

4. EASEL GRAPHIC WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE FINE ARTS FROM BESSARABIA (1887-1940)

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Abstract: *The present article tries to reveal the situation in the field of the Bessarabian art and the role of the easel graphic during the period 1887-1944. Outlining the distinct aspects of each of the decades of the Bessarabian art, the author uncovers the emerged relation between graphics and painting, marking the direction towards which both fields have developed: artists, styles, themes, motives, artistic means, etc.*

Key words: *plastic arts, easel graphic, easel painting, plastic artists, art, Bessarabia*

The modern Bessarabian art represents a relatively early creation step, receptive to the European changes and tendencies, marked by individualism, prolific creating impulse and various plastic and stylistic searching, while lacking any monopoly or pre-established conditions. The artistic bloom had simultaneously covered all the fine arts, reaching its peak in the interwar period. The social and political circumstances have favored the opening of new artistic horizons and the intensification of the cultural exchanges process. Following the integration in a unitary national state, qualitative changes took place within the artistic education, aligning itself with European didactic programs, the principles and the artistic qualifiers within the Chisinau Art Society were re-harnessed, new opportunities had emerged for collaboration and joint participation with Romanian artists at official fine arts, sculpture and graphics exhibitions, this fact contributing to the artistic competitiveness of the creators.

Within the last decades of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century, the Bessarabian artists managed to found, in a record period of time, a viable art school and imprint unrepeatably national character. The multiple obstacles and the major circumstances emerged within these decades have conditioned the course of the artistic development. On one hand, the spontaneous nature of the foundation of the national fine arts school had the effect of assimilation of a multitude of foreign influences, which had generated the emergence and simultaneous co-habilitation of several styles of Eastern and Western origins.

On the other hand, the internal situation and the political instability had determined many artists to leave Bessarabia, and turn to more culturally friendly environments. The emigration of artists generated by the centripetal and colonial politics of the Russian Empire (Bessarabia being a part of it within the period of 1812-1917) had given the local art a provincial statute, disadvantaging the creation of a blooming artistic environment. The journeys of initiation of the Bessarabian artists were most often resulting in their permanent residency abroad, examples of such artists being: Pavel Șillingovschi, Toma Răilean, Ion

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Croitoru, Niuma Patlajan, Boris Anisfeld, Boris Bilinsky and others.²⁵¹ By the end of the 19th century, the provincial chaos determined more artists to take difficult paths in order to finish their education in arts, the most important destinations being Odessa, Moscow and Petersburg.

These circumstances had subordinated the local art to the dominant tendencies of the empire, like the realism of the *peredvizhniki*, and, at the same time to the aspirations of the modern art promoted by the “*Mir iskusstva*”, “*Bubnovji Valet*” and others. Under the influence of the *peredvizhniki*, in Chisinau are created the Drawing school (1887) and the Society of fine arts amateurs from Bessarabia (1903), these two having identical statutes to the similar organizations from Russia and Ukraine²⁵². The Bessarabian art between 1887 and 1918 represents a miniature echo of the multiple processes which were taking place in Europe and Russia. The few artists who had returned home after finishing their education, had formed an artistic nucleus grouped around the Drawing school managed by Vladimir Ocuşco, where the Society of fine arts amateurs was having regular meetings. This society aimed at exhibiting and promoting the Bessarabian art²⁵³.

The circumstances of that time and the desire to align with the European artistic models had stimulated many artists to specialize in easel painting, scenery, decorative art, artistic critique and easel graphics. Among the drawers there were Gavriil Remmer, Vladimir Ocuşco, I. Stepancovschi, Lidia Arionescu-Baillyre and Eugenia Maleşevschi. And such painters as Grigore Fiurer and Eugenia Maleşevschi were among the first ones making landscapes and nudes in etching. A part of the Bessarabian artists were involved in teaching drawing, among them being Terenti Zubcu, Vasile Blinov, Vladimir Ocuşco, V. Tarasov, Pavel Piscariov and others²⁵⁴.

