

Jeux de Mémoire
– Review¹ –

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With a coverage of four years, the present art album sums up Teodora Cosman's artistic creation, outlining at the same time a creational biography of her entire pictorial work. The subject of the album is the exposure of the author's artistic vision, both through paintings and through the explicative texts auxiliary to their interpretation. Combining various methods of expression, from the figurative and plastic one to the objective-subjective vision exposed by means of words, this volume marks the apogee of the work of the artist who is also its author.

If we take the author's aim as a starting point for our analysis of this album, we can discover a set of complex substrata. The words of Roland Barthes, "la nécessité du Monument", are quoted in this sense in the introductory part of the album. But what does the above expression actually mean to the author/artist?

Presenting her motivation the artist states that she does not create art work for art's sake – paintings are "oeuvre de mémoire" for her, meaning that they are not independent objects, but they each have a past and a future. "This is the Monument", clarifies the author. At this level of interpretation various problems are raised, among which I comment on the following: *what is the justification of her creation?* and most importantly *what are its sources?* A specification of the sources of the artistic creation would be required in the first part of the album, from which the full meaning of the paintings derives, and without which these works would be simple exposures, simple reproductions. The sources of the paintress are implicitly revealed by the texts and

¹ Teodora Cosman, *Jeux de Mémoire* (<http://www.blurb.com/books/2950021>, 2011), 44 + 39 pp. I note here that for reasons of beliefs and artistic and existential intimacy, this album was printed in an extremely small number of copies, thus it has to be considered from the time of its appearance a rare book.

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explicitly shown by the illustrations when we get to browse through the pages. She relates to the family photographs as to primary sources, offering through them a meaning and a story to each work. The aim of this practice is to achieve concentration and meditation on family photographs and on the different types of memory implied by them.

From an organizational point of view, there is no rigid method of exposing the ideas and the paintings. A strict division would have caused a monotonous narration, but some guidelines, either chronological or thematic, could have been drawn. The motivation, which should have to be present on the first pages, only comes at the end of the album. The author mentions that the texts are fragments of her doctoral dissertation. This statement justifies this organizational pattern of the work, and for a deepening and detailed understanding of the subject, the author's dissertation is clearly the indicated source. Besides the art works and the additional texts, the album also includes some photographic sources of the paintings. The target audience is a very small one, a feature also emphasized by the very small number of copies of the book.

The album includes 39 illustrations, among which there are reproductions of paintings by Teodora Cosman, their photographic sources and some photographs taken at the artist's exhibitions. Mention must be made of the illustrations of the works consecutively exposed, similarly to a photographic film, on the occasion of the exhibition at APC Fribourg in the year 2010, and the photographs taken at the Matthias Corvinus House Gallery at the exhibition held in the year 2011, organized on the occasion of the artist's PhD-defence.¹

The generic title, *Jeux de Mémoire*, under whose auspices the pictorial compositions are placed, is borrowed from the gallerist Pierre Eichenberger, who organized the exhibition with the title *Jeux de Mémoire/Jeu de Mémoires* at the APC Gallery and Ateliér Fribourg-Nord from Fribourg, Switzerland, in 2010. This exhibition, in which Teodora Cosman also took part, represents the top of her work carried out in Fribourg during the year when she conducted there a research stage on art history.

Representative works of each stage of Teodora Cosman's artistic creation are gathered under the title *Jeux de Mémoire*. Her works are thematically categorized, and among these thematic categories we mention here: childhood (*Chasing the Shadow*, *Catching the Shadow*), birth (*Triptych*, *Photograms*, *Monumentum*), the eternal feminine (*The Three Graces*, *Triptych*) and happiness (*The Last New Year's Eve*).²

Intercalated among the reproductions, the text comes to guide the viewers'/readers' perspective on the works, in order not to allow for a free distinct interpretation for each of them. The artistic description designating the painted "objects" is explained, and, at the same time, the origins of the "reproduction" procedure applied over the history of photography are presented as well.

