

## **TECHNIQUE, EXPRESSION, MEANING AND YOUNG ARTISTS**

**Alexandru RĂDVAN**

*National University of Arts Bucharest, Romania*

### **PREMISES**

Working with students, young artists, is always a challenging task, but at the same time it is or should be a win-win situation. One of the parties provides the guidance based on professional experience, technical know-how, while the other comes with fresh stamina, the beautiful audacity of youth and most of all with the freedom generated by the lack of experience.

The young artists are never concerned with the longevity of their work, they create for here and now and in this enterprise, they make use of various unorthodox technical means. A well-behaved restorer may say that this attitude is very dangerous when speaking of the artworks' health and durability, but it is also a great terrain for exercise and experiment, which pushes forward the field of artwork conservation and restoration, the same way rare wounds help in developing medical knowledge and finding surgical solutions.

One of the aims of VISART project is the dissemination of the research results to art students, in a less conventional language: a free dialogue between researchers, conservators, restorers and young artists. In this manner, the first category will expand their area of issues and questions, while the second category will gradually become aware of the technical aspects and their importance in the creation process. Since I teach in the painting department at the National Arts University from Bucharest, I take the opportunity to open this dialogue with my students.

### **A FEW EXAMPLES**

The most important thing in art education is, in my opinion, helping the students to reach their way towards creativity. This may sound very abstract, poetic and ultimately cheap, but the methods used to reach creativity are nothing of the sort. They are very concrete, often physical and many times technical. Every artist has his/her own way to adjust these methods to its specific temperament and needs. As I said, technique and materials are very important in the process, because there is a strong connection between idea and material and quite often the idea has to adapt to the material's properties and limits. The group of students I worked with were in their final year of study and they were preparing their graduation works, meaning that each one had to create a series of paintings (I use this term in a very loose manner), that the message each artist chose had to be coherent around the idea.

I tried to apply a pattern in the approach, turning the balance towards idea, material, creativity and technical stability. The main concern was that the students should develop their own ideas, no matter how hardly possible they seemed at first look. I encouraged the students to experiment various materials, thus resulting in various expressions charged with various messages.

After the first phase, selection of ideas, experimenting materials, collecting the new ideas born during the experimentation process, came a second, more difficult phase. It was the moment of recalibration, of rethinking the whole body of works as an ensemble that had to be unitary, not only from the conceptual point of view, but also in the technical aspects. We decided to maintain the unconventional character of pictorial technique, but at the same time, we started

to be aware of how durable or perishable a certain material or technique might be. In other words, we tried to find the healthiest way of using materials that were not specific to painting, materials gathered under the term of “unconventional”, even though they had been used by artists for decades.

It was very interesting to see the response of the students to these problems, having in view that they took classes of pictorial technology, focused on traditional techniques, mostly tempera and oil (but not the acrylics, a medium that most of them use). In the end, almost all the works contained elements of different mediums, from tempera, board, drywall, celluloid, crayons, salt, burns, tar, fluorescent markers, golden spray, lights.



Alexandru Popa, *Habitat*, oil, salt, sand, ash, mounted paper on canvas

Some of the most challenging situations involved works that were conceived more like installations based on the possibilities of mixed media. In the same piece of work one can find crayons and tempera on wood, painted drywall, as well as rough drywall, paper cutouts, glitter-paper (cutouts and drawn with crayon), acrylics and charcoal, pins, lights.



Raluca Macovei, *Studio 22*, detail of the installation

The result was charming and very vivid as expression, but the artist faced the problems of installing, dismantling, packing, unpacking the work, all that experience leading to the conclusion that the work would never look the same twice; it is a new work every time the artist reconstructs it. Some of the parts may be stored and carefully kept (drawings, cutouts) and some will require total remake at every new installing (drywall).

