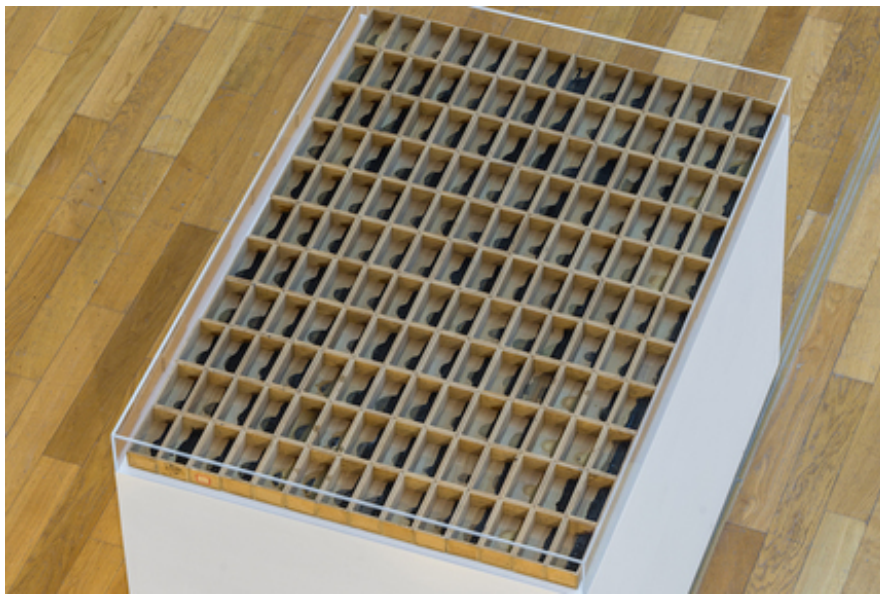


ARTFORUM

Ion Bitzan

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Ion Bitzan, *Image Generator*, 1972, 120 boxes, wood, wax, ink, 3 x 1 1/7 x 1/2”.

Aside from painting commissions under the approval of Romania's Communist Party, Ion Bitzan independently created objects, installations, drawings, maps, books, and manuscripts. His oeuvre, made up of nearly a thousand works, could be called social realist, but also minimalist, conceptualist, functionalist, gestural, and abstract. After post-Communist years dominated by a Romanian discourse of resentment concerning art sanctioned by the Communist Party—a discourse devoid of any real criticality—now comes a moment when art historians and curators are beginning to rediscover a mass of artworks hidden in museum depots.

This exhibition displays only a fragment of Bitzan's output, often juxtaposing the artist's so-called official art with his experimental work. This decision risks locking Bitzan's works into a binary of good and evil. Better to consider their aesthetic qualities, how their surfaces are often barely sketched, as in

Compoziție cu Nicolae Ceaușescu, 1986, a portrait of the titular dictator looking stunned and unnatural, the brushstrokes giving an impression of forceful incompleteness. Rauschenberg and Pop art are discreetly present. When the subject matter was imposed upon him, Bitzan disclosed exceptional irony while generating his own method. It was authorization that allowed him an extended degree of technical freedom and modernity, while the neo-avant-garde Bitzan was in an unstoppable, fervent search for new mediums and affinities. This is evidenced by Image Generator, 1972, which consists of one hundred and twenty wooden boxes containing wax. The installation, in addition to resembling an abandoned hive, demonstrates the severe and playful commitment to deconstruction that drove much of the artist's work, both official and independent.