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The cement nude, the (h)ero(tic)ism of the working class – the artistic programme of outdoor sculptures on the Black Sea littoral and the pro-natal, pro-family policies under communism

Abstract: Controlled eroticization of the proletariat through pro-natal policies was an almost unnoticed facet of the programme of iconographic public works displayed in exceptional locations throughout the newly-built resorts along Romania's Black Sea shore. Never previously studied on its own merits, this artistic programme of open-air sculptures that begun in the Romanian Popular Republic and continued in the Romanian Socialist Republic needs to be understood and contextualized, by way of interdisciplinary instruments, against a broader post-Eastern approach that goes beyond the established methodologies of art history.

Keywords: artistic programme; ideology; communism; sculptures; Black Sea Region; pro-natal policies

Słowa kluczowe: program artystyczny; ideologia; komunizm; rzeźby; region Morza Czarnego; polityka pronarodzeniowa

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Controlled eroticization of the proletariat through pro-natal policies was an almost unnoticed facet of the programme of iconographic public works displayed in exceptional locations throughout the newly-built resorts along Romania's Black Sea shore. Never previously studied on its own merits, this artistic programme of open-air sculptures that begun under the Romanian Popular Republic and continued under the Romanian Socialist Republic needs to be understood and contextualized, by way of interdisciplinary instruments, against a broader post-Eastern approach that goes beyond the established methodologies of art history.

For a better overview of the context preceding the advent of socialist realism, I should mention that eroticism had previously been a favourite among Interwar artists, and among sculptors, in particular. This interest was twofold: on the one hand, it was a recourse to Greco-Roman Antiquity, a fundamental pillar of any artistic education. On the other hand, it showcased the influence of notable models of Western sculpture, represented by the works of Antoine Bourdelle, Auguste Rodin, Aristide Maillol and Ivan Meštrović. Moreover, the theme of the nude took pride of place among the artistic tastes of the Interwar public, featured in both small-scale nude sculptures and commissions of substantial size¹. Naturally, the boundaries of eroticism were drawn by the period's existing taboos and trends in popular taste, often making recourse to symbolism and expressiveness in order not to directly transgress societal mores or negatively skew public perception.

The implementation of the programme of socialist realism from the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s left no room for exhibiting works even remotely resembling erotic nudity; to have received any public commission of this sort during this time would have, likewise, been almost incomprehensible. Eroticism only ever rarely found a place among the themes recommended by socialist realism, and even then, by pushing the limits of other loosely-related topics such as motherhood², bathing³ or peasant women⁴.

¹ See, among others, the commissions of K. Zambaccian to sculptor Oscar Han, namely, "The Kiss" ("Sărutul") and "The Thorn" ("Ghimpele").

² See Cornel Medrea's work, "Maternity" ("Maternitate"), plaster, 1949, in the "Medrea Museum" catalogue, Popular Assembly of the "Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej" District, undated, ca. 1957, p. 46.

³ See Cornel Medrea's work, "Descending to the bath" ("Coborând la baie"), plaster, 1952, in the "Medrea Museum" catalogue, Popular Assembly of the "Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej" District, undated, ca. 1957.

⁴ See G. Oprescu, *Sculptura statuară românească* [Statuary Romanian Sculpture], State

The Romanian communist regime's approach to sexuality was characterised by diehard conservatism, focusing on the aspects of fertility, pragmatism and prudence. In this, the Communist Party outlined itself as the principal defender and protector of the socialist family against the Western offensive of commercialism and sexualisation. Socialist eroticism was presented as the "hale" counterpart to its decadent Western corollary, geared towards profit and exploitation and whose brutality would be accused of pornography, immorality and decadence in stark contrast to what would later be defined as "Socialist humanism".

We may also recognise several defining traits underpinning sexuality in the communist period characterised by heterosexual monogamy, rigid sexuality, early ages for marriage and juvenile parenthood. In the socialist imaginary, sexuality was separated from physicality, pleasure and exhibitionism, having become more closely correlated with hygiene and syndicated solidarity and camaraderie. As a result, depictions of nude bodies often reduced or nullified sexual dimorphism, often implying masculine traits *in lieu* of the expected feminine ones, highlighting muscular robustness and other asexual bodily features⁵.

Nevertheless, some natural continuities of the artistic interest in eroticism in the Interwar period, survived. Artists such as Boris Caragea, Oscar Han, Cornel Medrea, Constantin Baraschi, Ion Irimescu, and Ion Jalea continued sculptural pursuits inherited from the Interwar years⁶, while their workshops produced similar nude representations, without aiming for their exhibition. Let me also note the temporal discrepancy between the creation of these diminutive works and small-scale mock-ups and their eventual transposition into large-scale, definitive forms – as was the case of the works by Constantin Baraschi, "Ecstasy" ("Extaz"), bronze, 1962, displayed in the Mamaia Summer Theatre in 1966, and "On the Waves" ("Pe valuri"), bronze,

Publishing House for Literature and the Arts, 1954. See also Cornel Medrea's work, "Peasant-woman nude" ("Nud de țărăncă") in the "Medrea Museum" catalogue, Popular Assembly of the "Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej" District, undated, ca. 1957, p. 45.

⁵ J. McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR*, Cambridge University Press, 2011.

