

Abstract. Contemporary art is an open resource of discourses that challenge preconceptions including the ones dealing with notions of history and memory. Renée Renard is an artist interested in the exploration of this topic in her on-going project began in 2012 and reflected by *A Road as One Hundred Lives* or *faBrique*. This paper addresses the meaningful contribution of a woman artist that is sensitive to the processes of restoring and conserving personal and local collective histories that intersect notions of archival work, archaeology, medical science, historiography.

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Working with the paradox of coexistence in the philosophy of knowledge introduced in the realm of visual arts means challenging the chronological concept of time, the *formal network of processes* (*Deleuze*). In these processes, imagining, collecting, overlapping, intersecting are tools used with the purpose of revealing and adjusting the mechanisms of memory conservation always under the scrutiny of time and the fabrics of our brains, always in a vulnerable position with our concrete possibilities of conservation. The idea draws upon the concept of a universal museum coined by the Russian communist philosopher Nikolai Fyodorov in 1906. In his futurist perspectives the mission of the museum was to actually resurrect by encompassing all the lives of all those who

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have lived before us, a cemetery-like museum, a complete testimony for investigators and a collection that can be used for individual resurrection. In our current technological era this idea could probably take better shape with the dimensions of artificial memory, the cloud, digital data and archives.

Renée Renard is exploring her own past with esthetic and scientific tools. She is using personal and collective public archives in order to trace back the past of her ancestors, to restore the history of her family from Tomnatic with roots in Lorena and the Schwarzwald of the 18th century. The personal story becomes the story of others as she evolves to see that the grand narrative of our existence is not in isolation. Perhaps this is one of the most interesting aspects of Renard's work while she operates esthetic juxtapositions, layering and collages and also looking at objects and samples from earth or building constructions to observe relevant details under the microscope. Renard is contributing not only to the processes of conceptualising the relationships with memory in contemporary art, but also to the historical restoration of a generation that took part to dramatic socio-political phenomena such as the German deportation in USSR from the 1940s and the German, Serb and Aromanian deportations in Bărăgan from the 1950s.



Fig. 1. – Renée Renard.

Un drum cât o sută de vieți – Rădăcini / A Road as one hundred lives – Roots, 2013.

Family archive photography, digital processing, digital print 40 × 50 cm,
The house of Haman family in Tomnatic.

The deportation decision was issued by the Prime Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the influence of Stalin and Tito, therefore on June 17th and 18th 1951, 12,791 family members, respectively

40,320 people from areas near the border with Yugoslavia were forcibly relocated, transported in cattle wagons to Bărăgan. Among them were the great-grandparents of the artist from Tomnatic, 68-year-old

Haman Dominic and 66-year-old Haman Margareta, who left behind their prosperous business (the factory) and their household. They lived for 4 years in Răchitoasa commune, in a hole they dug in the ground. The plan of the brick factory, the original of which is in the State Archives in Bonn, Germany, was drawn from memory by Haman Dominic after the age of 70. The reality of these conditions is simply unimaginable for most of us, although similar conditions exist nowadays in territories torn by armed conflicts. These realities reveal our constant insecurities, our fragile state of peace.

Through digital photography and interventions on digital photography, object, installation and video both the psycho-emotional layer of personal history and the one of a collective history belong to a discourse where displacement represents the artist's personal desire for belonging and reconciliation with the past. Various residue of walls and earth exposed in Petri dishes define the "archaeological" and laboratory research work on a past that remains insufficiently evoked in contemporary consciousness. This type of artistic practice manages to capitalize on the multifaceted relationship with history, influencing and shaping long-term awareness.



Fig. 2. – *fabRIQUE*, 2022, Family archive photography, digital processing, digital print 40×50 cm, With the family in the Haman brick factory yard 1.

The ongoing project signed by the artist is also tackling emotional territories, working with the images as tools for

generating empathy through connection. For the artist art is not a noisy political manifestation, rather a poetic strategy of

addressing hard core topics. She is telling stories of displacement, otherness, the failure of political systems, beaurocracy in shaping identities, the emotions of non-belonging. This emotional infrastructure is also built on a fragile foundation revealing a responsible act of self-vulnerabilizaton conjuring the voices from the past that paradoxically empower.

This work opens a discussion around the specific relations between personal and collective histories (stories), on how personal archives and memory contributes/ contribute to the general reading of local and European history. It introduces a discussion around the layers and values of otherness and the embodiment and disimbodiment of information.

Historical narratives are sources of information presenting a mixture of layers that intersect different perspectives, memories and empirical evidence. In this context we must pay attention to a wide range of sources when we are dealing with history and memory, from oral histories, first-person accounts, documents, photographs, and other traces of the human experience in order to allow the coexistence of variables and shared experiences of time. This narrative creates a context for understanding our nature and limitations as a species, embracing vulnerability, instability and loss in regards to our past and present. It is a space defining the awareness of our uncertainties, a space of our possibilities of healing.



Fig. 3. – *faBRIQUE*, 2022, Mother and grandparents.



Fig. 4. – *faBRIQUE*, 2022, with great-grandparents Haman from Tomnatic in the exhibition.

* **Renée Renard** is a graduate of the Faculty of Arts and Design from Timișoara and the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine. Her works address two main themes: the convergence of science and art, and the documentation/interpretation of the micro-history of her family with Central European origins, as well

as the settlers who arrived in Banat in the 18th century. Her preferred means of expression are installation, object, mixed media under the microscope, photography/video under the microscope and underwater, digital processing, adaptations of ancient Japanese techniques such as kintsugi and tataki zome.

Notes

