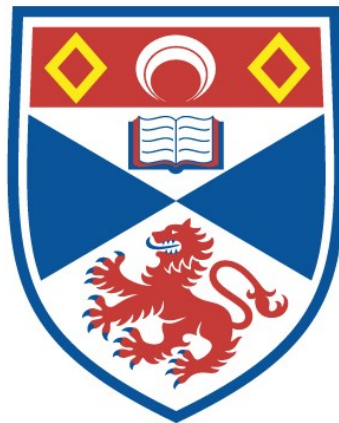


**Putting the peripheral centre stage: performing modernism
in interbellum Bucharest 1924-1934**

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Alexandra Chiriac

A thesis submitted for the degree of PhD
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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates how modernism manifested itself in applied arts and design in interbellum Bucharest, expanding the field of enquiry of the avant-garde outside two-dimensional production. The framework utilised is underpinned by two recent approaches: from art history, the concept of ‘circulations’ developed by Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin, and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel; and from the field of performance studies, Erika Fischer-Lichte’s new aesthetics of performance.

The narrative thread is provided by the activities of the artist M. H. Maxy in the realms of design and performance, yet he is not always the protagonist. The first half of the thesis recovers the history of the Academy of Decorative Arts, a private venture founded by designer and pedagogue Andrei Vespremie and later joined by Maxy and his wife Mela Maxy. Through newly uncovered archival material, it provides a close reading of the Academy’s curriculum and workshops and establishes its links with the Schule Reimann, a pioneering Berlin-based design institution. The second half of the thesis focuses on Maxy’s work in stage design and reveals the trajectories of his innovative collaborators: the Vilna Troupe, Dida Solomon and Iacob Sternberg. Examining a range of theatrical productions, it highlights the experimental visions, intricate performances and iconoclastic endeavours of these practitioners, which ran the gamut of ‘high’ to ‘low’ art and blurred the boundaries between modern life, modern commerce, and the theatrical stage.

Overall, this thesis brings to light the rich artistic life of modern Bucharest, a heretofore peripheral location in histories of art, and highlights practitioners whose contribution to the European interwar avant-garde have been obscured by the gaps between disciplines or national narratives. It challenges the categories of ‘avant-garde’ and ‘modernism’ and their restrictive usage, advocating for a more inclusive and transnational approach that eschews binaries and normalises cross-cultural and cross-media slippages and collaborations.

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INTRODUCTION

Often exiled somewhere on the peripheries of modernism, the Romanian avant-garde inhabits a shifting and unstable terrain, its very designation a contested one: how Romanian and how avant-garde can it claim to be? This thesis does not attempt to answer such questions, positing instead that uncertain appellations and fluctuating identities should not only be accepted as an essential part of art historical narratives, but should be at their very core. By challenging the preconception that artists belonging to what is termed the ‘Romanian avant-garde’ should be measured by their level of affiliation to these two categories, it explores narratives that transcend both geographical and disciplinary boundaries.¹ The results of this approach reveal innovative artistic practices and vibrant collaborative experimentations that fluidly move between media and across borders, thus rendering centre-periphery relationships immaterial.

In 1994, Magda Cârnelci observed that ‘the history of the Romanian arts in the inter-war period is still to be written’ and this statement remains true today in many respects.² In some ways, it might seem like the entity known as the ‘Romanian avant-garde’ has attracted a fair amount of scholarship, at least in the post-communist period and in the Romanian language. Yet the narrative that emerges has a narrow focus, privileging a small group of Bucharest-based and mainly male artists whose activities centred around a lively succession of printed periodicals. The nucleus of the group was formed during the period 1922-1924, when two young artists returned from their studies abroad. Marcel Iancu had spent the previous decade in Zürich and Paris studying architecture, as well as being one of the founders of the Dada movement alongside his fellow Jewish-Romanian Tristan Tzara.³ Max Herman Maxy had been in Berlin, studying painting with Arthur Segal, another Jewish-Romanian émigré, and exhibiting with Herwarth Walden’s gallery *Der Sturm* and with the *Novembergruppe*. They

1. For this reason and others that will become apparent, this thesis avoids the use of the term ‘Romanian avant-garde’ unless it is specifically referring to literature that deals with this category. When a collective designation is required, the term ‘Bucharest avant-garde’ is used instead, purely as indicative of the location where the activities in question were carried out rather than the origins of the artists involved.

2. Magda Cârnelci, ‘O expoziție despre avangarda românească’, in *Bucharest in the 1920s and 1930s: Between Avant-Garde and Modernism*, ed. Magda Cârnelci (București: Simetria, 1994), 11–17, 12.

3. Biographical notes for the main figures discussed in this thesis have been compiled in Appendix A.

were joined by Hans Mattis-Teutsch, who was based in the Transylvanian city of Braşov and had studied in Vienna and Munich, and by Victor Brauner who had studied at the School of Fine Arts in Bucharest and would eventually move to Paris, becoming a prominent Surrealist. Broadly speaking, accounts of the Romanian avant-garde focus on these four figures in the domain of fine and applied arts, with several other figures joining them from the realm of literature for collaborations that resulted in the creation of a string of periodicals.⁴

The first to appear was *Contimporanul* ('The Contemporary'), in 1922, edited by poet Ion Vinea who as a teenager had collaborated on two symbolist publications with the equally youthful Tristan Tzara and Marcel Iancu, before their emigration to Switzerland.

Contimporanul had a strong political agenda during its first two years of existence, frequently commenting on government policies, but from 1924 gave increasing prevalence to artistic matters, both national and international.⁵ Collaborating with the artists outlined above, it became the mouthpiece of the avant-garde and that same year it published its 'Activist Manifesto to Youth', considered the first interbellum avant-garde manifesto published in a Romanian context.⁶ Also in 1924, the artistic group around *Contimporanul* organised the first international avant-garde exhibition in Bucharest, inviting colleagues from Poland, Hungary, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Germany and Sweden, as well as special guest Constantin Brancusi, to join them in exhibiting their work.⁷ The exhibition was organised by Vinea, Iancu and Maxy, but soon after the latter formed his own splinter group around the publication *Integral*, first published in March 1925. The publication's subtitle, 'A Review of Modern Synthesis', and the very definition of Integralism provided by Maxy's collaborator, writer Mihail Cosma, were characterised by eclecticism: 'a scientific and objective synthesis

4. Other artists are sometimes included, in particular sculptor Miliţa Petraşcu whose link to the Parisian avant-gardes is often highlighted, having been a student of Brancusi, or Corneliu Michăilescu, a collaborator of Tzara, Iancu and Maxy. However, these artists are not discussed in scholarship as frequently and as expansively, perhaps because although they contributed to avant-garde periodicals they were not involved in directing or editing them. See for example the brief mentions they garner in Krisztina Passuth, *Les avant-gardes de l'Europe Centrale* (Paris: Flammarion, 1988) or in Cârnecki, ed., *Bucharest in the 1920s and 1930s*.

5. Shona Kallestrup, *Art and Design in Romania 1866-1927. Local and International Aspects of the Search for National Expression* (Boulder; New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 188-9.

6. Literary historian Paul Cernat calls this manifesto 'the birth certificate of the autochthonous avant-garde'. See Paul Cernat, *Avangarda românească și complexul periferiei* (Bucureşti: Cartea Românească, 2007), 146.

7. See *Contimporanul*, no. 50-51 (30 November 1924).

of all the aesthetic pursuits we have witnessed so far (futurism, expressionism, cubism, surrealism, etc.), all combined on constructivist foundations'.⁸ *Integral*'s content was equally diverse, covering painting, graphic arts, film, theatre, and applied arts from Romania and abroad.

Other significant publications of this decade were *75HP*, *Punct* and *unu*. Although its first issue, published in 1924, was the only one, *75HP* became a defining moment for the Romanian avant-garde. Collaborators Victor Brauner and poet Ilarie Voronca created an innovative blend of word and image which they named 'picto-poetry' and gave the magazine's design equal importance to its contents, experimenting with lettering, language and typography. *Punct* ('Full stop' or 'Point'), which ran for sixteen issues between 1924 and 1925, aligned itself with international constructivism and was edited by left-leaning writer Scarlat Callimachi. Its collaborators included many of the artists and writers already mentioned, emphasising the interconnectivity of the Romanian avant-garde. Although rivalries did occasionally spring up, such as that between Iancu and Maxy, the many short-lived ventures of the avant-garde included its core members in one configuration or another. The decade ended with the publication of *unu* ('one' in lower capitals, utilising the graphic potential of the Romanian word), which first appeared in 1928, edited by the writer Saşa Pană. Its focus was predominantly literary and its agenda experimental with a dose of mischievousness, on one occasion presenting its audience with an entirely blank number entitled *unu alb*, or 'white unu'. It thus heralded the next generation of surrealist periodicals, which flourished in the 1930s.⁹

This core narrative and its main protagonists have been discussed by Romanian scholars, and increasingly by international scholars, part of the growing movement towards de-centring histories of modernism and the avant-garde.¹⁰ On the surface, the Romanian avant-garde has

8. Mihail Cosma, 'De vorbă cu Luigi Pirandello', *Integral*, no. 8 (December 1925): 2–3.

9. For a fuller account of Romanian avant-garde periodicals, see Kallestrup, *Art and Design in Romania*, 187–98; Shona Kallestrup, "'Romania Is Being Built Today!'" Avant-Garde Journal Illustration 1912–1932', *Centropa* 4, no. 1 (January 2004): 64–79; and Irina Livezeanu, 'Romania: "Windows towards the West". New Forms and the "Poetry of True Life"', in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, ed. Peter Brooker et al., vol. III, Europe 1880–1940 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1157–83.

10. For example, Passuth, *Les avant-gardes de l'Europe Centrale* and Steven Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe. From the Baltic to the Balkans ca. 1890–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). See

been documented and investigated, starting with its very name: for example Stephen Mansbach has debated its degree of ‘foreignness’, while Erwin Kessler has labelled it ‘retro-garde’.¹¹ Thematic studies include Paul Cernat’s monograph on the avant-garde’s periodicals, or Mădălina Lascu’s work on its relationship with the urban environment.¹² However, a closer look reveals many lacunae, one being the involvement of the avant-garde in the development of modern Romanian applied arts. The country’s territorial expansion in the aftermath of the First World War led to a new search for a cultural identity, and to an increase in the capital’s population followed by a boom in construction.¹³ After a wave of buildings in the historicist national style, modernist architecture – promoted by Iancu and increasing numbers of young architects – gained ground and became predominant by the 1930s. If architecture by its very nature is easily visible, the decorative and applied arts are less so and have suffered by an absence of scholarship that examines whether the new urban spaces fuelled an interest in modern design.¹⁴ Existing research in the field has focused on the emergence of the historicist neo-Romanian style, an approach also rooted in historic causes such as the prominent revival of craft traditions led by Queen Marie, the success of Constantin Brancusi’s vernacular-inspired oeuvre, and the endorsement of a constructed national narrative by the communist regime.¹⁵ Thus the history of decorative and applied arts

Chapter One for a full literature review.

11. Steven Mansbach, ‘The “Foreignness” of Classical Modern Art in Romania’, *The Art Bulletin* 80, no. 3 (September 1998): 534–54; Erwin Kessler, ‘Retro-Gardes’, in *Colours of the Avant-Garde. Romanian Art 1910-1950*, ed. Erwin Kessler (Rome: Gangemi, 2011), 9–20.

12. Cernat, *Avangarda românească*; Mădălina Lascu, *Imaginea oraşului în avangarda românească* (Bucureşti: Tracus Arte, 2014).

13. Romania’s territory more than doubled after 1918, with Bucovina, Transylvania and Bessarabia becoming part of the newly enlarged state. Although the dream of a ‘Greater Romania’ had been achieved, the cultural and ethnic diversity of the new territories created some unease for the post-war government since one third of its population was now non-Romanian. See Kallestrup, *Art and Design in Romania*, 160.

14. Recent works that focus on modernist architecture in Bucharest are numerous and include Mihaela Criticos, *Art Deco sau modernismul bine temperat* (Bucureşti: Simetria, 2009); Luminița Machedon and Ernie Scoffam, *Romanian Modernism. The Architecture of Bucharest, 1920-1940* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 1999); Carmen Popescu, *Spațiul modernității românești 1906-1947* (Bucureşti: Fundația Arhitect Design, 2011); and Anca Bocăneț, ed., *Marcel Iancu in România interbelică. Arhitect, artist plastic, teoretician* (Bucureşti: Simetria, 1996), which focuses in large part on Iancu’s architectural oeuvre.

15. The neo-Romanian style has an extensive bibliography, including Lucian Boia et al., eds., *Mitul național. Contribuția artelor la definirea identității românești* (Bucureşti: MNAR, 2012); Maria Camelia Ene, *Stilul național în artele vizuale. Artele decorative* (Bucureşti: NOI Media Print, 2013); Kallestrup, *Art and Design in*

in Romania has become subsumed with that of traditional crafts. Even today, there is no national museum of applied arts in Bucharest and the decorative arts section of the Romanian National Art Museum has no gallery space.¹⁶

This thesis aims to address this imbalance by investigating how modernism manifested itself in applied arts and design in Bucharest, by expanding the field of enquiry of the avant-garde outside two-dimensional production. I focus on M. H. Maxy as a case study due to his engagement in a wide breadth of artistic activities, much more so than most other artists associated with the nucleus of the Bucharest avant-garde. He produced an avant-garde publication, collaborated with an institution for applied arts education and commercialised his own designs, produced advertising graphics and designed for the theatrical stage on numerous occasions. These diverse activities are rarely discussed in detail in existing scholarship, despite Maxy's prominent place in the history of twentieth century Romanian art. As well as being well-known for his avant-garde activities, Maxy subsequently became the first director of the Romanian National Art Museum which was inaugurated in 1950 during the communist regime. He led the museum until his death in 1971, thus not only being a participant in the history of Romanian art but also a shaping force in its narrative. A controversial figure, Maxy is thus ever-present in discussions of Romanian art, engendering both approval and opprobrium. Yet, as I discovered, the only monograph on his career to be published since Petre Oprea's 1974 slim volume has been authored by Michael Ilk, an independent researcher and curator of exhibitions on the Romanian avant-garde, who has painstakingly traced information, objects and documents over several decades.¹⁷

The thesis focuses on two of Maxy's activities: his contribution to modern design in Romania through his collaboration with a private venture named the Academy of Decorative Arts (*Academia de Arte Decorative*) and his activity as a stage designer. Both of these aspects are briefly mentioned in scholarship on the Romanian avant-garde, but the details are seldom

Romania; Popescu, *Le style national roumain*.

16. By contrast, most cities in Romania have at least one if not two museums of folk and vernacular culture, both indoor and outdoor. In Bucharest, the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant is an award-winning institution, known for its distinctive curatorial vision, while the outdoor Village Museum is frequently included by the authorities on the itinerary of foreign dignitaries as an emblematic example of Romanian culture.

17. Petre Oprea, *M. H. Maxy* (București: Arta Grafică, 1974); Michael Ilk, *Maxy. Der integrale Künstler* (Ludwigshafen: Michael Ilk, 2003).

sketched in. Recently, Irina Cărăbaș's essay 'The Shadow of the Object. Modernity and Decoration in Romanian Art' dedicated a section to the Academy and its output, but concluded that the institution had left too few traces for a more detailed analysis.¹⁸ With regards to Maxy's theatrical collaborations, the existing information is even scarcer, with dates and names of plays sometimes differing between publications, but accompanied by tantalising illustrations of sketches from museum collections.¹⁹ I thus focused on following these two trails - design and theatre - eventually unearthing several diverse, vibrant and intriguing facets of the avant-garde beyond the core narrative and its protagonists.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter One positions the Romanian avant-garde within existing literature on both Romanian and European art. It explores some of its most common framings, from critiques of its eclecticism and lack of political involvement to examinations of its effervescent periodical production and its links to a wide range of international avant-garde practitioners. Seeking to find a middle ground, this chapter evaluates some of these frameworks and proceeds towards a survey of recent developments within the art historical discipline, particularly those leading to more inclusionary approaches. It thus examines modes of dealing with artworks and artists considered 'peripheral', it explores the rise of the term 'transnational', and it asks how successfully can modernism be 'de-centred'. Finally, the chapter considers some concepts drawn from performance studies and the presence of an anti-performative stance within histories of modernism. Overall, this introductory chapter interrogates methodologies that can serve to expand the boundaries of art history and establishes a framework for this thesis and its findings based on the concept of 'circulations' and on Erika Fischer-Lichte's new aesthetics of performance.²⁰

18. Irina Cărăbaș, 'The Shadow of the Object. Modernity and Decoration in Romanian Art', in *Dis(continuities). Fragments of Romanian Modernity in the First Half of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Carmen Popescu (Bucharest: Simetria, 2010), 101–42, 128.

19. See for example Magda Cârneli, ed., *Rădăcini și ecouri ale avangardei în colecțiile de grafică ale Bibliotecii Academiei Române* (București: Academia Română, 2011); Ilk, *Maxy*.

20. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin, and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, eds., *Circulations in the Global History of Art* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015); Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics* (London; New York: Routledge, 2008).

The next two chapters focus on the Academy of Decorative Arts, a private venture that operated in Bucharest between 1924 and 1929, incorporating both theoretical classes and practical workshops in modern applied arts and design. Chapter Two recovers the history of the Academy and of its founder, Andrei Vespremie, whose career was overshadowed by that of Maxy. Through newly uncovered archival material, it establishes links between the Academy and the Schule Reimann, an innovative Berlin institution that provided classes in commercial applied arts and design. It thus shows that Maxy and his narrative of a Bauhaus connection were far less influential than previously thought in the creation of the Academy and its diverse curriculum. Likewise, the chapter highlights the transnational career of Andrei Vespremie, a pedagogue and designer of Hungarian Jewish origin, who worked in Berlin, Bucharest and Riga, and whose contribution to the Romanian avant-garde has been heretofore overlooked. Chapter Three delves further into the programme of the Academy, providing a close reading of three workshops and their outputs: metalwork, textiles and bookbinding. Based on research in museums and private collections, this section untangles the work of Vespremie and Maxy, showing the former as a decisive influence on the latter. Furthermore, the chapter explores the commercial undertakings of the Academy, such as the creation of a visual graphic identity and the opening of a selling exhibition space under the directorship of Mela Maxy, the artist's wife. The Academy's claim to modernity is thus considered in the light of recent scholarship that recasts the feminine, the commercial and the performative as essential elements of modernist design histories.²¹

The following two chapters explore the realm of the theatre. Chapter Four focuses on Maxy's collaborations with the Vilna Troupe, an experimental theatre group that performed in Yiddish. Created in Vilnius in 1915, the ensemble rapidly became a theatrical sensation, touring Europe with its innovative productions. From 1923 to 1927 it settled in Bucharest, enlisting Maxy as one of its artistic collaborators. He created designs for six plays, one of which did not make it to the stage. The chapter reconstructs each of these performances in turn based on detailed archival research and continues by discussing them in the context of European developments in theatre and stage design during this period. It also teases out heretofore overlooked transnational and interdisciplinary connections, such as a Maxy-

21. For example, Tag Gronberg, *Designs on Modernity: Exhibiting the City in 1920s Paris* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2003); Robin Schuldenfrei, *Luxury and Modernism. Architecture and the Object in Germany 1900-1933* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

designed production itinerated to Chicago and the presence of the Academy of Decorative Arts on stage. Chapter Five continues to explore Maxy's involvement in the theatre after the departure of the Vilna Troupe, focusing on his collaborations with actress and theatre-owner Dida Solomon in 1927 and with director Iacob Sternberg from 1930 to 1934. As previously with Vespremie or Mela Maxy, the chapter aims to recover the contribution of Solomon and Sternberg to the activities of the avant-garde in Romania, highlighting their innovative visions, intricate performances and iconoclastic endeavours, running the gamut of 'high' to 'low' art. Together, the two chapters dedicated to the theatrical stage challenge the assumption that experimental theatre had a sparse presence in Bucharest during this period, by expanding the parameters to acknowledge artists of diverse nationalities, varying forms of performance, and a wide-ranging array of geographically-dispersed archival materials.

As is evident from this outline, Maxy is a conduit for the narrative of the thesis, but he is not always its main protagonist. This shift in focus became apparent as the research progressed and several of the figures mentioned above came to the fore. It was a welcome development that highlighted the extent to which histories of the Romanian and the European avant-garde can be selective in their narrative, neglecting artists or artworks that defy categorisation, be it national, disciplinary, or otherwise. The types of cultural production presented in this thesis disrupt vertical models of art history and their markers, such as originality, individuality, aesthetic hermeticism, or national specificity. Performance, whether theatrical or otherwise, is repetitive, collaborative and frequently transnational. Likewise, design is collaborative, reproducible and apt to circulate. Furthermore, just as Maxy provides a narrative thread, Bucharest provides a core locale for the thesis. Geographical delimitations are not ideal in shaping art historical research, as will be discussed in Chapter One, and so this focal point is used flexibly. Locations such as Berlin, Riga, and Chicago become equally important to the shaping of the thesis at different times. The choice of Bucharest is also an attempt to avoid placing this thesis too firmly within the categories of 'Romanian art' or 'Romanian art history', which, although a common approach in existing scholarship, would sit uncomfortably with the findings discussed. This would be firstly due to the artists present in this thesis, who come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and locations, and secondly due to the shifting geographies of Romania and its neighbouring countries during their lifetimes, which frequently affected their nationalities and trajectories.²²

22. As Andrzej Turowski observes, referring to art historical surveys of Central and Eastern Europe, 'the

This shifting geographical and disciplinary terrain has brought a number of challenges. In particular, fleshing out these artists, their outputs and their journeys has been frustrating and rewarding in equal measures. The vagaries of the communist regime and its effect on research and preservation, as well as the lack of a dedicated museum space for modern applied arts and design in Romania have contributed to a scarcity of relevant material in national collections. My search for artworks and archival materials thus evolved in surprising ways and would deserve a chapter in itself, such as the chance encounter with Vespremie's own hallmark on an erroneously catalogued metal dish in the memorial house of writer Ion Minulescu, or the discovery of Maxy's grinning face amidst Harvard Library's collection of photographs, as part of a theatrical archive. Some of the most important materials for this thesis came from disparate corners of the world: the Latvian State Historical Archives, Harvard's Widener Library and its Judaica Division, the Staatsbibliothek and the Humboldt Library in Berlin, the Centre for the Study of Jewish History in Romania and the Yivo Institute for Jewish Research in New York, as well as private collections. Amongst Romanian state institutions, I made use of the Romanian National Art Museum, the Brăila Museum, the Romanian Academy Library, the Central University Library, the National Romanian Archives, the Bucharest National Theatre, the Romanian Institute for Art History, and the National Museum of Romanian Literature. Nonetheless, some questions remain unanswered at present and some objects remain lost or missing, while the ephemerality of the theatrical arts raises difficulties when attempting to flesh out performances that occurred nearly a century ago, some of which completely lack visual material. Furthermore, as we shall see, witnesses to the events presented in this thesis who have left behind written testimonies, prove to be unreliable more often than not. Yet despite these theoretical and practical challenges, I posit that recovering such narratives is a task worth undertaking and one that may ultimately open the door towards a more inclusive history of art, encouraging the use of cross-media and cross-cultural approaches.

concept of Central Europe as a cultural community' is a recent one and thus finding a unifying perspective may not be possible or even advisable. See Andrzej Turowski, 'The Phenomenon of Blurring', in *Central European Avant-Gardes. Exchange and Transformation 1910-1930*, ed. Timothy Benson (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2002), 362–73, 365.

Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Romanian, German, and French are my own. Titles of plays, theatrical troupes, institutions or artistic groups, and works of art have been translated into English, while titles of journals and newspapers have been left in the original language. When titles are in Yiddish, the Romanian transliteration of the period has been preserved, as employed by the artists themselves. When several variants exist, the selection made is explained within the footnotes. Likewise, the spelling of names is preserved as used by the artists themselves in Romanian publications and documents of the period i.e. Marcel Iancu not Marcel Janco; Iacob Sternberg, not Yankev Shternberg. Other spellings or pseudonyms are detailed in the biographies compiled in Appendix A. Names of institutions where research has been carried out are abbreviated after the first time they occur in a chapter if a widely accepted acronym is available. Likewise, footnote references are given in full on first use in each chapter, and in abbreviated form subsequently.

Chapter 1. THE PERILS OF THE PERIPHERAL: ROMANIAN MODERNISM IN THE GLOBAL HISTORY OF ART

In 1986 Andrzej Turowski asked the question ‘Existe-t-il un art de l’Europe de l’Est?’ noting that textbooks or compendia of modern European art are mostly silent on this whole geographical area, as though it has produced no notable cultural output.¹ Perhaps, writing before the fall of the Berlin wall, Turowski was being unfairly critical of art historians. For those outside the region, access to source materials could be difficult, while those within were frequently not at liberty themselves to examine certain movements or artists, depending on the political vagaries of the time, and even when they did, their work was rarely disseminated outside the region. Steven Mansbach, whose survey of East European art was one of the first to be published in the English language after 1989, recognised these difficulties concluding that ‘for a half-century the ideological confrontation between East and West suppressed a free enquiry into the full history of modern art’.² It is troubling however to see another concern voiced in 2012 by Piotr Piotrowski who, in examining a recent textbook of twentieth century art, concludes that, although the authors of *Art Since 1900*³ do include examples of non-Western art, they nonetheless make no attempt ‘to revise the unspoken assumptions of modernist art geography’, so that works produced outside the recognised centres of modernism are ‘presented as a fragment of the global or universal art history [...] produced in the West’.⁴ Three decades since Turowski asked his provocative question and the physical boundaries dividing Europe fell apart, it seems that other kinds of borders, mental and virtual, still exist.

As the debate about the region’s place within the established narratives of art history continues, the treatment of Bucharest’s interbellum avant-gardes is a case in point. Their cultural diversity and mobility provide a challenge for nation-based narratives.

Furthermore, so does their stylistic fluidity: their vocabulary tended towards notions of

1. Andrzej Turowski, *Existe-t-il un art de l’Europe de l’Est? Utopie et Ideologie* (Paris: Editions de la Villette, 1986), 11.

2. Steven Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe. From the Baltic to the Balkans ca. 1890-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 2.

3. Hal Foster et al., *Art Since 1900* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004).

4. Piotr Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 25-26.

fusion and their artworks intermingled the abstract and the figurative, and challenged hierarchies of ‘fine’ and ‘applied’ arts. Thus, their outputs and their artistic programmes, which often synthesised different styles and disciplines, have led to them being perceived as less radical than their counterparts in Western Europe or Russia. This chapter explores methodological frameworks that would allow the inclusion of such material within the narratives of modernism, challenging the established canons of art history. Beginning with a review of the scholarly literature on the Romanian avant-garde and its lacunae, it continues with an investigation of methodologies that seek to dispute West-centric approaches to art. These include both region specific approaches and those aiming towards a wider geographical framework, such as methodologies for reframing centre-periphery relations or models for a global history of art. The chapter ends by casting the net even wider towards the methodologies of performance studies, seeking a model that normalises cross-cultural and cross-media slippages and collaborations, and disrupts the narrative of a ‘slow-lane’ avant-garde.

The ‘Theoretical Mutability’ of the Romanian Avant-Garde

Piotrowski’s critique of the West-centric canons of modernism is indeed a valid one, yet it is difficult to dismantle these without comprehensive scholarly accounts of the art they disregard. Romanian scholarship on the avant-garde was stunted post-Second World War by the demands of the communist regime which in its early decades followed the dictates of the Soviet Union with regards to art production and historiography, although a certain thaw became visible in later years. In 1993, the exhibition catalogue *Bucharest in the 1920s-1940s. Between Avant-Garde and Modernism* took stock of the existing historiography and attempted to tackle its subject in a detailed manner.⁵ The volume contained essays on architecture, music, literature, as well as the visual arts, thus providing a relatively rounded analysis of the phenomenon of the avant-garde in Romania’s capital. In the introduction, editor Magda Cârnelci referred to the lacunae existent in the Romanian-language bibliography of the subject, terming the latter ‘frugal’.⁶ She observed that the

5. Magda Cârnelci, ed., *Bucharest in the 1920s and 1930s. Between Avant-Garde and Modernism* (Bucureşti: Simetria, 1994).

6. Magda Cârnelci, ‘O expoziție despre avangarda românească’, in *Bucharest in the 1920s and 1930s*, ed. Cârnelci, 11-17, 11.

subject of the avant-garde, which may seem familiar and even exhausted to a Western audience, has barely been touched upon in Romanian culture, aside from a small number of studies that focus largely on literary modernism. Her observation was borne out by the essay selected to provide an overview of the visual and applied arts, a text which was over a decade old, having been written by art historian Andrei Pintilie in 1982.⁷

Pintilie's article has aged well however. Without falling into the trap of nationalist bathos, he gave due credit to early proponents of avant-gardism in Romania such as the writers Urmuz or Ion Vinea and highlighted the little-known abstract wooden reliefs produced by Marcel Iancu in Zürich in synchronicity with the emergence of abstraction elsewhere in Europe.⁸ Pintilie's notion of the avant-garde as an art historical concept was quite prescient, allowing for flexibility and change: 'avant-gardism is a state of mind; so [...] it can acquire various particular forms that change according to events and people'.⁹ In this respect, Integralism's move away from a strict constructivism was construed as a positive development, an attempt to capture the evolving zeitgeist through its 'diversity and [...] spontaneity'.¹⁰ In the same exhibition catalogue, Ioana Vlasiu's contribution was rather more critical. Although she posited that the Romanian avant-garde demonstrated 'an authentic creative impulse' that aligned them with their European peers, she qualified this with the remark that the Integralist movement remained 'an unfinished project' that adopted constructivist principles in a selective manner and could never shake off its attachment to the figurative.¹¹

This apparent ambiguity of the Romanian avant-garde continues to remain divisive in scholarship on the subject. In 2011, Erwin Kessler's contribution to the exhibition catalogue *Colours of the Avant-Garde. Romanian Art 1910-1950* was entitled 'Retro-

7. Andrei Pintilie, 'Considerații asupra mișcării de avant-gardă în plastica românească', in *Bucharest in the 1920s and 1930s*, ed. Cârneli, 27–37. The text was first published as Andrei Pintilie, 'Considerations sur le mouvement roumain d'avant-garde', *Revue roumaine d'histoire de l'art*, no. XXIV (1987): 49–58, and written in 1982, as revealed in a footnote.

8. Pintilie, 'Considerations sur le mouvement roumain d'avant-garde', 47 and 49.

9. *Ibid.*, 47.

10. *Ibid.*, 57.

11. Ioana Vlasiu, 'Idei constructiviste în arta românească a anilor '20: Integralismul', in *Bucharest in the 1920s and 1930s*, ed. Cârneli, 38–46, 45.

gardes’, lamenting ‘the hybridization and compromising practices’ of the art of this period.¹² Kessler interpreted the artistic practices of the avant-garde as surface endeavours that privileged the aesthetic in an attempt to capture the burgeoning local market for modernity.¹³ Maxy and Iancu’s endeavours to create outlets for modern applied arts and architecture on their return to Bucharest were characterised as a desire to be part of a ‘corporate aesthetics’, while their changing pictorial vision was described as a downfall from the truly avant-garde towards a ‘common modernis[m]’.¹⁴ A more nuanced approach was taken by Shona Kallestrup in a 2006 monograph on Romanian art and design, analysing this phenomenon in the context of dissolving borders, both geographic and artistic. Kallestrup acknowledged that the vocabulary of the Romanian avant-garde tended towards notions of fusion, from Integralism itself to the experiments of Ilarie Voronca and Victor Brauner who merged painting and poetry in a new art form they named ‘pictopoetry’.¹⁵ This tendency towards a synthesis of different artistic movements and disciplines was defined by Kallestrup as being a particularity of Romanian modernism which, rather than being interpreted as a ‘theoretical mutability [that] demonstrated the weakness of the Romanian avant-garde’, could be understood as a reaction to the country’s culturally diverse context.¹⁶

This diversity is itself a bone of contention. Firstly, the artists in most scholarly studies of the Romanian avant-garde are male, with very few exceptions. Sculptor Milița Petrașcu is sometimes mentioned in the context of her apprenticeship with Constantin Brancusi and very seldom is there any reference to Dida Solomon, who was nevertheless a participant in the 1924 Contimporanul exhibition and a regular contributor to several avant-garde periodicals. Recently, a number of studies are redressing the balance, such as the catalogue *Egal. Artă și feminism în România modernă* which accompanied a 2015 exhibition at the Romanian National Art Museum highlighting the contribution of women artists to the interwar period, or *Lizica Codreanu: o dansatoare româncă în avangarda pariziană*, a

12. Erwin Kessler, ‘Retro-Gardes’, in *Colours of the Avant-Garde. Romanian Art 1910-1950*, ed. Erwin Kessler (Rome: Gangemi, 2011), 9-20.

13. *Ibid.*, 9.

14. *Ibid.*, 18-9.

15. Shona Kallestrup, *Art and Design in Romania 1866-1927. Local and International Aspects of the Search for National Expression* (Boulder; New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 194.

16. *Ibid.*, 196.

biographical study of the avant-garde dancer who collaborated with Tristan Tzara and Sonia Delaunay.¹⁷ Although these artists are becoming better known, their inclusion in general accounts of the avant-garde is still rare and this thesis takes a small step towards changing this by examining the activities of Mela Maxy and Dida Solomon, and their contribution to the avant-garde, more closely. A further layer of exclusion is added by the Bucharest-centric approach taken by most studies of the avant-garde in Romania, which means that artists from further afield, many of whom were of diverse ethnic origin are ignored.¹⁸ An exception is sometimes Hans Mattis-Teutsch, who came from a mixed Hungarian-German family in Transylvania and who collaborated with the Bucharest-based groups whilst also living and working in Budapest and his home-town Braşov. Although the central focus of this thesis is also Bucharest, it expands the field of inquiry by following through on marginalised figures whose stay in the capital was briefer yet equally important, such as such as Bessarabian Iacob Sternberg or Transylvanian Andrei Vespremie. The latter's links to German design education and subsequent activity in Latvia are also explored.

Although still centred on Bucharest and focused on male artists, an increasing number of studies have been dedicated to the contribution of Jewish artists to the Romanian avant-garde.¹⁹ In 2011, an exhibition at the Jewish Museum in Amsterdam tackled this subject, with curator Radu Stern asking 'Why so many Jews?' in the exhibition catalogue in reference to the large number of Jewish artists involved in the Romanian avant-garde movements, despite (or perhaps because of) the frequently anti-Semitic climate.²⁰ Stern

17. Valentina Iancu, Monica Enache, and Adina Nanu, *Egal. Artă și feminism în România modernă* (Bucureşti: Muzeul Național de Artă al României, 2015); Doina Lemny, *Lizica Codreanu. O dansatoare româncă în avangarda pariziană* (Bucureşti: Vellant, 2012).

18. See for example Mariana Vida, 'Ce este modernismul în România?', in *Ipostaze ale modernismului. Pictura în Bulgaria, Grecia, România 1910-1940*, ed. Takis Mavrotas, Mariana Vida, and Irina Genova (Bucureşti: Muzeul Național de Artă al României, 2009), 38–49, where the author expressly chooses to focus on Bucharest, considering that the most 'representative forms of modernism' occurred here, 39.

19. See for example Ovid S. Crohmălniceanu, *Evreii în mișcarea de avangardă românească* (Bucureşti: Hasefer, 2001); Monica Enache and Valentina Iancu, *Destine la răscruce. Artiști evrei în perioada Holocaustului* (Bucureşti: Muzeul Național de Artă al României, 2010); Amelia Pavel, *Pictori evrei din România* (Bucureşti: Hasefer, 1996); Radu Stern, *Jewish Avant-Garde Artists from Romania 1910-1938. From Dada to Surrealism* (Amsterdam: Jewish Museum, 2011).

20. Stern, *Jewish Avant-Garde Artists from Romania*, 8. In answer to this question Stern posits that the

referred to the notion of the ‘foreignness’ of modern art in Romania, a concept first advanced by Mansbach in a 1998 essay in which he argued that ‘Romania’s modern art differs from that of other Balkan countries where modernism was a principal vehicle for the development and expression of national identity’.²¹ Stern’s analysis was a more nuanced one, observing that equating Jewishness with modernism is an argument too frequently used by the detractors of both. The circle of the Romanian avant-garde varied widely in their commitment to Judaism: the financial backer of the periodical *Integral*, A. L. Zissu, was a staunch Zionist; Tristan Tzara and Arthur Segal were defiantly non-observant; Iancu married a gentile but chose to emigrate to Israel when the opportunity arose and actively raised awareness of anti-Semitism in the pages of *Contimporanul*. Furthermore, although the artistic output of the avant-garde rarely broached the theme of Jewish identity, its members organised events that specifically showcased the work of Jewish writers and artists, as revealed in Chapter Two.

Tackling as it does the Bucharest-based avant-garde, much of the content of this thesis focuses on Jewish artists, a focus which is emphasised by the important presence of Yiddish theatre in this study. For these artists, the consequences of their ethnicity were perpetually present and could not be ignored. Romania’s citizenship laws for Jews changed several times during the lifespan of the avant-garde, cultural policies determined the subsidies that Jewish performers could or could not obtain, and the rise of fascism in the late 1930s led to the expulsion of Jews from art institutions across the country. Although mindful of these historical factors, the goal of this thesis is to avoid an essentialising approach and to recognise the achievements of these artists as part of the plurality of avant-gardes across the globe. To ascribe them the blanket label of ‘pseudo-Romanians’ whose artistic output is unified in its ‘foreignness’ is to ignore both their varied social and political engagement with the local context and their myriad artistic visions.²² As Irina Livezeanu shows, the proliferation of new avant-garde periodicals in the 1920s in Bucharest stemmed from the frequent disagreements that led to the forming and

Jewish artists did not resonate with the search for a Romanian national style and therefore focused their artistic efforts in a different direction.

21. Quoted in Stern, *Jewish Avant-Garde Artists from Romania*, 9. The article referred to is Steven Mansbach, ‘The “Foreignness” of Classical Modern Art in Romania’, *The Art Bulletin* 80, no. 3 (September 1998): 534–54.

22. Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe*, 248.

reforming of splinter artistic groups.²³ Their political sensibilities also differed, a case in point being Marinetti's visit to Bucharest in 1930: the *Contimporanul* group welcomed him and organised his itinerary, while the editors of *unu* chose not to attend the events organised for 'Mussolini's academician'.²⁴

The lively and diverse flowering of print periodicals has probably been the most closely studied aspect of the Romanian avant-garde, attracting a number of prominent literary historians, such as Ion Pop, Marin Mincu, and Ovidiu Crohmălniceanu.²⁵ It is thus possible to trace the history of these magazines from the symbolist leanings of the pre-World War One period to the surrealist sympathies of the 1930s, through the artists that gathered around them and the programmatic writings and manifestos they included. More recently, although also a literary critic, Paul Cernat has produced a self-confessed attempt to evade 'literature-centrism' by also examining the magazines through their attitudes to visual arts, theatre and film.²⁶ His account of the Romanian avant-garde is thus one of the most complex to date, incorporating a variety of art forms. Nonetheless, by focusing on the artistic groups that gathered around the printed periodicals Cernat follows a scholarly tradition that restricts the Romanian avant-garde to a central nucleus of artists and maps its trajectory according to the rise and fall of *Contimporanul*, *Integral*, and their competitors. Thus, Cernat's own assessment is that the Romanian avant-garde was an 'aesthetic avant-garde' that did not directly engage with the political, focusing instead on seeking new artistic expressions.²⁷ This not only overlooks activities such as the explicitly political music hall revues of Iacob Sternberg, but it also fails to consider how a focus on international artistic trends could be construed as dissent, at a time when the arts were being called upon to reinforce a purely 'Romanian' national expression. The activities of the Academy of Decorative Arts, for example, although not overtly radical, did

23. Irina Livezeanu, 'Romania: "Windows towards the West". New Forms and the "Poetry of True Life"', in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, ed. Peter Brooker et al., vol. III, Europe 1880-1940 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1157–83.

24. *Ibid.*, 1181.

25. Crohmălniceanu, *Evreii în mișcarea de avangardă românească*; Marin Mincu, *Avangarda literară românească* (Constanța: Pontica, 2006); Ion Pop, *Introducere în avangarda literară românească* (București: ICR, 2007).

26. Paul Cernat, *Avangarda românească și complexul periferiei* (București: Cartea Românească, 2007), 5.

27. *Ibid.*, 245.

consciously deviate from a political agenda that rendered the applied arts markers of national identity.

An interpretation similar to Cernat's has made its way into Western scholarship construing the preoccupations of the Romanian avant-garde as purely aesthetic, and positing that artists preferred to create composites of established international styles instead of engaging with national issues. Two influential surveys of modern art in Eastern Europe were published on either side of the historical cusp that marked the region's transition towards post-communism. In 1988, Krisztina Passuth's *Les Avant-Gardes de l'Europe Centrale* was probably the first work to broach the subject of the Romanian avant-garde in recent historiography, observing that Romania's cultural history during this period contained more lacunae than the other countries in her study.²⁸ Although Passuth's overall assessment was a positive one, she proposed a rather restrictive time period: Romania's avant-garde came of age and peaked between 1922 and 1925.²⁹ The following decade, in 1999, Steven Mansbach's study of *Modern Art in Eastern Europe* appeared.³⁰ Romania's artistic output was discussed more widely, beginning with the establishment of its art academies in the nineteenth century and encompassing a closer analysis of painting alongside that of print culture and little magazines. The avant-garde was judged to have flourished for a whole decade, from 1922 to 1932.³¹ The work of Passuth and Mansbach reiterate some of the parameters that we have encountered so far, and which although somewhat questionable, have endured since, or rather have not been disputed by new evidence.

Firstly, there is the problem of location. Passuth posits that Romania's prominent avant-gardists flourished mainly abroad as was the case with Tristan Tzara, Arthur Segal or Constantin Brancusi, while Mansbach's overall thesis is that Romania's home grown avant-garde embraced 'foreign' styles rather than creating a 'national' artistic identity like other equivalent artistic groups in the region.³² According to both of these scholars, the artists

28. Krisztina Passuth, *Les avant-gardes de l'Europe Centrale* (Paris: Flammarion, 1988), 209-10.

29. *Ibid.*, 214.

30. Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe*.

31. *Ibid.*, 266.

32. Passuth, *Les avant-gardes de l'Europe Centrale*, 209; Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe*, 243 and 266.

who remained or returned to Bucharest did not attain the same quality of work as their expatriate counterparts. For example, Maxy's painting output is described as struggling to reach the virtuosity of his Berlin master Segal, remaining 'half-way between the figurative and the abstract', while Marcel Iancu's return to figuration in Bucharest is judged to have produced a 'modest modernism' that lacked 'the visual power and aesthetic challenge' of his earlier dadaist output.³³ These assessments lead to the second parameter, that of the programmatic ambiguity of the Romanian avant-garde becoming its Achilles' heel. For Passuth, *Contimporanul* lost its cutting edge in 1925 when it became 'eclectic', while in Mansbach's view *Integral*'s 'fashioning of syncretic modernism [...] was self-contradictory and self-defeating'.³⁴ According to both scholars, the avant-garde ultimately failed by not elaborating 'a unified and consistent philosophy', although Passuth and Mansbach disagree on what caused this: too close an alignment with the tastes of Bucharest's bourgeoisie or, on the contrary, a case of 'aesthetic hermeticism'.³⁵ The use of *Contimporanul* and *Integral* as barometers point to the third and final parameter: the use of its printed periodicals as the main scholarly resource on the subject of the Romanian avant-garde and an emphasis on the dominance of literature rather than the visual and other arts as its most significant output.

These parameters have resulted in a limited and limiting perspective that discounts, as we have seen, artists active in the provinces, artists who were highly mobile or who were not Romanian nationals, and the majority of female artists. It also overlooks artistic outputs that were not present in Bucharest's avant-garde publications, for example experimental productions by the Vilna Troupe and Iacob Sternberg, or results in skewed perspectives, as is the case with the disputed origins of the Academy of Decorative Arts. As these case studies demonstrate in the following chapters, scholars have frequently assumed such an abundance of publications should be sufficient when compiling a comprehensive history of the Romanian avant-garde, thus neglecting to consult other contemporary sources. This thesis tackles some of these oversights by focusing on design and performance, two areas that have either been neglected or explored through the prism of avant-garde periodicals. It explores a range of other contemporary material, including newspapers, photographs,

33. Passuth, *Les avant-gardes de l'Europe Centrale*, 216; Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe*, 250.

34. Passuth, *Les avant-gardes de l'Europe Centrale*, 213; Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe*, 262.

35. Passuth, *Les avant-gardes de l'Europe Centrale*, 213; Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe*, 266.

theatre programmes, and personal documents, often coming to surprising conclusions that challenge established narratives.

To conclude, the activity of avant-garde artists in Bucharest during the two decades between the First and Second World War is still an unknown quantity in many respects. If this is to change, approaches to the study of artistic production during this period need to become more inclusive and thus the rest of this chapter is devoted to exploring methodologies that can accomplish such a shift in perspective.

‘Existe-t-il un art de l’Europe de l’Est?’ The Peripheral from Negative to Positive

In their introduction to the edited collection entitled *Decentering the Avant-Garde*, Per Bäckström and Benedikt Hjartarson identify a ‘topographical turn’ in recent studies of the avant-garde and modernism. Notions of geographical space have been drafted in to address the omissions of a longstanding West-centric narrative, whether through a rehabilitation of ‘peripheral’ territories or through an emphasis on the border-crossing, or transnational, activities of the avant-gardes.³⁶ The intention of the editors, and of the volume itself, is to widen the geographical scope of avant-garde studies outside the established centres. One of the volume’s contributors is Partha Mitter, whose work on Indian art in the twentieth century frequently disputes the canons of modernism. In his 2008 journal article ‘Decentering Modernism. Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery’, Mitter examines the survey volume *Art Since 1900* as an example of current art historical discourse and critiques its reluctance to significantly expand the existing canon, echoing Piotrowski’s assertion that the book takes a universalist approach which ‘equates Western norms with global values’.³⁷ The difficulty of challenging such an approach becomes evident when Mitter reveals its ingrained nature:

36. Per Bäckström and Benedikt Hjartarson, ‘Introduction’, in *Decentering the Avant-Garde*, eds. Per Bäckström and Benedikt Hjartarson (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2014), 7-32, 7-8.

37. Partha Mitter, ‘Decentering Modernism. Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery’, *The Art Bulletin* 90, no. 4 (December 2008): 531–48, 531. Mitter reiterates some of these ideas in his essay ‘Modern Global Art and its Discontents’, in *Decentering the Avant-Garde*, eds. Bäckström and Hjartarson, 35-54.

In the social sciences, this use of the universal for the specific is described as an unmarked case. Modernism in this sense is an ‘unmarked case’ that implicitly stands for ‘Western’ modernism. By this token, a qualifying epithet becomes necessary to speak of any other: East European modernism, Chinese modernism, Indian modernism, and so on.³⁸

Although Mitter does not refer to the 1936 schema of Alfred H. Barr which charts the development of modern movements towards abstraction, its long-standing influence on the discipline of art history is implicit. In his essay ‘Towards a Horizontal History of the European Avant-Garde’, Piotrowski condenses and discusses the implications of an art historical narrative based on this schema which he terms ‘vertical’ as it implies a stylistic hierarchy.³⁹ He employs the notion of the centre and its relationship with the periphery to describe the link between the universal and the particular within this type of ‘vertical’ approach:

The heart of modern art is the centre – a city or cities – where the paradigms of the main artistic trends came into being: Berlin, Paris, Vienna, London, New York. From those centres particular models come to the periphery, radiating all over the world. Put differently, from within certain nations those models are subsequently internationalized.⁴⁰

Thus, when examining those locations considered marginal, there is a danger of attempting to redress the balance by integrating them within this ‘vertical’ model. Yet to do so would only strengthen this already dominant approach, for instance by referring to the Western artistic canon and divisions of style to evaluate art from the East European region, maintaining this relationship of subordination. Instead Piotrowski proposes a horizontal history of the avant-garde, separating ‘two concepts which have usually been merged: the concept of Western Modern art and the concept of universal art’.⁴¹ The reliance of the

38. Mitter, ‘Decentering Modernism’, 532.

39. Piotr Piotrowski, ‘Towards a Horizontal History of the European Avant-Garde’, in *Europa! Europa? The Avant-Garde, Modernism and the Fate of a Continent*, eds. Sascha Bru et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 49–58, 50.

40. *Ibid.*, 50-1.

41. *Ibid.*, 54-5.

Western model on defined artistic movements – which, according to Piotrowski, are created in the West and ‘subsequently internationalized’ – as a narrative framework brings such an approach into question, but also raises the issue of how it may be successfully replaced.

Developing such a model to be applied retrospectively also involves the challenge of recovering as much as possible the experience of the historical participants themselves. Even when the intention is positive, certain assumptions may create a level of distortion. Mansbach for example acknowledges the value of a creative contribution coming from this region, yet maintains a geographical classification that reinforces the notion of an ‘eastern periphery of Europe’ populated by ‘pioneering artists located far distant from the art centres of Paris and Berlin’.⁴² In this introductory paragraph he explains the necessity of his work:

The intimate acquaintance of Western artists and intellectuals with the new visions of art and society being articulated on the eastern periphery of Europe – and the almost immediate integration of these visions into the mainstream of modern (Western) art – necessarily raise important questions for contemporary scholars: why is it that today these avant-garde figures and movements, which earlier in the century overcame their peripheral location to assume a critical and formative role in the genesis of advanced art, are almost totally forgotten and overlooked?⁴³

The implication here is that the Western narrative of modern art is not only the central ‘mainstream’ model, but it is also the given, pre-existing model rather than a retrospective one. The statement assumes that ‘Western artists and intellectuals’ were consciously elaborating this model and allowing peripheral ideas to be integrated within it in a deliberate and organised manner. This premise, of a single existing history of art and a single avant-garde that self-consciously developed its own narrative, has been contested by recent scholarship. Although Piotrowski recognises that ‘the historian of the centre [...] tends to ignore the significance of place’ while ‘a historian of modern Czech or Romanian

42. Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe*, 1.

43. *Ibid.*, 1.

art knows very well where he or she is',⁴⁴ he argues that the artists of the avant-garde themselves did not conceive of contemporary activities according to a vertical model. The relationship of the French Surrealists to Prague is a good example, used by both Piotrowski and Derek Sayer: André Breton called it 'the magical capital of old Europe', judging that Surrealism was developing there in parallel with Paris, while Guillaume Apollinaire also paired it with the French capital to form 'alternating poles for a continent'.⁴⁵ Furthermore, Sayer questions the criteria at work in Mansbach's survey, citing the absence of a particular painting cycle by Alphonse Mucha:

We might well then ask: what does it mean to be a *modern* artist – for the *Slav Epic* was painted entirely in the twentieth century. Being modern evidently bears the same relation to time here as being Eastern does to a place. At least [...] Apollinaire was alive to *simultaneities* – to what may be encountered by chance on a single dissecting table at one and the same time.⁴⁶ [his italics]

Sayer seems to be implying that the concepts of 'modern' and 'Eastern' are still developed according to a certain hierarchy by scholars such as Mansbach; that is to say that value judgements are made on what artists and works are more or less 'modern' and more or less 'Eastern' relative to each other and to the Western canon. In other words, 'periphery is not a matter of geography, but of art history', as Mitter also observes.⁴⁷ Sayer argues instead for replacing such a model with one that reflects the simultaneity endorsed by the Surrealists and which seems to be close in conception to Piotrowski's 'horizontal history of the European avant-garde'. How such an approach would work in practice has been demonstrated to some extent by the 2002 exhibition *Central European Avant-Gardes: Exchange and Transformation 1910-1930* which originated at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and was subsequently itinerated to Munich and Berlin. The exhibition was structured around fourteen 'exchange sites' where the avant-gardes congregated, covering the geographical area between Weimar and Bucharest, by way of Prague, Budapest,

44. Piotrowski, 'Towards a Horizontal History', 55-6.

45. Piotrowski, 'Towards a Horizontal History', 51; Derek Sayer, 'Surrealities', in *Central European Avant-Gardes. Exchange and Transformation 1910-1930*, ed. Timothy Benson (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2002), 90–107, 90-1.

46. Derek Sayer, 'Surrealities', 96.

47. Mitter, 'Decentering Modernism', 540.

Zagreb, Warsaw, and so on. The aim of this mapping was threefold: to offer an entry point to those ‘encountering Central Europe from the West’ weary of its supposed geographical nebulosity, to highlight the artistic mobility of the European avant-gardes, and at the same time to showcase the local specificities of each metropolis. In the introductory essay of the exhibition’s publication, Timothy Benson paraphrased Geeta Kapur in asking ‘where was? - when was? - the avant-garde of Central Europe?’.⁴⁸ Benson emphasised the experience of the artists themselves who mingled across the whole continent not just physically, but also virtually through exhibitions and publications international in scope and outreach:

From the perspective of its participants the avant-garde was becoming pluralistic, not centered in one place but constantly shifting among various sites of exchange, where multiple views and approaches were debated and absorbed. The avant-garde was itself becoming migratory, as artists’ mobility increased. [...] Not one avant-garde, then, but many avant-gardes, interacting with one another yet each retaining its unique characteristics.⁴⁹

The exhibition and its comprehensive catalogue represented an important step forward in acknowledging the transnational aspect of the avant-garde. Yet, in focusing on a particular geographical region, it sidestepped the question of how the centre-periphery relationship should be approached methodologically when seeking to expand the boundaries of art history. In Mitter’s view, ‘asymmetrical power relations’ are not an obstacle to two-way cultural interchange, however his model is based on relationship between the coloniser and the colonised, whereas the dynamic between Europe’s various regions is somewhat different.⁵⁰ Maria Todorova has attempted to untangle the concepts of Orientalism and Balkanism:

48. Timothy Benson, ‘Introduction’, in *Central European Avant-Gardes*, ed. Benson, 12-21, 13. Geeta Kapur, *When was Modernism* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2000).

49. Benson, ‘Introduction’, 16.

50. Mitter, ‘Decentering Modernism’, 542. The relationship of post-colonial theory to post-socialist spaces is an ongoing debate. See for example Beáta Hock and Anu Allas, eds., *Globalizing East European Art Histories* (New York: Routledge, 2018); Madina Tlostanova, *Postcolonialism and Postsocialism in Fiction and Art. Resistance and Re-Existence* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

...is it possible to successfully ‘provincialize Europe’ when speaking about the Balkans, to use the jargon for epistemologically emancipating non-European societies? To me, this is impossible, since the Balkans are Europe, are a part of Europe, although, admittedly, for the past several centuries its provincial part or periphery.⁵¹

In this context the imbalance of power in a political and economic sense is perhaps of less consequence than the cultural hegemony perceived as belonging to Western nations. According to Piotrowski, Eastern Europe displays an absence of cultural unity that has prevailed not solely due to the shifting geo-political boundaries but also due to ‘a lack of direct communication among cultures’.⁵² In his view, the different regions of Eastern Europe select the West as a cultural model instead of turning to each other and their different inhabitants are frequently in the dark about their neighbours’ artistic achievements.⁵³ Nonetheless, although stylistic similarities may appear at first glance in the works of avant-gardes from the ‘centre’ and those from the ‘periphery’, their meaning, intention and perception could be dramatically different.⁵⁴ Such an apparent conflict between the universal and the particular can only be resolved as long as one acknowledges the existence of a two-way traffic of influence and avoids the pitfall of what Mitter terms ‘the Picasso manqué syndrome’, that is the assumption that the periphery can only produce imitations of the centre’s original output.⁵⁵ Homi Bhabha’s concept of ‘cultural hybridity [which] entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy’ is highlighted by Mitter in this context⁵⁶ and echoed by Turowski who uses the term ‘hybridization of artistic phenomena’ to describe the way in which multiple styles merged, converged or

51. Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 17. Romania’s position relative to the Balkans is contested, with some accounts positioning it outside this area geographically and/or politically. Todorova’s criterion is a common Ottoman heritage. Kallestrup also discusses Romania within a Balkan or South-East European context, see Kallestrup, *Art and Design in Romania*, 100-6.

52. Piotrowski, ‘Towards a Horizontal History’, 57.

53. Ibid.

54. Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe*, 3.

55. Mitter, ‘Decentering Modernism’, 537.

56. Ibid., 541.

fused in different locations across Central and Eastern European, with their originators using terminology inspired by Western movements or created locally by themselves.⁵⁷

Returning to Turowski's 1986 model, it becomes evident that its approach is very much ahead of its time. He does not propose to reverse the centre-periphery relationship so that the centre is exposed as 'degenerate' but to find an alternative to this model that implies cultural dominance of one space over another. He suggests rejecting the criteria usually employed in defining the avant-garde, such as the idea of linear progress which implies prioritising or ranking material, adopting instead a holistic approach encompassing various artistic movements, the relationships between them and their interaction with the surrounding environment, both cultural and political.⁵⁸ This rejection of a hierarchical modernism anticipates Piotrowski's horizontal model, as well as concepts of global cultural hybridity. Furthermore, Turowski also offers a new way of perceiving the marginal. He re-frames the peripheral vocation of Eastern Europe as positive rather than pejorative, casting it as a space where cultures coexist dynamically leading to pluralism, accelerated cultural rhythms and vast networks of relationships.⁵⁹ This means that the marginal is no longer a lesser, negative space, but a point of access and a place where interactions occur and information is swapped. In this he is echoed by Todorova, who discusses at length the position of the Balkans vis-à-vis the centre. Quoting the work of social anthropologist Mary Douglas, she reveals how human behaviour is 'governed by a pattern-making tendency' that rejects ambiguity as threatening and polluting: 'dirt is essentially disorder'. Hence the 'in-betweenness of the Balkans, their transitional character' can position them as 'the shadow, the structurally despised alter-ego' of the West.⁶⁰ Yet this very same attribute can be positively construed in the light of an 'acceptance of ambiguity' that characterises the Balkan region. Like Turowski, Todorova reveals that a state of marginality need not be a weakness, quoting Bulgarian scholar Roumiana Mihneva: 'What drama does this transitional position bring, but also what power!'.⁶¹

57. Andrzej Turowski, 'The Phenomenon of Blurring', in *Central European Avant-Gardes*, ed. Benson, 362–73, 368.

58. Turowski, *Existe-t-il un art de l'Europe de l'Est?*, 12.

59. *Ibid.*, 13.

60. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 17-8.

61. *Ibid.*, 60.

Thus, we arrive at a positive framing of the marginal space, at least in a theoretical context. In practice, the thorny question of legitimacy remains: is the peripheral in art history simply a container for amalgamations of other, more prominent, styles or movements? As the previous section has shown, scholars are divided in their assessment of Bucharest's avant-garde. On the one hand, ambiguity causes discomfort, something that Vlasiu, Kessler, or Passuth seem to exhibit in their assessment of Romanian modernism and its 'anomalous' quality. Others, such as Kallestrup or Pintilie, offer a positive interpretation of fluidity which echoes Todorova's depiction of the Balkan space as a place that embraces and thrives on ambiguity, lending support to a reading of the Romanian avant-garde as architect of its own culturally-specific identity, rather than a pale imitator of Western trends. Yet, both of these interpretations require an acceptance that a certain differentiation between what constitutes the centre and what constitutes the periphery is possible based on the levels of 'ambiguity' being tolerated.

Jeremy Howard is one of the few scholars working on 'East European' art to question the legitimacy of the category itself, thus bringing into dispute the very division of the continent into centres and peripheries.⁶² He asks what, if anything, constitutes 'Eastern' Europe, and if such a division of the continent is not only artificial, but also a tacit acceptance of political and historical narratives created to serve various agendas.⁶³ Eastern Europe is thus 'a notion, or rather numerous notions', a construction with permanently shifting characteristics.⁶⁴ In his survey volume, Howard begins his account in the seventeenth century, so that the trajectories of the art academies of Vienna and St Petersburg allow a view of a Europe untainted by the political and cultural divisions that have marked recent history. He thus highlights the perils of erecting boundaries – whether national or stylistic – in the field of art history. The migratory element, so central also to Benson's depiction of the avant-gardes, emerges as the only certainty in a world where

62. Jeremy Howard, *East European Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). See also Piotr Piotrowski, 'Between Place and Time. A Critical Geography of "New" Central Europe', in *Time and Place. The Geohistory of Art*, ed. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann and Elizabeth Pilliod (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 153-171, where the author analyses a number of post-1989 exhibitions on 'East-Central European' art from the point of view of territorial inclusions and exclusions.

63. Howard, *East European Art*, 1-2.

64. *Ibid.*, x.

‘sedentariness is but a transient aspiration of a privileged few’.⁶⁵ Howard terms the art he discusses ‘a polycentric, polymorphous amalgam [...] [that] defies categorization’ and draws its strength and ‘richness’ precisely from this state of flux, thus adding his support to a positive reading of ambiguity and fluidity.⁶⁶ Crucially however, he also qualifies this artistic production as being ‘as much northern, southern, central and western as it is eastern’.⁶⁷

Recognising the fluidity and hybridity of peripheries as positive factors has been a step forward, but extending this recognition outwards to all corners of the art historical discipline and its geographies, as Howard suggests, may be an even more effective strategy. Mitter’s conclusion, for example, suggests the applicability of a global framework that acknowledges the diversity inherent in all modernist endeavours:

And yet the most exciting aspect of modernisms across the globe is their plurality, heterogeneity, and difference, a ‘messy’ asymmetrical quality that makes them all the more vital and replete with possibilities.⁶⁸

Thus, accepting and exploiting ambiguity with all its ‘dirt’ and ‘mess’ becomes the key to establishing a new direction in the study of modernism and in recovering its multifarious histories regardless of their locality. Yet, how to engage with such a strategy on a wide topographical scale is a predicament that has been haunting the art historical discipline in recent years.

The Trouble with Transnationalism, or Travels Around the Global History of Art

If attempts to decentre art history by recasting the peripheral as positive are a relatively recent endeavour, the concept of global or world art history is an even more novel development. Perhaps a natural extension of the centre-periphery debate, it aims to expand

65. Ibid., 1-2.

66. Ibid., 4-5.

67. Ibid., 4.

68. Mitter, ‘Decentering Modernism’, 540.

the discipline holistically across all cultures, temporalities and geographies. In *Is Art History Global?* James Elkins observes that this approach is such a recent development that no scholar could be found to provide an introductory survey of its historiography for the volume.⁶⁹ Aruna D’Souza takes up this task a year later in *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn* identifying two broad approaches taken by scholars writing on the subject.⁷⁰ On the one hand, some scholars are delving within the realm of the art historical discipline itself to seek methodologies that can be applied to non-Western art production. This is the direction taken by Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann who looks to the German art historical tradition of *Kunstgeographie* or David Summers who investigates the concept of space in the production of art across the globe. A more adventurous approach that nonetheless remains within the realm of the visual is that of John Onians who researches the neurological processes of art creators. On the other hand, D’Souza acknowledges those scholars who are ‘unconvinced that the disciplinary framework of art history can ever be genuinely transformed to accommodate the noncanonical’, with Elkins being the most vocal of these.⁷¹

Elkins’s stance is supportive of a possible global history of art, yet mindful of its pitfalls. The discipline may be seemingly expanding, yet at its core, he argues, the same canons of Western art history survive. The so-called ‘canon wars’ that affected languages and literature disciplines in the 1980s have been avoided within art history by including marginalised artists such as women artists or artists from outside Western culture within survey works without ‘displacing’ canonical artists.⁷² As an experiment, Elkins compiles some statistics using the *Bibliography of Art History*, examining for example the most frequently cited artists over a period of two decades. He finds that ‘almost all the artists in the top one hundred are “dead white males”; all are European and North American; and virtually all are painters’.⁷³ In *Circulations in the Global History of Art*, Catherine Dossin and Beatrice Joyeux-Prunel are equally skeptical about the impact of the ‘global turn’ on

69. James Elkins, ‘Art History as a Global Discipline’, in *Is Art History Global?*, ed. James Elkins (London; New York: Routledge, 2013), 3–23, 4.

70. Aruna D’Souza, ‘Introduction’, in *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn*, eds. Jill H. Casid and Aruna D’Souza (Williamstown, Mas.: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2014), vii–xiii.

71. D’Souza, ‘Introduction’, viii–ix.

72. Elkins, ‘Art History as a Global Discipline’, 16.

73. *Ibid.*, 16–7.

studies of modernism in art history.⁷⁴ They echo Elkins in observing that a survey approach has been one of the main tools used to purportedly redress the balance, with many publications now incorporating chapters on non-canonical modernisms.

Yet those added chapters do not fundamentally alter the main narrative. The new stories include peripheral regions and groups, but only to prove that they followed the same avant-garde logistics as the centres, be it Paris or New York, and to establish who from the peripheries can enter the modernist canon, thereby preserving the symbolic hierarchies and processes of exclusion that define Western Modernism.⁷⁵

The recently-published *Routledge Companion to Expressionism in a Transnational Context* illustrates some of these pitfalls.⁷⁶ Edited by a scholar belonging to a German institution, the volume is described as an ‘exploration of the transnational formation, dissemination, and transformation of expressionism outside of the German-speaking world’.⁷⁷ The term ‘transnational’ itself is part of the drive for less West-centric and nation-bound art historical narratives and has become increasingly popular in usage in recent scholarship to connote cross-border exchanges and practices, whether artistic or otherwise.⁷⁸ Yet its use is not always indicative of methodological progress. In the case of

74. Catherine Dossin and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, ‘The German Century? How a Geopolitical Approach Could Transform the History of Modernism’, in *Circulations in the Global History of Art*, eds. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin, and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 183-201.

75. Dossin and Joyeux-Prunel, ‘The German Century?’, 183.

76. Isabel Wünsche, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Expressionism in a Transnational Context* (London; New York: Routledge, 2018).

77. From the Routledge website, accessed 5 December 2018, <https://www.routledge.com/The-Routledge-Companion-to-Expressionism-in-a-Transnational-Context/Wunsche/p/book/9781138712553>.

78. See for example James M. Harding and John Rouse, eds., *Not the Other Avant-Garde. The Transnational Foundations of Avant-Garde Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006); Matthew Rampley, ed., *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe. Transnational Discourses and National Frameworks* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), Hubert F. van der Berg and Lidia Gluchowska, eds., *Transnationality, Internationalism and Nationhood. European Avant-Garde in the First Half of the Twentieth Century* (Leuven: Peeters, 2013). ‘The concept’s sudden prominence has been accompanied by its increasing ambiguity’ according to Luis Eduardo Guarnizo and Michael Peter Smith, ‘The Locations of Transnationalism,’ in *Transnationalism from Below*, eds. Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo

the *Routledge Companion to Expressionism*, the transnational aspect is not easy to discern from the content of the volume, which has been divided into geographical areas. ‘Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic States’ form a group, as do ‘Western Europe’ and ‘Southeastern Europe’. Within each regional bracket, essays tackle the national manifestation of the expressionist movement in each country, an endeavour made even more unhelpful by the frequent redrawing of borders that this historical period entailed. For example, this division means that Romania and Hungary have been placed in different sections of the volume, despite the fact that expressionism flourished in particular amongst Transylvanian artists who may have been citizens of both these countries during their lifetime. This is in fact a paradox of the global art history project: how can the study of modernism outside a West-centric framework be achieved without recouping artistic narratives in countries and regions that have been neglected and yet steer clear of a nation-based framework that separates rather than connects? Some of the artists in this thesis have been neglected purely by virtue of being too ‘transnational’. As Chapter Two reveals, Andrei Vespremie was of Hungarian Jewish ethnicity, born in a Transylvania that belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, subsequently naturalised Romanian and later Latvian. Scholars of the Romanian avant-garde considered him Latvian and thus of limited interest, yet he was also invisible to experts on the Latvian avant-garde having settled into a teaching career in Riga’s Jewish schools during his time in the country. The same can be said of the Vilna Troupe, whose itinerant brand of experimental theatre has found no place in national narratives of avant-garde performance.⁷⁹

Hubert F. Van der Berg has remarked on this very paradox of avant-garde historiography: although the terminology of an ‘international’ or ‘transnational’ avant-garde has become increasingly common in recent years, scholarly outcomes frequently emerge as ‘collection[s] of national stories’.⁸⁰ Artists such as Vespremie or the Vilna Troupe, who truly lived border-crossing lives, are still unfathomably neglected. Furthermore, the

(New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1998), 3–34, 3.

79. See Debra Caplan, ‘Nomadic Chutzpah. The Vilna Troupe’s Transnational Yiddish Theatre Paradigm, 1915– 1935’, *Theatre Survey* 55, no. 3 (September 2014): 296–317, 298.

80. Hubert F. van der Berg, ‘Expressionism, Constructivism, and the Transnationality of the Historical Avant-Garde. Introduction’, in *Transnationality, Internationalism and Nationhood*, eds. van der Berg and Głuchowska, 23–42, 23. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann also writes on the implicit and explicit localisation of style in DaCosta Kaufmann, *Toward a Geography of Art* (Chicago; London: Chicago Press, 2004), 8–9.

‘national predicates’ that define certain movements are not so easy to leave behind:

Although, for example, alongside German expressionism, Dutch, Flemish, Danish, Swedish, Polish and Hungarian versions or continuations of expressionism are distinguished, the “main” form of expressionism is still regarded as essentially German.⁸¹

The transnational thus used not only becomes a piece-meal approach in which national borders are only deceptively permeable, but also a model that maintains the existing hierarchies of art history. The centre-periphery dichotomy is very much present and scholars writing outside the Western paradigm must position themselves relative to it in order to be weighed, measured, and probably found wanting. The *Routledge Companion to Expressionism* illustrates this through its ‘conceptual introduction’ to expressionism, which examines the movement within the German-speaking world, literally defined as ‘central Europe’. It concludes:

In the other, more peripheral regions of Europe, including the Baltics and the Balkans, expressionism neither appeared as a clearly defined movement with a specific program or ideological background nor succeeded in creating a distinctive and autonomous style. Instead we find a hybrid modernism that linked aspects of expressionism, cubism, and futurism in the prewar period...⁸²

We thus encounter again the terminology of a ‘weak’ modernism that conflates too many strands of authentically avant-garde movements. In a review of Mansbach’s *Modern Art in Eastern Europe*, Elkins defines this predicament clearly if rather plastically:

What is to be done about this problem of description, in which every work that is made at a distance from the centre becomes a soup pot of styles from other countries? How is it possible to quell the art historical analysis, and stop it from

81. van der Berg, ‘Expressionism, Constructivism’, 23-4.

82. Isabel Wünsche, ‘Expressionist Networks, Cultural Debates, and Artistic Practices. A Conceptual Introduction’, in *The Routledge Companion to Expressionism*, ed. Wünsche, 1-30, 26.

pulling out the ingredients of the soup one by one until nothing is left?⁸³

In Elkins's view, Mansbach's approach amounts to 'nothing less than a kind of Orientalism', with artists from non-Western locations perceived as 'exotic' being described and assessed in terms of Western styles. As this criticism was taking place in 2000, one might assume that newer methodologies have been developed to resolve this problem, with the positive re-framing of liminal spaces discussed in the previous section being a case in point. Yet, scholars such as Monica Juneja are critical of the rise of the term 'hybridity' which she finds 'limited [...] by indelible biologicistic overtones of "pure" cultures which then somehow blend or merge'.⁸⁴ The implied hierarchies are still evident, the value judgements still present, and Elkins's severe assessment still seems to stand. Juneja's essay is part of the recent volume entitled *Circulations in the Global History of Art*, which attributes these setbacks to a focus on 'influence' and 'diffusion' when tackling transnational art histories.⁸⁵ Utilising these concepts reinforces the structures of vertical art history, even when attempting to prove the impact of other cultures on Western art narratives.⁸⁶ In the context of Romanian avant-garde art, such an approach can be exemplified by Tom Sandqvist's book on the East European origins of Dada, and in general by attempts to reclaim figures such as Tristan Tzara or Constantin Brancusi as ambassadors of Romanian culture abroad.⁸⁷ Rather than expanding the borders of art history, these endeavours, although transnational in name, serve to reinforce existing structures by focusing on figures who have been already been accepted into the modernist canon.

The question in such cases remains Turowski's rhetorical 'Existe-t-il...?', a provocation to art historians of the region who must respond by legitimising the existence of their

83. James Elkins, 'Book Review: Modern Art in Eastern Europe: From the Baltic to the Balkans, ca. 1890-1939 by S. A. Mansbach', *The Art Bulletin* 82, no. 4 (December 2000): 781-85, 783.

84. Monica Juneja, 'Circulation and Beyond. The Trajectories of Vision in Early Modern Eurasia', in *Circulations in the Global History of Art*, eds. DaCosta Kaufmann, Dossin, and Joyeux-Prunel, 59-77, 60.

85. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin, and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, 'Introduction. Reintroducing Circulations. Historiography and the Project of Global Art History', in *Circulations in the Global History of Art*, eds. DaCosta Kaufmann, Dossin, and Joyeux-Prunel, 1-22, 2.

86. Ibid.

87. Tom Sandqvist, *Dada East: The Romanians of Cabaret Voltaire* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006).

respective modernisms according to existing criteria, or as Elkins puts it measure them ‘against the appropriate scale, with *Impression: Sunrise* at the 100 percent mark’.⁸⁸ For the editors of *Circulations*, the solution is to recognise that the ‘project of a global history is not a matter of geographical scope but of questions and methods’, echoing Mitter’s belief that a state of liminality is bestowed not by geography but by disciplinary methodologies.⁸⁹ *Circulations* thus proposes a methodological perspective in which global art history is not the opposite of a West-centric art history, but the opposite of a collection of individual national narratives.⁹⁰ To achieve this, scholars must focus on ‘circulations’, that is to say ‘transcultural encounters and exchanges’, with a heightened awareness for their circuitous and reciprocal nature and without ‘assigning superiority’ to any one party.⁹¹ Such an approach relies on recognising the materiality of art objects:

The diffusionist, hierarchical narrative of art history, which has been particularly dominant in discussions of modern art, rests on an understanding of the visual arts in which art is the equivalent of images, styles, or texts (but not material objects), or represents “visuality” (but not embodied in individual historical actors); in this model artistic production emerges in a centre before spreading to peripheries.⁹²

As the editors of *Circulations* observe, art history frequently interprets objects through an emphasis on images and ideas without delving into the material realities of the artefact itself, a remnant of formalist approaches that privilege the aesthetic autonomy of the artwork over its interaction with its social, political, or commercial milieu. Some of the essays included in *Circulations* take this approach to a level that some might term mundane minutiae. Michele Greet discusses the database she created tracking Latin American artists in Paris from 1918 to 1938, recording their addresses, the schools they attended, the galleries where they exhibited and so on.⁹³ Likewise, Dossin and Joyeux-

88. Elkins, ‘Book Review’, 75.

89. DaCosta Kaufmann, Dossin, and Joyeux-Prunel, ‘Introduction’, 15; Mitter ‘Decentering Modernism’, 540.

90. DaCosta Kaufmann, Dossin, and Joyeux-Prunel, ‘Introduction’, 18.

91. *Ibid.*, 1-2.

92. *Ibid.*, 2.

93. Michele Greet, ‘Mapping Cultural Exchange. Latin American Artists in Paris Between the Wars’, in *Circulations in the Global History of Art*, eds. DaCosta Kaufmann, Dossin, and Joyeux-Prunel, 133-148. The

Prunel have mapped modernist magazines according to the period and geographic location in which they were created, as well as examining the artists who contributed and whose artworks were reproduced.⁹⁴

Although this thesis does not use such detailed cartographic methodologies, it does embrace the concept of ‘circulations’ by following artists and artefacts across borders and carefully mapping and considering their trajectories. This approach leads to the complete reevaluation of Bucharest’s Academy of Decorative Arts in Chapters Two and Three, by recovering Vespremie’s transnational career through archival materials found in Latvia and Germany. It also acknowledges the international trajectory of the Vilna Troupe in Chapter Four, placing its collaborations in Romania in a different perspective and locating valuable material on the subject in the archives of Harvard University’s Widener Library and the Yivo Institute for Jewish Research in New York. Interrogating the presence and the perceived ‘quality’ or ‘purity’ of various modernisms within the Romanian territories is not part of this endeavour, not even (or especially not) for the purpose of ‘proving’ their comparative worth vis-à-vis the centre. Instead, the purpose is to acknowledge their existence and examine how they manifested themselves on their own terms.

By focusing on the circulations of artists and artworks, this thesis circumvents the type of criticism that has been levelled at Bucharest’s avant-gardes, and indeed other so-called peripheral modernisms. If it is the formal or stylistic qualities of the artists’ works that are judged to be lacking, moving towards a more thorough material assessment could disrupt the vertical hierarchies of art history in a much more effective manner than methodologies that rely on concepts of hybridity, ambiguity, or locality for example. Such methodologies render peripheries as positive spaces, but maintain their difference from the centre. Instead, the permeability and instability of both these categories should be emphasised: the centre is no less heterogenous or ambiguous than the periphery. Howard highlights this ‘amorphous’ quality of art on the European continent, focusing not only on the importance of ‘intracultural contact’, but also choosing a ‘cross-media approach’ so that ‘the disciplines themselves are not viewed as having fixed parameters but as frequently

project website is <http://chnm.gmu.edu/transatlanticencounters/>, accessed 21 January 2019.

94. Dossin and Joyeux-Prunel, ‘The German Century?’.

overlapping with one another'.⁹⁵ In doing so, he disrupts 'notions of fixedness and hierarchy' by challenging not only the geographies of art but also its disciplinary parameters.⁹⁶ It is a two-pronged approach that invites a closer scrutiny of the uses of disciplinary permeability.

Towards A New Aesthetics of Performance

As we have seen so far, the leading narrative of art history, and perhaps even more so of modern art, is a difficult one to unsettle. The construction of the modernist canon hinges on a number of conditions that privilege painting and on the dominance of one artistic strand that advances in linear fashion through various avant-garde movements, its absolute goal being abstraction. It is the formal qualities, the aesthetic aspects of an artwork that determine its value and its place in the canon. Despite much recent debate, combating this narrative through a topographical turn has proven difficult. If the study of modernism and the avant-gardes is approached through this purely pictorial lens, 'peripheral' artworks and artists always carry the burden of aesthetic proof. The concept of 'circulations' and re-focusing on the 'material conditions' of art objects and their border-crossing trajectories is a step forward in disrupting the hierarchies of art history. However, it is only partly effective in the case of more ephemeral artistic outputs, where a further methodological lens may be required.

In his 1967 essay 'Art and Objecthood', Michael Fried posited that these two titular aspects exist in opposition to each other. Modernist art 'aspires [...] to defeat or suspend its own objecthood'. Those artworks that embrace their status as objects thus become theatrical by interacting with the beholder and exhibiting 'a kind of *stage* presence'.⁹⁷ This is an unwelcome development:

[T]he imperative that modernist painting defeat or suspend its objecthood is at bottom the imperative that it *defeat or suspend theatre*. And *that* means there is a

95. Howard, *East European Art*, 2.

96. *Ibid.*

97. Reprinted in Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 155.

war going on between theatre and modernist painting, between the theatrical and the pictorial...⁹⁸

If in Fried's view, theatricality constitutes a dangerous attack on the 'high art' of the modernist canon, perhaps the time has come to embrace its disruptive potential. The field of performance studies, although recent, is a rapidly developing one and its methodologies are fast evolving.⁹⁹ Scholars working on modernist and avant-garde performance have pondered the existence of this 'antiperformative bias' encountered in existing methodologies.¹⁰⁰ Some, like Martin Puchner, equate this with a wider 'antitheatrical prejudice' extant in all cultures, a notion developed in the early 1980s by theatre scholar Jonas Barish.¹⁰¹ In this context, theatre is judged as an act intended to deceive, an affront on morality, and an unashamed courting of public attention. As Puchner observes, Fried's own stance relies on associating theatricality with artificiality and superficiality:

“theatrical” paintings or sculptures [...] are “aware” of the audience and thus lose their self-sufficient unity and integrity, in the process of which they start to resemble vain human actors pandering to the audience.¹⁰²

Although Fried's derogatory assessment was referring specifically to the minimalist art of the 1960s, the interaction between art and its public, or art and life, has become a bone of contention when it comes to modernism. Theoretical models run the whole gamut from Clement Greenberg's opposition between avant-garde and kitsch, or popular culture, to Peter Bürger's distinction between modernism as a formalist endeavour and avant-garde as

98. Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, 160.

99. The field of performance studies has its roots in the collaboration between theatre scholar and practitioner Richard Schechner and anthropologist Victor Turner, which began in the late 1970s. See Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies. An Introduction* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), 11.

100. See for example James M. Harding and John Rouse, 'Introduction', in *Not the Other Avant-Garde*, eds. Harding and Rouse, 1-17, 1.

101. Martin Puchner, *Stage Fright. Modernism, Anti-Theatricality, and Drama* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2002), 1, referring to Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

102. Puchner, *Stage Fright*, 3.

an engaged functionalist praxis.¹⁰³ To determine the current state of the field one only has to look once again at *Art Since 1900* and its assessment of the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes as ‘the birth of modern kitsch’. Derogatorily termed ‘department-store modernism’, the exhibition’s ethos and its aesthetic are contrasted with Aleksandr Rodchenko’s starkly designed Workers’ Pavilion.¹⁰⁴ Rodchenko and his fellow constructivists are often used as prime examples of a ‘good’ socially and politically engaged avant-garde, but this distinction might not be as clear cut as it appears. The majority of constructivist projects remained unrealised, idealistic fancies, and Rodchenko enjoyed his stay in the ‘city of chic’ as he called it in the letters he sent to his wife Varvara Stepanova, outlining the fashionable items of clothing he had purchased for them both, presumably from the same maligned department stores.¹⁰⁵ Yet, the binary categorisation used in *Art Since 1900* does not allowed for such blurring of lines between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ modernisms, between ‘avant-garde’ and ‘kitsch’.

This example demonstrates once again the inadvisability of determining precise parameters for the study of avant-garde art instead of aiming to accommodate its many facets, a realisation that seems to be presently gaining currency in the field of performance studies more so than in art history. According to James M. Harding, although scholars are now more accepting of the plurality inherent in this phenomenon, demonstrated even semantically by the increasingly widespread use of the term ‘avant-gardes’, they still ‘attempt to mold divergent avant-gardes within a unified theory of the avant-garde as

103. Clement Greenberg’s ‘Avant-Garde and Kitsch’ was first published in 1939, and reprinted in Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture. Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 3-21. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). The division between modernism and avant-garde seems to be more widely debated in the field of literary and performance studies, perhaps due to Bürger’s lasting influence. For example, both Puchner and Harding discuss this in their publications. By contrast, art historians seem to accept a certain equivalence between the terms, or use them to distinguish between disciplines e.g. avant-garde art but modernist design or modernist architecture. This can be seen for example in Foster et al., *Art Since 1900*, or Partha Mitter’s work on Indian modernism.

