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Religious and sacred art in Romania in the
last part of the century XX and the
beginning of the century XXI

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KEY WORDS

Sacred art

Religious art

Sacred

Symbol

Recovery

Recycle

Experiment

Creativity

TRANSLATION REPORT

The PhD Thesis “**Religious and sacred art in Romania in the second part of the century XX and the beginning of the century XXI**” studies elements of Christian anthropology with regards to the sacred art in joining the centuries XX-XXI. The interdisciplinary and multimedia character of the thesis is confirmed by the projects and studies developed during the three years of research. The theoretical work consists in specialized research: volumes of famous writings in this area, critical studies, interviews, that bring clarifications regarding the differences between the religious art and the sacred art.

The theoretical research is based on the direct observation by visiting the churches, the museums and the exhibitions dedicated to the religious and sacred art. The contact with the thesis provides the possibility to assess the content and the compositional structure of the image in relation to the work technique. Also, the image archives with works of some artists, accessed online from specialized sites, have contributed in achieving some comparative studies and a more precise perception of the contemporary sacred art.

The surveys and the discussions with the artists, in conjunction with the study cases presented in comparative analysis with regards to the religious art and the art with a religious subject, provides the research an artistic scientific perspective. During the doctoral studies, I published articles on spiritual themes and sacred art in specialized magazines.

My personal experience as an artist concerned with my own creation of sacred and religious art, has helped me in understanding the differences and similitudes between a canonical image and an image signed by a contemporary artist who uses a religious theme and religious symbols, thus, the thesis being part of the sacred art areal.

The fundamental principles and the iconographic program in the Christian orthodox art, art with a religious meaning, have been presented as a synthesis of the ecclesial painting in relation with the architecture. The fact that the spiritual elements can be communicated only by symbolic conventions and allegories, makes this art more mysterious and more attractive. All the details are focused on unity and harmony, a refined and tinted balance that includes the hieratism of the saints and the transmission of the faith doctrine through images, being a pedagogy that visually supports the Holy Bible.

The study refers to some of the Romanian painters from the centuries XX, XXI, known in the field of religious plastics (Arsenie Boca, Petre Achițenie, Costin Ioanid, Viorel Grimalschi, Ion Grigore, Cătălin Băluț). The thesis also presents stylistic particularities and the innovating work of some emblematic artists for the scene of the contemporary Romanian visual arts (Silviu Oravitzan, Marian and Victoria Zidaru, Sorin Dumitrescu, Ion Grigorescu), in whose works, from the painting, object, until installation and performance, we can find the sacred as a dominant theme, as a feeling, visual representation and personal artistic expression.

The PhD Thesis consists of seven chapters:

Chapter 1. Anthropomorphic transfer - Christian anthropology; Chapter 2. The power of the Word, of the Name and of the Image; Chapter 3. Considerations upon the religious and sacred art; Chapter 4. The religious image from the orthodox churches in Romania in the second part of the century XX and the beginning of the century XXI; Chapter 5. Stylistic particularities in the sacred art in Romania in contemporary times; Chapter 6. Cultural events having as a subject the religious and sacred art; Chapter 7. The personal contribution from the object to the film image; Conclusions; Bibliography and four Annexes.

Chapter 1. Anthropomorphic transfer - Christian anthropology contains a research that summarizes the historical-biblical theme of the human genesis in relation to the iconography and its thaumaturgic role. In this chapter, I have referred to human being which is made according to the God's image and likeness. Later, Christ is embodied in order for His icon, which is not made by human hand, to heal the human being and the creation. The iconographic representation has been created starting the real image of God who became human, whose ho-liness can be expressed only by symbol.

Chapter 2. The Power of Word, Name and Image argues the fact that the icon contains and provides power not only through the image's energy, but also through the word and name that belong to the Saints or to Jesus Christ, graved on it.

Chapter 3. Considerations upon religious and sacred art. Here, there are presented: definitions and opinions regarding the religious and sacred art, the rigors of the eastern iconographic program, the transition moment to the image/picture with religious subject. I also mention the artist who freed the ecclesiastical art from synodal canons - Giotto di Bondone provided a new vision, passing from the byzantine icon program, considered and shaped, with many rigors, in hundreds of years, to the art with religious subject whose concept I have exemplified in the Sistine Chapel painting.

