

**Abstract.** *Virginia Haret came to the attention of the public opinion due to the claim that she was the first Romanian female architect, and less from an interest in her work or in the professional history of architects. The paper investigates the professional path and the activity of Virginia Haret, focusing on the institutional structures in which she activated. The research discusses the circumstances that allowed her to enter a male dominated profession after the First World War, focusing on the way she used studies as a path to enter the domain and on her contribution to the built environment.*

**Keywords:** *Virginia Haret, architect, professional expertise, gender, built environment.*

Virginia Haret<sup>1</sup> came to the attention of the public opinion mostly due to the possibility of being the first Romanian female architect, and less from an interest in her work or in the professional history of architects. Given that this type of discourse has no scientific relevance, the present research, at the intersection of biography, gender and history of architecture, brings a new approach and proposes a case study on how Virginia Haret entered the profession in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and her contribution to the built environment. Some difficulties were encountered due to the inability to accurately identify the key moments in the architect's professional career and some aspects of her life remain ambiguous and subject to re-evaluation, although the personal archive<sup>2</sup> and a few pieces of research<sup>3</sup> offered helpful data.

Starting with 1880s, women received the right to enrol in higher education. Still, gaining admittance in universities did not automatically provide the right to exercise a profession and in the beginning, university studies allowed women to consolidate their position in professions where they were already accepted (such as teaching)<sup>4</sup>, just to

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## VIRGINIA HARET: THE PROFESSIONAL TRAJECTORY OF A WOMAN ARCHITECT IN INTERWAR ROMANIA

*Ramona Caramelea*

be later used to identify new career opportunities. With the exception of the field of education perceived as a female domain, women did not have many professional choices. The other field of action, the artistic one, did not offer many alternatives either. Practicing an art was part of an education open only to women with a certain social status or as part of a teaching position in arts<sup>5</sup>. As a result of women enrolling in universities, the number of female students studying arts increases in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but career options for women remained the same, as well as “the chances of recognition of female artists”<sup>6</sup>. There are, however, a few exceptions of successful female artists: in 1916, Cecilia Cuțescu-Storck became a university professor at the School of Belle Arte (Department of Decorative Arts), and a handful of female graduates managed to succeed as artists: Maria Ciurdea-Steurer, Olga Greceanu, Rodica Maniu<sup>7</sup>.

The period after the First World War registers changes in the mentality towards women's position in society. The rise of feminist movements and a more sustained activity from feminist associations, societies and personalities draws attention

to and brings forth the role of women in society. At the same time, the war showed that women can perform the same tasks as men, and the contributions they made during the war effort (but other reasons, too) pointed towards the need to grant them political rights. In social and political terms, these changes brought an increase in the professional options available to women and granted them certain political rights<sup>8</sup>.

### Training as a professional path

Virginia Haret née Andreescu was born on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1894, as the first of the four children of a middle class family who decided to give her access to education through enrolment in a private secondary school in Bucharest. Her father, Dimitrie Dobrescu, the brother of painter Ion Andreescu, appears in historical sources as a merchant<sup>9</sup>. We assume that, like his brother, Dimitrie was equipped with a certain education by his parents. Without a mother, Virginia Haret grew up in a family dominated by the energetic and determined figure of her paternal grandmother.<sup>10</sup> The lack of information does not allow to ascertain whether the family instilled the idea of pursuing an education or a career in

their daughter. The self-confidence and autonomy of the young adolescent, if not encouraged by the family, were at least tolerated. The support of the family<sup>11</sup>, willing to provide for a long term education, proved to be essential for studying and embracing the future profession. In 1912, Virginia Haret passed the baccalaureate at a high school for boys in the capital, following the practice of the moment and subsequently gained admittance to the Higher School of Architecture in Bucharest. Deciding on architecture as a field of study remains an unexplained, adventurous option.

She graduated after the war, in 1919; the diploma project, *An Academy of Visual Arts*<sup>12</sup>, revealing the assimilation of the Beaux Arts aesthetics. Although, at the time of the architect's graduation, the debates regarding the „national style” in architecture were more fervent than ever, driven by new political realities (the unification of Transylvania, Bessarabia and Bukovina with Romania), the influence of Écoles des Beaux Arts in architectural education continues to make its presence felt both formally and in the prevalence of certain study topics, such as monumental architectural programmes specific to the urban space.



Fig. 1 – Dimitrie Andreescu (Virginia's father) with the family. Reproduction from Radu Bogdan, *Andreescu, vol.I, Artistul în epocă*, Ed. Meridiane, Bucharest, 1969.



REGATUL ROMANIEI  
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MINISTERUL INSTRUCTIUNII SI AL CULTELOR  
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SCOALA SUPERIOARA DE ARHITECTURA  
din  
BUCURESTI  
-----

DIPLOMA DE ARHITECT

In numele Majestății Sale Regelui Ferdinand I  
Noi Ministrul Secretar de Stat la Departamentul Instruc-  
țiunii și al Cultelor, văzând referatul Direcțiunii Scoalei  
superioare de Arhitectură No.231 delă 15 Septembrie 1919 din  
care rezultă că Domnișoara Andreescu Maria de naționalitate  
română, religie ortodoxă, născută în București la anul 1894  
luna Iunie 11 a terminat cursul complet al Scoalei obținând  
toate notele și recompensele cerute de Regulament.

