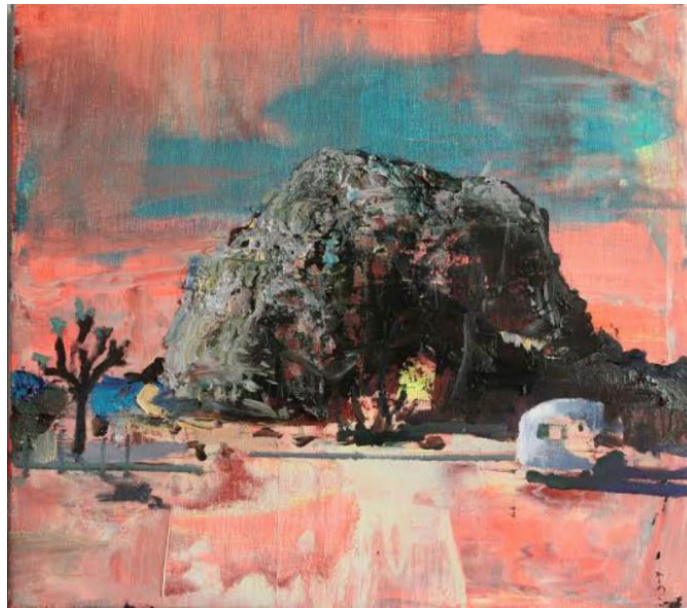




Romania's 10 Contemporary Artists and Where to Find Them

by Rich Francis

January 2017



Marius Bercea, *The Flame of the Little Match Girl*, 2013. © Marius Bercea, Photo Credit: Peter Mallet, 2014. Courtesy Blain Southern Gallery.

The last two decades have seen a real renaissance take place in Romanian contemporary art, with the country's major figures in sculpture, portraiture and painting emerging on to the global avant-garde scene. This selection of ten of the country's great contemporary artists and where to find them should serve as a suitable introduction for those eager to see what all the fuss is about.

Marius Bercea | Blain Southern Gallery

Born in 1979, Marius Bercea now represents one of the most distinctive figures of the so-called Cluj School. His kaleidoscopically colourful pieces can be seen in the context of a changing Romania, throwing up a curious mishmash of impressionist, Dadaist, and avant-garde styles that encapsulates the contemporary interfacing of various divergent ideologies, often intermingles the sublime and the grimy, and even amalgamates different topographies from across the globe. Take his 2011 oil work, *Truths With Multiple Masks*, where the individual outlines of faceless humans are adrift in a sea of concrete monstrosities and maligned urban constructions, or his 2014 piece, *Suspended Animation*, which psychedelically fuses the geographical domains of Transylvania and California.

See *Marius Bercea's* work at the *Blain Southern Gallery*, 4 Hanover Square, London W1S 1BP, UK, +44 20 7493 4492

Adrian Ghenie | Plan B Gallery

Moving between Romania's artistic and cultural capital Cluj-Napoca and his studio amidst the burgeoning bohemian districts of north Berlin, Adrian Ghenie is now one of the most established figures in the country's line-up of contemporary artists. Since graduating from Cluj's prestigious

University of Art and Design in 2001, Ghenie has produced prolifically, featuring in exhibitions as far afield as Venice, Liverpool, Los Angeles and San Francisco. His works display a raw and visceral style that does well to disconcert the viewer with a cacophony of displaced lines, blurs, faceless figures and Kafkaesque portraiture. Many have been noted for their overtly clandestine political feel, which has in turn been linked to Ghenie's own childhood experience of Romania behind the Iron Curtain.

See Adrian Ghenie's work at the Plan B Gallery, The Paintbrush Factory, Henri Barbusse 59–61, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, +40 740 658555

Alexandra Croitoru | Plan B Gallery

The photographer Alexandra Croitoru was born in Bucharest in 1975 and graduated from the National Academy of Arts in 1998. She has since exhibited work in solo presentations in Copenhagen, Prague, Berlin and Vienna, and showcased pieces at the Biennial of Contemporary Visual Arts by Balkan Female Artists in Sofia, in 2003. Her work moves to challenge the traditional gender roles and prejudices towards women, focussing largely on the rendering of the feminine in the discourses of fashion and style.

See Alexandra Croitoru's work at the Plan B Gallery, The Paintbrush Factory, Henri Barbusse 59–61, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, +40 740 658555

Ciprian Mureşan | Extra City Kunsthall

Ciprian Mureşan was born in Romania in 1977 and studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Cluj-Napoca, which he completed in 2000. Today he's a senior editor of the IDEA art + society periodical and has exhibited in New York, London and at a number of Biennales, from Venice to Sydney. His work is highly politicised and takes a bold approach to examining the void between the communist and capitalist ideologies. He is particularly famous for his 2004 piece 'Leap into the void – after three seconds' and his multimedia work 'Choose' (2005), which critiques the dominance of free market ideals.