104. Foster et al., *Art Since 1900*, 220.

105. Aleksandr Rodchenko’s letters from Paris to Varvara Stepanova are available in English translation in Aleksandr Rodchenko, *Experiments for the Future. Diaries, Essays, Letters and Other Writings* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2005). For more on the commercial side of constructivism see Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions. The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2005).

such'.¹⁰⁶ Instead he suggests 'viewing the avant-gardes from multiple vantage points (including multiple theoretical vantage points)' in order to 'challenge the assumption that a single overarching theory' can successfully encompass this plurality of phenomena. There is a liberating impulse in this pronouncement. It offers the possibility that the many methodologies that seek to expand the field of twentieth century art history can co-exist, or even should co-exist, in order to achieve their goal. Likewise, it suggests that instead of seeking such a methodology, it would be more beneficial to focus on reclaiming those narratives that are yet unexplored. Harding uses the language of the avant-garde to reveal its unstable nature: instead of envisaging a monolithic force at the 'cutting edge' of cultural endeavour, we should acknowledge the existence of a multiplicity of 'rough edges'.¹⁰⁷ Harding references border theory, and in particular the work of Alejandro Lugo, which posits that we should move away from definitions of culture as that which is shared and harmonious to that which emerges from the clashes and fusions of competing ideas.¹⁰⁸ Such an approach would recognise the contribution of non-Western regions to the conceptual creation of the avant-gardes itself:

The contrast here is between a definition of the avant-gardes centred, on the one hand, around an imagined European cultural homogeneity that expanded in influence, or a definition of the avant-gardes, on the other hand, whose territorial coordinates were always already heterogenous, dispersed, and diversely located in moments of contestation.¹⁰⁹

Harding's wording recalls Howards's 'polycentric, polymorphous amalgam', as well as the concept of 'circulations', but geared more specifically towards a recalibration of the avant-garde.¹¹⁰ Employing such an approach would, for example, explore the encounter of Rodchenko with the Parisian department-store and its aesthetics without resorting to

106. James M. Harding, *The Ghosts of the Avant-Garde(s). Exorcising Experimental Theater and Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 8.

107. *Ibid.*, 143.

108. *Ibid.*, referring to Alejandro Lugo, 'Reflections on Border Theory', in *Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics*, eds. Scott Michaelsen and David E. Johnson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 43-67.

109. Harding, *The Ghosts of the Avant-Garde(s)*, 145-6.

110. Howard, *East European Art*, 4-5.

impermeable categorisations and value judgements.¹¹¹ What makes Art Deco 'modern kitsch' as opposed to genuine artistic production in the estimation of *Art Since 1900* is that 'the fair was a fantasy land' that duped visitors into purchasing cheaper imitations of the unaffordable items exhibited in ostentatious splendour.¹¹² The very language used echoes the 'antiperformative bias' discussed above and Fried's own analogy, by depicting the exhibition as theatrical and deceitful in its extravagance. While this assessment of the 1925 fair may or may not be correct, it should nonetheless not preclude it from being as illuminating an addition to the study of modernism as the Workers' Pavilion or a Picasso painting.

Such a departure from the tenets of art history requires an alternative to the aesthetics espoused by Fried and rooted in the antithesis between 'work that is fundamentally theatrical and work that is not'.¹¹³ It also requires a recognition of 'the vital role that performance has to play in the theoretical definition of the avant-garde' in the widest possible sense.¹¹⁴ In *The Transformative Power of Performance. A New Aesthetics*, Erika Fischer-Lichte proposes a new theoretical grounding for the performative, identifying some of its key traits.¹¹⁵ The impetus for this is the blurring of boundaries between performance art, theatre, and life which has become increasingly evident since the 1960s. Indeed, Fischer-Lichte's emblematic case study is Marina Abramović's 1975 performance *Lips of Thomas*. Yet the theoretical model that emerges has the potential to expand beyond this timeframe and medium, providing a much-needed alternative to 'an aesthetics rooted in the work of art'.¹¹⁶

Fischer-Lichte identifies some means by which performance disrupts the category of 'the artwork', just as Fried feared. Firstly, to counteract the notion of the artwork as an

111. This would perhaps require being 'alive to simultaneities – to what may be encountered by chance on a single dissecting table at one and the same time' in the words of Derek Sayer quoted earlier in this chapter. See Sayer, 'Surrealities', 96.

112. Foster et al., *Art Since 1900*, 221.

113. Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, 157.

114. Harding and Rouse, 'Introduction', 1.

115. Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance. A New Aesthetics* (London; New York: Routledge, 2008).

116. *Ibid.*, 161.

autonomous fixed object created by a virtuoso producer to be admired and/or deciphered by a reverent receiver, Fischer-Lichte introduces the biological concept of autopoiesis, which refers to self-perpetuating living systems. She posits that, likewise, performance operates through an autopoietic feedback loop which engages the performers and the audience alike in a continuous process of creation:

As a self-organizing system, as opposed to an autonomously created work of art, it continually receives and integrates into that system newly emerging, unplanned, and unpredictable elements from both sides of the loop.¹¹⁷

This analogy also acts to unsettle the distinction between art and reality, or life, which, as Fischer-Lichte observes, has been an important element of art theory, and has frequently served to deny functional objects the status of ‘artworks’.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, this distinction has reinforced the autonomy of the artwork and its inward-looking scope. An explicit engagement or acknowledgement of an audience is viewed with suspicion and implies a ‘theatricality’ that stands in direct opposition to ‘authenticity’.¹¹⁹ By recognising the interrelation between art and life, producer and receiver, subject and object, performance ‘cannot be grasped in binary oppositions’ and disrupts the dichotomies it encounters: ‘the in-between becomes a preferred category’.¹²⁰ This notion is of course reminiscent of attempts to positively frame marginal spaces, which we have already encountered and whose usefulness we have questioned. However, performance studies has a stronger claim to the concept of liminality, which emerged not from art history or social studies but from ritual studies, a discipline that helped shape performance studies in its early years.¹²¹ Anthropologist Victor Turner referred to the work of early twentieth century ethnographer

117. Marvin Carlson, ‘Introduction. Perspectives on Performance. Germany and America’, in Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*, 1-10, 8.

118. Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*, 172.

119. Fischer-Lichte refers to Fried’s work on eighteenth century painting, in which he posited that painted figures that acknowledged the presence of a beholder weakened the integrity of an artwork, pandering to an audience outside the frame. See Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*, 189 on Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality. Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

120. Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*, 174.

121. Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 11.

Arnold van Gennep who coined the term ‘liminality’ as a transformative state that takes place during a ritual.¹²² During this phase, ‘new ways of acting, new combinations of symbols are tried out, to be discarded or accepted’.¹²³ Fischer-Lichte equates this with the autopoietic feedback loop that occurs when the producer encounters the receiver. A state of liminality, or transformation, ensues and it is ‘the transition itself [that is] the performance’.¹²⁴ This concludes Fischer-Lichte’s argument: the liminal experience itself, that is to say the journey and not the destination, is the goal of the new aesthetic and constitutes its identifying trait.¹²⁵

As discussed, the concept of liminality has been used in art history and avant-garde studies to raise the status of the marginal and construe it as a positive space. This approach however implies a burden of proof and a sort of artistic goalpost that must be reached to ‘compete’ with the established authority of the centre. By contrast, Fischer-Lichte’s model normalises the liminal, making the very act of transformation the purpose of the artwork, which cannot exist without it. By adopting ‘the in-between [as] a preferred category’, the expectation of a fixed state is removed and cannot be held as marker of artistic quality.

The aesthetics of the performative focuses on art that crosses borders. It unflaggingly attempts to transcend historically established borders which have since become so ossified that they appear natural. Among these supposedly natural borders are the border between art and life, high culture and popular culture, and Western and non-Western art. [...] In contrast to the dominant principle of division and partitioning, the aesthetics of the performative emphasises moments of transgression and transition. [...] The aesthetics of the performative does not pursue the project of homogenization [...]. Rather, its aim is to transcend rigid oppositions and to convert them into dynamic gradations. The project of the

122. Fischer-Lichte refers to Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-structure* (London; New York: Routledge, 1969) and Arnold van Gennep, *Les rites de passage* (Paris: A. J. Picard, 1909).

123. Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*, 175-6, quoting Victor Turner, ‘Variations on a Theme of Liminality’ in *Secular Ritual*, eds. Sally Falk Moore, Barbara G. Myerhoff (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1977), 36-57.

124. Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*, 179.

125. *Ibid.*, 199.

aesthetics of performance lies in collapsing binary oppositions and replacing the notion of “either/or” with one of “as well as”.¹²⁶

Thus, Fischer-Lichte’s approach provides a suitable pendant to DaCosta Kaufmann, Dossin and Joyeux-Prunel’s concept of ‘circulations’ for the purpose of revitalising the art historical discipline and expanding its field. The assignment of value based on the notion of ‘either/or’ must be replaced by that of ‘as well as’ and the continuing processes of transformation, exchange, motion and transit must become an integral part of artwork analysis. This thesis endeavours to test such a methodology in the chapters that follow.

More than three decades since Andrzej Turowski asked ‘Existe-t-il un art de l’Europe de l’Est?’ the debate about what, if anything, defines such a category, and what its place might be within the established narratives of art history continues, joining a wider drive towards a global history of art. An inquiry into the narrative of modernism and its relationship to art produced outside the main centres of the Western world has uncovered a range of emerging methodologies, from the reframing of centre-periphery dichotomies to notions of transnationalism, a new acceptance of pluralities and a shift towards a more ‘horizontal history of art’. This is a continuing and very current debate and as such cannot engender an exhaustive conclusion, however its many strands converge towards concepts of horizontality, hybridity and heterogeneity and a recognition of the marginal as a positive space and a site of interaction and exchange.

Casting Europe’s peripheries as margins where positive interactions can occur, with the added benefit of turning ‘Balkan’ chaos into a force for good, may seem a suitable place to start tearing down the vertical axis of art history. Yet the practical applications of such methodologies still have their pitfalls, as exemplified by the survey approach to histories of art which still pits the peripheries against the centre, placing the burden of proof with these ‘lesser’ modernisms. Mitter may have identified this as ‘the Picasso manqué syndrome’, but how are we, as art historians of the marginalised, to find a remedy?

126. Ibid., 203-4.

The treatment of Bucharest's interbellum avant-gardes is a case in point. Their vocabulary tended towards notions of fusion, as exemplified by terms such as Integralism or picto-poetry. This tendency towards a synthesis of different artistic movements and disciplines has often been interpreted as 'theoretical mutability' that could only produce a 'weak' form of modernism. Furthermore, scholarship on the subject has focused on a limited number of artists and artistic outputs, privileging in particular painting and print periodicals. Casting a wider net to incorporate applied arts, design, and performance, as well those artists neglected due to their transnational trajectories could be more conducive towards a disruption of the art historical canon and its established narratives. Not only are the concepts of originality and influence more fluid in this context, but the collaborative aspects of performance and design frequently contest national narratives.

Methodologically, this thesis takes a two-pronged approach in order to achieve this goal. DaCosta Kaufmann, Dossin and Joyeux-Prunel's concept of 'circulations' serves to highlight the mobility of artists, ideas, art objects and archives, helping to build a much more comprehensive account of avant-garde activities that occurred in a globally-connected Bucharest. Fischer-Lichte's 'new aesthetics of performance' provides a framework for the incorporation of activities such as education, design, and theatre within the history of the avant-garde, acknowledging the blurring of boundaries between producer and receiver and the 'autopoietic feedback loop' that drives continuous transformation. The material thus explored reveals a period of intense artistic experimentation, its existence obscured by the ephemerality of the performative and by unwieldy nation-blurring narratives. Although many of these artistic trajectories converged in Bucharest for only a short period of time, what emerged from their encounters was a cross-cultural and cross-media vision of modern performance that unsettles the notions of a 'slow-lane' avant-garde.

Chapter 2. MYTH, MAKING AND MODERNITY: VESPREMIE, MAXY AND THE ACADEMY OF DECORATIVE ARTS

The Academy of Decorative Arts has achieved a kind of mythical status in scholarship on the Romanian avant-garde. One of the rare applied arts initiatives that veered away from the national style, its association with prominent members of the avant-garde and its presence in a number of avant-garde periodicals, coupled with a lack of available archival material, has meant that while it has garnered many mentions in academic literature, these have been invariably riddled with inaccuracies, as we shall see. Frequently labelled an outpost of the Bauhaus in Bucharest, the Academy has been credited with introducing modern applied arts to the city's inhabitants through its educational and commercial activities.

Led by a young designer named Andrei Vespremie and financed by philanthropist Heinrich Fischer-Galați, the Academy opened in 1924 offering classes in a number of applied and visual arts disciplines including metalwork, ivory carving, bookbinding, drawing and sculpture. In 1926 the academy expanded its educational programme to include contemporary offerings such as advertising and interior design and opened a permanent exhibition space where a wide range of items, some produced in its own workshops, were displayed for sale. This expansion occurred with the aid of Mela and M. H. Maxy who joined the institution at this time. The following year Vespremie left Romania for Latvia and M. H. Maxy became the Academy's figurehead until its dissolution in 1929.

Using the methodological approach outlined in Chapter One, this section of the thesis charts the development of the Academy, challenging some of its most pervasive myths. The concept of 'circulations' informs the narrative, which follows both Vespremie and Maxy across borders, from their training period in Berlin to their respective careers post-Academy in Bucharest and Riga. The same multilateral approach was taken during the research process, which led to essential archival sources in Latvia and in Germany heretofore unexamined by scholars of the Bucharest avant-garde. Furthermore, the existence of a transformative feedback loop is acknowledged through an analysis of the Academy's changing programme and structure, and through an examination of its patrons and commercial activities. It is through this inclusive, multi-faceted approach that the history of the Academy can be

revealed here with much more precision than was previously thought possible, demonstrating the border-crossing fluidities of modernism.

Teaching and Exhibiting the Decorative Arts in Bucharest: Some Precedents

Before delving into an analysis of the Academy, this brief section provides a summary of the status of the applied arts at local level, their connection to artistic education and to nation-building, and the link between practical and theoretical aspects of the discipline. It focuses on two major state-sanctioned institutions: the national body providing an arts education, namely the Bucharest School of Fine Arts, and the newly established National Museum, also located in the capital.

The decorative arts became part of official artistic education in Bucharest in 1904 when they were added as a discipline to the curriculum of the state School of Fine Arts, at the same time as the department of architecture became its own separate School.¹ The Paris-trained architect George Sterian was appointed to teach the decorative arts class having had experience in designing furniture, carpets and other applied art objects. In 1906, he was joined by Costin Petrescu, another architect by training, whose specialty was mural painting. Given the prominence of mural decoration in Romanian art prior to the modern period, this was seen as an important branch of the decorative arts that would assure continuity with local artistic traditions. Altogether, the new decorative arts section focused on designing rather than making, with students learning the principles of decoration and creating designs for textiles, murals, stained glass, and more contemporary items such as posters. The decorative arts section expanded further in 1916, when Cecilia Cuțescu-Storck was appointed to teach the discipline within the women's section of the school, who since their admission to the School of Fine Arts in 1895 had attended classes separately from their male peers. A committed pedagogue and forward-thinker, Cuțescu-Storck advanced a memorandum to the Ministry of

1. The summary below is based on Raoul Șorban, ed., *100 de ani de la înființarea Institutului de Arte Plastice 'Nicolae Grigorescu' din București* (București: Meridiane, 1964), 56-9, 64-7. This is one of the most comprehensive accounts of the history of the Bucharest School of Fine Arts. See also Ioana Beldiman, Nadia Ioan Ficiu, and Oana Marinache, *De la Școala de Belle-Arte la Academia de Arte Frumoase. Artiști la București 1864-1948*. (București: UNArte, 2014), 25-7.

Arts in 1926, requesting a closer link between the teaching of the decorative arts and their application in industry and bemoaning the lack of graphic design and scenography in the curriculum of the School of Fine Arts, amongst other things.²

The limited range and lack of modernity of the curriculum were not the only deficient aspects of state-provided education in the decorative arts. The workshop component had a difficult relationship with the School itself throughout the first three decades of the twentieth century. In its first two years of existence, the course only had a classroom component as described above, but in 1906, to ensure a more rounded education, Sterian succeeded in adding a number of workshops where the designs could be realised. The division between the workshops and the design section was nonetheless marked from the very beginning: the former was staffed by female apprentices from a number of trade schools who were to craft the design projects of the students. Furthermore, working conditions in the workshops were inadequate, leading Sterian to complain to the authorities the following year about the lack of light and space. By 1908, a new entity was created under the directorship of Sterian and the umbrella of the School of Fine Arts, as well as the patronage of Crown Princess Marie, entitled the School of National and Decorative Arts where female students and apprentices were enrolled.³ This initiative drew the attention of French designer and pedagogue Eugène Grasset who published an account of the ‘Domnitza Maria’ school in *Art et Décoration*. He described how after a joint three-year programme that included drawing and painting, anatomy, perspective, art history and so on, offering the basics of an artistic education, some students continued on to the School of Fine Arts, while others joined the workshops of the School of National and Decorative Arts where they produced works based on the Romanian

2. Şorban, ed., *100 de ani*, 77.

3. The main decorative arts section continued to function as part of the School of Fine Arts for the male students, focusing on object design and mural decoration. The divisions between Sterian’s two initiatives is difficult to disentangle and has given rise to some confusion in scholarly accounts, further compounded that the fact that the new institution’s association with Crown Princess Marie could not be referenced in Şorban, ed., *100 de ani* which was published during the communist regime. Thus, in Irina Cărăbaş, ‘The Shadow of the Object. Modernity and Decoration in Romanian Art’, in *Dis(continuities). Fragments of Romanian Modernity in the First Half of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Carmen Popescu (Bucharest: Simetria, 2010), 101–42 and Shona Kallestrup, *Art and Design in Romania 1866-1927. Local and International Aspects of the Search for National Expression* (Boulder; New York: Columbia University Press, 2006) it is unclear that the School of National and Decorative Arts was in fact a different entity, separate from the decorative arts component of the School of Fine Arts’ curriculum.

vernacular style.⁴ Two decades later, these workshops were still the domain of female apprentices who were not students of the School of National and Decorative Arts itself, but who gained a practical education in textile-based crafts, such as carpet-making, weaving, and embroidery. They worked to order, using designs provided by the School's students, but it is not certain whether they received any remuneration for this. An internal document from 1928 reveals that the workshops had no real pedagogical programme, offering essentially the same training as an apprenticeship in a trade school or private workshop, and that there were no entry requirements. Despite the concerns raised, the workshops continued in this manner until they were eventually closed down in 1934.⁵

In terms of state support, the modern applied arts also encountered setbacks within the project of the Romanian National Museum which had been under development since 1906 under the directorship of Alexandru Tzigara-Samurçaş. Planned as a repository for Romanian art through the ages, the institution was to be originally named the Museum of Ethnography, National Art, Decorative and Industrial Art and was to be located adjacent to the School of Fine Arts, so that it may provide continuity with contemporary practices. However, according to Tzigara-Samurçaş himself, the Museum's title was successively reduced because 'national art included all the others'.⁶ Eventually, the collections focused only on ecclesiastical and ethnographic art, privileging the country's past traditions rather than its ensuing modernity. Furthermore, as Iulia Pohrib has shown, the discourse changed even further in the light of Greater Romania's newly acquired ethnic diversity:

At the start the National Museum was meant to show 'all native art'; it gathered the artistic productions created on territories inhabited by Romanians and referred to any object that showed the country's culture and civilization. In 1925, in [Tzigara-Samurçaş's] *L'Art du peuple roumain*, the distinction between the art of Romania and the art of the Romanian people appeared for the first time. The former stood for the

4. Eugène Grasset, 'L'École Nationale de Arts Décoratifs de Bucarest Domnita Maria', *Art et Décoration* XXIII, no.1 (January-June 1908), 125-132.

5. This account of the workshops comes from Şorban, ed., *100 de ani*, 56-9, 64-7 and is based on archival research by Şorban himself.

6. Alexandru Tzigara-Samurçaş, *Scieri despre arta românească* (Bucureşti: Meridiane, 1987), 163. This is a volume of collected writings and the text quoted was originally printed in 1936 in a volume entitled *Muzeografie românească*.

art of the populations that inhabited or passed through the land defined by the political borders of the Nation-State, whereas the latter was the one made by the people - the peasants, and that was ‘the only one that can be called national art’.⁷

The new National Museum thus rejected modernity, urbanity and cultural diversity, furthermore equating Romanian ‘national’ art with rural art.⁸ This policy was applied internationally as well, through travelling exhibitions that focused on religious and folk art. Most famously, Romania did not participate in the 1925 Paris International Exhibition, choosing instead to curate its own display, *L’Exposition de l’art roumain ancien et moderne*, whose decorative arts segment was entirely composed of ecclesiastic and ethnographic exhibits.⁹ It was thus in this context, where modern applied arts had not yet found state-sanctioned support and an adequate pedagogical infrastructure, that the Academy of Decorative Arts emerged as a result of a private initiative.

The Academy of Decorative Arts and its Beginnings

The Academy’s history has proven difficult for scholars to recover with any certainty, as it has left few traces in Romanian archives or in the period press. The most comprehensive study of its activities has recently been compiled by Irina Cărăbaș. She found that even Fischer-Galați, the Academy’s founding patron, did not mention the venture in an interview he gave in 1924, the year the school was established.¹⁰ Furthermore, only one art critic wrote

7. Iulia Pohrib, ‘Tradition and Ethnographic Display: Defining the National Specificity at the National Art Museum in Romania (1906–1937)’, in *Great Narratives of the Past. Traditions and Revisions in National Museums*, vol. 4 (EuNaMus, European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen, Paris: Linköping University Electronic Press, 2011), 317–29, <http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp/078/020/ecp12078020.pdf>, accessed 7 April 2016, quoting Alexandru Tzigara-Samurcaș, *L’Art du peuple roumain*, Exh. cat. (Genève: Musée Rath, 1925).

8. As discussed in the introduction, this has remained the accepted museographic stance even today, with Romanian decorative arts generally equated with folk arts and modern applied arts being comparatively rarely exhibited. Tzigara-Samurcaș’s institution is now the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant. Furthermore, this is reflected in the classifications of items within the national heritage database: Maxy’s carpets are classed as ‘ethnography’ rather than ‘decorative arts’. See the online database for Mobile Cultural Objects Listed in the National Cultural Heritage, accessed 16 May 2019, <http://clasate.cimec.ro/Clasate.asp>.

9. The exhibition was held at the Musée du Jeu de Paume in Paris from May to August 1925.

10. Irina Cărăbaș, ‘The Shadow of the Object’, 127.

about the institution in its early days, in an article published in October 1924 in the magazine *Ideea Europeană*. The author, Ștefan I. Nenițescu, welcomed this venture although he found it small by Western standards, ‘a workshop’, but a sign of progress nonetheless for modern decorative arts in Bucharest.¹¹ The director of the newly formed Academy was named as Andrei Vespremie, and his technical skill in metalwork and bookbinding was praised by Nenițescu. In January 1925, the school was also mentioned in the avant-garde magazine *Contimporanul*. A brief unsigned article ascribed the Academy to the new current for bringing art into everyday life, which in Western countries had already led to collaborations between artists and industry. Before this stage could be reached in Romania, ‘the basis of the new elements’ must first be established in schools and workshops like the welcome new venture of Fischer-Galați and Vespremie.¹²

This was a promising start for Vespremie, so it is perhaps unfortunate that his career in Bucharest became eclipsed by that of Maxy. For Romanian scholars, Maxy has long been one of the most prominent members of the Bucharest avant-garde, and his subsequent directorship of the Romanian National Art Museum from 1950 to his death in 1971 has ensured his posthumous reputation. Vespremie on the other hand has been a heretofore unknown figure, denied as it transpires not only his real artistic achievements but even his identity. Most recent scholarly accounts give his nationality as Latvian, probably due to his relatively brief presence in Bucharest and departure for Riga in 1927.¹³ However, Vespremie only became a Latvian citizen in 1934, having previously held Romanian nationality. It is quite possible that his perceived ‘foreignness’ has contributed to his marginalisation by Romanian scholars, who either fail to mention his contribution to the Academy or present him as Maxy’s less significant collaborator. In a further twist of fate, it is material found in the Latvian national archives that can now restore Vespremie his Romanian citizenship. The documents he submitted over several years to obtain permission to work and live in Latvia

11. Ștefan I. Nenițescu, ‘Artă decorativă’, in *Scrieri de istoria artei și de critică plastică*, ed. Adina Nanu (București: Institutul cultural român, 2008), 129-130. The article was originally published in *Ideea Europeană*, 19-26 October 1924.

12. ‘Academia de Arte Decorative’, *Contimporanul*, no. 52 (January 1925).

13. See for example Cărăbaș, ‘The Shadow of the Object’; Michael Ilk, *Maxy. Der integrale Künstler* (Ludwigshafen: Michael Ilk, 2003); Ioana Vlasiu, ‘Idei constructiviste în arta românească a anilor ’20: Integralismul’, in *Bucharest in the 1920s and 1930s: Between Avant-Garde and Modernism*, ed. Magda Cârnelci (București: Simetria, 1994), 38–46.

have been preserved in the country's State Historical Archives and can at last provide a clearer picture of Vespremie's life and work.¹⁴

Vespremie was born in 1898 Covasna, in what had been the Austro-Hungarian province of Transylvania, but became part of Greater Romania in 1918. His secondary education was undertaken in Braşov, a large city in the vicinity of Covasna, and then in Budapest where in June 1915 he graduated from a commercial college. During the First World War, he was active in the Austrian army and received a serious injury that required a lengthy period of recovery.¹⁵ In the aftermath of the unification, Vespremie found himself citizen of a new country and for reasons that are unknown relocated to Bucharest probably sometime between 1918 and 1920.¹⁶ In a letter to the Latvian Ministry of Education, he revealed his hopes at this juncture:

From the beginning of my studies I had the intention, after graduation, to open an arts and crafts school and workshop in Bucharest (my previous permanent residence) and to manage these myself. Therefore, I did not specialise in one area, but I endeavoured to gain a sound, practical education in the most varied branches of the arts and crafts.¹⁷

14. Latvia State Historical Archives: fond 3234, inv. 2, file 25150 (citizenship); fond 3234, inv. 19, file 19384 (work permit); fond 1632, inv. 1, file 23144 (teaching); fond 2996, inv. 20, file 14272 (passport); fond 2942, inv.1, file 2059 (house register). I am indebted to Elvija Pohomova for translating the contents of these files from Latvian.

15. Latvia State Historical Archives, 1632/1/23144. Also 3234/2/25150, where a health inspection certificate for Vespremie's citizenship application reveals he had a deep scar from an old operation, resulting perhaps from the same injury.

16. Legislation created in the aftermath of the unification in 1918 gave all inhabitants of the new territories joining Romania the right to Romanian citizenship. However, the legislation of the old Romanian territories did not give Jewish inhabitants the automatic right to citizenship, giving rise to a strangely discriminatory situation. In this case for example, Maxy might not qualify for Romanian citizenship in 1918, but Vespremie would. This situation was rectified in 1919 through new legislation and the right of all Jewish inhabitants of Romania to citizenship was fully recognised by the Constitution of 1923. See Carol Iancu, *Evreii din România 1919-1938. De la emancipare la marginalizare* (Bucureşti: Hasefer, 2000) for more details on Romania's Jewish community during the interwar period.

17. Latvia State Historical Archives, 1632/1/23144. This particular document is in German and was translated by the author of this thesis.

To obtain this education Vespremie departed for Berlin where he took classes at the Schule Reimann, an innovative and highly successful school of art and design, between October 1920 and June 1922. In addition to this, he gained practical experience by working in other institutions: the Staatliche Kunstgewerbeschule, the sculpture workshop of Felix Kupsch, a sign-painting workshop and the workshops of the Reimann itself. By 1924 Vespremie was back in Bucharest as director of the newly opened Academy of Decorative Arts. Whether this really was the realisation of his earlier plans is difficult to know, however it is possible to speculate that the philanthropist Fischer-Galați had supported Vespremie's education in Berlin with this goal in mind, having met him in Bucharest after the war. In the statements made to the Latvian Ministry of Education over the years, Vespremie wrote that he 'was asked to lead the Academy of Decorative Arts'¹⁸ and that he enjoyed the patronage and 'financial support of well-known Maecenas Heinrich Fischer-Galați'¹⁹, statements that support the hypothesis of a prior connection that led to the opening of the school.

As well as securing patronage, Vespremie developed links with the Bucharest avant-garde from an early stage, as revealed by a document found in the archives of the Harvard University Library. It is the programme for a Festival of Jewish Romanian Writers and Artists taking place on 11 April 1925, thus about half a year or so after the Academy had opened its doors.²⁰ (Fig. 2.1a) The festivities included literary, theatrical and musical moments, all listed in the programme opulently designed by the artist Sigismund Maur, with graphic vignettes and gold borders surrounding the text. Many of the vignettes were portraits of the participants by their peers: Maxy sketched the cubist profile of theatre director Sandu Eliad, while Maur preferred a more realist style for his stern Marcel Iancu. Then, facing each other on opposite pages were Maxy's features elongated by caricaturist Jacques Kapralik²¹

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Harvard Library Judaica Division, Judaica ephemera collection, Theater, series B, collection 1, Romania. According to the magazine *Puntea de fildeș* this event was part of an international festival intended to celebrate the opening of the new Jerusalem campus of the Hebrew University in Palestine. Jewish artists and writers around the world were invited to organize their own events taking place simultaneously on 11 April 1925. See 'Scriitorii și artiștii evrei...', *Puntea de fildeș*, no. 1 (April 1925): 1.

²¹ Jacques Kapralik (1906-1960) was a Romanian caricaturist who emigrated to the United States in 1936, becoming a celebrated poster designer and illustrator for Hollywood film studios.

and Vespremie sketchily drawn in profile by Iancu. (Fig. 2.1b) According to the acknowledgements listed on the final page:

The decoration of the theatre hall was executed after the designs of Messrs. Vespremie, Maur and Ross at the Academy of Decorative Arts. The decoration of the cabaret was executed by Messrs. Iancu, Maxy, Brauner and Kapralik.²²

Even earlier than this, in January 1925, an advertisement in the avant-garde journal *Punct* suggests that Iancu and Brauner were collaborators in a design venture entitled the Atelier of Constructivist Art which focused on architecture, interiors and furniture.²³ Prospective customers were directed ‘for plans and execution’ to the Academy of Decorative Arts under the directorship of Vespremie. (Fig. 2.2) These occurrences suggest that Vespremie was well integrated within the Bucharest avant-garde and that the Academy had become a welcome and trusted addition to the city’s artistic life less than a year after its opening. The connections to prominent artists such as Iancu and Brauner and the commissions received for executing decorative projects place Vespremie on a similar footing with Maxy in terms of influence and prominence.

The Atelier for Constructivist Art is not to be confused with the Atelier Integral, Maxy’s own applied arts venture, which had the support of Brauner but not that of Iancu and whose third member was Corneliu Michăilescu. The Atelier Integral was an extension of Maxy’s periodical of the same name which had made its debut in March 1925. Both were located at the same address, Calea Victoriei 79, Maxy’s own home. An advertisement printed in *Integral* in October 1925 suggests that Maxy’s Atelier had a two-pronged approach: a ‘modern painting workshop’ for training students and a studio that took orders for ‘decors, interiors, carpets, ceramics, theatrical set and costume designs, scenic constructions, cinema and theatre posters’.²⁴ (Fig. 2.3) To what extent this was successful is difficult to determine, however advertisements for a number of businesses, including a law firm and a photography studio, that utilised modern graphics and were the work of the Atelier’s three founders

22. Harvard Library Judaica Division, Judaica ephemera collection. Theater/ B/1/ Romania. The cabaret will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

23. *Punct*, no. 8 (9 January 1925): 4.

24. *Integral*, no. 6-7 (October 1925): 27.

appeared in many of *Integral*'s issues. A year-long interruption in the appearance of *Integral* means that the fate of the Atelier is unclear, especially as the first issue to appear after the hiatus, in December 1926, heavily promoted the Academy of Decorative Arts in which Maxy was now evidently involved.

The disappearance of Atelier Integral and the emergence of the Academy within the pages of *Integral* has led many scholars to suppose that they were a continuation of one another under the tutelage of Maxy. Ioana Vlasiu, for example, treats Maxy's Atelier as the first and better version of the Academy, giving it credit for the wide-ranging applied arts curriculum that Vespremie had in fact established. She believes that the name of the institution was subsequently changed so as to sound more traditional, faced as it was with resistance to its constructivist ideas.²⁵ Vlasiu also conflates Maxy's Atelier with that of Iancu, giving its name as the 'Atelier for Constructive Art' (sic), a misapprehension repeated more recently by Mirela Duculescu when writing about the early history of Romanian design:

An alternative education system also emerges for what will be called design, namely the private Academy of Decorative Arts (1924-1929), led by Latvia-born [sic] Andrei Vespremie. Originally founded, it seems, by Max Hermann Maxy according to the Bauhaus model of education, under the name of the Studio of Deconstructivist Art, it represents a significant moment for Romania's integration into the European avant-garde.²⁶

Aside from the error of Vespremie's Baltic origins and the strangely rendered name of Maxy's venture, the example above introduces another common misconception repeated by scholars over the years: that Maxy was the originator of the Academy under the influence of the Bauhaus.²⁷ To unpick this most enduring myth of Romanian design history, it is

25. Vlasiu, 'Idei constructiviste', 42-43.

26. Mirela Duculescu, 'Bauhaus Influence in Romania', *Herito*, no. 24 (2016): 29. These informations are repeated in Mirela Duculescu, 'Preocupări privind designul în România Socialistă (1969-89). Învățământul superior de design între teorie și practică', in *Arta în România între anii 1945-2000. O analiză din perspectiva prezentului* (București: UNArte, 2016), 71-91, 72.

27. See for example Petre Oprea, *M. H. Maxy* (București: Arta Grafică, 1974), 5; Radu Stern, *Jewish Avant-Garde Artists from Romania 1910-1938. From Dada to Surrealism* (Amsterdam: Jewish Museum, 2011), 46; Vlasiu, 'Idei constructiviste'; or more recently Emilia David, 'Romanian contributions to the cooperation

necessary to examine more closely the period spent in Berlin by Maxy and Vespremie in the early 1920s and the relationship between the Schule Reimann and the Bauhaus.

Competing Models for the Academy of Decorative Arts: the Schule Reimann and the Bauhaus

Maxy spent a year in Berlin, most likely from June 1922 to June 1923, training in the workshop of Arthur Segal, an artist of Romanian origin who had become well integrated within the Berlin art world. As Cărăbaș observes, Maxy's time in Berlin is poorly documented and has thus been susceptible to myth-making, especially by the artist himself who later in life spoke repeatedly about the influence of this period on his formation, indicating it as a source for his life-long practice.²⁸ Ilk has been able to identify a number of key dates relating to Maxy's artistic activity in Berlin, such as his participation in the Juryfreie Kunstschau exhibition in October 1922, a visit to Der Sturm Gallery where he signed the guestbook in January 1923, and his participation in Der Sturm's 118th exhibition in April 1923.²⁹ According to Ilk, Maxy visited Weimar in June 1922, painting the local cityscapes.³⁰ Although Ilk offers no evidence to support this, Maxy's Der Sturm exhibition catalogue does list three paintings of Weimar - *Altes Haus*, *Am Palais* and *Ruheplatz am Liszt-Haus* - so he certainly did visit the city sometime before April 1923.³¹ Maxy's exposure to the ideas of the Bauhaus was in all likelihood not limited to his visit to Weimar. His mentor Segal hosted monthly gatherings at his home in Berlin where Maxy may have come into contact with, among others, Kandinsky and Moholy-Nagy.³² The latter would only join the Bauhaus in the summer of 1923, whereas Kandinsky arrived in 1922 and immediately

between personalities and magazines of the European avant-garde. *Der Sturm, Ma* and the "Constructivist" synthesis in *Contimporanul* and *Integral*', *Caietele avangardei*, no. 9 (2017): 43-56, 53.

28. Irina Cărăbaș, 'To Germany and Back Again. The Romanian Avant-Garde and Its Forerunners', *Centropa* 12, no. 1 (September 2012): 253-68, 264.

29. Ilk, *Maxy*, 24-26.

30. *Ibid.*, 24.

31. Romanian National Art Museum, Documentation department, fond M. H. Maxy. The catalogue numbers for these works are 19, 20, and 21. See also Israel Marcus, *Sapte momente din istoria evreilor în Romania* (Haifa: Glob, 1977), 45, where it is revealed that Maxy was in Weimar during the festivities commemorating 90 years since Goethe's death. This would also indicate 1922 as the correct year.

32. Cărăbaș, 'To Germany and Back Again', 265; Ilk, *Maxy*, 23.

began preparing with his students a set of large-scale mural paintings that became the centrepieces of the same edition of the Juryfreie Kunstschau in which Maxy participated.³³

Whether Vespremie also visited the Bauhaus is impossible to determine with any certainty, however it is certainly plausible considering his professional interest in applied arts education. As previously mentioned, during his time in Berlin he attended the Schule Reimann, run by Albert and Klara Reimann, which had grown from a sculpture workshop in 1902 to a worthy competitor for the Bauhaus. By 1922, the year that Vespremie graduated, it had 754 students and at its peak in 1936 that number had reached 1000.³⁴ By contrast, the Bauhaus trained around 500 students in total from 1919 to 1933.³⁵ The Reimann offered a wider range of classes, with the overall focus on modern commercial design and the ambition to provide students with the skills to work in business and industry. It was innovative in its curriculum and introduced classes for poster design in 1911, for theatre design in 1913 and for commercial art, including window display design, in 1920. The Reimann's aims, as stated in the school's own magazine *Farbe und Form*, were 'to serve craft..., to serve industry..., to serve commerce'³⁶. From 1904 onwards there was also a Reimann Studio, which offered 'a combination of theory and practice [and] where a limited number of approved students worked as salaried assistants upon completion of their studies'.³⁷ It is here that Vespremie worked after graduating in 1922, which would suggest that he was appreciated by this teachers and sufficiently skilled to undertake such a role.

Vespremie's report card has survived in the Latvian National Archives, revealing that he was a student at the Reimann from 15 October 1920 to 30 June 1922, taking eleven subjects

33. Barry Bergdoll and Leah Dickerman, *Bauhaus 1919-1933. Workshops for Modernity* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2009), 122 and 326.

34. Yasuko Suga, 'Modernism, Commercialism and Display Design in Britain', *Journal of Design History* 19, no. 2 (2006): 137–154, 140.

35. *Ibid.*, 154.

36. Jeremy Aynsley, *Graphic Design in Germany: 1890-1945* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 144. For further information on the Schule Reimann see also Yasuko Suga, *The Reimann School. A Design Diaspora* (London: Artmonsky Arts, 2014) and Swantje Kuhfuss-Wickenheiser, *Die Reimann-Schule in Berlin und London 1902-1943. Ein jüdisches Unternehmen zur Kunst- und Designausbildung internationaler Prägung bis zur Vernichtung durch das Hitlerregime* (Aachen: Shaker Media, 2009).

37. Suga, 'Modernism, Commercialism', 140.

during this time.³⁸ (Appendix C) He excelled at bookbinding, ivory carving, metalwork and ornament, and achieved various levels of proficiency in drawing from life, colour theory, modelling, poster design, etching, engraving, and typography. Another previously unseen document found in Vespremie's file in the Latvia State Historical Archives reveals the educational programme of the Academy of Decorative Arts as at 1 November 1924, thus shortly after its opening.³⁹ (Appendix D) The course catalogue was quite comprehensive even at this early stage, including metalwork, ivory carving, batik, carpet design, bookbinding, typography and ornament, as well as drawing, painting and sculpture. Even a cursory comparison with Vespremie's report card reveals the highly personal nature of the Academy's curriculum. (Appendix B) Most of the classes offered were in the disciplines he had been trained in at the Reimann, such as life drawing, metalwork, or bookbinding. The only exceptions were the textiles classes: carpet making and batik. Of these, the latter also has a strong Reimann connection as the school's batik workshop was well known, having been set up by Albert Reimann himself in 1908.⁴⁰ At the Academy, it was Victoria, Vespremie's wife, who led this particular course, suggesting perhaps that she was also a Reimann alumna. Furthermore, Albert Reimann had a particular interest in early education, and had organised formal and informal courses for children from the school's early days, even forming an association named 'Kunst in Leben des Kindes' (Art in children's life).⁴¹ Vespremie may have taken inspiration from this when creating a separate curriculum at the Academy for children from six years of age, where they could 'learn to create their own toys and would be taught the decorative arts in an easy and pleasant manner'.⁴² (Appendix D)

Comparing this pedagogical offering with that of the Bauhaus, it is evident that the majority of disciplines do not coincide, especially when considering the curriculum available in 1922-23, the final year of the Weimar period. The core Bauhaus workshops included ceramics, carpentry, glass and wall painting, while ivory carving or batik were never offered and bookbinding had a very short lifespan. The Academy also offered a course in typography and graphic lettering, something that was not formally taught at the Bauhaus until 1925, but had a

38. Latvia State Historical Archives, 1632/1/23144.

39. Ibid.

40. Kuhfuss-Wickenheiser, *Die Reimann-Schule*, 143.

41. Dedo von Kanowski, *Modern Art of Metalwork. Bröhan-Museum. State Museum of Art Nouveau, Art Deco and Functionalism (1889 - 1939)* (Berlin: Bröhan Museum, 2001), 278.

42. Latvia State Historical Archives, 1632/1/23144.

long tradition at the Reimann. In October 1926 the Academy expanded its course catalogue, now offering seventeen different disciplines available for study.⁴³ (Appendix E) The main additions were the printing workshop, book illustration, advertising and poster design, decorative painting, religious art, interior design and a course on art history and theory. Several of these, such as book illustration and religious art, find no equivalent in the Bauhaus curriculum, while the ‘architecture of interior design’ course pre-empts the architectural department at Dessau by nearly a year, although the Bauhaus did have a carpentry workshop that engaged in furniture design from 1921.⁴⁴

Whatever Maxy may have seen in Weimar in 1922, it did not directly translate into the organisation of the Academy of Decorative Arts in 1924 and not even in 1926 when he joined the latter in an official capacity, thus invalidating the possibility that he was the originator of the Academy under the influence of the Bauhaus. Cărbăș has traced the origin of this myth back to Maxy himself, suggesting that the artist’s growing prominence later in life led him to overestimate his youthful achievements and his status within the avant-garde.⁴⁵ For example, according to the chronology in the catalogue for Maxy’s major 1965 retrospective, on the occasion of his 70th birthday, he is described as taking over the directorship of the Academy in 1924.⁴⁶ Equally, in a 1971 interview in the magazine *Arta*, Maxy recalled:

In Germany I went to Dessau, I looked, I inquired, I was shown the way they were organised, the possibilities of a modern decorative art emerging from the collaboration between artists and craftsmen. Returning from Germany, I had the idea

43. Ibid.

44. Information from the Bauhaus Museum, Dessau, visited in August 2017. Whilst Bauhaus literature is plentiful the following works have been most useful with regards to the institution’s pedagogical programme: Bergdoll and Dickerman, *Bauhaus 1919-1933*; Howard Dearstyne, *Inside the Bauhaus* (London: Architectural Press, 1986); Magdalena Droste, *Bauhaus 1919-1933* (Köln: Taschen & Bauhaus-Archiv, 2002); Rainer Wick and Gabriele Diana Grawe, *Teaching at the Bauhaus* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2000). The original presentation albums of the Weimar Bauhaus, which documented the various workshops, the Haus am Horn and the 1923 exhibition, have also been published: Klaus-Jürgen Winkler, *Bauhaus-Alben*, 4 vols. (Weimar: Verlag der Bauhaus-Universität, 2006-2009).