Acordăm Domnișoarei Andreescu Maria Diploma de Arhitect  
spre a se bucura de toate drepturile și prerogativele acor-  
date de legi

București în 15 Septembrie 1919.

p. Ministrul Instrucțiunii și al Cultelor

(ss) Kirițescu

Directorul Scoalei superioare de Arhi-  
tetură

(ss) Pangrati

Semnătura titularului

Legea din 5 Aprilie 1900

(ss) M.V.D. Andreescu

Regulamentul din 6 August 912

No. Diplomei 62

p. conformitate

*K. S. Haul*

Fig. 2 – Virginia Andreescu's diploma of architect of the Higher School of Architecture Bucharest.  
National Archives of Romania, fond Corpul Arhitecților.



Fig. 3 – *An Academy of Visual Arts*, Virginia Haret diploma project.

At the time when Virginia Haret graduated as architect, there was no other female in a similar position<sup>13</sup>. Interesting to point out is that not all male architects had degrees. Attending a few years of study in a national or international academy, without completing the entire programme or earning a degree, was sufficient to enjoy professional acceptance similar to the architects with degrees. The view on degrees and studies would change as a result of the professionalization of the field of architecture, and from 1933 obtaining the title of architect was conditioned upon getting a degree<sup>14</sup>. Virginia Haret resorts to the first access path, as will other female architects. Although more challenging, studies have increased women's chances of being accepted into a male work culture and contributed to their professional recognition. An educated woman architect was a definite novelty for Romanian society and raised the question who would entrust a commission to a female practitioner?

In parallel with attending the Higher School of Architecture, Virginia Haret took painting courses at the School of Belle Arte in Bucharest, but it is not documented whether she was a regular student or just attended the courses, a widespread practice of the time. Despite drawing skills and the artistic background, she did not choose to

practice painting, the only professional option available, as drawing teacher proved to be not very attractive for her. The memory of her uncle, the painter Ion Andreescu whose artistic career was marked by financial difficulties was still vivid in the family. The pursuit of a career in architecture which could afford emotional and economic independence seemed safer, at least financially, compared with an artistic one, and probably weighed more in making the decision. However, the choice did not automatically guarantee a successful career since architecture was a profession which depended heavily on social networks, at that time predominantly male.

Her professional training, drawing skills and the interest in historical monuments contributed to her recruitment at the Historical Monuments Committee as a draughtswoman. According to some authors, she worked at the Historical Monuments Committee between 1918 and 1920, under the guidance of Nicolae Ghica-Budești<sup>15</sup>. The time spent at the Historical Monuments Committee proved to be important for the aesthetic evolution of the future architect. It allowed her a comprehensive knowledge of historical monuments and of the local architectural repertoire, and also to accumulate visual resources integrated in her earliest works.

From 1920 dates an exhibition of watercolours achieved during the formative period, some of them purchased by the Historical Monuments Committee. A review of the exhibition recalls briefly the themes of the works – “Miss Andreescu exhibits houses, churches, well-represented interiors”<sup>16</sup> – pointing out her interest in architectural form, a result of professional training. Choosing historical monuments as a theme for the pictures, in line with the national pedagogy and the official aesthetics of political importance backed by the state, could explain their purchase by the Historical Monuments Committee.

A historical perspective upon collective exhibitions indicates that the presence of women at artistic events was not unusual and occurred since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>17</sup>. Women involvement in arts was never contested; on the contrary, it reflected the collective mentality which saw this as a natural and adequate manifestation of the feminine sensibility. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, individual and collective exhibitions by women artists become more frequent in the Romanian landscape and acquire a new dimension, of professional recognition. Perhaps the most prominent manifestation of this type was the first *All-Women Exhibition* from 1916<sup>18</sup>, attended by artists known for their feminist ideas, supporting education and professional careers for women. Contrary to what we might have expected given the professional trajectory and savvy personality, Virginia Haret did not activate in any feminist group or participate in collective exhibitions organised by women artists. Her sole exhibition, which seems to be driven by aesthetic inquiries and intellectual exercises, brought her public visibility. Although Virginia’s artistic inclinations were explained as a family inherited feature, which brought to the fore her kinship with Ion Andreescu, the specialized themes of the watercolours (historical monuments) suggest the input of architectural education.

The art status attributed to architecture and the image of the artist-architect, borrowed from Écoles des Beaux-Arts, dominated the pedagogy of the Bucharest School of Architecture. From this perspective, drawing fulfils a double role of essential requirement and skill of architectural training, and opens the way to the artistic act<sup>19</sup>.

