

My retrospective exhibition curated by Madalina Ionescu at the **National Museum of Contemporary Art** in Bucharest. Exhibition design by architect Attila KIM.

Madalina Ionescu: Márta Jakobovits. Part of the road travelled

The Márta Jakobovits retrospective continues the MNAC series of monographic exhibitions focusing on artists most representative for the last five decades in the Romanian arts. It also marks the beginning of a concentrated research on practices or media that outline important directions in the Romanian art. One of these studies focuses on the applied arts, on the arts of fire and the Romanian school of ceramics – acknowledged in Europe and internationally but which has, at a first glance and mainly due to a decrease in state funds, took a step outside of the spotlight. The Romanian ceramic arts, together with all of the decorative arts have occupied a privileged position, especially from the late 60s to the late 80s, as they played an essential part in the opening towards the formal and technological experiment, by the means of recovering and revaluing visual means of expression, language and an entire array of cultural references. In the last decade however we witness in Romania a reconsideration of the decorative arts – internationally already they have secured a central place in both museums and biennials, a phenomenon doubled by an increased extension in various media and practices of specific techniques such as casting and modeling, weaving, sewing and embroidery.

Innovation, increasingly flexible boundaries between media and practices such as installations and actions are central to the artistic and pedagogical practices of the generation of professors – Mircea Spătaru and Ana Lupaş - which formed Marta Jakobovits and her colleagues – among which artists Eugenia Pop and Elena Tulcan, to name just a few. Therefore, even from the early beginning, her practice – which later was also doubled by an important teaching activity – has been defined by the opening towards formal experiment and interdisciplinarity, on the one hand, and by an exploration of the innate connection between material, culture and identity, on the other.

The exhibition which is at the same time an environment – installation and a presentation, for most of its part chronological, of the main stages and directions in her practice, showcases artworks from the earliest terracotta series from the 60s and 70s all the way to the newest pieces, exhibited now for the first time. The earliest works are from the 60s and 70s series of terracotta silhouettes – characters such as the Story-tellers, the Puppeteer and the Groups, all belonging to a rural universe that is at the same time autobiographical and generic – a daily reality that communicates directly with an archaic traditional fund. They are followed by the series of Fantastic Animals, Snake Idols, Kings and Queens and Mythological Figures, artworks from the

70s and 80s in which she explores this fantastic narrative articulated from overlapping layers of history, mythology and legends. From the late 80s and in the 90s she starts to work with open, ongoing series, such as Raku, Mimesis, Interactions, Offerings and Crops, and in the 2000s and recent years she focuses on the interactions with the landscape and on themes such as the journey and the ascension – in the series of Coordinates, Hills, Mountains, Pseudo-stones, White Stones, The White Road, The Great Circle, The Turquoise Pilgrimage and the series that named the exhibition – Part of the road travelled, to name just a few of her major works. One constant interest was, throughout her creation, the various ways in which the ceramic object can maintain / rediscover / revalue its quality of container: in series of utilitarian objects and also as a less obvious dimension of the elements in her works, who silently double as vessels, boxes, drawers and shelves.

Her oeuvre is one of the most complex, complete and applied researches on ceramic techniques, on modeling, casting and baking, from traditional materials and procedures which she rediscovers and reinterprets to experiments with the chemistry, baking temperatures and limitations of certain processes. One very important part of the exhibition is the series of Drawers with Test and the Library of Engobes, ensembles which are at the same time artworks and solutions for the storage of her countless experiments with glazes, engobes, firing times, reductions and various materials. She experiments with the particularities of ceramic paste, such as thixotropy, the time-dependant viscosity of porcelain, with various combinations of mineral powders and pigments and their infinite textures and chromatic subtleties, and she frequently extends her research on manual paper techniques and on practices such as installations, interventions and environments. This thorough study on the materials is paralleled by an observation / consideration of matter in its acceptations as receptacle of both content and the artistic will. These are two of the premises in her practice, centered on themes related to the birth and development of form, sign and symbolic charge. The origin and evolution of the visual sign is therefore always found in the dynamic between matter itself, with its particularities, the artistic intervention and a universal vocabulary of representation. From the recovery of an archaic, traditional and mythological fund and all the way the discovery and affirmation of the connection between the natural and the spiritual, her work explores a dimension of the sacred which not only cancels any contradiction with the material but becomes operational only in its indissoluble tie with the substance. Series of works often initiated over 30 years ago are still ongoing, and are in a continuous reconfiguration. Her ensembles describe various trajectories, pathways that continue in logical successions of steps or close back upon themselves, roads that are open or reveal the stages of a growth that projects a different finality. Evolution, continuity, journey, ascension are themes central to her permanent exploration of the potential of ceramics – a material which contains the poetics of both malleability and hardness (and the dynamic processed in-between) and of a beauty which is intrinsic to matter, the images from inside of the substance.