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In the Name of Brâncuși: Complexes, Projections, and Historical Symptoms

On August 19, as this text was just being finished, the Romanian press coincidentally published an article on Constantin Brâncuși. “Amazing! Brâncuși's donation to Romania rejected by Călinescu and Sadoveanu”, writes the *Ring*, a local newspaper distributed for free in the Bucharest subway¹. The article discusses a well known topic which continues to attract the attention of the Romanian cultural milieu, still, after 62 years: in 1951, at the peak of socialist realism, Brâncuși wanted to donate his work to the Romanian State. The Romanian Academy members refused the offer.

The official records of that meeting reveal political arguments against the artist. Here I quote two of them: “Brâncuși cannot be considered a creator in the field of sculpture since he does not express himself through the essential and characteristic means of this art”, states the literary critic and writer George Călinescu. Moreover, George Oprescu, the most important art critic before and after the World War II, spoke of a betrayal and a “lack of sincerity” on the part of the sculptor after he left the country: “having been a talented individual and having incited great expectations in the first part of his career, under the influence of fashionable artists in Paris who cultivated the *indefinit* and cubism, he became a formalist even when he used elements of folk art, speculating through strange means the morbid tastes of bourgeois society”². But the article about Brâncuși's rejection early in the 50s is joined by the opinions of some former but recent ministers of culture, such as Mircea Diaconu:

“We are talking about a man who had departed from a certain point, from a certain religion and thereafter became Brâncuși... but his wish was to come back to what he had been. [...] Somebody has to perform the office for the dead for him.”³

Almost falling into ridicule, this statement reminds us of a cultural debate which has periodically flooded the Romanian media in the last two years, namely the discussion pertaining to repatriating Brâncuși's remains. This initiative was started by a fierce Romanian intellectual, Laurian Stănescu, to whom I will come back later. Being difficult to categorize, Brâncuși creates confusion as everyone can project their own views onto him.

One of the most recent Romanian publications on Brâncuși is the study written by the art historian Doina Lemny: *Brâncuși – the Artist Who Crosses All Boundaries*, first published in Paris in 2012 and in Bucharest the same year. The author draws attention to the flexibility required of a researcher who approaches his work, leaving aside all abusive nationalistic marks which can only limit the discourse. Brâncuși, the “Peasant of Carpathians”, as he is called sometimes, “would not have reached this perfect synthesis between modern and archaic, if he had diligently followed tradition, simply repeating what the craftsmen created for centuries”, she writes⁴. “Despite these very different analyses, the sculptor and his work keep their share of secrets”⁵, concludes the author of this volume written by a mature researcher who wishes neither to debunk a myth nor to cultivate it by means of contrived interpretations. The naturalness with which Doina Lemny revisited some landmarks of Brâncuși's work and the way in which the text slides from his oeuvre to quotations or photography and back to the work, allow for a maintenance of the awareness that the condition of the classical artist must be approached with care. There will be continued discourses in all directions, but something will always escape the exegesis: “never pry on the masters. Their secret can never be breached”, Brâncuși would have said.



Fig. 1 Romanian Exhibition in the Central Pavilion at the XIVth edition of the Venice Biennale in 1924.

Doina Lemny's study appeared on the background of an overgrown Romanian cultural phenomenon, namely that of Brâncuși's appropriation by a multitude of identity-related and nationalist discourses. Such examples are public Romanian manifestations in the Western milieu – which use elements of the artist's work and deliver them to the public as symbols standing for the “essence” of Romanian culture (exemplifying a kitsch and reductionist appropriation of the artist) – or publications which direct the artist's work to a one-dimensional reading, such as *Brâncuși, Romanian Orthodox Sculptor*⁶, written by the Blessed Daniel, the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, a book published in 2007 recuperating the “orthodox dimension” of Brâncuși's work. Other past scandals referred to the faulty restoration of the *Endless Column*.

In this context, the history of Romanian representations in the Venice Biennale, the biggest and most important spectacle of contemporary art from 1895 until today, should be carefully examined. It is a spectacle in which the idea of *national representation* has been

key to all editions up until today, when this concept started to lose its authority, or on the contrary, when it gained a new authority in the context of globalization. Let us see how and to what extent Brâncuși's works were exhibited in Venice, if this happened before or after his death, or better put, when precisely this display took place if it did at all.

