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ÎN ARTA CONTEMPORANĂ A STICLEI**

REZUMAT ÎN ENGLEZĂ

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REZUMAT ÎN ENGLEZĂ

ARGUMENT

The story of glass has, to some extent, the symbolical qualities of the Penelope's web. Woven over several millennia, it is an inexhaustible blend of possibilities, that are renewed, reinvented and reinvested over and over again. The human curiosity employed in the exploration of the physical and aesthetic potentiality of glass has its possible origin in man's perplexity when he came into contact with mirabilite, obsidian, fulgurite, moldavite or rock crystal etc.

In trying to reproduce the fineness of these rocks, man has discovered a new material, heterogeneous and complex, resembling many substances and materials, but also very different from them. Glass has maintained for a long time its mystical, almost magical aura, having even today, after millennia of research and exploitation, surprising new aspects, that fascinate and seduce. But, most of the time, these new features are uncovered either when glass breaks or when it embodies a work of art.

Among the many factors that have influenced the weaving of the story of glass throughout time, there are three that constantly reemerge: *technology*, *technique* and *creativity*. These coordinates are converging, all throughout the history of glass, in a game of circumstances which has modeled our way of approaching the material itself and the its ingenious manifestations. If we are to look at the existence of glass up to the 20th century we will remark that technology as well as creativity are mostly dominated by technique (or techniques and the ability of manipulating them). This was brought about by the primacy of utility in the design of artisans Even today, most glass objects are tributaries to utility.

Along with the quality of the material, the craftsmanship involved in fabrication and a good knowledge of the techniques of execution have given and still give value to an object made of glass. In the 20th century glass started being modeled by artists in their studios which gave rise to a temporary emancipation of creativity from under the ascendancy of technique and technology. In the case of glass modeling by blowing, which was specific to the studio movement of the '60, this technology had been, up until that moment, inaccessible to artists. With the invention of the small studio furnace for

glassblowing, technology was surmounted, for a time, by the enthusiasm of the artist. Also, given the novelty of the phenomenon and the lack of technical specialized experience of the artist, creativity prevails on technique. A way of experimenting and exploring without prejudices defines the artist's attitude towards the material. The aesthetic and conceptual factor constitute also a plus in the glass work.

As experiment turns to experience, the artist progressively changes his attitude towards glass. The call for personnel with an advanced specialized training and the need to access new, more efficient technologies – access that is limited only financially - have occasionally tempered the direct experimental pursuit of the artist. This phenomenon is not limited to glass, but can be observed equally in the field of sculpture and graphics. The studio glass paradigm, that has defined the artistic approach to glass in the 20th century, has now gradually lost its relevance, and has become fragmented.

Without entailing a decline in the creative factor, the beginning of the 21th century has brought about a mutation in glass art, which is expressed by the shift of accent in the technique – technology – creativity scheme. New scientific and technical developments have progressively instated the dominion of the hyper-technologies paradigm. This situation has repercussions in the field of art, and in the recently artified domain of glass the technological paradigm is easily discernible.

The present research was conceived as a review of the territories recently occupied by the medium of glass on “the map” of contemporary art.

The underlying itinerary of the research aims at “mapping” three major aspects that represent in essence the intention expressed in the chapters of the present work. I have designated the three aspects as *the body*, *the imagination* and *the concept* of glass.

The *body* is, in the economy of my inquiry, related to the understanding and examination of the physical properties of glass explored in art. The *imagination* indicates the manifold valences that these properties have been actualized by artists throughout time. The *concept* defines the exploration of the conceptual potential of glass that contemporary art has stimulated.

My intention was guided by two major objectives. The first was, as we already stated, to create a portrait of the debut of glass on the scene of art, of what this debut meant, and of what it means today. The second objective was to identify on the “map”

thusly drawn of those methods and peaks that can be considered paradigmatic for the actual existence of the vitreous material in art.

What we noticed was the fine compatibility of this medium with the phenomenon of contemporary art, so much so that even in the glass art the limits seem diluted and the hierarchies start to dissipate. Anything, or almost anything, becomes possible.

What I have discovered in my research is fascinating making the journey one without regrets.

Maybe just one: that is was too short.

Chapter 1

THE ARTIFICATION OF GLASS

This first chapter brings into discussion the moment of the official insertion of glass on the scene of modern art. The debut was signaled by the building, at the beginning of the '60, of the first small studio furnace for glassblowing. Historical studies identify the actual trigger of this process in the establishment of the first workshop for modeling glass by ceramist Harvey Littleton. The workshop was situated in an unconventional space: a garage on the premises of the Toledo Art Museum. The novelty in our investigating this debut, its causes and repercussions consists in the analytical “lens” we use, i.e. using the concept of *artification*.

