ARTnews

February 2, 2015

2015 Venice Biennale

Romania Taps Adrian Ghenie for 2015 Venice Biennale Pavilion

By Andrew Russeth

Painter Adrian Ghenie has been selected by Romania to represent it at the 56th Venice Biennale, which opens to the public in just a little more than three months, on May 9.

Ghenie, who was born in 1977, is known for moody paintings, often portraits or interiors, that he bedecks with patches of brushy abstraction. Michaël Borremans and Luc Tuymans may come to mind as precedents when viewing his canvases.

The painter has had solo shows at S.M.A.K. Ghent, the MCA Denver, and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, and been in included in quite a few international group shows. He's represented by Pace, Tim Van Laere Gallery, and Galerie Judin, and is cofounder of Galeria Plan B, which has locations in Cluj and Berlin.

Adrian Ghenie, The Dada Room, 2010.COURTESY THE ARTIST, VAN VAERE, PACE, JUDIN

Ghenie has some big shoes to fill. In 2013, Romania presented Alexandra Pirici and Manuel Pelmuş's An Immaterial Retrospective of the Venice Biennale, which received wide acclaim. In 2011, the nation presented a three-person show with Ion Grigorescu, Anetta Mona Chişa, and Lucia Tkáčová.

http://www.artnews.com/2015/02/02/romania-taps-adrian-ghenie-for-2015-venice-biennale-pavilion/

November 25, 2014

Which Top 50 Living Artists Performed Surprisingly Well at Auction in 2014?

Adrian Ghenie Courtesy Tim Van Laere Gallery

Which 50 living artists performed incredibly well at auction in 2014? The editors at artnet news were pondering this very question, as the auction season is now over and the year is coming to an end.

artnet owns the world's largest and most comprehensive price database for secondary market sales of fine and decorative art, so we decided to go visit the people on the analytics team (thanks, artnet analytics) and asked them to crunch some numbers. They determined how best to create a list for us, and we hereby publish the findings.

For each artwork lot offered for sale at an auction house in 2014, our database records the reserve price as well the realized price (among many other metrics). For instance, if an artwork is estimated to sell for $1 million, at its high end, and sells for $2 million, the difference between the realized and estimated price is $1 million.

We examined the 18,079 living artists (as far as we know) whose works have been offered for sale by auction houses in 2014 in order to find the artists achieving the greatest price increases over the initial high estimates. We did take into account, of course, that there was not always a range or spread of artworks offered for sale, so we excluded artists for whom there were only one or two recorded secondary market transactions in 2014.

For each of the artists below, we list two key dollar amounts. The first, the maximum difference in US dollars, represents the greatest spread between a single lot's high estimate and its price realized at auction (including premium). The second number represents the average spread between the price realized at auction and each lot's high estimate when all of the artist's lots are taken as a group.

For more information about top lots, including the name of individual works, or comparable sales, or to research other artists, we invite readers to visit the artnet Price Database at artnet.com.

1. Adrian Ghenie, Romanian
   Romanian–born artist Adrian Ghenie's haunting and multilayered images reference a number of sources such as news, media, classic films and social media sites, often depicting figures that appear gnawed and slashed, blurred and speckled. His work has been widely exhibited, including at Tate Liverpool, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi in Florence.
   Maximum difference in US dollars: $1,841,115
   Average difference in in US dollars: $301,645
   Number of lots sold in 2014: 10

Figures are accurate through November 12, 2014.

http://news.artnet.com/market/which-top-50-living-artists-performed-surprisingly-well-at-auction-in-2014-172310

ART+
AUCTION

September 2014, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 1, P. 113

By Doug McClemont

LONDON

PACE

ADRIAN GHENIE: GOLEMS

● The Romanian-born Ghenie, who maintains his studio in Berlin, makes paintings that draw on his emotional and intellectual experiences growing up in a communist country and his rich knowledge of European history. For his first exhibition at the London gallery, the artist created a mixed-media installation titled *The Darwin Room*, 2013–14, using genuine 19th-century furniture and floorboards to forensically reconstruct Rembrandt's painting *Philosopher in Meditation*, 1632. Visitors were required to travel down a dark passageway to encounter the musty-smelling, gloomy, three-dimensional, unpopulated tableau. The experience was Ghenie's own kind of aesthetic time travel. His painted interiors on canvas and his unforgettably deformed figures have made Ghenie one of the most sought-after painters of his generation. Pace currently has a waiting list of 89 serious collectors eager to acquire a piece by the artist. Just eight works were available from the recent Darwin-themed exhibition, with small paintings starting at $90,000 and the largest works selling for up to $500,000. This past June, his *Fake Rothko*, 2010, sold at Sotheby's London for £1,426,500 ($2.4 million) against an estimate of £250,000 to £350,000 ($426–596,000). Polly Robinson Gaer, senior director at Pace London, says that Ghenie's collector base reflects broad global interest and includes "the Far East, Korea, Hong Kong, and the Americas, as well as fans in the Middle East and virtually every single country in Europe."

Charles Darwin at the age of 75, 2014. Oil on canvas, 78¾ x 106¼ in.

FINANCIAL TIMES

July 12 / July 13, 2014

By Jackie Wullschlager

Visual arts Jackie Wullschlager

Adrian Ghenie

Pace Gallery, London

The young Romanian says he wants to paint "the texture of history", and he does it in the texture of paint, slathered, scraped, layered with a luxuriant physicality and palette of rich contrasts. The effects are abstracted but narratives, especially depictions of figures who changed the course of events or thought, are always the subject. In this show the figure is Darwin, whose flowing beard, Victorian garb and appearance in 19th-century caricature as an ape afford Ghenie marvellous possibilities for employing thick, dark paint and his signature grotesquerie. "The Darwin Room", a cave-like installation modelled on Rembrandt's "Philosopher in Meditation", completes the exhibition and affirms Ghenie's ambition within the framework of European figurative painting.

pacegallery.com, 020 3206 7600, to July 25

<THE L MAGAZINE>

April 24, 2013

Consuming Themselves Within, Without

Adrian Ghenie: New Paintings

Pace Gallery

Paul D'Agostino

Adrian Ghenie, *Pie Fight Interior 8,* 2012, courtesy Pace gallery

Devouring the gallery walls despite their generously spaced hanging arrangement—and despite their generally large as opposed to definitively massive dimensions—the paintings by Adrian Ghenie at Pace Gallery, amounting to and marking the Romanian artist's first solo exhibition in a US gallery, are a riveting, haunting, unforgettable array. In taking them in, however, take note, too, that more than just wall space is offered up for the devouring.

Ghenie's palettes are bold, nearly brazen, at times well-nigh conceptually abrasive—but work they do, and very well, and their range of brilliance is something beyond extensive. Earthy ochres, ambers, olives and ivories ground a rather consistent mix of interiors and outdoor visions, but vibrant fluorescents dance within and splatter about the very same canvases as if chromatic chaos were rushing in to lay visual

landmines, or as if technicolorful underpaintings were rupturing forth to reclaim primacy. This internecine battle raging between interlappably heaving strata of paint, if not paintings, serves Ghenie's abstractly figurative subjects quite well: a crouching figure surrounded by vicious canines in assault mode in an otherwise pacified, wintry birch-scape, although at second glance the dogs seem to disappear; a lone figure in a grand room arrested in fully wrenching, writhing guffaw as comeuppance gnashes him asunder from every angle, though a lovely lamp on a table remains pristine enough; some mildly deformed figure before some grim stone bridge, somewhere, awaiting some ominous meeting with a maker while lively smatterings out of a circus's color box flitter about. The works seem to surge forth and suck you in all at once thanks to their contradictory energies, or their energetic synergies. Something about them is wondrously agape.

Combining with due deftness, and not always candidly, certain maneuvers and devices from a range of painterly predecessors and contemporaries, Ghenie creates holistically engaging, devastatingly strong compositions that still gasp and shudder with unique richness. They are enough his own to make formal influences scarcely matter, that is, which makes it almost distracting—if not also a bit disappointing—to learn that one or another among his generally faceless figures is meant to be Hitler, Darwin or some other Historical Figure, or that a certain scene revisits Nazi atrocities. There is nothing wrong, per se, in wrangling with such subjects, but Ghenie makes his references so pictorially ambiguous as to subjugate them to the checklist, and the same references are far from fresh. Ghenie's works are too splendidly complex to seek such simple buttresses. Like walls and viewers, his paintings devour them, too.

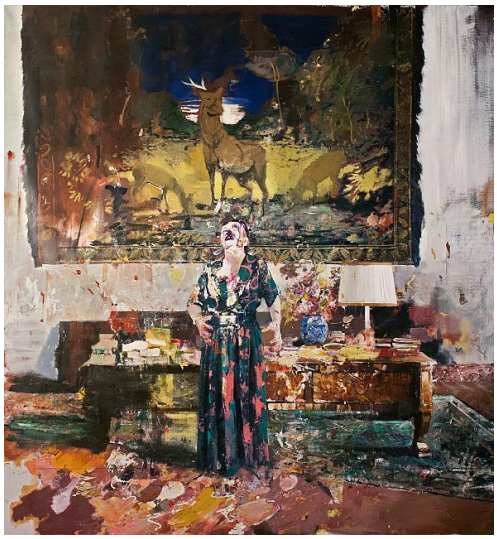
http://www.thelmagazine.com/newyork/consuming-themselves-within-without/Content?oid=2309791

ARTOBSERVED

April 27th, 2013

New York – "Adrian Ghenie: New Paintings" at Pace, through May 4th 2013

E. Baker



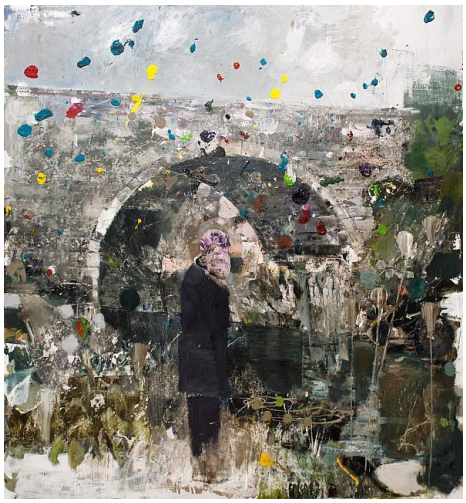
Adrian Ghenie, *Pie Fight Interior 8* (2012), Courtesy Pace Gallery

Romanian painter Adrian Ghenie's first U.S. gallery exhibition, *Adrian Ghenie: New Paintings,* explores a dark, distorted side of modern European history, pulling images from publications, films, and artistic sources and blending them with his own personal memories and visceral artistic style. The exhibition is presented by Pacc Gallery, which has represented the artist since 2011.

Born in 1977 in Baja Mare, Romania, Ghenie attended the University of Art and Design in Cluj, Romania, and currently lives and works between Cluj and Berlin. He has held solo exhibitions worldwide, from Bucharest, Romania to Denver, Colorado, and he has been included in exhibitions at the Tate Liverpool, the Prague Biennial, the 54th Biennale di Venezia, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and Bucharest Biennial. In 2005, he also co-founded Galeria Plan B, a space for contemporary art and center for research on contemporary Romanian art.

Adrian Ghenie, *Persian Miniature* (2013), Courtesy Pace Gallery

The exhibition at Pace includes pieces from *Pie Fight*, an ongoing series he began in 2008, and returned to in 2012. Ghenie works at the duality of the images he creates, exploring how the two disparate tropes play against each other while simultaneously working in tandem to create new meanings. In these works, thick paint obscures the human faces, evoking themes of lost individuality and the irony of horrific historical events. These dark, surreal images take figures such as Adolf Hitler and Charles Darwin, and transform them into faceless, unrecognizable non-humans. Paralleling this loss of identity, the pie fight brings a comical note to the works, robbing the figures of their historical stature through slapstick imagery.



Adrian Ghenie, *The Death of Charles Darwin* (2013), Courtesy Pace Gallery

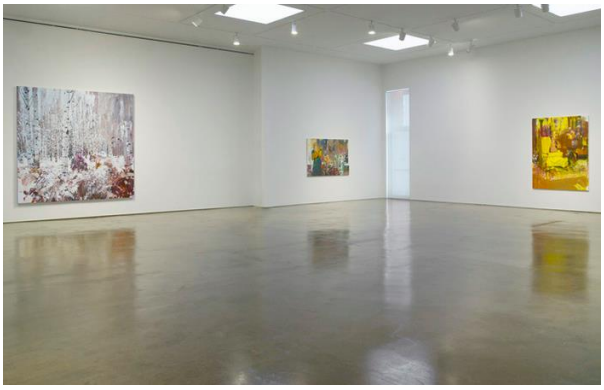
Burnett Abrams, the curator of Ghenie's first U.S. exhibition, refers to his strategy as one attempting "to alter — destroy, really — this historical legacy…By attacking his distinctive features and sullying his face with thick strokes of oil paint…"

Adrian Ghenie, *New Paintings* (Installation view), via Pace Gallery

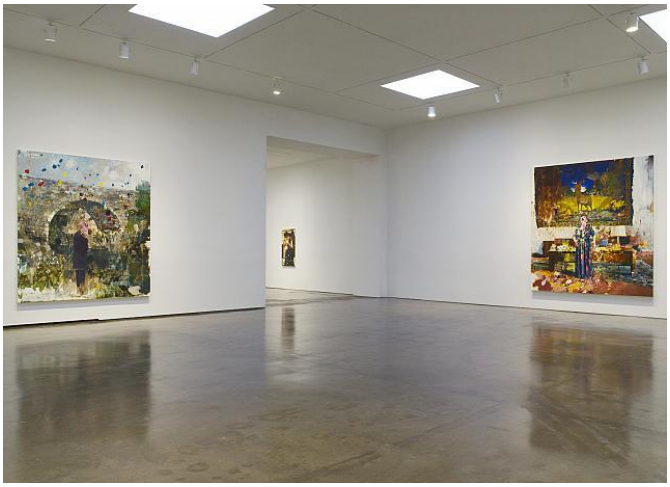
Ghenie's more recent works on view are slightly more abstract, but remain focused on layering and texturing the canvas with different consistencies of paint. He uses the techniques of scraping and spilling color, and often makes use of self-portraiture. Consistent themes involve the mixture of history and the absurd, combining his own imagination with archival interpretations of past events.

