

**Abstract** The article debates on the genesis of Ion Nicodim's monument and its relationship with Francisco Goya's famous painting *The Third of May*.

**Keywords:** Nicodim; 1989; Goya; monuments in Bucharest; contemporary sculptures.

Ion Nicodim (1932-2007), debuted in the 1950s with paintings in realistic manner. Since the early years of career he became one of the most gifted portrait and landscape painters of his generation. His artistic vision transformed with pass of the time and in the 1960 Nicodim was already in search of new ways of expression. A while he seemed to oscillate between figurative and abstract but there are works where the border between the two zones is ambiguous. The works in the 1960s could be resumed as solar, serene, fluid-like appearance.

In postmodern context, the painter developed historical subjects having as starting point iconic scenes and figures of art history as well. The monumental tapestry he designed and realized between 1970-1977 for The National Theatre in Bucharest, *Genesis*, has as central motif an interpretation of Leonardo's *Homo universalis*<sup>2</sup> while in his *al fresco* decoration (now destroyed) representing *The Birth of Nation* echoed Piero della Francesca's mural paintings that he had seen during the years he lived in Italy (1965-1968). The original project design of *Genesis* (guache on wood, private collection, Bucharest) was larger and contained an opposite scene representing *The Apocalypse*. Under Leonardo's *Homo universalis*, an icon that stands for the glory of mankind, Ion Nicodim symbolically had situated an imprisoned character. That bottom half of the image has been erased from the final version.

The tragic and its avatars insinuated in his art at the mid of 1970s when Nicodim

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## A BRIEF SURVEY ON ION NICODIM'S MONUMENT DEDICATED TO THE VICTIMS OF THE ROMANIAN REVOLUTION<sup>1</sup>

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started the work at the first versions for *The Fall*. The title alluded to original sin but in the same measure it referred to sacrifice in specific contexts: the anonymous soldier's death. The work represents a falling, upside-down figure whose representation changes from a version to another toward a more and more explicit representation of death. The oldest versions of this group (mixed technique and collage, 1974) drawn viewer's attention to the reversed dead body with its skull almost touching the ground. Later paintings of this series dating from middle of 1980s have added new elements transforming the image into an object-painting. These new relief elements – members' bones escaping from the frame of the painting in the objective space of the viewer –as well the earthy colors, were introduced with the purpose to enforce the sensation of putrefied body. Some fragments of the image in later works are brushed away in order to suggest the return or/and dissolution of body within the archetypal, original clay.

Ion Nicodim's *Monument dedicated to the Victims of the Romanian Revolution in December 1989* (bronze and stone, Bucharest, 1990) was prepared by prior sketches and finite works years ago before

it was erected. We already have analyzed *The Fall*. Another two cycles of works titled *Anonymous* and *Goyesque* (1982) stayed also at the base of this monumental project. Their point of convergence is represented by Francisco Goya's painting *Tres de Mayo*, a manifesto for national and individual freedom.

Nicodim made his first attempts in creating a tridimensional version of Goya's tragic hero in the 1980s, anticipating the rebellion that led to the fall of communist regime. A preliminary work for *The Monument of the Victims...* represents explicitly an interpretation of Goya's *Tres de Mayo* (*Goyesque*, mixed technique on wood, 1982, private collection). The central white dressed figure with his hands up in the air, and desperate, highly exalted

expression was extracted from Goya's painting. *Goyesque* is connected to older works of the cycle *Anonymous* but also with the monument as a necessary visual document in the process of understanding the history that the monument refers to. In the cycle of *Anonymous* the artist deconstruct successively the pose of Goya's character, preserving his emphatic raised hands. For more dramatic effects, Nicodim's character is a kneeling human being with broken arms as a sign of his impotency. Nicodim paralleled two similar moments of modern history by reinterpreting one of the most famous icons of liberty. His sculpture, reflection of artist's concerns and ideals, is an image of martyrdom, a new icon of heroically lost battles.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For all images commented here, see Ilinca Nicodimi-Gèze (ed.), *Ion Nicodim*, , București, 2011.