The first pertinent comment which an art historian can put forth in this respect relates to the fact that the artist's works were exhibited only once during his life: in the XIVth edition in 1924, when his two works both entitled *Child's Head* (one in bronze and the other one in stone) were displayed alongside the creations of other masters of Romanian sculpture such as Oscar Han, Ion Jalea or Dimitrie Paciurea in a massive exhibition of Romanian art – let us say that Romania was for the first time present at the Venice Biennale (fig. 1). Even more surprising is the fact that the then-current art reviews ignored Brâncuși's presence, with the opinion of Sander Pierron, a French critic, being its best expression: “Among the sculptors and the painters

there is no name who stands out and who might make us think that one day they will reach glory”⁷. The exhibition occasionally maintained a compromise, since it relied on only a few art collections in Romania, some important ones were impossible to access (for example, the valuable resources of the national Pinacoteca – part of the Romanian thesaurus which was sent to Russia during World War I – were still not returned by the Russian authorities). It was rather an exhibition which aimed for a quantitative representation (106 works by 36 artists were exhibited). At the same time, 1924 is considered “the year of great importance of the first Romanian avant-garde”⁸. In Bucharest, a large exhibition was organized that year, showing works by Kurt Schwitters, Paul Klee, Hans Arp, Constantin Brâncuși, Victor Brauner, Marcel Iancu, M.H. Maxy, and H. Mattis-Teutsch for the first time.

One can speak of an *in absentia* representation of the sculptor at the Venice Biennale. Here are the four types of situations we encounter. I am referring, on the one hand, to the retrospectives organized in the Central Pavilion after his death: the first one, rather modest in size, in 1960 and a bigger one in 1982. However, the other three situations uncover the very idea of exhibition representation, since Brâncuși is only present as a name or as a concept. A specific case is offered by his 'appearance' in the discourses on certain exhibition projects of the Biennale or in debates related to the selection process thereof: in 1938 or 1995. Another context has been generated by Brâncuși himself who refused the authorities of the Biennale and their attempt to organize a big exhibition of his in the Central Pavilion, in 1950. A fourth situation is equally ironic for the phenomenon of nurturing a myth and creating a mythology around a certain figure. It pertains to two projects from 2009 and 2013 proposed for the Romanian Pavilion and both left at the stage of projection: pieces of a parallel art history, a history of potential.

Without discussing in too much detail the retrospective exhibitions organized in 1960 and 1982, it must be mentioned that they succeed in reacting at a discursive level to very different political contexts that characterized those two moments, namely the beginning of the 60s and of the 80s. In 1960, Constantin Brâncuși's name was still rather *tabu* in Romain cul-



Fig. 2 Brancusi retrospective at the XXXth edition of the Venice Biennale in 1960.

ture. The rediscovery of the artist would occur posthumously, only after 1965, a year in which Nicolae Ceaușescu took over the position of general secretary of the Romanian Workers' Party thus initiating what the Romanian literary critic Mircea Martin termed as the “restoration of the national idea”, “the recuperation of local tradition”, adding that “what happened after 1964 with and in Romania was a timid return to European values and Western culture after 15 year of Asian communism”⁹. Accordingly, Brâncuși's presence at the 1960 Venice Biennale (fig. 2) was not left without echoes in the Romanian press. The artist and the commissioner of the Pavilion in that year, Jules Perahim, wrote in the Romanian official magazine *Arta plastică* about what he experienced in the Central Pavilion. Although he maintained a certain reserve, he could not refrain from criticizing the exhibition in the Central Pavilion:

“at an international level, Brâncuși is the creator of a school. [...] And still, the Brâncuși retrospective was given a small and dark room (5x5 m), housing only 10 works which had been selected without a clear idea in mind, at the unhindered decision of the organizers.”¹⁰

In 1982 another retrospective of Brâncuși's work, curated by Romanian art critic Dan Hăulică, then the president of the International Art Critic Association (AICA), was organized. Hăulică was also the commissioner of the Venice Biennale in 1988 and – except for