⁶ See the works of Constantin Baraschi, "Spring" ("Primăvara"), 1956, plaster, 62 cm, artist's collection; "The Slave" ("Sclava"), bronze, 120 cm, 1952; "Torso" ("Tors"), bronze, 75 cm, 1944, [in:] R. Șorban, *Constantin Baraschi*, Meridiane Publishing House, 1966. See also the works of Cornel Medrea: "In the washroom" ("La baie"), marble, 1941; "Contemplation (Constellation)" ("Contemplație (constelație)"), artificial stone, 1942; "The Kiss" ("Sărutul"), plaster, 1942; "Victory – Amazon torso" ("Victorie – tors de amazoană"), marble, 1943, [in:] *the Medrea Museum (Muzeul Medrea)*, Popular Assembly of the "Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej" District, undated, ca 1957.

1963, displayed at the “Bucharest” Hotel in Mamaia in 1966. Moreover, of the works by Oscar Han, “The New-Born” (“Noul născut”), 1958, bronze, displayed at the “International” Hotel in Mamaia, 1961; Constantin Baraschi, “Satyr and Nymph” (“Satirul și nimfa”), bronze, displayed at the Constanța State Theatre, 1964.

The necessary steps for the execution of such monumental works of art included the arrangement of representative exhibitions meant to showcase the artistic proposals destined to decorate construction projects along the Black Sea coast. These exhibitions, organised according to specific themes proposed by the National Ministry, highlight the authorities’ particular concerns related to any such commissions, not least from the Securitate’s own dossiers that document them. A note penned by agent Anton (the undercover name of Petru Comarnescu) dated 16 September 1959, states that “proposals for the decoration of constructions along the Black Sea coast in frescoes, ceramic plates, stained glass, mosaics etc. were, until recently, exhibited in the Nicolae Cristea Hall. A number of younger artists presented their projects, sometimes under the guidance of a master, and other times forming collectives. Among those exhibiting their projects were Gh. Popescu and Ion Bitzan, Mac Constantinescu, Mircea Ionescu, Ion Pacea, Mimi Podeanu, E. Aniței, M. Cilievici, and C. Piliuță. Most of them tailored their projects to follow the established tenets of socialist realism, in that they portrayed more easily recognisable figures and livelier action scenes (‘The Foundation of the Port of Constanța’, ‘Fishing’, ‘Evolution of navigation means in the Black Sea’, etc.). These themes were suggested by the Ministry, and the artists would often approach them with great skill in the monumental-decorative arts, yet with more concrete and livelier figures and forms. The architects, who largely decide what is to adorn the walls of the buildings they design, did not agree with the proposed projects, arguing that they were too visible, too concrete and that they were detrimental to the architecture; that what was needed were more discreet frescoes and decorations that would not avert the onlooker’s gaze from the building’s architecture. When they had to dwell on certain such projects, however, the architects were less consistent in their position, solely selecting projects authored by Mimi Șaraga-Maxy and Alma Redlinger – projects that were relatively realist and concrete, yet less artistic and even decorative than other submissions the architects claimed would only ‘bore holes in their walls’⁷.

The state of mind of the artistic community had, likewise, come under the scrutiny of the Securitate, especially in the aftermath of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution.

⁷ ACNSAS, Network Fund, Dossier no. 330218, vol. 1 (Petru Comarnescu), pp. 170–171.

Consequently, “this dispute has aroused bafflement and discontent amongst artists, who had been promised they would begin work in September, having established which projects would be selected for execution. Today, September 16th, Ion Bitzan told our source that the artists would be summoned to the Ministry to see comrade Teclu, who would decide how this matter is to be settled. They were informed of this two, three weeks ago, and have yet to be summoned. The mild weather necessary for the execution of frescoes and mosaics falls now, in September and October, so any further delay would mean the work could only be resumed next spring, to the detriment of the artists who were counting on the remunerations from these projects (having been hurried along, and told they would start working on September 1st, etc)”⁸.

The 1960s, with the continuing systematization of the Romanian coast, marked the emplacement of works of art depicting “censored” erotic representations within these new architectural and landscape ensembles. These privileged the social unit comprised of the nuclear family and its associated values, while the defining attributes of eroticism in the socialist vein had been underpinned by the iconographic drivers of a depiction of love as broadly uncomplicated, sanitised and faithful, in support of the official programme of pursuing post-war demographic growth (whose outcome is known, today, as the “baby boom”). Estival eroticism was encouraged, as attested to by the various brochures⁹ edited by the State Inspectorate for Hygiene and Labour Protection alongside the Bureau of Propaganda and Sanitary Agitation, as an activity integral to the rest, recuperation and relaxation of the familial unit, and as a part of a broader series of entertainment programmes dedicated to “leisure” organised through the planned holiday programmes offered by national workers’ syndicates in collaboration with either the National and County Tourism Offices or the Tourism and Youth Bureaus. The programme of mass tourism connected the country’s hinterlands in a concerted effort to “discover the cities and vistas of the motherland”¹⁰.

Considering the growth in productivity and the increasing budgets allocated to “leisure”, the socialist consumer society exceptionally relaxed societal understandings and representations of eroticism in these specific summer settings. Without

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ State Inspectorate for Hygiene and Labour Protection, Bureau of Propaganda and Sanitary Agitation: *Soare, mare, sănătate* [Sun, Sea, Sanitation], Fine Arts Fund, undated.

