

# ȘTEFAN BOTEZ

INTERVIEW BY: TEODORA DINU

Teodora Dinu: Your educational background- graduating the Faculty of Architecture in Bucharest, moving to Geneva where you finished a master in visual arts and a program focused on artistic practices in the public space- and also the variety of artistic means you chose to work with- photography, drawings, video, collage, prove an artistic curiosity and spontaneity. How do all these mediums connect and relate to your artistic discourse?

Ștefan Botez: I don't know if spontaneity would be the proper word to describe me; I am curious and impulsive, but I approach projects in a thought-out manner. Employing different mediums helps me to better understand projects, concepts, it's like having different points of view. My background as an architect imprinted a particular way of working.

T.D.: In 2011 you graduated the ALPes program- Art, Landscape, Place, sound, space from the Geneva Art and Design University, specialized in artistic practices that can be implemented in the public space. How did this program influence your subsequent creative process?

Ș.B: It influenced me by making me realise that I do not depend on a certain type of space. During this program I did small interventions with the purpose of testing the concept of public space fluidity. I realised I can develop extremely efficient works with almost nothing and that I am freer than I thought.

T.D.: With the exception of two groups exhibitions, one opened in Iași (Video Salon, Method Notions) and in Sibiu (Desire is War), this show is your first solo one in Romania. The period of four years after your relocation in Geneva was extremely productive, a period of time in which you exhibited in Switzerland, Germany, France or Scotland. At the moment of this interview the show is not yet open to the public. Is there a certain excitement that you feel concerning the reaction of the Romanian public to this show?

Ș.B: Of course! Every time you exhibit, even more when we're talking about a personal show, there is a certain excitement concerning the reaction of the public.

T.D.: Between the forest and the sea is to a large extent a very personal exhibition- you insert moments, memories, important elements from your maturing process. At the same time you broaden this field created around the concept of maturation, and talk about discipline, practicing a sport as a form of maturation. If this is not too personal to ask, what was the catalyzer which determined your coming-of-age?

Ș.B: The catalyzer that determined my coming-of-age was leaving Bucharest. The moment when I realised that what I wanted to do was going to be much harder than I anticipated.

T.D.: The male body, a central motif in your artistic endeavours, only recently received the attention of sociologists and anthropologists. How do you, as an artist, relate to the male body and how do you see masculinity?

Ș.B: After I saw Gus Van Sant's Paranoid Park and read Iain Borden's Skateboarding, Space and the City, Architecture and the Body I realised I could employ the concept of masculinity as the subject of study; I wanted to do that without excluding the desire.

How can you relate to a copy of a copy of an image multiplied countless times? This process makes me think at the way Philip K Dick describes time travelling, in his famous *Ubik*, in which he says that a man from our times was to go back in time, he wouldn't become immediately an infant, but would progressively become a man from the 90s, then from the 80s and so on, and then become one with the origin; or Peter Greenway's *The Belly of an Architect*, in which „the architect” would obsessively photocopy different representations of the male abdomen, so as in the end to find out that cancer was hiding in his loins. I got the feeling that sometimes masculinity manifests itself as trauma.

T.D.: Your discourse about masculinity becomes more and more coherent as you insert variables such as history, myths, social prejudices, and culture. I would like to focus on myths and folklore stories, as you reference such instances (man transforming into wolf, Jupiter's myth, Tom Thumb stories), and ask you how much influence do you think these fantasy elements still have on the contemporary perception of masculinity?

Ş.B: This question makes me think about the extremist group I.S.I.S' televised decapitations from last summer. I stated this because I precisely recall the moment when I saw the video of James Wright Foley's decapitation, moment in which I had the same reaction of repulse mixed with fascination as the moment when I saw Omar Fast's *Continuity* at Documenta. I also remembered the Benvenuto Cellini's statue from Loggia dei Lanzi, Perseus with the head of Medusa, and what struck me is not the unprecedented phenomenon to aestheticize the violence and the heroic representation of an act of cruelty, but also the employment of some aesthetic canon.

To answer your questions exactly, yes, I do believe that these fantastic elements continue to influence the contemporary perception of masculinity, even more, I think European myths will continue to influence the society we live in.

T.D.: The exhibition's set-up marks your architectural formation and at the same time highlights the importance of scenography in the exhibition space, as an element that backs up the artistic discourse.

What is the concept behind this specific set-up, how important are lights, sound for you?

Ş.B: Light and sound imbue the whole space, I consider them invasive elements. The concept of the installation came with the first images I first saw from Karolina Bregula's exhibition that you curated, which looked really good, and I found the space incredible. I recounted the many basements and old houses as locations for parties at the beginning of 2000s in Bucharest. I was walking through the gallery's basement while installing the works, many of the elements were fitted up, and it seemed funny, I had the impression I was in a memory, but a memory in which fresh elements were inserted, from a different time and space.

T.D.: In some of your works you assume the position of a scientist who analyses from a distance and registers the activity of his subjects without interfering. What is the reason behind this choice? Is it related to the naturalness, spontaneity, veracity of the gestures that turn into an artistic act, or is it just a cinematic resort?

Ş.B: One of my projects, a series of five videos, is called *On How to Become a Film Maker*. It's a name I came up with after some conversations I had with Jeniffer Allen, and has an ironic significance, consisting of recordings of training sessions, physical exercises, the series being at the same time a practice, a study of image and style. I reference my love for cinema and my desire to become a director. Going back to a former question, I realize that masculinity becomes a pretext for the study of image and its power of seduction, of beauty if you want.

My video works were influenced by two artists, Mounir Fatmi and Ali Kazma, whom I also had the chance to meet during an internship at Analix Forever, a Gallery from Geneva. Some of their works

belong to this minimalist, dry movement, in which, as you say, the artist “assumes the position of a scientist who analyses from a distance and registers the activity of his subjects without interfering”.

T.D.: Name some artists whom you admire and whose works inspired you.

Ş.B: Apparatus 22 will always be an inspiration to me, a collective of passionate people who succeeded in producing smart and beautiful works of art despite limited resources. Mat Collishaw, I found his last series of paintings, “This is not an Exit” to be fabulous. Janet Biggs dazzled me with the installation she commissioned for Hermes, New York in 2006. Ryan Trecartin, presented some incredible installations in Venice, in 2013; and of course Tracey Emin, Martin Honert, and their tents.

T.D.: This exhibition opened now in Bucharest, in the first month of 2015, anticipates a promising year.

What’s next?

Ş.B: A lot of work.