

Agir dans son lieu — Săcel

Ioana Cîrlig, Morgane Denzler, Andreea Medar, Aurelia Mihai, Ilie Mihali, Ileana Mihali, Delia Popa, Maria Poterașu, Damien Rouxel

Curatated by **Julie Crenn**

Since 2016, Agir dans son lieu (“Act in our own place”) is a long-term project, a cycle of research, residencies and exhibitions dedicated to the links that exist between artists and peasants. Agir dans son lieu first took visible form at Galerie Duchamp in Yvetot, Normandy (2017), then Les ateliers des Arques in the Lot (2018), Transpalette in Bourges (2021), La Galerie du Durven - La Coopérative in Locquémeau (2024), La Traverse in Alfortville (2025), ARAC in Săcel (Maramureș, România, 2025). Agir dans son lieu proposes a multi-voiced, situated reflection based on peasant worlds.

Throughout the history of Western art, the figures of the peasant and the peasant woman have undergone an essentialization that endures in the collective imagination. In the latter, the representation seems unchanging. Yet, since the 1960s, we no longer speak of a peasant world, but rather of peasant environments in the plural, inhabited by actors who make choices about how they practice their work. Political, militant, strategic and economic choices that lead them down two paths: exploitation or reciprocity. The former sees the living world as a short-term resource designed for maximum yield; the latter, which is as reasoned as it is reasonable, applies a sustainable approach to the living world. The first leads to an agriculture without a farmer, an agriculture out of the soil; the second to a physical, ethical and political reconnection with one's environment. *“Farming without a farmer is not just a problem of the countryside becoming decertified; it's also a matter of the disappearance of a profession and, with that profession, of the body of knowledge and know-how that founded the fundamental link to the living world that peasants and farmers have held in trust for millennia, on behalf of society as a whole.”* So, from farmer to peasant, the professions are not the same, nor is the relationship with time and the land.

Over two weeks in July 2025, a group of artists (Morgane Denzler, Damien Rouxel, Delia Popa, Ioana Cîrlig, Andreea Medar and Ilie Mihali) reactivated the project in Săcel (Maramureș, Romania) at the invitation of Anca Poterașu (ARAC). A collective time of thought, encounters, plastic experiments, discussions and questioning about the agricultural realities of our place. We are aware of the extreme fragility of these agricultural realities. Practices are based on family subsistence. This blatant fragility contrasts with the intensity of the interdependence between faith, rurality, crafts (ceramics, weaving and embroidery in particular), traditions, animals, the

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river and the forest. At Săcel, everything in daily life and in its own ecosystem (visible and invisible, human and more-than-human), is connected. Thus, Morgane Denzler continued her reflections on sheep farming, wool and the relationship between shepherd, flock and place. Damien Rouxel sought to merge personal issues with observations made in Maramureș about traditions and material realities. Ilie Mihali devoted his time to working with earth and fire to create ceramic works. Ioana Cirlig has immersed herself in the vegetal dimension of Săcel. Delia Popa thought up links between her place (Crețești, Vidra region) and Săcel, two vulnerable villages. Andreea Medar continued her research into a disappearing memory. In Săcel, she became aware of the disappearance of pastoral customs and collaborated with a potter and a singer to revive a gestural and musical memory.

The residency inspired us to come together for a group exhibition at the Anca Poterasu Gallery in Bucharest. This is the first time that an Agir dans son lieu exhibition is presented outside France, and we are very happy about it. The works brought together for this exhibition include some of those created in Săcel, as well as new and older pieces. I also chose to invite Ilieana Mihali to present traditional Săcel rugs, Maria Poterașu, who created a textile work depicting a rural scene, and Aurelia Mihai, whose film, City of Bucur, establishes a perfect link between the countryside and the city in Romania. The works are thus imbued with attachments, stories (both personal and collective), and a desire to pass on traditions, gestures, and narratives drawn from culture and agriculture.

Agir dans son lieu is a collective research and conversation project designed to make visible a set of choices that have major repercussions within the living world. To make visible those who act in their place as best they can. The works manifest the ways in which all bodies (human and more-than-human) are heavily affected by a system governed by the law of exploitation. Through their works and actions, the artists also demonstrate the places of resistance, the joyful perspectives in which everyone is engaged in their place.

