

Aria Mineralia

Larisa Crunțeanu

Curator: Julia Harasimowicz

12.09 – 11.10.2018

(...) I knock at the stone's front door
'It's only me, let me come in.
I want to enter your insides,
have a look around,
breathe my fill of you.' (...)

Wisława Szymborska, *Conversation with a Stone*, 1962,
from *Poems New and Collected: 1957-1997*,
translated from the Polish by Stanislaw Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh

CONVERSATION WITH A STONE

Larisa Crunțeanu's project started with two meetings. The first, with the artist Sonja Hornung, took place during the Femina Subtetrax research project in 2015. The artists' collaboration revolved around the Romanian post-socialist textile factory APACA, which they studied in terms of power, gender and media presence.

The second meeting is closely linked to the first one. At the end of their collaboration, while walking through the centre of Bucharest, Crunțeanu and Hornung encountered a bizarre object: a silent, stone-shaped loudspeaker standing on a lawn. The paradoxical finding provoked many questions, not only about what the object was and what it was for, but also about what it sounded like and what its voice said. Was it one of the voices of a larger group? What was its function in the natural environment?

Crunțeanu focuses on the object itself. She asks questions about the strange finding which, as she well knows, will remain unanswered. The *Aria Mineralia* exhibition takes the shape of her own way of thinking, a map of thoughts, composed of personal associations, common symbols and cultural references. It combines absurdity and surrealism with a critical view of society.

Crunțeanu invites the viewer to conscious observation. A bit like in a nature film, she shows us an object found in its 'natural' environment. As viewers, we are invited to assume the perspective of Crunțeanu and Hornung when they found the object and to make the discovery once again. We are forced to distinguish between what is natural and artificial in our surroundings and ask questions about the meaning of this finding. At first, the space can evoke associations with a kitsch plastic garden. The feeling of nonsense of the situation is replaced by a gloomy statement, through the effect of associating the space with a kind of modern panopticon, in which nature changes imperceptibly into a masked technology for control.

A reference to the phenomenon of mimicry can be found in all the works presented, yet the artist does not employ its effect in a purely aesthetic manner. In a witty way, she refers to mimicry in her work presenting a ceramic sculpture modelled on the form of the loudspeaker. She shows an imitation of an imitation and creates another variation on the original form of the rock. This gesture brings to mind the interpretations of mimicry by Jacques Lacan or Roger Caillois, for whom this phenomenon are not means of survival and protection of oneself against threats, as they are usually interpreted to be. It is a kind of seduction of the background, a gradual loss of personality. Thus, a ceramic object is no longer a real stone or even a copy of it — only its form remains.

Further reflections on mimicry appear in the sound-spatial installation of stones talking to each other. The arrangement of the exhibition allows the audience to enter the space of this strange formation. Objects (creatures? devices? — their status is difficult to define) produce sounds that imitate human sounds: grunting, humming, laughing, and even shouts with political content. The viewer listens to this discussion — the aria mineralia, whose structure escapes the logic of human communication (the humorous answer to the stones' imitation of human language is the work *A Story with 255 Possible Parts*, in which the artist reinterprets the well-known game of paper/rock/scissors). The audience circulating around the objects can create their own narration with their movement, as well as recognise logical errors in the

conversation of the stones. Crunțeanu seems to be asking the question of whether these errors are reminiscent of our own flaws in our day-to-day communication. The senseless imitation of human voices brings to mind a different theory concerning mimicry — its cultural aspect described as making (often for manipulation purposes) certain symbols, behaviours similar to those present and positively reinforced in the consciousness of a given group.

The title of the work, *Esprit de Corps*, refers to the definition of a sense of community and unity in the pursuit of an objective. As Crunțeanu points out, it is particularly important in military contexts, where it measures the success of reducing cognitive and emotional distance during a mission, so that the unity can function in the closest possible connection. Camouflage of objects within a space is also associated with militarism. 'Visible and invisible at the same time, camouflage is the art of hiding in the open. Making artificiality similar to nature, making lies true', says the artist.

Crunțeanu carefully analyses the phenomenon of camouflage and takes into account its military and biological connotations. She points to them in an attempt to understand nature through her direct connection with it. She uses her body to put on a depersonalising SFX suit and tries to blend in with her surroundings, which is a reference to Caillois' theory. The French intellectual wrote that mimicry is not connected with the instinct of survival, but with total submission. An individual can be seduced by and attracted to the environment. It is absorbed by the space, it becomes part of it, its subjectivity is completely disintegrated. Crunțeanu seems to be subtly suggesting that this loss of self can affect our everyday existence when we are thoughtlessly lost in the world.