45. Cărbăș, ‘The Shadow of the Object’, 130.

46. *Expoziția retrospectivă M. H. Maxy*, exh. cat. (București: Arta Grafică, 1965).

to propose a collaboration to the Vespremie family; my first proposal in 1925, with *Integral*, with those particular workshops, with exhibition spaces, with events.⁴⁷

As Cărăbaș points out, and as we have established above, the Bauhaus headquarters were still in Weimar during Maxy's time in Germany and in all likelihood the link between this institutions and the Academy 'seems to have been made retrospectively'.⁴⁸ What really is at stake here is the educational aspect of the Academy and its origins, perhaps perceived as being its more innovative and impactful outcome. Maxy is frequently described as having taught at the Academy, or even as having been especially invited by Vespremie to instruct the painting and art theory classes.⁴⁹ There is however no real evidence of this and Maxy's name does not appear on any of the Academy's course catalogues of 1924 or 1926, even though quite a number of prominent Romanian arts practitioners were involved, offering a wide range of approaches. (Appendix E) For instance, some of the teaching staff were members of the more traditionalist faction of the Romanian arts community, such as sculptor Cornel Medrea, painter Francisc Șirato, classics professor George Murnu, muralist Cecilia Cuțescu-Storck or draughtsman Jean Al. Steriadi. The avant-garde was present with fewer members, the most prominent being Marcel Iancu and graphic designer Sigismund Maur. There is less detailed information about teachers in the first course list of 1924, but the names that are mentioned - Janeta Scăeru Teclu and Cornel Medrea - were still with the Academy in 1926. The exception was Milița Petrașcu who only taught sculpture and composition at the newly opened Academy in 1924, having recently returned from her period of study with Constantin Brancusi in Paris. Once more, Vespremie's institution can be seen to be connected to the latest developments in art and design, and perhaps not only that as the special section for children and young people was under the patronage of Isabella Sadoveanu, a well-known pedagogue and feminist.

Maxy himself acknowledged Vespremie's role as the founder of the Academy and highlighted his educational vocation and technical abilities in an article in *Integral* in

47. Mihai Driscu, 'Retrospective. M. H. Maxy', *Arta*, no. 4-5 (1971): 52-54, 53.

48. Cărăbaș, 'The Shadow of the Object', 130.

49. Marcus, *Șapte momente*, 52; Alina-Ruxandra Mircea, 'Arhitectura, mașina și interiorul modernist', *Arhitectura*, no. 2 (644) (2013): 42-47, 44.

December 1926.⁵⁰ According to Vespremie himself, he led courses for children aged four and a half to twelve years of age, as well as courses for adults, with the highest number of students reaching 115, quite an achievement for the Academy's brief life.⁵¹ In the memoirs of Liana, Maxy's daughter, the organisational division between the workshops and the exhibition spaces is shown to have existed from the beginning of the collaboration between Maxy and Vespremie. Liana reveals that it was in fact Mela Maxy, the artist's wife, who contracted an association with Vespremie. Having seen an advertisement for the Academy, she drew up a proposal that involved Vespremie running the educational activities, with Maxy and herself taking over the commercial and administrative aspects. This led to the Academy's move to its new address Str. Câmpineanu 17, which also became the Maxy family home, and to the opening of the permanent selling exhibition.⁵²

Maxy's involvement with the Academy in late 1926 led to *Integral*, his own avant-garde publication, becoming the mouthpiece of the institution. Thus, most of the information about the Academy's programme, staff and output after this date was disseminated through advertising spreads, photographs and articles in *Integral*, another factor perhaps that has led to Vespremie's contribution being sidelined. In the early months of 1927 advertisements for the Academy continued to be published in *Integral* with the same information about its staff, classes and selling exhibition. In June 1927 however, an advertisement announced that the Academy has passed under Maxy's artistic direction. This was the moment when Vespremie decided to leave Bucharest and travel to Latvia.

Andrei Vespremie in Latvia

Vespremie arrived in Latvia in May or early June 1927, although his motives for leaving Bucharest to settle in Riga remain unclear.⁵³ His own account to the Latvian authorities cite family reasons,⁵⁴ and the only other source of information is Liana Maxy, in whose memoirs

50. M. H. Maxy, 'Expoziția Academiei Artelor Decorative', *Integral*, no. 9 (December 1926): 14.

51. Latvia State Historical Archives, 1632/1/ 23144.

52. Liana Maxy, *Nucleul magic* (Tel Aviv: Integral, 1986), 191-192.

53. Latvia State Historical Archives, 3234/2/25150. His Romanian passport was issued on 29 April 1927 and on 8th June he obtained a visa from the Riga prefecture.

54. Ibid. In his application to Ministry of Internal Affairs for Latvian citizenship, Vespremie states: 'I came to Latvia to visit relatives and friends and I stayed here, as I married a Latvian citizen.'

the narrative acquires some curiously romanticised aspects. Vespremie's departure is blamed on the unfaithfulness of Victoria, his Bessarabian wife, and he is even described as contemplating a crime of passion which Mela Maxy skilfully averts. According to Liana, the artist was yearning for his hometown Riga and its Baltic shores, which he had supposedly left behind some ten years previously.⁵⁵ This is probably the earliest occurrence of Vespremie's perceived 'foreignness', and may thus be at the root of this enduring myth, as scholarly accounts that pre-date Liana Maxy's memoirs do not mention his nationality.⁵⁶ The accuracy of the memoirs is further disputable in its description of Vespremie's departure from Bucharest. Liana recounts how the artist wanted to leave quietly on a Riga-bound train when his Romanian friends discovered this and organised a surprise farewell at the station, yet this passage contains another factual error. Vespremie's literary double recounts the efforts of Jacob Sternberg in convincing him to remain in Bucharest by reading him a letter from Vilna Troupe actor Joseph Buloff to a friend in Vilnius, describing life for Jewish artists in the Romanian capital in glowing terms.⁵⁷ The text of this missive, cited by Liana, is in fact an open letter Buloff had written in 1925 to a Warsaw literary magazine.⁵⁸ By 1927 Buloff had already left Bucharest for the United States, finding it difficult to make ends meet in Romania with the Vilna Troupe.

Although, as we have seen, Liana Maxy's autobiography is frequently flawed, there is probably truth in its claim that no replacement could be found for Vespremie's role as artistic educator, eventually leading the Academy's closure and to the opening of Maxy's new solo venture Studio Maxy in 1929. A comparison of the June 1927 advert in *Integral* with previous promotional materials suggests that the educational dimension of the institution was losing ground. And although Maxy did do some teaching later in his career, most notably supporting young artists during the period of anti-Jewish legislation instituted under Romania's right-wing dictatorship, Vespremie was much more steadfast in his role as an

55. Maxy, *Nucleul Magic*, 203-205.

56. I could find no other mention of Vespremie as a foreign national before Liana Maxy's account. As Liana was born in 1923 and was only 4 years old when Vespremie left Romania, she must have compiled her account of this period based on information received from her parents or relatives.

57. Maxy, *Nucleul Magic*, 217-219.

58. The whole letter is quoted in Romanian translation in Israil Bercovici, *O sută de ani de teatru evreiesc în România* (București: Integral, 1998), 130-131. The original was published in Warsaw in *Literarische Bleter*, no. 59 (19 June 1925).

educator.⁵⁹ In Riga, he worked as a drawing and applied arts teacher in some of the city's most prominent Jewish gymnasia, teaching up to 1,200 students a year and organising after-school activity groups in multiple disciplines.⁶⁰ To advance his career he undertook further training at Riga's Jewish Pedagogical Institute and in 1931 successfully passed exams in pedagogy, psychology and history of pedagogy. In 1937 and 1938, he attended further courses aimed at applied arts teachers, organised by the Latvian Ministry for Education.⁶¹ According to a reference letter dated 1934 from the Ezra gymnasium, where he had worked since arriving in Latvia in 1927, Vespremie was:

[...] a very gifted and diligent pedagogue and professional. Through his work he was able to awaken in the students active interest in his taught subjects and he was able to achieve excellent results not just with gifted students, but also with less gifted students in developing their art and their skills.⁶²

At least three photographs of Vespremie with students of various age groups have survived. Images from a 1934 class trip and end of the school year celebrations in 1939 can be found in the Yad Vashem archives, while a 1937 class photo from the Ezra Gymnasium is preserved at the Jewish Museum in Latvia. (Figs. 2.4-2.6) Furthermore, it is due to an account by a former student, the artist Boris Lurie, that we know how Vespremie's life ended in the Kaiserwald concentration camp, probably in 1943-44.⁶³

Lurie[']s drawing teacher [was] Mr. Vespremi (sic), who he admired as a teacher and a man but thought that he couldn't be an artist because he was too good a craftsman.

59. Magda Cârnci, *Rădăcini și ecouri ale avangardei în colecțiile de grafică ale Bibliotecii Academiei Române* (București: Academia Română, 2011), 16. Maxy taught at the School of Fine Arts for Jews from 1941 to 1944, during the period when anti-Semitic legislation curtailed the rights of Romania's Jewish population, including access to education. During this time he had many students that became well-known artists, including his second wife Mimi Șaraga-Maxy. After the Second World War he taught at the Nicolae Grigorescu Fine Art Institute in Bucharest, however his main professional activity was that of museum director.

60. Latvia State Historical Archives, 1632/1/23144.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

63. This approximate dating is given in Aleksandrs Feigmanis, *Latvian Jewish Intelligentsia Victims of the Holocaust*, (Riga: Feigmanis, 2006), accessed 22 September 2016, <https://www.jewishgen.org/latvia/latvianIntelligentsia.html>.

When they ran into each other in the Riga Ghetto, Vespremi spoke to the seventeen-year-old Lurie (1941) not as a fellow Jew or fellow prisoner, but as a fellow artist. Lurie found this definition both gratifying and disconcerting. [...] Lurie recounted that Vespremi was later beaten to death in Kaiserwald when, one morning, he was unable to awake on time at reveille.⁶⁴

It is unfortunate that even this moving epitaph questions Vespremie's artistic abilities, as though these cannot co-exist with technical skill. This appraisal had dogged Vespremie since the beginning of his career, when Nenițescu's overview of the newly opened Academy praised his metalwork and bookbindings, while at the same time observing that his skill and industry were not matched by artistic value.⁶⁵ Similarly, Maxy's own account of the Academy in December 1926 contained some double-edged praise. According to him, although the school had many students, well-run workshops and good production levels, its output was too stylistically diverse and the Academy suffered by following trends, rather than creating them.⁶⁶ As we see in the following chapter, this statement is particularly problematic when considering the question of influence in the relationship between Maxy and Vespremie. Furthermore, this perception of Vespremie as being technically proficient yet bereft of artistic vision may be at the root of his erasure from the history of art and design, despite his important contribution to the development of applied arts in Romania.

Vespremie continued to pursue an artistic career in Latvia alongside his pedagogical work, as can be gleaned from a small number of sources. According to his own account to the Latvian authorities, he had an exhibition in Riga in 1930 showcasing his graphic works, as well as metal and wood objects.⁶⁷ The catalogue of this exhibition was submitted with other paperwork to the Latvian authorities, but has unfortunately not been preserved in the archives. A newspaper advertisement shows that the exhibition took place from 1st to 30th November at the E. Ettinger bookshop in Riga.⁶⁸ Earlier that year Vespremie had also been commissioned by the Second Riga Tennis Club to decorate the rooms of the Jewish Club for

64. Igor Satanovsky, ed., *KZ - Kampf - Kunst. Boris Lurie: NO!Art* (Köln: Boris Lurie Art Foundation, 2014), 48-49.

65. Nenițescu, *Scieri din istoria artei*, 129.

66. Maxy, 'Expoziția Academiei Artelor Decorative'.

67. Latvia State Historical Archives, 1632/1/23144.

68. 'Ausstellung graphischer Werke von Andor Vespremi', *Rigasche Rundschau*, 1 November 1930.

their annual party. Themed ‘Paris-Montmartre’, the event was inspired by infamous Parisian nightspots such as the Moulin-Rouge or the Jockey Club and guests were promised ‘two live music bands, lovely dancing girls, and other surprises’.⁶⁹ After the festivities a note appeared in the local newspaper acknowledging that Vespremie’s ‘energetic initiative and elaborate execution’ greatly contributed to the success of the evening.⁷⁰ His patrons must have been pleased, as Vespremie was also invited to contribute to the 1933 annual party which took place at the Auto-Touring Club and which lured guests with ‘an American bar, an Eastern cafe [and] a Russian teahouse’.⁷¹ Perhaps Vespremie’s experience creating decorations for the 1925 Festival of Jewish Romanian Writers and Artists in Bucharest contributed to his success, as well as his time at the Reimann School which was famed for its annual fancy dress parties.⁷² Nonetheless, he does not appear to have joined Riga’s avant-garde artistic groups and only one piece of evidence has come to light linking Vespremie to such a group. In 1928 the Association of Riga Graphic Artists founded the Free Applied Arts Studios, an endeavour similar to the Academy of Decorative Arts, offering nineteen different disciplines, from etching and woodcuts, to poster design, bookbinding and painting on fabric. In a brief newspaper announcement, Vespremie is listed as one of the teachers, amongst members of the Latvian avant-garde such as Raimonds Šiško or Sigismunds Vidbergs who was also the Association’s president.⁷³ However, no further information has come to light and Vespremie does not mention his involvement with the Association in his otherwise detailed reports to the Latvian authorities - although he includes information about his membership in the Latvian Fine Artists Trade Union - so it is possible this engagement did not last long. A photograph dated May 1928 from the collection of the Jewish Museum in Riga also shows him in a

69. ‘Richt-Abend in Paris-Montmartre’, *Rigasche Rundschau*, 28 January 1930.

70. ‘Das große Berliner Reitturnier’, *Rigasche Rundschau*, 8 February 1930.

71. ‘Chacun à son gout!’, *Rigasche Rundschau*, 15 February 1933.

72. According to von Kanowski, *Modern Art of Metalwork*, 278: ‘The “Reimann Balls” and summer fetes and, as of 1912, the organised fancy dress parties aroused much attention in the Berlin of the twenties and culminated in 1926 in a fancy dress ball with around seven thousand people in the Berlin Sportpalast, and a float parade on Unter den Linten in 1928.’

73. ‘Rīgas grafiķu biedrība...’, *Latvijas Grāmatrūpniecības Apskats*, no. 4 (1 October 1928): 10. I am indebted to Irēna Bužinska from The Latvian National Art Museum for directing me to this article and for translating it. See also Suzanne Pourchier-Plasseraud, *Arts and a Nation. The Role of Visual Arts and Artists in the Making of the Latvian Identity 1905-1940* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 332, on the Association of Riga Graphic Artists.

pensive pose alongside colleagues in rather more performative stances at a gathering of the Latvian Jewish Artists Society. (Fig. 2.7)

Vespremie evidently found some sense of community in Latvia and appears to have settled into his new life both professionally and personally, more so than in the other places he had lived and worked. In May 1931, he was married once more to Gisela Freudenberg⁷⁴, the daughter of a merchant from Kuldiga, and three years later he obtained his Latvian citizenship.⁷⁵ By 1932 he was earning 250 lats a month and was considered ‘capable of supporting himself and his family’ by the Latvian authorities.⁷⁶ He does not appear to have had children from either his first or his second marriage, and thus no personal archive is known to have survived.⁷⁷ Apart from the documents in the Latvian National Archives, one of the few traces left by the Vespremie family are the names Andrey and Gisela on the memorial wall of the Riga Ghetto Museum, alongside a photograph of Vespremie and his fellow teachers at the Ezra gymnasium, a fitting remembrance for a gifted pedagogue. (Figs. 2.8 and 2.9)

The Modern Interior in Bucharest and the Aftermath of the Academy of Decorative Arts

Having reviewed the history of the Academy and its creators, shedding much-needed light on its genesis and development, it is now necessary to consider the state of the applied arts and especially the modern interior in Bucharest in order to position the institution in its environment. In the aftermath of the First World War and the creation of Greater Romania, Bucharest became the capital of a much larger country and its population, as well as its surface, increased exponentially.⁷⁸ Like Vespremie, many of the country’s new and old

74. Latvia State Historical Archives, 3234/2/25150.

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid. For comparison, a daily newspaper in Riga in 1932 was priced at about 0.10 lats.

77. A descendant from another branch of Gisela’s family informed me that neither Gisela nor her sister had any children.

78. According to Luminița Machedon and Ernie Scoffam, *Romanian Modernism. The Architecture of Bucharest, 1920-1940* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 1999), 28: ‘The population of Bucharest grew from 380,000 in 1918 to 650,000 in 1930 and 870,000 in 1939, and its territory expanded from 5,600 to 7,800 hectares within the same period.’

citizens from less affluent backgrounds came to the capital seeking a better life. Laws passed by the municipality in the early 1920s sought to encourage the construction of new homes and to support those most affected by the conflict in accessing property. An additional law passed in 1927 encouraged the development of collective housing.⁷⁹ This led to large numbers of new urban dwellings, whose inhabitants were often experiencing modern living for the first time.

In the eyes of Bucharest's avant-garde, these new homes sorely lacked the streamlined harmonious aesthetics that should have accompanied the advances made by contemporary architecture. Avant-garde periodicals describe them in less than flattering terms, deploring the heavily furnished rooms of a new generation arriving in the capital from the provinces and seeking to exhibit their new status:

When the new gentleman and lady, with their mortgaged bedroom freshly decorated and in it the walnut commode and the lemontree bureau, the *dormeuse* flanked by a bear skin on the floor as seen in the latest sensational movie, when this happy couple looks for something in the same “style” to decorate their walls, they should not go to Maxy's studio in the hope of finding clay pots and paintings with ashtrays, cigarettes and every banknote from the National Bank artfully fanned out.⁸⁰

The ‘clay pots’ so scornfully referred to are representative of the vogue for a commercialised national style that proliferated in the aftermath of Romania's unification in an attempt to create a unitary vision for a country incorporating significant ethnic diversity. Architects such as Ion D. Traianescu called for ‘Romanian homes, furniture, paintings with Romanian subjects, carpets, sculptures, music, theatre literature’.⁸¹ Demand far outstripped traditionally made objects from Romania's diverse regions and industrial production began to expand, with ceramic objects becoming one of the more ubiquitous outcomes of this process.⁸² At its

79. Carmen Popescu, *Le style national roumain. Construire une nation à travers l'architecture, 1881-1945* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2004), 227.

80. Ilk, *Maxy*, 15, quoting Felix Aderca, *Viața literară*, no. 50 (1927).

81. Popescu, *Le style national roumain*, 207. The chapter entitled ‘Style official de la “grande Roumanie”’, 205-282 discusses the rise of the national style as official policy.

82. Maria Camelia Ene, *Stilul național în artele vizuale. Artele decorative* (București: NOI Media Print, 2011), 111.

most extreme, this trend led to Romania's absence from the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes which took place in Paris in 1925, celebrating modern decorative arts. Instead, as already mentioned, an alternative exhibition took place at the Musée du Jeu de Paume entitled Romanian Art Ancient and Modern with rooms dedicated to folk art, religious embroidery, religious painting and even an entire iconostasis. In the 'Modern Art' section, the largest number of works belonged to Nicolae Grigorescu, the famed Romanian impressionist, who had been dead since 1907.⁸³ Although Maxy probably did not see these exhibitions in situ, he expressed his discontent at the lack of a Romanian presence at Paris's international event in a text that appeared in the Academy's 1926 brochure. (See Appendix E) The text is unsigned, but its subject and rhetoric suggest it was written by Maxy. Romania's absence, he believed, was rooted in the widespread conviction that the country's only valuable contribution to the decorative arts was the folk art of its rural population:

Romania was not present at the Paris Exhibition. Those responsible for this decision were convinced that other than the simple and instinctive art of the Romanian peasant [...], we could have nothing new or interesting to show, as if our urban dwellers do not build their homes, decorate their interiors or clothe their bodies.⁸⁴

This observation may have been one of the catalysts for Maxy's involvement with the Academy of Decorative Arts, one of the few Bucharest institutions whose aesthetic did not conform to the trend for a national style. Vespremie was a capable pedagogue, but the Maxy family was more in tune with the commercial potential of the venture. As the next chapter shows, Maxy's wife Mela was behind the initiative to open a permanent exhibition space for selling to the public. The exhibition included works by a large number of practitioners in both the applied and the fine arts, some of whom, but not all, were on the Academy's staff. Although no catalogue with a fully itemised list exists, the promotional brochure that also contained Maxy's text reveals the types of objects submitted by each artist. (Appendix E) Vespremie received top billing for his metal objects, bound books, lamps and ivory carvings. Maxy was listed second, exhibiting modern furniture, cushions, batik and carpets. Both

83. *Exposition de l'art roumain ancien et modern*, exh. cat. (Paris: Imprimerie Georges Petit, 1925).

84. Text from the Academy's 1926 prospectus, Latvia State Historical Archives, 1632/1/ 23144. See Appendix E for full translation.

Vespremie and Maxy were credited with the designs, while the execution was ascribed to the workshop staff. The exhibition also included ceramic, crystal, lace and leather items, as well as more traditional sections for painting, sculpture and works on paper. The overall design of the exhibition was credited to Maxy.

What the work produced by Vespremie and his colleagues actually looked like is revealed in a small number of images. Five photographs of the selling exhibition exist in the archives of the Romanian National Art Museum.⁸⁵ (Figs. 2.10a-d) They suggest the existence of at least two display spaces, with parquet flooring and large double doors, arranged to resemble functional living areas. The only indication that these spaces were not part of an actual modernist home were the discreet labels found next to the objects. Liana Maxy described her mother Mela making the final preparations for the opening, which took place on 23 October 1926: after taking one last look at the objects and making some final adjustments, Mela settled down in a modernist armchair to contemplate the display. The next day the doors opened to welcome art critics and collectors ready to buy, as well as the ‘snobs’, as Liana branded them, and the elegant ladies of Bucharest, alongside journalists, writers, actors and friends from all branches of the arts.⁸⁶ Group photographs were taken and Liana sat on Vespremie’s lap between Maxy and Mela, surrounded by the Academy’s staff and apprentices. (Fig. 2.11) In another image Mr. Fischer-Galați posed amongst the Academy’s teachers, with Iancu and Maur, as well as the Maxy and Vespremie families. (Fig. 2.12) The group photographs were taken in one of the exhibition rooms, as indicated by the graphic works displayed on the walls and the carpet by Maxy visible on the floor.

Although so picturesquely described by Liana, the grand opening did not attract much attention in the press. The cultural daily *Rampa* published a short announcement prior to the event on 3 October and a review of the exhibition on 3 November by the critic Petru Comarnescu.⁸⁷ He praised the aesthetic unity of the exhibits, a feat that he felt had been lacking in Romanian exhibitions except perhaps those organised by the *Contimporanul* group. Nonetheless, Comarnescu was ambivalent about Maxy’s work: while the cushions

85. Romanian National Art Museum, Documentation department, fond M. H. Maxy.

86. Maxy, *Nucleul Magic*, 195.

87. ‘Vernisagii’, *Rampa*, 3 October 1924; Petru Comarnescu, ‘Expozitia Academiei artelor decorative’, *Rampa*, 3 November 1926.

benefited from the application of cubist geometries and striking colours, the furniture was found to be lacking in style and material and his paintings far too eclectic. Vespremie's metalwork however exhibited 'real artistic value' and its 'sculptural stylisation' was worthy of admiration. Two candleholders in particular exhibited a well-proportioned linearity. Overall, Comarnescu was impressed with this venture which he hoped would educate the citizens of Bucharest about the importance of tasteful interiors and a unitary style.

In comparison to the cluttered interiors typical of Romanian homes at this time the Academy's showrooms were perfectly restrained and minimalist, the geometries of the objects echoing those of the furniture and paintings. If, as we have seen, Bucharest's petty bourgeoisie had a penchant for heavy furnishings, wealthy Bucharest homes from the early 1920s were not much different, exhibiting a preference for opulence, with busy, highly-decorated interiors and surfaces covered with heavy pile rugs and patterned textiles.⁸⁸ The prevalence of this style is evident not only from historical accounts, but also from the content of today's museum collections. The Museum of Art Collections is a satellite of the Romanian National Art Museum which preserves over thirty private collections in their entirety, comprising decorative arts, painting and sculpture, amassed during the twentieth century. None of the collections contain what might be termed modern applied arts objects, gathering instead an eclectic array of Romanian folk art, objects of Middle Eastern and Asian provenance or pre-20th century West European decorative items.

An even more pertinent example involves two memorial house museums located in the same early 1930s modernist apartment building, both containing objects produced in the Academy's workshops. Liviu Rebreanu and Ion Minulescu were successful writers and respected members of Bucharest's cultural world. In 1934, Rebreanu bought an apartment in this building for his daughter Puia-Florica. She died in 1995, bequeathing to the state the space and a wide-ranging collection of objects that had belonged to her parents.⁸⁹ The Fanny and Liviu Rebreanu memorial house is a good example of a more maximalist approach to interior decoration, with a strong nod to the national style, containing for instance heavily

88. Popescu, *Le style national roumain*, 233-234.

89. 'Casa memorială Liviu și Fanny Liviu Rebreanu', Muzeul Național al Literaturii Române, accessed 6 Mar 2018, <http://mnlr.ro/case-memoriale/casa-memoriala-liviu-si-fanny-rebreanu/>.

decorated wooden furniture, colourful ceramics and a display of icons that spans an entire wall. (Figs. 2.13a-b) In this context, a tobacco box by Maxy with a cubist motif is an anomaly within the collection and is further explored in the following chapter. The Rebreanu apartment is representative of the tastes of the Romanian middle classes at this time, who were unlikely to seek out objects aligning with the aesthetics of the artistic avant-garde.

The owner of the neighbouring apartment, Ion Minulescu, is an altogether more complex case. Known in Romania mainly as a poet, he was in fact a renaissance man who also wrote prose and theatre plays, held important public positions, acting as director of the National Theatre (1926) and as Minister for the Arts (1922-1940). He collected both old and new art copiously. (Figs. 2.14a-b) His home, although far from Maxy's vision of geometric minimalism, is clearly attuned to the ideas of the artistic avant-garde. The collection includes paintings, works on paper and sculptures by many prominent Romanian artists, from the precursors of the avant-garde such as Iosif Iser or Camil Ressu, to its main proponents such as Maxy, Hans Mattis-Teutsch or Victor Brauner, whose 1924 portrait of Minulescu is today one of the museum's most highly prized pieces. The decorative arts are well represented with an eclectic selection typical of many Romanian collectors, from regional folk art pieces and icons to Greek and Roman artefacts, Spanish polychrome sculptures and a wooden Chinese cabinet.⁹⁰ However, the collection does not, like many others, eschew modern applied arts and Minulescu was evidently a committed patron of the Academy of Decorative Arts. Pieces acquired include a selection of metalwork by Maxy and Vespremie, as well as books with cubist leather covers bound in the Academy's workshops. Nonetheless, even a supporter of avant-garde aesthetics such as Minulescu did not follow the example of the Academy's minimalist exhibit: even the metal bowls and trays he had purchased from the Academy were displayed on a wooden sideboard underneath a large framed icon, together with a samovar and some pottery.⁹¹ (Fig. 2.15)

This intermingling of tradition and modernity seems to have served the Academy well.

90. *Colecția Ion Minulescu* (București: Arta Grafică, 1968). The collection also included a large number of works by contemporary women artists.

91. This is based on images from the museum's 1968 catalogue, *Colecția Ion Minulescu*. The arrangement aimed to replicate how the house looked during Minulescu's life. The display still follows this arrangement very closely today.

Despite its purported position as an avant-garde and therefore marginal endeavour, its supporters hailed from the upper echelons of Bucharest society. Its main financial backer, as previously mentioned, was Heinrich Fischer-Galați, a wealthy industrialist whose father Max Fischer had founded a shoe polish and metal packaging factory in Galați in the late nineteenth century. Fischer-Galați was a passionate supporter of Esperanto, as well as a collector of printed materials, which led him to create the Bibliofilia society, a commercial venture dealing in antique books and prints.⁹² The Academy's two other directors, alongside Fischer-Galați, were Cecilia Cuțescu-Stork, professor of decorative arts at the state-run School of Fine Arts and Jean Al. Steriadi, director of the Kalinderu Museum. Both were well-respected artists and took part in the Academy's educational activities. According to its promotional material, the Academy also counted amongst its patronage committee a banker, senator, member of the Romanian Academy, as well as professors and government ministers, including Minister for the Arts Ion Minulescu.⁹³ (Appendix E)

How many of these supporters were also clients is difficult to determine at present.

Romania's communist past has precluded in-depth studies into the practice of arts patronage and even a prominent individual such as Minulescu, who remained popular as a poet after his death in 1944, has not been the subject of a serious study regarding his collecting practices.⁹⁴ Names of the Academy's patrons occasionally surface in archival documents, giving a glimpse of who they might have been. Many were wealthy Jewish entrepreneurs, such as Abraham Leib Zissu who also provided financial support to Maxy's avant-garde publication *Integral*, or Micu Zentler, who commissioned metalwork from Vespremie. Zissu, a successful businessman, was also a committed Zionist, a writer and a publicist. In 1928 he

92. Documents pertaining to the family and to Heinrich's artistic interests are held at the Romanian National Library, fond Saint Georges, Fischer-Galați donation. In 1916, before creating Bibliofilia, Heinrich organised an extensive exhibition of works on paper in Bucharest, containing over 600 engravings, woodcuts, lithographs etc. from fifteenth century to contemporary works. The artists ranged from Dürer and Rembradt to Toulouse-Lautrec and Hokusai, and items were on loan from various local collectors, including members of the Romanian royal family.

93. Latvia State Historical Archives, 1632/1/23144.

94. A study of art patronage in Bucharest is needed, especially in view of the objects that are 'hiding in plain view' within satellite collections such as the Rebreanu and the Minulescu memorial houses. The Maxy items in these collections have not been discussed in other literature and it was during a chance visit that I recognised the style of the Academy's metalwork in the objects on display.

commissioned the architect Michael Rachlis to build a luxurious modernist villa in the affluent Gr newald suburb of Berlin. The finished product was widely admired and the magazine *Innendekoration* published an illustrated feature in April 1930 revealing wide open spaces, clean lines and perfectly proportioned geometries in the arrangement of its orderly interiors.⁹⁵ (Figs. 2.16a-b) Although paintings, murals and decorative objects adorned the rooms, they were judiciously and sparsely displayed, affording each item the space to be appreciated. The quality of the images in *Innendekoration* does not allow a clear attribution of the objects - even if some of the metalwork in the art deco bar does appear similar to Vespremie and Maxy's output - however, it is evident that such a habitation was much closer to the aesthetics of the Academy of Decorative Arts than the interiors one might see in Bucharest, even in the homes of progressive intellectuals such as Minulescu. By contrast with Zissu, oil magnate Micu Zentler commissioned architect Cristofi Cercez known for his use of the Romanian national style, to build him a Bucharest villa in 1911. Zentler commissioned at least one piece of metalwork from Vespremie, as revealed by one of the archival photographs of the Academy's showroom. This piece is discussed in the following chapter, however it may not have been the only one. A label can be glimpsed in the photograph, positioned in front of the piece, which reads 'Radiator cover, part of Director M. Zentler's commission'.⁹⁶ (Fig. 2.10c) If Zentler's house was distinctly neo-Romanian in style, its interior may well have been in a traditional vein too and indeed the Vespremie piece, with its intricate and figurative design, was not amongst the Academy's more daringly minimalist offerings. Nonetheless, some patrons did combine old and new, as exemplified by Tudor Vianu, a well-known literary theoretician and art critic, also of Jewish origin. Reminiscing about his childhood home, his son Ion Vianu, born in 1934, described a universe where remnants of Ottoman Bucharest rubbed shoulders with the latest modernist aesthetics:

There are paintings, carpets everywhere, on the floor, on the walls, oriental, but also an avant-garde one, cubist, signed across its width "Maxy", right by the entrance.

95. 'Ein Landhaus von Michael Rachlis. Haus Gen. Dir. Zissu in Berlin-Gr newald', *Innendekoration* (April 1930): 139-142. See also Heidede Becker, *Villa Zissu - ein Haus der Moderne in Gr newald* (Havelland: Filum Rubrum, 2016).

96. Romanian National Art Museum, Documentation department, fond M. H. Maxy. The caption is hard to make out in copies of the image and even in the original without magnifying equipment. It has been transcribed on the reverse of the photograph, probably by museum staff when cataloguing the image.

There are settees, sofas. The one by the entrance shows the influence of Modern Style and is more comfortable than the wooden bench from the small office.⁹⁷

Maxy's short lived Atelier Integral, as well as the business he opened in 1929 after the closure of the Academy, indicate his interest in the commercial aspect of design. So much so that art historian Erwin Kessler has critiqued the artist's use of 'corporate aesthetics' in order to become 'integrated in the market'.⁹⁸ Yet his peers, writing about Maxy's work in various avant-garde publications, bemoaned the 'indifference and barbarity' of the local populace in the face of 'an intellectualisation [...] of the interior'.⁹⁹ Maxy himself blamed financial reasons for the closure of the Academy¹⁰⁰ and the opening of his eponymous Studio, but if the 1929 economic downturn doubtlessly played its part, the absence of Vespremie's pedagogical vision probably did too. As *Integral's* short-lived run ended in 1928, information about Studio Maxy can only be found scattered in a few other publications of the period. *Tiparnița literară*, a monthly magazine with the tagline 'Criticism - Art - Politics' published between 1928 and 1931, frequently reproduced images of Maxy's work from this period, yet gave little factual information. In the first issue of the magazine, an advertisement revealed that the Academy was still operating at its usual address Str. Câmpineanu 17, but had been renamed The Decorative Arts: Academy of Modern Applied Art (Artele decorative: academie de artă modernă aplicată), and that Maxy was about to open a new exhibition on 4 November showcasing the modern interior.¹⁰¹ (Fig. 2.17) The following issue contained images of such an interior and several objects by Maxy, probably from the exhibition, although this was not explicitly stated and the images were interspersed amongst poetry and literary criticism.¹⁰² The interior was even more minimalist than the Academy's 1926 display, containing hardly any curved lines and far fewer objects. (Fig. 2.18) An armchair, a shelving unit, and a chaise-longue with a built-in bookcase bordered the edges of a carpet with a cubist motif. Four paintings, toeing a fine line between the abstract and the figurative, adorned the walls.

97. Ion Vianu, *Amor intellectualis* (București: Polirom, 2010), 23.

98. Erwin Kessler, 'Retro-Gardes', in *Colours of the Avant-Garde. Romanian Art 1910-1950*, ed. E. Kessler (Rome: Gangemi, 2011), 9–20, 18-19.

99. Ilk, *Maxy*, 16, quoting Felix Aderca, *Adevărul*, 22 November 1928.

100. M. H. Maxy, 'Contribuțiuni sumare la cunoașterea mișcării moderne de la noi', *unu*, no. 33 (February 1931).

101. *Tiparnița literară* I, no. 1 (October 1928): 31.

102. *Tiparnița literară* I, no. 2 (November 1928).

Decorative objects were sparsely arranged: a vase, a cushion, and a few books, probably bound in leather in the Academy's workshops. In early 1929, more objects by Maxy were illustrated and another advertisement revealed that the Academy's exhibition space was being used for displays by other artists, perhaps even rented out¹⁰³, or for group exhibitions for Maxy and his peers.¹⁰⁴ In the autumn of 1929, the first mention of Maxy's new venture finally appeared:

Studio Maxy is the name of the shop-permanent exhibition of objects, furniture and decorations open on Calea Victoriei, across the road from the White Church, by our friend the painter M. H. Maxy.¹⁰⁵

As Liana Maxy reveals, this also meant a move for the family whose home had previously been on the Academy's premises. Their new apartment was not far from the business, in the vicinity of Calea Victoriei, above a hairdresser's. Maxy's financial situation must have been somewhat difficult as the family was forced to downsize: the parental bedroom had to be installed in the salon and the flat was small and gloomy. Nonetheless, Maxy used his decorative nous to improve the situation, having the walls painted with geometrical shapes in pastel shades and displaying his paintings thus.¹⁰⁶

Maxy also took the opportunity to participate in national and international exhibitions, promoting his work. Romania did have a presence at the 1929 international exhibition in Barcelona and it included a decorative arts section curated by Cecilia Cuțescu-Storck. The 'Maxi Academy of Decorative Arts' (sic) exhibited fifteen items within this section: two examples of leather book bindings and one leather frame, one carpet, two metal vases, two cushions, six metal boxes and a copper tea set.¹⁰⁷ These must have stood out quite

103. *Tiparița literară* I, no. 3 (January 1929): 75. The advertisement announces the opening of an exhibition on 5 January with works by Lucia Demetriade-Bălăcescu and Lucian Grigorescu. Similar announcements can be frequently found in *Rampa* during the period 1927-9.

104. C. B., 'Expoziția dela Artele Decorative', *Tiparița literară* I, no. 6-7 (April-May 1929): 141. This was the Arta Nouă group which included Marcel Iancu, Victor Brauner and Milița Petrașcu.

105. 'Studio Maxy...', *Tiparița literară* II, no. 1 (October-November 1929): 13.

106. Maxy, *Nucleul magic*, 223-224.

107. *La Roumanie à l'Exposition Internationale de Barcelone 1929*, exh. cat. (Barcelona: J. Horta, 1929), 24. Although present in the exhibition, Maxy's work does not appear to be in any of the photographs in this

distinctively in the Romanian pavilion, whose other sections included folk art, religious art and ancient art. Furthermore, a visitor may have been hard pressed to tell the decorative arts section apart from these other displays, containing as it did an array of ceramics, floral patterned textiles and stained-glass centrepiece with a religious scene. (Fig. 2.19) A separate display celebrating the production of trade and craft schools included furniture and textiles copied after sixteenth century originals, as well as an array of religious objects.¹⁰⁸ (Fig. 2.20) If Maxy was gratified that Romania did have a presence in the exhibition, he was probably less enthusiastic about the objects chosen to decorate the national pavilion, which signalled a regression towards a neo-national, historicist style in the decorative arts. Some consolation may have been provided by a new addition to the official salons of Romanian art held annually in the capital. From 1929 an annual Official Salon of Architecture and Decorative Arts began to be held. Maxy participated with twelve objects in 1931, the Salon's final year as it turned out. As well as smaller metal items, leather book bindings and carpets, his contribution included larger pieces of furniture, such as two tables and an armchair with metal and wood components.¹⁰⁹

If the country, and indeed the capital's, wider populace never fully warmed to the modernist aesthetic of the interior, the more progressive intellectuals did and Maxy even gained long-lasting fame immortalised through a classic of Romanian literature. In Camil Petrescu's *The Bed of Proustes*, published in 1933, the heroine Madam T. opens a shop dedicated to interiors 'in the new cubist style [...] around the same time as a modernist painter'.¹¹⁰ The mention of Madame T.'s mysterious competitor is probably a reference to Maxy, while the heroine herself seems to be at least partly based on him, having returned from Berlin with progressive ideas about art and architecture.¹¹¹ Madame T.'s shop, called 'Decorative Art' contains:

publication.

108. Ibid., 34.

109. *Salonul oficial de arhitectură și arte decorative 1931*, exh. cat. (București: Luceafărul, 1931), 22.

110. Camil Petrescu, *Patul lui Procust* (Timișoara: Facla, 1973), 267. Petrescu (1894 -1957) was a writer, journalist and poet, and one of the most prominent exponents of the modernist novel in Romania. He was also a theatre critic and in 1937 published his PhD thesis entitled *The Aesthetic Modality of Theatre* (Modalitatea estetică a teatrului).

111. This theory is advanced by Cărăbaș, 'The Shadow of the Object', 134, but in light of the findings advanced by the following chapter, the mysterious Mrs. T. may well be a reference to Mela Maxy rather than M. H. Maxy.

beds [...] with geometric storage chests at one end, ready to hold modern vases and stylised statues, and inside bedsheets, [...] armchairs like hollowed-out cubes, [...] ceiling lamps instead of chandeliers, with large, matt, glass containers, [...] colourful carpets with geometric and asymmetric patterns...¹¹²

The book's hero visits the shop and delights in having his entire apartment decorated in this minimalist style. As he recalls these moments some years later, he opines that although cubist furnishings have become more widespread in Bucharest, he had been ahead of the trend.¹¹³ According to Ion Vianu, whatever interest there was did not last for very long. Even in the Vianu residence, with its Maxy carpet and Modern Style sofa, the passing of time saw 'the cubist furniture, with smooth asymmetrical surfaces' replaced by 'a more classic style'.¹¹⁴ This return to order also prefaced the political changes that led Maxy's business to finally close in the late 1930s, signalling the end of his avant-garde career.

This chapter has unsettled a number of modernist myths, from those of the 'peripheral' Romanian avant-garde to those of the 'central' figurehead that is the Bauhaus. It demonstrated once again the instability of these categories, as well their interdependence and permeability. Most importantly, the newly uncovered documents in Latvian archives contributed to piecing together for the first time Vespremie's life and career, re-establishing his Romanian citizenship and his links with avant-garde artists and collectors. Thus, the Academy of Decorative Arts was shown to be a product of the innovative teachings of the Schule Reimann and its gifted student. While Maxy's own contribution to continuing the work of Vespremie should not be diminished, his retrospective appropriation of the Academy and adoption of a more 'prominent' modernist genealogy indicate the dangers of accepting established art historical narratives based on vertical hierarchies and unidirectional influences.