Adrian Ghenie, *Untitled* (2012), Courtesy Pace Gallery

Adrian Ghenie, *Pie Fight Interior 2* (2012), via Pace Gallery



Adrian Ghenie, *New Paintings* (Installation view), via Pace Gallery



Adrian Ghenie, *New Paintings* (Installation view), Courtesy Pace Gallery

http://artobserved.com/2013/04/new-york-adrian-ghenie-new-paintings-at-pace-through-may-4th-2013/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+artobserved+%28AO+Art+Observed%3F%29

THE BROOKLYN RAIL
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

April 2013, p.31

DISTURBING DICHOTOMIES, ADRIAN GHENIE BY ALANA SHILLING

Adrian Ghenie: New Paintings

PACE GALLERY | MARCH 8 – MAY 4, 2013

Adrian Ghenie, "Persian Miniature," 2013. Oil on canvas, 118-1/8 x 114-3/16". © the artist; image © Pace Gallery.

It is impossible to categorize the curious pleasure that emerges when our most complacent knowledge is challenged. Without doubt, Pace Gallery's current exhibition of 13 paintings by Romanian-born Adrian Ghenie beggars complacency. Its oscillation between figuration and abstraction might even provoke a reexamination of aesthetic taxonomies.

In Ghenie's compositions, the dialogue between abstract and figurative elements is hardly trifling. It insinuates itself everywhere, quietly reminding us that the distinction between the two is a convenience, as fictional as the slapstick convention structuring the artist's "Pie Fight" series—a sequence to which many of the works on view belong. The paintings force acknowledgment of what everybody knows and forgets: figurative art is always already abstract, just less honest about it. Figuration's cult of mimesis strains to conceal artifice; abstraction lays it bare.

Ghenie's works often brood on history and its injustices. Some pieces in his "Pie Fight" series isolate characters from film stills of comedic pastry wars and radically re-contextualize them, mingling those figures with iconic images from Nazi history. The consequence is an erasure of the separation between fictional comedy and historical tragedy, between the unexpected poignancy of anonymous pie fight victims and the bathos of calculated Fascist grandeur.

But it is the intense aesthetic conflict—the uneasy exchange between abstract and figurative elements—that makes all these works worth viewing. Abstraction and figuration tear at their very seams. Though the paintings nearly always contain figural elements, abstraction is never far, clouding backgrounds with improbable tempests, dissolving tassels of rugs.

"Persian Miniature" (2013) invokes and reveals the thinness of artifice's disguise; the very title embodies the paradox of the truthful lie. Neither a "miniature" (this is the largest work in the exhibition) nor an adherent to other conventions of that genre, the work unfolds in a grove of birches devoured by winter. Yet, the right-hand third of the canvas rebels, refusing to sustain the conceit. Trees occupying that representational netherworld turn changelings; the intricate bark patterns so convincingly rendered elsewhere turn stylized, as if dreaming they were the painted eyes that danced on prows of ancient ships as they cleaved the Aegean.

Similarly, abstraction laps at the edges of "Pie Fight Interior 8" (2012). A pie-splattered woman occupies what is both the center of the room and the canvas. The floor dissolves at the subject's feet into a cacophony of pigments. The intervention of abstraction shivers across the composition—indeterminacy of pure pigment rises along an edge of the tapestry, while dress patterns turn apostate: careful, open circles weep into irregular red splotches. In other works, resolute armchairs stand against backdrops filled with pigment as unpredictable as summer rain; a seated figure's leg withers to a mere intimation of form; through erstwhile windows the world turns grisaille and fills with the unlicensed offspring of Chagall crossed with Goya.

These paintings do not oppose abstraction and figuration; they demand we acknowledge how artificial their separation is—and Ghenie's skill at figuration lends that demand its vitality. Though his formative training was limited to outdated textbooks, his study of Old Masters was not in vain. His skill in illusionism enables these paintings to reveal how the genesis of figuration lies with abstraction; "abstract" and "figurative" are neither impermeable categories nor cladistic strangers. What appear to be actual books overflowing on an oak table are single horizontal brush strokes—nothing more. Perfect pleats on a dress prove merely uniform black vertical lines upon a green ground. Luxuriant ferns are a flurry of impatient paint on canvas. The collapse of distinctions cuts both ways. Drip painting could be custard; errant vertical strokes may signal change in the weather. Put differently, this is not a representational war. There is no meaningful outcome, no 'victor.' The abstraction spreading across canvas may be a revenging angel of Modern Art or it may be a universe of pigment on the cusp of domestication by figuration. In this world, Art is refused the comfort of entelechy.

Performing this drama of representational conflict and collusion demands a big stage. Accordingly, it is the large format works that are most compelling. As the exhibition progresses, works taper to smaller portraits that cannot inspire the same experiential intrigue with which larger paintings—simultaneously imperious and fragile—tempt viewers to invent their own shadow-plays while offering no tales of their own.

More is at stake than conventional ideas about abstraction and figuration. Ultimately, the alternation between opposition and fusion of the two unsettles the compositions, infusing them with a sense of risk, of invasion. Aggressive overpainting refuses the works the sanctity of diegesis. None of these paintings is granted what Art so often takes for granted. No imaginary Maginot Lines protect these painted worlds. None is spared drip-painted invasion; there is always ambiguity about what elements belong in the painting and which are dropped over it as an afterthought. The relief of taxonomic clarity is denied.

534 W. 25th St. // NY, NY

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

March 16-17, 2013

ARTIST FOCUS: ADRIAN GHENIE

Slapstick With Dictators

ROMANIAN PAINTER Adrian Ghenie says his creative epiphany came when he created a series of paintings based on "In the Sweet Pie and Pie," a 1941 Three Stooges sketch where Curly, Larry and Moe instigate a pie fight.

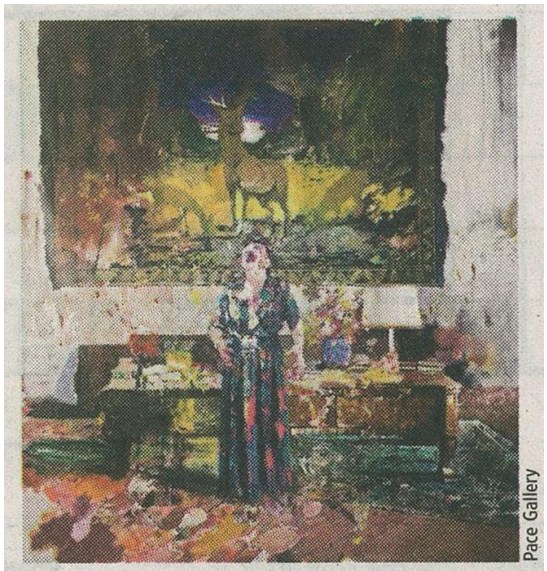
"The slapstick thing is the perfect analogy" to express the humiliation that dictatorships make you feel, Mr. Ghenie says. He should know: Born in 1977, he grew up under the dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu and remembers queuing for hours as a child to buy food. On Christmas 1989, his family gathered for a warm holiday meal after watching Ceaușescu's execution on TV.

The 2008 Three Stooges painting led to other pie-fight works, many included in Mr. Ghenie's latest show, which opened March 7 at New York's Pace Gallery. Before the opening Pace sold all 13 works for between $65,000 and $350,000 each.

That followed a drastic spike in the artist's auction prices. At a Sotheby's London sale in February, "Dr. Mengele 2," Mr. Ghenie's portrait of the notorious Nazi physician, sold for $190,826—over three times its high estimate and more than twice the artist's record from 2012.

For Mr. Ghenie, Nazism is a major theme (Romania was an Axis power). In his show at Pace, the Berlin-based artist contemplates Adolf Hitler, whom Mr. Ghenie calls "an archetype for evil like Einstein is an archetype for intelligence." The artist hopes to awaken a feeling of queasiness in viewers whom he says have been desensitized by ubiquitous images of Nazi-era Germany.

In "Pie Fight Interior 8," the artist mixes absurd fantasy with fiction by portraying a Hitler-like figure in a dress in front of the dictator's office desk and lamp, which Mr. Ghenie painted from photos of Hitler's chancellery. Splotches of paint cover the room, as if the figure had just been the subject of an intense pie fight. The piece sold at the higher end of Mr. Ghenie's price range. Another work, "Untitled," portrays a man's face smeared with red and gray paint that obscures the subject's eyes while leaving room for a mustache identical to Hitler's.



ADRIAN GHENIE'S 'Pie Fight Interior 8,' on view at New York's Pace Gallery.

Mr. Ghenie has other targets. "The Death of Charles Darwin" is a fictional scene of the British scientist contemplating suicide, his face obscured by purple paint. Citing the Nazis' eugenics policies and Josef Stalin's gulags, the artist calls Darwin's theory of natural selection "the foundation for all the totalitarian theories of the 20th century."

Mr. Ghenie says he's "scared" about the effect auctions could have on his prices. "There's sort of an evil spirit that's awoken by these huge amounts of money," he says. *—Mary M. Lane*

Right: A work in progress on the wall of Adrian Ghenie's Berlin studio; at far right, the artist in his workspace in Cluj.

ADRIAN GHENIE

THE PAST IS PRESENT—AND NEVER RESOLVED—IN THE ROMANIAN ARTIST'S ABSORBING, AMBIGUOUS CANVASES

BY RACHEL WOLFF

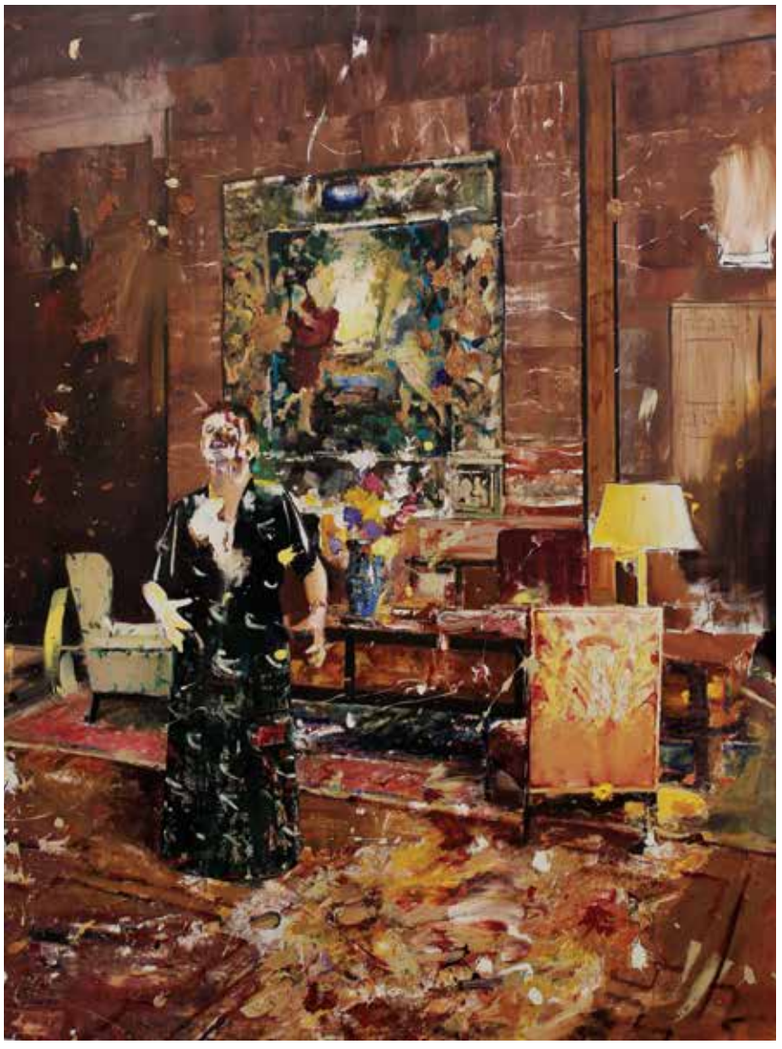
ADRIAN GHENIE'S BERLIN STUDIO is located in a space that once housed the Nolan Judin gallery, the site of his first local show. It's a bit tricky to find, tucked away in a cluster of postindustrial buildings down the road from the city's Hamburger Bahnhof Museum of Contemporary Art, in the area that preceded Mitte as Berlin's primary gallery hub. The studio may be a bit haunted, too—not only by the ghosts of gallerinas past, but perhaps, Ghenie tells me, by something more sinister as well.

Indeed, there's a rumor circulating among those who have worked in and on Ghenie's studio building that its basement once served as a Gestapo prison. Whether or not that's true, it's a supposition that might have spooked another, more superstitious artist. But for Ghenie, a ghost story of this caliber suits the dark and stirring mythology he constructs on canvas—one that encompasses the layers of history, the clichés surrounding its most horrific figures, and our collective and personal memories of how it all went down.