Analogically speaking, Teodora Cosman's works have an imprint of the photographic character, which calls for their association with memory. Using the generic name of "photograms" given to the paintings realized based on photographs, has

¹ The exhibition had the title *Memorie și Reprezentare* (Memory and Representation) and it was organized at the Matthias Corvinus House Gallery from Cluj-Napoca, in September 2011.

² Teodora Maria Cosman, *Memorie și reprezentare. Surse fotografice în arta contemporană* (PhD diss., University of Art and Design, 2011), 98.

the aim of recovering the “visible and tangible trace of these people and things, and of their existence on the Earth.”¹

The eight overexposures from the period 2009–2010, which are placed in the first part of the album, are followed by a compact representation cycle. Bearing the generic title *The Three Graces*, the works included here compose one single triptych. After noticing the similarity between the attitude of a person from the family photographs and the counterpose of Venus from Sandro Boticelli’s *Birth of Venus*, then translating this plastic representation – emblematic of beauty – into the posture from the source image, the artist uses the photograph in the creation of the triptych. Even if we are not talking about the three goddesses, the embodiments of feminine grace and beauty, raised to another level of perception, the triptych is about “the three ages of grace”² of the same Venus. In order to enhance the reader’s beliefs, the author places, comparatively to the work, the photographic sources that were the bases of the painting.

The Last New Year’s Eve, the title of the following series that includes six reproductions, originates from the archetypal idea referring to the perishable nature of happiness, also present in the domain of movies, art or literature. The artist goes back in time to the moment of capturing the event in the source photograph.



Teodora Cosman, *Over-exposures*, acrylic on synthetic tissue, 90x120cm, 2011

¹ Teodora Cosman “Amintirea locuiește într-o cutie de pantofi” (Memory lives in a shoebox), exhibition catalogue *Photograms* (Sibiu: Galeriile Passe-Partout, 2007), quoted in: Cosman, *Jeux de Mémoire*, 34.

² Cosman, *Memorie și reprezentare. Surse fotografice în arta contemporană*, 121.

The significance of the idea of spending New Year's Eve in the communist period inspired the whole semantic content of developing the subject.

Inserted after the presentation of the two series, the texts bearing the title *In the name of photography* and *The metaphors of photography and the metaphors of memory* familiarize the reader with subjects from the history of photography, and with the work method used by the artist. The artist's theory referring to the choice of naming her works "image-objects" instead of "tableau", is very important and also well justified. This explanation is vital to the reader regarding the understanding of Teodora Cosman's artistic belief and vision. The well-founded justification refers to the material used as support, which is a totally unconventional one, supporting the intentional deviation from the name given to the paintings. The specific method of preparing the surface of the material results in a variety of models which differentiate the works that use a mechanical presentation of the same theme. Repeating the theme results in several images that are not equal and have a profound meaning, namely that of correcting the memory of the experienced events. All reproduced works of this album were painted with acrylic on synthetic tissue.

The Triptych of Birth and the sequences from childhood are materialized in the series *Catching the shadow* which concludes the album. Both the idea of the triptych in itself, and the idea of birth offer the work a sacred aspect, as the artist herself claims. The additional text that refers to the different levels of interpretation of images, guides the reader towards the true sense of her vision, towards what she aimed to represent. Using here a stereotype well-established in the collective mentality, referring to family photographs, she implies a meaning that goes beyond the simple presentation, the real goal being to achieve a social and cultural recovery.

The reproductions of the works and the information complementary to their understanding, not only do not introduce us into the universe of autobiographic memory, but they invite us to meditate on the documentary value of photography and family albums, which have lost their initial valences in the era of digitalization.

Through its undeniable value imprinted by the exceptional quality of the graphic condition of this album, to which we can also add the small number of copies, makes this book – as the Teodora Cosman correctly suggests – a "bibliophile rarity".

Translated by Boglárka Németh