In the early stage of the national arts school's foundation we can see a strong bond between fine arts fields, as well as the significant role of the graphic language. The overlapping of subjects in the paintings and easel graphics allows us to deduct and reconstruct the artistic panorama in the first decades, even if the artworks that were preserved until today are very few. Thus, we can ascertain that the main preoccupation surrounded elitist motives like landscapes and portraits, the other genres having quite modest representations. A result of this interdependence could be the assumption that a large part of the artists which practiced easel painting have also tried to perform in easel graphic. Thus, the graphic artworks of artists like Vladimir Ocuşco, Eugenia Maleşevschi and others can be reflected in their oil paintings and vice versa.

Between 1918 and 1944 the artistic climate is considerably enriched, a new generation of artists appears, artists that proved their talent in several fields. To

²⁵¹ Plămădeală, A., 1933, Bessarabian plastic artists, in “Life of Bessarabia”, year II, no. 11, November, p. 51, “Cuvant Moldovenesc” Printing house, Chisinau

²⁵² Stavilă, T., 2000, Modern plastic art from Bessarabia. 1887-1940, “Stiinta” Printing house, Chisinau, p. 7

²⁵³ Plămădeală, A., 1933, Bessarabian plastic artists, in “Life of Bessarabia”, year II, no. 11, November, p. 49, “Cuvant Moldovenesc” Printing house, Chisinau

²⁵⁴ Noroc, L., 2011, Bessarabian culture in the inter-wars period (1918-1940), 2nd edition, S. n. Printing house, Chisinau, p. 122

the evolution of plastic arts a significant contribution was brought by the development of the artistic concept of the sculpture and teacher Alexandru Plămădeală, as well as by the moving to Bessarabia of the French origin artist Auguste Baillayre. The prestige and professionalism in the field of graphics was developed by professors: Șneer Cogan, Nicolae Gumalic, Alexandru Plămădeală, Gavriil Remmer and Rostislav Ocușco. Under these talents were raised and formed artists like Theodor Kiriacooff, Gheorghe Ceglokoff, Elena Barlo, Elisabeth Ivanovschi, Moisey Gamburd, Tania Baillayre, Victor Ivanov and others.

It is important that the artworks of Bessarabian artists were also presented at exhibitions in Bucharest, starting with 1922. An universal statute of graphic art is noticed, which, at that time, was taking an important place in the creation of the Bessarabian graphic artists, painters, as well as sculptors. This aspect is illustrated by the graphic artworks at the Fine Arts Society Salons from Bessarabia and at the Salons held in Bucharest. Within these salons, the artworks of graphic artists like Șneer Cogan, Tania Baillayre, Gheorghe Ceglokoff și Pavel Bespoiasnâi were presented along with graphic works of the sculptors Claudia Cobizev and Alexandru Plămădeală, as well as with a significant number of paintings of Auguste Baillayre, Dimitrie Sevastianov, Moisey Gamburd, Anatol Vulpe and others.

Within the third decade, the sculptor Moisey Kogan joined them, launching himself in the art of engraving. The artist performs in the technique of etching, xylography, linocut and easel drawing. The subjects on the graphic sheets signed by Moisey Kogan are comon with the ones of his sculptures from that period. The fourth decade there is noticed an increased interest of the artists towards the techniques of easel graphic like oil pastel and watercolors, which are applied primarily in landscapes, as well as portraiture, interiors and still life, by artists like Rostislav Ocușco, Victoria Semenschi, Elisabeta Zottoviceanu, Gavriil Remmer, Saul Rabover, Irina Olșenschi, Liubov Ocușco, Mihail Berezovschi, Victor Fiodorov, Gheorghe Ceglokoff and others.