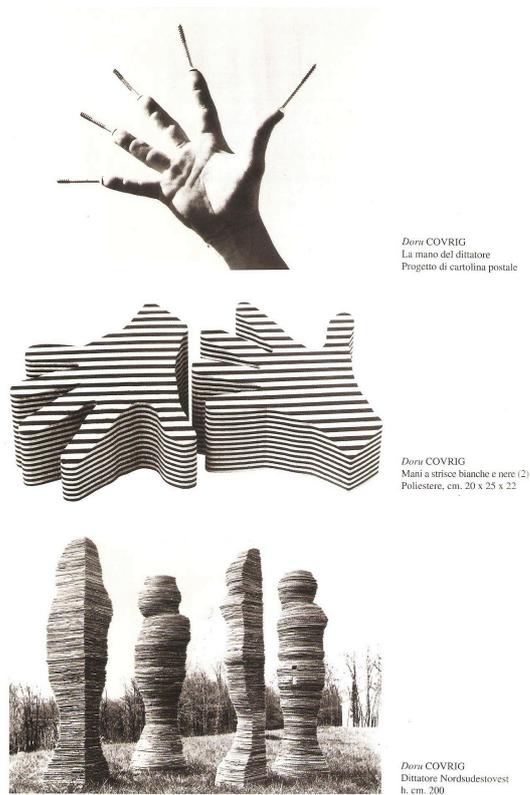


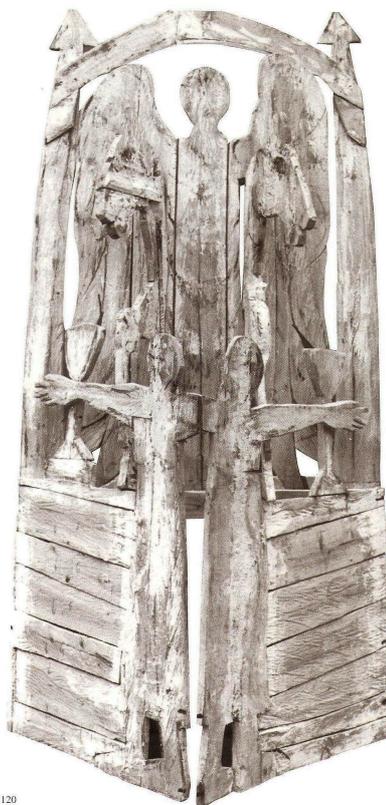
Fig. 3 Doru Covrig at the Venice Biennale in 1995.



Fig. 4 Napoleon Tiron at the Venice Biennale in 1995.

1993 – during the post-communist period between 1990 and 1999. The exhibition also benefited from life-size photographs, made by Dan Er. Grigorescu, which tried to give visitors the impression that the sculptural assembly in Târgu-Jiu (*The Endless Column*, *The Gate of Kiss* and *The Table of Silence*), had been relocated in Venice. It presented the occasion for the critic Ion Frunzetti, the commissioner of the Romanian Pavilion between 1968-1982, to discuss the origins of Brâncuși, “the great Romanian peasant who resisted assimilation in full-blown Euro-American technocratic culture”, “craftsman of artistic regeneration by means of a «sui-generis» classicism of creative thinking, learned from the age-old Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic tradition which spoke in his works”¹¹. Due to the cultural closure of Romania after 1982, the country was not present at the 1984 and 1986 Venice Biennale, but opened its pavilion anew in 1988. In Romania, the nationalist discourse reached its climax in the 1980s, being “often most efficient diversion in the face of the accumulation of real difficulties”¹². While at first the communist regime took an internationalist and anti-nationalist stance – in which the soviet model was the sole landmark – after 1964 the founding myths, targeting the recuperation of the past and tracing the ethnic purity, began to be reactivated. History received a nationalist amplification and Brâncuși perfectly served this type of discourse. But here we are back in time to witness a two-fold presence of the sculptor, on the one hand in a negative discourse of rejection and on the other in a positive discourse focused on a generation of Romanian sculptors who had gained recognition in the mid-1960s. In 1938, the historian and cultural figure Nicolae Iorga, an avid nationalist keen on local values but also engendering an overt openness towards the West, managed to purchase a Pavilion for Romania in Giardini di Castello, a Pavilion in line with the fascist style, authored by the architect Brenno del Giudice, and to open the Romanian exhibition with great noise (national songs, the Romanian Royal Anthem and the Fascist Anthem „Giovinezza”¹³). This was a predictable show, under the sign of a “healthy” and conservative art, as Iorga termed it. Moreover, he organized a radio conference in Bucharest in the same period in which he clearly defined the “national specificity” of art worthy of being displayed in the Pavilion

