

## COMMERCIAL AND ART PHOTOGRAPHY IN ROMANIA 1900-1950

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### Abstract

In the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the main topics which attracted the 19<sup>th</sup> century photographers - studio portraits and folk types - were still in great demand. Old photographers such as Franz Mandy, Alfred Brand, A. Ihalsky, George Maksay, Christian Nielsen, all of them bearing the much coveted title of "photographers of the Royal Court" were still active.

At the General Exhibition of 1906 which was mounted in Bucharest to celebrate King Carol's forty years of glorious rule over Romania, photography benefitted a privileged position. The national topics were mostly appreciated. Pictures with peasants wearing traditional costumes done by Alexandru Bellu and the Manakia Brothers were utterly appreciated. The following generation of photographers, both amateurs as Gheorghe Capa, or professionals such as Adolph Chevallier, or the Transylvanian-based Wilhelm Aurelich and Emil Fischer, did their best to compete their seniors in the same kind of compositions, mostly romanticizing the folk types.

During World War I, when Romania sided with the Allies in 1916, the General Army Staff established a special department with professional photographers which provided official and propaganda images. That was Serviciul Fotografic al Armatei (The Army's Photographic Department). Head of this department was Lieutenant Ion Oliva who chose some experienced photographers for his team. During World War II, the Photographic Department of the Army was again very active. On 20th June 1941, it was affiliated, as its twin brother the Film Department, to the Propaganda Department of the General Army Staff. Professional photographers were concentrated in order to work for that department. They were organized in two different sections: that which was involved in the operative area (i.e. battlefield) and that in the interior (inside the country where they were involved in processing the material taken on the front line).

Art photography was in obvious decline in the first decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century while commercial photography was at its apex. Street photographers tempted the passers-by with their advertisers "Fotografie la minut" (moment photography) which were of low cost and of low quality either. Everybody could afford to have his or her likeness taken on the spot. A lot of studios flourished all over the country but there were produced only conventional portraits in stereotype style. In spite of

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some efforts to organize and to make a visual education both for photographers and for customers, there was impossible to talk about art photography until mid and late 1930s. There were just a few exceptions such as Brassăi, Constantin Brâncuși, Josif Berman and Nicolae Ionescu, who mastered a style of their own, full of taste and artistry.

With ups and downs caused by wars and depression, the Romanian photography in the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century preserved its passion for folk-life topics and, through the inspired eyes of such masters as Brâncuși, Berman and Ionescu, reached the peaks of Art.

**Key-words:** Photography, Iosif Berman, Nicolae Ionescu, Brâncuși, The Army's Photographic Department, Ethno-photography.

In 1900s, the Kingdom of Romania – which was proclaimed in 1881 - was at its apex. The Royal Court encouraged the photographers of whom some received the much coveted title of Royal Court Photographer.

Until 1910, the old 19<sup>th</sup> century photographers<sup>1</sup> were still active in the main cities of the country. **Franz Mandy** (1848-1910) ranked among others due to the quality of his works. He was an outstanding photographer active in Bucharest since early 1870s until his death. Most of the portraits of the Royal Family were taken by him. Skilled and inspired, he completed portraits full of artistry for Queen Elizabeth, the celebrated poetess Carmen Sylva, and for Crown Princess Marie. It was quite a co-operation between royal models and photographer in what concern background, set designing, symbolic objects and light. All these portraits were masterpieces of composition and expression. Shown wearing loose white robes and surrounded by works of art, books, manuscripts and musical instruments, Queen Elizabeth was the embodiment of the high-minded intellectual. Accompanied by the young violinist, future composer of genius, George Enescu, the queen played the organ or presided over larger musical Court events. In this way she wanted to be remembered as a patroness of arts through Mandy's pictures. On the other hand, young Princess Marie played various literary characters such as Edmond Rostand's *Princesse Lointaine*. She wore either historic costumes for fancy balls or fashionable gowns for formal Court receptions. She was also fond of her cavalry uniform - for she was honorary commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> Roiori (*Red Hussars*) Regiment - and posed proudly, with due military bearing, for Mandy's camera. She often sported folk costumes as Queen Elisabeth did. But, unlike her aunt who liked to have lots of objects around her, Marie preferred only a bunch of lilies, her

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<sup>1</sup> Adrian-Silvan Ionescu, *Early Portrait and Genre Photography in Romania*, "History of Photography" Vol.13, No. 4, October-December 1989, 271-285; *Idem*, *Photography in Romania (1840-2008). A Chronology*, "Historical Yearbook" Vol. V/ 2008, p. 127-144.

beloved flowers. All these pictures were taken by Franz Mandy either in the Royal Palace or the Cotroceni Palace in Bucharest<sup>2</sup>.