Artification is a concept that has only recently been circulated in Finnish aesthetics theory. According to Nathalia Heinich and Roberta Shapiro, two main promoters of this subject, it defines a complex process that results in the adoption and acknowledgement of practices formerly not associated with art and which were even discredited by it, as being capable of generating authentic works of art. The thorough sociological and cultural investigation accomplished by the research group lead by the two authors we mentioned, proves with strong and empirical arguments that this process has affected a multitude of phenomena, like painting, the print, handicraft, animation, graffiti, tribal art, raw art/ art brut, cult objects, the patrimony, photography, the cinema, the theater, the circus, the break-dance, fashion an jazz etc.

The mechanism of artification, as it revealed by the research gathered in the work *De l'artification. Enquêtes sur le passage à l'art*, coordinated by Nathalia Heinich and

Roberta Saphiro is indeed very complex and is comprised of a whole series of micro-processes. This motley constitution of artification recommends it for the title of *process of processes*. The main stages a practice must go through in the process of artification are, according to the promoters of this term: *dislocation, renaming, reclassification, institutional and organizational change, patronage, legal consolidation, individualization of work, dissemination and intellectualization*.

Covering all this stages of artification determines the acknowledgement and the ratification of the respective mediums as artistic practices and the confirmation of the items they generate as works of art.

There are many areas of social life that can be affected by the process of artification, but the regions most sensible to its influence are industry, handiwork, entertainment, sports, technique, science, religion, politics as well as the field of welfare and the delinquent behavior management.

Using the coordinates offered by the empirical data and the critical data registered throughout time by the literature specialized on the field of glass art, this chapter tries to identify the resemblances between the phenomenon of artification and the events that shaped the glass art domain in the second half of the 20th century. A comparative analysis of all the accessible data has allowed us to contextualize the debut of glass in art and to establish the significant synapses connecting that which took place in the world of glass with the social, artistic, cultural and aesthetic regions. The research of the arguments gathered during the documenting stage has lead us to place the current of studio glass under the paradigm of artification.

The description of the European and consecutively the Romanian partake of the studio glass movement is one of the objectives of this section of my work. The aim was to point out the resemblances and differences between the Romanian phenomenon of glass and its international, mainly European, manifestations.

By signaling the specificity of the development of this practice in Romania, we can better appreciate the scale of the cultural heritage represented by this domain, to which recent generations of Romanian glass artists owe their origin.

Chapter 2

CONTEMPORARY REFRACTIONS OF GLASS

Once the debut of glass as a material and a practice on the scene of art has been conceptualized, the second segment of the work has focused on researching the main developments in this medium after the studio moment.

I opted for bringing together these explorations under the title contemporary “refractions” because it brings to mind the phenomenon of refraction in glass along with the newest expansions in the glass art field. Refraction refers to the way in which light passing through the glass prism is decomposed in a variation of luminous fascicles of different colors. Similarly, our research in this chapter has sought to identify and analyze the main fascicles/paradigms/segments that the practice of glass develops by its intersecting the medium of art.

We have placed an emphasize on the most significant moments and the most representative artists of the period following the studio glass movement.

This itinerary offers us a better understanding of what we can today call glass art, and allows us to have a more comprehensive perspective on the current state of this medium in the context of today's competitive artistic environment.

Chapter 3

THE VOCABULARY OF GLASS

This step in our investigation is dedicated to documenting the body of aspects and phenomena that are correlated with glass, that through creative processing becomes an authentic expression force. Exploring the personality of this language and identifying the dominating elements in the vocabulary glass is what this section aims for.

In what follows qualities as transparency, reflexion, refraction, translucence, color, opaqueness, form, hardness and fragility are described *microscopically* and *macroscopically* so that their mechanism and the way they associate with glass art can be understood.

Chapter 4

THE EMERGENCE OF DEFECT IN ART

The next step in our research is the detailed analysis of what we have considered, in the *Argument* section, to be the conceptual aspect of glass, as it is reflected and actualized today. The investigation shows in the first place the origin in theory as well as practice of an evolution in art which focuses on the aesthetic and plastic exploration of the defect phenomenon.

The defect as subject and desired effect in itself is virtually inexistent in the total sum of historical manifestations of glass art. Defect as a subject was only considered a source of inspiration and an originality factor in the 20th century. Thus, this chapter was conceived as an antechamber to the investigative enterprise on defect in glass art.

