



Omnia Communia Deserta

By Mona Vătămanu and Florin Tudor

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Over the last two decades, Mona Vătămanu and Florin Tudor have developed a collaborative, research-based practice – consisting of film, photography, painting, and performance – which looks into the material and formal manifestations of ideological change. Tracing the symbolic remains of power structures in the urban landscape and architecture, the duo critically engages with issues surrounding individual and collective memory in postcommunist society, and how they relate to global developments.

La Loge presents Vătămanu & Tudor's research on the Omnia Hall – a building set to house the National Center of Dance in Bucharest after its restoration and refurbishment – alongside a painting series mounted on display structures by artist Céline Condorelli. Designed in 1967 by the architect Cezar Lăzărescu as part of the headquarters for the Romanian Communist Party's Central Committee, the Omnia Hall was mainly used as a location for party rallies. A brutalist building with an interior of wooden decorative structures referencing archaic principles and folkloristic elements, its socialist modernist architectural setting and its function as a political arena served the nationalist rhetoric and ideological agenda of Ceaușescu's regime. Extensive renovation plans have since transformed the building's interior: meticulously staged ornaments and sculptural elements have been dismantled, obliterating the building's former symbolic function and its uncomfortable historical legacy.

The notion of erasure, of *tabula rasa*, of the deserted space after destruction, is an underlying thread in the work of Vătămanu and Tudor. At La Loge, *Omnia Communia Deserta* opens with a video of a hurricane titled *Storm* (2020), a prelude to the exhibition which deals with the idea of failure – of modernist ideals and the inability of learning from one's past – and the destructive forces of history that we cannot get a grip on: a stormy detachment from soil and roots, the destruction of resources and common grounds. Due to unbridled ambitions and megalomania in Socialist Romania, which translated into the construction of large-scale infrastructures and symbolic monuments and industrialization, severe environmental damage was inflicted with particular harm caused to the water supply, soil, and forests. The exploitation of raw materials and supplies by dominant ideologies – socialist and capitalist ideology alike – to the benefit of their own preservation still remains unchecked today.

"The continuous construction and disintegration of the world" referred to by Russian philosopher Nikolai Fedorov can also be perceived in the permanent dislocation and resettlement of the

built space, engaged by the relentless tectonics of ideologies. The architectural transformation of the Omnia Hall started after the fall of socialism: for a period of time the building was initially the new democratic Senate's headquarters but in 2004 the institution was relocated to the House of the People, leaving the building abandoned for more than a decade. Thanks to the close collaboration with The National Center of Dance Bucharest (CNDB), architectural remnants from the Omnia Hall are presented at La Loge, which will be returned for an integration into the renovated building upon the exhibition's closure. Elements such as a wooden ornamental structure and acoustic textiles have been transposed to La Loge's temple, stripped of their decorative function and static nature. The vertical axis of the wooden structure (*Roots*, 2020) has been flipped, liberating its individual elements from their fixed position to interact freely.

On the walls, pieces of textiles (*The Spread of Time*, 2020) carry the traces of the Omnia Hall's ornamental architecture. This intervention dialogues sensitively with the space and the multiple temporalities of the Omnia Hall. The white velvet was mounted behind wooden wall panels in the conference room for acoustic purposes. Over time, and independently of human will, the velvet membrane recorded an imprint due to dust particles settling in the interstitial spaces of the walls as if it had been stamped. The pieces of textile almost appear as photographic imprints of the architecture – they are fragments from an image-membrane; testimonies of a future imagined in the last century that did not really come to pass; a future that has disappeared but that continues to haunt us. The work is an imprint of history outlined in the nothingness of dust; a posthuman image; an image whose substance carries autopoietic attributes.

A new commissioned film titled *Omnia Communia Deserta* is projected in the basement. Showing the structure of the Omnia hall, the film is overlaid with a soundtrack, narrated by philosopher and cultural theorist Ovidiu Țichindeleanu. He connects the building's historical function to historical and contemporary metaphors. The film introduces the Omnia Hall as a ruin of socialist civilization, but also as a remnant of efficient modernity that extracts and harnesses resources wherever it can find them. In this new work, the artists interweave their concerns about the erasure of history with the threat of worldwide ecological collapse. The film lays out a path through the building, starting from the gate to the wooden sculpture to the foyer filled with symbols. The building was conceived as a honeycomb, an important metaphor of communism. Ironically, the Omnia Hall takes its name from "*Omnia sunt communia*", a proverb coined by the German preacher Thomas Muntzer during the peasant wars, meaning "all things are to be held in common and distribution should be to each according to his need". The tragedy of the commons, however, suggests that shared resources are depleted and spoiled by the users through their collective action.