The interdependence of the subjects and the variety of the available artistic language had contributed to the prestige of the graphic art during the period studied in this article. Diligent drawing was resulting in successful careers, a large number of these artworks finding their place in the gallery of easel drawings signed by Alexandru Plămădeală, Eugenia Maleșevschi, Pavel Șillingovski, Gavriil Remmer, Moisey Gamburd, Anatol Vulpe, Auguste Baillayre. Between 1887 and 1944 we notice an increased interest for stamping procedures, the diversification of the applied techniques and the increase in the number of artists practicing engraving.

This tendency is partially explained in the courses of engraving in linocut and etching taught by Șneer Cogan within the Chisinau Art School, as well as by the appeal of this field, the possibility to multiply, which made several artists get acquainted with this on their own. Thus, the interest for this direction in graphic is presented in the art of Șneer Cogan, Tania Baillayre-Ceglokoff, Gheorghe Ceglokoff, Pavel Bespoiasnâi, Eugenia Maleșevschi, Anatolie Cudinoff, Nina

Arbore, Gavriil Remmer, Victor Ivanov, Anatol Vulpe, Theodor Kiriacoff, Grigore Fiurer, Irina Olșevschi, Pavel Piscariov and others.

The problem of the genre within the plastic arts is inherently linked to the stylistic and personal preferences of the artists. The influence of the *predvizhniki* art, which had marked the Bessarabian art in the first decades of the century, was manifested mainly through the realistic manner of interpretation, as well as through the preference for the genre dominant in the Russian art, like landscapes, portraits and genre scenes. In the second decade it is noticed the influences of the "*Art Nouveau*" style, which catches the interest for biblical subjects - "*Lotte and her daughters*" (1914) by Pavel Șillingovski, "*Apocalypse*" (1930-936) by Theodor Kiriacoff, as well as the panels signed by Eugenia Maleșevschi, Pavel Piscariov and others. Meanwhile, the postimpressionism has generated a predilection towards still art in the creation of Lidia Arionescu - Baillay, Auguste Baillayre and others.

The analysis of the easel graphic from the Bessarabian period uncovers a constant preference of the artists for the nude, followed by portraits and landscapes. A more modest place was taken by thematic compositions, still art, animal genre and interior. Thus, from over 500 graphic sheets which were preserved, almost a half of them represents the human nude figure, one quarter represents portraits, one fifth - landscapes, and the rest - themed compositions, still art, interior and animal genre.

An enormous contribution to the evolution of the nude was brought by Moisey Kogan, there are known over 150 graphic artworks in different techniques representing the female nude²⁵⁵. The art signed by Moisey Kogan is present in the collections of the museums from Europe and America. The sculptor is followed by the painter Eugenia Maleșevschi, 80 drawings of this genre being preserved until today. Graphic sheets presenting the human body are common also to artists like Pavel Șillingovski, Alexandru Plămădeală, Moisey Gamburd, Anatol Vulpe, Milița Petrașcu, Auguste Baillayre, Lidia Arionescu-Baillayre și Theodore Kiriacoff.

The portrait genre is largely used in the creation of Milița Petrașcu, Alexandru Plămădeală, Pavel Șillingovski, Nina Arbore, Moisey Gamburd, Șneer Cogan, Eugenia Maleșevschi, Gheorghe Ceglokoff, Tania Baillayre-Ceglokoff, Dimitrie Sevastianov, Grigore Fiurer și Rostislav Ocușco. Most of the portraits were created within the fourth decade. In the field of portraits prevail the techniques related to engraving, especially the easel graphic in charcoal, pencil and sanguine, while the portraits made in engraving techniques like etching, linocut and xylography take a more modest place.