where – as Iorga pointed out premonitorily – a certain name which he did not directly speak of, would never be welcome: the author of some “wondrous birds”¹⁴ which are a mere geometrical line”, of some “deceased figures rejected from cemeteries because they resemble Easter eggs”, of some creations “which the US customs mistook for scrap iron parts”¹⁵. Brâncuși's name was thus assimilated to the avant-garde as a deviant art which could not find a place in the national Pavilion due to its non-representational values. Iorga's analysis could provide an explanation for the absence of the avant-garde from the national Romanian Pavilion. This was an avant-garde which did not belong at home, and the relevance of which was rather marginal in its place of origin. In a possibly ironic twist, 1938 was the year in which Brâncuși frequently visited Romania and creates the Assembly in Târgu-Jiu.



Aurel VLAD
Atto finale
Legno,
cm. 300 x 100 x 120

Fig. 5 Aurel Vlad at the Venice Biennale 1995.

In 1995, Brâncuși was present in a statement: *L'eredità di Brâncuși in Romania*, an exhibition housed by the Romanian Pavilion, curated by art historians Coriolan Babeți and Dan Hăulică, dedicated to a rich generation of sculptors who made their debut in the 1960s, a true phenomenon on the Romanian art scene. They were presented as the direct descendants of Brâncuși, indelibly connected with tradition.

“The direct cut with which the unofficial Romanian sculpture of the last three decades (1965-1995) offers itself to art history, appears increasingly clear as a *primal scream*, liberating and vital in the 1960s, the cry which announces any *birth*. (...) The new sculpture erupted at the core of post-war darkness (1944-1964), in the confusion of values created in Romania by the violence of war and by the soviet paternalistic authority”,

wrote Coriolan Babeți¹⁶. The direction given by the curator belonged to a generation of artists – such as Doru Covrig (fig. 3), Paul Neagu, Napoleon Tiron (fig. 4), Aurel Vlad (fig. 5), Marian Zidaru – who succeeded in severing the connection with socialist-realism, moreover relating to the “protean” space of myth and to the so-called *modernity of the archaic*. This time Brâncuși functioned like an access path to the modernity of European art for the young sculptors of the 1960s, a generation who cultivated wood in their practice as a primordial element that connected them to the Romanian tradition¹⁷. Babeți discussed the inheritance of Byzantium and the Romanian civilization of a prolonged Middle Ages which encountered only by chance the “graven image” and had “available, as a predestination of history, the layer of aniconic modernity, the ancestral customs of abstraction and the ancestral exercise of the *direct cut*”. Here we have an irrefutable argument for the indelible connection between Brâncuși and the past of Romanian culture: “the son of this universe which is little indebted to the figurative representation in sculpture, turned a *deficiency* of art history in the former Eastern Roman Empire into an opportunity to renew it.” Thus, Coriolan Babeți pointed out that the artistic innovation, i.e. the revolution brought by Brâncuși, could only occur in an envi-

ronment such as the one from which the artist originated, being the product of a history different from the western one. This special generation of sculptors succeeded in taking sculpture out of “the long shadow of the *Endless Column*” and in reconnecting Brâncuși's heritage with the tradition of the wood craftsmanship (“the *earthly* half” of the artist's studio). The Post-Brâncuși trend thus dominated Romanian sculpture after 1960 and, within this discourse, Brâncuși was the protective umbrella of a generation.

Going back in 1948, to the third type of situation encountered, when the grand retrospectives were organized at the Biennale, Romania was missing: in this country, as the Italian Ministry in Bucharest Michele Scammacca later stated, “political considerations take precedence”¹⁸. The attempt of the general secretary of the Biennale during 1949-1951, Giovanni Ponti, to convince Brâncuși to exhibit in the Biennale, in the Central Pavilion, failed. While he accepted at first on condition that he would bring along his entire studio, he refused thereafter on account of illness and fatigue. When he was promised the Grand Prize he replied without hesitation: “Give the exhibition to somebody else, give it to Arp, he needs it more than I do”¹⁹.

There is perhaps a hint of irony in the fact that this text will discuss, in what follows, two proposals for the Romanian Pavilion which have not been executed to date, implicitly demonstrating that Brâncuși is the basis of multiple histories, sometimes opposing, most of the time imaginary, and even surreal ones.