Chapter 4. The religious image from the orthodox churches in Romania in the second part of the century sec. XX and the beginning of the century XXI contains studies of the religious works, signed by contemporary artists such as Father Arsenie Boca, Petre Achițenie, Costin Ioanid, Viorel Grimalschi, Ion Grigore, and Cătălin Băluț. The authors respect the specific canonical iconography, but they interfere in the image with elements of originality from the chromatic and compositional perspective, or through symbols of customized elements with influence from the ordinary life (Arsenie Boca) or the popular life (Costin Ioanid).

Chapter 5. Stylistic particularities in the sacred art in Romania in contemporary times contains four subchapters that describe the stylistic particularities in the vision of some famous contemporary artists, whose work has contributed to the originality of the sacred art in the Romanian areal - Silviu Oravitzan, Marian and Victoria Zidaru, Sorin Dumitrescu, Ion Grigorescu and Maria Constantinescu.

The chapter reflects a rich overview whose characteristics oscillate from the easel painting to mural painting, from installation to performance, from symbol and traditional art to art in public space. The subchapters, each dedicated to each artist, try to expose elements of thought and visual representation from the sacred art areal, present in the work of these artists.

In the subchapter **5.1. The Importance and significance of the geometric detail in the seen world of the unseen, created by Silviu Oravitzan** I present the Church of **Transfiguration** from Cluj, ecclesial-ecumenical work. In the first part of the text I mentioned details regarding the technique and the symbolistic of the shape and light, and in the second part I focused on the analysis of the report between the small elements and overall, considered as a ecclesial architectural space.

In subchapter **5.2 The orthodox Christianity and elements from the village culture, sources of inspiration for Marian and Victoria Zidaru** I underlined the influence of popular culture and the usage by the artists of the visual metaphor with sacred symbols in sculptures, installations, environment and performance.

In subchapter **5.3 The symbols of the sacred image in the work of Sorin Dumitrescu** I present ecclesial projects and I mention the importance given by the artist to the inseparable connection between drawing and color and I underline his belief that the icon does not belong to this world, but it is only sheltered here.

In the subchapter **5.4. The ironizing of evil in the work of Ion Grigorescu** and in the subchapter **5.4.1. The metaphysical equilibrium and the sacred** I identify ways of artistic expression in his opera. The artist, contesting the old communist regime, expresses himself in his creation, using a unique ironic way, both in painting, drawing, gravure, video art, photogra-phy, object, installation and also in body-art, performance, happening, pop-art. In parallel with the experienced and described conceptual art, Ion Grigorescu also performed church painting, having good knowledge of the iconography and Christian symbols.

In subchapter **5.5. Tradition and modernism in glass painting of Maria Constantinescu** and the subchapter **5.5.1. Installation – remembrance and symbol** I analyze the origin of source inspiration and the interest of the artist for the plastic expressiveness of the light of heaven, in a personal vision expressed in iconographic compositions, having glass as a support. Also, the artist corroborates the sacred symbolic message and enhances the value of the essence of the tradition of Romanian popular art in installation, form of unconventional contemporary art.

Chapter 6. Cultural events of religious and sacred art refers to events that are under the guidance of the Romanian Orthodox Church, sacred and religious art are promoted through exhibitions, contests, book launch and albums, conferences and workshops, some of them being national, other being international.

Chapter 7. Personal contribution – from the object to the film image contains three subchapters: 7.1. Elements of sacred art in the contemporary design; 7.2. Retrieval-recondi-

tioning; conversion and creativity in furniture; 7.3. “Eucharistic Throne” exhibition. The last of them is divided in five subchapters: 7.3.1 Premises, 7.3.2 Experiment, 7.3.3 The icon concept „Eucharistic Throne”, 7.3.4. The film „ Eucharistic Throne”- the icon’s story, 7.3.5. The exhibition „ Eucharistic Throne”.

Subchapter 7.1. Elements of sacred art as source of inspiration in the contemporary design refers to the role of some sacred decorative motifs that belong to the Romanian ethnographic patrimony, used in the contemporary ambient design (case study - „Damian” pension in Crasna village, Covasna county), associated with furniture whose common characteristics are the retrieval-reconditioning and the enhance of the value for tradition.

