

NATURAL OBJECT OR ELEMENT OF AN ARTWORK? CASE STUDY: ARTISTS, ARTWORKS AND EXHIBITIONS IN CLUJ, ROMANIA

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ABSTRACT. *Natural object or element of an artwork? Case Study: Artists, Artworks and Exhibitions in Cluj, Romania.* In this article, we discuss the relationship between art and natural objects such as stuffed animals, skins, bones, dried plants or minerals and their aesthetical value from their position as artworks or elements of an artwork. In Cluj, between 2017 and 2019, artworks and exhibitions which integrate this type of practices and natural history materiality flourished. We aim to compose an inventory that could contribute to the archive of local art events, artworks, and artists in order to serve further analysis of local specificity, which could eventually find relevance in the theoretic approaches of art. In conclusion, we underline some of the theoretical approaches of the dynamics of natural object's values and of the procedures established by organizations such as museums and galleries.

Keywords: *art galleries, art museums, natural history museums, natural object, BioArt*

Introduction

In the following analysis, we will present a series of artworks and will discuss the transitions of natural objects cultural values, in order to reveal the dynamics of art practices and the popularity of such objects present in artworks exhibited in Cluj. By highlighting a particular situation of Romanian art, this paper may represent a useful archive of an episode in the local art manifestations.

The aim of this paper can be summarized in four central questions that we address here: 1. what kind of natural objects appears in works of art or in art exhibitions? 2. What perspective the artist's discourse brings on the value of the

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naturalized object used in the artwork? 3. What transitions can be identified in the process of artistic processing of a natural object? and 4. which directions and polarization these transitions involve?

Before presenting the examples selected for this analysis, we have to give a more general context to which they subscribe. A representative artwork for this context is Damien Hirst's famous *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*, first exhibited in 1991. The tiger shark preserved in a huge tank filled with formaldehyde embodied and represents the idea of death and the great fear that the awareness of death brings¹. A series of works followed. They integrated animals preserved in formaldehyde or dried insects that subscribed to different discourses referring to shapes and colours. One work comprising a series of fish conserved in small containers was related to the Bruce Nauman's *One Hundred Fish Fountain*, 2005². Hirst's works may be related to an event of the artist's past in which he was intoxicated with drugs, confusing them with candy.³

Another suggestive artwork in the context of our analysis is that of Joseph Beuys, who in 1974 locked himself up in a gallery with a coyote during the *performance I love America and America loves you*.⁴ This work probably inspired more recent ones, such as that of Cai Guo-Qiang from 2006, entitled *Head on*, which includes 99 naturalized coyotes forming a column that at one point collides with a glass wall⁵. This installation wants to represent a portrait of the human tragedy in which the man tries to reach his objectives without compromises.

In the work of Jean-Luc Moulène, entitled *Donkey*, exhibited in 2016 at the Chantal Crousel Gallery in Paris, it is about a donkey skull integrated in cut cement block. The artist's intention can be synthesized by his brief and statement: the intention is to give a concrete existence of the mental image.⁶

So far, we have only mentioned animals, but plants also appear quite frequently in works of art in different forms. From live plants in pots and fresh plants mounted in installations that simulate vegetable gardens, to pressed dried plants, these organisms are present as constituent elements of some works of art. We have chosen here two slightly different examples. One refers to the work of Marie-Jeanne Musiol - *Nébuleuses végétales. Corps de lumière no 61 Grand (Plectranthus)*⁷

¹ <http://www.damienhirst.com/the-physical-impossibility-of>

² <https://gagosian.com/artists/bruce-nauman/>

³ Holzwarth, Hans, Werner: *Modent art 1870-2000. Impressionism to Today*, Editura Taschen, Bibliotheca Universalis, 2000, p. 638.

⁴ <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/joseph-beuys-actions-vitrines-environments/joseph-beuys-actions-4>

⁵ <https://www.guggenheim.org/exhibition/cai-guo-qiang-head-on>

⁶ Moulène, Jean-Luc, *Donkey*, Artist's statement on Thomas Dane Gallery website, 2016.

⁷ Musiol Marie-Jeanne, "Nébuleuses végétales. Corps de lumière no 61 Grand (Plectranthus)". *The Magazine of the Palais de Tokyo*, nr. 25 – The dream of forms, Paris, 2017, p. 85.

