

University of Art and Design Cluj-Napoca

PhD Thesis

**From Don Quixote to Roşia Montană – the Personality and the
Creation of the Painter Ioan Sbârciu**

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ABSTRACT

The PhD thesis having the title “From Don Quixote to Roșia Montană – the Personality and the Creation of the Painter Ioan Sbârciu” wants to answer to a series of essential questions regarding Ioan Sbârciu the human being, the creator of a school and the artist. Both the painter’s individuality and creation being a work-in-progress, the historian’s work and endeavor to offer a complete and complex image does not lack difficulties, being hard to find a limit, where to end, at least, this period of Ioan Sbârciu’s evolution. The work is a research as well as an analysis, a monograph of the painter’s creation and life, a personality which has a lot to offer and whose creative energy is always new and fresh, fed by the every day life and by the existence close to his disciples.

The work *Lucrarea* “From Don Quixote to Roșia Montană – the Personality and the Creation of the Painter Ioan Sbârciu” is structured in 3 parts having an argument as a starting point and closing with the conclusions followed by the abstract in Romanian, the appendixes and the painter’s and author’s CVs. It also contains the bibliography. Each part is accompanied by a short video film, a study case, witnesses of the most recent exhibitions signed by Ioan Sbârciu and organized at Palatul Mogoșoaia (Bucharest, October 2006), Anaid Art Gallery (Bucharest, January 2007) and the Contemporary Art Gallery of the Brukenthal Museum (Sibiu, December 2007), this last exhibition being made together with a very dear friend, the German painter Markus Lüpertz.

The argument, which explains the reasons why I opted to analyze a living painter is followed by the chapter dedicated to Ioan Sbârciu’s life and personality – **Biographical Marks** (2). This first chapter’s subchapters: **The Beginnings: Feldru** (2.1.), **The Years of School: Bistrița** (2.2.), **The Years of Study and of Artistic Maturity: Cluj-Napoca** (2.3.), **Ioan Sbârciu Pedagogue Artist** (2.4.), **The Exhibitions** (2.5.), **Ioan Sbârciu the Head of the School** (2.6.) are, in fact, an extended CV, detailed and updated, trying to detect all the aspects of Ioan Sbârciu’s life and also to answer to a few questions like who is Ioan Sbârciu, where does he come from and from whom he inherited this overflowing energy which is characteristic to his work and personality,

what did he do and what he does nowadays, what does he represent to the University of Art and Design Cluj-Napoca.

Striking personality of the Romanian contemporary art, with a sustained activity both on the Romanian and international artistic stage, characterized by an overflowing creativity in painting and by multiple of ways of doing it, the painter Ioan Sbârciu was born on the 9th of April 1948 in Feldru the county of Bistrița-Năsăud, a beautiful village with diligent and faithful people.

“I believe immortality was born in the village” says the Romanian great poet Lucian Blaga, and the painter Ioan Sbârciu subscribes to this statement often coming back to the place where he was born, even if the child and the teenager were raised in the city, Bistrița becoming and 2nd and new home of the artist. He attended the primary and secondary school at Școala Generală nr. 1 from Bistrița, and he graduated from the Liceul nr. 1 “Liviu Rebreanu”, in the same town. Bistrița is a reference point in shaping the personality of the future painter.

The story of the painter’s career starts with a drawing showing horses, a piece of work he made at the age of 4. Impressed by little Ioan’s creation, his parents framed the drawing and put it on a wall, the child being praised and encouraged by a family friend to keep going in this direction. This was the moment that marked the artist’s destiny. He started working more and more, feeling attracted and passionate about painting.

At the end of the ’60’s, along with graduating the high-school, although he did not attend the classes of an art school and did not have a special training in the field of arts, Ioan Sbârciu entered, 1st on the list of candidates, the painting section of the “Ioan Andreescu” Institute of Fine Arts in Cluj (1969 – 1973). A new chapter starts in the painter Ioan Sbârciu’s life, creation and career, Cluj being the city where the artist meets the mature love, builds a family, works for the first time with the masters of the Romanian painting becoming their heir, builds up friendships and starts his career as a teacher at the Art School in Cluj and later, after the Revolution from ’89, as a professor at the Institute of Fine Arts which became the Academy of Fine Arts and then, in 2000, the University of Art and Design Cluj-Napoca.

