

Forms of artistic transposition of philosophical ideas through conceptual re-staging

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Abstract: The exhibition “Under Constriction” by artist Radu Carnariu refers to the failure, but also to the constant challenge of the ideals of democracy in relation to the geopolitical game of resources. This article questions the artist’s way of creating artistic transpositions by expressing philosophical ideas in visual variants. The transposition proposed by the artist involves a visual-conceptual “staging”, the core of the entire exhibition project being an “allegorical” satire on consumption: an oversized straitjacket made of recycled political maps that dresses the “absence” of a human body, suspended in the vacuum of a cosmos guided by a financial constellation.

Keywords: artistic transposition, Iași artist, Romanian art, multidisciplinary in the visual arts.

Introduction

This article analyses the way in which the artistic transposition of philosophical ideas into contemporary artworks is configured through different types of medium. The case study on which the analysis is based is the exhibition called “Under Constriction” by the artist Radu Carnariu curated by Cristian Nae. This took place between September 19 and November 12, 2023 and was organized by the Artep Gallery Association, being co-financed by the National Cultural Fund Administration. The exhibition involved, in addition to the project of the artist from Iași, a series of artist talks with four invited artists, namely: Alexandra Ghioc, Mihai Zgondoi, Raluca Ilaria Demetrescu and Mircea Modreanu.

Known especially for his critical interventions on the imaginary and the system of signification specific to advertising, Radu Carnariu proposes this time a multimedia installation that is both playful and sarcastic, with elements that evoke the vocabulary of pop art and the semiotics of social criticism projects from the beginning of the current millennium. In the composition of the exhibition space, he combines graphic interventions with painting, object, sound works and short video interventions.

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Artistic transposition as a means of expression is configured in the present case study through a critical attitude towards the vision of democratic ideals, geopolitical games and natural resources. With reference to the failure and constant challenge of democratic ideals in the context of geo-economic competition for resources, a broad discussion is opened about the divergence between democratic aspirations and the geopolitical reality of today's world¹. This leads to a reflection on the attitude that can affect values and behaviours based on a predominant concern for profit, highlighting the importance of critical analysis.

In terms of artistic transposition, the visual “staging” at the core of the project represents a satirical form of overconsumption, highlighted by an oversized straitjacket made from recycled materials from political maps. This installation visually emphasizes the impact and exaggeration of consumer actions in an allegorical manner, highlighting the critique of overconsumption behavior in the context of a financial constellation. Thus, art offers a means through which complex themes can be expressed and explored, outlining a creative and provocative perspective on our contemporary world.



Fig. 1 “Freedom”, object, installation, variable dimensions, 2023

The exhibition project proposed by Radu Carnariu extends his long-standing interest in exploring the increasingly unequal distribution of the planet's wealth and resources under the impact of the extracting and colonial economic system on which globalization, in the form in which it was configured after 1990, continued to consolidate, contributing decisively to the current planetary climate crisis.

¹ Eric D. Beinhocker (2006). *The Origin of Wealth. Evolution, Complexity, and the Radical Remaking of Economics*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, p. 29.

“The discourse articulated in the Artep Gallery space extends a long-standing artistic research on the concept of necropolitics advanced by Achille Mbembe, which designates the use of political power to calculate the profitability of life and ‘dictate who can live and who must die’. It also artistically transposes T. J. Demos’ indications regarding the military-industrial complex (encapsulated by concepts such as «capitalocene / thanatocene») that determines planetary anthropogenic effects on the natural environment camouflaged under the much more familiar geological concept of «anthropocene».”²



Fig. 2 “Unequal halves I”, acrylic, spray, canvas, 140/150/2.5cm, 2023

The pun in the title proposed by Radu Carnariu suggests both the perpetual procedural aspect and the inherent limitations of critical discourse in the context of the full assimilation of art into the entertainment and luxury industries, as well as the increasingly acute constraints that vitally affect life, especially in underdeveloped regions, but rich in natural resources, which are becoming areas of global conflict between the great powers in international politics³.

“Unequal Halves” I, II, and III form a series of three diptychs that form part of an installation that focuses on the superposition of two mirror images,

² Quote from the argument of curator Cristian Nae, according to artep.ro, accessed in December 2023.