(2017), which is realized by a particular method of electromagnetic photography. The second example is Anicka Yi's work in which artificial reconstructions of plastic plants are mounted⁸.

A last example is Katja Novitskova with *Approximation V⁹* and *Branching I¹⁰* exhibited in Berlin in 2013. These works are cut-outs in aluminium prints and, although they are representations, we have added them here as they consist in a reconstruction on another scale of an actual chameleon, in the first case, and a sloth (the animal - the genus *Bradypus*), in the second case.

First, we will explain how objects, which until recently had a strictly technical role in a certain zoological collection or a natural history exhibition, became aesthetic exhibits, as elements of artworks.

The question mark attached to the phrase *natural object (specimen) or element of a work of art* send to a question that arose from visits in current exhibitions in various Natural History Museums, but also in numerous art exhibitions that integrate natural objects. We can evaluate this question by looking at one of Damien Hirst's works, which closely resembles an insectarium. In this work where the insects are placed in positions that generate certain geometric assemblies, all on a particular chromatic background, we can identify a kind of *uncertainty* principle. It will be difficult to decide at first glance whether they are insects from the exhibition of a zoological museum or an art installation. Due to these considerations, we came to the hypothesis that there is a transition of the object's value from the technical perspective of the natural history museum to the aesthetic perspective of the artistic vision. Thus, another question arises: is there a trend in this regard?

The uncertainty about the status of Damien Hirst's works will be shattered immediately, once we see their description and we find that they belong to a renowned artist who uses in his art works natural objects such as insects, fishes or other preserved animals. Analysing the descriptive text assigned by the artist to a work entitled *Pink*, we note that the ensemble does not suggest the technical aspect of the orthoptera or beetles it consists in, but the chromatic symbolism of the colour pink found on the background of the work and on the body of these insects: "Pink represents childhood and youth; he is (the pink) for open sexuality and choice or care, for summer freedom, for desire, for a new life; pink has traditionally been used for girls."¹¹

⁸ Yi, Anicka, "Our Brand is Crisis". *The Magazine of the Palais de Tokyo*, nr. 25 – The dream of forms, Paris, 2017, p. 87.

⁹ Novitskova, Katja, "Approximation V". *The Magazine of the Palais de Tokyo*, nr. 25 – The dream of forms, Paris, 2017, p. 41.

¹⁰ Novitskova, Katja, "Branching I", In *The Magazine of the Palais de Tokyo*, nr. 25 – The dream of forms, Paris, 2017, p. 43.

¹¹ Hirst, Damien: *Pink*, Artist's statement on Instagramul post of the artwork, 2019.

This transition of the natural object value is not limited only to the physical replacement from a technical museum or collection into an art environment. It also reflects the extraction of these objects from the position they had not long ago in the technical discourse or taxonomy series, specific to the natural history museum and the replacement in a new position integrated in the artistic discourse. Historically speaking, to get from the prehistoric mural paintings to the “sculptures” of Damien Hirst, as he calls them, the natural object goes through a series of numerous transitions, most of which related to the development of the natural history museum.

The transitions of one object from the status of natural element to that of a museum piece, are not limited to a simple collecting and naturalization processes, just as the naturalized specimen is not a simple stuffed animal. The natural object acquires a set of cultural values such as taxonomic, educational, financial and not least aesthetic ones. All these values are determined by a series of transitions, from which the last one mentioned above is the object of our study here.

Artwork and art exhibitions

To answer the first and then the second question addressed here, we must look at the local exhibitions and works of art that integrate natural objects, such as specimens found in collections, and exhibitions specific to natural history, and then study the artist's statement or the curatorial discourse of those artworks.

In 2019, on the graduate student's exhibition from the University of Art and Design in Cluj-Napoca, a series of works were noteworthy, in that they refer to natural objects and natural history. These artworks could have been exhibited in a natural history museum as well. We notice in these works the shift from the technical discourse, specific to the museum of natural history, to a different discourse. The set of works by Teodora Bota entitled *Microlab*,¹² the album *Botanic Herbarium* made by Pavel Cristina, and the works reunited under the title *Atavus* by Robert Sergiu Ujvaroși are some examples in this sense. In the first case, we are dealing with microscopic structures such as seeds, pollen, diatoms, and radiolarians reproduced on a macroscopic scale, based on the work of Ernst Haeckel and Luke Jerram.¹³ In the second case, the artwork is about graphic representations of orchids or carnivorous plants, and in the third case, about mixed technique representations, suggesting certain fossilized organisms to which scientific names were attached, very much resembling the exhibits of a natural history exhibition.