Ioan Sbârciu’s initiation in painting was made in the presence of artists whom he respects and venerates: Radu Fulger, Victor Ciato, Abodi Nagy Bela, Toth Laszlo, Eugen

Gocan, Aurel Ciupe, Petru Feier and Petre Abrudan. A smaller or bigger influence over the evolution of Ioan Sbârciu's painting had also the great artists of the world such as Michelangelo, Rafael, Leonardo da Vinci but Egyptian art, ancient Greek art, the Renaissance, impressionism, Spanish art, abstract art, neo-expressionism and folk art, too.

After finishing his studies, Ioan Sbârciu was permanently preoccupied with the creation, with the improvement of his technique and with enriching his vision, looking for elements to inspire him and combining the creative activity with the teaching one. After a period of 16 years when the painter was a teacher at the Art School in Cluj and head of the decorative and fine arts department, in 1989 he became lecturer at the "Ioan Andreescu" Academy of Fine Arts in Cluj and three years later he obtained the title of reader of the same institution.

A special name and personality, Ioan Sbârciu explosively affirmed himself after 1990 a year when in his artistic trajectory important improvement periods and documentation travels appeared. In 1992 he got a scholarship in Spain, in Madrid and in Barcelona. The scholarship also offered the artist the chance to participate to the 1st art fair "Arco – Madrid" and to "Art Futura, an exhibition of video art and installation organized in Barcelona. For the painter Ioan Sbârciu, coming from the East European space, from Romania passing through a period of transition, these 2 events allowed him to get in touch with the Western art belonging to the last decade of the 20th century. They also gave him openings he did not think they would be possible couple of years before. Spain remained till today a country very close to the painter's soul, not only as an element of inspiration (the Don Quixote cycle), but also as a space where he always gladly returns feeling like home.

Painter by vocation, Ioan Sbârciu is nowadays professor, having a PhD in visual arts and chair of the University of Art and Design Cluj-Napoca. But his steps towards being the chair of the University followed a trajectory where he had several academic functions such as member of the Fine Arts Faculty's Council and of the "Ioan Andreescu" Academy of Fine Arts' Senat (since 1992), head of the painting-sculpture department within the "Ioan Andreescu" Academy of Fine Arts (1992), dean of the

Faculty of Fine Arts within the “Ioan Andreescu” Academy of Fine Arts Cluj-Napoca (1999 – 2000), rector of the University of Art and Design Cluj-Napoca (2000 – 2008).

For over 30 years, regardless the level education he was involved in, during the ours he spent with the pupils or with the students he always alternated creation with education. In his activity with the students from the University of Art and Design his preoccupation is the study of the field’s disciplines: the creative exploration in painting, the advanced exploration in painting, the composition in the easel painting, the study of the colour in the easel painting, the basics of composition and the visual language’s analysis, the study of drawing, the basics and study of drawing, sketches and chromatics.

Passionate painter, with an overflowing energy, continuously working in his studio, always inspired in what he is doing, his activity as an artist is characterized by a large number of solo or group exhibitions, all over Romania and abroad, his works, always appreciated and recognized as values by the critics and the public, being part of state or private collections in Romania, Germany, France, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Belgium, Greece, Italy, Spain, Hungary, Scotland, Poland, Japan, Canada, Argentina and The United States.

In his painting the artist from Cluj makes a synthesis of the existence’s principle, of the conscience’s light and of the universe’s mystery. Ioan Sbârciu combines in his creation knowledge, experiment and all the elements belonging to the conscience and subconscious.

Figurative, Ioan Sbârciu’s works present different worlds, real or imaginary, where the artist uses a rich chromatics in order to depict the beauty of the human being and the nature’s greatness.

In his work’s doing, the painter uses a wide range of techniques including acrylic on lined paper on canvas, mixed techniques on canvas or netex on canvas.

Personality whose fundamental qualities are the pleasure to paint, the on going work and energy, the desire to self-improve and to discover new ways of expression, Ioan Sbârciu organized a large number of solo and group exhibitions both in Romania and abroad.