¹⁰ *De-a lungul șoselei Oradea-Mangalia* [Along the Oradea-Mangalia Highway], foreword by Radu Cosașu, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest 1962.

becoming a product for broad cultural or artistic consumption, eroticism nevertheless began to see a certain degree of coordination, while its dissemination among the masses was still cautiously controlled. In this way, and in these specific contexts, Romanian artists were allowed to tackle erotic themes and subject matters incorporated with naiveté and childishness in works bearing titles such as “Gentleness” (“Gingăşie”), “Contemplation” (“Contemplație”), “Youth” (“Tineret”) etc. These oversized depictions of nudes were eulogies to women’s fertility, to youth and health – topics which, from the point of view of their limited eroticism, achieved their precise purpose. Behind the redeeming recourse to titles that reference classical themes, such as “Fawn and Nymph” (“Faun și nimfă”) – titles that were not necessarily accessible to the public by way of markings, indications or labelling – the works appear to whisper: “Proletarians, go forth and multiply!”

It must be noted that such specific and limited permissions were also granted in the context of ongoing competitions between the available tourism offers for the coasts of Romania and Bulgaria, respectively; especially so when they served to attract foreign tourists. Thus, informant Anton (the undercover name of Petru Comarnescu) goes on to affirm that “in Mamaia, rumour had it the Bulgarians had offered foreigners more advantageous conditions than we had, as well as more attractive entertainment (roulette, baccarat, jazz orchestras, famous artists in attendance etc.)”¹¹. Consequently, tourism offers for the Romanian littoral were forced to diversify and become more attractive, even within the scope of this limited socialist competitiveness.

By 1963, the press eulogised: “The beauty of our littoral, with its numerous modern constructions, parks and esplanades, is enhanced by the completion of a series of new monumental works of art: sculptures, paintings and mosaics. A grand mosaic (of 200 sq. m.) was recently completed, and placed onto the façade of the House of Culture in Mangalia. Authors: Jules Perahim and Ștefan Constantinescu. Sculptors, in turn, are bringing new monumental works to the coast. C. Baraschi has completed his sculpture, “In the Sun” (“În soare”), while Boris Caragea’s work titled “Bountiful Harvest” (“Rod bogat”) will adorn the esplanade of Eforie-Nord resort. Lelia Zuaf titled her work “Audacity” (“Cutezanța”), linking it to the idea of man’s flight to space. Zoe Băicoianu will endow the littoral with a glass frieze approximately 200 m in size, to decorate the breakwater of the new “Tomis” Port of Constanța. New monumental sculptures by Cornel Medrea, Vasiliu Falti, Ada Geo-Medrea,

¹¹ ACNSAS, Network Fund, Dossier no. 330218, vol. 2 (Petru Comarnescu), p. 34 v.

Naum Corcescu, Lie Doina, Doru Popovici, Vetro Artur, Ovidiu Maitec and others will also be displayed on the littoral – in Mamaia, Eforie Nord and Eforie Sud”¹².

In the same year, superlatives continued to flow in comparison with Western tourism offers: “Lying at the same latitude as the Côte d’Azur, the Romanian coastline competes with the Jewel of the Mediterranean. [...] Beauty has been created on the littoral, in the spirit and sense of nature. [...] Almost all of the great public forum buildings in Mamaia, Eforie and Mangalia have been conceived and constructed in the spirit of collaboration between an artist and an architect”¹³. On the one hand, the socialist gulag kept its beneficiaries captive through the phenomenon of mass tourism; yet it was also forced to convincingly depict the progresses achieved by socialism in the context of a cultural Cold War.

1964 saw these “works of fine art on the littoral” again referenced: “The resorts of the Black Sea coast are now adorned with new works of fine art. In Mamaia and Eforie Nord, sculptures of stone and bronze were installed alongside bas-reliefs. In the following days, other monumental works of art will adorn the parks, the esplanade and the sports hall in Constanța, the resorts of Eforie Nord and Sud, etc. The total number of works of fine art will, thus, exceed 80, contributing to the beautification of the littoral’s modern constructions”¹⁴.

Also in 1967, Meridiane Publishing House issued a “Guide to the Romanian Black Sea Littoral”¹⁵ (“Litoralul românesc al Mării Negre – Ghid”) authored by Ion Ionescu Dunăreanu, in which the new sculptural achievements are presented both in the text descriptions and on the included maps.

After Gheorghiu Dej’s passing from the leadership of the party and state, changes began not only amongst the communist nomenclature, but also in the hierarchical structures of the Union of Fine Artists. As such, the first criticisms in reaction to the works that had been lavished praise only a short time prior came in 1967, alongside stinging portrayals of the artists who had accepted the seaside commissions. The anomalies of the monumental art programme were pointed out: “From Mamaia to

¹² I. Pleavă, *Pentru împodobirea orașelor* [Towards the Adornment of Cities], *Scînteia*, no. 5941, July 2nd 1963, p. 1.

¹³ M. Vanci, *Notații despre estetica litoralului* [Notes on the Aesthetics of the Littoral], *Contemporanul*, no. 29, July 12th 1963, p. 2.

¹⁴ *Lucrări de artă plastică pe litoral* [Works of Fine Art on the Littoral], *Steaua Roșie*, no. 90, April 16th, 1964. p. 1.

¹⁵ *Litoralul românesc al Mării Negre – Ghid* [The Romanian Black Sea Coast – A Guide], Meridiane Publishing House, 1967.