Courageous and entrepreneurial, mindful of the financial situation, Virginia Haret was capable of planning her professional career and ensuring economic independence. The exhibition is a good opportunity to sell some paintings, using the money for a study trip in Rome, following the customs of the time. A tradition of Western artists and architects, borrowed by Romanians, these trips perform an educational function and also allowed acquaintance with and assimilation of Western culture<sup>20</sup>. Somewhat surprisingly, Virginia Haret chooses Rome, not Paris, opting for the Scuola Superiore di Architettura di Roma newly established in 1919, and not for the prestigious Écoles des Beaux-Arts, popular with Romanian architects. While both cities were prime locations for architects and artists, the choice bears an artistic significance. For a year and a half, the future architect attended courses of interior design at Scuola Superiore di Architettura di Roma<sup>21</sup>, thus completing her professional training. The decision to choose formal studies instead of a free voyage and an experience without institutional constraints can be read as an aspiration of improvement, supported by a certain interest for the advantages held by the diploma, but other reasons cannot be excluded. Scuola Superiore di Architettura di Roma<sup>22</sup> proposed a training course in accordance with the image of the profession of architect that combined technical and scientific knowledge with artistic one. The formative model corresponded very well to the double specialization of Virginia Haret and, at the same time, overlapped on the desire to

merge the identity of an architect with that of an artist. The study travel in Italy functioned as a way to reinforce the academic identity and professional training. The student visits archaeological sites, historical monuments and architectural attractions; makes sketches, takes notes, probably follows the common practice at the time of ordering photographs of monuments (the example of Ion Mincu is well-known), all these converging in a cultural experience and a visual archive.

The professional debut of the architect takes place in a social context marked by the reconstruction efforts commenced by the state and individuals after the war, which led to a pressing need for architects with degrees and allowed for female architects to be accepted. It was also the case of Virginia Haret, hired in 1921 as an architect at the Reconstruction Committee subordinated to the Ministry of Public Works<sup>23</sup>. The Reconstruction Committee was to deal with the repairs of the numerous damages of the buildings and infrastructure destroyed by the war, but the institution was soon overcome by the multitude of works and requests from all over the country. The employment at the Reconstruction Committee is brief, after just a few months, the architect resigned<sup>24</sup>, deciding instead to embark in the previously mentioned study trip to Rome<sup>25</sup>. Upon the return from Rome, she had been working for a short time at the Modern Construction Company involved in house design<sup>26</sup>. From here, she ended in 1923 at the architecture department of the Ministry of Education where she underwent an intense activity for two decades until 1947. Co-opting women architects in school design was a trend present in other countries as well<sup>27</sup>. This area was considered appropriate for women since education was seen as an extension of the maternal role, thus reinforcing a cultural stereotype regarding femininity.

In 1928 took place Virginia's marriage with the engineer Spiru Gold Haret who became a professional partner and whose support proved to be essential for the architect's career. Their professional collaboration started before marriage<sup>28</sup>, the building company where Spiru Gold Haret worked being the agent undertaking several projects designed or supervised by Virginia Haret while working for the Ministry of Education<sup>29</sup> or as a freelance architect. In charge with the execution of the buildings, the engineer accompanied the architect for on-site inspections<sup>30</sup>, a difficult aspect of the profession which seldom questioned a woman's competence and authority<sup>31</sup>. The marriage and later the birth of a child didn't impede her from practicing architecture, on the contrary, she demonstrated the same mobility and interest in pursuing the profession, contradicting possible critics of an incompatibility between marriage and career.

### **Assuming the professional identity**

Under the impetus of professional pursuits, Virginia Haret joined the Society of Romanian Architects, and in 1923-24 was appointed in the board of the society, together with four other architects<sup>32</sup>. If joining the society was open to everyone, the architects being highly encouraged to sign up so the society gained visibility, being a board member was more difficult to obtain and needed the votes of other members of the society. The Society of Romanian Architects set standards for training and accessing the profession. Furthermore, it offered members the opportunity to participate in technical debates or discussions about the social organisation of their profession and the involvement of architects in public life. Joining the association signals the architect's interest for the knowledge and professional practices that defined the

profession. Similar reasons determined her to attend international architecture symposiums in Brussels, Paris, Rome, Moscow, Berlin<sup>33</sup>, some of them in an official capacity, as a representative of Society of Romanian Architects<sup>34</sup>.

Being a member of the society comes with additional responsibilities; in 1924 it is mentioned a financial contribution she made to the publication of the society's journal<sup>35</sup> in which she will publish a few projects<sup>36</sup>. With one exception, she preferred practicing architecture instead of writing. A short article published in *Architecture* journal, dedicated to school buildings, revealed the architect's ideas about the programme, conveying a functionalist approach that privileges vast spaces, light and simplicity<sup>37</sup>. Publishing in a prestigious professional journal validated her area of expertise in projects associated with public education and school buildings, thus consolidating her professional reputation.