³ Pierre Bourdieu (1993). *The Field of Cultural Production*, Columbia University Press, New York, p. 62.

manifesting an imperfect symmetry that results in a single divided surface at the top of the ensemble. The panelling method used highlights a duality of meanings: division-union, distance-approach, association-disassociation.

The cohesion of the meaning of the whole becomes evident as the imagistic content is probed, identifying a reference from art history that serves as a backdrop – “Liberty Leading the People” by French artist Eugene Delacroix, an emblematic image for the ideas of the French Revolution, in which the silhouette of Liberty is symbolically placed on the floor. Radu Carnariu intervened on the initial image by bringing additional references that explore identity and economic aspects of decolonization, compositionally including a Nigerian soldier from the Nigeria-Biafra conflict 1967-1970⁴ and the satellite image of a large copper mine in South Africa, Palabowra, in the chest area of the character depicting freedom.



Fig. 3 “Priceless”, object, 80/40/5 cm, 2023

“Unequal Halves I” is a frame that encompasses an image, painted and, at first glance, apparently unrelated to the initial suggestions. In it, the discourse leaves the historical context in favour of a re-semanticization: a grenade whose characteristics, through the similarity of shapes, are associated with a pacifier. Beyond the rhetoric of staging multiple historical references, the ironic ensemble called “Unequal Halves” alludes to the failure and constant challenge of the ideals of democracy in relation to the geopolitical game of resources.

⁴ The Nigerian Civil War (6 July 1967 – 15 January 1970), also known as the Nigeria–Biafra War or the Biafran War, was a civil war fought between Nigeria and the Republic of Biafra, a secessionist state that declared independence from Nigeria in 1967.

“Priceless” represents a contrasting object or even an anti-object that criticizes and insinuates, through its composition, the existence of a luxury piece, an exaggeratedly large piece of jewelry, in the form of an enormous pendant that satirizes social disparity and the considerable distance between classes. This satire is highlighted by the association of diamonds, symbols of opulence and status inaccessible to most people, with a word at the opposite end of the spectrum – “Free”. At the same time, the work raises questions regarding inappropriate attitudes that can sometimes have the capacity to constrain value systems and support behaviors based exclusively on the “principle” of commercialization. To the same extent, the work emphasizes the fact that not everything is susceptible to being sold or marketed.



Fig. 4 “Float line”, object, 245/5/5 cm, 2023

“Two linear meters of barbed wire sectioned into ‘rhythmic modules’ and sequentially recomposed into black velvet jewellery boxes is one of the metaphors of status-based division. At the same time, in the opposite sense, it can be interpreted as a poetic ‘destruction’ of oppression, confinement, limitation and a symbolic reconversion of it into ‘jewellery’, ‘decoration’ or ‘artefact’.”⁵

On the other hand, the work “Promo sapiens” (I and II, animation, 4 second loop) is at the intersection of visual pun and the practice known as “subvertising”⁶. The GIF, which lasts a few seconds, proposes an examination of the audience's attention and visual memory by modifying a well-known logo into the inscription H2O. This image satirizes the contemplative and passive

⁵ Mentioned by artist Radu Carnariu during an Artist Talk from the series that took place during the exhibition at the Artep Gallery.

⁶ *Subvertising* refers to the process of converting advertisements to modify, parody, satirize, and subvert the meaning of the messages found in advertising.

aspects associated with consuming products such as popcorn or nachos while watching movies, diverting expectations towards a forced contemplation of water as a fundamental resource and, simultaneously, as a primordial source of life.