Both projects revolve around Brâncuși who has been turned into a fictional, mythological character by several authorities: he appears only as an object of study or as a social and political subject. But the artworks themselves (of Brâncuși) are missing. One of the main traits of these projects is the impression which lingers, namely an impression of excess and losing a sense of proportion. In 2009 the artist Alexandra Croitoru, together with the art historian Ștefan Tiron, applied for the Venice Biennale competition with a project entitled *The Heritage of Brâncuși*. While at first they envisaged the creation of a *luna park* which would not conceal irony at all, in the second phase they constructed a far more complex project, entering the rhetoric of a multitude of discourses perpetuated

around Brâncuși and allowing irony to permeate the representation so diffusely that it become difficult to perceive. *The Heritage of Brâncuși* presented the model of a complex cultural ecosystem which had to be stimulated and sheltered once it had been transplanted *in situ*.

“We want to respect diversity and the role of Brâncuși's Heritage as time has come for it to be approached in a larger context. [...] We will transform the Romanian Pavilion in a place of living cult dedicated to Brâncuși, the frame of the Venice Biennale allowing for the meeting between a space of national representation and the artist as a national hero”²⁰.

The main elements which could occupy the space of the Pavilion were as follows: half of the room was intended as an altar with the copy of a famous Brâncuși work as a centerpiece, guarded by two members of the special forces personnel (fig. 6). The altar was to function as a “popular altar of the public and of the great Brâncuși's fans”, and as a resting place for the offerings thereof, thus ensuring “a natural growth” of the project. In the opposite side, at a special rostrum, daily sessions of communication were supposed to be held on Brâncuși's heritage both by specialists and others who wished to do so, with a national and international participation (fig. 7). In the middle of the Pavilion, the projects of some contemporary artists invited by the curators would be placed, with the purpose of triggering the dialogue with the *Heritage of Brâncuși*. In time, these would be joined by the works created in the green space before the Pavilion, subsequent to a sculpture residency organized there and accessible to Romanian sculptors pursuant to a competition (two artists per month) (fig. 8). In this way, in time, the exhibition was to accumulate an entire set of “reflection” on the topic of Brâncuși's heritage, a collection of uneven voices, democratically accepted in the Pavilion. Being written in the purest and most refined nationalist rhetoric, the project is dominated by sentences such as “we must stop promoting the absence of values” or

„we succeeded in identifying the toxic effect of certain historical and cultural curses. This is the



Fig. 6 Simulation from *The Legacy of Brâncuși*, proposal for the Romanian Pavilion in 2009.



Fig. 7 Simulation from *The Legacy of Brâncuși*, proposal for the Romanian Pavilion in 2009.



In intrarea principală a pavilionului va fi montată lucrarea lui Razvan Botis, o creație de vâsc realizată din bronz iar în spațiul verde din fața pavilionului va fi organizată o tabără de sculptură deschisă prin concurs sculptorilor români. Este o tabără de creație având ca model tabăra internațională de sculptură de la Targu Jiu. Câte doi sculptori selectați în fiecare lună (12 în total) vor lucra pe toată durata bienalei, procesul lor artistic de creație va constitui un punct de interes pentru vizitatorii bienalei. Odată realizate, sculpturile vor fi expuse în pavilion.

Fig. 8 Simulation from *The Legacy of Brâncuși*, proposal for the Romanian Pavilion in 2009.

curse of the foreigners' failure to recognize these values, the curse of having local achievements and discoveries stolen, in direct connection with the curse of traitor elites”.

Four years later, Ștefan Tiron confessed that it was an obsessive idea to apply with the same project at each edition precisely to feed the myth of excluding Brâncuși's heritage and of the anti-Brâncuși conspiracy. “In fact we were trying to introduce, in capacity of generous gatekeepers, the snow-drift of an overflowing and toxic inheritance”²¹. After the rejection of the project had been announced, Croitoru and Tiron simulated an interview which they spread in the Romanian Press, explaining the rejection by the Ministry of Culture as a “general crisis of values”²² and a repeated history: the refusal of 1951 was joined by this new one, 20 years after the revolution. The obtained a play which is so serious and controlled that they almost simulate persecutory delusions in which secret entities “were interested in evicting Brâncuși's name from his place of honor in the Romanian Pavilion in Venice”. From the perspective of the art historian, this project failed on account of always maintaining its anecdotal key and being from top to bottom an *artistic* project.