Text by Julie Crenn

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Julie Crenn (b. 1982, France) is an art historian, art critic (AICA) and independent curator. In 2005, she obtained a Master's degree in art history and criticism from Rennes 2 University, with a thesis on the art of Frida Kahlo. Continuing her research into feminist and decolonial practices, she was awarded a doctorate in Arts (history and theory) from the Université Michel de Montaigne, Bordeaux III. Through texts and exhibitions, she has been conducting intersectional research into bodies, memories, and artistic activism.

Ioana Cîrlig (b. 1987, Bucharest) studied Cinematography and began working as a photojournalist while still in school. Since 2011, she has been a freelance photographer, developing personal long-term projects that focus on the industrial landscape and the relationship between humans and nature in rural Romanian communities. In 2017, she started working on an exploration of the botanical world, encompassing rare plants and national parks, as well as an imagined future that examines plantgarbage symbiosis and speculative space colonies. The New Empire project has been presented in Bucharest by Anca Poterașu Gallery with a solo show curated by Julie Bonzon (2024), and in Timișoara at the Art Encounters- My Rhino is Not A Myth Biennale, curated by Adrian Notz (2023) been exhibited in: Kunsthalle Bega (Timisoara, 2025); Noorderlicht Biennale-Machine Entanglements (The Netherlands 2025), Creative Europe Forum (Paris, 2023), Nature Future European travelling exhibition (Cologne, Dusseldorf, Stuttgart, Berlin, Prague, 2022-2023), Kommunale Galerie Crossing the Same Circumstance exhibition (Berlin, 2021).

Morgane Denzler (b.1986, Maisons Laffitte, France) graduated in 2011 from the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris (master's degree), specializing in fine art photography and anthropology under the guidance of Patrick Tosani and Maurice Godelier. Working between Brussels and Paris, she is a photographer and visual artist who reinterprets the photographic medium to enhance its physical and sensory dimensions. Her work lies at the intersection of research and contemporary art, centered on a reflection on memory, landscape, and human condition. Since 2019, she has been pursuing the research project Agir dans son lieu, initiated by curator Julie Crenn, marked by artist residencies and exhibitions in which she carries out fieldwork in collaboration with sheep breeders (Les Ateliers des Arques, Le Transpalette Bourges, Les Abattoirs Toulouse, La Galerie du Dourven). Since 2019, Morgane Denzler has also been engaged in pedagogical work at Plateau 96, within the Indigo collective (artists with disabilities).

Andreea Medar (b. 1990, Târgu Jiu, Romania) is an artist working across objects and mixed media, sculpture, media installations, and video, her practice is characterized by a layered visual language. Since 2017, she has also collaborated on various projects with Romanian artist, curator, and art critic Mălina Ionescu. Through the juxtaposition of contrasting elements, Medar reconfigures her personal imaginary, developing projects that examine family history, rural communities, ritual, and processes of change, dissolution, and persistence.

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Aurelia Mihai (b. 1968, București, Romania) is a visual artist and film-maker based in Hamburg. She studied at the National University of Arts in Bucharest and later at the Academy of Visual Arts in Düsseldorf and the Academy of Media Arts in Cologne. Between 2009 and 2021 she was a professor at the University of the Arts in Braunschweig. Aurelia Mihai has received numerous awards and scholarships throughout her career, including Villa Aurora (Los Angeles), the German Academy Villa Massimo (Rome), and grants from IASPIS Stockholm and Stiftung Kunstfonds. Her Films and video works have been presented in international exhibitions, including at The Chelsea Museum of Art, New York, Cheekwood Museum of Art, Nashville, Tennessee, USA, Museum Ludwig Köln, K21 Düsseldorf, Documenta 13, Kassel, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Germany, Cobra Museum Amstelveen, Netherlands, Palace of the Arts in Naples, Italy, MACRO, Rome, Kunsthalle Salzburg, Austria, MOCAP, Krakow, Kaunas Picture Gallery, Lithuania, BIENALSUR, Cordoba, Argentina, Museo Nacional Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain, Centre Pompidou, Paris, The National Museum of Contemporary Art (MNAC) Bucharest, Periferic 8, Contemporary Art Biennial, Iași, Romania.

