

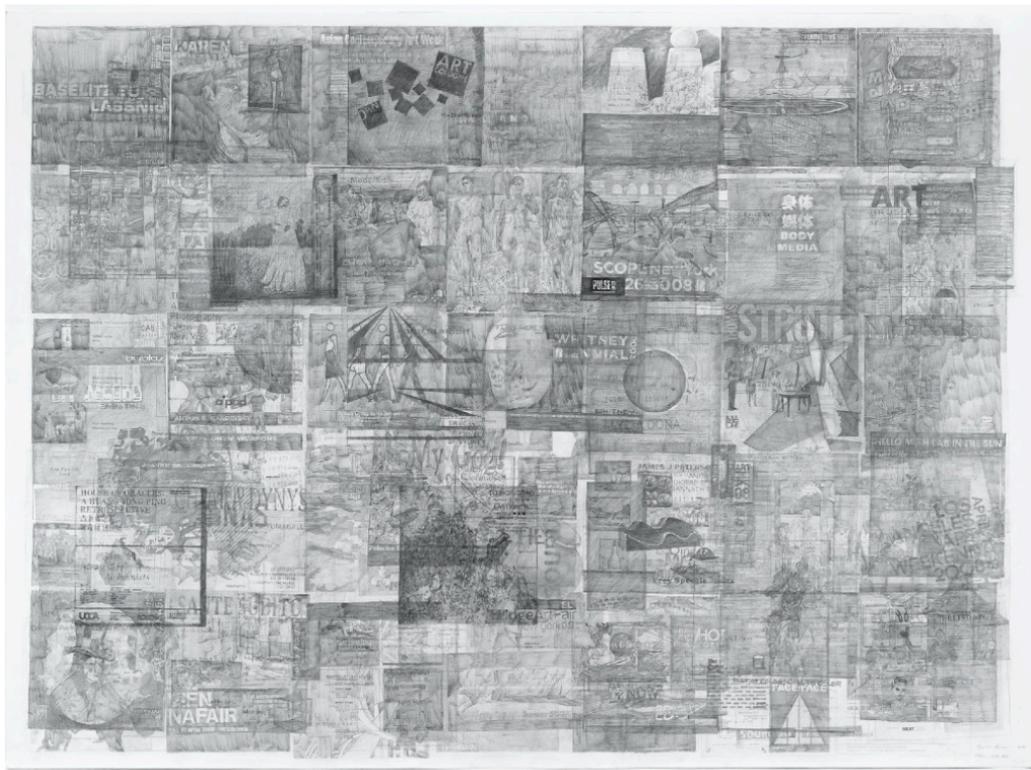
KAJET DIGITAL

The Paintbrush Factory in its own words, Interview with Ciprian Muresan

June 16, 2020
By Olga Ștefan

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The Paintbrush Factory was launched in 2009 and closed down ten years later. Curator and researcher Olga Ștefan seeks to provide a deeper understanding of what The Paintbrush Factory entailed: its horizontality and organisational structure, its importance to the local community, and its existence as a model for similarly minded arts organisations. The fourth interview is with Ciprian Mureșan, Romanian artist and editor of the IDEA Art + Society magazine.

dimensions on the Romanian cultural scene and also one of the most relevant examples of converting an industrial building into a cultural space. The artists, galleries, and organizations—active in the fields of theater, contemporary dance, visual arts, arts in public space, music—are jointly engaged into delivering relevant cultural content, both for the artistic community and the wide audience. Besides artist studios and production spaces, *Fabrica de Pensule* (The Paintbrush Factory) also hosts events of local and international partners. It acts as a major player in cultural and urban policies in the Romanian context.”

In 2016, a rupture between two factions of the Paintbrush Factory tenants tore the collective apart, with one group leaving. The Paintbrush Factory as an art center closed in December 2019 after the real estate management decided to rent to the IT industry.

This series of interviews was conducted with some of the co-founders of the Paintbrush Factory—the manager, the association president, a gallery owner, and an artist—to delve deeper into the mechanics of such a collective undertaking, and offer reflections and analysis for any future endeavour that might wish to create a similar community. The fourth interview from a series of five is with Ciprian Mureșan, artist living and working in Cluj Romania, editor of IDEA art + society magazine since 2005. Read the first interview with Corina Bucea, cultural manager and co-founder of The Paintbrush Factory ([here](#)), the second interview with Miki Braniște, cultural manager and curator for performing arts and interdisciplinary projects, president of Colectiv A Association and Fabrica de Pensule ([here](#)), and the third interview with Sorin Neamțu, Romanian artist, from Baril Gallery ([here](#)).