The first part follows the identification and the placing in context of the earliest mentions of defect in the artistic theory of aesthetics. We have started with the analysis of the defect in relation to the circumscription of the subject of ugliness in aesthetics and art. The next step was to examine the manner in which the correlation defect – accident – innovation reveals less known aspects of the use and manipulation of defect in art by the interaction with science or industry.

Our second step was identifying the first and most significant discussions around defect in contemporary art, which is dominated by a paradigm of hyper-technology. In this sense, the examination has focused on a number of vectors like electronic art, respectively the digital art of error (*glitch art*) and the aesthetic the latter promotes, as well a discussion of the artistic project of the British-Indian artist Anish Kapoor entitled *Between shit and architecture*. Subsequently we fixed our attention on the manner in which the defect intersects the glass art and the conceptual element of modern artistic creation.

The case of Duchamp's *The Large Glass* is an important artistic landmark because it constitutes the official moment when the artistic gesture ratifies the emergence of defect in the work of art through the medium of material. The importance of acknowledging these moments and licensing them as active factors in the artistic conceptual realm constitutes a prime gesture, which entails decisive consequences in the reception and manipulation of glass.

Considering the works of contemporary artists who make increasing use of the conceptual and aesthetic effects and implications of the defect, not only in glass but equally in sculpture, fashion, graphic, textile, design etc., we think that a critical and aesthetic discussion on the role of the defect is pertinent. Thus, Defect must be taken actively into account along with beauty and ugliness.

Chapter 5

THE TYPOLOGY OF THE DEFECT IN GLASS

With the fifth stage of our research we go deeper into the problematisation we opened in the last chapter. We will accordingly explore that which is conventionally understood as the weak or *negative* side of the material. The index of defects that glass is prone to show will be examined, inventoried and analyzed in such a way as to allow for an authentic closeness to the vitreous material and for a better understating of the laws it is governed by. Some of the defects we identified and discussed at this stage are: *devitrification, impurities, air bubbles, fissures, tensions, burrs, nails* and many others.

Chapter 6

THE DEFECT AS EFFECT

The sixth stage of our research was conceived as an incursion into the universe of contemporary exploitation of the defect through the prism of the aesthetic effect and from the standpoint of the conceptual effect. In this sense, we chose as examples the most recent artistic exploitations of the defect in glass work. We follow the itinerary we have previously traced, the intention being that of revealing the way in which contemporary art manipulates and models the expressive potential of what is conventionally designated as scrap item or, in the best case, as physical weakness in the material.

The manifestation in glass of the above mentioned aspects is the more spectacular when this defects meet with other qualities that are characteristic to glass, thus offering a wider range of means of expression. Also, the chosen examples show the indisputable modernity of the medium of glass and certify it as a eminently contemporary material.

CONCLUSIONS

Glass is one of the factors that has constantly accompanied and stimulated the evolution of human knowledge. As such, the meeting between glass and art was unavoidable, because, to paraphrase Rudolf Arnheim, art is, as is the case with science, one of the two techniques or tools *that man has developed to transgress the mysterious interface of what appears as accidental*¹ and to better understand the nature of things.

But the path stretching from the discovery of glass to its acceptance by the artist, the art critic and the public, as a valid language of art was a tumultuous one. From skepticism to tolerance, from acceptance to patronage, from consideration to adoption, support and consolidation, from practice to the development of a discourse, these represent stages in the evolution of glass as an artistic medium.

One of the aims of this research was to analyze and contextualize the beginnings of studio glass from the perspective on a new aesthetic concept/process, that of artification. This has allowed us to affirm that the studio glass movement represents in its complexity an authentic process of artification which allowed for glass as a material, a medium and a domain to officially enter the world of Art. Surmounting the inaccessibility of glassblowing, this debut is marked by the indifference towards the utility of the object and the mastering of the skills or the productivity factor. The only guiding rule was the (aesthetic) fascination the artist experienced when working with the seductive material that is glass. In the new relation between glass and artist, abstraction and free experimentation with the material overshadowed, at first the complex techniques of crafting the glass object used in the artisanal and industrial context.

The studio glass movement had major repercussions for the perception of glass. As it became more and more obvious that glass has the potential to embody works of art many other artists adopted this material as their preponderant medium of expression, which led to an expansion of the domain, especially in the sector of art practice. Various forms of glass making that focused on creating art, started to developed.

¹ Rudolf Arnheim, "Accident and the necessity of Art", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (September, 1957) p. 19.