Structurally, the Romanian painter didn't change a thing from the space's Nolan Judin days. (The gallery, which still represents Ghenie's work in Berlin, relocated to a light-filled flagship on Potsdamer Strasse in 2011.) But upon entering, there is a distinct morning-after vibe uncharacteristic of a pristine white cube. Cigarette butts and other assorted scraps and garbage cover the poured-concrete floor; empty beer and water bottles are clustered atop what once served as the gallery's front desk; and bountiful stacks of aggressively rifled art and history books and pixelated printouts are strewn about. The mess continues deeper inside, in what once served as the gallery's primary exhibition space. Squeeze bottles of acrylic paint and craggy mounds of pigment-soaked paper towels lie in front of Ghenie's paintings-in-progress—moody, unstretched canvases pinned to grubby, workaday white walls.

Ghenie's studio in Cluj, a small city in northwest Romania that's lately been colonized by artists, is nearly identical, he tells me. It's a former gallery too, and he spends three or four months there each year, working alone, as he always does. These blank, open spaces suit his technique, which is increasingly built on layering several colors and then scraping them away to create singular patinas on the haunting figures and ambiguous interior spaces he tends to depict. The flat walls are crucial, he explains, to counter the pressure of his metal scraper.

Abandoned showrooms also suit Ghenie's work habits, providing a sterile environment that could never be



mistaken for the coziness of home, amplifying his self-imposed separation between work and life.

Such structure and discipline were critical of late as Ghenie prepared for a series of high-profile exhibitions, including his first museum show in the United States, where he had shown only in galleries. "Pie-Fights and Pathos" closed in January at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) Denver. And on March 8, he will make his New York solo debut at the Pace Gallery's 534 West 25th Street outpost. That show will continue in the same vein, with expressionistic renderings of spectral figures, some of which are frozen in mortifying vignettes as they use their fingers to scrape whipped cream off their faces—and seemingly, at times, their skin along with it.

Ghenie's ascent has been rapid by any measure. It's all the more impressive given that he started painting in earnest only in 2006, earning his first museum solo in 2009, at the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Bucharest, and placements in the collections of MOCA Los Angeles and SFMOMA. He was an arty kid and studied the medium at the University of Art and Design in Cluj. But a long bout of painter's block left him discouraged. He was making "very classical, very Symbolist, very 19th-century, anachronistic paintings" at the time, he says, and when he graduated, in 2001, he felt as if his work had no place in the contemporary art world—which he didn't totally understand, anyway.

Growing up, Ghenie was aware of Rembrandt and the Old Masters, he says one afternoon late last spring, "but I had no idea that Francis Bacon existed, and it's not just me, it was my whole generation." We're sitting in a back room of his Berlin studio, surrounded by towering rolls of raw canvas. Ghenie's hooded sweatshirt, Nikes, and jeans make him look younger than his 35 years. He taps ashes on the floor from his constant stream of American Spirit cigarettes. Things changed a bit with art school—not to mention the dawn of the Internet age—and Ghenie gained a vague awareness of an interdisciplinary, idea-driven art world beyond the academy. "I knew there was something outside of that, this rhetoric against paintings, against commercialism, but I knew not how to access it," he says. "I was really well trained in terms of skills and classical technique. But this 'art world' was sending all these confusing signals. So I decided to quit."

In 2002 Ghenie moved to Vienna, where he was intent on living "a very ordinary life." He made a few "crap paintings" during that time, he says, but nothing serious. He found himself perusing the local gallery scene as well, once he no longer felt pressure to contribute to it. "I was looking slowly," he says, "to try to understand what the hell is going on." But after two years, Ghenie says, "I had failed completely. I was just sitting in this shitty apartment with no money, no business, eating 50-cent tuna salad, so I went home. I thought I will probably have the same life, but at least I will have friends to laugh about it with."

Reunited with his art-school friends in Cluj, Ghenie found himself in good company: They had failed too. "There was nothing—no infrastructure, no market, no galleries, no institutions," he says. "And we had already been outside; we had turned to the West and we were total losers. But we learned something. We decided the only thing we can do is open a gallery for ourselves." So Ghenie and the multimedia artist and curator Mihai Pop founded Cluj's scene-making Plan B gallery to show local artists, fellow rising stars Victor Man and Ciprian Muresan among them. (Plan B, which expanded to Berlin in 2008, remains a critical local resource; the gallery was tapped to organize Romania's pavilion at the 2007 Venice Biennale.)

In 2006 Ghenie was inspired, once again, to paint, and staged his first solo show at Plan B. He was promptly picked up by Haunch of Venison in London and by Antwerp gallerist Tim Van Laere, followed by Mihai Nicodim in Los Angeles and Pace, in December 2011. The artist was propelled by an acute interest in 20th-century European history—"what happened »

Pie Fight Interior 4, **2012, above, is among the new works Ghenie is exhibiting at New York's Pace gallery this month. He recently began to paint women instead of men as pie victims, as in *Pie Fight Study,* 2012, right; the effect, he says, is "even more disturbing."**

BOTH IMAGES: ADRIAN GHENIE AND PACE, NEW YORK. PREVIOUS SPREAD, FROM LEFT: KATRIN HAMMER, ADRIAN GHENIE, AND NOLAN JUDIN, BERLIN; ADRIAN GHENIE

***The Hit*, 2007, is characteristic of Ghenie's earlier black-and-white works and depicts a German U-boat with a gouged hull as it might have appeared in a 1940s-era newspaper. Below: the artist's Berlin studio.**

with Communism, Nazis, all of this," he says. "My generation, we were all losers historically, economically. There was no culture of winning. Winning under a dictatorship is to make a deal with the power, which is a moral dead end. A black hole." He continues, "I realized how complicated the history of Eastern Europe is from a moral perspective, from a psychological perspective, because almost everybody was, at the same time, both killer and victim."

Having grown up under Nicolae Ceausescu, who was executed on national TV on Christmas Day in 1989, Ghenie was especially interested in the contradictory ways in which history is recorded and experienced. He looked to his mother, who came of age during the height of Communism: "She lived in the worst period of the 20th century, but when I asked [her] about it she said that it was great because it was her youth," the artist says. "I realized that people's perspectives about history are automatically cool. And it's very sick. They don't care that it was the Stalin years. They just remember that they were young and they had this energy and they fell in love."

It's this gap between fact and subjective memory that Ghenie sought to explore through his work. The paintings he's made since that realization apply a dreamlike veil to historical figures and events. Faces are fuzzy; moods are grim; and surroundings are abstract, surreal, and otherwise off. When he wasn't sure how to communicate these psychologically fraught tableaux, he says, "David Lynch came along and gave me the solution." Hitchcock, too. "In terms of composition, colors, atmosphere, I borrow many things from cinema," he says.

Early on, Ghenie limited his palette to black and white, as in *That Moment*, 2007, which introduced themes and imagery that persist in his work today. The 5½-by-7½-foot canvas features the legs of a lifeless man and woman sticking out from beneath a black couch-table hybrid; a marble statue of a classical Greek discus thrower hovers nearby. The moment in question is when Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun purportedly took their own lives as Allied forces closed in. "It was never documented, never even confirmed," says MCA Denver curator Nora Burnett Abrams. "But it's a moment that exists in everyone's mind." »

FROM TOP: ADRIAN GHENIE AND PACE; KATRIN HAMMER, ADRIAN GHENIE, AND NOLAN JUDIN

"Adrian is fascinated by episodes of history that will never be resolved," Abrams continues. "He knows that he will never resolve them either, but he attempts to address them."

Ghenie's compositions have become more and more complex over the years as he's turned increasingly toward color and abstraction to shape figures and construct space. He relies on drips, scrapes, and splatters—"staged accidents," the artist calls them—to impart texture. He makes preparatory collages combining art historical images and documentary photographs to plot out the rest. When I arrived in his Berlin studio, Ghenie was working on another Third Reich–inspired image: a rendering of Hitler perched on a deck at his Alpine retreat, his jet-black comb-over and mustache are barely discernible on his abstract and bloodied face. (Titled *Berghof*, the 2012 work was included in the MCA Denver show.) For Ghenie, Hitler is a means to an end: "I really like to work with cliché," he says.

The other set of recurring images in his work seems almost flippant in comparison: hapless suckers covered in pie, their mugs culled from screen grabs of the Three Stooges and Laurel and Hardy on YouTube. The Internet is a constant source, Ghenie says. "I like democracy in terms of access to inspiration." When frozen, these slapstick moments of impact and shame are deeply unsettling. "When I cropped these images from the films, I realized it was a very psychological, very powerful image," Ghenie says. "It's also about humiliation, which is a very strange ritual in the human species and still one of the most important features of a dictatorship. The best way to terrorize people is to humiliate them."

Ghenie's first pie paintings were poignant studies, formal portraits of men whose faces are disfigured by impasto swirls of white paint. He later expanded these into larger, more ambitious compositions, such as the 10-foot-wide *Turning Point*, 2009, in which a four-way pie fight erupts. The artist's most recent pie paintings, several of which will go on view at Pace, where his prices range from $75,000 to $350,000, are striking tapestries of color and texture. He's pushing the abstraction—those staged accidents—further and further to achieve a visceral effect, to bring the viewer almost physically into this cringe-worthy scene.

Ghenie recently started rendering female victims of pie fights as well. "It's even more disturbing," he notes. By clothing them in 1940s and '50s garb, he evokes an era when a woman was expected to have the family dinner on the table promptly at six; instead, someone off-canvas smashes a day's work into her face. It's a fraught and ambiguous narrative. Is it a prank? An accident? An act of terrorism? Is it the consequence of domestic upheaval, the punishment of a tyrannical regime? Of course, we'll never know who threw the pie. ⊞

***Berghof*, 2012, top, is among Ghenie's many canvases that grapple with Adolf Hitler and other totalitarian leaders of the 20th century. He lifts source photographs, below, from books and the Internet.**

FROM TOP: ADRIAN GHENIE AND PACE; KATRIN HAMMER, ADRIAN GHENIE, AND NOLAN JUDIN

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

October 02, 2012

Cities on the Edge

Six Lines of Flight
San Francisco Museum
Of Modern Art
Through Dec. 31

By David Littlejohn

San Francisco

In June 2010, Apsara DiQuinzio, then a curator at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (now at the Berkeley Art Museum), received a grant from the Andy Warhol Foundation to travel around the world and find six relatively off-the-chart cities where significant new art institutions, movements and activity had taken root and flourished in the past 10 or 20 years. The cities she ended up with were Beirut, Lebanon; Cali, Colombia; Cluj, Romania (the Communist government added "Napoca" to its name in 1974, but no one ever uses it); Saigon, Vietnam (the Communist powers have renamed it Ho Chi Minh City, but no one except bureaucrats ever uses that name, either); Tangier, Morocco; and San Francisco.

The result is the eye-opening "Six Lines of Flight: Shifting Geography in Contemporary Art," which fills the top floor of SFMOMA. It contains 60 works in many media by 19 artists or art collectives from these cities, separated geographically by gallery.

San Francisco doesn't belong on the list. As an art city, it's not "marginal," or "peripheral," as the catalog authors define the other locales, and its significance as a creative center has long been acknowledged. Ms. DiQuinzio's justification was that "this exhibition was about the importance of the local, and I had to include my own locality." But what if she lived in New York?

Moreover, the San Francisco contribution, by an environmentalist, anticorporate group called Futurefarmers, is the weakest of the six: 10 audio recordings about the future, by experts (on ecology, planning, astronomy, physics, biology, etc.) from Berkeley, Harvard and other universities, that could have been PBS broadcasts.

The only other disappointing contribution from Ms. DiQuinzio's six chosen cities is the sole one from Tangier. There is no question that Morocco's colonialist past, and the two decades of repressive national government that came after independence, provide plenty of material. But in her photographs, posters and videos, Yto Barrada (director of the Cinémathèque de Tanger) focuses on the uglification of her native city since masses of impoverished new immigrants and wealthy tourists have led to the destruction of old quarters and the erection of banal hotels and apartment blocks. A good story, yielding grim, banal photographs.

Unlike the U.S. and Morocco, the other four countries have been through hell in the past 20 to 50 years. This goes a long way to explain why their suddenly released artistic energies—as they try to remember, rediscover and rewrite their tragic pasts—are so much more moving.

'The Trial' (2010) by Adrian Ghenie. SFMOMA

An inconsistent survey of six art cities said to be flourishing with new ideas.

Lebanon has a 3,000-year-old history, perpetually cloven by religious and cultural divisions and invasions. Akram Zaatari tries to reconstruct this messy history through the archives of hundreds of thousands of photographs he discovered, all taken by a popular Beirut portrait photographer Hashem el Maadani since the 1940s; the exhibit includes a reconstruction of this photographer's studio. Joana Hadjithomas has taken dozens of colorful "Welcome to Beirut" postcards of the good old days—the beaches, grand hotels, quasi-Parisian night life—and burned or smudged each one. (Museum visitors are invited to take copies home.) Lamia Joreige has composed a wall-filling "time line" of the history of Beirut, from 1200 B.C. to A.D. 2100—made up of 29 photos, drawings, reproduced paintings, maps, texts and video monitors—that would take a day or more to absorb.

Cluj, in Romania, is a city that not one museum visitor in a thousand is likely to have heard of. Yet it is that country's second city, arguably its most active in terms of new art and intellectual activity, looked down on (like Saigon by Hanoi, Cali by Bogotá) by the more powerful capital city, Bucharest.

After serving as dictator of the country since 1967 (and after 1971, as the most repressive, neo-Stalinist dictator in Eastern Europe), Nicolae Ceauşescu and his wife, Elena, were seized by the army (which had joined forces with the revolutionaries, after four days of national mass demonstrations), given a brief show-trial, and almost instantly shot by a firing squad on Christmas Day 1989. The assassination was shown on national television and the Communist Party dissolved.