¹² Bota, Teodora, *Microlab*. Text curatorial pentru Expoziția Absolvenților UAD – 2019.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

At the same time at the Matei House, headquarters of the University of Arts and Design in Cluj Napoca, an exhibition was showcased with and about plants, which integrated besides works of art, interactive panels and even live plants in microtransactions. The exhibition, realised under the coordination of Corina Cătană (professor at the Faculty of Horticulture in USAMV Cluj-Napoca) represent the placement of natural objects in an artistic space and the re-placement of a technical discourse in the context of an artistic discourse.

These examples already anticipate the main directions for integrating natural objects into works of art. Before examining the actual examples, it is necessary to mark the two general directions that are highlighted by art practices, which integrate these natural objects (animals, plants or mineral formations). On the one hand, we are dealing with the reconstruction of the natural object, as is the case of works by Axenia Roșca, which uses an artificial crystal growth technique. On the other hand, we are dealing with the relocation (repositioning) of the natural object itself, as is the case of the work of Nona Inescu (curator Vlad Nancă), who uses a geological formation that may be better known as “globes” of Feleac. We use both examples from the field of mineralogy to facilitate the comparison and also because they were accessible to us, these works being part of two simultaneous exhibitions that took place at the Centre of Interest in 2018.

Let’s look at some examples of artists who use natural objects in their works exhibited in Galleries in Cluj. We will use these examples as case studies since they actually synthesize the answers to the first two central questions addressed here.

At the beginning of 2018, at Atelier 4 Gallery, Anda Roman had an exhibition entitled *Senseless* which started from photographs taken in zoology museums representing among others some naturalized animals.¹⁴ We find from the text of the exhibition: “In general, the project invites the public to decipher the ephemerality of a subtle world correlated with the desire to combat the passage of time through taxidermy, in the form of an attempt to preserve an apparent reality.”¹⁵

In another exhibition, at the same gallery, opened just a few months before (November 2017), entitled *FEW STEPS TILL DISAPPEARING*, Alexandra Mocan proposes an installation in which she reproduces a marsupial tiger skin, an extinct species. To give an overview of the curatorial discourse, I quote the following excerpt from the statement of the exhibition:

... the conservation of species as a way of taking over. We are skin, everything goes through the skin, everything hits the skin. The skin as a coating,

¹⁴ Roman, Anda, *Senseless*. Text curatorial al artistei, 2018.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

as the first element that deteriorates or regenerates. The first contact with the outside, the most visible part that affirms the material existence. The covering that contains everything that is inside, under which is hidden what we cannot know. Superficial layer. The layer that emanates aesthetic valences, which gains admiration¹⁶ (trad. from Romanian by Liviu Pripon)

Likewise, in Cluj there was a collective exhibition with the opening in October 2017 at the Visual Kontakt Gallery. At least three artists have presented works that we can discuss here. One of them was Dionisis Christofologiannis, who took a series of photographs of some bird corpses, an image that also appears on the poster of the exhibition. Especially two other exhibitors have integrated natural objects. In the case of Ioana Olăhuț, it is about birds, and in the case of Liviu Bulea, it is about plants.

Ioana Olăhuț uses stuffed birds in her installation, the whole ensemble being very similar to a diorama with a theatrical decor given primarily by the location and lighting. However, from the statement of the exhibition it can be seen that its intention is detached from the typical message of such diorama:

... More than that, this work represents a visual reflection on the absurd, on the fragile boundary between natural and artificial in our contemporary world; the inequality and irresponsibility of the actions of the civilized man, aggressive deforestation, seeds of genetically modified plants created by greedy companies or groups of hard-working people who enthusiastically pollinate each cherry blossom from an orchard in the absence of the bees being gradually exterminated.¹⁷ (trad. from Romanian by Liviu Pripon)

In this artwork we can note the strong discursive nature of the natural objects and their assemblage, rather than the immediate visual appearance of the component elements themselves.