The most numerous and various graphic landscapes were made by Pavel Șillingovski. He is followed by artists like Șneer Cogan, Tania Baillayre, Theodor Kiriacoff, Eugenia Gamburd, Nina Arbore, Gheorghe Ceglokoff and Victor Ivanov. Also, it is known the fact that Auguste Baillayre had created a

²⁵⁵ Shiner, H., 1997, Artistic radicalism and radical conservatism: Moisey kogan and his German patrons, 1903-1928, <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/volltextserver/>, 10.05.2013

significant amount of landscapes in tempera and gouache, of which only the artworks attributed to the Bucharest period have survived²⁵⁶. The same situation, but in a variety of engraving techniques, repeats in the case of the plastic artists Anatolie Cudinoff and Tania Baillayre, which continue creating after 1945 on the right bank of the Prut river. In contrast to the portrait, in the graphic landscape there prevail the techniques of stamp in etching, linocut, xylograph and lithography, while the techniques afferent to stamp take a more modest position, and some materials like sanguine and charcoal so largely applied in portraits, are practically missing in the graphic landscape.

The themed compositions are not many, but they are quite diversified. A significant part of them represent graphic studies, as a preparation step before paintings, murals or scenery, signed by Auguste Baillayre, Moisey Gamburd, Eugenia Maleșevschi și Milița Petrașcu. The most prolific in this field was the graphic artist Gheorghe Ceglokoff, which got noticed through genre scenes, creating an entire series dedicated to the miners and prisoners of the concentration camps, and after 1945 also to laborers²⁵⁷. The genre scenes is also found in the creation of Mihail Larionov, Nina Arbore, Theodor Kiriacoff and Anatol Vulpe. If in portraits and graphic landscapes we can see the existence of particular preferences, than in the thematic compositions we notice heterogeneousness, in the absence of predilections for an exact technique or field. Therefore, we find, in equal manner, compositions in etching, xylography, linocut, lithography, charcoal, pencil, India ink, oil pastel and gouache.

The still life and interior are found in the graphic creation signed by Nina Arbore, Tania Baillayre-Ceglokoff, Theodor Kiriacoff, Boris Nesvedov, Gavriil Remmer, Eugenia Maleșevschi, Irina Filatieff, Irina Olșevsky and Auguste Baillayre. The artists approach this subject in xylography, linocut, watercolors, pencil, gouache and oil pastel. In paintings, the still life and interior were practiced by Auguste Baillayre, Lidia Arionescu-Baillayre, Nina Arbore, Alexandru Plămădeală, Pavel Piscariov, Vasile Blinov, Dmitrie Sevastianov, Eugenia Maleșevschi, Ion Antoceanu, Elena Barlo, Natalia Danilenco, Eugenia Gamburd and others.

The zoomorphic representations within the easel graphic can be found in the graphic creations of Nina Arbore, Tania Baillayre-Ceglokoff, Milița Petrașcu and Pavel Șillingovski. These artworks are made in various techniques like pencil, sanguine, etching and aquatint, linocut, etc. The oscillation of the Bessarabian plastic art in the context of the stylistic tendencies from the end of the 19th century - the beginning of the 20th century, limited to the art of the *peredvizhniki*, impressionism, postimpressionism, the *"1900 Style"* and the moderated expressionism, had conditioned the preservation of a traditional themed structure and the prosperity of the figurative art.

Even if the history of the Bessarabian art between 1887 and 1944 is contemporary with the pre-war and between wars historical avant-garde, those

²⁵⁶ Stavilă, T., 2000, Modern plastic art from Bessarabia. 1887-1940, "Știința" Printing house, Chisinau, p. 27

²⁵⁷ Suter, C., 1978, The repertoire of the Romanian graphic from the 20th century. Vol. I. A-C., S.n. Printing house, Bucharest, p. 269-277

were not fully assimilated by the Bessarabian artists, which remained neutral towards the fever of cubism, futurism, dadaism, surrealism, abstractionism, etc. This characteristic of the Bessarabian art allows the obvious presence of that form of mimesis, specific to the figurative art (the historical avant-garde actively opposing this form), as well as the traditional presence of the genres which are easily identifiable and can be analyzed.

