

## RECENZII / COMPTES RENDUS / REVIEWS

MONA MOMESCU, EDUARD ANDREI, *Risipitorul de talent: Ilie Cristoloveanu, pictor și filolog în România și SUA [The Prodigal Prodigy Ilie Cristoloveanu, an Artist and Philologist in Romania and the USA]*, Bucharest, Paideia, 2022, 522 p., with ill.

Ilie Cristoloveanu (1893-1964), an artist trained in fine arts in the *Belle Époque* Romania, has recently made the subject of a consistent monograph written by philologist Mona Momescu and art historian Eduard Andrei. The artist's archive and quasi-complete donation of works (about two hundred paintings, sketches, drawings, portraits), were identified in 2021 at the Romanian National Museum of Art in Bucharest. They came to the museum's collection after a last-minute decision of the artist's late wife Olga Cristoloveanu – herself an art lover, a soprano and her husband's muse – to donate them in 1977 to a Romanian museum, against her husband's anti-Communist will. Olga Cristoloveanu, a voluntary character, outlived her husband more than two decades and tried to leave his inheritance to Columbia University, New York, where her husband had lived and worked. Eventually, she donated the works to probably the most visible museum in Romania, which now appears to have been a wise decision, as it offered the artworks better visibility and recognition. The volume also includes a consistent corpus of images taken after the main assets of this archive.

As a long-time lecturer of Romanian language and culture in New York, Mona Momescu (professor at "Ovidius" University of Constanța) found traces of Ilie Cristoloveanu's activity as a professor of Romanian language and Romance philology, and as a painter in the library and archives of Columbia University, and started a thorough restitutive research on him as her predecessor at the philological department. Together with Eduard Andrei (researcher at "George Oprescu" Institute for Art History, Bucharest), further co-opted to cover the research on the artist Ilie Cristoloveanu, they wrote a multi-layered professional monograph that can be read both through the eyes of historians (art historians included), and as an insightful chapter on the life of a particular middle-class, ambitious Romanian diaspora in the States.

Since 1942 to his death, Ilie Cristoloveanu was an "adjunct" professor of Romanian Language and Romance Philology at Columbia University, New York. The book recreates his life as an emigré viewed by his Romanian fellows as a successful artist and academic in the United States of America while being, on the other hand, a

“lost face” and a puzzle to his monographers both as a professional and as a person. After many years of silence, with this monograph the Cristoloveanu’s self-archiving and a final touch of grace pay the cost for the two spouses’ past tragedy (the premature loss of their son) and for their persistent small dissatisfactions, as documented or guessed by the authors.

An academist artist by training, the former pupil of G.D. Mirea, Ilie Cristoloveanu did not feel any urge to advance beyond post-Impressionist techniques at the very most. In an American fast-changing milieu that turned New York into the world capital of modernist aesthetics as early as the first decades of the twentieth century, a personal enumeration of museums by Ilie Cristoloveanu would mention the famous “MOMA” as the last highlight on his list. It tells much of the artist’s taste and limits, some of which kept him beneath the desired level of acceptance. The co-authors analyse his profile with intelligent hints towards a psychology of expectations and needs that were actually sabotaged by the spouses’ strong commitments to a pre-war traditional and idyllic Romania in a world of much versatility and modernity like the US: Cristoloveanu seems to somehow have mimicked versatility himself while forced to do many things in order to make a decent living for his family.

In the end, what we can read in this monograph, as in a novel, is the life of an artist who made a name mostly as a university artist through official portraiture, and who thus channelled his best training at the Bucharest Academy of Fine Arts, built between 1909 and 1921, to meet a fortunate end in the USA. He served the requirements of a reputed American university in the establishment of its own visual history of academics and personalities, some of whom stepped outside the campus and wrote big history for the Americans, like Dwight D. Eisenhower, president of the United States (see the full-size portrait by Elie Christo-Loveanu dated 1950). Or see the portraits of Herbert Hoover, president of the USA, Charles Curtis, vice-president of the USA, general William N. Haskell, of two Olympiad athletes of the 1930s, of industrialists, etc.

The portraits of George Enescu, Nicolae Iorga, of violin player Sandu Albu, or of the Romanian ambassador in the U.S., Carol A. Davila, add to the said list as our personal interests in the Romanian history. I choose to mention the portraits resulted from Ilie Cristoloveanu’s personal encounters with the sitters, in an attempt to identify a more genuine touch from a time, a place or a particular vision: for instance, Enescu sat for his portrait in 1928 or 1930, and Iorga in 1930, while an undated portrait of King Carol II of Romania was probably painted after a conventional photograph. A photograph also keeps the memory of Enescu’s portrait by Cristoloveanu, as displayed – outside the official selection – at the 1939 New York World Fair in the Pavilion of Romania. Despite some glamorous package added, we see in this episode just one example of how Ilie Cristoloveanu failed in his attempts to gain the best recognition. It happened several times in his life: he would not become an official artist for the Royal House of Romania, was neither selected as an artist for the 1939 World Fair to represent Romania, nor to paint the “Sf. Gheorghe” Romanian Cathedral of Detroit in 1941, despite the warm recommendations presented. Yet, a balanced providence made him successful in practical matters or with other projects, but mainly as the praised portraiture artist of Columbia University and a non-tenured professor of Philology without holding a

diploma; an impressive fulfillment (with good living conditions in Manhattan, near Central Park), one should admit.

As for the philological skills, his achievements as a professor of philology (and not of fine arts, as deserved), are a puzzling testimony of a time and a country full of all possibilities. Most probably, as the authors infer after much search into the archives and helped by related information or logical deductions, he did not graduate any Faculty of Letters, and was an autodidact in philology. After his son's death, in 1942 he took a path designed for his son. He found his way to teach Romanian philology for a couple of decades in an Ivy-League American university at a time when the Romanian language was still placed in the right family of latinity where it belongs. After Ilie Cristoloveanu, the departments of Columbia University were reorganized according to geopolitical factors and Romanian began to be studied in the geographic area of Slavic and East-European Languages, a decision that Cristoloveanu could already feel in the air, but did not live to see.

He must have served this profession with all diligence and commitment: good memories of him were kept by occasional ex-students speaking of a kind and gifted pedagogue. He even wrote the manual *The Romanian Language* and compiled an etymological dictionary of Romanian language, now lost. The textbook was published in 1962 as one of a kind: it is the artistic fulfillment of an artisan, who used disguised references to his own family, large parts of the unpublished dissertation of his beloved son (a tragic loss that marked his life), and embellished it with original illustrations. Printed in a few hundred copies, this Romanian manual is written with texts about the *Belle Époque* Romania that his author used to know and love.

Mainly through Ilie's art exhibitions and Olga's concerts of Romanian folk music, the artist and his wife worked hard for decades as promoters of their country of origin in the United States. Both in Romania and the US they gained (moderately) important recognition for their works and merits several times, and became American citizens only after approximately two decades of living in New York. Their time was one of unthinkable possibilities; their personal fate, a mixture of success, failed achievements and loss, now rendered by Mona Momescu and Eduard Andrei minutely and with talent, in a complex mirror of history.

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René GIRARD, *O teorie a miturilor arhaice și moderne*, traducere din limba franceză de Marinela Blaj, Iași, Editura Cartea Românească Educațional, 2021, 268 p.

Teoria mimetică formulată de René Girard în *Minciună romantică și adevăr românesc* (1961) și în *Violența și sacrul* (1972) a apărut ca o posibilitate de interpretare culturală a