When Bucharest, the capital city, was lavishly decorated for Emperor Franz Joseph's 1896 visit to Romania, Mandy, along with Ioan Spirescu, Gustav Waber and Franz Duschek Jr. took pictures with the triumph arches, fir-tree garlands and monuments erected on that occasion. Mandy was awarded an "honourable mention" at the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris for some of these pictures. That was one of the many awards he received during his long career. In his later years Mandy took as associate his assistant, **Etienne Lonyai** (1885-1957), a gifted young photographer who continued his master's legacy and eventually became the co-founder and president of Uniunea Fotografilor din România (The Romanian Photographer's Union). In 1909, when the German Crown Prince was guest of the Romanian Royal Family in Bucharest, Lonyai was called to take pictures with the noble visitor. The picture taken in the garden of the Cotroceni Palace, the residence of the Romanian Crown Prince Ferdinand and Princess Marie, shows their elder son, Prince Carol - future King Carol II – carrying a camera. In that period, Lonyai's works were issued under the signature of his patron, Mandy. He signed, for a while, as successor of his master but, in the 1920s, he worked under his own name. His portraits of Queen Marie were masterpieces of the genre.

Both Prince Ferdinand and his wife, Princess Marie, were amateur photographers and took their own pictures while spending the summer in Sinaia<sup>3</sup>. In her memoirs edited years later under the title *Story of My Life*, Queen Marie remembered her Kodak camera with which she took snapshots now and then<sup>4</sup>. Her favourite subjects were her children playing on the valleys and meadows surrounding their mountainous residence.

During summer, when the Royal Family moved to the Pele Castle, the summer residence in Sinaia, all formal and informal pictures were shot by **Alfred Brand** or **A. Ihalsky**, two other Court Photographers who were located in that mountain resort. They took pictures either inside the castle or outside, in the grand mountainous scenery. Visiting royalties posed, along with their obliging hosts, on the Pele stairs and in its magnificent halls, or on top the Carpathian rocks or on the forest's shadow.

Two other photographers from Bucharest, **Gustav Waber** and **Ioan Spirescu**, who began their career and co-operated in early 1880s, were still activate there until 1910 and 1922 respectively.

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<sup>2</sup> Emanuel B descu, *Franz Mandy, fotograful Principesei Maria*, "Revista Muzeelor" – Special issue dedicated to Queen Marie, XLII, 2008, p. 25-28.

<sup>3</sup> Ana Ple ia, *Între vis i via . J'ai voulu tout pour le mieux, Sinaia, iulie 1906, Marie*, "Revista Muzeelor" Special issue dedicated to Queen Marie, XLII, 2008, p. 59-60.

<sup>4</sup> Maria, Regina României, *Povestea vie ii mele*, Editura Eminescu, Bucure ti, 1991, p. 193.

In Constanța, the most important town on the Black Sea Coast, **Christian Nielsen** was active until 1930s. After the Second Balkan War of 1913, when Romania received the Quadrilater as territorial compensations, Nielsen moved to Balchik and established a studio there. Around 1926 he photographed, *Tenha Juvah*, the new summer residence Queen Marie built on the Silver Coast, along with its magnificent gardens. The radiant queen of Romania, her family and guests, were often his models.

Galați, an important Danubian port, had its master photographer too, **George Maksay**. He was still active in late 1920s. He was honoured with the title of Court Photographer. When the first congress of Romanian Professional Photographers was held in Bucharest in 1924, old Maksay, unable to attend the meeting, wrote a letter in which he greeted his younger colleagues<sup>5</sup>.

At the General Exhibition of 1906 which was mounted in Bucharest to celebrate King Carol's forty years of glorious rule over Romania, photography benefitted a privileged position. The national topics were mostly appreciated. **Alexandru Bellu** (1850-1921) was a wealthy landlord of noble descent who took photography as his favourite pastime<sup>6</sup>. His models were peasant women and gypsies from his estate of Urlați, Prahova County. Bellu was fast friend with Nicolae Grigorescu (1838-1907), the outstanding Romanian artist, whose paintings he collected with great enthusiasm. Consequently the amateur photographer's compositions were deeply influenced by the idyllic setting in Grigorescu's paintings. Bellu's pictures became fashionable around the turn of the century. They were successfully displayed at the 1906 exhibition and most of them were multiplied and sold as picture postcards on that occasion. The same acclaim received two photographers of Romanian origin who worked in Macedonia, then part of the Ottoman Empire, the **Manakia Brothers, Ianakis** (1878-1954) and **Milton** (1882-1964)<sup>7</sup>. In their works they depicted the daily life of the Macedonian shepherds, their traditional costumes and ceremonies. All their collection on display at the General Exhibition was afterwards acquired by Alexandru Tzigara-Samurcaș, Director of the Museum of National Art (i.e. folk art) which organization was then in progress. As a coronation of their success they were received by King Carol I in private audience at the Pele Castle in Sinaia where they were awarded the Jubilee Medal and the title of Royal Court Photographers.

There were still other amateur photographers who devoted their time to landscapes and folk types. **Gheorghe Capa** (1870-1942) studied civil engineering

<sup>5</sup> *Scrisoarea D-lui George Maksai din Galați*, "Fotografu" Nr.1/August 1924, p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> For more information about Bellu and his work see: Petre Costinescu, *Documente în alb-negru. Un fotograf de la sfârșitul veacului trecut, Alexandru Bellu*, Editura Sport-Turism, București, 1987.

