

# ARTFORUM

Ciprian Mureșan

by Riccardo Venturi

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## Ciprian Mureșan

GALERIE ÉRIC HUSSENOT

Understanding “Plague Column” required knowing something about the sculptures stored in the warehouse of the National Museum of Art in Cluj (the Romanian city where Ciprian Mureșan studied and still lives), particularly the ones acquired at the height of socialist realism. There, in a place of both conservation and hiding, one can detect the oscillations of the country’s taste and cultural politics. In 2012, the artist used twenty-five sculptures, each resting on two plywood bases, as weights for drying and flattening his own prints; for later iterations of the project, he substituted plaster casts of the originals, and now, composite sculptures made from fragments of leftover negatives of the casts. Like empty chrysalises, these lay resting in a corner of the artist’s studio until he decided to recycle them to create the resin sculptures *Plague Column #1* and *#2* (all works 2016).



View of “Ciprian Mureșan,” 2016. From left: *Plague Column #1*, 2016; *Plague Column #2*, 2016. Photo: Aurélien Mole.

In their magma of abstract forms, anatomical fragments and even human faces emerge in the way that an anthropomorphic profile might appear on some tree bark. While both columns are hollow, one is displayed horizontally, its interior exposed, bringing to mind the numerous bodies the artist has drawn lying on the ground: sleeping figures, or perhaps corpses. The opacity of the resin transfigures these degraded monuments, exhumed from storage, into a “sickly” skin. The title suggests as much, although the Plague Column, a Baroque memorial at the center of Vienna, might also suggest the mysterious finds evoked by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky (which inspired the artist in the past) in *Roadside Picnic* (1972), a science-fiction novel long censored in the Soviet Union, and the source for Andrei Tarkovsky’s celebrated *Stalker* (1979).

With this work, Mureșan transposed into sculpture a technique he had already employed with drawing, in which he uses reproductions, what he has called a “low-resolution education, rather than first-hand experiences of artworks,” as a stimulus to reinvention. In his drawings, he appropriates the work of other artists, duplicating the layouts of magazines or art catalogues, focusing his attention on the dialogue between word and image, and superimposing the pages one over another on a single large panel. The result is a palimpsest in which the individual elements are hard to decipher.

Copying is not only the foundation of traditional art education, still in practice in Romania, but it is also an analogical process charged with historicity. The copy is not the duplicate of the original or a digital file ready to be printed, ideally without altering the image’s quality, but rather a medium that degrades the original, as in an engraving. With this step, the object risks disappearing: “Copying obsessively,” the artist suggests, “or conversely, destroying copies in a shredding machine, these operations stem from the two tempos of our experience of art history.” Through copying, Mureșan is able to reactivate the artistic past, in opposition to the way in which works of art are preserved in museum warehouses. He is moreover able to mimic the process of history and to reflect on the fate of Romania—its delicate negotiation between a premodern and a post-Communist identity (as described, for example, by Marius Babias), and its abrupt passage from Communist regime to Capitalist economy.

The dialogue between drawing and sculpture becomes more intricate in *The Sculpture Storage*, for which Mureșan has reproduced sculptures from the museum in Cluj, first in pencil on paper, then in etching and, finally, in a bronze bas-relief carved onto the surface of a table. The show concluded with a video, *Untitled*, discreetly projected near the floor; here, the focus is on the artist’s hands as he fabricates a Dadaist poem, following the Romanian poet Tristan Tzara’s formula, by cutting up a Bible. Mureșan skillfully manipulates the slivers of text as if they were sculptural elements, aware of both the fragility of the poetic word and the rhetorical force of our language.

—Riccardo Venturi

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

## BERLIN

### Ignasi Aballí

GALERIE NORDENHAKE

From the first, Catalan artist Ignasi Aballí has questioned the notion that painting is an eminently visual device. He began working at the end of the 1980s, when the weariness produced by the painting overflow of that decade impelled many artists to reflect not so much upon what was to be seen but rather upon the conceptual framework that made it visible. For Aballí, this led to a practice based more on suggestion than on explicit presence, in which painting was active as an idea and not as a physical entity, and images were to belong to the realm of the mind rather than to that of the eye. Aballí began to paint without painting, so to speak, focusing more on the operation’s hidden inner processes, eventually relegating traditional activity in the medium to the sidelines.

Following an outstanding retrospective at Madrid’s Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in 2015–16, Aballí presented a group of recent works in Berlin under the illuminating title “Something Is Missing.” And in fact, something is always missing in Aballí’s work. Linguistically paradoxical and formally elusive, his recent output takes invisibility as its major subject, one that, oddly enough, the artist often turns into tangible objects. Thus, *Double Broken Glass* (all works 2016) consists of a glass vitrine showing randomly distributed fragments of a photograph of a broken pane. The fragments of the photograph do not match the broken pieces of glass that were photographed; if they did, we would not be able to visually verify that the glass was broken. The complexity inherent to the work is obvious, and it neatly underscores one of Aballí’s recurrent topics: the will to represent and to acquire visual awareness of invisibility, of which transparency has long been emblematic in his work.

A set of medium-format framed photographs from the series “Something Is Missing” formed a frieze running around the exhibition