In 2013, Adrian Bojenoiu and Alexandru Niculescu, the founders of the Romanian contemporary art center *Club Electroputere*, applied to the Venice Biennale with the project *The Bones of Brâncuși*, inspired by the “national initiative to repatriate the remains of the Romanian sculptor”²³. This later initiative was commenced by Laurian Stăncescu in 2010, supported by Romanian Academy members and politicians, by the Orthodox Patriarch Daniel, financially backed by the International Orthodox-Christian King of the Roma, and by the Ministry of Culture, which in 2012 publicly declared that it wanted to turn Brâncuși into “a country *brand*”. This was an undertaking which, in the words of Stăncescu – the individual who personally submitted the request for the repatriation of the remains at the Elysee Palace and the French Parliament, after he had made Brâncuși's journey by foot, from Hobița to Paris – was close to becoming reality, thus fulfilling the wish that Brâncuși supposedly had, to be buried alongside his mother, and not “to rot in foreign earth” (as Brâncuși supposedly said).

Intending to watch and convey the spectacle of the contemporary world and relying on an image leverage accrued in time by Stăncescu, the authors of the project envisaged the transformation of the Pavilion in



Fig. 9 Simulation from *The Bones of Brâncuși* project, proposal for the Romanian Pavilion in 2013.



Fig. 10 Simulation from *The Bones of Brâncuși* project, proposal for the Romanian Pavilion in 2013.

three distinct rooms. A projection room (fig. 9) displaying a mix of interviews with both Laurian Stăncescu and the representatives of the institutions involved in the repatriation process (the Government, the Patriarchy, the Romanian Academy etc.); another room showing a chronological reportage on the relationship between Brâncuși and the Romanian state, containing “animated scenes of some important moments” (the rejection of the donation, the attempt to tear down the Endless Column etc.). This reportage was open and awaited to be extended live with a possible end to this story (that of bringing back the remains to Romania during the summer of 2013, a resolution which Stăncescu believes to be very near). A third and intermediary room (fig. 10) was deliberately left empty and intended to represent the symbolical *expectation of*, before the arrival of Brâncuși's remains. While in Croitoru's and Tiron's project the loss of proportion is played on in the project and assimilated thereto from top to bottom as excess, *The Bones of Brâncuși* exhibits an exacerbated lucidity and takes a reserved position.

In this history through the Venice Biennial, Brâncuși is either turned into a political instrument – as a shield of nationalist politics – or into an artistic one: either as a protective space for the development of a generation or as a toll of irony, in view of emphasiz-

ing the absurdity of some gestures. Everything takes place in his name, a convoluted discourse, opening a large discussion pertaining to the condition of the classics. The situation proposed for the Biennale in 2009 grows into a climax: Brâncuși becomes an operator, a key, a magic password. The expansion of this myth on either a pathological basis or an ironic one, but always in relation to identity, will never cease.

In 2013 artist Alexandra Croitoru created a sound work which consisted of a musical adaptation of the Romanian national anthem using Brâncuși's words of wisdom as lyrics. In an ironic twist, the sound piece was played during the summer 2013, at the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Bucharest, a museum placed in the very House of the People.²⁴ Alexandra Croitoru's 55 minute recording, played in a loop, features a soprano who sings the national anthem: but the patriotic call addressed to Romans in the original song to rise up turns into a universal call addressed by Brâncuși to a generic human being:

“Rise up Man / Take on the right road / Fight that sloth and laziness that halts you / Soar like an eagle to the azure spheres / Praise the gift of the world / Forget yourself!”.