<sup>7</sup> For more information about the Manakia Brothers and their work see: Ioana Popescu, *Prive te! Frații Manakia*, Supliment al revistei "Martor" VI/2001; Marian Căușu, *Frații Manakia sau Balcanii mici și mari*, Arhiva Națională de Filme – Cinemateca Română, București, 2004; *Idem*, *Frații Manakia și imaginea Balcanilor*, Editura Noi Media Print, București, 2009.

and worked all his life in this field. He got his doctoral degree in the U.S.A. which was something strange for that period. In 1933 he travelled extensively in the States. It was a good opportunity for him to take plenty of pictures there. Unfortunately, all that material, some 1200 plates, remained unprocessed for he wanted to improve the technique. His revolutionary idea was to develop and copy more plates at a time but wasn't able to complete his experiments. He never left home his camera whenever he went on trips. He took pictures in the countryside: traditional houses, carts, oxen, shepherds, ploughmen, hay stackers, peasants returning from the fair, etc., were his favourite topics. He exhibited now and then along with other amateur photographers but most of his pictures remained unknown to the public and were kept by his family.

In the same period, ethno-photography was kept in great esteem in Transylvania too. Transylvania was then included in the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. Most of the photographers were either Germans or Hungarians. **Wilhelm Aurelich** (1853-1917)<sup>8</sup> was an outstanding photographer who activated since 1880 both in Braşov (Kronstadt) and Sibiu (Hermannstadt). After a few years spent in Vienna where he opened a studio at the turn of the century, he returned to Transylvania. In 1903 he remodelled his Sibiu studio after the one in Vienna. In 1906 and 1907 he took pictures at the First and Second Children Exhibitions held in Apold and, respectively, Ilimbav<sup>9</sup>. His peasant children portraits were fine examples of artistry in what concern the infantile pose which was one of the most difficult to take. Affable or shy boys and girls clad in their finest clothes are shown side by side with their parents. The tiny, delicate faces are in great contrast with the stern traits of their elders. Aurelich was also instrumental in organizing the amateur photographers in Sibiu whom he encouraged a lot. His legacy is very important for he was a master portrait maker but he also felt propensity towards folk costumes, mountain views and local cityscapes. Another photographer of pre-eminence was **Emil Fischer** (1873–1965)<sup>10</sup> who had a long career and wide-spread interests in that field. After learning photography in a Bucharest studio he moved to Braşov where he found employment as assistant photographer. In 1897 he took over Camilla Asboth's studio in Sibiu, the former Theodor Glatz<sup>11</sup> studio. In 1903 he followed the courses of the *Lehranstalt für Photographie* in Munich. His renown

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<sup>8</sup> For more information about Wilhelm Auerlich see: Konrad Klein, *Fotografische Ateliers in Hermannstadt 1860-1918. Einige Anmerkungen zur Erfassung des historischen Fotomaterials im Hermannstädter Staatsarchiv*, în Monica Vlaicu (coordonator), *120 de ani de arhiv public în Transilvania*, Editura Tenis-Club-Sen, Sibiu, 1996.

<sup>9</sup> Adrian-Silvan Ionescu, *Începuturile fotografiei etnografice în România*, "Revista Muzeelor" nr. 1/ 1991, p.24; *Idem, Fotografie und Folklore. Zur Ethnografie im Rumänien des 19. Jahrhunderts*, "Fotogeschichte" Heft 105/2007, p. 57.

<sup>10</sup> Konrad Klein, *Ethnografische Fotografie in Siebenbürgen. Biografien und Materialien*, "Fotogeschichte" Heft 103/2007, p. 38.

<sup>11</sup> Konrad Klein, *Foto-Ethnologen. Theodor Glatz und die frühe ethnografische Fotografie in Siebenbürgen*, "Fotogeschichte" Heft 103/2007, p. 23-36.

crossed the borders and he was recognized as a master photographer both in the Habsburg Empire and in neighbouring Romania. He received the title of photographer to Grand Duke Josef's court in 1904 and was also awarded the "Romanian Cross" Order for the pictures taken at the Pele Castle (1910). Later, the title of Royal Romanian Court Photographer was bestowed upon him in 1920. He took pictures with the winners of the 1908 and 1912 Children Exhibitions held in Poiana Sibiului and, respectively, Rîinari. Fischer was co-founder of the Sibiu Photo-Club (1904) and President of the Romanian Photographers' Union in late 1930s. His legacy is very important for the modern photography: portraits, landscapes, folk types and costumes, genre compositions and press snapshots such as Aurel Vlaicu, the Romanian aviation pioneer and his 1911 airplane flight over the Liberty Plain in Blaj. He was also a postcards editor.

One of the very few Romanian photographers from Transylvania, **Alexandru Roșu** (1854-1913)<sup>12</sup>, who was based in Bistrița, received a prize for his exquisite works displayed at the 1906 Romanian General Exhibition. A few years earlier he was commissioned by the ASTRA Cultural Association in Sibiu to take pictures in forty-five villages from the Târgu Lupșu area. Thus he created some very interesting ethno-photographs.