Liviu Bulea exhibits both mineral and vegetable elements. The statement of the exhibition mentions: "This work represents a garden designed and made for the present exhibition. It is a childhood memory of the gardens near the cement factory in Turda. (...) it also represents a metaphor for what we as a society tend to surround ourselves with concrete, nature becoming a luxury ...".¹⁸ In this exhibition are mounted live plants and dried in the form of a small garden with flowers and plants grown for consumption.

¹⁶ Mocan, Alexandra, *Few steps till disappearing*. Text curatorial al artistei, 2017.

¹⁷ Bera, Olimpia, *Dead Gardens*. Text curatorial pentru Expoziția artistei Ioana Olăhuț, 2017.

¹⁸ Bera, Olimpia, *Dead Gardens*. Text curatorial pentru Expoziția artistului Liviu Bulea, 2017.

Nona Inescu is a Romanian artist who has exhibited both abroad, for example in Germany, Poland, Italy, and in various cities in Romania, such as Bucharest or Cluj. In her works she went on both artistic directions that determine the process of transition of the natural object: both on reconstruction and on repositioning. What is interesting about this artist is the fact that she focuses on the actual identity of the natural objects, aesthetically exploiting this aspect in particular. As an example, we will give a brief excerpt from an exhibition statement: “Some animals’ bodies are so vulnerable to their surroundings that they need to be encased in hard shells to survive.” Taken from the text of the exhibition *Hands don’t make magic*¹⁹ realized in 2015 the Sabot Gallery. Another example is the placement of that “Feleac globes” in the exhibition *Lithosomes* of 2017 at the Exile Gallery, Vienna, Austria and reinterpreted in another future exhibition, realized in Romania cities, such as Cluj.

One of her latest exhibitions, *An animal that was thought to be a plant that transformed into stone*, opened at the Spazio Pistoia Gallery, Italy in 2018, integrates a series of corals exhibited on minimalist supports, and some of them on skin upholstered chairs without legs. The exhibition looks at the compatibility between the human body and other non-human bodies and the symbiotic possibilities offered by medical and nutritional practices, such as the consumption of calcium supplements in corals and the use of corals for bone implants. At the same time, corals are a symbol of climate change and acidification of the oceans, a problem that appears in the exhibition discourse related to exposing corals for an aesthetic experience of their overall form or constitution, represented by the organization of the limestone skeleton.²⁰ This exhibition represents an edifying example for the transition of the natural object itself into an element of a work of art, by the aesthetic exploitation of the natural form as well as by its character as a discursive aesthetic element (symbol of discourse) or semiophore in the sense Pomian proposed and Bennett adopted the term for the museum exhibit.²¹

Next example is not an exhibition from Cluj but due to its materials which consist in actual natural objects (bees) will be discussed here. Dragoș Neagoe is another artist who integrates in his works natural objects, which in this case are bees, works that he calls sculptural. I will present a short excerpt from the text of the exhibition *Shape (s)* that took place in Mogoșoaia in the Cultural Center of Brancovenesti Palaces, being opened in 2017:

¹⁹ Dabóczy Géza, *Hands don’t make magic*. Text curatorial pentru Expoziția artistei Nona Inescu, 2015.

²⁰ Inescu, Nona – artist statement, <https://nonainescu.com/an-animal-that-was-once-thought-to-be-a-plant-that-transformed-into-stone/>, septembrie, 2019.

²¹ Bennett, Tony, *The Birth of the Museum. History, theory, politics*. Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, London, 1995, p. 165.

The whole visual alphabet that builds the beekeeper's reality – beehives, honeycombs, bees – is transposed into sculptural objects, in bas-reliefs or installations. D. Neagoe approaches nature, as his predecessors imagined, a Jannis Kounellis or a Giuseppe Penone, in the arts of poverty.²² (trad. from Romanian by Liviu Pripon)

The latest example is *The Museum Affair. Engraftment exercises of the Cluj museum space*, which was held in several museums in Cluj. It was initiated by the exhibition opened on October 17, 2019 at the National Museum of History of Transylvania. From the perspective of our analysis, we are interested in what happened at the UBB Zoological Museum and the UBB Botanical Museum, where a number of art works were installed in the main exhibitions. What we could see from the perspective of the public who participated in one of the guided tours was that people were engaged in discussions about the artistic discourse and even invited to analyse them directly, encouraged to express their own perception. From this point of view, the public had guidance in understanding artworks and even their integration in the native discourse of the museums. On the other hand, the participants visited the basic exhibitions of the two museums being equally interested in the exhibits and the discourse proposed by the museum, in its specificity. Thus, the experience was completely hybrid from this point of view and the artistic and scientific discourses hybridized as it could not be better in a mixed experience.