### **Architectural programmes**

The beginning of her career takes place under the sign of collaboration with architect Jean Pompilian, professor at the Higher School of Architecture and architect at the Ministry of Education, with whom she shared an artistic family background<sup>38</sup>. Graduated from École des Beaux-Arts Paris in 1899, Jean Pompilian had a rich professional experience as an architect for several institutions<sup>39</sup>. Their first project, Tinerimea Română Building, 1923, was commissioned by the Ministry of Education, but their collaboration went beyond the institutional framework. The building for Societatea Comunală de Locuințe Ieftine, 1924, and Ghencea Church, 1927-1934 are some of their common achievements. We might assume that, in a masculine line of work as was the case of architecture, the association with a

notorious architect might prove to be a validating aspect, thus increasing the chances for the professional recognition of Virginia Haret.

As an architect working for Ministry of Education she was granted with a high level of responsibility in the design and supervision of numerous projects. In the second half of the 1920s, the Ministry of Education launched a wide campaign of building schools, and Virginia Haret was given the task of designing superior schools, high schools, primary schools, and also of coordinating and supervising their construction. In 1926, she was coordinating the construction of 15 secondary schools (high schools, normal and vocational schools)<sup>40</sup>. Dimitrie Cantemir and George Șincai High Schools in Bucharest and several secondary schools in Botoșani, Cluj, Făgăraș, Focșani, Iași, Pitești, Râmnicu Sărat, Tecuci, Vaslui, several buildings for the University of Medicine are amongst her best known projects. School architecture was constantly in her work and concerns, always seeking to improve, to keep track of the technological advances and similar achievements from Western Europe.

From the 1920s until the establishment of the communist regime she executed projects in two typological categories: institutional and residential. The institutional projects materialized in significant edifices that entailed different logic and complex issues: several schools, cultural institutions (Tinerimea Română Building, Govora Casino), churches (Ghencea Church), headquarters (Societatea Comunală de locuințe ieftine Building), industrial buildings (a water tower and heating plant for University of Medicine Bucharest). These commissions, some of them landmarks of public spaces, built the professional reputation of the architect and maintained a public profile paving the way for future orders.



Fig. 4 – Virginia Haret (1894-1962),  
photography, 1935. Library of Romanian  
Academy, fond Radu Haret.



Fig. 5 – Dimitrie Cantemir High School, 1926, Bucharest.





Fig. 6 – Tinerimea Română Building, 1923, collaboration with architect Jean Pompilian, Bucharest.



Fig. 7 – Societatea Comunală de Locuințe Ieftine Building, 1924, collaboration with architect Jean Pompilian, Bucharest.

Alongside the activity in the Ministry of Education, Virginia Haret ran an important work as a freelance architect. Actively engaged with domestic architecture, she designed during the 1920s and 1930s several villas for the upper middle class: engineers, medics, intellectuals, military personnel that worked in public institutions and were often involved in socio-cultural life of the capital. Although information about the architect's collaboration with private clients lacks, it is presumed that they had a number of requirements as they came from active socio-professional categories who aim to represent their social status and perceive their future home as a symbolic place.

From a stylistic perspective, the architect chose valued aesthetic trends, which ensured an easy reception for her private and public projects. In the first stage of the career, she opted for the national style, the official aesthetics of the moment. After 1918, this stylistic expression became the official political discourse, gaining ideological stakes and being seen as a symbol and vehicle for the newly established state, embodying a triumphant and unifying architecture that glorified the Romanian values in the annexed territories<sup>41</sup>. Furthermore, the Higher School of Architecture was an important factor in the success of the idea of a national architecture through professors such as Ion Mincu, Grigore Cerchez, Petre Antonescu, Jean Pompilian, from whom she gained not only knowledge, but also values and aesthetic solutions<sup>42</sup>.

Certain compositional themes, decorative elements and solutions are a leitmotif for several villas commissioned in 1920s: cylindrical corner towers (Iosif Gabrea villa, 1930, 6 Mihail Obedenaru St.; Colonel Cezar Golici villa, 1926, 16 Mihail Obedenaru St.), bow-windows (the villas of engineers Spiru Haret and P. Leibovici, 1926, 8 Intrarea Spătarului, villas for clerks from Casa de Depuneri și Consemnațiuni, 1929, 2-10 Theodor Burada St.), loggia,

generous eaves and cornices, conical roofs (Iosif Gabrea and Cezar Golici villas), the organization of windows in groups of three, but the architect employs them in different modes of expression.

The metamorphoses of artistic taste determined her to gradually move in the 1930s toward modernist aesthetics that had begun to win supporters among both architects and clients. The change did not happen for pragmatic reasons; it corresponded to a shift in the sensitivity of the architect reflected in the preference for modernism for the second family home she will design in Bucharest (Virginia and Spiru Haret villa, 1931, 14 Lascăr Catargiu Boulevard). The villas she designed in Bucharest (Radu and Elena Perianu villa, 1932, 18 Eroilor Boulevard; Viorica and Gheorghe Rujinski villa, 1933, 22 Berzei St.; Panait Mazilu villa, 1935, 76 Popa Savu St.; I. Nistor villa, 1935, 17 Anibal Theohari St.; Constantinescu villa, 1936, 11 Intrarea Bitolia; Dumitru Stoica villa, 1937, 27 Veronica Micle St.) reveal common features and formal elements of the new architectural mood: severe rectangular plans, simple volumetric composition, compact volumes, plaster layering on the facade, rectangular and circular windows, curved surfaces that create the visual dynamic<sup>43</sup>.