**Adolph Chevallier** (1881-1962), a professional photographer of Swiss descent, was born and brought up in the wooded area of Northern Moldavia. His father was involved in the lumber industry there. Chevallier opened a photographic studio in Piatra Neamă and eventually became Royal Court purveyor in 1921<sup>13</sup>. Besides routine studio portraits he took outdoor pictures with peasants and lumbermen, villages and traditional folk life. His portfolio is of great importance for documenting a vanishing traditional peasant way of life in early and mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. Due to his prints the picturesque, wind-bitten, white-head countenances of long-forgotten grandfathers and grandmothers came to life. He photographed a whole variety of topics, from old customs and festivals, both religious and secular, such as weddings and funerals, the Sunday mess or the Easter service to carolling boys on Christmas Day. He was also attracted by old trades and occupations such as rafting on the Bistrița River – the ancient way of shipping logs downriver by stout lumbermen who were cutting wood up in the mountains - or returning from the fair with the cart full of merchandise. Not far from Bellu and the other turn of the century photographers bound to ethnographic topics, Chevallier kept an idyllic way of viewing peasant life in most of his pictures. A selection of his photographs was used for illustrating the book *Valea Bistriței – tradiții populare* (The Bistrița Valley – Folk Traditions), which was published in 1993 at Piatra Neamă<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> *Idem, Ethnografische...*, p. 40.

<sup>13</sup> Geo Șerban, *Restituire: Adolphe A. Chevallier*, "România Literară" nr. 27/13-19 iulie 1994, p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> Elena Florescu, Adolph Chevallier, *Valea Bistriței – tradiții populare*, Muzeul de etnografie Piatra Neamă, Piatra Neamă, 1993.

Another photographer from Transylvania made a brilliant career abroad in the 1930s. That was the celebrated **Brassaï** (Gyula Halász 1899-1984)<sup>15</sup> who was born and brought up in Braşov (Brassó in Hungarian, from where he took his pseudonym). He studied painting and sculpture at the Fine Arts Academy in Budapest and, after he served in a cavalry regiment during World War I, he went to Berlin and studied at Charlottenburg Art Academy. A multi-talented artist, he settled in Paris, in 1924, where he was introduced to photography by André Kertész and published extensively in such periodicals as “Minotaure” and “Paris-Magazine”. All his life he kept a balanced relation between art and photography. At a moment he ascertained his aesthetic creed stating that “I look for the surreal in reality itself”<sup>16</sup>. While documenting the night life in Paris, from 1932 onwards, he came upon the anonymous graffiti on the walls of the houses of the Left Bank of the Seine. Captivated by their rudeness as well as by their strange force as messages imbued with a mysterious symbolism, he tracked them down and pictured them as often as he could. His first contribution to reconsidering these humble wall scratches as real graphic art came as early as 1933 when he published some pictures along with a text, *Du mur des cavernes au mur d’usine* (From Cave Walls to Factory Walls), in the surrealist magazine “Minotaure”<sup>17</sup>. In the following 25 years he acquired an impressive collection of some 2000 images which he finally exhibited in 1961. In the catalogue published on that occasion the author stated: “Since the time when I first began to photograph graffiti, contemporary art has passed through a historical development that may be as important as Cubism – that is, the discovery of the wall by majority of contemporary painters, including Klee, Miró, Dubuffet, informal painters, action painters, the Tachistes... art has gone back to its origins, to the arts of all historical periods and above all of the archaic period, of instinctive gestures and primordial signs”<sup>18</sup>. Nevertheless, his most important work was *Paris de nuit* for which, in 1933, he made a selection of 63 pictures from his large portfolio and published them in an album which benefitted of an introductory text by Paul Morand (1887-1976), himself a distinguished writer, with close connections with Romania both by career, being a diplomat, and by family ties, being married with a Romanian lady, Hélène Soutzo.

Brassaï used to make long walks on the streets of Paris and on the border of the Seine taking pictures whenever he found something interesting. And almost everything was interesting to him and turned to become interesting through his pictures. Thus he unveiled an unknown – or ignored – world of modest, sometimes suspect, people who strolled on the back streets or swarmed the bars, cafés and

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<sup>15</sup> Diane Elisabeth Poirier, *Brassaï, an illustrated biography*, Flammarion, Paris 2005; Michel Frizot (editor), *A New History of Photography*, Könemann, Köln, 1998, p. 454, 520.

<sup>16</sup> Brassaï, *Notes et propos sur la photographie*, exhibition catalogue, Centre Georges pompidou, April 19-June 26, 2000.

<sup>17</sup> *Idem*, *Du mur des cavernes au mur d’usine*, “Minotaure” No. 3/4, Décembre 1933.

<sup>18</sup> *Idem*, *Graffiti*, Les éditions du Temps, Paris, 1961.

brothels. For his incessant wanderings, so rewarding in spectacular pictures, his friend, the American writer Henry Miller nicknamed him “The Eye of Paris”.

In close relations with the artists and writers of the avant-garde Brassai was influenced by most of them. He portrayed his friends: Picasso, Dali, Miró, Matisse, Giacometti, Eluard, Breton, Cocteau, Malraux and many others. Being Picasso’s close friend Brassai took many pictures in his studio from the Rue des Grands Augustins, showing his works, mostly sculptures, in a special light. But he also portrayed the artist either at work or relaxing among friends. Their long talks were published into a volume, *Conversation avec Picasso* (Conversation with Picasso)<sup>19</sup>. Picasso praised a lot Brassai’s drawings and insisted to practice more often and seriously: “Picasso (...) says ‘You’re a born draftsman. Why don’t you go on with it? You have a gold mine and you’re working a salt mine.’ (...) Later, whenever we met, the first question he asks is always: ‘And what about your drawing? Have you started drawing again?’”<sup>20</sup>. Taking his friend’s advice, between 1934 and 1935, the photographer produced a series of engravings on photographic plates. Called *cliché-verre*, that method was not a new one: as early as mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, a few painters - Delacroix, Daubigny, Millet and Corot - made such engravings using a pen-point instead of the etcher’s dry-point to draw on the emulsion of the glass plate. The only difference was that Brassai drew on plates which have been already used for photographs. Called *Transmutations*, they depicted nudes taking the shape of musical instruments, such as guitar-woman or mandolin-woman. These *Transmutations* were a new means of expressing himself in the visual arts, a technique of his own in which he mingled photography, drawing and engraving for obtaining a work with high artistic qualities. He also used photographs as stage design for the ballet *Rendez-vous* by his friends, the poet Jacques Prévert and the composer Joseph Kosma, himself a Romanian settled in Paris.