Endnotes

1. <http://www.ziarulring.ro/stiri/cultura/218711/ULUITOR-DONATIA-lui-Brancusi-pentru-Romania-REFUZATA-de-Calinescu-si-Sadoveanu->, 19-08-2013. George Călinescu (1899-1965) was one of the most important Romanian literary critics; Mihail Sadoveanu (1880-1961) was one of the most renowned Romanian novelist. In 1949 Sadoveanu was elected the president of the Writers' Union.
2. The translation of this official declaration belongs to me.
3. Ibidem.
4. Doina Lemny, *Brâncuși – artistul care transgresează toate hotarele* [Brâncuși – the Artist Who Crosses All Boundaries], Bucharest 2012, p. 71.
5. Ibidem, p. 150.
6. The Blessed Daniel, the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, *Brâncuși, sculptor creștin-ortodox* [Brâncuși, Romanian Orthodox Sculptor], Iași 2007.
7. Sander Pierron, *L'Exposition internationale des Beaux-Arts à Venise*, in: *Anvers*, 15-05-1924.
8. *Bucureștii. Anii 1920-1940 între avangardă și modernism* [Bucharest, 1920-1940. Between Avant-garde and Modernism], ed. Simetria, București 1994.
9. Mircea Martin, *Cultura română între comunism și naționalism* [Romanian Culture Between Communism and Nationalism], in: *Revista 22* [22 Magazine], 23-09-2002.
10. Jules Perahim, *A XXX-a Bienală de la Veneția* [The 30th Venice Biennale], in: *Arta plastică* [Fine Art], year 7, no. 5, 1960.
11. Ion Frunzetti, *A XL-a Bienală internațională de artă plastică de la Veneția, 1982, la ora închiderii. Recurs la lecția lui Brâncuși* [The 40th International Venice Biennale, 1982, at Closing Time. Call to Brâncuși's Lesson], in: *Contemporanul* [The Contemporary], 1-10-1982.
12. Lucian Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*, Budapest 2001, p. 74, translated by James Christian Brown.
13. This mention appears in the press release written by Rador Agency on June 4th, 1938, in: *The Romanian Diplomatic Archives of the Foreign Affairs Ministry*, File no. 71/Italy, Vol. 65, "Relations with Romania, June 1938-April 1939".
14. Coming from Maiastra, a bird featured in Romanian folk mythology and endowed with supernatural characteristics, such as foretelling the future.
15. Nicolae Iorga, *România la Expoziția din Veneția* [Romania at the Venice Exhibition], Bucharest Radio conference, May 20th 1938, in: *The Romanian Diplomatic Archives, The Ministry of National Propaganda Fund, The Internal Press Service*, File no. 387/1938, p. 92-94.
16. *L'eredità di Brancusi in Romania: dal taglio diretto alla scultura mentale, 1965-1995: Padiglione della Romania, Biennale – Giardini di Castello*, ed. Arte in, Venice 1995.
17. „Wood is the epiphany of Romanian tradition itself. Therefore it invades all spaces and takes all shapes”, writes the anthropologist Vintilă Mihăilescu, in an analysis about the “soft patrimony” of the Romanian culture, in: *Scutecele națiunii și hainele împăratului. Note de antropologie publică* [The Nations' Diapers and the Emperor's Clothes. Public Anthropology Notes], Iași 2013, p. 145.
18. Letter from Michele Scammacca to Giovanni Ponti, the Extraordinary Commissioner of the Venice Biennale, 9-01-1950, in: ASAC, Archivio Storico della Biennale di Venezia, Box no. 24, “Paesi” Series, “Padiglioni, atti 1938-1968”.
19. *La Biennale. Visual Arts 82. General Catalogue*, Ente Autonomo Venezia, Venice 1982.
20. All quotations referring to the project *The Legacy of Brancusi* derive from the application form, 2009, courtesy: Alexandra Croitoru and Ștefan Tiron.
21. Fragment from a private discussion with Ștefan Tiron, October 2012.
22. <http://aerobix.blogspot.ro/2009/01/0199.html>, 1-10-2012.
23. All quotations referring to the project *The Bones of Brancusi* derive from the application form, 2013, courtesy: Adrian Bojenoiu and Alexandru Niculescu.
24. Alexandra Croitoru's artwork was produced for the exhibition *Good Girls*, curator: Bojana Pejić, opened between June 20 and September 29, 2013.

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Summary

This essay focuses on a specific case study: the relationship between the Romanian artist Constantin Brâncuși and the Venice Biennale. In a broader sense, the paper analyzes how notions such as nationalism are configured through an artistic personality who had (and still has) a tense affiliation to Romanian culture, Brâncuși's place of origin. Being rather a report on a phenomenon that is still active in the contemporary local mentality, this analysis focuses on different types of situations that the art historian encounters when looking at Brâncuși's presence in the context of the national representation at an international art event such as the Venice Biennale, during a longer period of time, between 1924 and 2013. It explores the official art history, as well as an alternative one which is characterized by the notion of potential.

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Title

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