Virginia Haret's aesthetic experiments oscillate between richly ornamented facades (Colonel Cezar Golici villa, Obedenaru St., Spiru G. Haret villa, Intrarea Spătarului) to austere, simplified volumes (modernist villas from 1930s), adapting the language to the taste, cultural and social peculiarities of their inhabitants. She keeps up with new technological innovations, integrates new construction materials and techniques (Tinerimea Română Building used steel frame encased in reinforced concrete). Around 1923 she was engaged in an exchange with her future husband of specialized works on civil engineering and construction techniques<sup>44</sup>.



Fig. 8 – Colonel Cezar Golici villa, 1926, Bucharest.



Fig. 9 – Nicolae Gheorghe Lupu villa, 1929, Bucharest.

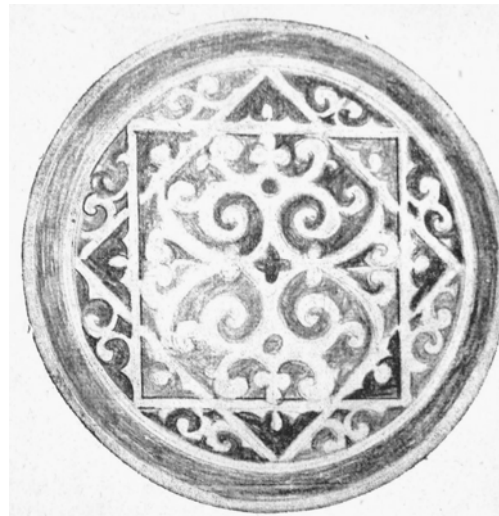


Fig. 10 – Virginia and Spiru G. Haret villa, 1931, Bucharest.



Fig. 11 – Viorica and Gheorghe Rujinski villa, 1933, Bucharest.

Fig. 12 – Rose window from Jicia Monastery, Serbia. Drawing made by Virginia Haret in a study trip in Serbia, 1922. *Artele frumoase. Revistă pentru popularizarea artelor plastice. Arhitectura, sculptura, picture și arta decorative, 1923.*



### Travel between training and leisure

A keen traveller, Virginia Haret undertook voyages in the country or abroad – to Serbia<sup>45</sup>, Rome, Madrid, Cairo, Paris, Germany –, alone or accompanied by friends, colleagues or family<sup>46</sup>. The correspondence addressed to her husband in the 1930s, partially kept at the Library of Academy, implies that the architect used these trips for documentation and professional development, particularly in the field of school architecture, in line with professional assignments at the Ministry of Education (visiting various schools in Germany). The new spaces and countries offer her an opportunity to observe, document, know the culture and the mentality of the inhabitants. Attracted by the hectic city life, she makes notes about the public places imbued by history and culture, the people and the street chatter, the unique sensations and feelings. There are various mentions about the political situation of Germany in the 1930s in Virginia's notes<sup>47</sup>. Her travelling experiences are a source of inspiration and knowledge, marking both her personal life and professional career. Pointing to the importance of these, her son recalled that their home was full of paintings, books, frills, decorative artefacts, embroideries,

“memories of the many study trips” of his mother of which “she always carried impressions and snapshots”<sup>48</sup>.

### From “the first Romanian architect” to “the first female architect in the world”

Virginia Haret's connections with the elite and the bourgeoisie, “dangerous groups” for the communist regime, led to her temporary marginalization after 1947. But, a few years later, the regime showed an interest in co-opting her in various Sovrom<sup>49</sup> institutions etc. Retiring from the design work, she dedicated herself to study<sup>50</sup>. With a solid professional training, she started writing a construction handbook that was not published under her name and a history of the National Theatre building in Bucharest (not published). She died in 1962.

The architect has benefited from the communist regime's attention since the 1980s, when she was the subject of various articles and TV documentaries. Her image was intensely included by the regime in a triumphal and nationalist discourse meant to emotionally replace scarcity, daily poverty and censorship, and to provide “virtual” spaces of accomplishments and achievements, so Virginia Haret became

“the first female architect in the world” and suffered a change of name<sup>51</sup>. In the 1980s, dominated by a series of debates on national identity, the communist regime “has established” Virginia Haret as “the world’s first architect”. This was part of the new official cultural direction, protochronism, which supported the historical precedence of Romanians in a series of scientific discoveries and cultural innovations of universal value<sup>52</sup>. Intellectuals and important figures in the artistic and cultural domains who had asserted themselves before the war or who had suffered repercussions in the 1950s were recovered and reintegrated into the cultural life. This recognition happened during the International Congress of the History of Science in 1981<sup>53</sup>, in a formal and festive setting, likely to give consistency, notoriety and a peremptory character to the decision.