Mangalia, the construction programme carried out in recent years was underpinned by a considerable effort on the part of the fine arts. Numerous open-air sculptures (especially in Mamaia), murals in hotels, restaurants, bars etc., welcome the multitudes of people arriving to unwind on this coast of light. [...] The gravest decreases apparent in the littoral's monumental and decorative art can be explained by the inadequacies of the fine arts programme; to be precise, by the absence of an actual programme and, consequently, by a lack of correlation between the fine arts and architectural visions. The fact that some of the sculptures in Mamaia are nothing more than oversized curios (works by Ada Geo, C. Baraschi, etc. come to mind), that others are grandiloquent (Dorio Lazăr, Artur Vetro – the works in front of the “Neon” Hotel in Eforie Nord, etc.), that the scale of many works is incorrect when contrasted to the architectural volume and the spatial openness of the coastline, that the apparent thematic or stylistic inadequacy of the sculptures and murals, the heteroclit nature of the ensemble and, finally, the great inequality in the value of the works, are all attributable – not exclusively, but primarily – to the shortcomings in the conception and organisation of this monumental art effort and to the lack of a movement of ideas to support and underpin it. Substantial funds have been invested in a series of mediocre works”¹⁶.

The main sculptors who came under such criticism naturally had stood out and secured commissions during the time of Gheorghiu Dej. For now, I must note that Ada Geo and C. Baraschi were accused of creating “oversized curios”, while Dorio Lazăr, Artur Vetro had made “grandiloquent” works. Artists such as Oscar Han, Cornel Medrea and Spiru Săbiescu were spared the pillory through the unfortunate placement of their works: “Naturally, the seaside also houses works remarkable by virtue of their intrinsic value and, at times, by their fortunate circumscription to the architectonic and city planning milieu: such as, for example, the works of Oscar Han, Cornel Medrea (whose depiction of Ovid, nevertheless, seems altogether out of place situated next to the “Ovid” hotel, even though the suggestion came from the author himself) or Spiru Săbiescu that can be found in Mamaia”¹⁷.

The new generation of artists were touted as the most likely to impose themselves and replace those who rose to prominence during the criticized period of socialist realism: “I would reference a further few decorative panels in Mamaia and Eforie Nord (authors: Gh. Popescu, Ion Nicodim, Camilian Demetrescu, Mircea

¹⁶ A. Măndrescu, *Anomalii în programul de artă monumentală* [Anomalies in the Monumental Art Programme], *Scînteia*, no. 7456, September 8th, 1967, p. 4.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

Ionescu, Ion Pacea, Virgil Almășanu, Ion Bițan), or else the recent achievements at the “Europa” Hotel in Eforie Nord”¹⁸.

By 1973, the architectural programme of tourism constructions had been concluded. “Consequently, slightly less than 100 km between Năvodari and Mangalia feature 11 holiday resorts, comprising 208 new and modern hotels, in addition to a multitude of other small hotels, villas, bungalows, huts and tents with a total accommodation capacity, in this calendar year, of 110,000 units in a single series. In operation for the tourists’ benefit are 115 restaurants, 58 buffets, 19 soda parlours, 454 commercial units, 34 stands and, as a last-minute novelty, the Mamaia Summer Fair”¹⁹.

For a comprehensive image of the effort involved in supporting mass tourism, it is worth citing at length from the detailed presentation of the infrastructure and artistic programmes made available for consumption on the coast: “Coast 1975 in a few numbers: 196 hotels (94,673 spaces), 135 restaurants, 41 pools, 7 nautical bases, 139 day bars, 4 entertainment parks, 20 sporting compounds (featuring tennis, volleyball and basketball courts)... And over 2,100 staff (from receptionists to chefs, waiters and confectioners) that have all followed qualification and preparation courses in order to raise – by an order of magnitude – the threshold of excellent service. Eforie Nord, the laureate of the 1974 season, awaits us with flowers and exquisite services. At “Perinița” (a local specialty restaurant featuring barbecued mutton, kebabs and an in-house band), the hosts are preparing discrete arrangements in the shape of huts, while the bands “Phoenix” and “Mondial” are expected to perform at the youth-centric seafront restaurant, “Barul Roman”. Street vendors (in their kiosks) announce very colourful and well-supplied trade this year. In the centre of the resort, the U.G.S.R. has erected a new hotel (including a restaurant). The “Acapulco” bar (such a splendid seafront panorama!) has once again invited Cornel Patrichi to redouble the success of last year’s programme, in a new format. The rich and excellently-maintained landscaping of the Saturn resort has seen rows of linden trees planted along the road, connecting it to its neighbour, Venus. In fact, the entire southern region, overseen by I.H.R. Mangalia – Jupiter, Venus, Aurora, Saturn and Mangalia – presents itself, this year as a vast garden. Two million seasonal flowers have been planted (200,000 of them roses), as well as 10,000 conifer and broadleaf trees. The resorts advertise themselves at their roadside entrances

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ S. Zabarancea, *Frumosul și utilul pe 100 de kilometri* [Beauty and Utility within 100 kilometres], Munca, no. 7927, May 15th, 1973, p. 4.

in large multicoloured lettering made of flowers. This year, the programme of the “Paradis” night bar (in Jupiter) will be supported by performances from the Ploiești Street Theatre. The well-renowned folkloric ensemble “Banatul” will perform at the highly original “Cătunul” complex (Aurora) and the “Pelicanul” fishmonger’s restaurant (Saturn). This summer, the Mangalia Casino will see performances from two orchestras hailing from R.S.F. Yugoslavia. With better orientation of the tourists in mind, 28 informational / advertising panels and 7 resort maps have been installed.