**Constantin Brâncuși** (1876-1957), father of modern sculpture, took photography as means of presenting his works in the way he wanted them to be understood, as forms in motion. A graduate of the Arts and Crafts School and of the School of Fine Arts in Bucharest, he moved to Paris where he soon established his reputation as an outstanding sculptor in the first decades of the 20th century. A cherished company for his contemporaries, Brâncuși’s studio was visited by many representatives of the avant-garde, either artists, writers or composers: the painter Amedeo Modigliani - who was, for a time, the sculptor’s pupil -, the sculptor and designer Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, the poets Ezra Pound and Carl Sandburg, the novelist Peter Neagoe, the photographers Edward Steichen, Man Ray and Brassai,

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<sup>19</sup> *Idem, Conversation avec Picasso*, Gallimard, Paris, 1964; *idem, Conversation with Picasso*, translation by Jane Marie Todd, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2002; *idem, Convorbiri cu Picasso*, translated by Radu Ionescu and Yvonne Oard, Editura Meridiane, București, 1975.

<sup>20</sup> *Idem*, 1975, p. 65.



and the composer Erik Satie were among them. All of them were influenced, in a way or another, by the Romanian sculptor's art. For instance, inspired by Brâncuși's works, Satie wrote, in 1903, a piano composition called *Three pieces on a pear shape*. Sandburg dedicated a poem to the sculptor using as title his very name, *Brancusi*, while Neogoe wrote a biographical novel called *The Saint of Montparnasse*.

Brâncuși was disappointed with the way professional photographers pictured his works. So that, in 1921, he asked Man Ray to teach him how to take good pictures and from that moment on he immortalized his own works<sup>21</sup>. His cameras were, at first, a Thornton Pickard 13 x 18 cm with 250 Berthiot-Eurygraphe lens and a Voigtländer Killinear (16,5 cm l: 6.3) for smaller glass plates. He later acquired a Mackina Plaubel 6,5 x 9 cm with Anticoma objective 1: 2.9. He also had a 35 mm Zeiss Ikon Kinamo movie camera with Zeiss Biotar objective<sup>22</sup>. He used the most appropriate light in order to reveal the delicate polished surfaces or the elegant shapes of his sculptures. Friedrich Teja Bach states: "Reflective high polish is both the final consequence and the intensification of the rigour of volume defined by its contours. Yet it at once undermines its closeness and disturbs the clarity of severe shape through the multiplicity of reflections that play along its contours. In the reflective brightness of its surface, shape opens itself to time. It comes alive by reflecting the ransomness surrounding it. As some of his photographs demonstrate, Brâncuși often enhanced the effect of high polish by meticulously calculating the incidence of light. (...) Brâncuși's *Golden Bird* or the *Newborn* are no longer illuminated objects, but have themselves become radiant figures, matter luminously oscillating. The drama of light and shadow and the shining reflectivity in the **photos radiuses** engulf the clear contours of the **ideal**. Essential form is not presented here as ideal form, as a reductive, inert formal proposition, but as generative form; form in motion, as it were"<sup>23</sup>.

General views or details from his studio have both artistic and documentary value. "The site of the **cumulative universe of form**" – states Bach – "is Brâncuși's studio, which developed from humble beginnings into an exhibition hall for his sculptures, becoming the masterpiece of his art. Today only the artist's photographs provide an impression of its real quality"<sup>24</sup>. He also took pictures of his "Endless Column", "Gate of the Kiss" and "Table of Silence" in Târgu Jiu

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<sup>21</sup> Friedrich Teja Bach, *Brancusi. Photo Reflection*, Didier Imbert Fine Art, 1991, 8; Ioan Cuciurc, *Brâncuși fotograf*, "Steaua" no. 1 (320)/ ianuarie 1974, 53-54; Raluca Bem Neamu, *Constantin Brâncuși fotograf*, Exhibition booklet, Romanian National Museum of Art, 1 September-15 October 2006.

<sup>22</sup> Friedrich Teja Bach, *Brancusi...*, p. 8, 32.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 18.

when, in 1937, they were completed. At his death he left some 560 glass plates and more than 1300 prints.

Both Brassăi and Brâncuși did masterpieces in their field. But they developed their talent abroad, not in their native country.

Art photography was in obvious decline in the first decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century while commercial photography was at its apex. Street photographers tempted the passers-by with their advertisers “Fotografie la minut” (moment photography) which were of low cost and of low quality either. Everybody could afford to have his or her likeness taken on the spot. A lot of studios flourished all over the country but there were produced only conventional portraits in stereotype style.