Between 1975 and 2009, the painter from Cluj organized over 30 solo exhibitions both in Romanian galleries and museums.

Among these, **The Mystery of Friendship / Misterul prieteniei** was made at the Art Museum Cluj together with the renowned German painter Markus Lüpertz (2005), **Sbârciu/Painting/2006 / Sbârciu/Pictură/2006** – marked the painter's 1st solo exhibition in Bucharest at the Centrul Cultural Palatele Brâncovenești – Mogoșoaia (2006), **The Forrest of Ashes / Pădurea de cenușă** was organized in Bucharest at Anaid Art Gallery in 2007 and at the end of the same year Ioan Sbârciu teamed up again with his dear and close friend Markus Lüpertz for the exhibition **Landschaft, Mensch und Ding. Der Kunst die Regeln geben** organized in the contemporary art gallery within Brukenthal Museum in Sibiu as part of the Sibiu European cultural capital's agenda. The year 2009 brought an event-exhibition into the painter's career. He presented his works at the Art Museum Cluj together with Tarohei Nakagawa, a Japanese calligrapher master. The exhibition was entitled **Syo/Workshop / Syo/Atelier**.

The exhibition **The Mystery of Friendship** from The Art Museum Cluj-Napoca consisted of 2 works of art belonging to 2 highly important artistic personalities within the contemporary art realm: Markus Lüpertz, world renowned painter, one of the most important representatives of the contemporary art, rector of the Art Academy in Düsseldorf, Germany and Ioan Sbârciu, striking personality of the Romanian contemporary art, at that time rector of the University of Art and Design Cluj-Napoca.

The exhibition was also a premiere, the German artist showing his art for the 1st time in Romania. The dialogue between the two personalities was perceived as a very important event for the Romanian contemporary art. Result of the friendship between two contemporary artistic personalities, the exhibition showed the mystery of the dialogue and communication within the open perimeter of the contemporary existence.

Awaited for too long, a new premiere of the artist, this time within the Romanian capital city's artistic space, took place at Centrul Cultural Palatele Brâncovenești – Mogoșoaia. The exhibition **Sbârciu/Painting/2006** showed the art lovers from Bucharest a very pleasant surprise, both by underlining the painter's international artistic activity and by the special conception of presenting the works.

The space of the Brâncovenesc Palace was also invested with an air of modernity, being subordinated to the works' beauty and expressivity. This exhibition showed a series of works belonging to cycles which the artist made over the past few years. Among them:

Europe's Kidnapping / Răpirea Europei, Knight / Cavaler, The Forrest of Ashes / Pădurea de cenușă, Transylvanian Landscapes / Nocturne – peisaje transilvane, Corpus or Roșia Montană. The selection proposed to the public gave him the possibility to get in touch with a creation whose thematic and stylistic complexity is impressive and proves to be coherent from a conceptual point of view and which bears a significant visual force.

Given the painter's exceptional artistic power, his prestige and most of all the quality of the works shown to the public, the event-exhibition **Sbârciu/Painting/2006** from Mogoșoaia represented one of the key moments of the Romanian agenda of exhibitions in 2006.

The Forrest of Ashes is a more recent project made by Ioan Sbârciu and consists of works having as a starting point the social, political, economical and media phenomenon which is Roșia Montană. The drama of the human being and of nature within the context of has already been developed in a series of works called „Roșia Montană”. The pure gesture, contoured within the big dimension works depicts the Transylvanian landscape through a balanced swing between abstract and figurative. The landscape, as a pictorial style, is re-interpreted within the re-iteration of the visual sign by the demonstration of the lyricism's force and of the technique's vigor.

The end of the year 2007 a marked a new artistic meeting of the two renowned artists Markus Lüpertz and Ioan Sbârciu within the frame of the exhibition entitled **Landschaft, Mensch und Ding. Der Kunst die Regeln geben – Landscape, Human being and Work. The Art Setting the Rules** from Sibiu. The exhibition was part of the project called „Contemporary Exhibiting” / Sibiu 2007, European Cultural Capital and closed the events calendar at the Contemporary Art Gallery within the Brukenthal Museum. If the 1st exhibition of the two artists consisted of only 2 works, this time Markus Lüpertz presented 40 drawings and Ioan Sbârciu surprised the public with a series of totally new works dedicated to the female nude, a less frequent thematic in the painter's creation.

