

ANCA BENERA

born 9/11/1977

lives and works in Bucharest

Interview with Anca Benera by Simona Nastac
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The art of Anca Benera reflects a thirst for experiment and uncharted territories specific to contemporary anxiety. Her work has the potential of transforming and re-symbolizing the elements and the space it investigates, gaining aesthetic sharpness through processes of imaginative recycling and re-contextualization.

Simona Nastac: As far as I know, you are the only Romanian artist who paints Asian characters. Are they real or fictional? Are they maybe inspired from Japanese manga and anime? Where this fascination for Orient does come from?

Anca Benera: I'm fascinated and inspired by Japanese manga and anime but this is not where my characters come from. Most of the characters are Asian people I meet. I have always been attracted by Asian typology. The idea of 'remixing' portraits started when I heard once, from an Asian friend, that many Asian women started to do surgical operations in order to change the typical Asian eyes or nose shape. The portraits are created by mixing Asian with European features. I'm interested in finding a 'universal typology', a perfect *mélange* of different features. The names are fictitious, actually Romanian words turned into Japanese; for instance, Okyo comes from "ochi", which in Romanian means eyes.

S.N. Some of the works look very much like video stills, as you would seek to freeze and decompose the cinematic movement. You also seem to ask a certain degree of participation from the viewer, inviting him or her to continue, mentally, the action or the narrative.

A.B. I totally agree, you've noticed very well. I have series of works in which I wanted to represent one single frame of a 'painted second'. More precisely, I tried to capture, exactly like I would do in editing, one frame of a second, in which the liquid is in the air.

S.N. This brings me to the next question. Another distinctive feature of your painting is the recurrent presence of water or other fluids, as an unstable element disturbing or enhancing the *a priori* stillness of painting. Is this related somehow to special effects in Japanese action movies or animation? Why is water so important for you?

A.B. I am fascinated by the ability of fluids to change its shape according to its container and to fluctuate depending on movement in and around it. What is the shape of water? How can I represent a fluid as something always changing, always fluctuating? Although our bodies are mostly water, we often continue to have an uneasy relationship to this element due to the risk of drowning. Human life is very tightly bound up with water and it stirs up in me both visual pleasure and frustration because I can't swim!

S.N. Besides painting you work also with video and mixed-media installations. Can one speak about a conceptual continuity between them or would it be better to consider them autonomous experiments? Why are you interested in exploring different types of artistic practice?

A.B. There is a certain conceptual continuity between some of the works. Starting from water and fluids, as continuously changing shapes, I developed the idea of changing materialities of objects (as the jelly gun and chocolate toilet) and further more, in my site-specific installations, using white wool threads and ping-pong balls to create the illusion of space flexibility.

I even combined video projection on painted canvas.

I use different types of artistic practice mainly because of the possibilities that other media can offer. I don't primarily search for a medium for a work; the concept dictates which medium is most appropriate.

S.N. Related to this, what do you think about the debates around a certain crisis in contemporary painting? Is that a real issue? Does it have any effects on you as an artist coming from a 'periphery' and trying to fit in the international context?

A.B. I'm not influenced by the debates concerning the crisis in contemporary painting.

S.N. To what extent have you been influenced by the previous encounter with Belgian contemporary art and galleries?

A.B. Due to the residency program offered by Mie Lefever, my first visit to Belgium was a great opportunity to visit contemporary art galleries and museums. It was absolutely beneficial for me not only in terms of improving my knowledge in contemporary art, but also as a really inspiring place for working. I found many subjects for my paintings - the lovely Nijntje and different places to explore, as 'the mad house' in Gent, a painted house with objects hanging on the façade. Therefore I can say I've been positively influenced in developing further art projects and exhibitions.

S.N. As an exercise of imagination, could you anticipate the evolution of your work in ten years from now on?

A.B. I wish I could find a way to combine all the media I'm working with now, including painting, objects, installations, video.

I would like my imagination become real in ten years or less...

Simona Nastac is an art critic and freelance curator. Editor of *e-cart* web magazine (www.e-cart.ro), contributing editor of *Cultural Observer* magazine (Bucharest) and *IDEA Arts+Society* magazine (Cluj). Lives and works in Bucharest.