112. Petrescu, *Patul lui Procust*, 268.

113. *Ibid.*, 272.

114. Vianu, *Amor intellectualis*, 28.

Chapter 3. PERFORMING OBJECTS: PRODUCTION AND PROMOTION AT THE ACADEMY OF DECORATIVE ARTS

The previous chapter surveyed the careers of Vespremie and Maxy, with their convergences and divergences. The current chapter presents the first in-depth exploration of the work they produced within the sphere of the Academy of Decorative Arts, shedding light on the institution's various activities. It begins by reconstructing the activities of three workshops - metalwork, textiles, and bookbinding - piecing together archival evidence and existing objects to establish the techniques employed, the outputs produced, and the educational activities undertaken. From production, the second section moves on to promotion and consumption, considering the Academy's visual identity through the graphic design of its publicity materials and ending with an analysis of the selling exhibition section added in 1926 under the directorship of Mela Maxy.

Throughout this section, the theoretical underpinnings presented in Chapter One are continuously present. The concept of 'circulations' is used in tracing the various artworks discussed not in terms of influence, but in terms of the journeys taken by these objects and their creators. This allows for the first time a real understanding of the contributions of both Vespremie and Maxy to the Academy's programme and outputs and leads to thoroughly documented attributions and, in some cases, reattributions. Furthermore, Fischer-Lichte's new aesthetics of performance offers a neutral framework for assessing the Academy's commercial and promotional activities, arguing that these are part and parcel of the institution's modernity rather than a proof of its deficient avant-gardism. The theatricality of promotional photographs, staged interiors and window displays, or the marketing of luxury commodities to wealthy patrons is examined as a response to a new urban modernity and its spectator-consumer, directly comparable to French or German design of the same period.

Production

Although the Academy offered as many as seventeen disciplines for study, according to its 1926 course catalogue, many of these have left few real traces and it is debatable whether they all gathered sufficient numbers of students in order to proceed. However, based on the items that have survived in various museum and private collections, it is possible to closely

examine three of the main workshops, all of which functioned throughout the Academy's entire life and which were closely linked to both Maxy and Vespremie. As well as the close readings of the workshops which follow below, this thesis also contains three newly compiled catalogues raisonnés of their outputs in Appendices F, G, and H.

The Metal Workshop

For many reasons, the metal workshop constitutes the most suitable case study for shedding light on the activities of the Academy including its origins, outputs and legacy and will thus be the most amply discussed. Firstly, thanks to their durability, metal objects connected to the Academy have survived in greater numbers than other items and can be found in museums and private collections in Romania and abroad. (Appendix F) Secondly, metal workshops existed at both the Schule Reimann and the Bauhaus and metalwork was produced by both Vespremie and Maxy, offering grounds for a fruitful comparative study. Finally, visual material from the period seems to be more plentiful in the case of metal objects, which appear frequently in avant-garde journals and publications.

Similarly to his contribution to the creation of the Academy, Vespremie's metalwork is challenging to recover and to disentangle from that of Maxy. In December 1926, a photograph in *Integral* captioned 'A. Vespremie' showed an asymmetric vase constructed from geometric shapes. (Fig. 3.2) The combination of sharp angles and smooth curves and the verticality of the composition lend it a strongly modernist aesthetic, as does the interplay of light on the reflective metal. The vase also appeared in the image that graced the cover of *Integral*'s ninth issue, a promotional photograph of the Academy's selling exhibition. (Fig. 3.1) Its caption reads: 'Modern Interior by M. H. Maxy: Furniture, Cushions, Carpets, Paintings'. The authorship of the vase is announced inside the journal, but the cover photograph gives no indication that the display is a collaborative project containing objects by other artists, a problematic approach that raises questions about artistic autonomy within the Academy.

The largest collection of objects by Maxy currently in existence is housed at the Brăila Museum, in the artist's birth town. It was donated to the museum by Mimi Șaraga-Maxy, the

artist's second wife who emigrated to Israel in 1982, a decade after Maxy's death.¹ These are the objects that remained in the Maxy household and, as evidenced by the presence of wear and tear, were in frequent use by the family. The direct provenance means that their authorship has never been questioned, and yet, like the cover image of *Integral*, they may conceal unrecognised contributions. No scholar has yet remarked upon the close kinship of a vase from this collection with Vespremie's 1926 exhibit. (Fig. 3.3) Although the Brăila object has two containers that unite at the base instead of one, its overall shape exhibits the same combination of jagged and curved edges and the same diagonally-cut rectangular mouth. The Brăila vase is incised with Maxy's signature, discounting a possible misattribution, nonetheless the formal similarities suggest a close connection with Vespremie's work. In the magazine *Tiparița literară* of January 1929, a further image exists of a Maxy vase that appears to be from the same series. (Fig. 3.4) This example is even closer to Vespremie's object, especially in the shaping of the base which has a sharp angle topped by a semi-circle on the left side and a curved element on the right side. According to the caption, the material is silver, although silver-plating is probably more likely.

Despite Maxy's reputation as an innovator in Romanian applied arts, evidence places Vespremie as the originator of this series of objects. Firstly, he received specialist training in metalwork at the Reimann Schule and excelled in this field, according to his report card. (Appendix C) Secondly, his skill in metalwork is documented in the contemporary press, both in Ștefan I. Nenițescu's article on the Academy's opening in 1924, and in Petru Comarnescu's review of the 1926 selling exhibition.² The latter article specifies that the metal objects on display were 'made after the blueprints of Mr. Andrei Vespremie', leaving no doubt about their authorship. Neither Comarnescu nor the 1926 exhibition catalogue attribute any metal objects to Maxy at this point in time. (Appendix E) Altogether, the above evidence suggests not only that Vespremie designed the first prototypes of this series of objects, but that he may have been instrumental in introducing Maxy to the techniques of modern metalwork.

1. Alina-Ruxandra Mircea, 'Arhitectura, mașina și interiorul modernist', *Arhitectura*, no. 2 (644) (2013): 42–47, 44. Mircea reveals that while the majority of artworks were donated in 1982, a small number of objects had previously been purchased by the Museum from Șaraga-Maxy.

2. Ștefan I. Nenițescu, 'Arta decorativă', in *Scieri de istoria artei și de critică plastică*, ed. Adina Nanu (București: Institutul cultural român, 2008), 129-130 (article originally published in *Ideea Europeană*, 19-26 October 1924); Petru Comarnescu, 'Expoziția Academiei artelor decorative', *Rampa*, 3 November 1926.

This hypothesis can be supported by a further example, involving a different series of metal objects. A number of distinctively shaped brass fruit bowls and trays constitute a connecting trail from the metal workshops of the Schule Reimann to the showrooms of the Academy and finally to the home of a collector which has been preserved as a museum until the present day. Perhaps these items were particularly popular, as several are still in existence today and invariably attributed to Maxy. In Romanian public collections there are at least seven such objects: two in the Brăila Museum, one at the Romanian National Art Museum (MNAR) and four in the Ion Minulescu memorial house. These items are made of brass and share a similar shaping obtained by combining curved or cylindrical forms and sometimes adopting a stylised floral motif. The two bowls in the Brăila Museum appear to be less accomplished and may thus be the earliest examples of Maxy's metalwork. One item is a very simple construction of one large half-sphere on top of a smaller half-sphere that serves as a base. (Fig. 3.5) The upper section of the second item resembles a flower open in full bloom, with a petal-shaped rim, while the base is also circular but flatter than the first item. (Fig. 3.6) Both objects exhibit a certain asymmetry, which may or may not be intentional, as well as evidence of repairs that have been carried out. They have been marked with Maxy's name in a manner that once again suggests an early dating. The faceted bowl is lacking the artist's distinctive cursive signature, having been hallmarked with a rectangular struck mark that incorporates the name 'M. H. Maxy' in evenly shaped capital letters.³ The spherical object does exhibit the cursive signature, made probably using a burin rather than a punch, but the execution is uneven with parts of the lettering missing. The uncertain craftsmanship of these items entertains the possibility that they were handmade by Maxy, in an attempt to understand the specificities of metalwork. Although, as we have seen, documentation on the Academy's pedagogical programme and its 1926 exhibition suggest a separation between the design process and the making process, occasional experimentation may have taken place in the workshops. Furthermore, Vespremie himself had worked in the workshops of the Schule Reimann and was versed in both designing and making objects, thus being able to instruct Maxy.

3. This is the most common method for hallmarking metals. The struck mark is made using a metal punch which is hammered into the object. The edges of the punch, which is usually a rectangular shape, thus become a visible part of the hallmark.

The contrast between the pieces in the Brăila Museum with the metal bowl in the MNAR collection is particularly evident. This object is symmetrically and confidently shaped, with the ‘petals’ fully rounded and expanding outwards elegantly. (Fig. 3.7) The base is made up of three bulbous shapes and the object is unsigned. This item is related to the four objects in the Ion Minulescu collection, which are equally accomplished, in particular another bowl with a faceted upper section and a conical base incised with Maxy’s cursive signature. (Fig. 3.8) Of the other three items, two are circular trays, one with a lobed rim and the other with a spiralled rim, while the third is a large wide bowl with a lobed rim and three bulbous supports forming the base. (Fig. 3.9-3.11) None of these items is signed, yet the two trays - but not the large bowl - are attributed to Maxy in the museum’s inventory. So far, there is a certain consistency in the formal vocabulary, the materials and the techniques used to produce these objects that would suggest a single maker.

Nonetheless, photographs from the period raise certain doubts. In one image from the Academy’s 1926 exhibition two similar items appear, high on a shelf in a corner of the modernist living room imagined by Maxy. (Figs. 3.12) These are two flower-shaped bowls with conical bases, most similar to the signed bowl from the Minulescu collection. (Fig. 3.8) Careful comparison however reveals that neither of the objects in the photograph can be this particular bowl, especially due to the wider, more robust, bases. As already discussed, there is no evidence that Maxy exhibited any metal objects in this exhibition, so the authorship of the objects in the photographs is not as clear as the surviving items might suggest. The decisive piece of evidence comes from the December 1923 issue of the *Schule Reimann* magazine, *Farbe und Form*. In an illustrated spread about the metal workshop, two fruit bowls with unmistakably similar features appear. (Fig. 3.13) The faceted spherical containers are immediately recognisable, while their bases are variations on the designs already described: one is a smaller inverted sphere, in this case with a less prominent lobed pattern, the other a cone topped by a rhomboid shape. In an earlier *Farbe und Form* spread in November 1921, coinciding with Vespremie’s presence at the Reimann, another similar fruit bowl appears, together with a deep circular tray with a lobed rim which strongly resembles the similar item in the Ion Minulescu collection. (Figs. 3.14) Furthermore, the metalwork display of the *Schule Reimann* at a 1924 Frankfurt trade fair, also pictured in the magazine, contained several trays and bowls with the same characteristic designs. (Fig. 3.15) Although none of the images indicate the identity of the maker or the designer, it may be safely deduced that these items are by Vespremie or, if not, that they at least represent the preferred style of the

Reimann metal workshop in the early 1920s. In either case, it was a style that Vespremie was responsible for bringing to Bucharest, proving once more that not only was he the originator of this series of fruit bowls and trays, but that he was also Maxy's instructor in the art of metalwork.

If, so far, careful examination of existing objects and historical sources has shown that the relationship between Vespremie and Maxy needs to be rewritten, another example from the Minulescu collection demonstrates the pervasive belief among scholars that Maxy's authorship can be safely assumed even when evidence indicates otherwise. Close examination of the collection has revealed a metal tray hallmarked with Vespremie's own name, the only object in existence so far known to be by his hand. (Fig. 3.16) Within the museum's inventory the tray has been attributed to Maxy, despite the hallmark and the uncharacteristic style. Square-shaped and heavy, with a coppery patina, it has the robust quality suggested by period images of Vespremie's work. The struck mark itself, punched into all four edges underneath the rim, spells 'A. Vespremi' in the same graphic style and font as the non-discursive mark found on one of the Maxy items at the Brăila Museum. (Fig. 3.6) This seems to suggest that the Brăila objects are indeed early attempts at designing metalwork by Maxy, probably within the workshops of the Academy, replicating various aspects of Vespremie's own styling. Such a mark is not known to appear on any other Maxy items in existence, the artist having thereafter developed his own cursive style hallmark that resembled his handwritten signature and which seems to have been produced using an engraving technique rather than a struck mark. (Fig. 3.8)

Vespremie's skill was in fact remarkably versatile. A series of objects that does not find echo in Maxy's work can be attributed to Vespremie through a number of period photographs. The December 1923 issue of *Farbe und Form* has an illustration of a nine-branched candelabrum crafted from openwork metal probably depicting Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.⁴ (Fig. 3.17) A male and a female figure can be distinguished surrounded by luxuriant foliage skilfully fashioned in a stylised manner. Although *Farbe und Form* gives no indication of the

4. In Jewish religious practice the menorah is a candelabrum with seven branches. The nine-branch version is known as a Hanukkah menorah or a Chanukiah and is used during the Hanukkah holiday. The illustrations in *Farbe und Form* are captioned with the more generic description 'Leuchter' or candelabrum, and I have used this term also.

authorship of this work, several similar items can be seen in photographs of the Academy's 1926 exhibition. A candelabrum fashioned from openwork metal is visible on top of a chest of drawers, decorated with two female figures reclining amongst rich foliage. (Figs. 3.18) This particular object appears to be electric: instead of candles, the supports hold candle shaped light bulbs and a cable is visible coiled up near its base. A further extremely accomplished example in this series can be seen in the photograph that shows the Micu Zentler commission. (Fig. 3.19) He appears to have ordered a radiator cover in Vespremie's distinctive openwork design, perhaps to install in the home built for him by Cristofi Cerchez. No figures are present in this composition, in which vine leaves, flowers, bunches of grapes and an amphora coil together gracefully. The connection between the image in the *Schule Reimann* magazine and the photographs of the Academy's exhibition strongly suggest that Vespremie is the author of this series of objects, despite the lack of a period attribution. Further confirmation comes from the article that applauds the opening of the Academy in October 1924. It praises Vespremie's metalwork which deftly conjures up 'people and animals of all kinds, and birds, and fantastical creatures'.⁵

The whereabouts of the items described above are unfortunately not known, but smaller, more delicate openwork items produced at the Academy have survived and are currently part of a private collection. Coincidentally, they represent both the sacred and the profane. A half-nude female figure reclining amongst stylised vegetation was probably intended as a brooch or a similar piece of costume jewellery. A modern woman, she has bobbed hair and a garter visible underneath her short flapper-style skirt. (Fig. 3.20) Equally intricate is a miniature openwork menorah which acts as a bookmark for a volume bound in the workshops of the Academy, which will be shortly discussed in the section on bookbinding. (Fig. 3.21) Thoughtfully designed, its seven candle flames join together to create a slit for the ribbon that acts as a page divider. These two items, attributed by Michael Ilk in his monograph to Maxy, are much more likely to be the work of Vespremie, reflecting the style and technique of openwork he produced.⁶ Furthermore, *Farbe und Form* provides visual evidence once again, illustrating several items with such delicate openwork in its November 1921 issue. There are small lighting fixtures, jewellery items and even bottle stoppers, as well as an ivory brooch - another material that Vespremie is known to have used - decorated with a similarly shaped

5. Nenişescu, *Scieri de istoria artei*, 130.

6. Michael Ilk, *Maxy. Der integrale Künstler* (Ludwigshafen: Michael Ilk, 2003), 194 and 212.

reclining nude. (Figs. 3.22) The final clue is provided by one of the images of the Academy's selling exhibition. At least four small openwork items are exhibited, their shape suggesting they might be holders for letters or maybe candles. Although similar in form, they vary in the fantastical landscapes they depict. On the windowsill, one of them is accompanied by a barely legible label, where the name Vespremie can be deciphered underneath the word 'metal'. (Fig. 3.23) Vespremie's skill with openwork metal thus extended to objects of various sizes, shapes and levels of intricacy.

Both the openwork and the metal dishes discussed above suggest a stylistic link to the work of the Wiener Werkstätte. Bowls, platters and containers with similarly faceted, fluted, and bulbous shapes by Josef Hoffmann appeared in the Kunstschau 1920 exhibition in Vienna, alongside metal and ivory objects decorated with figures and foliage expertly rendered in openwork by Dagobert Peche. (Fig. 3.24) The exhibition was held from June to September 1920 at the Austrian Museum for Art and Industry in Vienna and 'the arts and crafts section was almost entirely provided by the Wiener Werkstätte and artists closely connected with it'.⁷ It is conceivable that Vespremie may have visited this exhibition on his way to Berlin, where he arrived some time before October 1920. Vespremie's skill in ivory is also documented in his report card from the Schule Reimann and he may well have found inspiration in Peche's designs for elaborate jewellery. He later included jewellery-making in his ivorywork course at the Academy, and it is perhaps conceivable that he also adapted these intricate and fantastical designs for larger scale metal objects. In any case, the work of the Werkstätte must have been well known to staff at the Schule Reimann, especially as both institutions had been active since the early years of the twentieth century and information circulated through periodicals. For example, in April 1923 the journal *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* included illustrated articles on both the Werkstätte and Peche, containing images that suggest a close kinship with the work of Maxy and Vespremie.⁸ (Fig. 3.25) As well as the stylistic similarities, there is an even more secure link. Peche posthumously appeared in the list of exhibitors to the Academy's 1926 display, his name marked with a cross to indicate his death three years earlier. (Fig. 3.26) He is the only exhibitor not connected to the Romanian artistic

7. Werner J. Schweiger, *Wiener Werkstätte. Design in Viena 1903-1932* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1984), 108.

8. Adolf Vetter, '20 Jahre Wiener Werkstätte', *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* (April 1923): 86-99; Schr., 'Dagobert Peche', *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* (May 1923): 100-105.

milieu, and his presence is thus a mystery. In the exhibition catalogue, he is credited with the ‘modern lace’ on display, which can be glimpsed in some of the photographs, for example amongst the objects displayed on the window sill. (Fig. 3.23)

In contrast to this more expressionist output, Vespremie also produced objects in a constructivist vein. In July 1926, and thus before the collaboration with Maxy officially began, *Contimporanul* printed an image of a ‘Lamp-Construction’ designed by Vespremie. (Fig. 3.27) The photograph shows the multi-functional objects twice: in its compact state, resembling a tall cubist construction, and fully extended, with components such as a clock, an ashtray and an inkwell unfurling out of its vertical frame. The lamp’s bulb is not covered by a shade, ensuring maximum light and eschewing an un-functional decorative touch.

Vespremie’s wide repertoire of forms and styles dates, as we have seen, from his time in Germany. The Schule Reimann’s metal workshop was led by Karl Heubler, a former pupil of Peter Behrens, who had been active at the Reimann since 1905.⁹ An important part of the school from the beginning, especially as Albert Reimann had an interest in metalwork himself, the department grew in prominence during the 1920s, with classes available six days a week. The output of the workshop also changed stylistically, moving away from an expressionist, decorative vocabulary towards a more functional, clean aesthetic.¹⁰ By 1930, on the occasion of a Schule Reimann exhibition in New York, the *Art Digest* could write that:

The Reimann School of Berlin [is] one of Germany’s foremost industrial schools [...] Although it is a private enterprise, this German school follows the same policy that has made the German Kunst-Gewerbe school a significant cultural and economic force. The students learn not only the technique and theory of design, but a definite philosophy of life as well, for they are taught to rationalise the modern spirit and apply it to life about them and to sense the aesthetic of the machine age [...] Copying and adapting period motives is not permissible - they must go to the life about them

9. Albert Reimann, *25 Jahre Schule Reimann 1902-1927* (Berlin: Farbe und Form, 1927), 11.

10. Swantje Kuhfuss-Wickenheiser, *Die Reimann-Schule in Berlin und London 1902 – 1943. Ein jüdisches Unternehmen zur Kunst- und Designausbildung internationaler Prägung bis zur Vernichtung durch das Hitlerregime* (Aachen: Shaker Media, 2009), 269.

for ideas. [...] “Executed by the Reimann School Workshops” has come to be synonymous with a personal interpretation of the modern spirit.¹¹

Although Vespremie’s period at the Reimann had ended well before 1930, the school’s determination to capture the spirit of the time had been part of its ethos from the beginning. Vespremie may have ‘gone to the life about him’ to conceive his multi-functional object, which finds a possible precedent in a wall-mounted lamp by Carl Jacob Jucker presented at the Bauhaus exhibition of 1923. (Fig. 3.28) Providing only one function, yet innovative in its streamlined design and enhanced mobility, Jucker’s lamp could adapt to the needs of its user just like Vespremie’s. Whether Vespremie did go to the exhibition in Weimar - he was probably still in Germany in the autumn of 1923 - perhaps with colleagues from the Reimann, is impossible to determine with any certainty. Images did however circulate and may have also provided the inspiration the photographic treatment of Vespremie’s lamp: illustrated in two positions that demonstrate its versatility, it mirrors the image of Jucker’s lamp in the Bauhaus exhibition catalogue.¹²

Vespremie’s lamp is visible also in the photographs of the Academy’s selling exhibition and it appears to not be the only object of this kind. Although the multi-functional aspect cannot be gleaned from these images, at least two other similar lamps appear. One is standing on the windowsill in the same photograph as the lamp from *Contimporanul*, its body less voluminous, but with hints of sections that might outwardly unfold. (Fig. 3.29) The other example can be found in the same photograph as the Zentler commission. (Fig. 3.30) Smaller, less elaborated and curved, it nonetheless contains a sturdy base with a protruding element that could conceal another function. It would be tempting to attribute these also to Vespremie, if a similar item had not come to light in a private collection during the research for this thesis. A totemic wooden structure composed of superimposed geometric shapes, and containing a mobile element (though without any apparent function), it is closely related to the lamp on the windowsill in the Academy’s 1926 exhibition. (Fig. 3.31) The material makes the Vespremie attribution unlikely, as he is not known to have worked with wood

11. Dedo von Kanowski, *Modern Art of Metalwork. Bröhan-Museum. State Museum of Art Nouveau, Art Deco and Functionalism (1889 - 1939)* (Berlin: Bröhan Museum, 2001), 280, quoting *Art Digest*, no. 6 (15 December 1930): 33.

12. *Staatliches Bauhaus in Weimar 1919-1923*, exh. cat. (Weimar-München: Bauhaus, 1923), 116.

during this period. These lamps are probably the work of Hans Mattis-Teutsch, whose wooden small-scale sculptures utilise a similar repertoire of forms.¹³ In a missive to Mattis-Teutsch written on the Academy's letterhead paper and probably dating from mid-1927, Maxy informs him:

A lamp has been sold and I have paid you. I am negotiating the sale of another and I will have an answer by next week. I think you should leave the other ones, especially as they are installed, and I have now taken over the Academy and will continue with it.¹⁴

Mattis-Teutsch's lamp is the only object of its type known to have survived from the Academy's exhibitions. No lamps attributed to Maxy are found in Romanian museums, but two such objects were illustrated in *Tipariņa literară* in late 1928 and early 1929. (Figs. 3.32 and 3.33) They do not appear to be multi-functional, but they are certainly sculptural and intricate, containing materials that we have not yet encountered in the context of the Academy, such as wrought iron, parchment and possibly frosted glass. These must have been the objects that Ion Vinea referred to, writing in *Contimporanul* of January 1929, when he observed that in the Academy's workshops 'an electric lamp can be a small monument'.¹⁵ Indeed, one of the lamps appears to be based on the monument erected by Gropius in the Weimar cemetery, which Maxy probably saw in 1922 and which had also been illustrated in *Contimporanul* in 1923. (Fig. 3.34) The vertical agglomeration of triangular shapes is unmistakable, as is the pointed upward motion. Maxy added a cubic shape to the wedge-shaped bases, enclosing the light bulb in parchment held together with stitching that is both decorative and functional. (Fig. 3.33)

As these lamps demonstrate, Maxy's own career in the applied arts continued after Vespremie's departure in 1927, although given the scarcity of information about the latter artist's output, it is challenging to separate clearly the objects produced under Vespremie's influence from those that were not. Metal objects produced by Maxy that have so far been found to have no equivalent in Vespremie's work include tea services and small containers

13. I am indebted to Michael Ilk for suggesting this attribution.

14. The letter is part of a private collection.

15. Ion Vinea, 'Interiorul Nou', *Contimporanul*, no. 78 (January 1929).

that display a strongly linear cubist style. The objects appear to be constructed from geometric elements, an aspect that is especially evident where ornament is involved. For example, a small container from the Brăila Museum that might be an ashtray or a sugar container has been decorated with strips of metal arranged in different patterns that complement its cubist aesthetic. (Fig. 3.35) The object itself, essentially a simple tubular shape, gains interest through an interplay of presence and absence enacted with the surrounding space. Sections have been both cut out and added to the rim and the base of the object, yet its overall shape has been preserved, so that the viewer perceives the object as a recognisable whole whose parts have shifted in a game of hide-and-seek with the surrounding space. This aspect also characterises Maxy's furniture, as can be seen from two further pieces from the Brăila collection: a bookcase and a side table that both contain metal elements within their wooden frame and which re-enact the same withdrawal and expansion within the surrounding space on a larger scale, their corners protruding and retreating in turn. (Figs. 3.36 and 3.37) The side table takes this further by incorporating a removable metal tray that leaves behind a gap in the wooden frame when lifted out. The shape of the metal tray is further mirrored by an ashtray that exhibits the same rectangular yet asymmetric form, revealing a certain unity of design. (Fig. 3.38)

Maxy also designed tea accoutrements, even winning a gold medal at the 1929 Barcelona International Exhibition for one particular set.¹⁶ Shown in a photograph in *Tiparnița literară*, it consisted of a teapot, milk and sugar pots, sugar tongs and a tray. (Fig. 3.39) The three containers are in this case composed of curvilinear elements, the main form being that of a bell shape, in three different sizes, which seamlessly integrates the lid. The handles also contain a curved element, whilst the teapot's spout displays a decorative flourish of zig-zagging linear elements encased within its curvature. The teapot and the sugar tongs have equivalents in the Brăila collection from which further information can be gleaned. The Brăila teapot has the same cylindrical container, but the handle and the spout are formed of linear elements that taken together appear to form a rectangular frame that traverses the body of the object. (Fig. 3.37) There is a slightly jarring note in the traditional shape of the lid handle, so different from the semi-circular piece that seamlessly emerges from the teapot in the photograph. All things considered, the Brăila teapot is probably an earlier incarnation of the object presented in Barcelona. It is not hallmarked and was kept by the Maxy family for

16. Ilk, *Maxy*, 60.

regular use as indicated by the limescale deposits inside the spout and the extent to which the silver plating has worn off. It may have been used in conjunction with the silver-plated sugar tongs in the collection that have also been subjected to wear and tear. (Fig. 3.40) The cubist influence is very evident in this object whose design suggests a patchwork of geometric elements that have been superimposed to create a shape that fans out elegantly. The signature is prominently displayed, indicating perhaps that this was another object with which Maxy was sufficiently satisfied.

The same playful yet intricate design element can be seen in a metal box, probably a tobacco container, in another memorial house museum. (Fig. 3.41) As previously mentioned, the apartment neighbouring Minulescu's belonged to the writer Liviu Rebreanu and his family, who preferred a more distinctly traditional style of interior decoration. Thus, the presence of Maxy's tobacco box is quite unusual and may conceivably have been a gift, perhaps from Minulescu himself.¹⁷ The object is constructed from a wooden box that has been encased in metal. The lid is reminiscent of a cubist collage and when viewed from above exhibits the same playful spatial interaction evident in the objects from the Brăila Museum that have already been discussed. Even the underside of the lid, although undecorated, has been manipulated through the addition of a band of metal to engage asymmetrically with the wood visible underneath. Thin strips of metal have also been added to the edges of the box, protruding outwards, their linearity disrupted on the front side by an irregular shape. Maxy produced other rectangular boxes decorated with collaged metal shapes, and some even survive today. (Appendix F) Vespremie own small containers are clearly distinguishable from those of Maxy. Their rotund shape and shiny hammered brass surfaces render them highly tactile, especially as the lids are topped with strange handles shaped like miniature flora and fauna. For instance, two such containers illustrated in the Schule Reimann's magazine *Farbe und Form* were playfully decorated with paw-shaped supports and a handle in the form of a toad. (Fig. 3.44) The link to Vespremie is provided by the similar item that can be glimpsed in the Academy's 1926 exhibition, so that a fourth such container that has

17. The two memorial houses are under the jurisdiction of the Romanian National Literature Museum and the curatorial team that looks after the collections is the same. They occupy the same floor in a block of flats from the interwar period. The proximity of the collections did lead me to enquire during my visit if Maxy's tobacco box could have accidentally migrated from the Minulescu to the Rebreanu flat over the past decades. The curator assured me that the inventories are accurate and they can be traced back to the period when nationalisation led to the flats and their contents becoming the property of the Romanian state.

survived can now be safely attributed to Vespremie. (Figs. 3.42 and 3.43) Currently held in a private collection, it has previously been deemed to have been authored by Maxy.¹⁸ Its shape, technique, and floral-shaped handle suggest otherwise and it can now join the other objects in this chapter that form Vespremie's increasing corpus of works.

This close reading of the metal objects produced by the Academy of Decorative Arts has sought to redress the balance between the contributions of Vespremie and Maxy, as well as to reveal the flux of ideas between Bucharest, Berlin and occasionally Weimar. The importance of Vespremie as a pedagogue and designer in this field can no longer be underestimated, especially as the emergence of several formerly miss-attributed autographed works signals the extent to which his reputation was suppressed by that of Maxy.

The Textile Workshops

The Academy of Decorative Arts offered two types of textile classes from its very inception: batik and carpets. The instructor for the former was Andrei Vespremie's first wife, Victoria. Although no class master is named in the Academy's 1924 course list, Victoria's name appears in the 1926 course catalogue as the instructor for the batik and painted textiles class.¹⁹ Furthermore, she is credited with making batik items based on designs by Maxy for the Academy's selling exhibition that same year.²⁰ It is possible that she learned this wax-resist textile dyeing technique at the Schule Reimann, whose own batik workshop had opened as early as 1908 under the supervision of Albert Reimann himself. His experimentation even led to a patented tool which 'facilitate[d] in an astonishing way the difficult method of wax drawing', according to British applied arts magazine *The Studio*.²¹ Reimann's expertise was such that he was even enlisted to provide private batik tuition to members of the German monarchy and nobility, such as Crown Princess Cecilie and Sophie of Wied.²² Although no documentation has come to light that confirms Victoria Vespremie's presence at the Schule

18. Ilk, *Maxy*, 200.

19. Latvia State Historical Archives, 1632/1/23144.

20. Perhaps one of these batik fabrics is visible on the table in one of the photographs taken in the Academy's showrooms (Fig. 2.10c), although the pattern is difficult to distinguish.

21. 'Studio Talk', *The Studio* 45, no. 190 (January 1909): 299-324, 314.

22. Kuhfuss-Wickenheiser, *Die Reimann-Schule in Berlin und London*, 145, based on Albert Reimann's own recollections.

Reimann, her knowledge of batik, which was not a well-established technique in Romania, and her association with Andrei Vespremie, suggests that the couple probably met while studying at the school in Berlin. Victoria probably attended the classes of Rose Petzold, who was the Reimann's batik instructor from 1921 to 1923.²³ Other than this conjectural account, no other information has survived about the Academy's batik classes or any of the outputs it produced.

The class on carpets, which was led by Janeta Scăueru Teclu (1896-1978), is somewhat better documented. Now mostly forgotten as an artist, Scăueru Teclu studied the fine arts in Bucharest and Vienna, forging a career as a painter and exhibiting in this capacity throughout her life. She was also a pedagogue, teaching drawing and later history of art.²⁴ Yet her most notable accomplishment is better known to scholars of ethnography: together with her husband, Scăueru Teclu published the first monographic study dedicated to Romanian carpets in 1938, detailing the techniques used for dyeing and ornamentation.²⁵ According to Ana Iuga, who writes about the development of ethnography in Romania, Scăueru Teclu's study formalised the decorative conventions that governed carpet-making in the Romanian territories, as well as establishing a sort of grammar of ornament, complete with 33 colour illustrations.²⁶ In view of this, it may be presumed that Scăueru Teclu's class at the Academy covered both design and making, offering a rounded perspective of hand-made carpet production.

Maxy's interest in textiles for the interior, including carpets and cushions, means that a number of items he designed under the umbrella of the Academy have survived and others are documented in period publications. (Appendix G) It is not known where this interest stemmed from, however it appears to pre-date Maxy's involvement with the Academy in 1926, unlike his work in metal or bookbinding for example. An advertisement for Atelier Integral which dates from 1925 lists carpets amongst the items on offer.²⁷ Furthermore, Maxy

23. Kuhfuss-Wickenheiser, *Die Reimann-Schule in Berlin und London*, 148.

24. There are few sources about her artistic career, other than the catalogue of this posthumous retrospective: Sanda Buta, *Liviu Teclu și Janeta Scăueru Teclu*, exh. cat. (Brașov: Muzeul Județean Brașov, 1982).

25. Janeta Scăueru Teclu and Liviu Teclu, *Studiu asupra covoarelor românești* (Cluj: Editura Autorilor, 1938).

26. Ana Maria Iuga, 'De la etnografie la antropologie. Repere în studierea artei tradiționale române', *Cercetări etnologice românești contemporane* II, no. 1 (Autumn 2006): 66–76, 68.

27. *Integral*, no. 6-7 (October 1925): 25.

contributed several textile items to the Academy's 1926 selling exhibition, as the catalogue reveals. As well as the batik designs executed by Victoria Vespremie, he exhibited cushions made by a certain someone named Didina Ștefănescu and carpets, although their maker is not named. One of these carpets acts as a strand that binds together temporal planes and personal stories. In the photographs of the Academy's exhibition, it appears both as a component of the display and as a decorative element for the group photographs taken on the occasion of the grand opening on 23 October 1926. (Fig. 3.45) Perhaps it did not find a buyer, or perhaps it became a sentimental keepsake, as it remained within the Maxy family until the early 1980s when it became part of the Brăila Museum donation. It is still there today looking well-worn and threadbare, much more so than other surviving carpets by Maxy, betraying not only its age but also its first-hand participation in the history of modern Romanian applied arts.

Maxy's output in carpet design seems to have been reasonably prolific, although it is as yet unclear how much of his work survives. The Brăila Museum holds three pieces by the artist and several others are known to exist in private collections, three of which will be discussed here. These are all knotted woollen carpets, and stylistically they can be split into two overarching categories. The first group of carpets has compositional affinities with Maxy's painting and drawing output, and thus can be dated to the second half of the 1920s when the severe geometries of the earlier part of the decade began tapering towards more fluid lines and patterns. Such is the rug exhibited at the Academy, whose overlapping planes are overlaid and surrounded by irregular wavy lines and dots, its colour palette a muted combination of brown, cream, and blue. (Fig. 3.46) The colouring may have been affected by fading and wear and tear, as already mentioned, as has the original fringing which has been lost. Another, much larger carpet in the Brăila Museum exhibits a more vivid colouring, with tones of red, brown and burgundy contrasted with lighter shades of peach and beige. (Fig. 3.47) The composition is abstract whilst ignoring the strictures of geometry, as shapes and patterns appear to freely float and intersect. This carpet is also signed in the bottom left hand corner, perhaps a marker of Maxy's increasing confidence as carpet designer. Both the existence of the signature, the large size and the style of the composition connect this carpet to one currently held in a private collection. (Fig. 3.48) This piece is in very good condition, revealing the subtleties of the colouring and the harmony of the design. It is extremely similar to a carpet that appears in a promotional image for Maxy's interior design business in the periodical *Tiparnița literară* in 1928, suggesting that the artist may have reproduced popular designs with small variations. (Fig. 3.49) The only known carpet design sketch by Maxy in

existence is probably from the same period, displaying the same type of composition centred around overlaying circular and rectangular shapes surrounded by free-flowing lines and dots. (Fig. 3.50) It is painstakingly drawn on graph paper, each element taking up a precise number of squares, including the signature which has been inked in a corner of the composition. A fourth carpet, which is part of the Brăila Museum collection, may be a slightly later design, having lost the appearance of collaged shapes, but preserving the free floating, criss-crossing lines and the reddish-brown colour palette. (Fig. 3.51)

The four carpets that have been examined so far, as well as the design on graph paper, cannot be said to support a link to the aesthetics of the Bauhaus, just as in the case of the Academy's metal workshop. Maxy's textiles do not resemble the early Bauhaus weaving experiments, with their strict geometry and extensive colour palette such as the wall hanging attributed to Else Mögelin and the carpet by Gertrud Arndt that can be glimpsed in Walter Gropius' new Dessau office in a 1923 photograph, or Benita Otte's pile carpet inspired by the work of De Stijl artist Vilmos Huszár.²⁸ Neither do they recall the carpets produced in later years under the leadership of Gunta Stölzl, who sought to move away from pictorial designs reflective of compositions by Bauhaus masters such as Klee or Kandinsky towards an understanding of weaving's own material specificity.²⁹ Maxy's carpets do however recall Stölzl's assessment of the early Bauhaus weaving output as 'picture[s] made of wool', their designs complete pictorial compositions that do not feature the split between border and ground present in traditional carpets.³⁰ They also exhibit a certain collage quality, with overlapping geometric shapes that create a three-dimensional effect, frequently surrounded or overlaid by undulating lines and irregular marks. Such features are most frequently encountered in synthetic cubism and consequently in carpet designs produced in France during the 1920s and 1930s by artists such as Sonia Delaunay and Ivan da Silva Bruhns.

In fact, two of Maxy's carpets mirror the work of da Silva Bruhns to a problematic extent. One of the most successful designers of modernist carpets active in France from the 1920s

28. Susan Day, *Art Deco and Modernist Carpets* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), 99 and 103.

29. T'ai Smith, *Bauhaus Weaving Theory: From Feminine Craft to Mode of Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), xvi.

30. Ibid., xvi. For an overview of stylistic devices used in traditional carpet design see Janice Summers Herbert, *Affordable Oriental Rugs. The Buyer's Guide to Rugs from China, India, Pakistan and Romania* (London: Studio Vista, 1980), 27-40.

onwards, da Silva Bruhns was originally a painter and considered his luxurious carpets works of art. Like other European artists of the period, he appropriated non-European art traditions, basing his designs on African or Aztec motifs, with minimalist compositions and subdued colours.³¹ The first carpet by Maxy has a simple design composed of blue lines, small circles and squares and chevrons and closely resembles da Silva Bruhns designs from the early 1920s. (Figs. 3.52 and 3.53) The second Maxy carpet is more colourful, with overlapping planes in three contrasting shades and zigzags and recalls da Silva Bruhns' work from the second half of the 1920s when the influence of synthetic cubism became more patent and when the French designer also abandoned the division between borders and ground in his carpets.³² (Figs. 3.54 and 3.55) A number of possible explanations exist for this close stylistic affinity. Perhaps Maxy started by producing copies of carpets he liked for his own use while training himself in the design process, a hypothesis supported by the fact that the rug with overlapping coloured planes, currently in a private collection, was not sold but kept in the Maxy family home.³³ Equally, these may be da Silva Bruhns designs owned by Maxy, although most carpets by the French designer tend to be signed and monogrammed.³⁴ Finally, there is the possibility of reverse-influence, with Maxy's designs somehow impacting da Silva Bruhns.

Yet the discussion of the Academy and its outputs so far has revealed Maxy's propensity for appropriation, and with this example the case seems to be strengthened. This behaviour did not escape the attention of contemporary critics. The opening of the Academy's selling exhibition sparked a heated exchange between Maxy and art critic Petru Comarnescu within the pages of the newspaper *Rampa*. What most angered Maxy was Comarnescu's assessment of his painting as a 'perpetual artistic vagabondage' that aligned itself with every novel stylistic development.³⁵ Maxy's response rejected this imputation and the accusation of harbouring too close an affinity with Picasso, but Comarnescu replied in damning fashion:

31. Susan Day, 'Art Deco Masterworks. The Carpets of Ivan da Silva Bruhns', *Hali*, no. 105 (July-August 1999): 78–81, 79.

32. *Ibid.*, 80.

33. The collector purchased it from Liana Maxy, the artist's daughter.

34. There are examples of da Silva Bruhns work in Day, *Art Deco and Modernist Carpets*, as well as Sarah B. Sherrill, *Carpets and Rugs of Europe and America* (London: Abbeville Press, 1996) and Cornelia Bateman Faraday, *European and American Carpets and Rugs* (Woodbridge, Antique Collectors Club, 1990).

35. Comarnescu, 'Expoziția Academiei artelor decorative'.

... Mr. Maxy [...] copies with much ease the work of Picasso, Braque, Juan Gris (someone else every year). [...] Maxy's painting, which until this year has willingly complied with Braque's, and has often seemed a poor imitation of Juan Gris, has now progressed. It has reached the master of modern painting, Picasso. [...] Maxy's painting does not present a slight influence, a commonality of feeling, an aesthetic fraternisation, but a servile imitation, and this is evident to anyone leafing through the Picasso reproductions published by the Librairie Stock within the well-known series *Les Contemporains*. There they will find surprising similarities between Mr. Maxy's guitarist and some of Picasso's canvases.³⁶

The phrase may have been coined only recently by Partha Mitter, but Maxy seems to have succumbed to the 'Picasso-manqué syndrome' at the hands of Comarnescu.³⁷ Of course, in Mitter's estimation such accusations are usually not justified, but weaponised in order to support the hegemony of Western modernisms. In this case however, Comarnescu's critique seems to have been appropriately directed and is substantiated by some of the findings of this thesis. In cases such as this, it is even more important to avoid the value judgement making tendency of art history which implies that artists must prove 'worthy' of study. Maxy's case is an interesting one because within Romanian art historiography he has been alternatively feted as an illustrious member of the avant-garde and denounced as a communist collaborator due to his later directorship of the Romanian National Art Museum. Yet debating Maxy's 'worth' within the grand narratives of art history is of far less use than exploring the circumstances of his artistic career with an open mind, as evidenced by the many gaps that still exist in the study of his work. Abandoning the need for hierarchies in art historical scholarship can perhaps encourage a more objective assessment that, in the spirit of 'circulations', allows the objects that Maxy produced to speak for themselves.