Cluj painter Adrian Ghenie's large 2010 oil called "The Trial" depicts a blurred, freely painted image of the Ceauşescus sitting before an L-shaped judgment table—an image shown on TV—shortly before they were killed. Another, "Dada is Dead" (2009), shows a spot-lit, frightened and frightening gray wolf in a dark cellar. A third ("The Collector," 2008) is a large, blood-red painting of Hermann Göring at his desk, surrounded by paintings he had looted from all over Europe. All three are museum worthy; "The Trial" belongs to SFMOMA.

Also from Cluj is Ciprian Muresan's video of a gang of animated dog-puppets shouting out the oppressive evils of the world, tormenting a female member of the Eternal Republic of Dogmania with every kind of insulting accusation, and then torturing to death one of their members for being insufficiently dedicated to the ruling regime.

Particularly impressive are the contributions of new Cali artists, after 21 years of rule by a brutal drug cartel often in collusion with a corrupt government. Wilson Diaz's video of a Colombian pop group (in military fatigues and bearing rifles) singing and playing jauntily about the recent atrocities of life in Cali is no joke. Oscar Muñoz's gradually fading images of his own face and of significant moments in recent Colombian history remind us of how quickly the present disappears into the past. Most powerful of all is Luis Ospina's 28-minute mockumentary ("The Vampires of Poverty") about the poor people of Cali, with paid actors, written lines and a borrowed set. Just before the end, the gaunt, dreadlocked, gap-toothed owner of the shack breaks in, curses the film crew as exploiters (what Latin Americans call purveyors of "pornomiseria" for the middle class), chases them out, and ruins their film.

We know something of Vietnam's historical horror story, because we had something to do with it, during what the Vietnamese now call "the American War" of 1965-75. It is against this background that the art on display from Saigon—the former capital of the U.S.-allied South, still regarded with suspicion and disdain by Hanoi—must be seen.

The Propellor group—two returned Vietnamese and one American—made a slow-motion video of an underground North Vietnamese tunnel near Hanoi (one of the thousands that were a major weapon in the Communist victory) that has been excavated and converted into a shooting gallery for tourists, mainly Americans, who pay to aim at a target with AK-47s. The ironies involved are almost stifling. Dinh Q. Lê's video contrasts a stiff, perfunctory daily assembly of Vietnamese soldiers in front of the huge white mausoleum of Ho Chi Minh in Hanoi with exuberant scenes of hundreds of gleaming motorcycles racing at night (sometimes upside-down) through the jovial chaos of still-Westernized Saigon.

Tiffany Chung's exquisitely drawn, colored and embroidered maps of each of the six cities (commissioned by SFMOMA) turn cartography into art overlaid with social commentary. Her precise, beautiful maps depict cities expanding through increased population growth (Cali, Cluj); past earthquakes and predicted floods (San Francisco, Saigon); major political events (Tangier); and total social chaos (Beirut).

I can't say that "Six Lines of Flight" totally won me over to its premise: that the relatively new, "peripheral" art cities of the world may now have as much to offer the "center" (New York, London, Paris, Berlin, Los Angeles) as they once drew from these art-world capitals. But, thanks to Ms. DiQuinzio and SFMOMA, I feel a slightly better-informed citizen of the world.

Mr. Littlejohn writes about West Coast cultural events for the Journal.

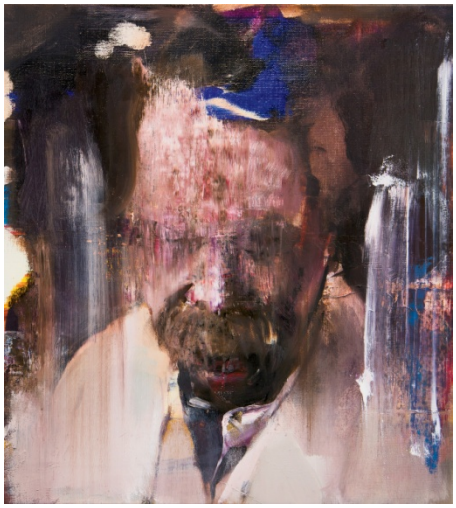
Interview

ADRIAN GHENIE

DECEMBER 2011

BY ALEX GARTENFELD

PHOTOGRAPHY SEBASTIAN KIM



Ever since the Wall fell in 1989, Berlin has been the city that artists have defected to—in part for the cheap living and studio space, in part to get away from the hungry market and social swirl, and in part for all of the dirty, glamorous decadence that has made the fraught German capitol a place of myth and mayhem for generations of young misfits. Artists don't come to Berlin to make it big—they come to be artists, and today, a new crop of international creators have arrived to make the city their own.

With figures gnawed and slashed, blurred and speckled, Adrian Ghenie's paintings involve the big ideas that transform men into larger-than-life emblems. Ghenie's recent exhibition at Haunch of Venison in London featured humans wildly distorted and many with monkey features. The canvases were inspired by the Nazi's ideological bastardization of Charles Darwin's theories of natural selection. "No discovery is ever good or bad—it depends on how you use it," says Ghenie, although his portraits frequently feel cautionary and almost malicious in their gestural violence. Take for example his depictions of notorious Holocaust doctor and torturer Dr. Josef Mengele, his features scraped away or washed out. Other faces are patchworks of textures, so skin appears as if sourced from different ages. It's pretty brutal stuff. "Reading the biography of Mengele, you realize the Nazis were normal, obscure bureaucrats—then something happens that

corrupts them," says Ghenie. "It could happen to you or me or anyone." Indeed, the show included a silhouette of the artist himself, wearing a mask of Darwin's features. It's an approach that's no doubt additionally charged for an artist who is based in Berlin. The 34-year-old moved part-time to the city in 2007 from Cluj, Romania. Growing up in a small industrial town, Ghenie compared official painters from his native country with the classics of the Western canon, while his personal brushes with art come largely from the experiences of his parents. Ironically, the time of communist insularity of the '50s and '60s proved to be the era of greatest freedom for his parents, who traveled across Eastern Europe in the '60s and '70s and imparted those memories to their son. Ghenie sees a connection with those family tales and his own artistic production: "I like the difference between the official story and the personal perspective."

Images:

Adrian Ghenie's *Dr. Mengele*, 2011, oil on canvas. Courtesy of the artist and Haunch of Venison.

Adrian Ghenie in Berlin, October 2011. All clothing: Ghenie's own.

Referencing slapstick cinema, art history and the annals of totalitarianism, **Adrian Ghenie**'s paintings find ways of confronting a 'century of humiliation'.

–

WORDS: **JANE NEAL**

ADRIAN GHENIE'S PRACTICE HAS CHANGED dramatically in recent years: there has been a sudden increase in scale and a more confident, at times aggressive, handling of paint. Although the thirty-four-year-old Romanian now works predominantly on a scale of 2 x 3m or bigger, four years ago, when his paintings were first exhibited internationally, they were fairly small (usually well under one metre square) and featured delicately rendered, intriguing *mise en scènes* of twentieth-century dictators in peculiar and often darkly humorous circumstances: Hitler and Lenin hanging out by abandoned swimming pools (*Ironic History I*, 2006), or Hitler in front of Lenin's tomb, teaching his little dog to sit (*Ironic History II*, 2006). The works play to the age-old tendency to ridicule once-feared figures of authority through banalisation, humour and caricature from a position of safety: in this case, the future, where a grown-up Ghenie can exact revenge for the fear his parents and grandparents were subjected to in their youth.

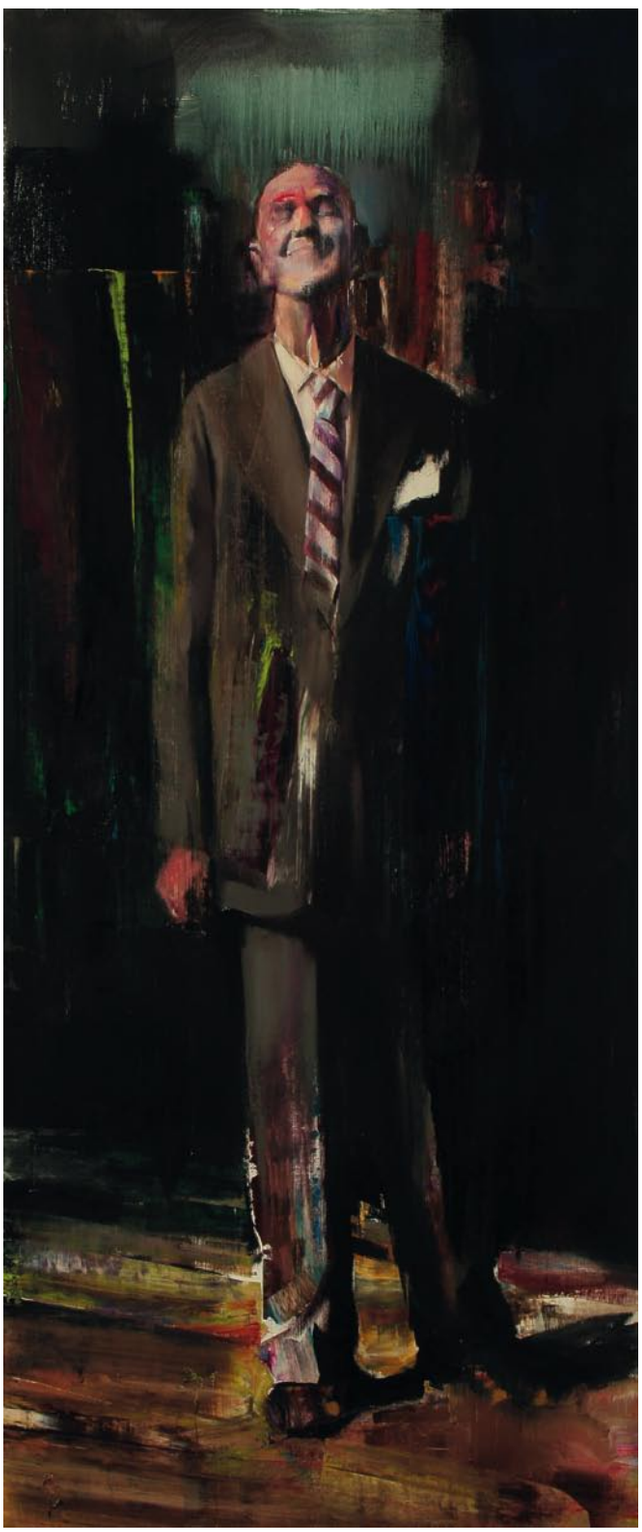
The paintings also reveal one of Ghenie's key sources of inspiration: the slapstick of early cinema, most notably Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* (1940). Indeed, Ghenie's preoccupation with his paintings' relationship to cinema finds expression in both subject and form as he translates motifs such as pie fights into paint and attempts to recreate the quality and atmosphere of early black-and-white film, with its punctuation of intermittent, cross-screen lines and flickering light. The influence of these old films has become increasingly apparent since the scale of his canvases increased to mimic the format of screens found in small, provincial film theatres. In his studio earlier this year, Ghenie tells me that, back in 2006, "I was actually more concerned with finding ways to combine my fascination for recent and ancient history, while still making works that were relevant to a contemporary audience".

The resulting paintings were part of a series entitled *If You Open It You'll Get Dirty* (2006), featuring grey tomblike structures half-buried by flurries of ash, collected in the shadows of underground chambers. The initial reading of the work suggests an epochal volcanic eruption – Pompeii, say – but there is also a latent political dimension to the paintings, a connection being made between the destruction of a great civilisation and what happened to Eastern Europe under communism, when all the colour and vibrancy of this culturally rich region was smothered and greyed under an ideological dust. While Ghenie obviously draws inspiration from history – notably that of Europe over the past 60 years – he rejects attempts to label him a 'history painter': "People have talked about me being a 'history painter', but I'm not – not in the nineteenth-century Romantic sense. Yes, I might have nostalgia for a golden age of painting, but my work takes me on much darker journeys into our collective imaginings of other stories – real and fictionalised. I'm simply trying to paint my vision of those times – a giant curiosity."

This "giant curiosity" of Ghenie's involved his reading up on psychoanalysis, particularly ideas of the collective unconscious, and experimenting with Jungian exercises to try to remember all kinds of 'ordinary' scenes and objects that might take on 'extraordinary' significance, such as the specific angle from which a room is viewed, or the presence of a lamp in a corner. The artist became fascinated with how the subconscious can merge physically encountered images with those received from cinema and television, so that both lived and virtual experiences become part of our memory banks. Towards the end of 2006 and into 2007, as Ghenie's work took on explicitly psychological themes, it became tonally darker too: "As soon as I changed the motive and the scale of my work and started to explore the collective unconscious, I became the subject, like Flaubert's line: 'Madame Bovary, *c'est moi*'. I have in my brain a double life, constantly between two worlds."

Shadow of a Daydream, as the ensuing series of works from 2007 came to be known, owes much to Ghenie's first long stay in Berlin. While the work contains references to Europe outside Germany, and to America, it is the period of Berlin in the 1940s that dominates these paintings in terms of subject matter, although some of the references can be subtle. Hitler and Eva Braun can be found in one work, *That Moment* (2007), but their identity is obscured by their sitting partway inside a coffinlike box, their heads and shoulders hidden in the shadow of the casket's open lid. The clue to their identity comes in the form of the *Discobolus Palombra*, a Roman copy of the lost Greek sculpture of the discus-thrower, which stands prominently and incongruously in the painting, and which Ghenie discovered was coveted and eventually purchased by Hitler from its Italian owners. In *The Nightmare* (2007), meanwhile, a sleeping Ghenie is watched over by the spectre of Hitler. This painting is the most explicit in terms of imagery and in some ways the most straightforward, even though the scenario is the most fantastical. The object of Ghenie's fantasy might be peculiar to him, but the scenario – a 'bogeyman' creeping up on people as they sleep – is familiar to all.