Right at the entrance to the Mamaia resort, motorists can seek mechanical repairs at one of the best repair shops in the country, featuring modern machinery capable of restoring automobiles’ bodywork. Its chief mechanic, comrade Iordan Grigore, can be contacted by dialling 31865. Engineer Nicolae Spînu has informed us that the unit is managed through patriotic work, and that the “Littoral” motorbase (run by ITTA-Bucharest) offers 6 garages and 150 coaches for the transport of tourists, throughout all seasons. This year, the taxi service has been supplemented with the ONT vehicles.

Over 580 theatre, opera and variety performances, shows and concerts join the tens of thousands of holiday programmes already available. For the summer schedules of touring theatres, see our forthcoming issue. The folklore festival (already a seaside tradition, on its 11th edition this year) will take place between July 7th and August 24th. The foremost stars of the music scene will grace the stage of the Mamaia Summer Theatre between July 21st and 27th, for the 1975 Edition of the National Competition and Festival²⁰.

The joy of communicating through figures was, likewise, characteristic for 1976: “over two million Romanian and foreign tourists arriving to the seaside annually [...]726 performances by artistic collectives from across the country”²¹.

In the early 1980s, we come to discover what the Romanian Communist Party and its Secretary General, Nicolae Ceaușescu was regarding as budget increase for “leisure time” following the technological and scientific revolution: “As a consequence of having liberated human labour from exploitation and its transformation from a factor for alienation to one of fulfilment of one’s personality, and given that the impact of the techno-scientific revolution, through automation, is leading to

²⁰ A. Raicu, *Marea noastră cea de toate verile. Caleidoscop* [Our Seaside, for all Summers. Kaleidoscope], *România Pitorească*, no. 6, June 1st, 1975, p. 9.

²¹ C. Căliman, *Viața culturală pe litoral* [Cultural Life at the Seaside], *Contemporanul*, no. 33, July 13th 1976, p. 9.

increasing productivity and a greater capacity for “leisure time” among the population, and given the necessity that one’s professional preparation for their labour be conferred new virtues...”²².

1. The theme of nudity in monumental works of sculpture

In what follows, I shall dwell upon several case studies of sculptural works and attempt their analysis in an interdisciplinary and post-aesthetic manner. As a general characteristic, I highlight the notable effort made to integrate urban landscapes and architecture with monumental works of sculpture, both through a reduction in the visibility of plinths and through the presentation of said works in a modern perspective, on a human scale and very close to an onlooker’s point of view of a broader arrangement.

The sculptor couple of Ada Geo Medrea and Cornel Medrea were the champions widely envied for having secured a series of commissions along the Black Sea coast. Cornel Medrea, a corresponding member of the Romanian Academy since 1957, used this opportunity to further pursue his interest in one of his most cherished themes: the nude as a representation of youth, of spring and of motherhood, in a vein inspired by Aristide Maillol. Among his representative works are “Virgin with Apple (Venus)” (“Fecioara cu mărul (Venus)”), bronze, displayed at the “Casino” Hotel in Mamaia, 1960, “Motherhood” (“Maternitate”), artificial stone, 1956, located at the Mamaia Clinic, 1961; “Siren and dolphin” (“Sirena și delfinul”), limestone, “Doina” Restaurant, Mamaia, 1962; “Water-lily” (“Nufărul”), bronze, displayed at the Sulina Hotel, 1963; “In the Sun” (“În soare”), travertine, 1962, emplaced at the “Dacia” Hotel, Mamaia, 1964; “In confidence” (“Confidența”), stone, 1963, displayed at the “Ovid” Hotel, Mamaia, 1964; “Spring” (“Primăvara”), bronze, located at the “Ovid” Hotel, Mamaia, 1964. The “Siren” and the “Water-lily” stand out through their special central placements in artificial lakes. In this way, the works bear a thematic as well as an aesthetic relationship with the water’s gleam, owed to

²² D. Ghișe, *Concepția PCR și a secretarului său general, tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu, privind rolul și răspunderea literaturii și artei în formarea și modelarea conștiinței umane. Dezvoltarea spiritului militant, revoluționar, patriotic, umanist în creația literar-artistică*, [in:] *Învățămîntul politico-ideologic 1982–1983. Culegere de texte pentru toate formele și cursurile învățămîntului politico-ideologic* [Political-Ideological Education 1982–1983: Collection of Texts for all Forms and Courses on Political-Ideological Education], Bucharest 1982, p. 323.

their innovative placement. I might also remark on the spectacular, modern relationship the sculptures share with their minimal plinths, designed to be entirely submerged and thereby engendering their fuller integration with the surrounding landscape in an arrangement of unexpected novelty. Today, these works are in an advanced state of disrepair, despite the fact that their degradation has been repeatedly lamented²³ by the press.