The communist propaganda quickly confiscated the rehabilitation of the architect. It became an opportunity to highlight the difficulties faced by women, in the nineteenth century, trying to enter the labour market, and to praise the communist state in promoting women. Obsessed with triumphant reports and the ambition to associate itself with great cultural actors, the regime objectified the architect as an icon for women’s progress and expressed more interest in assuming the professional niche rather than recovering the professional achievements of Virginia Haret. The fruitful professional life, the practical and theoretical contributions to various architectural programmes, or her accession to the profession, at a time when the presence of women in the lucrative fields was low were briefly dealt with. Several articles and TV documentaries were dedicated to the architect, an important role in building her postmortem reputation going to her son, the engineer Radu Haret<sup>54</sup>. Although renewed interest has prompted at least some professionals, historians and architects, to delve in the activity of the architect and to adopt various perspectives, exceptionalism

still dominates the discourse, especially in popular literature.

## Conclusions

In a socio-political context in which militants for women’s rights and professional recognition gained ground, and the high demand for architects as a result of post-war reconstruction efforts, Virginia Haret built a prolific and successful career in an area previously reserved for men. The peculiarity of the architecture, located at the confluence of art with technical sciences, has allowed Virginia Haret to embrace the profession of architect without much pressure, as has happened in other professions.

Virginia Haret had a significant career over a span of three decades. Following a traditional career path she resorted to a strong professional training provided by studies at the Higher School of Architecture in Bucharest (completed with a diploma) and at Rome which allowed her to secure a public position (architect of the Ministry of Education) with an increased responsibility. Although the architect’s professional start is linked more to her artistic skills, being employed as a draughtswoman at the Monuments Committee, later she went on to become an architect, working in several public institutions, but also as a freelance practitioner. Her work consisted of a large number of institutional and residential projects that embraced her personal views on functionality and aesthetics, with several significant public buildings that shaped the urban public space.

Virginia Haret individual strategy to establish herself as an architect cannot be generalized and considered representative for the group of female architects or female professionals. In order to obtain a broader perspective, additional case studies are necessary. However, it is certain that, through her public profile, professional authority among colleagues and customers, her contribution to the built environment,

Virginia Haret changed the relationship of women with the architectural profession. Architecture rapidly became attractive to women and, in 1921, of the 166 architects members in the Society of Romanian Architects, 6 were women: Virginia Andreescu, Maria Cotescu, Irineu Maria Friedman, Maria Hogas, Antonetta Ioanovici and Ada Zăgănescu Beza<sup>55</sup>, while eight years earlier, in 1916, the society did not count any women among its members.

<sup>1</sup> We opted for the name Virginia Haret, following the name used by architect to sign her work. Although a few researchers prefer the name Virginia Andreescu-Haret or Virginia Haret-Andreescu, we believe that the addition of the name Andreescu took place in the communist regime, after the architect's death.

<sup>2</sup> Library of Romanian Academy, Radu Haret fond, mss. IV, varia 26, 27, mss. V varia 1, 2.

<sup>3</sup> The meticulous research undertaken by architects Mihaela Lăcraru and Răzvan Lăcraru identifies the buildings design by the architect in Bucharest. [http://virginiaharet.blogspot.com/p/contact\\_26.html](http://virginiaharet.blogspot.com/p/contact_26.html)

*Virginia Andreescu Haret Architecture Tour* (Brochure), Project accomplished with the support of Romanian Chamber of Architects (OAR); Sidonia Teodorescu, Raluca Niculae, Andrei Bârsan, Vasile Ţelea, (eds.), *Dicţionar al arhitecturii româneşti moderne (sec. XIX, XX; XXI)*, A-C, 2012, p. 19-20 and <https://arhivadearhitectura.ro/arhitecti/virginia-haret/>.

<sup>4</sup> L. Rados, *Primele studente ale Facultăţii de Litere de la Universitatea din Iaşi*, „Anuarul Institutului de Istorie «A. D. Xenopol»”, XLVII, 2010, pp. 52-57.

<sup>5</sup> O. Niţiş, *Gen şi emancipare: călătoriile artistelor în primele decenii ale secolului XX*, in „Artişti români în străinătate (1830-1947). Călătoria, între formaţia academică şi studiul liber”, Bucharest, 2017, p. 344.

<sup>6</sup> Alin Ciupală, *Femeia în societatea românească a secolului al XIX-lea*, Bucharest, 2003, p. 68 apud Olivia Niţiş, *Gen şi emancipare...* p. 345.

<sup>7</sup> See *Egal. Artă şi feminism în România*, [cat.], ed. Valentina Iancu, Bucharest, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> In 1929 Romania granted women the right to vote, although restricted the right to some particular groups. Between 1926-1931 women gained the right to stand in local elections, to own and to manage their property and income. Ştefania Mihăilescu, *Din istoria feminismului românesc: studiu şi antologie de texte. (1929-1948)*, Iaşi, 2006, p. 15-41.

<sup>9</sup> *Anuarul general al Agriculturii, Comerţului şi Industriei României pe 1905*, Institutul de Arte Grafice Albert Baer, Bucureşti, 1905.

