



## Art Talk with Ciprian Muresan

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Ciprian Muresan. Photo courtesy of the artist.

**"I find inspiration in the fact that I can change a screw or a detail in an already established work of art, which could enrich it with new, updated meanings." Ciprian Muresan**

In anticipation of the next *NEA Arts*, which focuses on international artists and art projects, we're taking a look at international artists here on *Art Works*. We kicked off the series with South African theater artist Thoko Ntshinga. Today, we're visiting with Romanian visual artist Ciprian Muresan, a graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts in Cluj-Napoca.

Muresan came of age under Communist rule, and is among a group of young artists who are slowly but surely reclaiming and expanding Romania's artistic identity. Based in Cluj, Romania's second most populated city, Muresan works in a variety of media--including video, drawing, and photography--and his work is often in direct conversation with the works of other artists. Take, for example, his obsessive take on Martin Kippenberger's 1994 installation *The Happy End of Franz Kafka's 'America'*, which Muresan recreated as 120 graphite drawings. Muresan himself describes his art practice as one that "explores, salvages, and re-contextualizes historical, social and cultural (literary and/or artistic) references in order to unveil the complexity of everyday life and the conditions of viewing history." He is also the editor of *IDEA Art + Society*, a magazine that showcases new works by artists. In the U.S., Muresan's work is in the collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and he has shown at the Nicodim Gallery in Los Angeles, and the David Nolan Gallery in New York. He has also shown widely across Europe, including appearances at the Venice and Prague Biennales. We spoke with the multi-tasking artist via e-mail about his art practice, what inspiration means, and the importance of collaboration.

**NEA: What do you remember as your earliest experience of engaging with the arts?**

CIPRIAN MURESAN: My first experience goes back to soon after 1989, when I was in high school, when while watching the national television I saw a short film in which a lady with a white mask on her face was eating a plate full of soil. I thought that was rather weird and I was wondering if it's for real or whether she's faking it. The image stayed deeply carved into my mind and only after a few years I found out it was Geta Brătescu and that her performance was called *Earthcake* (1992). By chance, it was television that certified the existence of performance as an art form, despite the fact that until the 2000's, "alternative" media such as video or performance were regarded in a rather reserved manner by the Cluj academic scene.

**NEA: What was your journey to becoming a visual artist?**

MURESAN: I graduated the art high school and the art academy in Cluj, the city where I live most of the time. After graduating, I tried to survive through different jobs unconnected to arts. But at some point, together with friends we started to collaborate in various artists' groups, initiated some exhibitions and common projects, and in 2004 I started to work on my own, once in a while collaborating with various artists from different fields, such as theater, photography, architecture.

**NEA: How would you describe your art practice? What question--or questions--do you explore in your work?**

MURESAN: My practice is pretty dynamic; lately I oscillate between different questions. I can describe my work as a paradox between searching and enjoying what I am doing, which seems like an easy way, but aiming to do things that seem absurd and hard to put into practice, senseless at first and challenging. But maybe this is an inappropriate generalization.

**NEA: We just did an issue of the *NEA Arts* magazine on inspiration. How would you define inspiration?**

MURESAN: I like to think that artworks are somehow open, and you can take them as raw material, at a symbolical level, not the objects as such, meaning that I find inspiration in the fact that I can change a screw or a detail in an already established work of art, which could enrich it with new, updated meanings.

**NEA: You work across media--video, drawing, sculpture. Can you please talk about the relationship between the story you're trying to tell and the medium you use?**

MURESAN: I choose the medium that best suits the idea I aim to develop; that's how I ended up working sometimes even with theater. Usually when I [have not mastered] a certain medium, I choose to collaborate with different experts in the field. For example, I noticed that usually puppeteers are dressed in black head-to-toe in order to mingle with the background and make the puppets seem to be acting on their own, and not manipulated. So for one of my works I thought to stage a puppet theater in which puppets and puppeteers would be at the same level of visibility and importance, to change the convention. [But I didn't want to] make everything visible, but rather hidden. So I worked with completely black puppets, that would also mingle with the puppeteers. Obviously, in this case the best medium was theater, so I collaborated with a playwright (Saviana Stănescu) and a professional puppet company.

**NEA: Do you think your work is perceived/received differently at home in Romania as opposed to in the U.S.? If so, in what ways?**

MURESAN: Yes and no. Sometimes I feel that in Romania the public is looking for craftsmanship in certain media, such as video or photography, something that has to do with technical [mastery],

which for the international public is not so relevant. I feel like outside of the country, the public perceives the message as more important.

But anyway, I don't [distinguish] between the two types of public and my works are born in the context where I live, therefore [they are] first addressed to the Romanian public. Many videos that I made are in the Romanian language, for example. The work I made that refers to Catellan (in which I [switched] the Catholic Pope with the Romanian Patriarch) is precisely a questioning of this topic... it is a sort of a translation of a work in the Romanian context. Of course, this translation brings along a lot of interpretation changes, something that interests me a lot.

**NEA: In a 2011 interview with *Artnet*, you said, "There was no institution or place for art in Romania." How has that changed, or how is it changing? What are the barriers/challenges to creating a place for art in Romania?**

MURESAN: At that moment, I was referring to the fact that there were no institutions for contemporary arts through a very difficult period, of the beginning of 2000's. There are a few institutions that started to appear, but mostly private ones. Since 2006, in Bucharest there is the National Museum for Contemporary Arts, which for the last two to three years also holds another space [called] Salonul de Proiecte [which is] dedicated to production and experiment and open to young artists. But in Cluj where I live, there are only a few private independent institutions, some non-profit (The Paintbrush Factory, tranzit.ro) [and some] commercial (Plan B Gallery, Sabot Gallery).

**NEA: You are an editor for the magazine *IDEA Art + Society*. How is the magazine part of your art practice?**

MURESAN: For me this is a good exercise. What I do for the magazine is to invite artists to produce works for the magazine and write a text to introduce their work. Writing this text is always, for me, a resetting of my own artistic thinking, trying to mold on the creative laboratory produced by another artist.

**NEA: Who are some artists who have influenced your work, and in what ways?**

MURESAN: I have many favourite artists, that I take as an example. Among them, there is Bas Jan Ader, Chris Burden, Elaine Sturtevant, but also many Romanian artists such as Alexandru Antik, Miklos Onucsan, and Denes Miklosi, and artists of my generation such as the Czech artist Jiri Skala. But I couldn't necessarily say in what way precisely they influenced me, though each in a different way did that.