The fall of 2009 gave Ioan Sbârciu the opportunity to meet a new personality and establish a new friendship with the Japanese artist Tarohei Nakagawa. Beyond words, Tarohei Nakagawa and Ioan Sbârciu met on the magical field of creation through an

exhibition which marked the opening of the 8th edition of the Fall Academy Europa Artium, a traditional event organized annually by the University of Art and Design Cluj-Napoca.

Having a simple title „**Syo/Atelier – Syo/Workshop**”, but complex due to its significance, the exhibition give the public the opportunity to get in touch with the works of the two artists, two separate worlds, the Central Europe and the Far East, united in a dialogue of the vertical and horizontal, of the white and black. The exhibition, an absolute premiere in Romania and even in Europe, the Japanese artist finding himself for the 1st time in this part of the world, impressed the public by its simplicity and beauty, by the way the master calligrapher’s works completed the ones made by Ioan Sbârciu. „**Syo/Atelier – Syo/Workshop**” “spoke” exclusively using the visual language brought back to its essences, having as core the abstract of the Japanese calligraphy and of Ioan Sbârciu’s works as well.

These solo exhibitions in Romania are interwoven with the ones organized abroad. Among these the exhibition „**Toscana Transilvania**” rebuilt in painting two poles of the space and brought to the public’s attention two spaces the painter is very found about.

The solo exhibitions are completed by the big number of group exhibitions the painter took part in both in Romania and abroad. One of the most important group exhibitions of his career was „**Plus Zwei. Artă contemporană din Bulgaria și România / Plus Zwei. Contemporary Art from Bulgaria and Romania**” organized in 2007 at the Küppersmühle für Moderne Kunst Museum in Duisburg. Being also one of the most important presence of the Romanian contemporary art in Germany, the exhibition was kept open for the public throughout the summer of 2007. The summer of 2008 gave the painter from Cluj the opportunity to be, together with his younger colleagues from the Painting School of Cluj, part of another significant group exhibition made in one of the most important contemporary art centers in this part of the world - MODEM Debrecen (Hungary).

The exhibition “**Under Natural Circumstances**” consisted of the works of 10 of the most interesting and convincing contemporary Romanian artists which, with one exception, are living, working or having close relationships with Transylvania as a

powerful center of Romanian contemporary art. The exhibition from MODEM Debrecen gave the Hungarian public the opportunity to see a significant selection of works which contributed to the development of the Transylvanian artistic life and of the Romanian visual art's production.

Another group exhibition the painter is very proud of was the international one called MOSS, initially opened in Bilbao (Leioa Gallery, December 2008), then in London (Lethaby Gallery, August 2009) and finally at the Casa Matei Gallery in Cluj-Napoca (November 2009). Ioan Sbârciu presented his works along with those made by his former students, nowadays young colleagues within the painting department, representatives for the Painting School of Cluj. The exhibition was part of a larger project developed together with Universidad del Pais Vasco, Bilbao and University of the Arts London, Central Saint-Martins School of Arts, institutions with whom The University of Art and Design Cluj-Napoca initiated and sustains international relations and important exchanges for the students' preparation.

Ioan Sbârciu's professional personality subsumes both the artist's impressive activity and the academic one belonging to the professor. Between 2000-2008 he has been the rector of The University of Art and Design Cluj-Napoca and today he is the president of the same institution.

A rare a happy case, Ioan Sbârciu managed to maintain a standard of impeccable professionalism in all the fields of his activity. The positive and significant impact he had on the generations of students can be seen in their careers development, most of them being now recognized names of the young Romanian art.

The summer of 2008 marked an important moment in the artist's and professor's life, Ioan Sbârciu being given the Doctor Honoris Causa title of the „Ovidius” University in Constanța. The new title came as a recognition of the artist's and professor's merits in sustaining and promoting the Romanian contemporary art as well as in the formation of the new generations of Romanian painters through the Painting School of Cluj.