In 2008 Ghenie produced *The Flight into Egypt*, a series that merged his fascination for the collective unconscious with his interest in early cinema and its impact on both society and painting as a whole. In the darkly evocative *Babe in the Wood* (2008), which plays to a small-town film-screen format, it seems at first glance as if the child is centred in the clearing of a wood, poised on an ominous-looking platform. Closer inspection, however, reveals the wood to be walled in by a sinister-looking shack, leaving the viewer to determine whether the child has emerged from this strange, forested 'room' or is about to be sucked into it. "Most people share the experience of having



dreamed they were abandoned in a wood", says the artist, "maybe because we've all seen so many of the same films". That's possible, but Ghenie also plays on the common dream of passing through a series of rooms, as if propelled by some unseen force. He perceives this process as a descent from the upper levels of consciousness into the depths of the subconscious. "The first room contains images and offers situations familiar to many, but the successive rooms or deep subconscious hold a person's darkest private fears."

Ghenie slides back from his discussion of Jungian psychoanalysis to the role of the cinema in shaping the twentieth century. "If you think about it", he says, "the ritual of going to the cinema in the 1930s was religiously observed. Never before or since has a whole generation of people observed the same images and seen the same stories together at the same time. Now, through television, we have so much choice – we can watch a myriad of different programmes on our own – but then there was this unique moment of shared experience. And what did people see? For the most part they went to see slapstick – so actually, what the audience was witnessing on a regular basis was ritual humiliation. Think of the typical scenario: the 'nice, middle-class lady' in her fur coat, minding her own business, only to be hit in the face out of the blue by a custard pie. When you really think about it, it's quite unpleasant... And you know the strangest thing – it's almost like a precursor to the rise of fascism. This was meant to be funny, but for millions of ordinary people who were simply minding their own business throughout Europe, life was about to change in the most shocking and unexpected way. They were about to be humiliated and destroyed – and the rest of the world couldn't believe it and didn't seem to have really seen it coming. Maybe the directors and actors could feel this – even before it began to become known."

Some of Ghenie's most important works to date – *Nickelodeon* (2008), *Laurel and Hardy* (2008) and a number of what he describes as his pie-fight studies, commissioned for the 2008 Liverpool Biennial – directly reference early cinema. *Nickelodeon* features a bedraggled group of men and women. Though expensively dressed in fur, the figures are in a sorry state, desperately trying to wipe off the cream dripping from their faces. It is disturbing on many levels, but when viewed in light of the

prominent role played by Jewish émigrés in the creation of neighbourhood movie theatres, known as nickelodeons (and from which the US cartoon channel took its name), the scene becomes a chillingly brutal metaphor for the realities of anti-Semitism. "I was struck by how powerful the scene becomes when you translate the black-and-white film into the medium of paint", says Ghenie. "For one thing it becomes static, so you are forced to look at this one scene for much longer; for another, the colours and medium of paint lend the subject a weight and force it formerly lacked in celluloid. The experience becomes actual, physical."

More recently Ghenie has been delving into the world of the obsessive collector. One figure in particular has lastingly captured his imagination: Hermann Goering. The artist points to a work hanging in his studio, *The Collector 2* (2008), depicting the Luftwaffe commander-in-chief holding paintings in both hands while looking longingly at another. "There he is surrounded by everything he could literally get his hands on – but he still wants more", says Ghenie. "He's sacrificed his humanity for his obsession." Goering's face is painted a shade of puce: a sick colour,

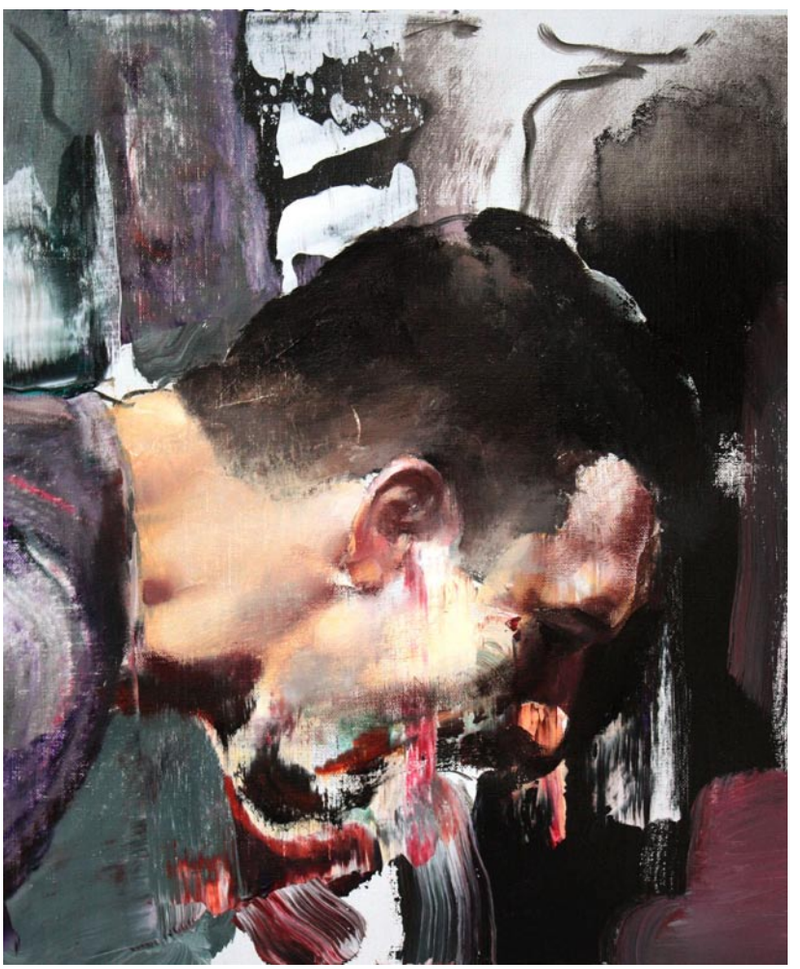
"A lady in her fur coat, minding her own business, only to be hit in the face out of the blue by a custard pie – when you think about it, it's quite unpleasant"

and intended to be read that way. The violent reds and angry purples are strongly suggestive of a slaughterhouse, and there are deliberate nods to Bacon's screaming popes. "As I was painting this", he continues, "I wondered what a contemporary collector would do if they found themselves in such a powerful position and could help themselves to anything they wanted in the name of 'confiscating it for the good of the people'. Don't you think if they were passionate enough they'd be tempted to do the same?"

And what of the artist? Ghenie's amusing yet derisive self-portrait as a decidedly unhip onstage Elvis suggests that the young art stars occupying a space in the lives and courts of the new super-rich have become 'acts' in themselves. The artist's portrait as a figure of shuffling ridicule makes it clear this is not a position Ghenie himself is comfortable occupying. This discomfort is intensified once you know that the self-portrait is also an homage to the artist's father, to whom Ghenie bears an uncanny resemblance. An Elvis impersonator in his youth, Ghenie senior never understood the words he sang or really grasped the Presley phenomenon, but Ghenie felt his father would nonetheless have enjoyed the 15 minutes of fame this work now brings him.

Despite that revelation, the artist would rather the motivations behind the painting remain more veiled than explicit: "I don't want to give the viewer everything", he says, "but when people look at my work, I want them to think about what they're looking at and to feel something. I'm not a history painter, but I am fascinated by what happened in the twentieth century and how it continues to shape today. I don't feel an obligation to tell this to the world, but for me the twentieth century was a century of humiliation – and through my painting, I'm still trying to understand this."

New work by Adrian Ghenie will be on show at SMAK, Ghent, from 3 December to 27 March, and at Tim Van Laere Gallery, Antwerp, from 27 January to 12 March



WORKS
(IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

Pie Fight Study II, 2008, oil and acrylic on canvas, 55 x 59 cm. Collection Hammer Museum, Los Angeles

The Dada Room (detail), 2010, mixed media, 320 x 600 x 500 cm. Courtesy Tim Van Laere Gallery, Antwerp

Laurel and Hardy (detail), 2008, oil and acrylic on canvas, 200 x 85 cm (Laurel)
© the artist. Courtesy Haunch of Venison, London, New York & Berlin

The Nightmare, 2007, oil and acrylic on canvas, 148 x 200 cm. Collection Blake Byrne, Los Angeles

Nickelodeon, 2008, oil and acrylic on canvas, 230 x 420 cm. Collection François Pinault Foundation

Laurel and Hardy (detail), 2008, oil and acrylic on canvas, 104 x 200 cm (Hardy).
© the artist. Courtesy Haunch of Venison, London, New York & Berlin

The Collector I, 2008, oil and acrylic on canvas, 200 x 290 cm. Hall Collection, New York & Düsseldorf

Selfportrait, The Devil, 2010, oil on canvas, 48 x 40 cm. Courtesy Tim Van Laere Gallery, Antwerp

Art in America INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

October 26, 2010

Adrian Ghenie, Pie Eater

By Stephen Riolo

With a 2006 group exhibition, "Cluj Connection," at Haunch of Venison in Zurich, British critic and curator Jane Neal drew a handful of young artists out of the bleak Transylvania arts scene and cast them into international limelight. Highlighting this exhibition was a figurative painter named Adrian Ghenie, whose dark compositions of urban architecture and shadowy figures, won him a solo exhibition *Shadow of a Daydream* at Haunch of Venison Zurich in 2007. Four years later, the 33-year-old Ghenie is London-based and preparing for a solo presentation at SMAK Ghent which opens this December. Ghenie's virtuosic figurative painting has grown to hold court with works from the New Leipziger Schule or New British movements of contemporary painting. For his solo show, "The Hunted" at Nolan Judin Berlin, Ghenie has created a new body of work brighter in tone but decidedly darker in content.

STEPHEN RIOLO: There has been significant development in the global awareness of your work since your first solo show, "Shadow of a Daydream" (2007). Now you are preparing a presentation of new work for SMAK Ghent in December. Your work has grown in scale significantly since then—do you now feel facilitated to make larger works?

ADRIAN GHENIE: It's not necessary to try to make a blockbuster, where every one is talking about *that* show. It's trying to make people more familiar with an aesthetic that may be hard to digest. If you want to have a healthy art scene it needs to start with openness to education.

RIOLO: How has your work been received back home in Romania?

GHENIE: You can't just transplant contemporary art movements to Romania, where people might not be able to access them as in Western Europe. First you need to sneak it in somehow. For me the development of contemporary art in Eastern Europe looks more like a sociological experiment at this point, not a 100% artistic one.

RIOLO: Does that sociological approach also guide your own practice?

GHENIE: My work is less sociological, and more psychological. I seek images that go straight to your brain, which you can't help but submit to. If you paint a successful image, you'll find it months later with a life of its own, scattered all over Google. My painting *pie fight study II*, 2008, I've even seen it reproduced on T-shirts in London.

RIOLO: Are you looking to create images that specifically reach this type of public?

GHENIE: I guess it's just about creating a visual gesture that is very familiar to everybody.

RIOLO: In the case of *pie fight study II*, which is a rather gory image of tearing at one's own face, the figure in this portrait seems to be wiping off more than pie. It's as if his is smearing away the paint that constructs his own face.

GHENIE: An image like that is based on the very common human experience of frustration. It's not exclusive to a specific culture or education. If I ask people what they remember about my work, they typically remember this image. I believe that art, especially figurative art, responsibility. If an image is not loaded with symbolic meaning on a Jungian level then it's an empty image.

I see it more from a scientific point of view. I guess I'm trying to do for arts what ["herd" psychologist and advertising innovator] Edward Bernays did for marketing-invent an object not just to resolve a human need, but to resolve a human desire. He took Freudian research on how desire acts on the human mind and applied this to an economic model. It initiated the birth of consumer society and a new kind of image, one designed to arouse deep feelings in you.

RIOLO: In your works these objects of desire are quite brutal. *Unbound*, 2007, is an atomic explosion rendered in a classic style that alludes to Whistler's *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket*. This theme continues across your work with massive submarines, spectral figures from military history and scenes of physical violence.

GHENIE: The object itself is nothing; symbols like these only become relevant when you have a powerful point of contrast. Without this sense of contrast an object will stay an object; even if it's an atomic bomb it will remain a dry empty shell. Only with an intriguing compositional contrast does the atomic bomb become a radical symbol or evoke a strong sense of desire. Every element in painting is inherently inert. It's all about how you activate them. Otherwise the work remains a still life.

RIOLO: So how do you create this contrast?

GHENIE: I make an intervention; I associate objects with something unexpected or something that your mind can't comprehend, something eerie.

RIOLO: You upcoming piece for SMAK Ghent is entitled "The Dada Room." What is your connection to Dadaism?

GHENIE: The Dadaists suggested methods, like automatic-dictation, free-association and Freudian analysis. My job is to combine these elements compositionally. My artistic experiment is to associate images in order to activate their symbolic meaning.

RIOLO: And how has this process solidified into "The Dada Room" work itself?

GHENIE: I participated in the 2009 Prague Biennial entitled "Expanded Painting," as I had been working with the idea that if you incorporate paintings and objects, you might start to create a fuller but still painterly atmosphere. As the title suggested, painting is the core of the environment and you "expand it."

For "Dada Room" I take this to the extreme, zooming in on a constructed environment, so that you actually have to go inside the expanded painting. It's based on the way the cinematic immerses you in a completely new environment.

RIOLO: There is a strong sense of the cinematic in many of your paintings. Their extra wide format aside, works like *Duchamp's Funeral*, 2009, or *That Moment*, 2007, have an unmistakably film noir character. There's a hint of scenography in their composition. In your work elements like point of view, shadow and light generate a deep visual field that can often feel quite filmic and uncanny.