In the 1980s, communist propaganda “confiscated” the architect's recovery, which underwent an instrumentalization and ideologically distortion in accordance with Ceausescu's triumphal nationalism. Instead of relevant considerations about her professional route and contributions to the built environment, the regime was more interested in making her an example of Romanian exceptionalism.

<sup>10</sup> Anastasia Dobrescu had six children, including the architect's father (Dimitrie Dobrescu) and painter Ioan Andreescu. Due to unexplained circumstances, Anastasia Dobrescu lived the second part of her life separated from her husband whom she, together with her oldest daughter, placed under legal interdiction due to his inability to manage his fortune. The legal ban allowed her to control the material fortune of the family and run her husband's business. Radu Bogdan, *Andreescu, vol. I, Artistul în epocă*, Bucharest, 1969, p. 278-279, 285.

<sup>11</sup> In 1911 Dimitrie Dobrescu owned two properties on 62 Fântânei Street Bucharest, which suggests a certain financial stability.

<sup>12</sup> Radu Haret, *Virginia Haret-Andreescu – prima arhitectă din lume*, in „Revista muzeelor şi monumentelor. Monumente istorice şi de artă”, XIII, 2, 1982, p. 66. The project, presented at the Exhibition of the graduates of the Higher School of Architecture held at the Romanian Athenaeum in 1925, was awarded the prize of the Ministry of Education.

<sup>13</sup> Both Virginia Andreescu and Ada Zăgănescu graduated as architects at the same time, 15 September 1919.

<http://arhivadearhitectura.ro/arhitecti/ada-zaganescu/> (Ada Zăgănescu) Documents from Mihnea Groza family archive. National Archives of Romania (henceforth NAR), fond Corpul Arhitecţilor, file 570.

<sup>14</sup> *Lege pentru înfiinţarea şi organizarea corpului arhitecţilor*, in *Monitorul oficial*, no. 108, 12 mai 1932, p. 7-8.

<sup>15</sup> <https://arhivadearhitectura.ro/arhitecti/virginia-haret/>. Her drawings were published in *Buletinul Comisiei Monumentelor Istorice, 1917-1923*, X-XVI, p. 120-121.

<sup>16</sup> Library of Romanian Academy, fond Radu Haret, mss. I 43, p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> *Repertoriul expoziţiilor de artă românească, Bucureşti 1965-1918, Vremea*, Bucharest, 2019. For Europe see *Fighting for Visibility. Women Artist in the Nationalgalerie before 1919*, [cat.] ed. Yvette Deseyve, Ralph Gleis, Reimer Verlag, 2019.

Notes

<sup>18</sup> The initiative of the exhibition belonged to Cecilia Cuțescu-Storck, Olga Greceanu și Nina Arbore. Ioana Vlasiu, *Strategies of Integration in the Artistic Milieu: the All-Women Exhibitions, Bucharest, 1916 to 1927*, in “RRHA”, serie Beaux-Art, tom XXXVI-XXXVII, 1999-2000, p. 68.

<sup>19</sup> From this angle must be considered the watercolours signed by Arghir Culina, Toma T. Socolescu, G. Simotta, Const. N. Popescu. *Arhitectura*, an 1941. Architects taking part in collective exhibitions with works of art were commonly before and after The First World War. *Repertoriul expozițiilor de artă românească....*

<sup>20</sup> Irina Cărăbaș, *Ion Mincu în călătorie. Remintirea trecutului și inventarea surselor arhitecturii naționale*, in eds. Cristina Bogdan, Silvia Marin Barutchieff, “Călători și călătorii. A privi, a descoperi. Vol. I, Incursiuni în istorie și artă”, Bucharest, 2016, p. 169, 171.

<sup>21</sup> Library of Romanian Academy, fond Radu Haret, mss. I 43, f. 2.

<sup>22</sup> Barbara Berta, *La formazione della figura professionale dell'architetto, Roma, 1890-1925*, in “Bollettino del Centro di Studi per la Storia dell'Architettura”, no. 42-43-44, p. 326.

<sup>23</sup> *Monitorul Oficial*, no. 062, 22 iunie 1922, p. 3257. Virginia Andreescu was not the only female architect in the Reconstruction Committee, at the same time another woman, Antoaneta Ioanovici, activated in the institution.

<sup>24</sup> *Monitorul oficial*, no. 62, 22 iunie 1922, p. 3257; *Monitorul oficial*, no.142, 30 septembrie 1922, p. 6481.

<sup>25</sup> Library of Romanian Academy, fond Radu Haret, mss. I 43, f. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Library of Romanian Academy, fond Radu Haret, mss. I 44, f. 1

<sup>27</sup> In Finland and United States, some of first women architects stand out through projects related to the school programme. Renja Suominen-Kokkonen, *The Fringe of a Profession. Women as Architects in Finland from the 1890s to the 1950s*, Helsinki, 1992, p. 41. Karen McNeill, “WOMEN WHO BUILD”: in *Julia Morgan & Women's Institutions*, “California History”, Vol. 89, No. 3 (2012), p. 41-74.