According to certain critical views, Ada Geo Medrea, a former pupil of Cornel Medrea who later found herself in the artistic and familial company of the famous sculptor, owes him the privilege of having had her own sculptural works displayed in public spaces throughout the Mamaia resort. What is beyond doubt, however, is that once bereft of Cornel Medrea's protection (following his unfortunate end) Ada Geo Medrea moved into shadow and shortly experienced a sharp decline in commissions. Nevertheless, her sculptural achievements are displayed along the Romanian coast: "Girl on Slide" ("Fată pe tobogan"), bronze, 1963, located at the Mamaia Nautical Club, 1964; "Daisy flower" ("Margareta"), brass, 1963, displayed at the "Flora" Hotel in Mamaia, 1964; "Sports game" ("Joc sportiv"), bronze, situated at the "Parc" Hotel in Mamaia, 1967; and "Mamaia", a joint venture by Ada Geo Medrea and Cornel Medrea in stone, displayed at the "Perla" Hotel in Mamaia, 1963, worthy of particular attention, even though they were later criticized as "oversized curios". The "Girl on Slide", located at the Mamaia Nautical Club (1964), enjoys perhaps, the most impressive placement out of the works outlined above, an exceedingly dynamic effect being created along a diagonal axis that follows the most striking line possible between the shore and the sea. Its spectacular artistic achievement let this sculpture grace the front cover of "Flacăra" magazine (issue 27, July 2nd, 1966). Unfortunately, the fate of these works by Ada Geo Medrea has not been kind: they were destroyed during the rehabilitation and re-commission efforts for the Mamaia promenade that took place in 2015.

On the topic of continuities, we also bear witness to a resumption of a series of works first attempted in the Interwar period or the subsequent years, a series that saw reproductions on a monumental scale. Such is the work "New-Born" ("Nou-născut") by Oscar Han, cast in bronze in 1958 in the style of socialist realism, displayed in front of the "International" Hotel in Mamaia in 1961. Another work version, attempted as early as in the 1940s and 50s, "Virgin with Apple (Venus)"

²³ M. Tița, *Tristeți autumnal-sculpturale* [Sculptural Autumnal Sorrows], Bursa, September 28th, 2020, available at <https://www.bursa.ro/plasamente-alternative-tristet-sculptural-autumnale-64627043> [accessed: 20.11.2022].

(“Fecioara cu mărul (Venus)”) would see a bronze variant 110 × 130 × 40 cm in size successfully emplaced near the “Casino” Hotel in Mamaia in 1960, through the efforts of Ion Jalea.

In turn, Constantin Baraschi would successfully recreate his 1938 work, “Fawn and Nymph” (“Faun și nimfă”) in bronze on a monumental scale (240 × 170 × 240 cm), displayed near the State Theatre in Constanța in 1964. Baraschi also managed to finalize a series of works such as “Ecstasy” (“Extaz”), bronze, 1962, displayed at the Summer Theatre in Mamaia in 1966; “On the Waves” (“Pe valuri”), bronze, 1963, displayed at the “Bucharest” Hotel in Mamaia in 1966; “Girl with Doe” (“Fata cu căprioara”), bronze, 2237 × 520 × 485 cm, at the “Albastros” Cinema in Mamaia, 1966. “On the Waves” saw two iterations, with one centrally situated in an artesian fountain arrangement. “Ecstasy” (1966), created under the auspices of a national rehabilitation of the great Constantin Brancusi, also saw a series of small-scale reproductions in the period, made available for purchase through the retail outlets of the Fine Arts Fund.

Boris Caragea, the first Chairman of the Union of Fine Artists (1951–1957) and a professor in the Sculpture Department of the Nicolae Grigorescu Institute for Fine Arts, undertook two sculptures in this period: “Youth” (“Tinerețe”), bronze, 1962, displayed at the Perla Commercial Centre in Mamaia in 1963; and “Fruit” (“Rod”), bronze, displayed on the pier esplanade at Eforie Nord in 1962. Notably, by virtue of the artistic solutions employed, his works remain the most tributary to the style of socialist realism of all the artists briefly described herein.

Perhaps the period’s most voluptuous representation in an erotic key was achieved by Naum Corcescu in his work, “Sports match” (“Joc sportiv”), stone, 1962, displayed at the “Dacia” Hotel in Mamaia in 1963. The eroticism of the ensemble is partially camouflaged by pretext of a dynamic composition that captures a sporting event between two partially-nude female competitors.

Following on from the experience of crafting the bas-relief that adorns the façade of the Romanian Opera House in 1959, Zoe Băicoianu pursued a similar artistic achievement in 1960, which she titled “Sportive Youths” (“Tineri sportivi”), bas-relief in coloured cement, displayed on the façade of the Constanța Sports Hall in 1964.

Ion Vlad authored “Music” (“Muzica”) in Rușchița marble, 1961, displayed on the Constanța esplanade in 1962, the same year the artist took part in the Venice Biennale with 15 different works²⁴.

²⁴ M. Mihalache, *Ion Vlad*, Meridiane Publishing House, 1966.

As briefly noted above, it is important to note that the national public rehabilitation by the Romanian Popular Republic of the importance of sculptor Constantin Brancusi was ongoing throughout the process of the Romanian littoral's systematization (including the emplacement of representative sculptures). The influence of Brancusi's art had an immediate impact upon Romanian sculptors, who no longer sought out either Western or Soviet influences, finding in Brancusi an exemplary model that was, first and foremost, Romanian. Through this process, we might argue that it was one of the first documented instances of the assumption of a typically-Romanian modernity expressed in the public space in the Romanian Popular Republic, by way of a series of works that were both aesthetic and cultural representations oriented towards a broader category of beneficiaries represented by the emerging mass tourism.