However, at the Botanical Museum UBB there was an interesting phenomenon that shows yet another asymmetry that is difficult to solve. This concerns the group represented by the scientific discourse that excretes the artistic act from its own inability to detach its strong specificity. The example refers to the work of Lucian Indrei which involved the integration of some packaging and waste in a diorama display, both in the Botanical Museum and in two dioramas in the Zoological Museum. This artwork had a well-defined message: “regarding current problems of the environment ... thus forcing the representations of the natural environment (such as the one in the museum) to reflect its reality.”²³ Despite this warning, the work was removed in order to clean the diorama from the Botanical Museum. The public participating in the guided tour could see only to the place where the artwork had been placed, the display case being restored to its original state, corresponding to the specific discourse of the museum. This proves that, although the museum accepted this intervention, it could not assimilate the artist’s proposal at the expense of a specific attempt to keep the dioramas clean, without waste.

²² Băloiu, Raluca, *Shape(s)*. Text curatorial pentru Expoziția artistului Dragoș Neagoe, 2017.

²³ Indrei, Lucian, Artist’s statement for the works exhibited with the occasion of The Museum Affair Exhibitions, 2019.

The museum did not have the capacity to overcome its own specific discourse, considering the artistic one too virulent and improper, unbearable in its own discourse. This fact, by describing the work of art itself, has shown that the museum is incapable of presenting and representing a real stage of nature, with an aesthetic that attacks the one assumed by itself. In other words, the scientific vision or discourse appeared in its subjectivity, detached from the real knowledge through the double intervention, first that of the artist, then that of the museum. This intervention generated a truly hybrid work that goes beyond the discourse of the artistic work integrating the museum one. This hybrid work that developed by itself after the artist's intervention involved, beside the artistic practice, the museum's specific scientific paradigm. To underline the museum's attitude towards artworks it hosted, the work of Thea Lazar comes to bring a confirmation. She made a model of the *Saussurea porcii* plant, which is a species that was thought to be extinct but has recently been rediscovered. Due to the way of carrying out the work but also of the discourse it integrates, which partially overlaps the discourse of the Botanical Museum, the work was requested to enter the patrimony of the museum. From here it is clear that similar discourses are very well accepted and integrated while foreign discourses are excluded or received with restraint. In the above example there is a polarization towards the nature, in terms of symmetry, as Bruno Latour proposed this concept.²⁴

To summarize, we can answer the first question addressed in this subchapter: what kind of objects appear in works of art or in art exhibitions?

From the first example, we find that we are dealing with microscopic structures, such as pollen or seeds, and microscopic organisms, such as diatom algae or radiolarian protozoa. At the same time, fossilized flowers or formations appear as reconstructions of the natural object through various techniques, such as ceramic, graphic or pictorial.

Among the natural objects that correspond to the naturalized biological pieces or the preserved fragments of the biological organisms, the following could be identified: feathered birds, fragments of mammal skins or birds, collages of these skins, insects preserved in dry form, parts of insects such as butterfly wings, fish or mammals preserved in liquid substances, skeletal fragments integrated in different materials, animals preserved in resins such as frogs, dry plants, and even natural minerals.

In other words, a broad spectrum of objects specific to natural history collections and exhibitions appear integrated in the context of works and art exhibitions. Finally, the objects subscribe to critical discourses that highlight from the outside the methods

²⁴ Bruno, Latour, Nu am fost niciodată moderni. Eseu de antropologie simetrică, Editura Tact, p. 134.

of natural history exhibitions and the functionality of the pieces in these exhibitions. Thus, the exhibitions of natural history gain a much more comprehensive perspective from the cultural point of view: historical, social, psychological. Moreover, we can see how these pieces can undergo cultural movements, which are not so obvious in the context of natural history collections and exhibitions.

From the above examples, we can foreshadow some answers to the second question addressed in this paper: What perspective does the artist's discourse bring on the nature of the naturalized object used in the work of art?