Thus, the blooming of the stylized and geometrized art, lacking the mark of the artist and affiliation to any specific genre, was an unknown characteristic to the Bessarabian art from the 20th century, which continued to be loyal to the traditions of the realism school launched in the middle of the 19th century, and the stylistic nuances of the avant-garde (like expressionism) were just partially manifested, mostly by form and not by content. An eloquent example is the creation of Nina Arbore, who, even if being a part of the avant-garde movement, still remained loyal to her artistic creed. "I hate everything that is vulgar and insistent; I seek classic greatness and seriousness." - confessed the artist²⁵⁸. For this reason, her creation distinguishes through elegance, frankness and a sense of monumental, as opposed to the creations of leading Romanian avant-garde artists.

The graphic works done by Moissey Kogan in Germany and France are simply beautiful. Being in the centre of the cultural and stylistic changes marked by German expressionism, the artist remained loyal to a poetic vision, full of ancient reverie. His creation remains neutral towards the deformation of the proportions or the exploring of the grotesque, specific to avant-garde. In an equal matter, this neutral attitude is taken over by his brother, Șneer Cogan, in his landscapes and portraits, where there is a slight tendency to use the plastic means specific to expressionism, which differs from the German engraving phenomenon, revealed by the creation of Max Beckmann or Karl Schmidt-Rottluff.

Among the Bessarabian artists who were in direct contact with the German secessionist and expressionist movement, there was also the graphic artist Gheorghe Ceglokoff²⁵⁹. His graphic sheets in linocut, xylography and lithography are marked by expression and inner tension, specific to the expressionism. An artistic and conceptual symbiosis of the expressionist goals in the Bessarabian plastic art is found in the "*Bestialites*" series (1927) by Theodor Kiriacoff. This graphic series, full of prostitutes, uses the expressionist technique with the excentric thematic vision of this movement²⁶⁰.

An essential contribution to the development of the Romanian avant-garde in the inter-war period was brought by Milița Petrașcu. The sculptor had tight relations with the French art scene, and in 1930 she was directly involved in the show "*L'Incendio della sonda*" in Bucharest, where there also participated Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, the founder and the theorist of the Italian futurism.

²⁵⁸ Octavian, T., 2002, *Forgotten Romanian painters*, "Noi Media Print" Printing house, Bucharest, p. 106

²⁵⁹ Stăvilă, T., 2008, *The engraver Gheorghe Ceglokoff*, in „Art. Visual arts”, p. 72-89, S. n. Printing house, Chisinau

²⁶⁰ Stăvilă, T., 2006, *Theodor Kiriacoff*. ARC Printing house, Chisinau, p. 13

As a result, Milița Petrașcu had participated, together with a group of Romanian artists, at a futuristic art exhibition in Rome, in 1933²⁶¹. This futurist adventure had offered peculiar dynamism to the easel drawings from the 1930's a.

Preceding expressionism, "*Art Nouveau*" managed to win grounds in the Bessarabian fine arts and keep its positions viable until the fourth decade, manifesting itself in paintings, as well as in easel graphic. In this context, we notice that the paintings made by Eugenia Maleșevschi and Pavel Piscariov starting with the second decade are a little sweet and erotic, in equal matter. In the 1930's, a. Baillayre is attracted to some aspects of the style, but the chromatics used are of a postmodernist nature. The influence of the "*1900 Style*" appears also in the easel drawings of Eugenia Maleșevschi in the nudes and portraits in charcoal and sanguine. Pavel Șillingovschi appeals also to the aesthetic of the "*1900 Style*", using in his artworks from 1914 the decorative rhythm of the sinuous lines from the engravings on biblical subjects.

The expressivity and elegance of the modern also attracts, temporarily, the graduates of the Chisinau Fine Arts School, among them being Theodor Kiriacoff, Elisabeth Ivanovschi, etc. A stronger influence had constructivism. In his youth, Auguste Baillayre had a passion for this style, a proof of this being his art, which is now kept in collection from the Netherlands and Russia. This tendency also reflected, selectively, on his pupils, one of them being Elisabeth Ivanovschi, which had also manifested an attraction to constructivism, an example of this being her artworks from the end of the 1930's (Sketch for a cover, A New Year postcard, 1934; the two sketches for a stained glass, 1929).