GHENIE: Yes that is true. As a teenager there was just one series that really touched me, "Twin Peaks" by David Lynch. I found it absolutely horrifying. In '92 it aired on Romanian TV. As I dove into my painting career David Lynch remained a core inspiration. He's not just making movies... he's making experiments. He plays with something inside of his audience, and his work is so well executed we don't realize it. I think consciously and unconsciously I want to master in painting what Lynch has done in cinema. It was with Lynch that I started to build the visual language of my paintings.

When you have to paint an object you are faced with two options. If you try to recreate an object from memory you wind up projecting yourself into the work; it becomes very personal, a self-portrait based on your subjectivity. But if you project an image and then paint it, it remains very proper and neutral, lacking that subjective touch. I never wanted my objects and figures to have a personal touch, so I've used this technique, especially in my handling of perspective. I arrange everything, as it would be in a film set. I was simply thinking about how I could take a painterly practice and blend it with film but remember I do this specifically to eliminate a sense of this personal touch. The question became how could I create a painting that gives you this intense cinematic experience but stays a painting.

RIOLO: Master directors like Hitchcock or Robert Bresson are often thought to have defined part of the symbolic language of cinema through their own personal style. Auteur theory was developed in the 1950's to describe the effect by which, these directors personal touch and methodology created the cinematic vocabulary used to define the genre. Do you feel this is also the case with Lynch?

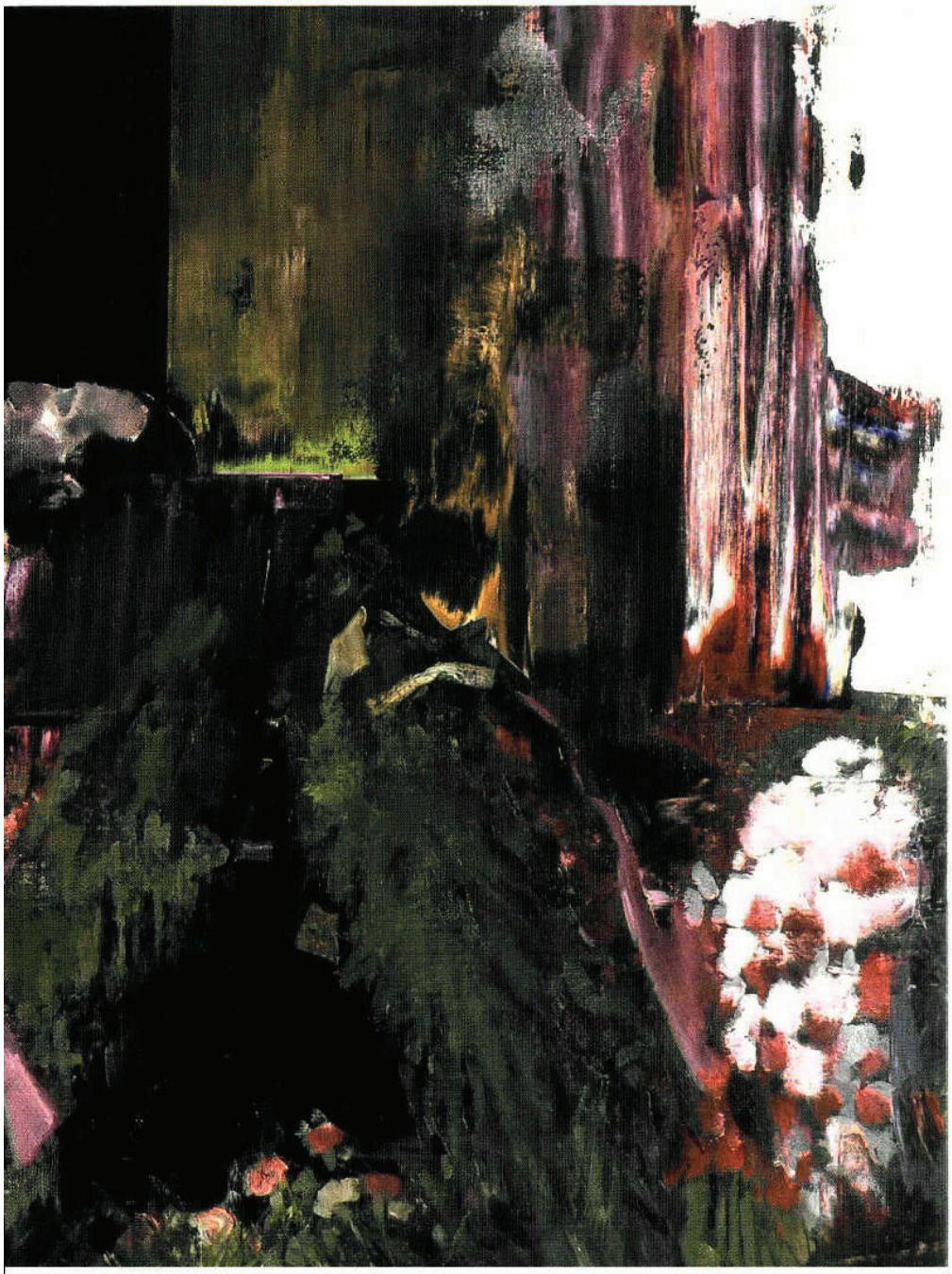
GHENIE: Its not only these directors its also the fact that the medium they use has this sort of creative power. Film is a medium that humanity has dreamt about for millenniums because separately painting, literature and music can seem like fragments. Suddenly humanity had this fantastic medium where everything had been combined. With that you can create the perfect escape, the perfect dream.

THE HUNTED IS ON VIEW AT NOLAN JUDIN GALLERY, HEIDESTRASSE 50, IN BERLIN. THE DADAROOM OPENS AT SMAK GHENT DECEMBER 3.

Adrian Ghenie

RISE & FALL

Magda Radu



Duchamp's Funeral (detail), 2009. Oil and acrylic on canvas. 200 x 300 cm. Courtesy Nolan Judin, Berlin.

Prior to becoming the "Transylvanian rising star," Adrian Ghenie co-founded, together with Mihai Pop, Plan B gallery, the epicenter of the vivacious art scene in Cluj, Romania. He is committed to supporting the thriving artistic environment in this small Romanian town through his involvement in a new art space — a reconverted industrial hall housing several galleries and studios — that opened this fall.

MAGDA RADU: *You deliberately leave room for the intervention of hazard and for arbitrary choices when you paint. To what extent does this interfere with the control you have over the painting process?*

Adrian Ghenie: When I provoke an accident and I let the oil or acrylic paint leak over a surface, I get interesting results and satisfying solutions that I haven't thought about. Representational painting can be quite tedious when it comes to the painterly facture, when paint is applied with a brush in a conventional way. The mix of colors resulting from accidents endows the compositional elements with vibrancy and I use this type of execution when I paint the background. In my works, the space framing the figures has to be painted as loosely as possible.

MR: *There is a tension in your work between a carefully planned preparatory stage (the making of collages and models) and the actual process of translating that into painting. Can you comment on this?*
AG: An antagonism is embedded in my paintings, which is not something I was fully aware of. On one hand, I work on an image in an almost classical vein: composition, figuration, use of light. On the other hand, I do not refrain from resorting to all kinds of idioms, such as the surrealist principle of association or the abstract experiments which foreground texture and surface. If the distribution of elements is precisely premeditated, paint is nonetheless applied freely, with unbridled gestures. The oil paint medium triggers a range of technical possibilities, which I am committed to explore in various combinations. For example, I mix various colors on a trowel and I apply it directly onto the canvas. Then I wipe it off with something else. Quite often I paint with a house-painter's brush. I'm interested to see the outcome of such exercises.

MR: *You have started making large-format paintings and recently your palette has diversified. What brought about these changes in your practice?*
AG: I wanted to confront this diversity, to test the combinatory possibilities after a period in which I employed an almost monochrome tonal range that reduced the intensity of experimentation. The decision to adopt a larger format came out of the same curiosity. Looking at Renaissance painting, I was keen to explore pictorial issues regarding the construction of space, such as the succession of planes, the use of perspective. My inclination to investigate geometry and volume demanded — for me at least — a bigger dimension to work on. At the same time, I was drawn to the illusionistic power of the cinema screen.

MR: *Can you describe the impact of film on you and your work?*
AG: If you look at my works, there is a filmic quality in all of them. In my case, the film has provided the most important ingredient of my visual background. When I paint I have the impression that I am also involved in directing a film. Looking at a film made by Lynch or Hitchcock, experiencing the tension and drama of a thriller is at once realistic and beyond the ordinary. For me, the genius of cinema resides in its capacity to project an illusion. The emergence of every artistic medium relied on a technical invention that was originally designed to serve a practical purpose. At the beginning there was no aesthetic. All of a sudden one looked at moving images that previously existed only in one's imagination. The first films had a certain type of grandeur because they captured historic moments, stories and myths that had to be represented on screen. There was the need to create worlds, inaccessible in everyday life. In the same vein, when the van Eyck brothers invented the oil

painting technique they realized that it had the capacity to render details, texture, volume with an astonishing accuracy. An accidental slip of the paintbrush could yield unexpected results, looking like sand or fur or the leaves of a tree. Once you discover the potential of such an invention you cannot resist it. To the 15th-century spectator, the combination of religious subject matter with the illusionistic power of oil painting must have had a great emotional impact. The same effect was experienced by the viewer in the early days of cinema.

MR: *How do your works convey this cinematic feeling?*
AG: The cinematic impression is partly given by light and texture. The settings in my paintings seem real; they seem to have suffered a process of erosion, you recognize in them a diversity of textures. The background, enclosing human silhouettes, is made up of wet, burnt, damaged walls.

MR: *What about the historical avant-garde and the way it is insinuated as a subject in your paintings? You conjure up the Dada Berlin exhibition or Duchamp.*
AG: The state of painting today prompted me to choose this subject. The ongoing debate about the "death of painting" may be intellectually stimulating, but I think it is also anachronistic. There is enough evidence to conclude that painting is not dead. And yet, I wanted to return to the historic context in which this problem was first articulated. I view key moments and personalities of the avant-gardes like Duchamp from a great distance and from a reversed perspective. Although I recognize the liberating effects produced by the outburst of the avant-garde movements (of which I am also a beneficiary), I can't help but notice the extent to which some of their ideas — exposed in time to manifold appropriations — have imposed themselves with such forcefulness as to become canonical. I simply want to question this state of affairs without making accusations. But I feel I have the right to see idols like Duchamp or Dada in a different light.

MR: *There are also references to the history of the 20th century, to figures like Lenin, Hitler or Goering. Do you invoke them because you want to address contemporary issues?*
AG: We inevitably live in a post-WWII epoch, which means that we constantly have to look back to that watershed moment in order to understand our present condition. Rather than historic figures, Hitler and Lenin appear as ghosts in my paintings. Indeed, I chose to paint them in very few instances and their presence is not conspicuous at all. It was a period in which I tried to depict their residual image in the collective unconscious, painting after such clichéd photographs like the ones with Lenin lying dead, an image familiar to millions of people. With Goering — whose portrait was featured in "The Collector" series — the motivation was slightly different. I was more interested in his personality; for me, he truly embodied the archetype of the rapacious collector. I tried to grasp the psychological complexity of this man driven by a collecting bulimia, which in the end was totally compromised by his power.

MR: *Your work is often discussed in relation to Communism. Last year you appeared in a video-film painting a portrait of Ceaușescu. To what extent does your work deal with the legacy of Communism?*
AG: I am particularly interested in the state of exceptionality that characterizes everyday life in totalitarian regimes, not just Communism. In such circumstances everything is being distorted. However, in terms of subject matter, national-socialism is more present in my work. But there are more subliminal, subterraneous ways in which I was marked, for example, by early memories of my life lived under the Communist regime. The basement of our family home was a space which contained many objects that were discarded, and this space represented for me the true receptacle of personal memories. The painting *Basement Feeling* (2007) is one of the few autobiographic works that captures this melancholic encounter with my past. The work with Ceaușescu is a project by Ciprian Mureșan; he wanted me to paint an official portrait of the dictator, giving me indications to comply to all the parameters of a conventional and neutral posture, as if an artist of that epoch had received this commission. The overwhelming majority of such portraits were horribly painted and ridiculous, so we wanted to find out if, given the imposed iconography, it was still possible to make an aesthetically passable work. It is an open experiment; the portrait turned out ok, but still, we didn't exactly live in those times. ■

Magda Radu is a Ph.D. candidate at Université Paris 1 and a curator at MNAC, Bucharest.

Adrian Ghenie was born in 1977 in Baia Mare, Romania. He lives and works in Cluj and Berlin.

Selected solo shows: 2009: MNAC, Bucharest; Haunch of Venison, London. 2008: Plan B, Berlin; Nolan Judin, Berlin; Hussenot, Paris (with Serban Savu and Ciprian Mureșan); Tim Van Laere, Antwerp. 2007: Haunch of Venison, Zurich; Rüdiger Schöttle, Munich (with Jānis Avotiņš and Andrew Palmer); Mihai Nicodim (former Chung King Project), Los Angeles. 2006: Plan B, Cluj.
Selected group shows: 2009: After the Fall, HVCCA, Peekskill (US); Prague Biennale 4. 2008: Liverpool Biennial. 2007: Prague Biennale 3. 2006: Cluj Connection, Haunch of Venison, Zurich.

Opposite: The Collector (detail), 2008. Acrylic and collage on paper, 140 x 200 cm. Courtesy Plan B, Cluj/Berlin.
Below from left: Dada is Dead, 2009. Oil on canvas, 220 x 200 cm. Courtesy Haunch of Venison, London. © Adrian Ghenie. Hunger, 2008. Oil on canvas, 40 X 30 cm. Courtesy Mihai Nicodim, Los Angeles.