See Ciprian Mureşan's work at the Extra City Kunsthall, Eikelstraat 31, Antwerpen–Berchem, Belgium, +32 3677 1655

Cristi Pogacean | Plan B Gallery Berlin

Criticising the divide between modernism and post-modernism and deconstructing the political status quo at every turn, the work of Cristi Pogacean has moved to question accepted ideas of authorship, power, belief and knowledge. Many critics have noted his proletarian style of creation, citing works like his 2006 piece, 'The Abduction from the Seraglio'—a profound depiction of Romanian journalists after being captured by extremist forces in Iraq, made curiously ironic by the chosen medium of woven carpet. Others have looked to his startling 'Obelisk' from the 2007 Venice Biennale, which transforms that most classic of authoritarian monoliths into nothing more than an elaborate birdhouse.

See Cristi Pogacean's work at the Plan B Gallery, Potsdamer Strasse 77 – 87, Building G, Second Backyard, Berlin, Germany, +49 30 39 80 52 36

Mircea Cantor | Walker Art Centre

Boasting award-winning works in the divergent mediums of dance, film, sculpture, painting and installation art, Mircea Cantor's modernist reworking of the Duchamp style, complete with all its trademark surrealism, intriguing absurdity and Dadaist eccentricity, has risen to become one of Romania's most unique contemporary exports. His works repeatedly challenge traditional artistic categories by displacing obvious subjects and their various interactions to whole new, and often unidentifiable, environments. For example, in 2005, his video piece *Deeparture* showed a wolf and deer confined together in a single space; simultaneously relating a new vision of the hunter and the hunted, and playing with the concept of climax or inevitability. Today, Cantor continues to work across various media, and lives between Paris, Berlin and his native Romania.

See Mircea Cantor's work at the Walker Art Centre, 1750 Hennepin Ave, Minneapolis, USA, +1 612 375 7600

Rudolf Bone | Plan B Gallery

Famed throughout Romania for his curious sculptures and installation pieces, Rudolf Bone currently lives and works in the western city of Oradea. Although he's oscillated between periods of inactivity over the last decades, Bone's exhibits remain remarkable for their overarching use of found materials and deconstructivist tendencies. Some of his best known presentations include his iconic tin-foil effigy of the human form and the dual selection of *Megalopolis* and *Die* that took centre stage at the avant-garde exhibit DICE(2010), at the Galeria Plan B in Berlin.

See Rudolf Bone's work at the Plan B Gallery, The Paintbrush Factory, Henri Barbusse 59–61, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, +40 740 658555

Serban Savu | David Nolan Gallery

Serban Savu's magnetic portraits of rural and urban Romanian life convey a stage-managed snapshot of the country's status quo, allowing the viewer a sort of cultural voyeurism that's focussed on the nation's untapped hinterland and nondescript metropolitan spaces. It's particularly important that Savu chooses to obscure any personal elements of his paintings by removing discernible facial features from his subjects, as if the people here are entirely blind to the artistic lens that's focussed upon them. Just as the workman in 'The Balcony' (2006), and the bathers from 'Weekend 2' (2007) are unaware of our gaze, so too are they unaware of the machinations of the great political morass that's currently changing their beloved homeland—a homeland that's depicted here with verdant bucolic beauty and civic cleanliness.

See Serban Savu's work at the David Nolan Gallery, 527 West 29th Street, New York, USA, +1 212 925 6190

Victor Man | Haus der Kunst

Hailed as the 2014 'Artist of the Year' by Deutsche Bank, Victor Man is unquestionably one of the most iconic Romanian contemporaries currently working. His pieces exude a dark, mystifying and brooding character that's been noted for its surrealist tendencies and playful attitude towards taboo. Take his acclaimed 2008 piece 'Grand Practice', which stands shrouded in a dream-like haze of darkened shadows and depicts a curious horse-man hybrid clad in armour and straps. It comes with a whole host of suggestions and leaves the viewer wondering if they've just witnessed some clandestine Faustian ritual, or simply some banal act of crude sexual gratification.

See Victor Man's work at the Haus der Kunst, Prinzregentenstraße 1, München, Germany, +49 89 21127113

Zsolt Berszán | Bazis Gallery

Zsolt Berszán was born in Marosvasarhely in 1974 and studied at the University of Art and Design in Cluj-Napoca. This year, he hosted a solo exhibition in Venice, fielding an array of metamorphic and monochrome sculpture works entitled 'Decomposition'. These conflated the idea of human decay after death and the destructive course of human history, evoking images of war, conflict and murder. Today, Berszán can be found working alongside a great many other contemporaries in his studio at the Paintbrush Factory in Cluj.