<sup>28</sup> Library of Romanian Academy, fond Radu Haret, mss. IV, varia 27.

<sup>29</sup> NAR, fond Casa Școalelor, file 1213, year 1927, p. 208 v. Normal schools for boys in Tecuci and Vaslui, a normal school for girls in Bârlad, Highschool „Frații Buzești” in Craiova, a highschool in Vaslui and a secondary school for girls in Bârlad.

<sup>30</sup> Library of Romanian Academy, fond Radu Haret, mss. IV varia 27.

<sup>31</sup> Kay Standley, Bradley Soule, Jo Standley, *Women and Architecture*, in “Journal of Architectural Education (1947-1974)”, vol. 27, no. 4, 1974, p. 78-82.

<sup>32</sup> *Arhitectura*, III, 1924, p. 1. One of these architects was her colleague at the Ministry of Education, Jean Pompilian.

<sup>33</sup> Library of Romanian Academy, fond Radu Haret, mss. I 27, f. 3.

<sup>34</sup> The Society of Romanian Architects used to appoint one or two architects to represent it at international congresses.

<sup>35</sup> *Arhitectura*, 1924, III, p. 38.

<sup>36</sup> *Arhitectura*, 1936, 5, p. 2, *Arhitectura* 1936, 6, p. 2, *Arhitectura*, 1936, 7, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> V. Sp. Haret, *Localuri de învățământ*, in “Arhitectura”, 1938, 12, p. 5-12.

<sup>38</sup> Jean (Ion) Pompilian was the son of painter Gheorghe Ioachim Pompilian.

<sup>39</sup> Jean (Ion) Pompilian (1872-1938) was architect-in-chief at Eforia Spitalelor Civile, Ministry of Interior Affairs, Post Office Service, and Ministry of Education (Casa Școalelor). Professor at Higher School of Architecture, teaching Theory of Architecture. Paul Constantin, *Dicționar universal al arhitecților*, Ed. Științifică și Enciclopedică, Bucharest, 1986, p. 260.

<sup>40</sup> NAR, fond Casa Școalelor, file 1213, year 1927, p. 261 f-v-262.

<sup>41</sup> C. Popescu, *Le style national roumain. Construire une Nation a travers l'architecture 1881-1945*, Rennes, Bucharest, 2004, p. 206.

<sup>42</sup> Formal influences from Professor Petre Antonescu can be noticed in the case of Nicu Stănescu Villa, Bucharest.

<sup>43</sup> Luminița Machedon, Ernie Scoffham, *Romanian Modernism. The Architecture of Bucharest, 1920-1940*, MIT Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1999, p. 113-162.

<sup>44</sup> In a letter it was mentioned a “book of Esselborn”. Library of Romanian Academy, fond Radu Haret, mss. IV varia 27, letter undated. Karl Esselborn (1852-1937), engineer, professor at Landesbaugewerkschule Darmstadt, author of several works and handbooks on civil engineering (ground, earth, roads, railways, hydraulic engineering). <https://www.darmstadt-stadtlexikon.de/e/esselborn-karl-vater.html>

<sup>45</sup> In 1922 she took part in trips organized in the Balkans by the Society of Romanian Architects, being one of the very few women at such manifestations. *Artele frumoase. Revistă pentru popularizarea artelor plastic. Arhitectura, sculptura, pictura și arta decorativeă*, year II, no. 1, 2, ianuarie-februarie 1923. Several watercolours realised during the trip were published in *Artele frumoase* magazine.

<sup>46</sup> The family archive records up to the end of the 1930s numerous individual trips. Library of Romanian Academy, fond Radu Haret, mss. IV varia 26 and IV varia 27.

<sup>47</sup> From Leipzig, which she visited in 1938, she wrote to her husband about the Nazi's oppression against the Jews “[...] everywhere death of the Jews, convenient store with the inscription «Arrisch» on the shop window”. Library of Romanian Academy, fond Radu Haret, mss. IV varia 26, letter from 6<sup>th</sup> March 1938.



<sup>48</sup> Library of Romanian Academy, fond Radu Haret, mss. I 44, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> Romanian–Soviet economic enterprises established after the communist takeover in 1947.

<sup>50</sup> The numerous library passes in her personal archive show a growing interest for research activity in the last years of her life. Library of Romanian Academy, Radu Haret fond, mss V varia 1.

<sup>51</sup> Her maiden name, Andreescu, was added to her last name (Virginia Haret-Andreescu).

<sup>52</sup> Magda Cârneli, *Artele plastice în România 1945-1989*, Bucharest, 2000 p. 132.

<sup>53</sup> Library of Romanian Academy, fond Radu Haret, mss. I, 31, p. 2.

<sup>54</sup> Radu Haret, *Virginia Haret-Andreescu – Prima arhitectă din lume*, in “Revista Muzeelor și Monumentelor”, XIII, 2, 1982, p. 65.

<sup>55</sup> Raluca Niculae, *Gender Issues in Architectural Education: Feminine Paradigm*, “Review of Applied Socio-Economic Research”, 2012, 1, p. 146.