A summary of the topics discussed is *A Conversation Between Three Workers...* Its central point is the set design made up of simple materials, referring to organic ones: raw wood and fabric. It is a kind of hybrid of office and employee uniform in one, uniting the worker with work into a whole at the moment it is established. For most of the exhibition's duration, the scenography functions as a kind of *in situ* sculpture — workers' uniforms waiting for the action to start. During the performance, the space becomes an office, a place of work for three characters played by the artist. Crunțeanu's protagonists are people with different positions in the corporate hierarchy who try to perform everyday duties. The gloomy metaphor of the work transfers the phenomenon of mimicry into our everyday lives.

The *Aria Mineralia* exhibition is an important stage in the artist's career and a consistent confirmation of her earlier interests. It is a record of Crunțeanu's multi-coloured thoughts and associations in the face of the impossibility of full cognition. The author breaks down her dilemma of (re)cognition into factors and, although she knows that she will not be able to fully understand the phenomenon of the found object, she may try to understand her own environment through it. A critical approach is valuable in Crunțeanu's work in that, instead of moralising the content, she proposes a humorous and diverse approach to important social issues. Employing various artistic strategies, Crunțeanu realises what Polish philosopher Maria Szyszkowska defined in the mid-1980s as the 'philosophy of everyday life' — a refusal of simplified thinking, solving problems beyond conventional modes of action, especially in times of rapid change and technological and biopolitical processes that require specific responses. Reflection and artistic activities are a confrontation with that which cannot be grasped by logic.

Julia Harasimowicz

The first presentation of Aria Mineralia will take place at the Anca Poterașu Gallery between 12.09–11.10.2018, later to be followed by a presentation at Zachęta Project Room Warsaw, between 19.10–02.12.2018.

The exhibition is part of the cultural programme "F vs F", initiated by Larisa Crunțeanu and Sonja Hornung, produced by Copia Originală and co-financed by the Administrația Fondului Cultural Național (AFCN) with further support from partnering organizations: Anca Poterașu Gallery, META Foundation, National Dance Centre Bucharest, Ex-Embassy Berlin, White Wave, Alexandru Dan Photography and Zachęta – National Gallery of Art.

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Larisa Crunțeanu studied Photography and Moving Image and is currently a PHD candidate at the National Arts University of Bucharest. She works at the intersection of video and performance between research and speculation, often collaboratively, creating contexts for the emergence of new practices and organization.

Solo shows: tête Berlin (2018); RKI Gallery Berlin (2015); Ivan Gallery Bucharest (2015); Atelier 35, Bucharest (2013); Galeria Posibilă, Bucharest (2012); Atelier 35, Bucharest (2012).

Selected Group Shows: MAB, FAAP, Sao Paulo (2017), Projektraum LS43, Berlin (2017); Martin Gropius Bau, Berlin (2016); District Berlin, Berlin (2016); National Museum of Contemporary Art, Bucharest & B5 Studio, Târgu Mureș (2014); Salonul de Proiecte, Vienna Art Fair, Vienna (2013); National Museum of Contemporary Art, Bucharest (2013); Salonul de Proiecte, Bucharest (2013); tranzit.ro Bucharest (2012); Platforma Space, Bucharest (2012); Sala Dalles, Bucharest (2011).

Selected performances: "A Conversation Between Two Workers and a Rock", with Sonja Hornung, FORUM Stadpark, Graz (2018); "Bite a Tail, Grow a Head", solo performance, FAAP Residency, Sao Paulo (2017) & tranzit.ro, Bucharest (2018); "Librarian for The Library by Galerie International", Blask Brzask Festival, Łodz (2017); "Do as I do as I do as I do", Black Hyperbox, National Dance Center, Bucharest (2016); "Things that Don't Matter" - with Xandra Popescu, MNAC Bucharest, DISKURS FESTIVAL Giessen, Romanian Cultural Institute Vienna (2016); "Things for Money" - with Xandra Popescu, Museums Quartier, Vienna (2014); "100 Loafs" - with Alice Gancevici, public space performance, Bucharest (2012); "The Firecracker Concert", MNAC Bucharest (2011); "I Hope This Gets to You" - with Maria Pitea and Adrian Cristea, Prague Fashion Quadriennale, Prague (2011); "Storm", Bucharest National Opera, Bucharest; "The Future of Romanian Contemporary Art", National Dance Center, Bucharest (2010).