For his part, Ion Irimescu – through the works, “Youth” (“Tinerete”), bronze 258 × 100 × 78 cm, displayed in Mangalia in 1964, and “On the Seafront” (“În fața mării”), bronze, 130 × 100 × 75 cm, emplaced in Mangalia Nord in 1968 – also successfully managed to make this post-Brancusian sculptural discourse public. The work of Ioana Kassargian, “Girl with Flower” (“Fata cu floarea”), bronze, 1964, displayed on the esplanade of the “Neon” restaurant in Constanța, 1967, exhibits the same deep Brancusian influence.

The two works by Iulia Oniță, “Youth” (“Tinerete”), stone, displayed at the “Belona” Hotel, Eforie Nord in 1962 and “Motherhood” (“Maternitate”), bronze, 1965, displayed at the “Dacia” Hotel in Neptun in 1969, are each important testimonies in their own right: the former for the artistic direction of “diluted” socialist realism, with the latter representative of the impact the rehabilitation of Brancusi had at the precise moment it was carried out.

In “The Swimmer” (“Înotătoarea”), bronze, 350 × 85 × 40 cm, displayed at the Mamaia Summer Theatre in 1967, Lie Doina successfully achieved a dynamic and bold depiction of the subject matter. Unfortunately, this remarkable work has also since been destroyed.

Under the pressure of the Space Race and the Soviet programme of conquering the Cosmos, Dorio Lazăr, through his work “Science” (“Știința”), Borsec travertine, 294 × 120 × 182 cm, displayed on Bloc A esplanade in Eforie Nord in 1962, proposed an allegorical representation that might now appear somewhat bizarre: a semi-nude female character holding the “Sputnik” satellite in her hands. The artist would go on to carve “Youth” (“Tinerete”) from stone, displaying it in front of the “Marea Neagră” restaurant in Neptun in 1968.

“Wonder” (“Uimire”) by Mihai Onofrei²⁵, in artificial stone, was purchased by the State Committee for Culture and the Arts following the artist’s personal exhibition in the Onești Gallery in Bucharest. The work was ultimately displayed near the Pioneer Stadium in Constanța in 1970.

Balogh Petre’s “Workmen on the Beach” (“Muncitori pe plajă”), carved from Bașchioi stone, was displayed near the “Perla” Hotel in Constanța in 1962. It depicts three statuary groupings, each featuring more characters than the previous one. This sculptural ensemble was perceived as an elementary and altogether too explicit representation of the cultural policy that commissioned it, with art critic Amelia Pavel qualifying it as “a system of rudimentary, elementary signs”²⁶ in stark opposition to artistic fantasy.

By 1967, “Mirth” (“Voioșie”) by Artur Vetro (marble, 1962, displayed at Bloc A Complex in Eforie Nord in 1964) was one of the sculptures facing criticism for being too “grandiloquent”, with “the scale being incorrect [...] in relation to the architectonic volumes and the spatial openness of the coastline”²⁷.

One instance of the extension of the programme of beautifying the Black Sea littoral to other sites would be in Murfatlar, where Constantin Lucaci displayed his marble work, “Spring” (“Primăvara”), at the Murfatlar Experimental Station in 1965. On the occasion, flyers and posters noted with pride how “workers in the city’s manufactories, vintners of Murfatlar, the neighbouring town, rural folk from around Medgidia, hundreds upon hundreds of people [...] come to admire paintings and sculptures, acquiring a greater familiarity with art”²⁸.

Let me add that, by the early 1970s, a new generation of sculptors and artists were tasked with creating a new environmental sculpture complex in the Costinești resort²⁹. Using concrete poured directly from moulds³⁰ concurrently with the con-

²⁵ V. Teodorescu, *Sculptorul Mihai Onofrei mărturii monografice* [Sculptor Mihai Onofrei: Monograph Testimonies], Junimea Publishing House, 2003.

²⁶ A. Pavel, *Realitate și fantezie în sculptură* [Reality and Fantasy in Sculpture], *Contemporanul*, no. 25, June 21st, 1963, p. 6.

²⁷ A. Mândrescu, *Anomalii în programul de artă monumentală* [Anomalies in the Monumental Art Programme].

²⁸ F. Urseanu, *Călătorie nouă* [New Journey], *Flacăra*, no. 8, February 20th, 1965, p. 6.

²⁹ See *Ansamblul de la Costinești 1970–1973* [The Costinești Ensemble, 1970–1973], [in:] C. Nasui, *Artele monumentale decorative din România: o incursiune în a doua jumătate a secolului XX* [Decorative Monumental Arts in Romania: an Incursion into the Latter Half of the Twentieth Century], Postmodernism Museum, 2020, pp. 148–153.

³⁰ I. Vlasiu, *Comanda socială și inițiativa artistului. Ansamblul de la Costinești* [Social Commissions and Artists’ Initiative. The Costinești Ensemble], *Arta*, no. 7, 1974.

struction of the resort's amenities, the new generation of artists made use of abstract geometric decorative and aesthetic solutions which, through their themes and stylistic approach, do not fall within the remit of the works broadly analysed herein. However, it is worth noting the importance afforded these works, being exhibited as small-scale models or photographic panels at the 1976 Venice Biennale.