Subchapter 7.2. Retrieval-reconditioning; conversion and creativity in furniture, refers to the work technology, materials and enhancing the value of it in a creative way of some elements in artistic objects, especially the wood being as a support, reunited in a personal exhibition under the title „Take a seat” at Sabion Galleries in Bucharest, February 2019.

The subchapter 7.3. „Eucharistic Throne”project. Significance and stages of work presents the personal project that describes a sacred art subject and it was presented at the Ghețarie Gallery of the Bran-coveanu Palace Cultural Centre in Mogoșoaia in the spring of 2020. The multimedia project has joined more forms of art – from the traditional icon on wood to the film experiment. In this subchapter that I have divided in 5 subchapters, I have followed the creative process in all of its stages from documentary, idea, concept, execution to transposing into opera. The film reveals the stages of creation, the emotional feelings, the searches and the transposition into the artistic object. Thus, the film becomes a metaphor of the artist’s work.

In the end of the work there are: **Conclusions, Bibliography and Annexes. The annex I** contains images of sacred and religious art; **Annex II** contains questions and answers regarding the sacred and religious art; **Annex III** describes the synopsis film „Eucharistic Throne”, making off photos during shooting and the work stages for the character’s garment. **Annex IV** contains the cover of the “Contemporary” magazine, No. 4(817) from April 2020 and a plastic chronical by Luiza Barcan, connected to the exhibition and the film „Eucharistic Throne”. **Annex V** contains a series of photos taken by Mihaela Petre at the musical show *To know taht I loved you*. O provide the props and made the stage design for this show.

By doing this research, I have tried to expose the sacred image’s characteristics. The icon exceeds a lot the aesthetic condition of the chromatic, the shape and the material, concerning the transcendence through the symbolic message and through the power of image, name and word invested in it. Thoma de Aqino and other Holy Fathers talk about the qualities of the words in the Holy Bible, asserting that they do not have just historical value or teaching value, but also prophetic and allegorical, meaning that there is a validity of their significance in time and space.

Different events connected to the contemporary religious and sacred art have been described in the thesis, in order to have an overview of the artistic tendencies and the interest for

this segment, came from the Romanian Patriarchy and from the visual artists.

The personal contribution reveals a work in progress activity, developed for retrieval, reconditioning and creative conversion, mainly the wood objects, in artistic objects. The study contributes to the synthesizing of some information gathered as an artist and theologian, in pre-senting some experiments and events, in exposing some results that converge to the concept of contemporary sacred art.

I have constantly cultivated this passion of retrieval/recycling/conversion having as a final purpose the object with aesthetic valence. I have focused my study on many levels: the sacred from the theological and dogmatic perspective, and as a basis of the traditional glass iconography in the byzantine iconography; the sacred symbolism transposed in the laic ornamentation and the ambient contemporary design with ethnographic implications, as a sacred space; the retrieval, the reconditioning and the preservation of some wood furniture elements, and also carved decorative details, enhancing the value of it through the creativity investment in the elements found and presenting them in a direct relation with the receiver both in an exhibition environment, but also by performance and projection of a short film that reflects a part of the personal activity.

The film together with the icons, the character's costume, making off photos and two installations have represented the subject of the personal exhibition „Eucharistic Throne”, performed at the Ghetarie Gallery of Brancoveanu Palace Cultural Centre in Mogoșoaia in the spring of 2020.

During the doctoral studies, I have attended group exhibitions in the country and abroad and I have won the Special Prize for Religious Art and Restauration at *Bienala d' Arte Adriatica*, in August 2018, for the work *Saint Nicholas*, natural stone bas-relief, exposed at Pescara, Italia.

In the end of the presentation, I would like to mention the fact that in Romania there are many artists whose valuable works belong to the sacred areal art, such as the artists from the Prolog group. Many emblematic artists for the visual arts, such as the sculptor Silvia Radu and the painters Horia Bernea, Ioana Bătrânu, Mihai Sârbulescu have signed works that invite you to meditation and to understanding the sacred time.

The PhD work „ **Religious and sacred art in Romania in the second part of the century XX and the beginning of the century XXI** presents and analyzes images and artwork that become theoretical and visual arguments that confirm the interest for sacred art and the valorization and integration of the objects, with sacred symbols and aesthetic valence, in daily existence.