The fact that Mona Vătămanu and Florin Tudor's works so masterfully complicate the way we read various histories and political narratives has to do with the artists' radical move

(over a decade ago) away from “thinking in juxtapositions and towards seeing the world as a complex entanglement of various competing realities”. In the upper room, a wall shelf and three display structures devised by artist Céline Condorelli as part of her installation “Collection Show” originally commissioned for the Art Encounters Biennial in Timișoara (2019) support the painting series *Intalnire cu Istoria [Appointment with History]* (2007-ongoing). This series echoes nineteenth-century realist paintings from the former East, and bears witness to forms of agency, solidarity and collectives over different times and places including scenes from an anti-capitalist demonstration in Basel; protests on Alexanderplatz in Berlin in 1989; the democratization of the Eastern Bloc; the alter-globalist movement; Spain’s Indignados; the global Occupy movement, as well from numerous environmental movements and political protests. Engaging with a realist visual vocabulary linked to social intention in art, the artists apply the aesthetics characteristic of changes and uprisings in the rest of the world, and transcend the old divisions between East and West.

About the artists

Mona Vătămanu and Florin Tudor have been collaborating since 2001, producing mixed-media installations, actions, and videos through which they approach the traumatic legacy of communism in their native Romania and Eastern Europe, while confronting the on-going challenge of how to process history. While the Socialist past is the focus of most of their evocative installations and atmospheric films, Vătămanu and Tudor also find connections between the history they know intimately and struggles worldwide.

Solo exhibitions include *Metalurgica* (collaboration with Martin Zet); *Magma* (2019); *Profile*, 64th International Short Film Festival Oberhausen (2018); *stones, too, feel*, Neue Galerie, Innsbruck (2017); *What seems to be still alive is the power of that dream to bring people together and to create another history*, Future Museum /Czech Center, Bucarest (2016); *I do not know the real story which happens there*, Argos Centre for Arts and Media, Brussels (2014); *I dreamt the work of another artist*, Kunsthalle Lissabon, Lisbon (2013); *Surplus Value*, BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht (2009).

Works in the exhibition

Hallway and corridor

The Storm, 2020
Digital video, 63'20", mixed media
Courtesy of the artists

Temple

Roots, 2020
Wood, 12 parts, each 380 x 60 x 60 cm
Courtesy of the artists, with thanks to CNDB, National Center of
Dance Bucharest

The Spread of Time, 2020
Textile, variable dimensions
Courtesy of the artists, with thanks to CNDB, National Center of
Dance Bucharest

Basement

Omnia communia deserta, 2020
Digital video, 29'
Courtesy of the artists

Upper room

Céline Condorelli
3 wooden structures, paint, variable dimensions
From the installation *Collection Show*. Courtesy of the artist and
Art Encounters Foundation, Timișoara

Display 1 (pink) – interior of the structure

Demonstration in Basel, 2008
Oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm

Demonstration in Rostock, 2008
Oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm

Don't Poison our Land, 2014
Oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm

Display 1 (pink) – exterior of the structure

4 November 1989, Berlin, 2008
Oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm

28 March 2009 London, 2009
Oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm

18 December 2005, Hong Kong, 2008
Oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm

Display 2 (blue) – interior of the structure

Downing Street, March 2009, London, 2014

Oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm

Iranian Green Revolution, 2010

Oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm

Tear Down This Wall, 2014

Oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm

Display 2 (blue) – exterior of the structure

General Strike, 3 November 2011, Oakland, 2014

Oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm

Anarcho-Syndicalist Flags, 2014

Oil on canvas, 40x50 cm

May 2011, Puerta del Sol, Madrid, 2011

Oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm

Display 3 (yellow) – interior of the structure

Si pietrele simt, 2016

Oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm

Black Block Rostock, 2008

Oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm

Timișoara, 20 December 1989, 2008

Oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm

Display 3 (yellow) – exterior of the structure

Syria, 2011

Oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm

August 2008, Bagua Province, Peru, 2011

Oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm

Police guarding the christmas tree, 2008, Athens, 2010

Oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm

Line of paintings

February 2011, Tunisian boat arriving in Lampedusa, 2011

Oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm

Migrant camp burning in Calais, 2016

Oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm

Somnul, 2019

Oil on canvas, 80 x 80 cm

Zone à défendre 1, 2020
Oil on canvas, 50 x 60 cm

Ende Gälende 1, 2019
Oil on canvas, 100 x 80 cm

Ende Gälende 2, 2020
Oil on canvas, 60 x 80 cm

Bougainville, Coconut Revolution, 2011
Oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm

Zone à défendre 2, 2020
Oil on canvas, 50 x 60 cm

Thank you

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La Loge is a privately initiated non-profit association founded by architect Philippe Rotthier. La Loge is supported by Philippe Rotthier Foundation for Architecture, the Flemish Government, and First Sight, La Loge's community of engaged individuals and organizations.