In the works of Teodora Bota, a tendency is to explore a world that is inaccessible directly, through devices that allow microscopic inspection and aesthetically explore these structures. The work directs also towards the technical process of their inspection, as suggested in the text attached to the works: "My intention is to introduce the person in a small laboratory in which what is seen under the microscope materializes through a stylization of microscopic events, bringing them to the forefront."²⁵

The representation of the natural object by graphic, pictorial technique and in general without a correspondent material body, as a variant of the reconstruction of this object, remains a method only in the case of exposing the structure of natural objects, such as the structure of the bone tissue, microscopic elements, such as bacteria that have a vague microscopic visual correspondence or hyper-realistic reproductions, such as cut-outs.

Discussions and Conclusion

In order to answer the first question proposed in this paper, we underline the different types of objects involved in art practices presented here. We concluded that in fact artworks may consist of natural objects in their full corporality, such as stuffed birds in the work of Bera, dried bees in the works of Neagoe, and complete mineralogical structures as "Feleac globes" in case of Inescu's works. Some art works may involve instead only parts, fragments of the animal or plant's body, such as those recognized in the work of Deborah Sengl – *The fox – as robber* (2004), as well as in many other artworks of different artists. The third type is the object resulted by material reproduction.

Two directions may be identified in that case. The reconstructed object is from the same material, as in case of Roșca's crystals, or it is from a different material, as the marsupial tiger skin in the work of Mocan. Another type of objects results from the re-materialisation of the images; a convenient example is provided by the

²⁵ Bota, Teodora, *Microlab*. Text curatorial pentru Expoziția Absolvenților UAD – 2019.

artworks of Katja Novistkova, such as “Approximation V” and “Branching I”. The last type is the one that involves the artistic reproduction of real natural objects, such as Christoflogiannis’ pictures, or involve graphic or painting techniques yet integrating a strong natural history perspective, such as Pavel’s *Botanic Herbarium*. From a more synthetic point of view we can underline two directions of the art practices in relationship with natural objects: 1. the relocation of the natural object, both in terms of spatial means and discourse, yet keeping its authentic materiality and 2. the reconstruction of natural object keeping of its form identity as much as possible, but switching and modelling its representative identity.

In order to respond to the second question addressed here we synthesize the main directions followed by the aesthetic discourses, which are:

1. The problem of timelessness - the fixedness given by the process of naturalization;
2. Aspects related to the negative anthropogenic impact on nature;
3. The capturing of nature by artificial structures;
4. The extinction of species;
5. The aesthetic character from the perspective of an interaction with the body and in fact from the perspective of a human ability;
6. The biological and material identity of an object from an aesthetic perspective (of the perception of the form);
7. The purely aesthetic character or aesthetic features isolated from the complex of morphological or structural characters of an organism.

According to Tony Bennett, in natural history museums, exhibits function as representatives and reflect in their arrangement a discourse about evolutionary series or progress applied to nature as well as to societies and human races, integrating a reflection on national identity.²⁶ Therefore, natural objects reflect nature through taxonomy and systematics as a cultural apparatus to investigate, present and communicate nature to the public. The natural objects in artworks mentioned here are representatives, but in a meta-representation position: a representation of the initial representation of nature (museums and other cultural constructs from which nature was culturally processed). In the context of the artwork, the natural object gains a new representative spectrum and power, similar to the ones manifested in the conditions of the curiosity cabinets, not being restricted to an element of evolutionary or taxonomy series. S

Still, the natural object cannot escape its original nature as stuffed animal integrates the techniques and practices specific to natural history museums. In the context of art this object will be undressed not by an abandon or denial of its initial

²⁶ Bennett, Tony, *The Birth of the Museum. History, theory, politics*, Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, London, 1995, p. 213-215.

state but by its critical discourse about this own nature that it embodied. In conclusion, the natural object suffers a transition from the supposedly objective nature to the aesthetical embodied materiality. This is instilled with a discourse of social, political, ecological or pure aesthetical importance, but mediated through the objects' natural history state, derived from the construct once generated by the natural history museum and other cultural apparatus.