The New Roman(ian) Order

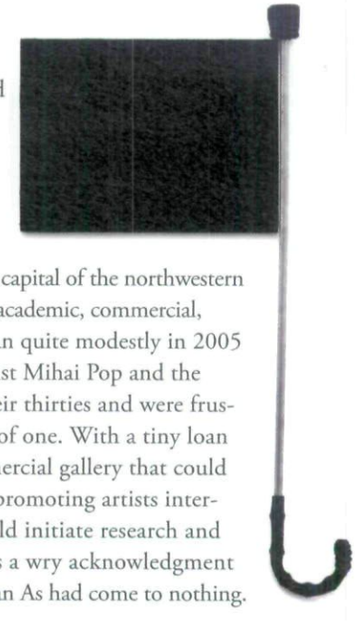
FROM TOP: Mihai Pop, left, and Mihaela Lutea at Plan B's Berlin location; Victor Man, *Untitled (Old Blue)*, 2007. Oil on canvas mounted on wood, cane. Painting: 10¾ x 12¼ in., installed dimensions variable.
OPPOSITE: The site of Plan B's new space in Cluj.

While no one was looking, Romania's thirtysomething artists seized control of their country's feeble gallery scene. Now, they're infiltrating the art world en masse.

by **Jane Neal**

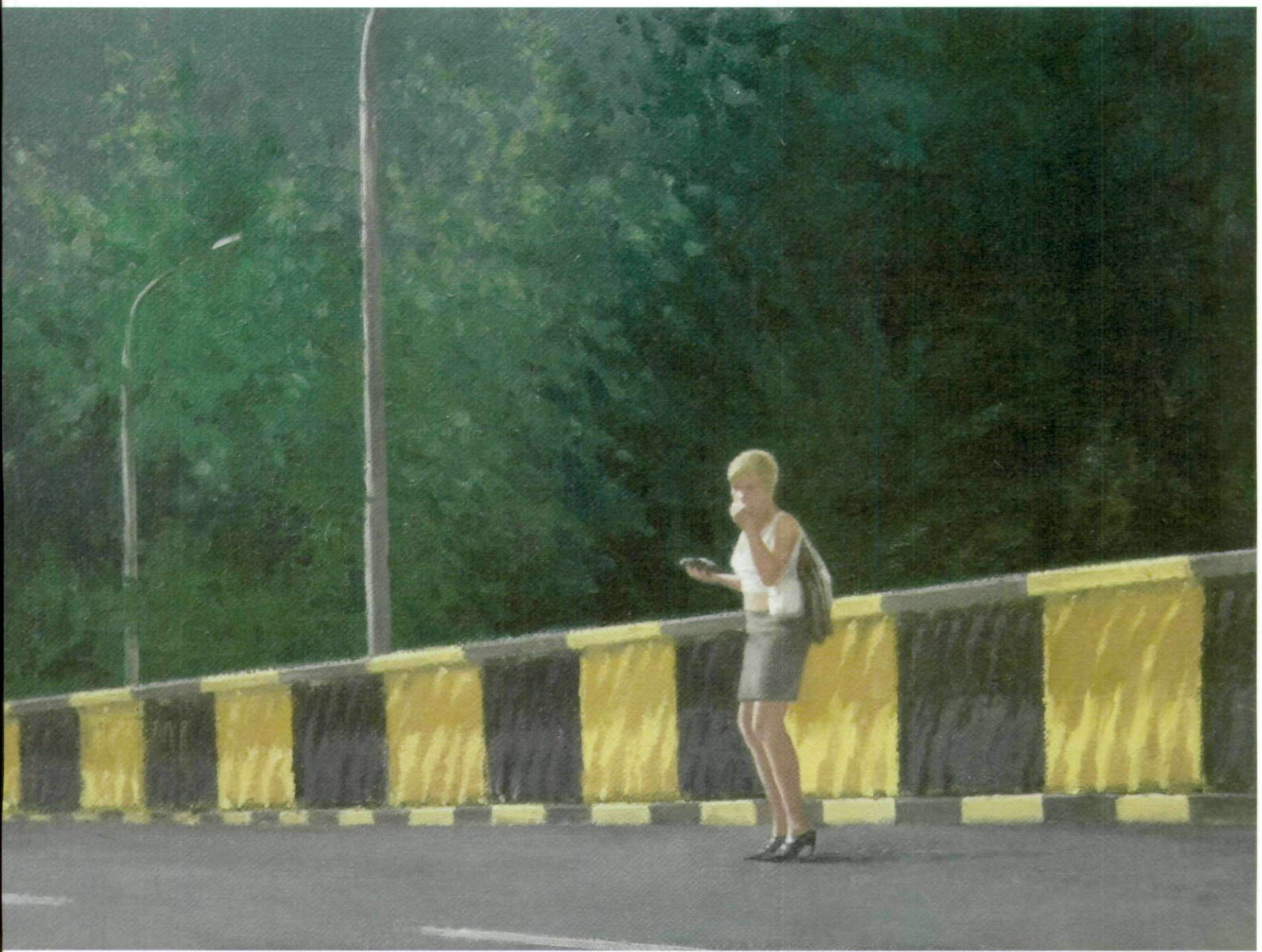
ACCORDING TO LEGEND, THE ROMANIAN SCULPTOR CONSTANTIN BRANCUSI refused Auguste Rodin's invitation to come to work in his studio because "nothing grows well in the shadow of a big tree." The prospect of being overwhelmed by an already successful and established artist is one thing, but the reality of living under a dictatorship and through its aftermath is quite another. Strangely, though, these problematic circumstances may have helped contribute to the generation of thirtysomething Romanian artists recently gaining recognition on the international art scene. Growing up during communism and witnessing its disintegration, followed by the rapid onslaught and effects of consumer culture on their society, has given them a unique perspective.

It could be, as Romanian critic Mihnea Mircan proposes, that the artists have developed a kind of "allergy to Utopia" that has imbued them with a watchful detachment, a desire to deconstruct and uncover things for themselves and to develop and sustain a strongly independent voice in their work. It would be wrong, though, to suggest that a common theme threads through the work of all up-and-coming Romanian artists. What they do share—and this extends across their various practices—is a highly individualized sense of perception often mingled with a dark, sometimes ironic, approach to their chosen subject matter.



A number of factors have contributed to the ascendancy of Romanian artists, not least the success of Plan B, an artist-run gallery in Cluj, a city that is itself something of a rising star. The capital of the northwestern province of Transylvania, it is a quickly growing academic, commercial, cultural, and technological center. Plan B began quite modestly in 2005 as a collaboration between the multimedia artist Mihai Pop and the painter Adrian Ghenie, who were entering their thirties and were frustrated by the local art scene—what there was of one. With a tiny loan from a family friend, they established a commercial gallery that could function as an exhibition space, a vehicle for promoting artists internationally, and a laboratory where artists could initiate research and develop projects. The name of the gallery was a wry acknowledgment of the fact that, up to that point, all of their plan As had come to nothing.

FROM TOP: COURTESY PLAN B, CLUJ AND BERLIN; JOSHUA WHITE/COURTESY THE ARTIST AND BLUM & POE, LOS ANGELES; GLADSTONE GALLERY, NEW YORK; AND JOHNEN GALLERY, BERLIN. OPPOSITE: COURTESY PLAN B.



Serban Savu, *Manastur Bridge 2*, 2007. Oil on canvas, 11¾ x 15¾ in.

The venture exceeded expectations. Plan B's artists are now included in the stables of some of the world's leading galleries and are regularly invited to participate in major international art events. (In fact, so successful has the gallery been in launching native artists that Ghenie has gone back to concentrating on his painting, although he is still linked to Plan B as an artist.) These international connections—and the non-Romanian collectors they attract—have been essential to the development of the country's contemporary art arena, as relatively few Romanians are willing to personally support emerging art.

Most of Plan B's artists are of the same generation as Pop and Ghenie, and, indeed, many of them—such as Mircea Cantor, Victor Man, Ciprian Muresan, Serban Savu, and Cantemir Hausi—trained alongside them at the University of Art and Design in Cluj. They could all be described as being conceptually strong, as the work of each is concerned with exploring and deconstructing specific ideas and phenomena. Cantor and Muresan work across disciplines; Man, in painting and installation; and Ghenie, Savu, and Hausi (along with a number of promising young talents from Cluj) maintain a steady commitment to painting. Historically, Romanian artists have a reputation for avant-garde thinking, most notably derived from their involvement with the Dada movement. (Their contribution to Dada and to Dada's continued influence on contemporary Romanian art was recently acknowledged in a 2006 book by Tom Sandqvist, *Dada East: The Romanians of Cabaret Voltaire*.)

Plan B has earned a reputation for the collaborative way with which it engages with artists. Last year, in keeping with his original intentions for Plan B to facilitate projects, Pop invited Cantor to use the gallery as a workshop in preparation for his solo show, "The Need for Uncertainty," which toured three U.K. museums. Pop also served as commissioner of the Romanian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2007, and in October, Plan B will participate in the Frieze Art Fair. The gallery's good reputation—coupled with the fact that its artists' works have become extremely desirable to international collectors—enabled Pop to open a second space in Berlin last year with cofounder Mihaela Lutea. And next month, their Cluj gallery will move into a larger space, a former paintbrush factory that has recently been renovated to house artists' studios and gallery spaces. Their neighbors will include

SERBAN SAVU/COURTESY THE ARTIST AND PLAN B. OPPOSITE: ADRIAN GHENIE/ COURTESY THE ARTIST AND PLAN B.

Adrian Ghenie, *Pie Fight Study 4*, 2008. Oil on canvas, 27½ x 23½ in.

Ciprian Muresan, *Choose ...*, 2005, DVD PAL, 41 sec.

Laika and Sabot, the newest editions to the gallery scene.

Meanwhile, Plan B shares a number of artists with Romanian-focused galleries outside the country in order to increase their international exposure. Among them is Mihai Nicodim's eponymous gallery in Culver City, California, where the recently opened group show "I Watered a Horseshoe as if It Were a Flower" features a mix of Romanian, American, and British artists. Like Pop, the Romanian-born Nicodim has worked hard to create a forum for Romanian art on the world stage.

But Plan B is not the only gallery in Romania to gain wider recognition. The Bucharest-based Andreiana Mihail Gallery will also premiere in Frieze's "Frame," a new component of the fair dedicated to young galleries that exhibit solo-artist shows, presenting the conceptual artist duo Mona Vatamanu and Florin Tudor. And in both Bucharest and Cluj is the aforementioned Laika, run by artists Marius Bercea, Vlad Olariu, Serban Savu, and Mircea Suciu. The idea behind Laika was to link two art scenes previously distinct from each other and thereby double the exposure for participating artists. The gallery showcases exciting emerging Romanian artists and those more established practitioners who might wish to have the opportunity to experiment on projects not typical of their usual practice. "We want to provide visibility in [these two cities], and we think it's very important that artists from Laika are seen by both audiences," says Bercea. Laika is one good example of a drive to not only provide a showcase for interesting new work but also to promote dialogue within Romania outside of the state-run institutions, which have a problematic image, due in large part to the country's political history.

Lia and Dan Perjovschi's model, the Contemporary Art Archive, is opposed to unruly government spending on cultural institutions. The CAA is run by the Perjovschis from their Bucharest studio, and the modest—and 100 percent privately funded—building that houses their organization is particularly poignant when held up against the controversial National Museum of Contemporary Art (MNAC). The latter occupies, along with Parliament, the gargantuan "People's Palace" masterminded by Nicolae Ceauşescu, and the maintenance costs alone are exorbitant. Also in Bucharest, the nongovernmental, apolitical, and nonprofit International Centre for Contemporary Art (ICCA) targets the young in particular and seeks to provide a resource center, a creative laboratory, and a platform for art to reach the wider community.

Concurrently, outside the capital, the Periferic Biennial in Iasi, the principal city of the province of Moldova, has deliberately maximized its position, though geographically peripheral, in northeast Romania. Operated by a dedicated group working under the name Vector Association, Periferic was initiated by artist Matei Bejenaru in 1997 and has grown into an international biennial. Always intended to operate outside the market, Periferic has nonetheless managed to create a sustainable operational structure. The involvement of experienced foreign curators in the biennial, the creation of the Studio for Art Practices and Debates—an educational platform for critical research and art production—in partnership with the local university, and the establishment of Vector Gallery (an independent art space with an international and educational program) have resulted in the city experiencing a greatly increased level of visibility and the development of a thriving local art scene.

