 116 *Atelierul – scenariul* [The Studio –
the film script], 1978
Charcoal, colored pencil and pastel on paper
89.5 × 116.8 cm
Collection of MoMA New York
- p. 122 *Nu violenței!* [No to Violence!], 1974
Series of four b/w photographs
30 × 30 cm each
Courtesy of the artist and
Ivan Gallery Bucharest
Photos: Mihai Brătescu
- p. 126 *Farmece* [Spells], 1987–88
Installation (tempera on paper, wood, rope,
painted wooden stick)
145 × 110 cm
Courtesy of the artist and
Ivan Gallery Bucharest
- p. 131 *Regula cercului, regula jocului* [The
Rule of the Circle, The Rule Game], 1985
Collage and drawing on paper
68 × 45 cm
Collection of Ovidiu Șandor, Timișoara
- p. 132 *Regula cercului, regula jocului* [The Rule
of the Circle, The Rule Game], 1985
Collage and drawing on paper
68 × 45 cm
Courtesy of Ivan Gallery, Bucharest
- p. 137 *Poarta* [The Gate], 1991
Collage, tempera on paper
157 × 180 × 4 cm
Collection of Centre Pompidou, Paris
Photo credit: unknown
- p. 143 *Carpați*, 1985
Collage on paper, paper from smoked
Carpați cigarettes
111 × 129 cm
Hauser & Wirth Collection
- p. 146 *Vestigii* [Vestiges], 1978
Textile collage on paper
35 × 50 cm
Collection of Joshua Mack, New York
- p. 160 *Nouă desene cu ochii închiși* [Nine
Drawings With the Eyes Closed], 2006
Series of ten drawings on paper
31.7 × 41.9 cm each
Courtesy of the artist and
Ivan Gallery, Bucharest
- p. 165 *Mume* [Mothers], 1997
Collage, tempera and ink on paper, triptych
104.5 × 104.3 cm
Courtesy of the artist and
Ivan Gallery, Bucharest
- p. 166 *Apariții* [Apparitions], 1997
Series of six drawings in ink on
parchment paper
52 × 42 cm each
Courtesy of the artist and
Ivan Gallery, Bucharest
- p. 170 *Athamor* [Athamor], 1974
Photomontage, text, drawing, metal
75 × 150 cm
Collection of Instituto Inhotim, Belo
Horizonte, Brazil
- p. 178 *Cricot* [Cricot], 1975
Series of eight drawings in ink and pencil,
collage on paper
27.5 × 33 cm each
Courtesy of the artist and
Ivan Gallery, Bucharest
- p. 180 *Thonet*, 1979
Nine vintage prints of b/w photographs
mounted on paper (detail)
23.5 × 32 cm
Courtesy of the artist and
Ivan Gallery, Bucharest
- p. 183 *Turnurile Danone* [Dannon
Towers], 2005
Installation (yogurt cans, tempera),
dimensions variable (detail)
Courtesy of the artist and
Ivan Gallery, Bucharest
- p. 200 *Femei* [Women], 2007
Collage of 200 drawings on paper with the
eyes closed
172 × 51 cm
Vehbi Koç Foundation Contemporary Art
Collection, Istanbul
- p. 203 *Linia nebună* [The Crazy Line], 2013
Drawing on paper, leporello
258.5 × 9.5 cm
Courtesy of the artist and
Ivan Gallery, Bucharest
- p. 206 *Călătorul* [The Traveler], 1997
Series of six drawings on paper
50 × 35 cm each
Courtesy of the artist and
Ivan Gallery, Bucharest
- p. 209, 210 *Bărbosul ingenuu* [The Ingenuous
Bearded One], 2007
Series of six drawings on paper
23 × 32.5 cm each
Courtesy of the artist and
Ivan Gallery, Bucharest
- p. 214 *Eu și pasărea Bird* [Myself and the
Bird Bird], 2006
Drawing and collage on paper
Courtesy of the artist and
Ivan Gallery, Bucharest
- p. 217 *Mume* [Mothers], 2004
Installation (paper, cardboard, tempera,
wooden sticks)
108 × 54 × 9 cm
Hauser & Wirth Collection
- p. 220 View of the studio, 2015
- p. 223 *Vestigii* [Vestiges], 1982
Collage, tempera, gouache drawing on paper
65 × 48 cm
Collection of Teixeira de Freitas, Portugal
- p. 224 *Vestigii* [Vestiges], 1982
Collage, tempera, gouache drawing on paper
65 × 48 cm
Collection of Deedie Rose, Dallas, USA

p. 226 *Clovnul meu drag* [My Dear Clown], 2011
Collage, drawing on paper
30.4 × 30.4 cm
Courtesy of the artist and
Ivan Gallery, Bucharest

p. 233 *Jocul formelor cifrate* [Game of Coded Forms], 2012
Series of six collages on paper
29.5 × 40.5 cm each
Courtesy of the artist and
Ivan Gallery, Bucharest

p. 234 *Jocul formelor cifrate* [Game of Coded Forms], 2011
Series of five collages on paper
25 × 31 cm each
Courtesy of the artist and
Ivan Gallery, Bucharest

p. 236 *Mume* [Mothers], 2011–12
Installation (six wooden spoons,
tempera, paper)
79 × 10 × 2 cm
Courtesy of the artist and
Ivan Gallery, Bucharest

p. 240 *Jocul formelor* [Game of Forms], 2013
Series of five drawing on paper
35.5 × 43 cm each
Courtesy of the artist and
Ivan Gallery, Bucharest

p. 242 *Forma magică* [The Magic Form], 2009
Collage on paper, leporello, three
parts (detail)
136 × 66 cm
Courtesy of the artist and
Ivan Gallery, Bucharest

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

Geta Brătescu – *Apparitions*

Romanian Pavilion, Giardini della Biennale
New Gallery of the Romanian Institute for
Culture and Humanistic Research

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