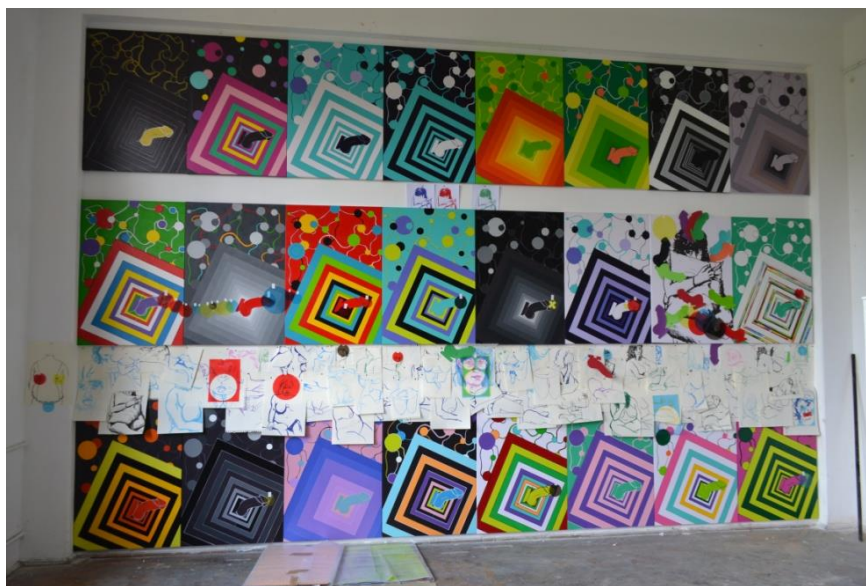


Raluca Macovei, *Studio 22*, view inside the box, wood, drywall, metallic structure, oil pastel, tempera, cutout paper, lights

Another artist accomplished her work on medium sized canvases, the number varying from 18 to 21. She used the canvases as a background, on which she gradually added works on paper, drawings made with markers, ink, pencil, roller pen. Colored paper cutouts were added and cutouts made in colored celluloid. Papers and celluloid were stuck onto the canvases with pieces of paper tape. Recycled paper tape, heavily touched by acrylic paint was used to create a collage on one of the canvas modules.

Canvases had differed priming. Being a modular work, they repeated the same formal pattern and varied color. Some of the canvases were cotton canvas primed for acrylic painting and drawing was made in pencil. Others were mix polyester-cotton, primed with ink jet receptive coating and the drawing was printed with black-brownish ink. Both categories of canvases had interventions with acrylic paints and were covered with good quality anti UV varnish. The main reason of the varnishing was to prevent the changes of color in the exposed parts of the canvases. While the priming used for acrylic is very stable, according to the lab analysis and its white remains virtually unchanged for very long periods of time, the ink jet receptive coating and the ink used for printing is much more sensitive to light. Since the artwork was designed to be shown indoors, not directly exposed to light, we considered varnishing as a sufficient measure.

Due to the approach mentioned in the beginning, the artist became aware of the material aspects of creation and the way they might affect the work: possible yellowing of the papers, loss of color of different markers, eventual loss of transparency of celluloid etc. This may sound like a list of diseases and one may argue that this approach suffocates the creativity and the free expression. The result was that the artists started to be more attentive with their works: with the choice of the materials, their combination and most important, their storage and preservation.



Daiana Savopol, *Naked state of fact*, general view



Daiana Savopol, *Naked state of fact*, detail, acrylic on canvas, cutout paper, cutout celluloid, marker on paper, print on canvas

The conclusion of this process is that the young artists started to perceive the technique and all the problems deriving from it as important tools, which should be used in order to achieve and enhance artistic expression, sometimes as important as the idea itself.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Alexandru RĂDVAN** has graduated from the National University of Arts Bucharest, painting section, prof. Florin Mitroi's class. He has a PhD on "*The fantastic image created with plastic means and literary means*". Currently he is teaching at the painting section at the National University of Arts Bucharest. His creation is divided in ample series of works – The Emperor, Minotaur, Constantin the Great, Homage to Judas, Christ – often containing links to myths and mythology.