36. M. H. Maxy, 'Scrisoarea unui modernist', *Rampa*, 5 November 1926; Petru Comarnescu, 'Răspunsul unui pretins modernist', *Rampa*, 8 November 1926. Comarnescu was referring to a painting by Maxy which appears in a photograph of the Academy of Decorative Arts (Fig. 2.10a).

37. Partha Mitter, 'Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery', *The Art Bulletin* 90, no. 4 (December 2008): 531-48, 537.

Comarnescu did make favourable pronouncements with respect to Maxy's textile designs. Regarding the cushions, he observed that 'cubism is admirably suited to these useful ornaments', whose colourful geometric designs prove quite striking.³⁸ Six cushions by Maxy are visible in one of the photographs of the Academy's 1926 selling exhibition. (Fig. 3.56) Their emphatically geometric designs are indeed eye-catching and the forms are varied, from circular and rectangular cushions, to what appears to be a five-cornered shape. Although the photograph is black and white, the crisp delineation of the collage-like patterns suggests that the colours used were probably more contrasting than the muted palettes of the carpets. The materials used are not identifiable from the image, however three cushion covers by Maxy that have survived are made using different techniques, including the use of different embroidery stitches and printed fabric.³⁹ (Figs. 3.57-3.59) As revealed by the Academy's exhibition catalogue, Maxy did not make the items himself, however he seems to have been sensitive to material specificities. The printed cotton cushion cover highlights the crisp edges and colour contrasts of the collage-like shapes that form the design, whereas the embroidered covers play with the material's softness and inherent intermingling of forms and colours. In his response to Comarnescu, Maxy had defended his work by emphasising his attention to the materiality of the object:

I have never understood [...] the purpose of painting applied to various objects. A discerning eye would realise immediately that the objects I exhibit are created not through surface application but by respecting the quality of the materials and freely engaging with them within the strictures of their structure. This is why I took close notice of the fabrics that composed the cushions, the quality of the wool for the carpet, the original colour of the wood for the furniture.⁴⁰

Although the style of the objects produced by Maxy and the Academy is sometimes described as art deco, in some cases with a view to disqualifying them from any claim to truly avant-garde ethos, they are only tangentially related to the interiors of the 1925 Paris

38. Comarnescu, 'Expoziția Academiei Artelor Decorative'.

39. I am indebted to Jonathan Cleaver for identifying the type of stitching used: the Double/ Smyrna cross stitch or the Star stitch (Fig. 3.58) and the Knitting stitch (Fig. 3.57). I was unable to examine the printed cushion closely enough to identify the technique used.

40. Maxy, 'Scrisoarea unui modernist'.

Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes.⁴¹ These were much more opulent and filled with competing forms and patterns that covered available surfaces. Even Le Corbusier selected a Berber rug for his Pavillon de L'Esprit Nouveau rather than exhibiting only contemporary machine-made designs. The simple, uncluttered interior of the Academy's showroom, with the piled cushions and a small selection of paintings acting as vivid highlights, is much closer in character to the modernist interiors of French cinema. Tumbled cubist cushions were not so much a feature of the 1925 Paris Exhibition, but they were a flamboyant addition to Robert Mallet-Stevens and Sonia Delaunay's designs for the cinema, as were Robert Delaunay's judiciously placed paintings, in films such as *Le P'tit Parigot* and *Le Vertige*, both of 1926 (Figs. 3.60 and 3.61). Maxy visited Paris sometime in 1926 and he shared a number of acquaintances with Sonia Delaunay, in particular Tristan Tzara, who was a frequent guest of the Delaunays.⁴² Although it is not known whether Maxy ever accompanied him on a visit, it seems that Tzara was willing to introduce Maxy to acquaintances, even writing personalised notes to Marc Chagall and Jacques Lipschitz on calling cards, asking them to receive him.⁴³ (Fig. 3.62) Moreover, Maxy's magazine *Integral* published material on both Sonia and Robert Delaunay and on the latest cinematographic trends in France.⁴⁴ Sonia Delaunay's own artistic outlook embraced the parity between fine art and applied art characteristic of Maxy's output and René Crevel's article in *Integral* 'presented [her workshop] as a total artwork in which theatre costumes, furniture and clothes enjoy the same status'.⁴⁵ Comparing the Academy's showroom to Sonia's own design

41. See for example Irina Cărbăș, 'The Shadow of the Object. Modernity and Decoration in Romanian Art', in *Dis(continuities). Fragments of Romanian Modernity in the First Half of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Carmen Popescu (Bucharest: Simetria, 2010), 101–42, 133, who refers to the 1925 Paris exhibition to date objects made by Maxy as they 'share a penchant for Art Deco'. By contrast, Mircea, 'Arhitectura, mașina și interiorul modernist', 44 observes that if Maxy's objects are to be qualified as Art Deco, they would have to be placed alongside the outputs of the style's more 'austere' practitioners such as Donald Deskey or Robert Mallet-Stevens.

42. Cécile Bargues, 'Sonia Delaunay, Tristan Tzara, Iliasz and Others', in *Sonia Delaunay* (London: Tate Publishing, 2014), 112–15.

43. Romanian National Art Museum, Documentation department, fond M. H. Maxy. It is not known whether these visits ever took place.

44. See for example *Integral*, no. 6-7 (October 1925), which contains an interview with Robert Delaunay conducted by Ilarie Voronca, an article by René Crével on Sonia Delaunay, and an article on new trends in French and American cinema, which refers to *L'Inhumaine* and *Entr'Acte*, two well-known modernist films.

45. Cărbăș, 'The Shadow of the Object', 118. The article was entitled 'La Mode Moderne. Visite à Sonia

ensembles (Fig. 3.63), it becomes clear that the individual items combine into a carefully constructed configuration, with elements such as the paintings, the cushions and the carpet reflecting similar pictorial themes.

We will return to the assemblages presented within the Academy's showrooms and their very modern sources later this chapter. Meanwhile, we may conclude the chequered history of the textile workshop, which veered from the batiks of Victoria Vespremie to the traditional Romanian carpet-making techniques of Janeta Scăueru Teclu and finally to Maxy's experimentation with modernist aesthetic vocabulary. If in this instance Maxy's main influence was not Vespremie but contemporary French design, his work nonetheless drew both criticism for his formal appropriation and praise for his understanding of the material.

The Bookbinding Workshop

Like metalwork, bookbinding is another area of the Academy where the boundaries between Vespremie and Maxy are blurred. Vespremie was certainly the initiator of the bookbinding workshop and its activity. According to his Reimann report card, bookbinding was one of the subjects he excelled at during his time at the school. (Appendix C) His instructor was Reinhold Maetzke, who had been in charge of this class since 1913.⁴⁶ Comparatively little is known about this class and their output was not often celebrated in *Farbe und Form*, as was the case with the metalwork workshop. Nonetheless, bookbinding was one of the courses offered at the Academy from its inception in 1924 and remained one of its main pedagogical offerings after the 1926 restructuring. It was taught by Vespremie with the support of E. Bonyhay, an artisan who led the workshop activities. Bonyhay's name, which indicates a Hungarian origin, also appears in the exhibition listings as the maker of Vespremie's bookbinding designs, but nothing else is known about him. The techniques taught in the Academy's bookbinding workshop included use of parchment, leather, cloth, card and decorative paper, as well as gold leaf application. Special classes were available for advanced students or even professional craftsmen, suggesting a high level of pedagogical skill was on offer.⁴⁷

Delaunay', published in *Integral*, no. 6-7 (October 1925): 18-19.

46. Reimann, *25 Jahre Schule Reimann*, 11.

47. The information on the workshop comes from the Academy's 1924 and 1926 brochures, held in the Latvia

A significant number of books bound in the Academy's workshops have survived, all of them attributed to Maxy. (Appendix H) Yet there is no evidence of Maxy engaging in this activity before 1927. He certainly did not exhibit any bound books in the Academy's debut exhibition in October 1926. He must have found the activity attractive however, as he did metalwork design, learning whatever Vespremie had to teach. By the summer of 1927, the Academy, now under the directorship of Maxy, appears to have done away with its extensive curriculum, keeping only the metalwork and bookbinding workshops which still offered courses 'for amateurs and professionals'.⁴⁸ Maxy signed some of his bookbinding projects, so his authorship can be securely determined for at least some of the surviving items. This is the case of four bound volumes stamped 'Artele Decorative București' on the leather edging of their inside covers, three of which are also signed by Maxy's hand underneath the stamped word 'Proiect', meaning 'project' or design. (Figs. 3.64-3.67) The books belong to a series of Anatole France's complete works which totalled twenty-five volumes and were published between 1925 and 1935 by the French publishing house Calmann-Lévy. This must have been a prestigious and probably expensive commission, not only because of the number of volumes and their size, but also due to the prominent inclusion of the client's monogram on the spine and on the back cover of each book. The intertwined initials G. L. form the design of each volume's verso, while the front covers contain cubist compositions made of coloured leather and gold tooling.⁴⁹ In all likelihood, the brown volume was made at a later date than the others as it was published later in the series and the typography of the stamps is different. (Fig. 3.67) It is also not signed, however the most likely attribution is still Maxy, in particular given the stamp with the name of the institution. Artele Decorative (The Decorative Arts) was the new name for the Academy that Maxy began to use from early 1928, together with the subtitle Academy of Modern Applied Art, in an attempt to stamp his own artistic personality upon the enterprise. An example of bookbinding has also survived from the Studio Maxy period, the business that the artist opened after the closure of the Academy. (Fig. 3.68) This binding was made for Ion Minulescu for a volume of poetry entitled *Strofe pentru toată lumea* (Verses for everyone), published in 1930. This has the Studio Maxy

State Historical Archives, 1632/1/ 23144. See Appendices D and E for English translations.

48. Advertisement in *Integral*, no. 13-14 (June-July 1927): 14.

49. No information has come to light as to what G. L.'s identity might be.

stamp on the inside of the front cover, as well as the name of the artisan who made it on the back cover, a certain Kollarik.

Due to its reputation as a luxury trade that catered to wealthy bibliophiles, bookbinding is seldom discussed in scholarship on modern design, which makes the Academy's production more challenging to analyse and position.⁵⁰ In a European context, Pierre Legrain (1889-1929) is acknowledged as one of the craft's main innovators in the modern age. As well as adapting the new abstract artistic vocabulary to binding, he began to compose design schemes as a whole rather than collating separate elements such covers and spines and he also began to integrate the lettering of titles into his compositions rather than relegating them only to the spine. Other innovations included reflecting the book's contents in the design and using new materials such as metal alloys within the binding.⁵¹ A closer look at Maxy's bookbindings discussed above reveals the use of many of these devices. The compositions are geometric, sectioned by straight lines and emulating collage techniques, and the contents of the volumes are often referenced. For example, the binding for Minulescu's poetry collection is a patchwork of leather segments in complementary colours that surround the one figurative element, a reproduction of the vignette on the title page by the artist Ioan Alexandru Brătescu-Voinești. (Fig. 3.68) The cover for France's *Nos enfants* (Our children) contains another figurative element realised from segments of bright leather, representing two stylised childish figures sheltering together under an umbrella.⁵² (Fig. 3.65) The decoration on France's *Le Livre de mon ami* (My friend's book) is an entirely abstract composition that incorporates the words of the title as part of its schematic design, expanding, tilting and shrinking the typeface for maximum effect. (Fig. 3.64) Perhaps not coincidentally, André Bruel, a follower of Legrain, explained the importance of utilising the book's title and contents as part of a holistic approach that echoes the ethos of Integralism:

50. For example, the main text dedicated to French art nouveau and art deco bookbinding is directed at collectors: Alastair Duncan, Georges de Bartha, and Priscilla Juvelis, *Art Nouveau and Art Deco Bookbinding. The French Masterpieces, 1880-1940* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989).

51. Dunca, de Bartha and Juvelis, *Art Nouveau and Art Deco Bookbinding*, 18-20.

52. On the front of the binding the title is incorrectly given as *Les enfants*, but on the spine it reverts to *Nos enfants*.

...the bookbinder can use the title to give it the most appropriate form for the spirit of the book, by a juxtaposition of colors, by linear combination, by carefully chosen and appropriate ornament. Synthesis, the aim is always synthesis! It's the sign of our times.⁵³

Although none of the surviving volumes has been signed or marked by Vespremie, three have a good likelihood of reattribution. The first is another book from the personal library of Ion Minulescu, a volume of his own poems entitled *Romanțe pentru mai târziu* (Songs for later) and published in 1908. (Fig. 3.69) The binding, which has been attributed to Maxy within the museum's inventory, exhibits a much more restrained style and palette and an unusual combination of cloth and artificial leather. The lettering design, both disrupted and shaped by the intersecting blocks of colour, is similar to the logos and letterheads designed by Vespremie for the Academy, which are discussed in the following section. The binding for this volume was perhaps designed by Vespremie, especially as it has already been shown that Minulescu collected his work. The second example is similarly a volume of poetry by Minulescu from his own library, entitled *De vorbă cu mine însu-mi* (Conversing with myself), whose binding displays some of the features described above. (Fig. 3.70) Two main shades of blue and cream are used for the design and whilst the lettering has been replaced by Minulescu's tell-tale circular glasses and cigar, distinctive colour blocking surrounds and disrupts the recognisable shapes. This volume is thus also a strong candidate for reattribution. The third example is one that was either created by Vespremie or was a collaboration between him and Maxy. (Fig. 3.71) It is a collection of short stories about Jewish life in a provincial Moldovan town by A. L. Zissu entitled *Spovendania unui candelabru* (The Confession of a candelabrum) which appeared in 1926 as part of a book series published under the umbrella of *Integral*. The volume has been bound in such a way as to reflect the book's content and title: the covers are decorated with lit candles and a metal plaque with a dedication incised onto a scroll that unfolds, like the Torah.⁵⁴ The addition of metal to leather and the insertion of block-coloured strips that traverse the spine to link the two covers demonstrate the Academy's familiarity with Legrain's latest innovations of material and form. Furthermore, the volume has been given a metal bookmark in the shape of a menorah,

53. Dunca, de Bartha and Juvelis, *Art Nouveau and Art Deco Bookbinding*, 18.

⁵⁴ The dedication reads 'Cel dintâi gând, cel dintâi exemplar', meaning 'the first thought, the first copy' [i.e. of the book].

referencing its title.⁵⁵ This openwork item was re-attributed to Vespremie earlier in this chapter, but the binding itself is more difficult to assign to one maker. The jutting shapes and the interlocking geometries are similar to Maxy's graphics and the autographed bindings we have already examined. There is a particularly strong resemblance to an album binding by Maxy which appears in *Contimporanul* in 1929. (Fig. 3.72) Yet, there is no equivalent corpus of works by Vespremie to allow an accurate comparison and Maxy is known to have appropriated elements of Vespremie's work. Whether the design for this volume was solely Vespremie's or a collaboration is thus difficult to establish. Nonetheless, this is the only known example of bookbinding that has been stamped with the name of the Academy of Decorative Arts in its original incarnation under the directorship of Vespremie, rather than Maxy's Decorative Arts or Studio Maxy.

Further examples of bookbindings linked to these ventures exist, however they are not marked as such and thus cannot be securely attributed. For example, five bound volumes are part of the Maxy donation at the Brăila Museum and four of these have their front pages marked with a stamp in the shape of Maxy's signature. (Fig. 3.73) As these marks are not part of the binding and the books are known to have belonged to Maxy, one possibility is that the stamp is an ex-libris rather than a maker's mark. The other possibilities of course are that the bindings were designed by Maxy, or by Vespremie. One volume with a cloth binding is another *Integral* production, Ion Călugăru's book of experimental short stories *Paradisul statistic* (The Statistical paradise) which Maxy also illustrated and which was published in 1926. (Fig. 3.74) The binding's interlinked geometric elements and the floating leather strips with the book's name and author reflect the aesthetics of the book's five illustrations. (Fig. 3.75) Typical of Maxy's graphic work during this period, they are densely composed patchworks of figurative and non-figurative elements, often traversed by linear elements. Another copy of this book, currently in a private collection, is bound in leather and has a metal insert on the cover revealing it was Zissu's own copy with a dedication from Călugăru and Maxy.⁵⁶ (Fig. 3.76) In this personalised volume, Maxy gave his illustrations a watercolour wash and signed his name, alongside Călugăru, on one of the front pages. These two bindings for *Paradisul statistic*, as well as a third one for an anthology of French painting by Maurice Raynal published in 1927 by Éditions Montaigne, display completely abstract

55. Or perhaps an amalgamation of two Jewish symbols: the hamsa and the menorah.

56. The dedications are not incised into the metal, instead a process of photographic reproduction has been used.

designs constructed in the manner of a collage, a style reminiscent of Maxy's textile designs, thus tilting the balance in his favour. (Fig. 3.77) Furthermore, the back cover of Raynal's anthology has a near-identical design to that of the Minulescu poetry volume bound by Studio Maxy in the early 1930s. (Fig. 3.68) Perhaps this was also the origin of two further volumes in the Brăila Museum which resemble Maxy's carpet design in its later stages: the collage elements have gone, the colour palette is restricted to two contrasting shades and the patterns are created using only lines and dots. (Fig. 3.78 and 3.79) The green binding covers art critic Gustave Coquiot's work *Cubistes, futuristes, passéistes*, published in 1914 by Librairie Ollendorff, while the red volume is a collection of poems by Jean Cocteau published by Gallimard in the mid-1920s. The pared-back designs are nonetheless effective, using thin leather inserts and gold tooling to create intricate patterns that flow seamlessly from one cover to the other across the spine.

Comparing the techniques of avant-garde bookbinders such as Pierre Legrain to the work of the Academy, we may conclude that a wide range of modern elements are present in the bindings designed and crafted in the institution's workshop, whether due to Vespremie's training, Maxy's familiarity with the latest artistic trends, or perhaps both. These designs, as well as many of the ones created and executed within the metal and textiles workshops, reveal the Academy's skilled craftsmanship and reinforce its claim to modernity. The close reading of these objects was part of a research process that involved tracking down dispersed, miss-catalogued, and miss-attributed items. The lack of a coherent body of works had led to the Academy's history being obscured and to Vespremie's contribution being erased. Thus, the approach taken in this chapter has been one of microhistory rather than a focus on the wider context of modern European applied arts. In choosing this methodology, the goal was to utilise the 'objectness' of the objects as a tool against historical erasure and to make the Academy's legacy manifest by handling, analysing and cataloguing its output.

Promotion

The Academy's workshops were supported by its promotional and commercial activities. The institution had its own visual graphic identity which included logos, brochures, letterheads and envelopes, all the accoutrements of a successful business. To begin with, they reflected Vespremie's training in this area, thanks to the Schule Reimann's pragmatically-minded curriculum, and later they became Maxy's responsibility, who imbued them with the spirit of

avant-garde graphics. Furthermore, the Academy's own exhibition spaces opened in 1926, with the aim of both educating consumers and providing an outlet for the workshops' output.

Graphic Identity

Graphic design was an important and highly visible part of both Maxy and Vespremie's careers. Until now, the visual identity of the Academy has been either overlooked or attributed to Maxy, another consequence of the organisation itself being incorrectly associated with him since its inception.⁵⁷ However, a closer analysis makes it possible to distinguish between the two artists, in particular by examining their training or earlier work.

Vespremie's training at the Schule Reimann included classes in typography, lettering and graphic ornamentation under the guidance of Max Hertwig, a well-known graphic designer. Hertwig had been teaching at the school since 1913, developing his commercial practice alongside his pedagogical one. As a young designer, he had worked as assistant to Peter Behrens together with Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, and thereafter had expanded his client portfolio creating visual identities for businesses, as well as posters, advertising, and book and magazine covers.⁵⁸ At the Schule Reimann, Hertwig taught his students the building blocks of graphic design 'just as a tailor would be taught to sew'.⁵⁹ These fundamental skills included ornamentation and lettering, the two classes that Vespremie attended. The students practiced by composing letterheads, 'small press advertisements and announcements, packaging and business printing, including labels, signets, and trademarks'.⁶⁰

Vespremie's education under Hertwig thus prepared him for the task of creating his own promotional materials for the newly opened Academy. The small flyer that advertises the

57. See for example the section dedicated to Maxy's graphic design, in Ilk, *Maxy*, 174, which includes several items related to the Academy, such as the cover of the 1926 brochure, letterhead paper and an envelope. See also Irina Cărăbaș, 'The Shadow of the Object', 129, where Cărăbaș does not discuss the graphics of the Academy's promotional materials, except to suggest that Maxy was probably responsible for the ones published after Vespremie's departure.

58. C. Arthur Croyle, *Hertwig. The Zelig of Design* (Ames: Culicidae Architectural Press, 2011), 101-103.

59. Jeremy Aynsley, *Graphic Design in Germany: 1890-1945* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 114.

60. Ibid.

classes available in 1924 is thus likely to be Vespremie's work, with its distinctive cursive lettering that is both elegant and somewhat playful, highlighting as it does the additional classes for children and young adults. (Fig. 3.80) The comical vignette that accompanies this announcement is eloquent despite its economy of means, showing students of mixed gender rushing through the door of the Academy and straight into a classroom where a drawing lesson is in progress. A more sophisticated advertisement appears in early 1926 in *Contimporanul*, listing the ten classes that the Academy is offering at this point in time: batik, bookbinding, metalwork, drawing, painting, sculpture, graphic design, architecture, ornamentation, and composition. (Fig. 3.81) The design of the advert is compact and geometric, juxtaposing simple shapes such as a circle, an arrow and several rectangles, and it utilises the blank space of the page to create shaping and lettering. Vespremie probably learned such techniques at the Schule Reimann, as Hertwig's own logo and trademark designs often feature 'a particularly strong integration of icon, letter, and resultant strong positive and negative forms'.⁶¹ (Fig. 3.82)

The Academy's expansion in the autumn of 1926 necessitated a new visual identity, which included a much more elaborate logo and a number of variations suitable for use on promotional materials, letterheads and envelopes. The logo itself appears in its most complete version on the cover of the brochure that served as catalogue for the opening of the first selling exhibition in October 1926. (Fig. 3.83) The black and green design integrates the blank space of the page within its composition, a device we have encountered above but which reaches a much greater level of intricacy here. Both the lettering and the surrounding geometric forms crisscross and overlap in a series of dizzying patterns and careful detailing. At least three different types of fonts are used, both serif and sans-serif, all containing playful detailing, such as the fragmentation of every horizontal stroke in the lettering of the main title. The composition itself contains three different registers. In the compact lower section we find the Academy's address and the tagline 'Permanent salon of decorative art for the modern interior'. In the middle of the composition is a large heading that reads 'Exhibition of the Academy of Decorative Arts'. The upper register is divided into two sections: one abstract configuration of overlapping shapes which also contains information on the opening hours, and a construction made from the initials of the main heading, with an E straddling a large A that incorporates another smaller A and a D.

61. Croyle, *Hertwig*, 231.

The full design has previously been attributed to Maxy⁶², like other Academy outputs, and there is a certain degree of plausibility in this based on Maxy's championing of the selling exhibition section. However, the elements of the design point to Vespremie as the author, not least due to the intricacies of the composition which would require a hand well-trained in different types of graphic lettering and logo construction. It was after all Vespremie who taught the Academy's graphics course, which incorporated 'modern ornamenting and artistic lettering', as the course catalogue reveals.⁶³ (Appendix E) Likewise, the shaping is consistent with Vespremie's other outputs: the elaborate yet compact design, as shown above, and the angular forms of his metal vases which are reflected in the abstract composition in the logo's upper register. Furthermore, the ludic use of initials to create distinctive graphic constructions for company logos was one of Herwig's strengths and one he passed on to his students, judging by the examples printed in *Farbe und Form*. A spread of student logo designs from the April 1926 issue for example, shows lettering being used with ingenuity to form strong graphic compositions. (Fig. 3.84) One composition in particular which incorporates an A and a V is stylistically comparable to another of Vespremie's logos for the Academy, which arranges the institutions' initials, AAD, into a pyramid shape emerging out of the opening of a V, for Vespremie. (Fig. 3.83)

Other Academy materials that have survived in a private collection reveal the use of the same branding identity on invoices and envelopes. The letterhead based on Vespremie's large logo for the selling exhibition is just as intricate, preserving the same elements but re-arranging them into a composition more suited to the format. (Fig. 3.85) A new element appears underneath the initials, on the left edge of the paper, combining words and graphics to create a list of available merchandise that resembles a vertical wall hanging. The list includes metalwork, ceramics, bookbinding, batik, toys, lamps, cushions, carpets, furniture, works on paper, books, painting, and sculpture, and a further extension of the design towards the centre of the page reveals that the artists of the Academy are available to execute design commissions and arrange interiors. For envelopes there were at least two different designs: one which replicated the full catalogue cover but in black and white (Fig. 3.86a) and one

62. Ilk, *Maxy*, 174.

63. Latvia State Historical Archives, 1632/1/23144.

plainer version, composed only of the main heading re-arranged for this purpose but with the same playfully fragmented design of the lettering (Fig 3.86b).

Comparing all of these designs with Maxy's graphics of the same period confirms the likelihood of Vespremie's authorship for the Academy's original visual identity. In February 1927, Maxy opened an exhibition of his own paintings on the premises of the Academy, designing invitations and a catalogue. (Fig. 3.87) He favoured a much more severe, pared back aesthetic, focusing on linearity and juxtapositions between horizontal and vertical elements, as well the repetition of certain words to create visual patterns. Maxy's own graphics for the Academy after Vespremie's departure utilised similar devices, in particular the use of sans-serif fonts and the preference for words as the building blocks of the composition rather than ornamental shapes. An announcement in *Integral* in the summer of 1927 revealed Maxy's directorship of the Academy using a simple pattern of indented sentences that formed a downward diagonal progression. (Fig. 3.88) In the following issue, an advertisement for the institution made use of a grid pattern similar to the one present on the cover of Maxy's exhibition catalogue of February 1927. (Fig. 3.89) Maxy's own design for letterhead paper from this period preserved all the elements of the advertisement but tilted the grid for added dynamism and added a circular shape, imbuing the whole composition with a somewhat suprematist feel, especially as the text of the surviving letter is written vertically across the page. (Fig. 3.90)

As with other examples of Academy outputs, differentiating between the work of Maxy and Vespremie is difficult but certainly possible through careful comparisons and attentive interrogation of surviving materials. In the case, it has been shown that the design of the Academy's graphic identity was undertaken by Vespremie until his departure in mid-1927. This included both the 1924 and the 1926 catalogues, advertisements, and letterhead paper and envelopes for the Academy's correspondence and invoices. Maxy subsequently took over the design of these elements exhibiting quite a distinctive style from that of Vespremie, displaying more clarity but also less virtuosity and diversity.

The Selling Exhibition

More widely discussed in Chapter One, the dichotomies of modernism are predicated around certain sets of assumptions. The conflation of decadent French art deco with kitsch, for

example, is often posited in contrast to the worthier goals of Le Corbusier's L'Esprit Nouveau, the proletarian aims of Russian Constructivism or the rational German ethos of the Bauhaus.⁶⁴ This division is based not only on the formal qualities of these design movements, but also on their relationship to the consumer and to the commodity. Embracing the possibilities of modern technologies and a clean visual vocabulary, the 'right' kind of modernism ostensibly produced utilitarian objects for the masses, eschewing luxury and the deficient tastes of the bourgeois classes. The Academy of Decorative Arts was thus a failure, whose expensive handcrafted products pandered to a small group of wealthy buyers.⁶⁵ Recent scholarship, however, has challenged such narratives and proposed much more nuanced readings of modernism and its commercial endeavours, which can be used to examine the Academy more fruitfully.⁶⁶

In *Designs on Modernity. Exhibiting the City in 1920s Paris*, Tag Gronberg observes the deficient treatment afforded to the Paris 1925 International Exhibition within scholarly studies of art and design. The event is rarely considered 'as an index of modernity worthy of study in its own right', instead being criticised for the expensive merchandise on display and unfavourably contrasted to the Soviet Pavilion or the Pavilion de L'Esprit Nouveau.⁶⁷ In

64. See for example Hal Foster et al., *Art Since 1900* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004), 220. Even the catalogue of a recent exhibition dedicated to Sonia Delaunay treats the artist's presence at the 1925 Paris exhibition ('lost in a surfeit of luxury') apologetically, emphasising her interest in 'the democratisation of art'. See Cécile Godefroy, 'The Métier of Simultanism', in *Sonia Delaunay* (London: Tate Publishing, 2014), 156–60.

65. Erwin Kessler is particularly critical, intimating that the Academy adopted a 'corporate aesthetics' in order to become 'integrated in the market'. See Erwin Kessler, 'Retro-Gardes', in *Colours of the Avant-Garde. Romanian Art 1910-1950*, ed. Erwin Kessler (Rome: Gangemi, 2011), 9–20, 18-19.

66. As well as the two main texts that will be referenced in this section, the growth of material culture studies and design history has produced an increasing body of scholarship on modernity and consumer culture, including Christoph Grunenberg and Max Hollein, eds., *Shopping. A Century of Art and Consumer Culture* (Hatje Cantz, 2002), Anca I. Lasc, Patricia Lara-Betancourt, and Margaret Maile Petty, eds., *Architectures of Display. Department Stores and Modern Retail* (London; New York: Routledge, 2017), Jeremy Aynsley, 'Displaying Designs for the Domestic Interior in Europe and America, 1850-1950', in *Imagined Interiors. Representing the Domestic Interior since the Renaissance*, ed. Jeremy Aynsley and Charlotte Grant (London: V&A Publications, 2006), 190–215; Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity. Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 1994).

67. Tag Gronberg, *Designs on Modernity. Exhibiting the City in 1920s Paris* (Manchester University Press, 2003), 16. One of the first works to challenge this dichotomy was Nancy J. Troy, *Modernism and the Decorative*

particular, Le Corbusier's own critique has been widely accepted, preserving his vocabulary which happened upon theatricality as a derogatory metaphor, 'claim[ing] that his Pavilion de L'Esprit Nouveau [...] was built "for real" in pointed contrast to the surrounding "plaster palaces writhing with decoration"''.⁶⁸ Yet Gronberg's study reveals the problematic ideas that lay beneath these criticisms. For instance, Le Corbusier conflated the female consumer with an interest in fashionable luxury items and surface decoration, positing his own environments as modern through their rational and masculine attributes, as well as revealing Orientalising tendencies in his treatment of folk objects gathered during his travels in Eastern and Southern Europe.⁶⁹ Thus, Gronberg questions the acceptance of Le Corbusier's modernism as the only 'real' one, and argues instead for legitimising the theatrical modernity of the 1925 Exhibition:

Designs on Modernity investigates the ostensibly unacceptable (and indeed largely unacknowledged) modernity staged by the Exhibition, a modernity which, I shall argue, had much to do with the explicit "shop-window" effect of this event. Theatricality and illusion [...] are foregrounded as a of means exploring and tracing the parameters of that other modernity in which the city was represented as a brilliantly lit, enticing spectacle. [This challenges the depiction of] the modern city [...] in terms of the café as opposed to the music hall, as the site of intellectual preoccupation rather than as visual spectacle.⁷⁰

The Academy of Decorative Arts engaged in this type of staged and consumable modernity through the opening of its permanent selling exhibition in October 1926, alongside its teaching activities. This new section, like the Academy itself, has frequently been considered the brainchild of Maxy. Advertisements credited the design of the space to Maxy and, as we have seen, the emblematic image of the exhibition which graced the cover of *Integral* bore the caption 'Modern Interior by M. H. Maxy'. (Fig. 3.91) Liana Maxy's memoirs do cast some doubt on this narrative when suggesting that not only it was Maxy's wife Mela who spotted the opportunity to join forces with Vespremie's educational venture, but it was also

Arts in France. Art Nouveau to Le Corbusier (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1991).

68. Ibid., quoting Le Corbusier, *The Decorative Art of Today*, translated and introduced by James I. Dunnett (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987), xiv and 139.

69. Gronberg, *Designs on Modernity*, Ch. 5.

70. Ibid., 18-9.

she who directed the commercial activities and supervised the arrangement of the exhibition itself.⁷¹ As Liana is an unreliable narrator, Mela Maxy's involvement has remained unexamined by scholarship. However, documents supporting Liana's statements have come to light during the research for this thesis. A hand-written agreement dated 1 September 1926 launched the association between Vespremie, Fischer-Galați and Mrs. A. M. Maxy, establishing the new permanent exhibition space and setting out the various duties involved in running it.⁷² (Appendix I) Mrs. Maxy was to bring a capital of 100,000 Romanian lei, and was to be responsible for selecting the merchandise together with Vespremie.⁷³ She was also to be the manager of the exhibition section, undertaking 'all the duties of a good administrator' and providing reports twice a month to the other partners. There is even a non-compete clause scribbled vertically across the page, stating that Mrs. Maxy must not engage in a similar business venture for one year should she decide to leave the partnership. Additional proof of Mela's managerial position comes from the Academy's letterhead paper found in the same collection. Vespremie's design contains the phrase 'under the directorship of Mrs. A. Brun-Maxy, in this case including Mela's maiden name. (Fig. 3.92)

The exhibition spaces of the Academy, revealed in this letter to be two rooms and an entrance hall, were arranged in the guise of domestic interiors. This blurring of the private and the public has shaped the interpretation of surviving photographs, sometimes thought to show the inside of the Maxy family home.⁷⁴ This reading not only erases the contributions of many other artists to the ensembles exhibited, but also overlooks the modern commercial strategies employed by Mela Maxy. The agreement included a clause that established a publicity budget of 36,000 Romanian lei for the first three months of the exhibition's existence.

71. Liana Maxy, *Nucleul magic* (Tel Aviv: Integral, 1986), 190-5. There might have been a precedent for this. It seems that during Maxy's time in Berlin Mela was also the breadwinner, working as representative of several German firms which presumably traded with Romania. See Andrei Pintilie, 'Maxy, un clasic al modernismului românesc. Fragment de monografie', *Studii și cercetări de istoria artei. Artă plastică*, no. 44 (1997): 59-70, 60.

72. The document is part of a private collection. Mrs. Maxy's full name was Ana Melania, generally shortened to Mela.

73. For comparison, in 1925 the average monthly salary of a workshop foreman was 3,813 lei and that of an architect 5,775 lei. See Gheorghe Iacob and Luminița Iacob, *Modernizare - Europeanism. România de la Cuza Vodă la Carol Al II-lea*, vol. 2 (Iași: Editura Universității Al. I. Cuza, 1995), 176-7.

74. For example Ilk, *Maxy*, 52 and 186, reproduces one of the photographs twice with different captions, one suggesting it was taken in the showroom of the Academy of Decorative Arts and the second indicating Maxy's home as the location.

Presumably, part of this was devoted to taking a number of photographs that would show the ensembles to their best advantage. These images, whose photographer is not known, were evidently staged. A tea trolley and stool topped with an abstract-patterned cushion obstruct a doorway in order that they may face the camera, while in another image which shows a section of the same room several items have been moved to create a more harmonious composition, as has the rug. (Fig. 3.93) The involvement of Mela Maxy, the re-staging of domestic interiors for consumption and the preoccupation with saleable commodities and with publicity, place the Academy's exhibition section within the realm of the 'unacceptable' and 'unacknowledged' modernity that Gronberg identifies, whose correlation to the urban 'shop-window' implies theatricality, consumption and female agency, attributes that are frequently considered incompatible with modernism. The performative aspect of this space was heightened further by the events taking place here, in particular exhibition openings for the Academy's own displays and for the temporary exhibitions of other artists. On one occasion, the Academy's showroom hosted a contemporary dance performance by Paule Sybille, a French émigré who had trained at the school of Jaques Dalcroze and Rudolf Laban and who subsequently opened a studio in Bucharest, instructing the next generation of avant-garde Romanian dancers.⁷⁵ The modernity of Sybille's performance required a suitable backdrop and thus the Academy was chosen specifically for its equally modern aesthetic.⁷⁶ Furthermore, Mela Maxy's own flair for theatricality was evident not only from her activities at the Academy, but also from the regular gatherings she hosted for Bucharest's artists, writers and actors. In his memoirs, Saşa Pană recalled her 'interesting manner of provoking debate and inciting, through dialectic controversies, discussions about current events'.⁷⁷ The

75. Maxy, *Nucleul magic*, 229 and 'Studio Paule Sybille', DanceCloud (platform of the National Centre for Dance), accessed 7 March 2019, <http://dancecloud.ro/ieri/organizatii/studio-paule-sybille/>.

76. Maxy, *Nucleul magic*, 229. If the interiors of the Academy now appear to some scholars as a form of 'weak' modernism, this was clearly not the case during the institution's existence. As Sabine Wieber has observed, 'interiors that do not look modern to our twenty-first century eyes might have had equal stakes in being "in the present"'. See Sabine Wieber, 'The German Interior at the End of the Nineteenth Century', in *Designing the Modern Interior: From the Victorians to Today*, ed. Penny Sparke, Anne Massey, and Trevor Keeble (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2009), 53–64, 59.

77. Saşa Pană, *Născut în '02* (Bucureşti: Minerva, 1973), 269. Geo Bogza, 'Destinul unui artist', *Contemporanul*, 30 July 1971, describes the Maxy household, without naming Mela specifically however, as 'literary club and artistic laboratory, or even salon [...] where I once had the honour of shaking the hand of Brancusi [...] in an ambiance that fused bohemia with learned discussion'.

Academy's exhibition spaces and their manager were thus well attuned to modernity, both intellectual and visual.

The critique also extends however to the nature of the objects produced and sold by the Academy, luxury items handcrafted from expensive materials and produced for wealthy patrons. Here, the ghost of the Bauhaus haunts the Academy again, with its archetypal modernity that aimed to generate utilitarian objects for mass-production, no frills German design versus art deco opulence. However, as in the case of the 1925 Paris Exhibition, this myth has recently been challenged by new scholarship. In *Luxury and Modernism. Architecture and the Object in Germany 1900-1933*, Robin Schuldenfrei shows how the distinction between her two titular concepts is not so clear cut and how the rhetoric of the German modernists was not matched by reality:

...this study shows that the consumers of modern design objects, and the dwellers who elected to live in modern architecture, ultimately constituted an elite. While modernism was never truly able to reach the masses [in the period under discussion] in the form of either ideas or objects, similarly, the intellectual elite could not become truly proletarian.⁷⁸

As Schuldenfrei demonstrates, even those endeavours that are often held as beacons of modern accessible design, in opposition perhaps to the 1925 Paris display, were in fact unaffordable and unreproducible. Such was the Haus am Horn, a 'singular object of expensive luxury', funded by private donors persuaded by Gropius, who once wrote to a well-connected acquaintance: 'Can't you help me find capitalists?'.⁷⁹ Likewise, the German Werkbund's 1927 *Die Wohnung* exhibition in Stuttgart included a model housing development for workers whose planning was managed by Mies van der Rohe, yet the majority of its show homes were subsequently bought by affluent Stuttgart families.⁸⁰ Schuldenfrei's examination of the objects produced at the Bauhaus is equally sobering.

78. Robin Schuldenfrei, *Luxury and Modernism. Architecture and the Object in Germany 1900-1933* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 9.

79. Ibid., 116-7. Le Corbusier also sought sponsors to fund the projects he presented at the 1925 Exhibition: he approached Michelin, but eventually settled for Voisin, a luxury car manufacturer, naming his urbanism project 'Le Plan Voisin de Paris'. See Gronberg, *Designs on Modernity*, 120.

80. Schuldenfrei, *Luxury and Modernism*, 11.

Marianne Brandt's teapots, so emblematic for modern design, were handcrafted from expensive materials in the metal workshop and their careful detailing made them unsuitable for mass production.⁸¹ Orders for private patrons produced in the individual workshops constituted the main activity of the Bauhaus for most of the 1920s, and negotiations with industry came to some fruition only under the directorship of Hannes Meyer. Even when the Bauhaus registered as a business, the Bauhaus GmbH in 1924, its catalogue, designed with crisp clarity by Moholy-Nagy, presented mostly luxury items such as a silver tea service or a chess set.⁸² As Schuldenfrei points out 'there [were] no Bauhaus forks': instead of producing ordinary everyday objects, the workshops laboured to provide upper class homes with the paraphernalia of bourgeois comfort, from tea accoutrements to ashtrays and chess sets made of expensive woods.⁸³ Prices were equally prohibitive, with a Bauhaus teapot costing the equivalent of one and a half week's wages for a working-class family.⁸⁴

When evaluated against this description of the Bauhaus's activity, the Academy displays a comparable modernity. It produced hand-crafted objects for a number of relatively wealthy patrons and members of the intellectual elite who evinced an interest in its activities. The objects were generally suited to a middle or upper class lifestyle, including such items as silver tea services, fruit bowls, cushions, and leather bookbindings. Although information is not available on the prices charged in the Academy's showrooms, a price list exists for objects exhibited by Maxy at the 1931 Salon for Decorative Arts and Architecture held in Bucharest.⁸⁵ A silver-plated brass fruit bowl was 2,000 lei, only slightly less than the average monthly salary of a Romanian factory worker that same year.⁸⁶ More expensive items included a tea service for 15,000 lei, a carpet for 20,000 lei and a binding for a limited-edition illustrated book by poet Ion Pillat which cost 25,000 lei. Prices were thus indeed prohibitive, yet questioning the modernity of the Academy and its staff based on this fact is

81. Ibid., 139-40.

82. Ibid., 150-3.

83. Ibid., 141.

84. Ibid., 142-3. Income for a working-class family is calculated at 64 marks per week in 1927, while a Bauhaus teapot cost 90 marks and a five-piece tea set 180 marks.