Natural objects can occupy a foreground position as well as a background position in the context of the artwork. The first situation is evident and shown by most of the artworks presented above. The second one is exemplified by works such as those of Lucian Indrei at the *Zoological Museum* of Babeş-Bolyai University. In this case the artwork was constructed on the basis of a diorama. Thus, stuffed animals constituted the "blank canvas ready to paint on". The actual elements of the artwork were the garbage pieces which represented more of an intervention than an actual material construct in itself. Still, the artist's work generates a powerful visual impact and a discomfort of the diorama aesthetic. This process is not related to the actual materials, objects, but the combination and rapport between them. We are dealing with the relation between objects: stuffed animals on one hand and garbage on the other as well as the relation and confrontation between discourses: the museum discourse and the art discourse. In this case, the art work is not dealing with the material manipulation, modelling and transformation, but more with the manipulation and processing of discourse for which material are auxiliary and background construction blocks with no importance in their self (they are garbage).

Regarding the directions and the poles from which natural objects' transitions may be drawn, we identified three such traces and three major organizations involved: art galleries, natural history museums and art museums. We can conclude, from the examples presented before, that art galleries are a major pole in which the trend of integrating natural objects in artwork is encouraged, developed and popularized in the art world, general cultural trend and to the collective mind. In the art museums this trend is rather less manifested but still present. In case of natural history or zoological museums this trend is relatively well manifested, but the situation deserves a more in-depth discussion. The implementation of art exhibitions or integration of artworks in this latter environment supposes three distinct situations: the first one is the artist's implication by its own intention and the natural history museums acceptance of the intervention; the second one reflects the initiative of natural history museum but with the involvement and invitation of artists; and the third one is represented by natural history museum intentionality in realizing the hybrid exhibition through its own curators. In some cases, there can be an initiative of the museum's art department while the implementation is delegated to the natural history department. An example in this case is the "Secret Garden" exhibition

realised at Brukenthal Museum from Sibiu. Such artworks and exhibitions emerged and multiplied in a frequent implementation by a synergic activity from all the directions discussed above.

Our analysis confirms a transition of the natural object from its initial status, proper to an exhibition within the classic Natural History Museum, towards an aesthetic character. Likewise, it confirms a similar tendency, signalled by the reconfiguration of the nature and value of the museum piece. The evidence is provided by:

- The large number of art exhibitions incorporating natural objects;
- The high frequency of these types of exhibitions even in the same galleries;
- The emergence of some steps to unify art with science, as noted in the *Scientifica programs*, which offer residence for artists under the “Our Nature” program to generate hybrid works between art and science;
- The large number of natural history museums that are aligned with an aesthetic discourse and integrate it as much as possible into both temporary and basic exhibitions (see Natural History Museum in London, Museum für Naturkunde in Berlin, and Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature in Paris);
- The fact that such initiatives of natural museums have been recognized worldwide by granting distinctions (Musée de la Chasse in Paris or Oceaneum in Stralsund).

The transition is therefore from a technical discourse to an aesthetic one. In this sense, regarding the Museum of Natural History, to which we can assign/ascribe the natural object itself, one can notice a significant restructuring of the exhibitions’ arrangement. This shifts from an exhibition set up with many pieces to an exhibition with few pieces. If before each species was represented by a limited number of pieces or even a unique specimen/piece, now species tend to be represented in exhibitions by multiple specimens that make up aesthetic, not systematic, assemblies.

Even the labelling changes, because it is precisely the exhibition discourse that changes. Thus, the well-structured and appropriate labels for each specimen, which should be classified from the perspective of taxonomic identity, are modified or merged into general labels that highlight other characteristics, especially the aesthetic ones or those that take into account various problems of perception of natural objects (e.g. information panels in the exhibition *Intelligence of plants*).

We are dealing here not with a relationship between art and nature. It is rather a hybridization between art and natural history, because these practices involve already processed materiality in the context of natural history (stuffed animals for example), and in this case, art is integrating natural history discourses (*The Museum affaire* for example). Thus, artworks discussed in this paper are involved in an indirect process since natural history objects are already cultural processed intermediaries between the actual nature and the messages or experiences

artwork offers. From the point of view of BioArt typical field (living organisms, laboratory practices), we are dealing here with a slightly different direction (dead animals and their reconstructions). Given these practices and the materiality involved, we consider this specific art movement as distinct and well-shaped, pending for its recognition and naming.

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