The next chapter of the thesis, **3 – Bibliographical Marks. National and International Context – about Ioan Sbârciu the Painter in Q and A's**, wants to build the painter's image and to discover his personality using as a tool the interview, a series of interviews being made with persons very close to the artist, either family members or

fellow artists, critics and friends. A short introduction is followed by the 1st interview made with Maria Sbârciu, the artist's mother (**3.2. Motherhood as a Profession**). Being over 70 years old, the painter's mother recalls several important moments from Ioan Sbârciu's childhood or teenage times, such as the first drawings and the Cluj professors' praises. The subchapter **3.3. "Ionică – My Mentor"** presents a Q and A meeting with the painter's youngest sister, Doina Sbârciu Lucanu, an artist and a professor as well at the National Art University in Bucharest. The perspective is here given by the little sister, passionate about art and who had the pleasure to be initiated in the visual arts by Ioan Sbârciu himself. In the interview, Doina Sbârciu Lucanu talks about all the "faces" of the painter's personality trying to give an explanation to this overflowing energy and creativity which are specific for Ioan Sbârciu. The art critic and curator Liviana Dan, whom organized a series of important exhibitions with Ioan Sbârciu's works, among them the ones from 2007 at MKM Duisburg (Germany) and at the Contemporary Art Gallery within the Brukenthal Museum, talks about the special relationship between Markus Lüpertz and Ioan Sbârciu, a relationship that crosses all the geographic and linguistic barriers, entering the mysterious space of art (**3.4. „... when you know how to work with the young artist, you automatically become more powerful"**). Dan Hăulică, member of the Romanian Academy, an older collaborator of the Artist, speaks about **The Mysterious Rhythms of the Artist (3.5.)** in an attempt to explain why Ioan Sbârciu does not present his works too often in museums or art galleries. For Marcel Lupșe, fellow artist and citizen from the artist's home town (Marcel Lupșe lives and works in Bistrița) „**Ioan Sbârciu Is Made of a Special Leaven"**(**3.6.**). Old friend of the artist, the painter Marcel Lupșe recalls in his interview both the elements regarding the artist's personality, such as the harmonious joint between the artist's, professor's and manager's work and the elements which help drawing a general view of his creation, talking about the works Ioan Sbârciu made during the '90s and about his relationship with Markus Lüpertz. "**...an iron hand in a velvet glove"** (**3.7.**) is the phrase PhD professor Mihai Mănescu, dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts within the National University of Art Bucharest, chooses to describe the painter Ioan Sbârciu. At the end of the interview PhD professor. Mihai Mănescu underlines the quality of model, in a classical sense of the word, which the artist bears in relation to his students. On another hand the

art critic Mircea Oliv, also a very close friend from Bistrița, looks at Ioan Sbârciu, “**...from the perspective of the German Neo-expressionism**” (3.8.). Adrian Popescu, poet from Cluj, chooses to situate „**Ioan Sbârciu in Modernity**” (3.9.). And because this part of the thesis could not be ended without taking the students and young colleagues pulse, the last subchapter **3.10. – Young Generations** is developed using their opinions and ideas about their professor.

The last chapter of the thesis **4. The Creation’s Universe** talks about the painter’s works, about the topics and motifs he is found of, about some of the exhibitions that marked his artistic career. The subchapters **4.1. Postmodernism – an overview** and **4.2. Romanian Postmodernism – The Generation of the ’80s**”, which try to give an overview of the atmosphere specific to the period when Ioan Sbârciu started his career as a painter are followed by **4.3. Themes and Motifs in Ioan Sbârciu’s Creation. Cycles of Works**. The presentation of the subjects the painter is interested in is made in the following subchapters **1973 – 1989 (4.3.2.)**, **1990 – 2000 (4.3.3.)** and **The Artistic Present (4.3.4.)**, an attempt of the PhD researcher to set some stages in the artist’s apinting based on the evolution of the themes and motifs. The subchapter preceding the stages’ presentation - **4.3.1. Introduction** – sketches the specific frame within Ioan Sbârciu manifests himself.

Having the youth, the talent and the teachings of his masters on his side, the young graduate Ioan Sbârciu starts his career as a professional artist and teacher in 1973, trying to melt into his works the tradition of the Transylvanian art and to overlap it with the new tendencies such as post-modernism and neo-expressionism. Already in his first works, from which the paintings from the series *Children and Youth*, *Self-portrait*, *Still landscape* and *Recomposed landscape* (see board XX), the powerful painter can be seen, as well as the artist which will astonish his fellow artists and the public with always new and fresh works, totally personal, where nature is nor copied but recomposed according to the artist’s vision and imagination.