The paradigmatic research into the evolution of glass art allowed us to identify the major repercussion of the glass studio movement which have influenced the relation between artist and the vitreous material. Many of this repercussions crystallised into ampler paradigms that dictated the evolution pattern of glass art.

Another important aspect that we addressed was the way in which studio glass movement developed in Romania in comparison with the international current. The study revealed that the Romanian approach to the studio glass movement, though undoubtedly affected by the restriction of the communist regime, had a fresh and innovative air, managing to keep up with the international tendencies. At the same time, the history of the Romanian glass art experiences a gradual fallback caused by the closing down of many of the glass factories after 1990. The original enthusiasm had gradually diminished as a result of the unsustainable requirements (technical, financial and creative) of glass production that, without the support of an existing glass industry, fell exclusively on the resources of the artist. Many artists associated with one another to try to keep small workshops for glassblowing. The effort to use glass as an artistic medium was also halted by the skepticism of the critical apparatus and the ignorance of the public.

Investigating the evolution of this field after the studio glass movement and the emblematic developments that shaped the current state of this material, we noticed the high compatibility of this medium on the phenomenon of the contemporary art. The compatibility is so strong that even the inner hierarchical structure begins to yield, giving way to a plurality of manifestations. If in the first half of the '60 the wright of glass work to be called a form of art was often debated, in the more recent times there is a higher degree of flexibility due to the prevailing relativistic way of thinking.

Glass has, consequently, known an extraordinary level of proliferation in contemporary art being used along with other new mediums for the creation of large installations, in performances, in sculptural works or in land art installations. Glass is also richly used in architecture, photography, jewelery and several industries (weapons, utilities and telecommunications).

Moreover, in his search for original new ways of expression, the contemporary artist started to use more vitreous materials in his works, materials that do not primarily

have an artistic valence. One can thus find art works that use toughened glass, optical fiber, bioglass or a number of scrap or recycled items.

The up until recently unilateral exploration and promoting of the glass object, which was founded on utility, is now replaced by a multifaceted approach. This phenomenon is triggered first and foremost by the reevaluation of the relation that artists have with the novelty of glassblowing. The first symptom of this mutation is the new found understanding for the idea that glass is not synonymous with shininess, color or quiet transparency. The second symptom is the acknowledgement and investigation of the aesthetic potential of that which was conventionally considered a weakness in the material. And a last symptom is the exploitation or the aesthetic and conceptual manipulation of the defects in the material.

The large variety of vitreous materials and the great range of their properties, along with the manifold processing techniques all represent different masques of the same character: Glass.

Under the new paradigm of the defect, glass appears to us as more than a reflexion of society and of the individual today. It is glass that, through its contemporary manifestations in art, makes us reflect. This leads us to affirm that if up until now the vitreous material has proven its civilizing potential in industry and science, the new aesthetic of defect emphasizes the capacity of glass to stimulate, through art, self-knowledge in a process of introspection and extrospection.

Being at the end of our itinerary, we can now affirm that glass is one of the most unusual materials created by man and it could very well be the material with the most complex personality. In itself, glass has contradictory properties, but it also brings the possibility of a gradual actualisation and the beauty of limitless imaginative and ideational connections that no other material can provide.

The vocabulary of the qualities of glass developed over millenia has finally found its best expression in art. It is undoubtedly the artist, and more specifically the contemporary artist, who exposed the complexity and the coherence of the manifold expression values of glass that were beforehand in a latency state or only partially harnessed by decorative glass, science and industry.

When we look at the plurality of the artistic manifestations of glass, what we picture is not very different from the effort of holding water in the cupped hands – some of it will always trickle down between the fingers. The speed and the rhythm of the digitalized life we have today seems to offer, not only in art, the experience of leaving a remixed Heraclitean philosophy – everything flows, everything changes. But this chaotic rhythm also gives way to a natural selection that allows for those truly valuable artist and their works to bring about change as they envision it.

Technique and technology have always influenced the way in which human creativity has conjugated the materials on hand, and in the case of glass this idea is even more appropriate and, to some extent, self generated. The history of glass can be read from the perspective of an accent shift in the triad technique – technology – creativity. The three inseparable concepts form a sort of Ariadne's thread unraveling through the labyrinth of the manifestations of glass.

În the contemporary glass art the ascendancy is indisputable held by technology, whose progress have a strong impact not only on the relation of the artist and this material, but equally on the public reception of the art work. The encounter between this paradigm and the aesthetics of postmodernist philosophy allows us to imagine the future of glass in the field of art, and imagine art itself in the future.