85. Romanian National Archives, fond 817 Direcția Generală a Artelor, file 22/1931.

86. Victor Axenciuc, *Evoluția economică a României. Cercetări statistico-istorice 1859-1947*, vol. 1 (București: Academia Română, 1992), 542-3. The table lists salaries by industry, ranging from 1,660 lei for workers in the wood industry to 3,598 for those involved in paper production.

inconsistent with the reality of other modern design ventures. Their objects did not reach a mass audience, but neither did those of the Bauhaus during this period, despite Gropius's rhetoric. As Schuldenfrei notes, 'it is very difficult, outside of its *own* buildings and photographs, to find the products of the Bauhaus in domestic settings'.⁸⁷ In this respect, the Academy did reasonably well, as demonstrated by the objects that have been preserved in the collections of Bucharest artists and intellectuals, the mentions garnered in memoirs or fiction of the period, and even in the list of items sold by Maxy at the 1931 Salon.⁸⁸

This nevertheless limited reach occurred not only due to the pricing and the small-scale workshop production of modern design ventures, but also due to public taste. Even in Germany, despite the concerted efforts of the Bauhaus and the Werkbund, the wider public did not take to modernist aesthetics with enthusiasm.⁸⁹ The same frustrations beset the Academy and its staff, according to a kind of manifesto text printed in the 1926 catalogue to coincide with the opening of the new exhibition spaces. (Appendix E) As previously mentioned, the text is unsigned but was probably written by Maxy. It reveals that the Academy's main aim is:

... to create and produce decorative arts objects that will replace the quantities still filling shop windows under the label 'artistic', and at the same time to prevent the majority of interiors from becoming true 'museés des horreures'.⁹⁰

Coincidentally, similar language was used in a guide to window design published the same year in Germany which berated displays overflowing with assorted cheap goods with the term *Schrekenskammer* or 'chamber of horrors'.⁹¹ Efforts to educate German consumers had led to an awareness of the function of the shop-window, with the Werkbund taking particular interest in its potential for reform even from before the First World War. In 1910, the Werkbund opened a 'school for display window decoration' in collaboration with the Schule

87. Schuldenfrei, *Luxury and Modernism*, 153.

88. The listings found in the archives only specify prices next to a limited number of objects, and thus it may be inferred that these were the objects sold during the Salon.

89. Schuldenfrei, *Luxury and Modernism*, 154.

90. Latvia State Historical Archives, 1632/1/23144.

91. Schuldenfrei, *Luxury and Modernism*, 75, quoting Hans Bode, *Ein Schaufensterbilderbuch* (Hanover: S. Hein, 1926), 91.

Reimann, where the courses were held. The initiative proved popular, boasting twenty-eight instructors by 1914, with modern design luminaries such as Lilly Reich amongst them. Herman Muthesius also became involved, being drafted in to plan a special building for the school, but the war prevented this project from coming to fruition. The school however went from strength to strength, culminating in the organisation of the Leipzig Display Window Exhibition of 1928, where modern life, architecture and design were reflected in the clean, functional displays of contemporary goods.⁹² The Schule Reimann's activity in this field became well known outside Germany. During its later activity in Great Britain for example, the Reimann greatly influenced exhibition and display design in the country, and even in the 1920s the British journal *Display* hailed its work as 'the most up-to-date style of Continental Display', observing that 'among the many schools of commercial art and display in Germany that have recently sprung into being, the Reimann Higher Technical School of Commercial Decorative Art easily ranks first'.⁹³

It is thus reasonable to suppose that Vespremie would have been aware of the activities of the Reimann's display department, and the importance of commercial display and Maxy certainly seems to be echoing the reformist vocabulary of the Werkbund when describing the Academy's aims.⁹⁴ Maxy's text explicitly positions the Academy and its displays as an educational aid for the wider public, offering guidance for the creation of tasteful interiors. The Academy may even have had its own window display, although only one image has survived as evidence of this. It was printed in the avant-garde periodical *unu* in early 1929, just before the institution's demise. (Fig. 3.94) Interestingly, its contents are not the Academy's own objects, but photographic equipment, constituting an advertisement for a photography studio named Omnia, located in the near vicinity. The image in *unu* is poor in quality, but a few details can be distinguished, such as the slogan in the top right hand corner recommending the use of Agfa Film.⁹⁵ The display also features some cardboard models, one

92. Schuldenfrei, *Luxury and Modernism*, 93-5.

93. Yasuko Suga, 'Modernism, Commercialism and Display Design in Britain', *Journal of Design History* 19, no. 2 (2006): 137–154, 141, quoting the journal *Display* from September and October 1928.

94. Arguably, the Wiener Werkstätte had initiated the art of commercial display even before the Werkbund, and its work would have also been known to Maxy and Vespremie, as discussed earlier in the chapter. For more on the rise of shop-window displays as artistic endeavours see Jean-Paul Bouillon, 'The Shop Window', in Jean Clair and Jeremy Lewison, *The 1920s. Age of the Metropolis* (Montreal: Museum of Fine Arts, 1991), 162-181.

95. This endorsement can be found in other advertising for Omnia photo studio from this period.

of which is operating a camera on a tripod, and a number of framed photographs on the left hand side. Both the title of the image, ‘The Modern Shop-Window Omnia’, and the clear structure of the display, with stylised figures and goods arranged in orderly, yet asymmetrical fashion, as well as the very technology it advertises, position this display firmly within the parameters of urban modernity.

Although the creator of the Omnia shop-window is unknown, the display’s existence and its presence in the pages of *unu* place the Academy within a wider context of modernity in which commercial display encountered various forms of artistic endeavour. Despite later criticism of theatricality and commerciality by modernist scholars, such distinctions were far from clear cut during the period, as we have already seen with the examples of the Werkbund and the Bauhaus. In Germany, artists such as Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and August Macke included shop-windows in their paintings as signifiers of the contemporary Berlin cityscape.⁹⁶ In France, vitrines began incorporating new technologies borrowed from the performative arts, such as spotlighting or moving components, and eventually entire staged displays of commodities made their way onto the cinema screen in films such as *L’Inhumaine*, *Le Vertige* or *Le P’tit Parigot*.⁹⁷ Furthermore, Fernand Léger acknowledged the ‘display-window spectacle’ and its ever increasing presence in everyday life as the direct competitor of the painter, while in the French journal *Présentation* a commentator observed:

‘Before, likening a painter’s style to that of a display artist would have been considered a criticism. I know of several today who would be extremely flattered by such a comparison’.⁹⁸

Perhaps the most distinctive connection between performance, window-dressing and avant-garde art was exemplified by the career of Frederick Kiesler, who transitioned from

96. Schuldenfrei, *Luxury and Modernism*, 110-2; Bouillon, ‘The Shop Window’, 174.

97. For example, Robert Mallet-Stevens employed a lighting professional for his windows and Robert Delaunay invented a roller device to exhibit Sonia Delaunay’s fabrics in motion. See Bouillon, ‘The Shop Window’, 171, and Gronberg, *Designs on Modernity*, 86. For more information on modernist interiors on screen, see Jean-François Pinchon, *Rob. Mallet-Stevens. Architecture, mobilier, décoration* (Paris: Action artistique de Paris, 1986).

98. Bouillon, ‘The Shop Window’, 177, quoting René Chavance in *Présentation 1927. Le décor de la rue, les magasins, les étalages, les stands d’exposition, les éclairages* (Paris: Les Éditions de Parade, 1927), 40.

designing the constructivist stage set for the 1923 Berlin production of *R.U.R.*, Karel Čapek's robot drama, to creating window displays for Saks Fifth Avenue in New York in the late 1920s.⁹⁹ Thereafter, Kiesler became a theoretician in the field, publishing his book *Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and Its Display* in 1930, which also included examples from Reimann-designed shop windows. Kiesler connected art, merchandise, and performance through the medium of the spectator-consumer, constructing his designs 'in order to promote contact between viewers and the works on display', each window an opportunity for spectacle:¹⁰⁰

Why doesn't the show window hold instead of a display - a play? A stage play - where Mr. Hat and Miss Glove are partners. The window a veritable peepshow stage.¹⁰¹

In Chapter One, this thesis argued that Erika Fischer-Lichte's new aesthetics of performance could function as a theoretical framework that expands the boundaries of modernism by acknowledging the communication between the artwork and its audience. As shown above, new scholarship is emerging that embraces this connection as part and parcel of modernism, questioning the stigma that has been attached to performativity, commerce and the link between them, in the context of modern design. Viewed through this lens, the Academy's exhibition section was a thoroughly modern enterprise, employing up to the moment display techniques, staging its commodities for publicity, manifesting an interest in reforming public tastes, and doing all this under the directorship of a woman. It is true that its high-priced handcrafted products did not reach the masses, yet this inconsistency between avant-garde rhetoric and the realities of mass-production and public tastes plagued many other equivalent organisations. Furthermore, the Academy did not stop here. In the following chapter, the

99. Kiesler (1890-1965) was born in a Jewish family in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, just like Vespremie. In the mid-1920s, Kiesler was a promoter of avant-garde performance, organising the International Exhibition of Theatre Techniques in Vienna in 1924, creating the Austrian theatre section during the 1925 Paris Exhibition and organising a reprise of the Vienna exhibition in New York in 1926. See Lisa Philips, ed., *Frederick Kiesler, 1890-1965* (New York: The Whitney Museum of American Art, 1989), 139.

100. Cynthia Goodman, 'The Art of Revolutionary Display Techniques', in *Frederick Kiesler*, ed. Philips, 57-84, 58.

101. *Ibid.*, 60, quoting Frederick Kiesler, 'Merchandise that puts you on the spot - Some notes on show windows', undated typescript from the Kiesler Estate Archives.

connection between theatre stage and design showroom, between spectator and consumer, between actor and mannequin, becomes even clearer, blending together contemporary theories of theatre and commercial display and reflecting Kiesler's ideas.

Chapter 4. MAXY AND THE VILNA TROUPE: RECONSTRUCTING AVANT-GARDE PERFORMANCE IN BUCHAREST

Among Romanian scholars, there seems to be a consensus that truly experimental theatre had no significant presence in interwar Bucharest, or that, as Paul Cernat writes, ‘the attempts of the Romanian avant-gardes to revolutionise theatre in the 1920s remained only a good intention’.¹ Artists such as Tristan Tzara and Marcel Iancu, who were at the forefront of avant-garde performative practices abroad, are seen as blueprints for what experimental theatre should look like, seeking to shock and awe its audiences with Dadaist abandon. In Bucharest, however, the goal of those involved in rejuvenating theatre was to create rather than destroy, to attract spectators rather than ‘épater la bourgeoisie’. This was true especially in the case of the Vilna Troupe, an itinerant ensemble that depended on an audience for its survival and which nonetheless brought a new vision of theatre through its radical productions during its time in Romania from 1923 to 1927. The Vilna Troupe collaborated with local artists and directors to develop its wide-ranging repertoire and to foster visual experimentation. During the years 1925 and 1926, Maxy became one of their foremost collaborators, producing stage designs and promotional materials for the troupe. His work in the theatrical realm is closely interconnected with his other activities during this period, including his collaboration with the Academy of Decorative Arts.

This chapter examines Maxy’s collaborations with the Vilna Troupe in an attempt to reconstitute for the first time this entire series of productions (Appendix J), with the Troupe’s itinerant career making it the ideal candidate for an analysis based on the concept of ‘circulations’. This transnational trajectory, the ephemerality of performative practices, and an often monolithic understanding of what constitutes avant-garde theatre have combined to erase the Vilna Troupe’s contributions to cultural experimentation in interwar Bucharest. This

1. Paul Cernat, *Avangarda românească și complexul periferiei* (București: Cartea Românească, 2007), 269. See also Ion Cazaban, ‘Futurismul ca model teatral’, *Studii și cercetări de istoria artei: Artă Plastică*, număr special (2010): 33–45, who concluded that the Romanian avant-garde’s rhetoric with regards to new theatrical practices, as seen in their periodicals for example, remained only a theoretical debate. On what constitutes avant-garde and/or modernist theatre see Günter Berghaus, *Theatre, Performance, and the Historical Avant-Garde* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Olga Taxidou, *Modernism and Performance. Jarry to Brecht* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Claire Warden, *Modernist and Avant-Garde Performance. An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015).

account of its activities comes in response to such lacunae and uses material gathered from a wide range of sources, including the Romanian National Art Museum (MNAR), the Romanian Academy, the Harvard University Judaica Division and the Yivo Institute for Jewish Research in New York, as well as detailed searches through the period press.

The Vilna Troupe and Experimental Theatre in Romania

During the mid-1920s Bucharest became home to the Vilna Troupe, an ensemble formed in Vilnius in 1915, which forged an international reputation due to its innovative Yiddish-language productions.² At its core was the Kadison family, whose Vilnius apartment had been the ensemble's first rehearsal space. Leib Kadison was the troupe's de-facto leader, as well as being its main director and sometime-actor. His wife Chanah provided home-cooked meals and moral support, as well as acting in the plays. The Kadisons had three children, of whom only Luba, the youngest, joined the troupe as an actress. Around 1918, while the Kadisons were based in Warsaw, the troupe was joined by young actors Joseph Buloff and Alexander Stein, who were soon to be competing for creative control.³ (Fig. 4.1) The ensemble had already engendered a splinter group that retained the now familiar Vilna Troupe name. This was to happen multiple times in later years, with the Vilna Troupe eventually 'encompassing nine distinct companies, hundreds of actors, and dozens of directors and designers across five continents at the height of its influence'.⁴

After touring Poland and Galicia and performing in Vienna, the original Vilna Troupe,

2. For a comprehensive account of the Vilna Troupe's international history, see Debra Caplan, *Yiddish Empire. The Vilna Troupe, Jewish Theater, and the Art of Itinerancy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018) and 'Nomadic Chutzpah: The Vilna Troupe's Transnational Yiddish Theatre Paradigm, 1915-1935', *Theatre Survey*, Vol. 55 (September 2014): 296-317. Referring to the rapid rise of the ensemble, Caplan writes in 'Nomadic Chutzpah', 296: 'Within a year, they are the most famous Jewish theatre company in Eastern Europe, and their productions are frequently reviewed by the Polish, Russian, and German press. In five years, they have become a global sensation, drawing the attention of prominent Jewish and non-Jewish theatre artists, politicians, and intellectuals from across Eastern and Western Europe, North and South America, and beyond. They are widely regarded as one of the foremost avant-garde theatre companies in the world.'

3. Biographical details from Luba Kadison and Joseph Buloff, *On Stage, Off Stage. Memories of a Lifetime in the Yiddish Theatre* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Library, 1992).

4. Caplan, 'Nomadic Chutzpah', 298.

managed by impresario Mordechai Mazo, arrived in Romania in 1923 and remained in the country until 1927 (albeit not always in the same configuration), having received a warm welcome from the public and critics.⁵ Few scholarly accounts exist of the Vilna Troupe's time in Bucharest. One of the more comprehensive is the section dedicated to the troupe by Israel Bercovici in his history of Jewish theatre in Romania.⁶ According to Bercovici, the ensemble's first two seasons in Bucharest drew large crowds, including actors from the local theatres and even members of the Romanian royal family, and received glowing reviews. The newspaper *Adevărul* considered its productions 'worthy of being seen even by those who do not understand the language.'⁷ Its greatest Romanian success came in early 1925 with a production of Osip Dymov's *The Singer of His Sorrow* (*Cântărețul tristeții sale*) which was so popular that it ran for over 150 performances.⁸ In an open letter to the Yiddish-language Warsaw magazine *Literarische Bleter*, Buloff - by now one of the ensemble's most prominent members - described this triumph and the troupe's reception in Bucharest:

...The stalls in front of the stage with its canvas curtain have been filled by spectators wearing tailcoats and monocles, tens of artists, professors, ministers, clapping wildly. [...] From the evening when automobiles with the royal coat of arms appeared on the dirty streets of the ghetto, the Jews have gone completely crazy and a theatrical frenzy started which lasted 76 days – a legendary number not just for a Jewish theatre, but for Romanian theatre too. [...] From the lowliest writer to the greatest poet or artist, all feel the need to express in public their admiration for Jewish art and the Yiddish language.⁹

5. According to Kadison and Buloff, *On Stage, Off Stage*, 9, Mazo had joined the company in around 1916 as managing director. 'He was a strong, good-looking man, a six-footer of athletic build and bearing who had been a teacher of gymnastics and fencing in Petrograd before the war had transplanted him to Vilna.'

6. Israil Bercovici, *O sută de ani de teatru evreiesc în România* (București: Editura Integral, 1998), 125-146.

7. *Ibid.*, 127.

8. Camelia Crăciun, 'Bucureștiul interbelic, centru emergent de cultura idiș', *Revista de istorie a evreilor din România*, no. 1 (16-17) (2016): 65-81, 75. Osip Dymov (1878–1950) was a writer and playwright born in Białystok and active in Russia, Germany and the United States. One of his most popular works was *Yoshke muzikant* (Yoshke the Musician), also known as *Der zinger fun zayn troyer* (The Singer of His Sorrow), which Dymov wrote in 1914.

9. The whole letter is quoted in Romanian translation in Bercovici, *O sută de ani*, 130-131. The original was published in Warsaw in *Literarische Bleter*, no. 59 (19 June 1925).

Naturally, Buloff had every reason to boast to his erstwhile friends and acquaintances in Warsaw, and when Luba Kadison was interviewed in 1980 by Irving Genn, who ghost-wrote her memoirs, he also seemed diplomatically dubious about some of these claims, such as the presence of the King of Greece in the audience.¹⁰ Nonetheless, this was entirely true. King George II of Greece had been exiled from his home country in 1923 and was at the time living in Bucharest with his wife Princess Elizabeth of Romania. According to a report in the newspaper *Curierul israelit*, the King came to see *The Singer of His Sorrow* accompanied by his adjutant and his secretary and stayed until the very end.¹¹ As well as Romanian royalty, represented by Prince Carol and his controversial mistress Magda Lupescu, the play's audience included the local aristocrats, as indicated by the carte de visite of Constanța Cantacuzino, a pianist and high-society lady from the inner circle of Queen Marie of Romania, located in one of the Buloff archives.¹² The hand-written text reads: 'Please reserve a good box for today's performance of *The Singer of His Sorrow*', with the word 'good' underlined for emphasis. (Fig. 4.2)

Despite this great commercial and critical success, the Vilna Troupe has made few appearances in scholarly accounts on theatrical life in Romania. The existence of a certain narrative regarding the 'acceptable' influence being that of West European culture, in particular that of France, means that certain theatrical visits have acquired a larger body of scholarship than others. The influence of French troupes, such as that of Georges Pitoëff, is the subject of a detailed article by Vera Molea,¹³ while the lasting impact of German director Karlheinz Martin has been frequently discussed by Ion Cazaban, one of the foremost theatrical scholars in Romania.¹⁴ The legacy of such visiting theatrical luminaries is

10. The full recordings of the working sessions for *On Stage, Off Stage* are part of the Joseph Buloff Jewish Theater Archive at Harvard University. Luba Kadison's remark about the King of Greece is on CD 1B. In the recording, Irving Genn affects incredulity and focuses instead on the Romanian royalty's interest in the Vilna Troupe.

11. M. Schweig, 'Trupa din Vilna (II)', *Curierul israelit*, 15 March 1925.

12. Yivo Institute for Jewish Research, Joseph Buloff and Luba Kadison collection, RG1146, series VIII Publicity & Reviews, file 192.

13. Vera Molea, 'Actori și trupe de teatru franceze la București (1830-1940)', *Lettre Internationale*, no. 88 (Winter 2013-2014): 9–15.

14. Ion Cazaban, *Scena românească și expresionismul* (București: Cheiron, 2012); Ion Cazaban, 'La scene roumaine et l'expressionisme (II)', *Studii și cercetări de istoria artei. Teatru, muzică, cinematografie*, 1 (45) (2007): 103–16.

frequently acknowledged, whereas that of the Vilna Troupe's productions is not, despite accounts that describe local cultural figures attending their performances with enthusiasm. Nonetheless contemporary commentators recognised their value, acknowledging that the Vilna Troupe's performances were 'a revelation for our theatre' and 'a school for the new generation of actors'.¹⁵ According to Buloff, even Eugen Ionesco, one of the most prominent modernist playwrights, was inspired by the performances he witnessed in Bucharest. Years later, when Ionesco had made his name as a pioneer of the Theatre of the Absurd, Buloff recalled having received an enthusiastic phone call from the unknown young playwright some years before.¹⁶

The success of *The Singer of His Sorrow* was due in part to the introduction of local collaborators. Whilst the troupe had been self-sufficient in its tentative first season in Romania, it now turned to Bucharest's artistic world for inspiration. As well as the talents of stage designer George Löwendal, the play also benefited from the directorial nous of Iacob Sternberg. A poet and writer born in Bessarabia, Sternberg was also one of the most innovative theatre directors in Romania during his time in the country between 1913 and 1940. Another neglected figure, like Vespremie, his theatrical activity forms a pendant to that of Maxy and is woven into the account that follows in this chapter and even more so in the subsequent one. Sternberg combined his knowledge of the traditions of Yiddish theatre with an interest in popular culture – in particular, the music hall – as well as a thorough understanding of contemporary theatrical developments. Furthermore, he frequently presented his observations and theorised his work in the press of the period and within the playbills of the theatrical performances he directed or supported.

In 1925 the Vilna troupe became part of the local landscape even further, reforming as a local ensemble and changing its name to Tragedy and Comedy (Drama și Comedie) in an attempt to escape the crippling taxes imposed on foreign troupes.¹⁷ It is during this period that Maxy's activity in the theatre began, as well his collaboration with the troupe. According to the programme drafted by Sternberg, the troupe's new artistic director, the goal was to create 'an avant-garde theatre, a theatre of synthesis, which will aim to imbue acting, direction and

15. Bercovici, *O sută de ani*, 144-145, quoting an article from the newspaper *Clipa* from 18 Sep 1927.

16. Kadison and Buloff, *On Stage, Off Stage*, 54.

17. Bercovici, *O sută de ani*, 131-132.

text with the rhythm of contemporary innovation'.¹⁸ (Appendix K) This was to involve a number of local artistic collaborators, such as Maxy, although the main curtain was made after the sketches of Ernst Stern, a Romanian émigré who had found fame abroad as Max Reinhardt's preferred designer.

Maxy's first theatrical project was not such a departure from his previous artistic work. In the collections of MNAR a sketch for a poster exists announcing the opening, on 1 October 1925, of the troupe's forthcoming season on the premises of the Central Theatre.¹⁹ (Fig. 4.3) The geometric composition with overlapping shapes is characteristic of Maxy's work from this period, as seen in previous chapters, and represents a theatre stage whose curtain swings aside to reveal four tiny figurines about to take a bow. On the other side of the stage is a cluster of tall modernist buildings that could be part of a constructivist set or a representation of modern life claiming its place on stage, or perhaps both. The planes slope and slide creating a sense of drama and dynamism. The proscenium swings upwards while the buildings lean to the right and the stage is angled in the opposite direction. The different sections of the composition serve different functions indicated by scribbled titles. The repertoire, in the yellow space above the stage, is divided into Yiddish, German, Romanian and Russian plays, with the premieres listed in the orange area next to the curtains, while the shape beneath the stage is intended to separately list the names of the troupe's male and female actors. Viewed as a whole, the allusion to the urban environment, as well as the dynamism of the sloping planes and the mobile proscenium, suggest that the swinging curtain uncovers much more than just a theatrical stage: a vision of modernity perhaps.

No evidence exists as to whether the poster ever became more than a prototype, however further material located in the Romanian National Archives suggests Maxy designed other promotional materials for the troupe. A printed brochure, probably submitted by Sternberg to support his application, was attached to an official letter from the Ministry of the Interior granting the troupe approval to perform in Bucharest.²⁰ (Fig. 4.4) The brochure is square in format and has a purple cover. The left margin is given over to the word 'Prospect'

18. Romanian National Archives, fond 652 Direcția Generală a Artelor, file 13/1925.

19. The troupe had previously performed at the Jignitza Theatre. See Vera Molea. *Hai, nene, la Iunion! Teatrele din gradinile de vară ale Bucureștilor de altădată* (București: Vremea, 2014), 82.

20. Romanian National Archives, 652/13/1925.

(Prospectus) and the dates of the upcoming theatrical season: 1925-1926. Aligned with the lower edge of the paper is the name of the troupe, ‘Drama și Comedie’, underscored by its former incarnation as the Vilna Troupe, together with the details of its location, Teatrul Central. Positioned within the space created by the two sections of text is a logo, which reconfigures the visual tropes of comedy and tragedy into a graphic construction contained within the troupe’s initials, D and C. They are enclosed on two sides by what may be a schematised cross-section of a theatrical stage, with a backdrop and curtain surrounding the initial D, while a jagged proscenium strides forward above the letter C. Although the designer of the brochure is not acknowledged, the design of the logo can be closely linked to the graphic compositions produced by Maxy during this period and printed in the avant-garde periodicals *Integral* and *Contimporanul*, some of which are discussed later in this chapter. Furthermore, the final page of the brochure is given over to two portraits of the troupe’s artistic directors, Sternberg and Mazo, signed by Maxy and demonstrating the same controlled equilibrium between the figurative and the abstract. (Fig. 4.5)

Maxy produced a further interpretation of this theme in a drawing published in his magazine *Integral* in October 1925 entitled *Tragedy and Comedy*. (Fig. 4.6) The issue also contained an announcement regarding the Vilna Troupe’s new name and management team, which included Abraham Leib Zissu, ‘friend and collaborator’ of the magazine. Maxy’s drawing accompanied the text of a short play by Zissu entitled ‘The Origins of Tragedy and Comedy. A Legend’.²¹ Set in the Garden of Eden, the play was dialogue between Harlequin – a stock character in commedia dell’arte, representing comedy – and the prophet Jeremiah – a figure from the Old Testament, representing tragedy – interrupted by the appearance of Adam and Eve. The text turned on a number of dualities: besides the titular one, there was also light and dark, as well as male and female, yet Harlequin insisted that these were all linked through common origins. Maxy’s drawing eloquently depicted these contradictions. The figures of Adam and Eve in the centre of the image seem to be both conjoined in the upper register and separated in the lower one by the diagonal line that divides light from dark. The acrobatic contortions of Harlequin are juxtaposed with the kneeling figure of Jeremiah whose face resembles a painted mask. Despite the somewhat traditional elements depicted, Maxy’s composition is firmly within the aesthetics of modernity and even the reference to antiquity present in Eve’s torso has an element of collage about it, while the figures of Harlequin and

21. A. L. Zissu, ‘Originile dramei si comediei. Legenda’, *Integral*, no. 6–7 (October 1925): 14–15.

Jeremiah display the jagged lines and robotic demeanour that Maxy was already using in his theatrical designs, as the next section reveals.

Saul (1925)

As revealed in the opening of this chapter, if theatrical initiatives of an experimental nature did take place in Bucharest, scholarly accounts of the subject have been few and far between.²² The ephemerality of the theatrical arts and the intervening years of communist dictatorship are some of the reasons that have impeded this recuperation. Furthermore, Romanian scholarship on the avant-garde has been preoccupied with its literary output to the detriment of other disciplines and has fetishised in particular the avant-garde's printed publications, such as *Integral* and *Contimporanul*.²³ Whilst these are important sources of information, their frequency could be inconsistent and their rhetoric unreliable, and thus they cannot be relied upon to provide an accurate and coherent picture of the productions that made it to the stage. As a result of this approach, Maxy's work in the theatre hardly makes an appearance in existing scholarship on the artist and when it does it is strewn with errors that have become self-perpetuating, as is the case with Maxy's first foray into scenography.

In March 1925, the first issue of *Integral* announced:

22. The most comprehensive work on this subject was done during the communist period by theatre historian Simion Alterescu, who published his findings in the journals of the Romanian Institute of Art History. See for example Simion Alterescu, 'Teatrului românesc din primele decenii ale secolului al XX-Lea și inovarea artei scenice interbelic (Avangarda. Semnificația conceptului și a mișcării artistice)', *Studii și cercetări de istoria artei. Teatru, muzică, cinematografie*, no. 30 (1983): 46–55 and Alterescu, 'Le Théâtre d'avant-garde. Conceptions théoriques et activité créative en Roumanie au début du XXème siècle', *Revue roumaine d'histoire de l'art. Théâtre, musique, cinéma*, no. XX (1983): 21–33. After his death, Ion Cazaban and Paul Cernat became the authorities on the Romanian avant-garde's involvement with theatre, yet as we have seen they do not believe this involvement to have been of significance. See Cazaban, *Scena românească* and Cernat, *Avangarda românească*.

23. The majority of scholarship published in Romania on the avant-garde journals has been by literary scholars such as Paul Cernat, Ovidiu Crohmălniceanu or Ion Pop. See for example Cernat, *Avangarda românească*; Ion Pop, *Introducere în avangarda literară românească* (București: Institutul Cultural Român, 2007); Ovidiu Crohmălniceanu, *Evreii în mișcarea de avangardă românească* (București: Hasefer, 2001).

The group INTEGRAL, not having at present the means to manifest itself independently and on its own terrain, its first experience will be the production of *Saul* by André Gide – at the Central Theatre of the Vilna Troupe – directed by I. M. Daniel, with decor and costumes by M. H. Maxy. The event must be emphasised: these are the first scenic constructions in our country.²⁴

The following month, the second issue of the magazine printed three images relating to the play. These are Maxy's designs for six costumes and for the set. Of the production itself there was no written account however and the images accompanied an article by Maxy on modernism in theatre in France, Germany and Russia.²⁵ The former was judged to have fallen behind, as the latter two brought an increasing number of innovations. According to the author, Germany had taken the lead in scenic inventions, bringing new technologies to the stage, as well as the concept of the 'scenic cube', which incorporated the actors and the décor into one 'plastic image' that could be manipulated according to dramatic requirements. In Russia on the other hand it was the actor who took primacy through Vsevolod Meyerhold's biomechanics and the stage environment was changing to accommodate the three-dimensionality of the new dynamic body.

Despite the lack of a textual link between these affirmations and the accompanying reproductions by Maxy, the idea of the 'scenic cube' is visibly translated into the stage designs for *Saul*. (Fig. 4.7) The set is fashioned from interconnected geometric elements grouped around a multi-level podium that may well form a mechanised assemblage. The geometric rigidity of the set is mirrored by the costume compositions, for the characters of Saul, David, Johel and three Devils, which reconfigure the same shapes into human form. (Figs. 4.9 and 4.10) Nonetheless these do not appear to be practical designs – the figures lack sections of various limbs – but the pictorial representation of a mechanical union between actor and stage, as well as a rejection of theatrical naturalism. The lack of concern for feasibility in these sketches and the lack of information about the production in the press of

24. *Integral*, no. 1 (1 March 1925): 16. The identity of I. M. Daniel is not certain, but he may have been Bulgarian experimental theatre director Isaac Daniel (1894-1942) who opened his Teatar Studia (Theatre Studio) in 1919 in Sofia.

25. M. H. Maxy. 'Regia scenică - decor - costum', *Integral*, no. 2 (1 April 1925): 4-5.

the period corroborate a later account that reveals *Saul* never actually made it to the stage.²⁶ This information is unclear from scholarly accounts of Maxy's career²⁷, as well as from studies of avant-garde theatre in Romania which frequently use *Integral* as their only printed source from the period.²⁸ Furthermore, due to *Integral*'s prominence for scholars of the avant-garde, Maxy's theatrical portfolio is often thought to consist only from the productions described within.

Nonetheless, *Saul* was planned for inclusion in the Vilna Troupe's repertoire, as it was listed alongside about twenty-five other plays envisaged for Tragedy and Comedy's 1925-26 season.²⁹ Sternberg's list, printed in the prospectus designed by Maxy, was part of his manifesto for a theatre of synthesis that would tackle a repertoire both classical and modernist. (Appendix K) This ambitious plan was realised only in part, with some projected productions, such as *A Night in the Old Marketplace* or *The Bewitched Taylor*, seeing the light of stage only several years later, as discussed in the following chapter. The choice of *Saul* was probably determined by its subject matter and its modernist pedigree. One of Gide's first plays, written in 1897-98 and published in 1903, it recounts the biblical tale of Saul, the first king of Israel, and his troubled relationship with David, his rival and eventually his successor. The political and possibly amorous entanglements between Saul, David and Saul's son Jonathan are observed by the Devils, who gradually impel the king towards his downfall and finally his demise at the hands of the servant Johel. Gide's play was staged for the first

26. Israel Marcus. *Sapte momente din istoria evreilor în Romania*. (Haifa: Glob, 1977), 54. The author spent several months interviewing Maxy in later life and claims the artist checked the manuscript for accuracy shortly before he died.

27. For instance Michael Ilk, *Maxy. Der integrale Künstler* (Ludwigshafen: Michael Ilk, 2003), 44 and 176. Ilk's monograph includes *Saul* in the lists of theatrical productions the artist was involved in, as well as in the chronology of Maxy's life which claims he created sets for this play on the stage of the Central Theatre in March 1925. This misrepresentation may also stem from Maxy's own accounts of his career, as is the case with the chronology of his 1965 retrospective where the designs for *Saul* appears under his activities for the year 1926. See *Expoziția retrospectivă M. H. Maxy*, exh. cat. (București: Arta Grafică, 1965), and also the monograph by Petre Oprea, *M. H. Maxy* (București: Arta Grafică, 1974).

28. See for example Ion Cazaban, 'Scenografii ai teatrului românesc interbelic (I)', *Studii și cercetări de istoria artei. Teatru, muzică, cinematografie*, no. 40 (1993): 55–62, 61 and Andrei Pintilie, 'Considerații asupra mișcării de avangardă în plastica românească', in *Bucharest in the 1920s and 1930s: Between Avant-Garde and Modernism*, ed. Magda Cârnelci (București: Simetria, 1994), 27–37, 33.

29. Romanian National Archives, 652/13/1925.

time in 1922 by Jacques Copeau at his Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier, and perhaps it was this association with contemporary theatrical developments that attracted the attention of Sternberg and the Vilna Troupe.³⁰

Other than *Integral*, visual evidence of Maxy's stage and costume designs for the Vilna Troupe are located in the Graphic Arts collections of MNAR and the Romanian Academy.³¹ Prepared on the same type of paper and in the same style, several such works are signed and dated and contain information about the productions they represent. They are highly finished and do not appear to be working sketches. It is thus likely that they are later recreations of working designs, perhaps for an exhibition, despite being dated with the actual year of the individual productions. Such a possibility is all the more plausible as Irina Cărăbaș has found further instances of Maxy recreating earlier works, probably for his 1965 retrospective. Organised during a period of ideological thaw, the exhibition was an important moment of validation from the communist regime for Maxy's entire artistic career and thus the inclusion of avant-garde works was important. According to Cărăbaș, at least two paintings from the 1920s were recreated: a portrait of Tristan Tzara from 1923-24 and another of actress Florentina Ciricleanu from 1925 and in both cases Maxy signed and dated the new works retrospectively.³² It seems likely that the stage designs were also recreated for this purpose, especially as they do not appear in other previous exhibition catalogues, but they were included in the retrospective.³³

30. For more information on the play see D. M. Church, 'Structure and Dramatic Technique in Gide's *Saül* and *Le Roi Candaule*', *PMLA* 84, no. 6 (1969): 1639-43 and Karine Germoni, '*Saül* ou la réécriture gidienne du mythe biblique', *Bulletin des amis d'André Gide* 31, no. 140 (2003): 485-501.

31. Romanian National Art Museum, Graphic Arts collection, fond M. H. Maxy; Romanian Academy, Graphic Arts collection, fond M. H. Maxy.

32. Irina Cărăbaș, 'Avangarda românească în viața de dincolo. M. H. Maxy - pictor comunist', in *Arta în România între anii 1945-2000. O analiză din perspectiva prezentului* (București: UNArte, 2016), 36-51, 37 and 48-49. According to Cărăbaș, Ilk was the first Maxy scholar to draw attention to the differences between the paintings of Tzara and Ciricleanu currently in the collection of the Romanian National Art Museum and the period reproductions from *Integral* and *Contimporanul*. In the Museum the works are currently exhibited as originals from the 1920s as per Maxy's own dating.

33. See *Expoziția retrospectivă M. H. Maxy*. This observation is based on the extensive solo and group exhibition catalogue archive in the Maxy fond at MNAR, as well as period press searches.

Within this group of works on paper two are related to *Saul* and to the prints that appeared in *Integral* in 1925. The set design, which closely resembles the version printed in *Integral*, is dated 1924, although as shown above it may have been created at a later date. (Fig. 4.8)

Unlike the other drawings in the group, it is not annotated with the name of the director or the theatrical ensemble, thus confirming the fact that this production never took place. It reveals a constructivist stage with three distinguishable elements: a backdrop with a geometric composition dominated by a half-moon shape; the stage-side tormentors with jagged zig-zag designs; and a multi-level podium topped by a rectangular contraption from which two beams reach out to the two sides of the stage. Perhaps Maxy envisioned the elements to be mechanised or to serve as acrobatic supports for a new breed of biomechanical actors. He was probably aware of the 1924 Berlin staging of Eugene O'Neill's *Emperor Jones* (1920), which introduced Frederick Kiesler's 'mechanical space scenery', an abstract stage set that could be mechanically manipulated to create a succession of scenes.³⁴ The actors are imagined by Maxy in a second highly finished work on paper which recalls another Kiesler production, namely the automaton-inhabited world of Karel Čapek's *R.U.R.* This is a version of the print representing the three Devils in *Integral* and the disjointed bodies, made up of primary-coloured geometric shapes and robotic elements, are even more evident in this drawing. (Fig. 4.11) One character is missing its arms, while another seems to have had them replaced by chevron-shaped springs. Like the set designs, the costumes are a futuristic flight of fancy that could not be realised and which may well have proven a step too far even for the ground-breaking Vilna Troupe. As shown later in this chapter, these were by far Maxy's most severely avant-garde designs, eschewing all naturalistic elements and fully embracing constructivist aesthetics on stage.

Thus, this particular vision remained only an imagined space and Maxy's engagement with the theatrical continued to unfold in two dimensions. The portrait of Ciricleanu, typical of Maxy's brightly coloured cubist paintings of this period, was entitled *Electric Madonna* when reproduced in *Integral* in November 1925 in the section dedicated to film reviews. (Fig. 4.12) Both this placement and its subject, a theatre actress, suggested that the stage and screen had replaced religion as a source of awe and wonder for the modern world. With bobbed hair and striking make-up, Ciricleanu's head hovers monumentally above the audience - whose

34. Barbara Lesák, 'Visionary of the European Theatre', in *Frederick Kiesler, 1890-1965*, ed. Lisa Philips, (New York: The Whitney Museum of American Art, 1989), 37-45, 43.

presence is suggested by the rows of sketchily drawn theatre seats - and is illuminated by an electric bulb. Although the quality of the reproduction in *Integral* does not allow a close reading, the background appears to be a theatrical stage with constructivist elements, such as a ladder and multiple levels. By contrast, in the painting of Ciricleanu currently on display at MNAR some of the more avant-garde elements have been removed, so that the background is just a theatre curtain and the audience has been sketched in. (Fig. 4.12) Information on the painting provided by the Museum notes that it is 'dated 1926, the year Florentina Ciricleanu played in productions of the Bucharest Jewish theatre Barașeum for which Maxy made stage designs'.³⁵ Although Maxy did act as stage designer for the Barașeum Theatre, this did not happen until the early 1940s when the institution was established as a home for Jewish theatre in an increasingly hostile political climate.³⁶ Ciricleanu was probably not involved with any of the Jewish theatre companies active in the mid-1920s and in September 1926 was recorded as working for the National Theatre, an institution with a much more traditional outlook.³⁷ Furthermore, Ciricleanu does not seem to have been a particularly prominent actress, at least during the 1920s and early 1930s, as she makes hardly any appearances in the press – avant-garde, cultural, or otherwise – and is also absent from theatrical avant-garde happenings, such as those described below. She may have been a friend and sometimes model for the avant-garde group, as Ilk has unearthed photographs of her together with the Maxy family and with other contributors to *Integral*.³⁸ It is thus intriguing to note that Maxy's depiction of a modern, performative Madonna was not based on one of the more prominent figures of Jewish or Romanian theatre, but on a relatively anonymous supporting actress.

Maxy's engagement with the theatre and its practices is further evidenced by a series of graphic vignettes representing well-known personalities. The catalogue for the 1965

35. 'Maxy – Electric Madonna', accessed 3 April 2018, <http://www.mnar.arts.ro/en/discover/permanent-galleries/117-romanian-modern-art-gallery/discover-the-works-in-the-romanian-modern-art-gallery/293-maxy-electric-madonna>.

36. Bercovici, *O sută de ani*, 174. The Barașeum did exist pre-1940s as a space for Jewish arts, but not specifically as a theatre.

37. According to a listing of current theatrical productions in *Rampa*, 19 September 1926, she had a supporting role in *Aesop* by Théodore de Banville.

38. See Ilk, *Maxy*, 47 and 49. Ciricleanu is also known to have modelled for other artists, such as Petru Iorgulescu-Yor, however I have found no reliable biographical data about her.

retrospective lists a number of such works, some originals executed in black ink and some reproductions from various issues of *Integral*.³⁹ Amongst those represented are Vsevolod Meyerhold, Max Reinhardt, Alexander Tairov and Jacques Copeau, as well as Romanian director Sandu Eliad and Abraham Goldfaden, who popularised Yiddish theatre in the nineteenth century.⁴⁰ As is the case with Maxy's graphic work from the mid-1920s, these portraits are highly schematic, resembling technical drawings composed of multiple elements, some recalling mechanical parts. These assemblages incorporate elements relating to the sitter and their work, with one well-known example being Maxy's portrait of Constantin Brancusi, in which the sculptor merges with his work. (Fig. 4.13) Likewise, Maxy's theatrical personalities of the modern stage are fragmented, mechanical and occasionally masked, reflecting their approaches. (Fig. 4.14) They resemble the characters from *Saul*, themselves seemingly assembled from interchangeable parts and perhaps not entirely human. Puppets, marionette and their contemporary incarnation, robots, were at the root of modernist performance and its relationship with the actor, and the theories of Edward Gordon Craig were well-known in Romania.⁴¹ In Camil Petrescu's 1933 novel *The Bed of Procustes*, which as we have seen fictionalised Bucharest's modernist intelligentsia, a character writes in a letter to his lover:

Dearest [...], we've decided to make a theatre group, we'll call it 'Proscenium'. A young director, who studied in Berlin with Karl Heinz Martin, will do the mise-en-scene. Before the play we will hold lectures explaining what we want. There are great hopes that we will completely revolutionise outdated Romanian theatre, which still holds onto cheap, vulgar forms. The first play we'll do will be Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, in a single stage setting, with modernist lighting and props [...] One of our best known authorities will speak on Tolstoy and Gordon Craig's directing.⁴²

39. *Expoziția retrospectivă M. H. Maxy*.

