

LILI DUJOURIE AND ION GRIGORESCU

29 August – 11 October 2009

Ludlow 38 European Kunsthalle Cologne Goethe Institut New York

38 Ludlow Street

New York 10002

www.ludlow38.org

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

All works shown courtesy of the artists.

FRONT GALLERY, CLOCKWISE FROM ENTRANCE

Lili Dujourie

American Imperialism

1971/2009

Steel, painted wall, dimensions variable

This work exists in a dozen possible permutations, prescribed by the artist, of wall color and treatment of the steel surface. The dimensions and the spatial impact varies with the location and occasion of the realization. When *American Imperialism* was first presented in Belgium in the early 1970s the combination of the title's explicit political critique and the subtly twisted take on the visuality of Minimalism (the frontal view subverted by the leaning sheets of metal and the pre-existing wall color left intact behind them) provoked some mental friction among viewers and the artist's peers. As the war in Vietnam kept unfolding in the aftermath of 1968, Western European intellectuals were highly critical of the Superpower's policies, but perhaps less aware that artistic and curatorial practices originating in the USA had become hegemonic.

Ion Grigorescu

Sketch for official portrait of Nicolae Ceausescu

1980

Ink on paper, 29.5 x 21 cm

In 1980 Ion Grigorescu was commissioned to paint a portrait of Nicolae Ceausescu. The painting presented to the Artists' Union's Director of Exhibitions contained three images of the Leader. It was as if he was arguing with himself. This submission was refused and changes to the painting were recommended, but no arguments were given for the refusal. In the 1950s there had been committees showing artists "the right way," but in the 1980s this work was done by individuals.

Grigorescu remembers: "He must have seen something in those three portraits, something he was not able to say. I had intended to create a critical tension between the three figures, but I resubmitted a singular Ceausescu. 'No, this is too realistic.' But I had never seen Ceausescu in real life, only on TV and in films. He had aged, whereas the official portraits still showed him corrected, without wrinkles. In the portrait his face was a little puffed up, with visible red veins. The hands were heavy and veined, but they were the floppy hands of someone doing a desk job. 'Yes, this is also true. He has a soft handshake...'"

Ion Grigorescu

Art and History

1974

Three b/w photographs mounted together, 60 x 115.5 cm

In the summer of 1974 an open session of the Artists' Union's Communist Party cell took place in Bucharest. The topic was a recent exhibition entitled *Art and History*. After visiting China and North Korea in 1971 Nicolae Ceausescu published his theses about a Cultural Revolution in Romania. They were not very slavishly followed at first, but now the Communist Party had started to show interest in non-professional culture. This was seen as a threat by the Artists' Union. Its functionaries, aware of what was

happening in China, wanted to show themselves ready to carry out every wish from the Party so that the artists (and themselves) would not be replaced by amateurs.

At the time there was talk of "Humanism," a term that had been negotiated by intellectuals and by leading art world figures who wanted to even out the differences between East and West by stressing "universal human values." During the session they came under criticism from the "revolutionaries," who focused on how the intellectuals had distanced themselves from the masses, creating an art that was understandable only to an elite.

One of these was the critic Adrian Petringenaru, who speaks into the microphone in the right-hand photograph. Behind him we see the principal organizer of the exhibition under attack, the art historian and critic Dan Haulica, and his colleague, the critic Ion Frunzetti. In the middle photograph the art historian Radu Bogdan is speaking in favor of *Art and History*, and in the left-hand photograph we see another of its supporters, the painter and Communist Party Secretary of the Artists' Union Virgil Almasanu, who was also one of the participants in the exhibition.

Grigorescu remembers: "The 'revolutionary' Paul Sorban was contradicted and felt himself 'silenced.' He stood up and said: 'I'm going to the Ministry to tell them that it's impossible to speak here.' This was a denunciation. Anatol Mândrescu, the editor of the art journal *Arta*, said: 'There will be a cultural genocide,' i.e. heads will roll at the Artists' Union. That was how irresolvable conflicts were usually resolved. But the Party decided to retain the old leadership. Perhaps there was simply no new team ready to take over. The preferred solution was to have two factions, professionals and amateurs, in conflict with each other. The Cultural Revolution never fully happened in the art world. It was, by the way, very unusual for anyone to be taking photographs at a political event of this kind."

Ion Grigorescu

In My Beloved Bucharest

1977

Super8 film transferred to 16mm, 10 min

This film is a meandering portrait of a city undergoing change and being slowly ground down by it. Grigorescu filmed the outskirts of Bucharest from Tramway no 26 as it passed through vast areas of housing for factory workers, the class of people supposedly playing the leading role in Socialist society and holding the key to its future. We see the heavy machinery and materials used for constructing the Bucharest subway, identifiable through the letter "M" painted on metal fences around the ubiquitous construction sites. The slogan the beginning says: "Long Live Communism, the Future of Mankind!". The inscription on a monument declares: "We Have Made the Ultimate Sacrifice for Future Generations."

Towards the end the camera arrives at the city centre, where young and fashionably dressed people are walking the streets around the former Royal Palace which at the time served as the office for the leader, Nicolae Ceausescu, and his wife Elena. This view is juxtaposed with the lyrics for a popular song from the 1950s: "Beloved Bucharest! We will make you as beautiful as in the fairytales. We will to give you new life." We also see propaganda leaflets from the 1950s with a young couple admiring a building site and Stakhanovite industrial workers who were already in delivering the results planned for twenty years later, when this film was being made.

Alternating with:

Ion Grigorescu

Boxing

1977

Super8 film transferred to 16mm, 3 min

This film, shot in Grigorescu's studio, shows him winning a fist fight against his own superimposed shadow or *Doppelgänger*. It has been characterized as a "dissident" work, demonstrating the struggle of the individual artist against external pressure. But it could also be understood as an act of aggression in which both participants risk losing their dignity, or as an attempt at heroism where nothing much is at stake, because the adversary is a mere shadow. Grigorescu points out that he always found boxing an unfair and destructive sport.

REAR GALLERY, CLOCKWISE FROM ENTRANCE

Ion Grigorescu

Truths about the Capitalist World

1977

Super8 film transferred to DVD, 11.35 min

This recently rediscovered film consists of street footage from Grigorescu's first trip to Western Europe. We see moving images from Zurich, Paris and Versailles. The camera pays special attention to textual signs, graffiti, images of the human body and institutions with a monopoly on the use of violence, such as the police and the military. The title was borrowed from article in a Romanian newspaper, intended to "unmask" real life in the Western bloc.

Lili Dujourie

Roman

1978

Three framed collages from a series, each 31.5 x 23 cm

The *Roman* series is quite extensive, and includes both framed collages like those exhibited here and wall pieces consisting of similar images torn out of illustrated magazines and arranged with plenty of "empty" space between them. The series can be said to reflect motifs from Dujourie's video works from the 1970s and early 1980s, particularly the contemporary image of the human body articulated through references to the nudes of art history, but they also represent a development of her earlier, less figurative collages.

Ion Grigorescu

Hommage à Francis Bacon

1978

C-print, 100 x 70 cm

This image of the artist himself belongs to a series of photographs that re-enact paintings by Francis Bacon centering on models on couches. Grigorescu's images attempt to formulate the relation between the bed and the bedsheets, and at the same time the relation between painting and photography. At this time he was experimenting with various "revitalising" approaches to painting, including three-dimensional additions to painted surfaces, photography-based representations of the human body in motion and the treatment of the canvas as textile.

New York, 27 August 2009

Anders Kreuger