During World War I, when Romania sided with the Allies in 1916, the General Army Staff established a special department with professional photographers which provided official and propaganda images<sup>25</sup>. That was Serviciul Fotografic al Armatei (The Army’s Photographic Department). Head of this department was Lieutenant **Ion Oliva**, an officer of the reserves who, in civil life was an architect. Oliva chose some experienced photographers for his team, such as Ștefan Mladenovici, Nicolae Cristea, Nicolae Șău, Ion Vișu, Samuel Fucs, Ion Maksai, Carol Ulrich, Virgil Reiter, Mori Grunberg, Herman Haimovici<sup>26</sup>. King Ferdinand reviewing the troops or decorating the braves, Queen Marie in white nurse’s apron caring for wounded soldiers, trenches, cannons and machine-guns in action, soldiers cleaning and greasing their weapons, troopers washing and sewing their rugged uniforms or eating their soup on the bottom of the trench, young officers relaxing by reading a good book or playing a violin, German prisoners and heaps of German captured helmets, destroyed railway stations and bombed churches or city halls, were common topics for those pictures. Working in teams it is difficult to state who was the author of each of those pictures. Some of them were published in illustrated magazines and newspapers. Many prints were sent to various units on the frontline as propaganda material meant to stir the troops’ moral.

There were also many amateur photographers who met periodically and discussed their work. They even tried to organize themselves and to edit periodicals on photographic topics. On 11 July 1903 was founded *Nagyváradi M kedvel Fényképezők Köre* (The Amateur Photographers’ Circle in Oradea)<sup>27</sup>. Mezey Mihály was elected as its first president. In 1913 the name changed into *A Nagyváradi Photo-club* (The Oradea Photo-Club)<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> Romanian Military Archives, The Great General Staff, Second Section, Intelligence, file 472, 286; Constantin Stoianovici, *Fotografia, mijloc de reflectare a r zboiului*, “Document” No. 2 (20)/2003, p. 59-61.

<sup>26</sup> Romanian Military Archives, The Great General Staff, Second Section, Intelligence, file 472, 289.

<sup>27</sup> Lucia Cornea, *Repertoriul vechilor ateliere fotografice din Oradea (1852-1950)*, Editura Muzeului rii Crișurilor, Oradea, 1999, p. 33.

<sup>28</sup> *Idem*, p. 35.

A Photo-Club was founded in Sibiu (Hermannstadt) in 1904. Emil Fischer, the outstanding local photographer about whom we talked above, was instrumental in its organization. An organization of amateur photographers was also based in Alba Iulia beginning with 1926. *Cercul Amatorilor Fotografi din România* (The Amateur Photographers Circle of Romania) published its own periodical, *Fotografia Român* (The Romanian Photography).

The professional photographers organized themselves too. A few years after the Great War, in October 1922, *Asociația Fotografilor Profesioniști* (The Professional Photographers' Association) was founded in Oradea<sup>29</sup>. It was the first reunion of photographers in Greater Romania. A month later, on 8 November 1922, at the Professional Photographers Congress held in Cluj, a larger organization was established. Even though it was proudly called *Uniunea Generală a Fotografilor din România* (The Overall Union of Photographers of Romania), its members were exclusively from Transylvania at first. They had their own publication, the magazine *Fotografia* (The Photography) which was published in Cluj beginning with 15 July 1922. The following year, the name was changed into *Fotografia. Revista Uniunii Generale a Fotografilor din România* (The Photography. The Overall Union of Photographers of Romania Magazine), as well as the location, to Alba Iulia. It lasted until 1926.

In late 1923, a few Bucharest-based photographers endeavoured to make an organization which took form on 24 January 1924 under the name *Uniunea Fotografilor Români* (The Romanian Photographers' Union)<sup>30</sup>. First president was elected Nicolae Buzdugan, Etienne Lonyai being the vice-president. Owing to some misunderstandings concerning the organization's management, Buzdugan soon offered his demission and Lonyai replaced him. In August 1924 it was published the first issue of *Fotograful. Organul Uniunii Fotografilor Români* (The Photographer. The Romanian Photographers' Union Organ). It was a trilingual publication meant to inform all photographers of Greater Romania, either Romanians or Hungarians and Germans. The first congress of the Romanian Photographers was held in Bucharest, 14-15 May 1924, and was attended by professional photographers from all over the country<sup>31</sup>. Their magazine ceased to be published after the fourth issue of February 1925 because of lack of financial support from the Transylvanian members. Nevertheless, in its last issue it was announced the organization of the first exhibition of photography in Greater Romania, to be held between 6 and 18 May 1925 in Brașov<sup>32</sup>. There were two sections for professional photographers and for amateurs. An exhibition of cameras

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<sup>29</sup> C. S. Vulescu, *Fotografia în România între cele două războaie mondiale*, "Fotografia" No. 190/ iulie - august 1989, 6; Lucia Cornea, *op.cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>30</sup> Et. Lonyai, *Începutul mișcării fotografice în România*, "Fotograful" No. 1/1924, p. 6-8.

<sup>31</sup> *Idem*, *Primul congres al Fotografilor din România*, "Fotograful" No. 1/1924, p. 18.