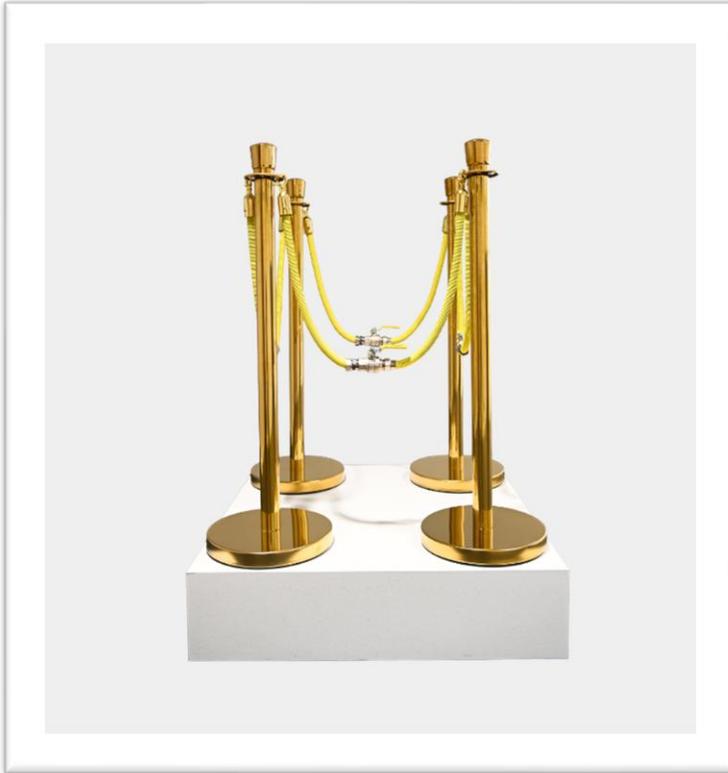


Fig. 5 “Under Constriction”, installation, variable dimensions, 2023

The installation “Under Constriction” is based on a semantic substitution of the velvet cord, which usually separates a special access perimeter with a gas connection. The small distance between the supporting pillars, which mark an empty and useless space in the centre of the base on which they are positioned, suggests the narrowing of the special perimeter, in which nothing is exhibited, the emphasis falling on the critical contemplation of the resources evoked by the gas connections. Beyond the social-political subtext, the ensemble proposes a space for reflection.

“Neon”, object, 67/45/4 cm, 2023, is a work that mimics the formal characteristics of museum or street light boxes, using hand-shaped candles instead of glass tubes. The piece also symbolizes a symbolic gesture that satirizes the perspective of the dystopian relationship with technology.

On the other hand, “Entropic Cartographies”, object, installation, 28/37/37cm, 2023 is a work that suggests the fragility of the concept of a map in relation to planetary resources and technology.

At the end of the analysis, as well as the visitor’s route through the exhibition, the audio “S.O.S”, sound, 5 sec (loop), 2023, can be heard against the darkened background of the gallery’s black-box. This is a short sound montage that mimics SOS (...---...) in Morse code using recordings of drops in plastic buckets of varying intensities. The sequence of six sounds ends with a coin jingling on a surface, thus creating a connection with the previous installation.

Under the guise of derision and cynicism, the exhibition invites a serious meditation on the slow violence, the effects of war on the climate and natural ecosystem, and the pressure for a fair redistribution of natural resources.

The exhibition entitled “Under Constriction” by artist Radu Carnariu is a medium for exploring the complex relationship between the failure and the permanent challenge of the ideals of democracy in the context of the geopolitical game of resources. Through this exhibition, the artist not only raises critical questions regarding these aspects, but also develops and illustrates a distinctive approach to the artistic transposition of philosophical ideas into a coherent and expressive visual language.

Radu Carnariu engages in a conceptual re-enactment of philosophical themes, using artistic forms to communicate subtly and powerfully. The exhibition thus becomes a territory where art and philosophy intersect, offering the viewer a profound and provocative aesthetic experience. Through his approach, the artist demonstrates a remarkable sensitivity in outlining the abstract aspects of philosophical thought and transforming them into an accessible and impactful visual language.

This example illustrates how the artist manages to create artistic transpositions, transposing philosophical ideas into powerfully evocative images. The exhibition not only serves as a place of reflection on the failure and challenges of democracy in relation to geopolitical dynamics, but, through its innovative artistic forms, also challenges the audience to re-evaluate perceptions and implicitly understanding of these fundamental themes.

Conclusion

“Under Constriction” articulates a critical visual reflection on the tension between democratic ideals and economic power. Through allegory and material symbolism, the exhibition transforms philosophical inquiry into a concise artistic commentary on consumption, control, and systemic absence.

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Illustrations

Fig. 1 “Freedom”, object, installation, variable dimensions, 2023.

Fig. 2 “Unequal halves I”, acrylic, spray, canvas, 140/150/2.5cm, 2023.

Fig. 3 “Priceless”, object, 80/40/5 cm, 2023.

Fig. 4 “Float line”, object, 245/5/5 cm, 2023.

Fig. 5 “Under Constriction”, installation, variable dimensions, 2023.