

Loc de acțiune - Crețești

Artist: Delia Popa

Curated by Julie Crenn

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Delia Popa and I share a desire to make rural areas visible. It remains an unthought-of part of the collective imagination. We speak of the countryside as if it were an undefined, unlocated space, as if it were a non-place. For my part, as an exhibition curator, I'm working on a very long-term project called *Agir dans son lieu*. Since 2016, I've been working to transpose into the art world the realities of peasants acting in their places in France. Since 2020, Delia Popa has been focusing on her place, the village of Crețești located in the commune of Vidra, in southern Ilfov County. In her grandparents' house, she establishes her studio. As in the work of Ana Lupas, Delia Popa's aim is to enhance the value of an invisible and unthought-of heritage. In 2022, starting from this precise location, she works in harmony with the house: the furniture, the ceramic tiles adorning the wood-burning stove, the architecture, the wood, the everyday objects. She also works with the garden ecosystem: the walnut tree, the greenhouse, the crops, the human and more-than-human inhabitants. Around the house, she spends time observing and documenting climatic, structural and topographical changes. Delia Popa observes the ways in which human constructions take precedence over living things. In this way, she photographs moments of change and transformation in the village: trees lying down, trees deliberately cut down, the construction of a bridge, housing, shops. Crețești is in a state of flux. And that's exactly what the artist is concerned with: a mutation that has both a cheerful dimension and critical aspects.

The photographs give rise to a reflection based on a classic, academic pictorial genre: the landscape. Delia Popa takes landscape scenes from the village and transposes them into paintings on artificial silk. To escape Western references and codes, the artist turns her gaze to the East, and more specifically to China. For her, it's a question of displacing the Western sphere of influence to envisage other perspectives and other cultural circulations. Delia Popa explains: "The project proposes to look at culture(s) as permeable, impure and mutually influenceable. If we think of the Silk Road, one of the first instruments of globalization, we learn that economic and cultural objects have traveled across Eurasia, long before the Americas have been colonized, and have meant constant exchange between actors as diverse as: Azerbaijan, China, Korea, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Mongolia, Pakistan, Russia, Sri Lanka, Syria, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan." Crețești's landscapes are also present on vases made from porcelain, stoneware and terracotta. The shape of the vase is inspired by Korean art and is also found in Chinese art. The paintings and painted vases anchor Delia Popa's thinking in an intercultural history. On the wall, clay statuettes refer to the *Venus de Vidra*. The artist shifts the Romanian Neolithic Venus to other imaginary divinities dedicated to joy, trees, play, waste, the river, monuments, the sun,

children and adolescents. The (pre)historical anchoring thus generates the creation of a mythology attached to Crețești.

The artist's voice tells us about her experience in the village, on the road to Bucharest and back. She draws us into her travels, her emotions, her criticisms and her love for Crețești. So, since 2020, Delia Popa's ambition has been to fabricate a space of representation where cultures and practices sediment: architecture, vernacular techniques, traditions, landscapes, materials, gestures, crafts, etc. The paintings and ceramic works participate in a reconnection of Crețești's inhabitants with their shared history and present. Why? Delia Popa writes: "Why then is this rural world important? Because 46% of Romanians live there, we all come from there and it is a world (still) connected to nature, although that is rapidly disappearing. Because we need to look at what/who we are." Crețești is thus an artistic, social and political subject in its own right. A subject that generates a de-hierarchization: all places have a value that artists can bring to the fore.