2. Final destination: an eternity lost

Before analysing other aspects of certain outbreaks of estival eroticism permitted during the communist period on the Romanian Black Sea coast, let me first add some testimonies of the eventual fate that befell the monumental works of the sculptures described above. "Of the ten statues in the Mamaia resort, five works of art had been classified as Category 'B' historical monuments. Although their disappearance had been reported in early 2004, the fate of these statues has remained unknown to this day. [...] According to the County Directorate for Culture, the stolen statues were "New-born" by Oscar Han, bronze, 1959; "Bust of Ovid" by Corneliu Medrea, bronze, 1958; "Girl with Doe" by Constantin Baraschi, bronze, 1965; "Virgin with Apple" by Ion Jalea, bronze, 1943; "Spring" by Corneliu Medrea, bronze, 1964. They are joined by "Cosmonaut", limestone, "Girl with Daisy" and "Girl on Slide" by Ada Geo Medrea, "Bas-relief" by Corneliu Medrea, and "Swimmer", bronze, by Doina Lie"³¹.

Another press article reveals that the statues had been "cut into pieces for transport, with the creations considered heritage items now "stored" in inappropriate conditions, in open space among weeds and rocks, their only "admirers" the stray animals populating the Constanța Biobase. [...] These works of art are historical monuments destined for public consumption, in accordance with the Order of the Ministry of Culture no. 2,361/2010, published on 1 October 2010 in Romania's Official Gazette, Yr. 178 (XXII) no. 670 (bis). Each of these artefacts features an LMI code identifying it as a historical monument, thereby falling under the jurisdiction of Law no. 422/2001 prohibiting displacement, repair, consolidation or modification thereof without the approval of either the Ministry of Culture or its decentralized subordinate institutions – in this instance, the Constanța County Directorate for Culture"³².

³¹ A. Fulaș Ionescu, "Triunghiul Bermudelor" din Mamaia. Unde sunt vechile statui? [The Mamaia 'Bermuda Triangle'. Where are the Old Statues?], Cuget liber, 4 August 2015.

³² N. Nicolau, *Statuile dispărute din Constanța, tăiate și "aruncate" la marginea urbei* (gal-

3. Syndicated socialist bohemianism and the “Miss Littoral” beauty and grace pageants

In the 1970s and ‘80s, the manifestations of estival eroticism fell under the sign of transformations that underpinned the regular cultural and artistic programmes, correlated with the changes occurring in syndicated mass tourism. Having reached its zenith in the 1970s, the programme for the commission and display of open-air sculptures *in situ* was replaced by cultural and artistic activities that involved more direct interaction with the wider public in general, and with the factor of mass artistic entertainment in particular. Therefore, other artistic forms began to take preference, ones decidedly less highbrow and elitist; in the absence of a consumerist society, this development would later come to be seen by certain branches of research as a form of socialist pop culture, recently analysed under the term *pop-communism*³³.

Thus, the “Miss Littoral” pageants launched in the 1970s enjoyed remarkable success, while the attention afforded the “beauty of nature” occasioned a degree of permissive relaxation regarding the presentation of nudity in certain clearly-delineated frameworks of public space (through physical competitions and, later, through the dissemination of photographs taken during dedicated sessions in a natural environment).

Within these new formulas for entertainment, eroticism was channelled into several manifestations of such “parades of youth”: not only the “Miss Littoral” pageant, but several closed-circuit establishments that featured variety shows and “oriental dances” (commonly referred to, today, as *striptease*). One platform of support dedicated to the genre of touristic publications, “Picturesque Romania” (“România pitorească”), even made direct use of female nudity, albeit following certain guidelines and ensuring that the exceptional photography carry such initiatives on its own merit. In highlighting the demographic richness and diversity of the Romanian Socialist Republic and placing emphasis on the good health of the nation, as evidenced by grace, dignity, good hygiene and athleticism, female nudity was displayed almost exclusively in exterior settings, either on the beach or among the waves.

erie foto + video) [The Missing Statues of Constanța, cut into Pieces and ‘Discarded’ on the City Outskirts], *Ziua de Constanța*, 5 June 2015.

³³ A. Bărdan, *Pop-comunism în România* [Pop-communism in Romania], available at <https://www.postmodernism.ro/pop-communism-in-romania/>.

Dwelling on the “Miss Littoral” competitions for a brief moment, let me highlight these beauty pageants’ altogether democratic and ethnographic nature: “Launched as a parade of youthfulness **open to all female tourists on holiday** (author’s bolding), “Miss Littoral” consisted of three stages, each following well-established criteria: the selection stage, the semi-final or “local final” stage for each resort (Mamaia, Eforie Nord, Eforie Sud, Mangalia and Neptun-Olimp), and the final stage, showcasing the most stunning of the beautiful. The top five competitors in the semi-final stage qualify for the final round, led by the five “Miss [Resort]”. The contestants are judged according to three trials: personal charm, general knowledge, artistic aptitude (contestant’s choice of song, dance or recital), as well as having to pass through a “gauntlet”, “a true instrument of torture” as a silhouette cut in a transparent wall in the ideal shape of the female body (after Miss Universe 1980) was also called”³⁴.

Conclusions

By way of the political and ideological dimension of mass tourism in the communist period, the Black Sea coastl functioned as a privileged space both through specific dedicated cultural programmes and supplemented measures of permissiveness and modernity. From the perspective of the component aspects of eroticism, it may be remarked that, beyond the gender stereotypes at play, socialist sexuality and morality played an important part in the demographic transformation of Romania, achieved through the national programme of pro-natal and pro-family policies. In a post-communist setting, this phenomenon of mass estival tourism has been perceived with particular nostalgia, and occasioned the creation of new cultural *ostalgia*³⁵ phenomena that transcend their purely archival or museographic reception.

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³⁵ www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/german-english/ostalgie [accessed: 20.11.2022].

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