The Bessarabian fine art was receptive to the principles and stylistics specific for postimpressionism. Thus, the work of Lidia Arionescu-Baillayre, "*Female portrait*" (1904) and "*Still life*" (1900) are distinguished by the impact of neoimpressionism, present in the plastic expression procedures. And the nocturne landscapes in India ink by Alexandru Plămădeală, from the period between 1910 and 1918, reminiscent to the easel graphic of Georges Seurat - "*Ploughing*", "*The gate*", and others. The tendencies of postimpressionism are also noticed in the creation of Auguste Baillayre, Vladimir Doncev, Olesi Hrșanovschi and others. The early work of Mihail Larionov by the end of 1902 are in compliance with the objectives of the postimpressionism, the most notorious being the oil pastels: "*The lady with muff*" (1890), "*The woman and the flamingo*" (1898) and "*Women*" (the end of 1890's). In the creation of the Bessarabian origin artist B. Anisfeld we find characteristics of the romantic symbolism and the influence of the "*Mir iskusstva*" group, reflected in the watercolors paintings "*The portrait of the wife*" (1904-1905) and "*The woman and the masked figures*" (1905)²⁶².

A particular interest present the artworks marked by the concepts of the impressionists' paintings, the influence of which lasts in Eastern Europe for a few decades after this movement ended. The play of the shadows and light, the

²⁶¹ Vlasiu, I., 2004, Milița Petrașcu, ARC Printing house, Chisinau, p. 26

²⁶² Sugrobova-Roth, O., Anisfeld in the Critics' Eyes, <http://anisfeld.org>, 21.05.2014

space and atmosphere effects are largely revealed in the paintings of Pavel Şillingovski - "*The portrait of the wife*" (1930's), Dimitrie Sevastianov - "*Winter landscape*" (1930's), Grigore Fiurer „*Pein-air*” (1938), as well as in the work of Pavel Piscariov, Alexandru Climaşevschi, Anatol Vulpe and Auguste Baillayre.

The Russian realism promoted by the peredvizhniki Association had the strongest influence in the first phase of the evolution of Bessarabian fine arts, as well as in the early work of several artists. This subject presents difficulties when being analyzed, as well as the entire Bessarabian art, due to the lack of the artworks. Thus, the creation of Nicolae Gumalic, I. Bulat, H. Şah, Irina Filatiev and Ion Antoceanu has almost entirely disappeared. Still, we can establish the predilection to realism in the artwork of Vladimir Ocuşco, Gavriil Remmer, Timofei Colţa, Alexandru Plămădeală, Mihail Berezovschi, Vasile Blinov, Pavel Piscariov and others. Realism is specific to the creation of Moisey Gamburd, but, as opposed to other artists, he learned it while studying in Brussels. The sober paintings signed by Moisey Gamburd, on which he worked for long periods, presenting families of farmers in monumental attitudes, reminiscent of Belgian realism from the end of the 19th century²⁶³. Still, the realism in the creation of Bessarabian artists manifests mainly in natural treatment of the motive and evocation of the rural life in harmony with the best traditions of Nicolae Grigorescu.

During the entire period analyzed in this article, the Bessarabian fine art went through a rapid evolution, marked by different political, economical and social conjunctures, which had imprinted it with Eastern and Western stylistics. Even if the Bessarabian artists have managed in record time to found a modern national school, their stylistic preferences have oscillated between realism and moderate expressionism. Being loyal to the tradition of the figurative art, distant from the avant-garde art, the Bessarabian art can be analyzed in a classical way of its art genres. As a result of this analysis, it has been established the predilection towards portrait and landscape, this being common to the easel graphic and painting. The foundation of the national school had a benefic impact of the local artistic environment, diversifying the exhibition activities, the stylistic approaches, the plastic and technical means, considerably strengthening the field of graphics.

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²⁶³ Octavian, T., 2002, Forgotten Romanian painters, “Noi Media Print” Printing house, Bucharest, p. 144.

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