Ilie Mihali (b. 1976, Săcel, Romania) studied ceramics in the 1990s at the University of Art in Cluj-Napoca, later completing postgraduate studies at the National University of Arts in Bucharest (2000). In 2003, Mihali emigrated to the United Kingdom, where he pursued a professional path outside the arts. With the start of the Săcel Art Residency, he re-engaged with his artistic practice, working at the intersection of contemporary art and traditional craftsmanship. A recurring invited artist in the Săcel Art Residency, Mihali explores ceramics and artisanal methods rooted in local knowledge, bringing them into dialogue with contemporary artistic approaches

Ileana Mihali (b. 1958, Săcel, Romania) was born into a family of six siblings. She attended school in the village for six years, which was the standard at the time. She would have liked to continue her studies, as she enjoyed learning, but that would have required moving to a town farther away. Without the necessary support, she was unable to do so, something she still considers one of her regrets. She married young, at the age of 18, as was customary at the time. She raised two children, a son and a daughter, who are now adults. They both live abroad (in the UK and Italy), and she now has six grandchildren. Ileana has lived in Săcel her entire life, working in agriculture and selling farm products at nearby town markets. During the winter, she sets up her weaving loom and produces various handmade textiles. Since her husband passed away a few years ago, she has reduced her farming activities and spends more time weaving. She is eager to teach her granddaughters the art of weaving when they visit during the holidays.

Delia Popa (b. 1980, Bucharest, Romania) holds an MFA in Painting and Drawing from School of the Art Institute of Chicago, USA (2007), a Postgraduate Diploma in Fine Arts from Goldsmiths College, University of London (2005), as well as an MFA in Visual Arts and a Bachelor Diploma in Painting from the National University of Arts Bucharest (2004). She works in media such as painting, video, installation, performance and participatory projects. Delia Popa's works have been presented in prestigious national and international group exhibitions,

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screenings and performance events, including at the National Museum of Contemporary Art/MNAC, Bucharest (2023/2020/2014/2005), Pragovka Gallery, Prague (2024), at Galeria Anca Poterasu, Bucharest (2024), at Toplocentrala, Sofia, Bulgaria (2022), at the Cologne Biennale, Germany (2022), at the Occupy Art Festival New York City, USA (2022), at Kunsthalle Bega, Timișoara, Romania (2021), at WASP Studios, Bucharest (2018). In 2020, some of Delia POPA's works were included, through public acquisition, in the collection of the National Museum of Contemporary Art of Romania (MNAC).

Maria Poterasu (b. 1949 – d. 2023, Săcel, Romania) was raised by her grandparents - an experience that shaped her sense of responsibility and independence from an early age. She had a strong desire to learn and she received state-supported merit scholarships, which enabled her to continue her education. She continued her studies beyond the village school, attending the Pedagogical Institute in Cluj, where she also received study scholarships - a significant achievement at the time, especially for a young woman from a rural area. After completing her education, she returned to Săcel, where she worked as a kindergarten teacher for over forty years. She dedicated her life to early childhood education and to the role of the school as a central space for community life. Alongside her professional work, she raised four children; her three elder daughters later emigrated to Spain and Belgium, while her youngest daughter continues her engagement with culture, education, and community through contemporary art. Maria Poterasu lived her entire life in Săcel. In her free time, she enjoyed sewing, weaving kilims and politics. She was also remembered by the children on her street as an excellent cook.

Damien Rouxel (b. 1993, Quimper, France) was raised on a farm, where he experienced the harshness, codes, tools and language of the farming world. His visual work (photography, video, sculpture, installation and performance art) puts a new spin on the farm, turning it into a stage on which the animals, the artist's parents and his sister, the farm equipment and tools, and everything in its work environment become the scenery and actors. Through them, Rouxel stages various fields of research, such as his personal and family history, his gender identity, art history, the notion of monstrosity, myth, model, drag and the mask. The farm becomes an imaginary theatre in which both freedom and complexity are performed.