The stage of creation between 1990 – 2000 is dominated by a series of themes and motifs constituting a sort of “hard core” of Ioan Sbârciu’s maturity works – Don Quixote, the sword, the labyrinth, the bird – and also by a series of searches conducting him towards the installation area, such as the exhibitions „Întoarcerea în labirint / Return to

the Labyrinth” (1994), „Realitatea secundă / Second reality” (1998) and „Corpus” (2002). This is the period when Don Quixote becomes the Transylvanian Knight, an alter-ego of the painter, joining other complex and diverse motifs such as the labyrinth, the snake, the time, the road, the stairs, the column, the temple, all of them elements of an initiatory approach. Another motif the painter is found of is the one of the bird, either small, delicate birds of powerful eagles, signs of the creative force being present in his works.

The artistic present marks the artist’s entrance into a period dominated by the new figurative art, where the motifs may have a social load as well, such the series called The Black Sun which can be identified with Roşia Montană.

Inquisitive spirit, Ioan Sbârciu could not stay far from the 21st century’s tendencies in the contemporary art, “flirting” with the installation through the exhibition „Corpus” organized at the Casa Radio Gallery. Corpus also represents a subject that fascinated the artist from Cluj, the result of his searches being a series of works where Ioan Sbârciu exploited the paper’s, and not the colours, materiality.

The works from the series Corpus want to visually reproduce the connection between the Universe and the individual world, between microcosm and macrocosm. According to the painter the human being is a microcosm, the perfect image of the Universe.

The works were conceived in order to give the viewer the capacity of own interpretation. The technique the painter used was the mixed one, acrylic and oil on canvas.

The works from the series Corpus are closely followed in 2006 by the ones belonging to the series „Traces”, first of these works being presented in the exhibition from Mogoşoaia in the fall of 2006.

Another series made during the 1st decade of the 21st century is the one having as a central motif the black sun drawn on the background of a dramatic situation – Roşia Montana. Using an artistic weapon in order to preserve the environment, the painter Ioan Sbârciu pulls an alarm signal regarding the way nature is destructed and the way a the beauty of a space such as Roşia Montana is gone the moment the mining project of the gold’s exploitation is put into practice.

With the series *Atelier / Workshop* Ioan Sbârciu allows the viewer to cross over the final image and enter the special perimeter of the workshop where the creation is done, both the visual and the human one, and I am thinking here about the master's disciples, also present in the paintings. By these works the painter demonstrates that he is a master of both traditional and modern techniques and he is using them skillfully in order to obtain the wanted result.

Situated at the limit between figurative and abstract, Ioan Sbârciu's landscapes emit calm and the joy of living. His landscapes are inspired either by the Transylvanian forest or by the Tuscan one or are simply coming from the painter's imagination.

Another motif the painter is interested in is the one of the forest. In creating the paintings of this series the painter uses diverse techniques and refined colours, from deep browns and ocher, to light colours and white, suggesting the sun light between the branches.

Always willing to be fresh and new in everything he does, Ioan Sbârciu astonished the public in 2007, when, in the exhibition from the Contemporary Art Gallery within the Brukenthal Museum, he presented, together with Markus Lüpertz' works, a new series of paintings having a less usual subject for the artist – the feminine nude. In his case the nude is a poetic day dream, musical, made with the help of the colours. Considered by the painter himself elaborate sketches, Ioan Sbârciu manages to realize with this paintings and drawings a connection between the landscape and the human figure, his women / nudes in the clouds being integrated in the nature.

A world opens to the viewer who chooses to enter Ioan Sbârciu's works, a world where the inspiration from the Greek mythology and the universal literature coexists with original elements coming from the artist's mind and talent, the painter himself having a personal approach regarding the environment and all the worries of the 20th and 21st century. Ioan Sbârciu's wish of being "trendy" mobilizes unsuspected energies. He manages to find new visual motifs and to use unusual visual structures in order to visually point out his ideas over the existence and the world.