OLGA ȘTEFAN:

How did you become involved in the Paintbrush Factory? How was it structured and funded at that time? What were some of the challenges that you were walking into? What did you want the Factory to be when you started it with your colleagues? What was the dynamic among the group’s stakeholders and who were the stakeholders? how were decisions made? How were different interests (and what were they, please enumerate) navigated and balanced?

CIPRIAN MUREȘAN:

In 2010, I was looking for a workshop space—I didn’t have one and had been working from home, in my kitchen—and sifting through options together with other artists, searching for dedicated spaces, we came across the building of the former Paintbrush Factory. In the beginning, there was no structure or financing. We just gathered together: artists, galleries and producers from the performance arts; spontaneously, each looking out for themselves.

It wasn’t a common dream, a shared purpose—just the desire to have workshops, exhibition and performance spaces. When the Federation was formed, it was purely bureaucratic. For lack of experience or following the advice of a lawyer unaware of the situation, officially and legally only associations could be members of the federation. In order to compensate for this, we all had the right to vote, the right to decide: it was an actual democracy exercise in a micro-community created overnight.

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It sounds ideal, but that's how it worked.

OLGA ȘTEFAN:

What changed as time went on? What new challenges were you faced with as conditions on the ground changed? How did you deal with them? Please tell us what led to the disintegration of the collective and the factory (the background, maybe even situation of the city), what took place exactly, and how things were handled.

CIPRIAN MUREȘAN:

The voting principle never changed, but in time grants and funding started to come in from various sources, so the responsibilities and expectations were considerably higher. The problem was we morphed into a more rigid institution and even though we settled priorities through vote, there were dissatisfied members. It was sort of a majority dictatorship... it feels different for a micro-community.

There was also an extrapolation of the performance arts versus visual arts, which was utterly stupid, in my opinion. Conversely, we were only democratic within our community, when we were out in the world things were different: some were more successful than others—financially, career wise—which led to dumb hierarchies and even dumber envy in the midst of the community.

Also, people comfortable with the mechanics of a rigid institution took advantage and a lot of confusion was created so it all culminated with a schism. Not to mention the scandal of the Paintbrush Factory brand take-over attempt—secretly and illegally, as determined by the ensuing law suit. It struck the ultimate blow to the relationship between the sides.

To cap it all, the owner simply raised the rent while also targeting IT companies as tenants, following the city's "natural order of development", so the ones still in the building were forced to leave. I left because my contract expired and the owner wouldn't renew it for any price, however high: he preferred private companies instead

OLGA ȘTEFAN:

Lessons learned: What do you feel you could have done differently, what should have been done and wasn't, what was done well and left as a lesson to others wanting to build these types of collectives, what should never have happened?

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There was no new lesson, it was well learned way before these events took place, I just didn't want to play by the existing rules, it was a little utopia. Nothing is lost: the fact that within the dynamics of the city a community of artists detonated the inertia of a petrified scene—dead UAP [The Union of Visual Artists], retrograde museum and University—only makes way for hope. The state's institutions do not function. Unfortunately.

OLGA ȘTEFAN:

What is your current vision or understanding of the Factory experiment, of what it was, should have been, achieved or never managed? Does it have a life after death? And if so, how?

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Even without the space of the old factory, events are still produced under the umbrella of the federation. Maybe not at the same speed, but the wheels are turning, there are solid partnerships with other centres around the city and the country. Unfortunately, Cluj is a business city, gentrification is taking over.

But happily the art scene is large and varied, there are several magnetic poles, it is not a centralised monolith making it all one-directional and one-dimensional.

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Olga Stefan is a curator, arts writer, documentary filmmaker and independent researcher, born in Bucharest, raised in Chicago, and currently residing in Zurich. Her exhibitions and writing can be found at <http://www.olgaistefan.wordpress.com> and The Future of Memory, the transnational platform for Holocaust remembrance in Romania and Moldova through art and media that she founded in 2016, is online here: [The future of memory](#).

"The project started at the beginning of 2009, as an independent initiative to bring together ideas, events and projects of cultural organizations, galleries, producers, and independent artists in Cluj and as a reaction to the local lack of production and exhibition spaces in the city. *Fabrica de Pensule* (The Paintbrush Factory) is the first collective

project of such dimensions on the Romanian cultural scene and also one of the most relevant examples of converting an industrial building into a cultural space. The artists, galleries, and organizations—active in the fields of theater, contemporary dance, visual arts, arts in public space, music—are jointly engaged into delivering relevant cultural content, both for the artistic community and the wide audience. Besides artist studios and production spaces, *Fabrica de Pensule* (The Paintbrush Factory) also hosts events of local and international partners. It acts as a major player in cultural and urban policies in the Romanian context.”

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