<sup>32</sup> *Expoziția fotografică din Brașov*, "Fotograful" No. 4/1925, p. 1-2.

and photographic material was also held alongside that of pictures. There were awarded gold, silver and bronze medals for each section. The exhibited pictures were mostly pictorial landscapes and portraits, some of them resembling in style and pose the glamorous likenesses of well-known 1920's Hollywood stars.

The Union's magazine was again available, under a new name and a new format in 1934. The editor and most prolific author of *Revista Fotografic Român* was Etienne Lonyai, the very active president of *Uniunea Fotografilor Români* (The Romanian Photographers' Union). In 1926, Lonyai had founded another publication, *Foto-Curier* (Photo-Courier). He authored most of the articles, either of history of photography or of modern photography, making good analysis of each epoch's works and accomplishments.

In spite of all these efforts to organize and to make a visual education both for photographers and for customers, there was impossible to talk about art photography until mid and late 1930s. There were just two exceptions: **Josif Berman** (1892-1941)<sup>33</sup> and **Nicolae Ionescu** (1903-1974). Both of them were employed as official photographers for the Sociological Teams organized and managed by professor Dimitrie Gusti, head of the Bucharest Sociological School. Berman had an adventurous life and long experience as press photographer when he was hired, in 1929, by Gusti. He travelled a lot and covered an impressive documentation in many villages such as: Fundul Moldavei, Drugu Nereju, Anșud, Runcu. He was also Royal Court Photographer during Carol II's rule and took many pictures during ceremonies and official receptions, as well as in informal occasions. Berman was also attracted by architecture, traditional or modern, and took snapshots on the main streets of Bucharest, crowded at rush hours. Innovative and inspired, he took pictures everywhere, in the countryside or on the capital city, in the Royal Palace or on a gypsy hovel. His old peasants' portraits are especially remarkable for their sharp lights and velvety shades, resembling sometimes Rembrandt's patriarchs. In 1940, at the rising to power of the extreme right National Legionary Party in Romania, Berman, due to his Jewish origin, was fired and his studio closed. Heart broken, he died a few months later, in early 1941.

When the Sociological Teams went on the field Berman worked side by side with Nicolae Ionescu. Their documentation was instrumental in organizing the Village Museum in Bucharest, in 1936.

Nicolae Ionescu<sup>34</sup> was born in a poor family. He was apprentice to a printer and all his life he worked for publishing houses and newspapers. At an early age he bought a camera and took pictures everywhere. Since 1927 he

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<sup>33</sup> For more information about Berman and his work see: Ioana Popescu, *Iosif Berman. A Photo-album*, "Martor" Nr. 3/ 1998.

<sup>34</sup> For more information about Ionescu and his work see: Emanuel Bădescu (editor), *Nicolae Ionescu: Bucureștiul de altădată / Bucharest of yore/Bucarest d'autrefois*, Alcor Edimpex SRL, București, 2002.

followed his dream to organize a museum of photography. In this respect he embarked in making a comprehensive Bucharest “portrait”: he pictured streets, houses, public gardens, events and festivals, both religious and secular and, most of all, people of all classes, from the lowest to the elite: a merry crowd at the market, a thirsty youngster enjoying a sip of fresh water at the corner of the street, fashionable ladies at the hairdresser, a gentleman at the hatter, and even the newborn children at the nursery or the dead people at the morgue. Brothels and prostitutes were also one of his favourite topics, in this way becoming a Romanian counterpart of Brassai. Another connection with the French photographer was Ionescu’s interest for circus and the comedians’ life. In 1938, Ionescu initiated the *Photographic Encyclopedia* hoping that this will be a means to get public interest and funding for his museum. The publication was elegantly printed and contained fifty pictures, both landscapes and cityscapes, folk types and costumes. Following his dream, in 1945 he founded the Romanian Photographic Encyclopaedia Publishing House. There he published some 67 illustrated books which were well sold. But when the communists took the power in 1948 he was obliged to give up both his publishing house and the projected museum of photography. Perquisition and investigations from the secret police ensued but he was fortunate enough not to be imprisoned. At an old age he donated most of his fabulous collection of photographs to the Library of the Romanian Academy.

An important photographic studio in Bucharest was the one called *Julietta*. For many years its manager was **Adolf Klingsberg**, a skilled portrait maker. Master and studio eventually get the much coveted title of Royal Court Photographer. One of Julietta’s constant customers was Queen Marie. She posed there quite often and even mentioned her pose sessions in her diary as important even though exhausting events. In the entry of 19 March 1923 she complained that she had to obey the artist’s request to have her pictured in her full dress cavalry uniform and on horseback<sup>35</sup>. She even changed two horses, Virtus and Austral, for that sitting. In late 1926 Queen Marie posed for her likeness as an American Indian chieftain, clad in the fine buckskin gown and sporting the eagle feathers war bonnet she received in a special ceremony of adoption into the Sioux and the Blackfoot nations, respectively, during her recent visit to the United States<sup>36</sup>. Two years later she had a portrait taken in the same studio smartly clad in white and wearing her celebrated pearls and the fabulous halo-shaped diadem with huge sapphires just “to look every inch a queen” as she herself often said when she put on all her finery. In both pictures the blurred silhouette and the apparently

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<sup>35</sup> Maria, Regina României, *Însemnări zilnice, Caietele anului 1923*, Traducere de Sanda-Ileana Racoviceanu, Editura Historia, București, 2006, vol. V, p. 94-95.