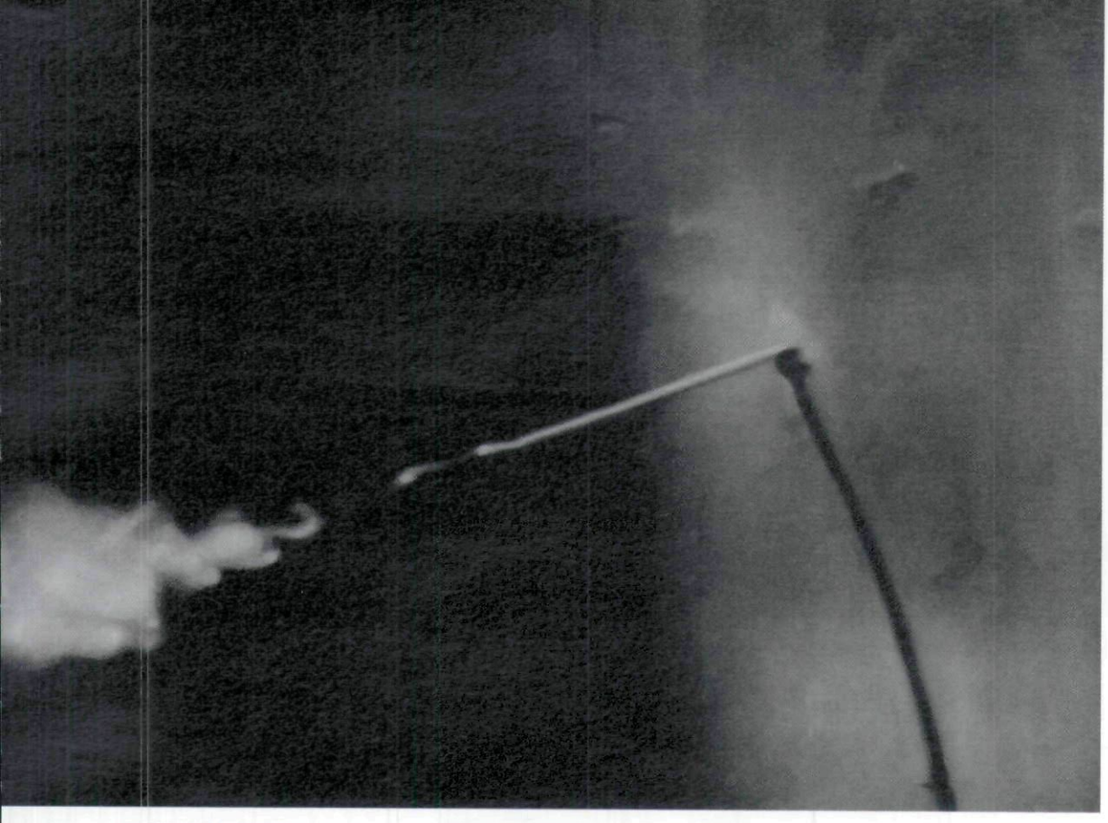
> "For so long, while we were growing up, there was this sense of frustration, a longing to get outside and taste freedom and to emulate the West."

Interestingly, virtually all of the artists who have begun to enjoy international success spent time away from Romania during the formative years of their artistic careers: Cantor in France, Man in Israel, Ghenie in Austria, Muresan in the Czech Republic, and Savu in Italy. Cantor, whose first solo exhibition in Switzerland, "Tracking Happiness," runs through October at the Kunsthaus Zürich, summarizes the impact of leaving Romania on his life and work: "Living between two countries gave me the opportunity to see the good and bad side of the contexts without being too touched by it, though [at the same time] not indifferent."

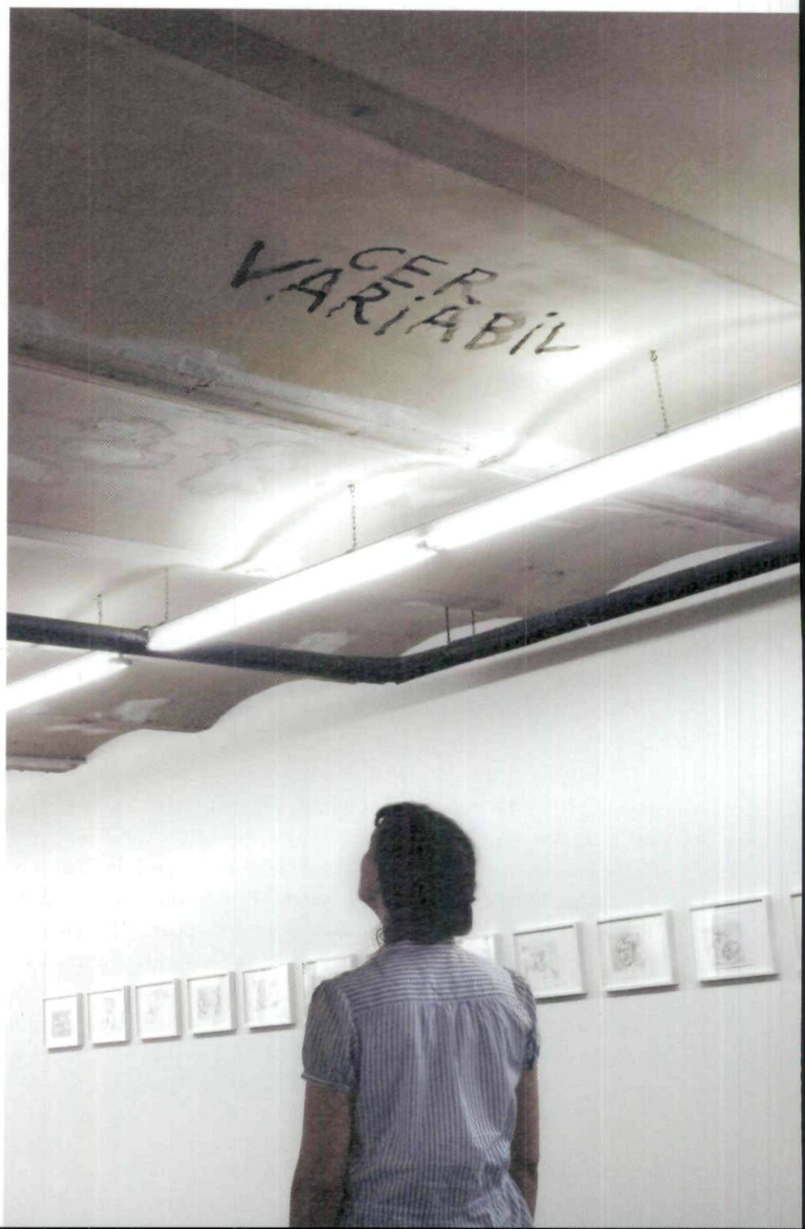
That so many young Romanian artists are becoming successful internationally is a phenomenon that intrigues and puzzles many, not least the artists themselves. Savu says, "No one knows why," but, after pausing for thought, he offers a possible explanation. "For so long, while we were growing up, there was this sense of frustration, a longing to get outside and taste freedom and to emulate the West. Once we had the opportunity to make something happen, we took it; we traveled. We learned what we could from established art scenes: how the gallery systems worked, how artists' careers developed. It wasn't as if we didn't have strong and interesting artists in Romania; the problem was how to become visible on a global scale. We realized we needed to apply what we had learned outside, inside. We had an opportunity that had been denied [to] the older generation, and we didn't want to waste this."

It is clear when talking to younger artists that they feel a certain obligation to their older counterparts. Certainly preceding generations of Romanian artists have played a part in the development of the highly conceptualized thinking that distinguishes much of Romanian art. Young artists such as Cantor are keen to support and promote figures such as painter Ion Grigorescu, sculptor Bone Rudolf, and the conceptual, multidisciplinary artist Miklos Onucsan, who taught and inspired them. Cantor says, "Due to our history, these artists didn't get the chance to benefit from international exposure. They grew like marvelous flowers and gave their fruits in a space where, often, they weren't taken for what they [were]. Now it's time that these flowers show their colors

COURTESY THE ARTIST AND PLAN B. OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: JOSHUA WHITE/COURTESY THE ARTIST, BLUM AND POE, GLADSTONE GALLERY, AND JOHNEN GALLERY; IDEA ARTS + SOCIETY; [illegible]



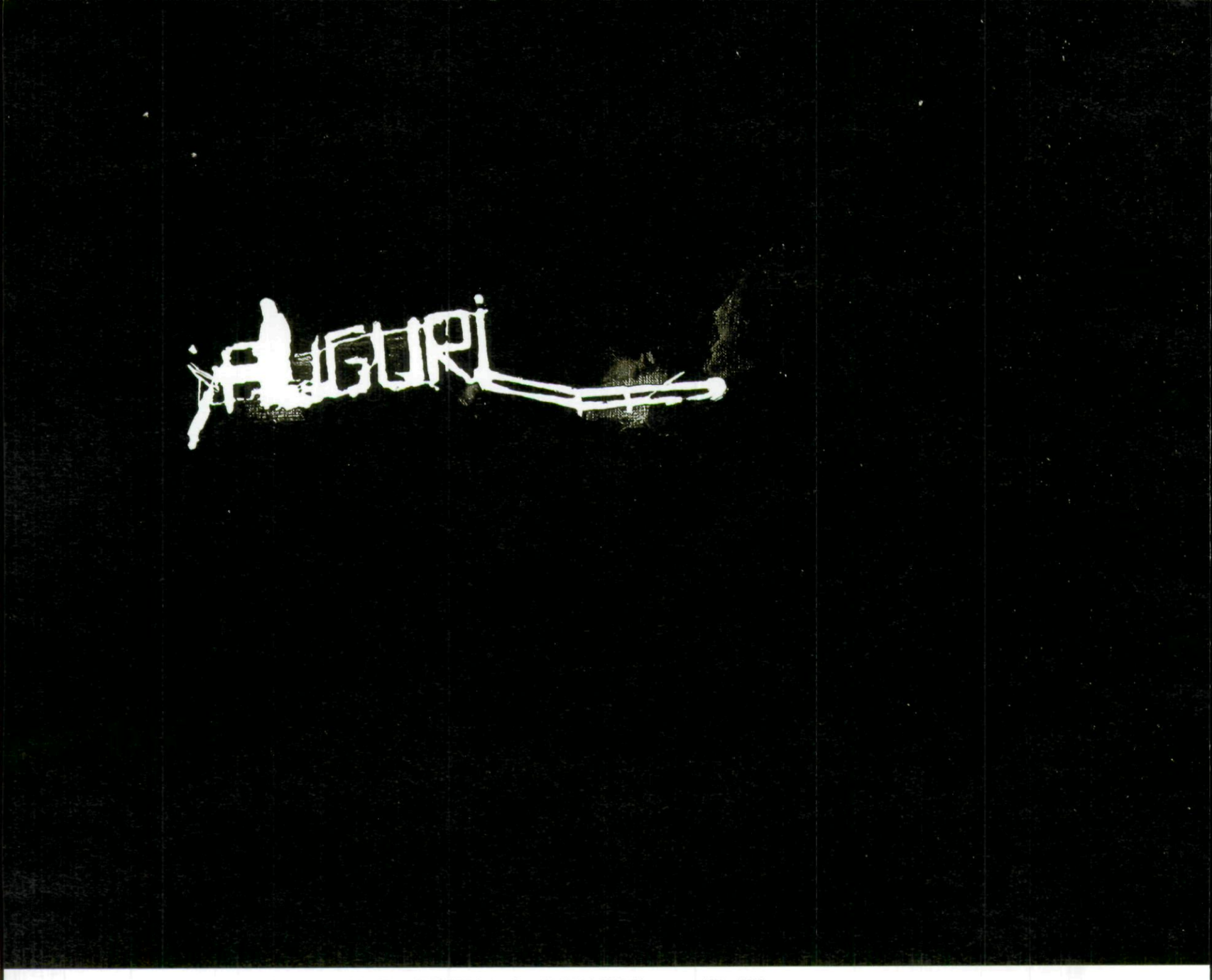
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Victor Man, *Untitled* (detail), 2007. Oil on canvas mounted on wood and print on acetate. Painting: 10½ x 14½ in., acetate: 15½ x 10¾ in., installed dimensions variable; *IDEA arts + society* cover, Issue no. 30-31, 2008; installation view of "Berlin Show #1," Plan B, Berlin; Victor Man, *Untitled*, 2007. Oil on canvas mounted on board and print on acetate. Painting: 23½ x 14½ in., acetate: 15 x 22¼ in., installed dimensions variable.



and [fragrances] in the global garden. I believe that these artists are still very up to date and should be recognized."

Many art academies in Romania still refuse to acknowledge the role of cultural theory and critical thinking in contemporary-art education. Instead, it is such entities as the Cluj-based *IDEA arts + society*, a magazine devoted to the dialogue between artists and thinkers in the field of social analysis, that have stepped into the intellectual vacuum. There are a number of other publications, among them the Bucharest-based quarterly *Omagiu*, that operate as vehicles for creative industries through themed issues, as well as the artist-run *Version* magazine, a collaboration between Paris-based artists Cantor and Gabriela Vanga and Cluj-based Ciprian Muresan. Though differently positioned, these magazines have made a significant contribution toward the building interest in Eastern European contemporary art and culture.

Curators, naturally, are vital to the artists' validation process, whether locally, nationally, or internationally, and a cadre of young Romanians has recently emerged and quickly become influential. Among them are the art historian Alina Serban, responsible for the Romanian Pavilion at this year's



ABOVE: Victor Man, *Auguri*, 2005. Oil on canvas, 29½ x 37¾ in. **OPPOSITE:** Serban Savu, *65-0944-2*, 2009. Oil on canvas, 15¾ x 11¾ in.

Venice Biennale; Mihnea Mircan, who is becoming increasingly well-known for his series dealing with monuments and monumental art (Venice Biennale 2007 and the Stroom Den Haag 2008); and Attila Tordai, former editor of *IDEA arts+society* and the coordinator of the studio/laboratory–style space Studio Protokoll, Cluj, which, together with *IDEA*, was active in shaping Cluj's art community.

One of the few locally based Romanians committed to cultivating this contemporary-art community as a collector is businessman Mircea Pinte. Next year he will loan his private collection for five years to the National Art Museum in Cluj, which in return will build a permanent section dedicated to the art of the past 40 years, with Pinte's collection at its core.

Although there is optimism within the Romanian art scene, it is cautious, especially at a time when the global economy is putting so many art businesses into difficulty. Nevertheless, the very number of ambitious, informed people working to establish a place in the international art world is encouraging, and so too is the host of individuals who are instigating this advance through small, collaborative initiatives. ✦

"They grew like marvelous flowers and gave their fruits in a space where, often, they weren't taken for what they [were]. Now it's time that these flowers show their colors and [fragrances] in the global garden."

VICTOR MAN COURTESY THE ARTIST AND PLAN B, OPPOSITE: SERBAN SAVU COURTESY THE ARTIST AND PLAN B