<sup>36</sup> Adrian-Silvan Ionescu, *America Seen by a Queen*, The Romanian Cultural Foundation Publishing House, Bucharest, 1999, p. 90-92, 110; *Idem, Regina Maria în America*, Editura Noi Media Print, București, 2009, p. 62-64, 66, 162-163, 177-178.

unfocussed traits rendered an aura around the model. These artistic means of portraying the model along with the soft shades and deep blacks partaking from pictorialism, enhanced the mysterious and multi-talented personality of the charming queen. Julietta might be considered one of the few Romanian studios which had a professed interest for art photography in the 1930's and 1940's.

In 1932, those workers involved in photography processing associated into an organization of their own, *Asocia ia Lucr torilor Fotografi* (The Photographic Workers' Association) which lasted until 1940<sup>37</sup>. In 1936, the outstanding photographer Tadeus Cios was its president.

Another short-lived periodical was *Fotografia. Revista Foto-amatorilor* (The Photography. The Photo-amateurs' Magazine): only four issues were published in 1933. But it was just a beginning for an amateur organization. On 16 December 1934 it was founded *Asocia ia Fotografi Amatori Români* (The Romanian Amateur Photographers' Association) – abbreviated F.A.R. (R.A.P.) - which issued its own publication a year later<sup>38</sup>. Entitled at first *Buletinul Asocia iei Fotografilor Amatori Români* (The Romanian Amateur Photographers' Association Bulletin), it changed its name into *Fotografia. Revista Asocia iei F.A.R.* (The Photography. The R.A.P. Association Magazine). It ceased its publication in 1941 due to financial problems. The R.A.P. numbered as many as 579 members in 1939 from all over the country.

The same year, at the photography's centennial anniversary, the two major organizations, *Uniunea Fotografilor Români* and *Asocia ia Fotografilor Amatori Români* joined forces in celebrating the event.

A special mention is worth **Willy Pragher** (1908-1992), a renowned German press photographer<sup>39</sup>. His father was born in Bucharest and the son has strong ties with Romania where he travelled extensively, as a reporter, before and during World War II. He made a comprehensive portrait of the country in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1939 he settled to Bucharest where he was employed as photographer by OSIN-Distribution. He journeyed through the country and shot such different subjects as fairs, folk festivals, industrial sceneries, political meetings, military reviews, the king and his ministers during the National Day, war destructions and victorious soldiers parading the conquered places. His pictures were published in such periodicals as *Die Woche*, *Die Linie* and especially.

*Signal*. His portfolio amounted to more than 20.000 negatives. After four years spent in a Russian forced labour camp in Siberia he returned to Germany where he resumed his activity as press photographer. Two exhibitions with his works were opened a few years ago in Sibiu, *Rumänische Bildraum 1922-1944*

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<sup>37</sup> C. S vulescu, *op.cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>39</sup> Kurt Hochstuhl, Josef Wolf (editors), *Willy Pragher: Rumänische Bildraum 1922-1944*, Institut für donauschwäbische Geschichte und Landeskunde, Tübingen; Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg, Editura Altip, Alba-Iulia, 2007, p. 23-30.

(August-September 2007) and Bucharest, *Refractions. Willy Pragher – Romanian Visual Spaces 1924-1944* (September 2007).

The outbreak of World War II had an important part in disorganizing the Romanian photographic associations.

During the war, the Photographic Department of the Army was very active. On 20th June 1941, it was affiliated, as its twin brother the Film Department, to the Propaganda Department of the General Army Staff. Professional photographers were concentrated in order to work for that department. They were organized in two different sections: that which was involved in the operative area (i.e. battlefield) and that in the interior (inside the country). As in the previous war, the main topics were battlefields, trenches, destroyed churches and public buildings from the areas which were recently liberated from under the Soviet Russian rule, fallen aircrafts and shattered tanks, troops reviewed by King Mihai I and by Marshal Ion Antonescu or war conferences held at the headquarters. All these pictures were used for stirring the patriotic sentiments of the troops and to assure the civil population of the army's strength and its victorious battles. Most of the pictures were published in periodicals, such as "Armata" and "Signal" in its Romanian version. Others were kept at the Military Archives and were intended to illustrate a history of the war which was never completed.

After the conclusion of the war, even though Romania sided with the Allies after 23rd August 1944 and fought its former allies, Germany, as far as Tatra Mountains, in Czechoslovakia, the country was occupied by Russian troops (1944-1953). Commercial photography was at its apex although most of the old studios were lost by the owners after the nationalization of all private properties, in 1948. Consequently, the quality of studio photography (mostly portraits) was quite poor for the former master photographers of mid 1940's were replaced by unexperienced employees with good references from the Communist Party.

More than a decade passed till photography gained its status due to a few passionate photographers, both amateur and professionals, who founded, in 28th November 1956, *Asocia ia Arti tilor Fotografi* (The Art Photographers' Association). Due to its meetings and exhibitions, either national or international, that organization was able to produce emulation among its members and to stir the interest for art photography.

With ups and downs caused by wars and depression, the Romanian photography in the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century preserved its passion for folk-life topics and, through the inspired eyes of such masters as Brâncu i, Lonyai, Berman and Ionescu, reached the peaks of Art.