40. Goldfaden (1840-1908) was the creator of the world's first professional Yiddish theatre troupe in 1876 in the Romanian city of Iași. See Anca Mocanu, *Avram Goldfaden și teatrul ca identitate* (București: Fundația Culturală Camil Petrescu, 2012).

41. Liliana Alexandrescu, 'Echoes of Gordon Craig in the Romania of the 1930s and 40s', *Studii și cercetări de istoria artei. Teatru, muzică, cinematografie*, no. 5–6 (49–50) (2011-2012): 137–45.

42. Quoted in Alexandrescu, 'Echoes of Gordon Craig', 137.

Petrescu was probably gently satirising some of the short-lived avant-garde theatrical groups that aspired to transform the Romanian stage, such as the Island (Insula) group active between 1922 and 1923. One of its leaders, Benjamin Fundoianu, was later involved with *Integral* and the remarks he made in Island's programme notes may have struck a chord with Maxy. Fundoianu advocated for a scenography stripped to its bare essentials and for costumes made of paper that could transform the actors into 'singing, mechanical marionettes, grotesquely idyllic, as dreamt up by Gordon Craig'.⁴³ Furthermore, Maxy may have had his first taste of theatre design during two avant-garde events that took place in the spring of 1925, at the same time that his sketches for *Saul* were published in *Integral*. The Festival of Jewish Writers and Artists, on 11 April of that year, has been discussed in Chapter Two in relation to Vespremie's involvement.⁴⁴ It is worth returning to it here to examine its content. As well as classical music by Mendelssohn, Chopin and others, and readings of new prose, the evening also included a cabaret with twelve different acts. Maxy designed a fantastical, elaborate playbill for the cabaret whose cover is an intricate collage of forms, fonts, and textures and which includes graphic vignettes that spell the title of each act, connected together like a geometrical spiderweb. (Fig. 4.15) The stacked rectangular shapes explode with fonts that shrink or expand, turn upside down, and move in every direction, including diagonally. Perhaps this exuberance matched the contents of the cabaret itself: some of the acts are quite cryptic and one wonders what the 'Salade Russe' or the 'Kubik Box' entailed. What is clear however is that members of the Vilna Troupe bookended the performances, with Joseph Kamen (Alexander Stein's brother) starting the proceedings and Joseph Buloff rounding them off.

The Festival was thus an occasion for the Vilna actors to share the stage with the local theatrical avant-garde, as the evening also included a production of Nikolai Evreinov's *The Merry Death* (1909), a modern take on commedia dell'arte, directed by Sandu Eliad and designed by Marcel Iancu. Although some of the illustrations in the Festival's programme are not signed, they represent all five of the play's characters (Harlequin, Pierrot, Columbine, the Doctor and Death) and can thus be attributed to Iancu. (Fig. 4.16) This is also the case of the final drawing, which represents a constructivist staging of the play, with jagged corners and

43. Ion Cazaban, 'Scenografi ai teatrului românesc interbelic (III)', *Studii și cercetări de istoria artei. Teatru, muzică, cinematografie*, no. 42 (1995): 55–64, 61.

44. Harvard Library Judaica Division, Judaica ephemera collection, Theater/ B/1/Romania.

multi-level ramps, recognisable by the oversize clock that is crucial to the plot.⁴⁵ (Fig. 4.18) A photograph of the staging was also published in *Contimporanul* in May 1925, when the performance was repeated as part of a two-evening happening entitled ‘Demonstrations of New Art’ in which music, dance and poetry readings prefaced Evreinov’s play.⁴⁶ The photograph, although showing a more modest endeavour than that suggested by the drawing, reveals a strikingly geometric stage with stacked platforms mostly devoid of props. (Fig. 4.19) There is a certain resemblance between this image and Maxy’s design for *Saul*, including the circular shapes in the background, the pyramidal outline of the multi-level structure and the use of steps. Iancu’s costumes however are distinctly less experimental than Maxy’s, even as sketches, perhaps because they were designed with specific performers in mind or perhaps due to the influence of Eliad, whose philosophy lay in liberating actors from conventions and restrictions, both old or new.⁴⁷ The characters are recognisably human and instantly attributable to the tradition of *commedia dell’arte* and the faces and bodies of the actors are not distorted or obscured as can be seen in two photographs. (Fig. 4.17)

Thus, the fact that the ‘first scenic constructions’ Maxy imagined for *Saul* failed to become reality was perhaps to be expected if even avant-garde performances eschewed the purely mechanical stage. In Romania, set design had been primarily developed by a number of Italian artists who worked in Bucharest during the second half of the nineteenth century. Elaborate, yet generic and interchangeable, painted decor was the norm. The 1889 obituary of Gaetano Labo, the most prominent of these artists, specifically referred to the complex skill required to obtain the correct perspective in painted backdrops.⁴⁸ According to Cazaban, the first truly modern stage design was seen in Bucharest only in 1922 when Karlheinz Martin, a disciple of Max Reinhardt, came from Berlin to direct four plays at the Bulandra Theatre.⁴⁹ His theatrical aesthetic was sparse, with monochrome backdrops and a limited number of

45. Douglas J. Clayton, *Pierrot in Petrograd. Commedia dell’Arte/ Balagan in Twentieth-Century Russian Theatre and Drama* (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University, 1994), 149-150.

46. ‘Program al Demonstrațiilor de artă nouă din 28 și 29 mai 1925’, *Contimporanul* no. 59 (28 May 1925): 6-7.

47. Sandu Eliad, ‘Vorbe de după culise’ in the Festival’s brochure, Harvard Library Judaica Division, Judaica ephemera collection, Theater/B/1/Romania. Text reprinted in *Contimporanul* no. 59 (28 May 1925): 7.

48. Ana Traci, ‘Pictori scenografii în secolul al XIX-lea la Teatrul cel Mare din București’, *Studii și cercetări de istoria artei. Teatru, Muzică, Cinematografie*, no. 7-9 (51-53) (2013-2015): 3-23, 14.

49. Cazaban, *Scena românească*, 56.

essential props, relying on lighting to create the desired atmosphere, as described by one reviewer who witnessed Martin's Bucharest production of Osip Dymov's *Nju*:

In one corner of the scene, a sofa, a table lamp; in the other, a table with four chairs; in the background, a podium. The lamp is turned off. Only one bright beam coming from above lights the corner of the sofa.⁵⁰

Although innovative in their sparseness, the sets still had some semblance to reality, with domestic objects used to suggest an interior. What had previously been a two-dimensional fantasy brought to life through the illusion of perspective could now be seen on stage, albeit in a more pared-back version. Maxy's and Iancu's scenic constructions made the leap much further, to a stage that resembled nothing familiar, except perhaps an abstract painting. As Eliad wrote, the new theatrical stage must have 'a floor fragmented into planes that correspond to the movements of the characters, [and] panels that frame it spatially not pictorially'.⁵¹ In his writings, Maxy also mused on the need for removing painterly illusion in favour of the three-dimensionality of the 'scenic cube', and increasingly strove to replace the pictorial with the spatial in his theatre designs, as this chapter reveals.⁵² Another endeavour of theatrical constructivism was mechanisation that could go further than expressionism's use of lighting technology, for example by employing multi-level platforms and moving elements on stage, as Meyerhold had attempted.⁵³ Perhaps Maxy intended for his stage design to include such elements, especially when considering his robot-inspired vision for the actors' costumes. However, this might have been challenging to achieve in reality, particularly in the context of Romanian theatre which tended towards the static despite having a tradition of technical trickeries and illusions that delighted nineteenth century audiences.⁵⁴

Although Maxy's ambitious vision did not see the stage that year, debates about modern performance continued to take place within the pages of *Integral*. Furthermore, it was in an

50. Ibid., 19, quoting the newspaper *Rampa*, 8 March 1922.

51. Eliad, 'Vorbe de după culise'.

52. Maxy, 'Regia scenică', 4.

53. There are many studies of Meyerhold and his theatrical innovations, but amongst the most comprehensive are Konstantin Rudnitsky, *Meyerhold, the Director* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1981) and Edward Braun, *Meyerhold. A Revolution in Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1998).

54. Traci, 'Pictori scenografi', 6-7.

interview with Luigi Pirandello that Maxy's colleague Mihail Cosma provided the definition of Integralism that has been critiqued for its eclectic inclinations, as seen in Chapter One: 'a scientific and objective synthesis of all the aesthetic pursuits we have witnessed so far (futurism, expressionism, cubism, surrealism, etc.), all combined on constructivist foundations'.⁵⁵ If his definition, together with *Integral*'s own subtitle 'A Review of Modern Synthesis', implies a pick-and-mix approach towards different modernist currents, a closer look in conjunction with aspects of performance reveals a number of complexities. The terms 'synthesis' and 'synthetic' had a number of uses in a theatrical context during this period. As early as 1915, Marinetti had written an article, together with two collaborators, on 'The Futurist Synthetic Theatre'. In this context, the concept of fusion was to be applied to theatre so as to make it 'extremely compact, compressing "into a few minutes, in a few words and gestures innumerable situations, sensibilities, ideas, sensations, facts, and symbols"'.⁵⁶ Marinetti's theatre was not a synthesis of the arts, in the sense of Gesamtkunstwerk, but a condensed version of traditional theatre in which every element becomes simultaneous, like a Futurist painting brought to the stage. By contrast, the Wagnerian sense of the term was closer to Fyodor Komissarzhevsky's definition of synthetic theatre, which he envisioned as a union of all the arts on stage.⁵⁷ Tairov took this even further, calling not just for an integration of various artistic forms – including those theretofore considered low-brow, such the music hall and the circus – but also for an integration of the totality of the stage space.⁵⁸

In November 1925, the Vilna Troupe, in its incarnation as the Tragedy and Comedy ensemble, presented a 'synthetic' production of Nikolai Gogol's *Marriage* (1842) which was evidently inspired by recent theatrical development, and in particular Tairov's ideas. Sternberg, who was the director, explained his understanding of the term as applied to theatre as a 'synthesis of the whole theatrical evolution', a definition that mirrored Maxy's description of Integralism as a movement that united the latest artistic advances. Synthetic theatre, Sternberg continued, presented that which is 'typical and eternal', eschewing

55. Mihail Cosma, 'De vorbă cu Luigi Pirandello', *Integral*, no. 8 (December 1925): 2–3.

56. Marvin A. Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre. A Historical and Critical Survey, from the Greeks to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 342, quoting Marinetti's article.

57. Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre*, 325.

58. James Roose-Evans, *Experimental Theatre. From Stanislavsky to Peter Brook* (London: Studio Vista, 1970), 27.

references to the past or the present and capitalising on Gogol's preference for 'pantomime, grotesque, silent scenes'.⁵⁹ A belligerent reviewer described the performance as follows:

Last night's synthetic theatre was understood by no-one, because it is absurd to do away with actors, to do away with walls, to do away with doors, in order to introduce characters through chimneys or flying trapezes, and to do away with furniture in order to replace it with ropes [...]. The cubist mask, the mask presented in profile, the facial triangle covered by a layer of green, red, lilac paint...⁶⁰

The designer was George Löwendal, who had also collaborated with the Vilna Troupe on the celebrated production of *The Singer of his Sorrows*, however he is not mentioned in the article about *Marriage* published in *Integral*, perhaps because Maxy viewed him as a rival. *Integral's* anonymous reviewer defended Sternberg's production and praised the few cultural personalities who wrote about it in positive terms. It did however contain the assertion, in italics, that *Marriage* 'did not attempt to be, and was not constructivist. It was only synthetic....'⁶¹ At fault was the text, which limited the potential for a truly modern performance. This assessment suggests that the writer may be Florian Barbu, one of the regular contributors to Maxy's magazine, who in an earlier issue had declared that theatre cannot be 'integral' without 'new text'.⁶² In this context synthetic theatre is seen as not being sufficiently avant-garde and thus not fully aligned with the concept of synthesis as used by the Integralist group. Barbu's colleague, Mihail Cosma, defended the eclecticism that led to the creation of Integralism by claiming that all the previous movements lacked a powerful pluralist vision – 'the power of synthesis' – that could unite them into a coherent whole.⁶³ This vision should be built in 'four dimensions':

The material of our creations? Anything. Wood, word, sound, steel, colour, sensation, idea. The field of our creations? Everywhere. Factory, street, brothel, man, society.

59. Bercovici, *O sută de ani*, 126-7, quoting an article from the newspaper *Rampa*, 8 Nov 1925.

60. Ibid., 138, quoting an article from the newspaper *Lupta*, 22 Nov 1925.

61. 'Căsătoria la Teatrul Central și constructivismul', *Integral*, no. 8 (November-December 1925): 14.

62. Barbu Florian, 'Teatru și cinematograful', *Integral*, no. 2 (1 April 1925): 13.

63. Mihail Cosma, 'De la futurism la integralism', *Integral*, no. 6-7 (October 1925): 8-9.

This multiplicity of spaces and materials gives Integralism a distinctive vision that makes it more than the sum of the movements it incorporated. There are elements of constructivist thinking in the expansion of the artist's portfolio into the realm of applied arts and design, but there is also a practical understanding of how this expansion requires different skills. 'The set is not the scaled-up version of a painting-sketch, but a decorative creation in which the optical illusion of the aerial perspective is removed' wrote Maxy, referring to the 'scenic cube'.⁶⁴ *Saul* may have remained in the realm of the 'painting-sketch', but it also represented the first step in a process of experimentation that sought to test the possibilities of the new theatrical stage. As 1925 drew to a close, financial difficulties and the departure of some of its actors led to the dissolution of the Tragedy and Comedy ensemble. The Vilna Troupe regrouped and returned to its old name, heralding also the beginning of a number of fruitful collaborations with Maxy.

***Shabbsai Tsvi* (1926)**

The very first production with designs by Maxy to see the stage was *Shabbsai Tsvi*, which premiered on 24 February 1926 at the Vilna Troupe's now permanent location, the Central Theatre.⁶⁵ The production was an amalgamation of dramas by Jewish writer Sholem Asch and Polish intellectual Jerzy Żuławski, and it recounted the exploits of the real-life eponymous hero who abjured his faith in front of the Ottoman sultan Mehmet IV, thus proving to be a false messiah.⁶⁶ The production enjoyed a great success: the newspaper *Rampa* quoted

64. Maxy, 'Regia scenica', 4.

65. A. Sch., 'Premiera de astă seară. Teatrul Central', *Rampa*, 24 February 1926. The spelling of the title varies even within the same article in the period press, so I have chosen the version used by Yiddish theatre scholar Debra Caplan.

66. Sholem Asch (1880-1957) is one of the best-known writers in modern Yiddish-language literature. His three-act poetic drama *Shabbsai Tsvi* was first published in 1908 in a Vilnius periodical. Polish writer Jerzy Żuławski (1874-1915) may have been inspired by it when he wrote *The End of the Messiah*, a four-act play about the same subject first published in 1911. The Bucharest performance was adapted by Joseph Buloff from both of these works. For more information about these plays see Joseph Sherman, 'Asch, Sholem', YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe (2010), accessed 9 January 2017, http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Asch_Sholem; Krzysztof Niweliński, 'Shabbetai Sevi on Stage: Literary, Theatrical and Operatic Creations of the Messiah', *El Prezente. Journal for Sephardic Studies* 10 (December 2016), 55-69; Sonia Gollance, 'Plotting Yiddish Drama. Shabse Tsvi', Digital Yiddish Theatre Project, accessed 28 March 2018, <https://yiddishstage.org/plotting-yiddish-drama/shabse-tsvi>.

positive reviews from eight other publications.⁶⁷ The reviewers were unanimous in their praise of the four scenes that made up the production which were ‘grandiose’, ‘breath-taking’ and ‘a delight for the eye’. The design of the sets and costumes, ‘superbly coloured and harmonious, is proof they were arranged and executed by an artist’, and the first act in particular was ‘a true poem of light and colour’.

Until recently, it might have been difficult to imagine what this performance really looked like. The surviving designs by Maxy, located in the collection of the Romanian Academy, have not been very widely discussed or reproduced, compared to *Saul* for example.⁶⁸ *Shabbsai Tsvi* was not mentioned in *Integral* (which only had one issue printed in 1926) and has thus escaped the attention of scholars of the Romanian avant-garde. The three designs are part of the same group of highly-finished works on paper discussed earlier and are thus more likely to date from the 1960s rather than being contemporaneous with the production. Nonetheless they provide an important visual clue to what the production looked like on stage, especially when examined alongside a group of period photographs that have emerged during the research for this thesis. Unconnected to Maxy’s name, the images have been part of the Joseph Buloff Jewish Theater Archive housed by the Judaica Division at Harvard’s Widener Library since 1987 when they were bequeathed by his wife Luba Kadison and their daughter Barbara.⁶⁹ The collection documents Buloff and Kadison’s international career and their life after settling in the United States, as well as holding many clues to the Vilna Troupe’s time in Romania. The images of *Shabbsai Tsvi* in the collection were dated 1924 and were catalogued without reference to the play’s designer, which explains their absence from any studies of Maxy’s work, despite the fact that he appears in one of the photographs together with Buloff.⁷⁰ (Fig. 4.20) The images were taken by one of Bucharest’s most

67. ‘Cronica dramatică despre *Sapsay Zwi* cu Trupa din Vilna’, *Rampa*, 6 March 1926.

68. They are briefly discussed in Ion Cazaban, ‘Scenografi ai teatrului românesc interbelic (I)’, 61, and illustrated in Magda Cârnci, ed., *Rădăcini și ecouri ale avangardei în colecțiile de grafică ale Bibliotecii Academiei Române* (București: Academia Română, 2011).

69. Gladys Damon, ‘Harvard Library Receives’, clipping from unidentified newspaper. Yivo Institute for Jewish Research, Joseph Buloff and Luba Kadison collection, RG1146, series XI Misc., file 212.

70. Following my research visit in October 2017 and upon my informing the archivists, the catalogue records of the relevant photographs in the collection were updated with the correct information, including the date of the production and Maxy’s name.

prominent photographers of the period, Iosif Berman, indicating the prestige afforded to the Vilna Troupe's performances.⁷¹

The photographs and the designs can now present a much more accurate account of the production than what has been previously thought possible. In addition, further textual and visual material has been located in the press of the period and in the archives held by the Yivo Institute for Jewish Research. Such is the case of a four-page promotional leaflet that announced the premiere of *Shabbsai Tsvi* to Bucharest audiences, with Buloff and Stein sharing the title role.⁷² The pamphlet revealed that the Vilna Troupe was trialling a new subscription system for faithful spectators, hoping for a more secure income stream and that this was the third premiere of the season. The text continued with a very loose synopsis of the play which mused philosophically about the importance of the historical figure of Shabbsai Tsvi for the Jewish faith. The final paragraph revealed that Buloff was the director of this production and that the decor and the costumes were by Maxy. According to Luba Kadison:

The sets were designed by Maxim (sic), a renowned Rumanian painter, who brought the leading personalities of Bucharest to see this highly stylized, surreal production that took the Vilna Troupe still further away from its earlier realistic style. The response was overwhelming.⁷³

The surviving visual material reveals three very different scenes that hover between the abstract and the figurative.⁷⁴ A photograph from Act I with Joseph Buloff in the title role was printed in *Rampa* shortly after the premiere.⁷⁵ (Fig. 4.21) It shows the hero standing on a

71. Iosif Berman (1892-1941) was one Romania's best known and most prolific photographers, specialising in photo reportage. He collaborated with numerous national and international publications (*National Geographic* and *New York Times*), was recruited by the ethnographer Dimitrie Gusti for his extensive study of Romania's rural areas, and served as official photographer for Romania's royal family.

72. 'Către vizitatorii noștri'. Yivo Institute for Jewish Reserch, Joseph Buloff and Luba Kadison collection, RG1146, series VIII Publicity & Reviews, file 187.

73. Kadison and Buloff, *On Stage, Off Stage*, 53.

74. According to the programme of the Chicago revival in 1928, the play's structure was: Prologue, Act I, Act II Scene I and Act II Scene II. However, Maxy's drawings and the Romanian press review refer to Acts I, II and III, so I will use this terminology. The Chicago Prologue was probably a later addition by Buloff.

75. Scarlat Fronda, 'Cronica dramatică. Teatrul Central. Sapsay Zwi (Falsul Messia)', *Rampa*, 26 February 1926.

pedestal outside the gates of a city, as his followers prostrate themselves.⁷⁶ The cubo-futurist outlines of the metropolis rise up behind him, juxtaposing historicist and contemporary architectural forms. The stylised turrets of a tower can be clearly distinguished in the centre of the composition, alongside a shape resembling a multi-storey modernist apartment building with a flat roof and fashionable ocean-liner styling, including a wave motif. Its porthole-shaped windows contrast with the latticed shapes above and below that evoke medieval portcullises. The overlapping shapes, with shadows sketched in, do create a sense of relief, but the *mise-en-scène* seems relatively two-dimensional. Stylised palm trees guard the flat representation of the city, with a small cut-out of a dwelling placed in front to suggest some sense of depth. In this sense, the staging still follows the theatrical convention of the painted backdrop, even though it has renounced all attempts at an illusionistic effect.

Paradoxically, Maxy's sketch has a more three-dimensional quality than its real counterpart: the stage space in front of the backdrop is clearly delineated by a striped border and the prompt box is visible at the edge of the stage, whilst the upper edges of the city seep out from the pictorial space culminating in a puff of chimney smoke that escapes the confines of the drawing's edge. (Fig. 4.22) The colour scheme is pared-back and earthy, with only a few touches of colour. The set's flatly sparse yet monumental quality, reinforced by the manner in which the upper edges of the city also escape the photographs, serves to emphasise the action taking place on the stage in front of it. Reflecting the tenets of modern theatrical innovation, in particular those of Meyerhold, it is the actors that provide the set with contrast, structure and volume through collective movements and configurations, emphasised by their costumes. In one scene, groups of supporters in monochromatic outfits surround Shabbsai Tsvi from all sides, using the stepped ramp in front of the backdrop to arrange themselves into a highly effective symmetrical composition. (Fig. 4.23) Thus illustrated, Shabbsai Tsvi's claim of being the new messiah of the Jewish people sets in motion the play's main conflict between the protagonist and the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, whose throne he wishes to usurp.

In Act II, Maxy's sketch displays a riot of primary colours that suggest the sumptuous setting of the Sultan's court, yet they are tempered by geometrical shapes and patterns, rejecting the fashion for unbridled theatrical orientalism exemplified by ensembles such as the Ballet Russes. (Fig. 4.24) The Sultan and his two attendants form a symmetrical group wearing

76. Żuławski's play is 'set in Ottoman Adrianople, today's Turkish city of Edirne, about mid-September 1666' according to Niweliński, 'Shabbetai Sevi on Stage', 58.

lavish, yet crisply abstract, garments. The potentiality of the stage space is once again carefully considered: there are curtains, steps and multi-level platforms in Maxy's sketch drawn according to perspectival conventions, including shading on the pyramidal shape, in contrast to the flat background. Several photographs show how the design was used in practice during different scenes in the play's narrative. (Figs. 4.25-4.27) In one image Shabbsai Tsvi can be seen in combat with the Sultan's Janissaries, wearing his messianic crown, while two other photographs show him being captured and paying obeisance to the Ottoman ruler. All of these scenes make full use of the set's dynamic structure: Shabbsai Tsvi's downfall is mirrored by this descent from the pyramidal podium to its base and the Sultan's underlings gather in compact formations, using the stepped platforms to create diagonal lines that frame the action. Maxy's costume designs can be seen quite clearly in these photographs. The striped garments of the guards alternate with patches of plain colour, whilst Shabbsai Tsvi is set apart by his white robes. The Sultan's costume is the most elaborate, consisting of a robe with an abstract asymmetrical composition and a turban topped with geometric patterns. The Sultan's oversized headgear and his bulging belly turn him into an antagonist that is perhaps too comical to be effective - a critique brought also by the Romanian press⁷⁷ - yet Żuławski did mean to portray him as a weak and ineffectual ruler.⁷⁸

Ultimately, Shabbsai Tsvi's battle is with his own self as the production's concluding act suggests. The design for this scene makes its visual impact through arresting simplicity, with an elongated pentagon shape emerging out of the darkness of the stage to enclose a step pyramid on which the protagonist stands, a barely human figure composed of interlocking geometric shapes. (Fig. 4.28) The photographs show that the luminous pentagon was created through the use of curtains, bunched together to expose an area symbolic of the throne that Shabbsai Tsvi has reneged. (Fig. 4.29) The two L-shaped elements that seem to only have a decorative function in the sketch are revealed in the photograph as stepped platforms that function as part of the narrative. Shabbsai Tsvi, having lost his white messianic robes, is juxtaposed on stage with his temptress Sarah, his position uncertain, hovering somewhere between heaven and earth. As Luba Kadison later revealed, Sarah's white dress was Buloff's

77. J. Blumberg, 'Sabetai Zwi. Câteva observațiuni cu ocazia Jubileului de 25 reprezentații a piesei *Sapsay-Zwi*', *Renașterea*, 27 March 1926.

78. Niweliński, 'Shabbetai Sevi on Stage', 60.

means of signaling that she ‘symbolized the false messiah’s alter-ego’ and thus his struggle with his own nature rather than a physical being.⁷⁹ For one reviewer, this last scene was truly memorable and offered:

...a majestic simplicity in its decorative concept and an impressive stylisation in the acting. Shabbsai Tsvi rise is swift but brief, as he encounters the capital sin with the aid of a woman, and we witness a lugubrious descent of bodies, plunging down the steps and into the abyss of immorality.⁸⁰

Shabbsai Tsvi was one of the Vilna Troupe’s most notable successes in Bucharest, after their first triumph with *The Singer of His Sorrows* in 1924. *Lupta* reported that during the premiere the audience was completely enraptured and there was great acclaim as the curtain went down on the play’s first act.⁸¹ The mise-en-scène was reputed to be the most sumptuous the Central Theatre had ever seen⁸², weaving together ‘decor, lights, apparitions, tempo, [and] acting’ into one inspired performance, akin to the experiments of influential theatre director Max Reinhardt whom the Vilna Troupe had met in Berlin.⁸³ Maxy’s work had ‘great artistic value’ and ‘Romanian theatre [could] count on him as a craftsman of admirable talent’.⁸⁴ For some commentators, the scenography was almost a victim of its own success, eclipsing the action on stage. ‘The theatrical overshadowed the intellectual and the emotional’ wrote one critic in *Lupta*⁸⁵, whilst another reiterated: ‘it has been said before and we repeat it here that Maxy’s splendid decoration distracts the attention of the spectator’ as ‘the wonderful exterior setting stifles the inner narrative’.⁸⁶ Perhaps Maxy had been overzealous in fulfilling his first

79. Kadison and Buloff, *On Stage, Off Stage*, 70.

80. L.B. Wechsler, ‘Cronica dramatică. Trupa din Vilna. *Sabsay Zwi*. Mister în 3 acte de Schalom Asch prelucrat de J. Jurlowsky’, *Renașterea*, 27 February 1926.

81. ‘Teatru. Dela Teatrul Central’, *Lupta*, 26 February 1926.

82. Sch., ‘Premiere de astă seară.’

83. I. Sing., ‘Cronica dramatică. *Sapsay Zwi* la Trupa din Wilna’, *Hasmonaea* VIII, no. 9 (February 1926). It is not clear what ‘apparitions’ (‘aparitiuni’ in the original) refers to exactly. Most likely, it refers to the section of the play in which Shabbsai Tsvi performs a number of miracles, such as raising the dead, which may have required a certain amount of on-stage trickery.

84. Wechsler, ‘Cronica dramatică’.

85. Int., ‘Teatrul Central. *Sapsay Zwi*, mister dramatic prelucrat după Schalom Asch de Julavsky’, *Lupta*, 26 February 1926.

86. Blumberg, ‘Sabetai Zwi. Câteva observațiuni’.

theatrical design commission, but his notoriety was now certainly assured. One month after the premiere, an article in *Renașterea* celebrated the play's 25th performance⁸⁷ and several newspapers ran serialised accounts of Shabbsai Tsvi's life.⁸⁸

The production was so popular that it was chosen to open the autumn-winter season at the Central Theatre that same year.⁸⁹ However, much had changed in the intervening months. Joseph Buloff and Luba Kadison, who had been married the previous year, were considering whether to follow Luba's parents to New York and forge a new life in the United States, joining the company of Maurice Schwartz. Buloff wrote to Leib and Chanah:

Dear Parents,

Yesterday I got a letter; today a telegram. The contract has been signed. I felt a pang in my heart. Yes, and then no. Conflict.

The productions of *The Singer of His Sorrow* and *Sabbatai Zvi* have raised me to the top. Now I hold the reins of power and Alexander Stein is in the opposition. But the opposition is weak.

[Schwartz doesn't know that] I have my own conception of theatre. Since I fought here to have it recognized, I must naturally bring it to America. But if my approach is not the right one for America, it might be a mistake to import it.

Here, by contrast, the entire field is mine. Here, I am recognised as the only man who can say something and prove it. [...] the Vilna Troupe is planning to return to Warsaw with *The Singer* and *Sabbatai Zvi*.

We are now on our way to Transylvania to perform for six weeks, whereupon we can leave - which will probably be on July 25.⁹⁰

Shabbsai Tsvi had evidently propelled Buloff to critical and popular acclaim, as well as ensuring his de-facto leadership of the Vilna Troupe following Leib's departure a year earlier.

87. Ibid.

88. See for example the serialisation of 'Sabetay Zewi' by Israel Zangwil in *Renașterea*, starting on 13 March 1926.

89. Rep., 'Deschiderea stagiunei Teatrului Central. *Sabetay Zwy*', *Rampa*, 15 October 1926.

90. Kadison and Buloff, *On Stage, Off Stage*, 59-60. Although in the couple's memoirs the letter is dated 1927, it was actually written during the summer of 1926. The dating in the memoirs is not very accurate, for example the Bucharest production of *Shabbsai Tsvi* is described as taking place in 1924 instead of 1926.

His faith in the production was such that he would have liked to take it on tour outside the borders of Romania, back to Warsaw, the troupe's previous theatrical base. However, the Transylvanian tour did not go according to plan, perhaps swaying the Buloffs' final decision. They found the audiences in the region less responsive than those in Bucharest and one of the main players, Judith Lares – who had created a sensation with her performance in *The Singer of His Sorrows* – collapsed on stage and died of peritonitis. Mazo and the other actors buried her in the Transylvanian town of Arad, emblazoning the Vilna Troupe's logo large on her gravestones, in the hope of preserving some fleeting remembrance.⁹¹

The Buloffs thus embarked on the journey to New York, leaving Stein to take the creative reigns of the troupe in Bucharest. Although, according to Buloff, Stein was his rival and opponent, change did not come so swiftly. Stein, perhaps aware of the popularity of *Shabbsai Tsvi* and wary of the perils of his new position, opted to start the season with it rather than a new production. In mid-October 1926 *Shabbsai Tsvi* was back on stage at the Central Theatre, with Maxy's decors and costumes enjoying a second outing. Having already reviewed this production, the press only ran short announcements about its revival, and thus, there is not sufficient information to compare Stein's vision with that of Buloff. However, considering that the one lengthier article about the Stein production printed in *Rampa* reproduced exactly the text of the review that had appeared several months earlier for Buloff's performance, it may be deduced that the differences were scarce.⁹²

This was not the end of *Shabbsai Tsvi*, which enjoyed a transnational afterlife. After a year in the United States, Buloff opted to leave Maurice Schwartz's troupe in order to become art director of the Chicago Dramatishe Gezelshaft, a Yiddish amateur theatre group. Buloff's decision stemmed from his frustration with the New York theatre scene and his desire to return to more experimental work.⁹³ He thus chose to undertake a revival of *Shabbsai Tsvi* on the stage of the Jewish People's Institute in Chicago in the autumn of 1927.⁹⁴ According to a letter Buloff sent to writer and journalist Yankev Botoshansky:

91. Ibid., 58-59.

92. Froda, 'Cronica dramatică. Teatrul Central, Deschiderea stagiunei. Sapsay Zwi', *Rampa*, 17 October 1926.

93. Kadison and Buloff, *On Stage, Off Stage*, 58-59.

94. According to Kadison and Buloff, *On Stage, Off Stage*, 70, this happened in 1928, however the period press indicates the production took place the previous year. See for example 'The Chicago Dramatic Society to Present Sabati Zwi', *The Sentinel*, 4 November 1927.

Sabbatai Zvi was our first production. As you know, I had done it earlier with the Vilner in Bucharest. Returning to the same story, I now re-kneaded it and baked it fresh. As a result, the play scored 100 percent - fifty percent old, fifty percent new.⁹⁵

Included in the ‘fifty percent old’ was Maxy’s scenography, which Buloff elected to keep, crediting its maker in the play’s programme. (Fig. 4.30) It was re-created anew by Buloff and the troupe, as they could not afford extensive professional services.⁹⁶ The costumes, for example, were made by a woman named Sarah Patt, who also acted in the play’s prologue as one of the ‘shadows of long past messiahs’. The programme for this production, located in two similar versions in both the Yivo and the Harvard University archives, has not been previously identified by scholars of Maxy’s work, and thus the transnational reach of this scenography has never been explored.⁹⁷ Press reviews lauded the production as ‘an artistic triumph of the first order [...] upon a stage lit up with scenic wonder’ and ‘a revelation’ with ‘enchancing music and [...] fantastic, almost bizarre, scenery’.⁹⁸ According Chicago reporter Meyer Levin:

The play was staged in the “modern way”. The scenery was in sections and parcels of color that suggested the forms of actual things. There were platforms and steps for the actors to group upon, there were costumes that moved as part of the scenery. [...] As the scene opens, there are in the foreground stone stairs and a ledge, in the background a design of grays and blacks, indicating a city of low hovels.⁹⁹

Levin reported in detail about the drama unfolding on stage, providing some clues that are absent from the Romanian press reviews. It is thus revealed that the Sultan’s underlings

95. Kadison and Buloff, *On Stage, Off Stage*, 75.

96. Ibid., 72: ‘for each offering, we build and paint new scenery and make our own costumes’. Buloff also kept the musical score created for the Bucharest production by W. Schwartzman.

97. Harvard Library Judaica Division, Joseph Buloff Jewish Theater Archive, Programmes, collection 1, folder 8; Yivo Institute for Jewish Research, Esther-Rachel Kaminska Theater Museum collection, RG8.

98. Clippings from unidentified publications found in Scrapbook 2, Harvard Library Judaica Division, Joseph Buloff Jewish Theater Archive, Scrapbooks.

99. Ibid. It was most likely taken from *The Chicago Daily News*, where Levin, later a prominent novelist, worked as a reporter until 1928.

visible in the photographs are his musicians and that the Sultan's dais is multi-functional, turning to reveal the staircase that prefaces Shabbsai Tsvi's downfall. Furthermore, Levin makes explicit the symbolic implications of the sets and costumes which signal the characters' paths, such as the use of black and white ensembles for Shabbsai Tsvi or the multi-level platforms that allow the hero and his antagonists, the Sultan and Sarah, to switch places both physically and metaphorically. It also becomes apparent that Buloff introduced new elements, such as a prologue in which 'Shadows of long past Messiahs' appear, played by six of the company's actresses, foreshadowing Sarah's depiction as Shabbsai Tsvi's alter-ego in the final scene of the play.

Although no photographs of this production on stage are known to exist, Buloff did use the opportunity to have portraits taken of himself and Luba Kadison in character, perhaps in order to establish a portfolio for their newly independent acting career.¹⁰⁰ These images allow a closer look at the costumes and the dramatic, mask-like make-up used in the play. Buloff appears in five different poses, from supplicant to crowned hero, while Kadison can be seen in an elegantly choreographed stance. (Fig. 4.31) A comparison between these images and the ones taken in Bucharest suggests that the costumes had remained largely the same, following Maxy's designs. Shabbsai Tsvi's spectacular openwork crown, with its Star of David pattern, appeared in both productions, as did the white robes with fluted sleeves, shalwar-style trousers and pointed slippers. A striking black trouser suit, perhaps made of silk, may have been a new addition by Buloff to give visual emphasis to the character's conflicted nature.¹⁰¹

Comparing the physical manifestations of *Shabbsai Tsvi* with the prototypes for *Saul*, it becomes clear that although the strict, strongly utopian constructivism of the latter was unrealisable, aspects of it did inform the former. The mask-like make-up, the multi-functional set with its ramps and stairs, the flatness of the backdrops infused with cubist shapes and echoes of modernist architecture, all echoed contemporary developments in stage design and performance. If some conventions were preserved, such as the backcloth, illusionistic effects

100. Harvard Library Judaica Division, Joseph Buloff Jewish Theater Archive, Photographs; Yivo Institute for Jewish Research, Joseph Buloff and Luba Kadison collection, RG1146, series X Photographs.

101. 'There stands Messiah, robed in black silk' according to one of the newspaper clippings from unidentified publications found in Scrapbook 2, Harvard Library, Judaica Division, Joseph Buloff Jewish Theater Archive, Scrapbooks.

were discarded and as were any aspirations of mimicking reality. The play's success in a transnational context may have stemmed from this easily transmutable vision, as well as from its conciliation of the traditional and the avant-garde, which is also visible in an intriguing photograph of the play's lead actor and designer standing in front of the Act I backdrop (Fig. 4.20) Buloff, in full costume and make up, strikes a pose next to what is probably the Sultan's hookah pipe, visible in the sketch for Act II. (Fig. 4.23a) Tall and elegantly dressed, Maxy stands next to Buloff holding another prop from the same act, a henchman's sword. Together they sartorially encapsulate the entwined historicist and modernist aspects of the metropolis behind them, which exists somewhere between Buloff's upturned Turkish slippers and Maxy's dapper suit, rather like Bucharest itself. Perhaps Maxy was already musing about this dichotomy that was soon to inform his interior design work and his campaign against the city's lingering preference for the remnants of Ottoman style, as shown in Chapters Two and Three. In his sketch for Act II, the Sultan's hookah pipe unmistakably recalls the shape of the vases produced at the Academy of Decorative Arts which Maxy was to join later that same year. (Fig. 4.32b) This is problematic, for a number of reasons. As the photograph shows, the prop was not in fact designed in this manner and its shaping was rather more conventional, despite the abstract motif that decorated its exterior. Furthermore, if Maxy had already designed such an object in February 1926, this would place him ahead of Vespremie, whose vase first appeared illustrated in *Integral* in December of that year.¹⁰² If Maxy was attempting to overestimate his role at the Academy later in life, this discovery adds substance to the claim that his theatrical sketches date from the period immediately prior to his seventieth birthday retrospective. Adding this recognisable shape to his recreation of the *Shabbsai Tsvi* designs could establish both his authorship of the vases and his pre-eminence in the field. Furthermore, Maxy's next theatrical project hinged on his developing relationship with the Academy of Decorative Arts even more comprehensively.

The Sentimental Mannequin (1926)

The last few months of 1926 were rich in further collaborations between Maxy and the Vilna Troupe: as well as Stein's revival of *Shabbsai Tsvi*, several new productions designed by the artist opened between October and December 1926. One of these premieres also represented a new step for the ensemble, by exploring contemporary Romanian dramaturgy. On 3

102. *Integral*, no. 9 (December 1926): 14.

November a new double-bill opened at the Central Theatre, presented by the Vilna Troupe. It began with a short comedy entitled *The Detective* (Detectivul) by Romulus Voinescu and continued with *The Sentimental Mannequin* (Manechinul sentimental), a three-act play by Ion Minulescu. Both Minulescu, whom we have already encountered, and Voinescu, who oversaw Romania's intelligence and security services, were highly placed government officials as well as patrons of the Academy of Decorative Arts and they both nursed literary inclinations. Maxy's collaboration with the Vilna Troupe thus seems to converge with his recent involvement with the Academy and it would not be implausible to speculate that he had a hand in selecting this repertoire. After all, the benefits would be manifold, from honouring the Academy's patrons to extending their benefaction to the Vilna Troupe and Stein's new artistic directorship.

Both of these plays had made their debut earlier that same year at Bucharest's National Theatre. *The Sentimental Mannequin* was a Pirandellian play-within-a-play that charted the attempts of a dramatist to find inspiration for his forthcoming oeuvre. Minulescu wrote it as a vehicle for Marioara Voiculescu, a famed Romanian thespian, and the play enjoyed considerable success before its run was halted due to the conflict of interest engendered by Minulescu's appointment as interim director of the National Theatre in April 1926.¹⁰³ After its premiere on 8 January, the play, which ran at about 45 minutes, was considered too brief to be shown on its own and several attempts at finding a suitable complement ensued.¹⁰⁴ In March, it was joined by *The Detective*, Voinescu's one act comedy about a private eye hired by several parties involved in the same love triangle.¹⁰⁵ This light-hearted and highly contemporary double-bill was an uncharacteristic choice for the Vilna Troupe and perhaps also a brave one, providing as it did the theatre going public with a very recent comparison

103. 'Premiera *Manechinul sentimental*. Reintrarea d-nei Marioara Voiculescu', *Dimineața*, 9 January 1926; 'Literatura românească în idiș. *Manechinul Sentimental* și *Detectivul*', *Rampa*, 4 November 1926.

Documentation confirming Minulescu's appointment is located in the Romanian National Archives, fond 652 Direcția Generală a Artelor, file 1/1926.

104. A. de Herz, 'Cronica Teatrală. Teatrul Național, *Striana*, comedie eroică în două acte', *Dimineața*, 18 January 1926.

105. Information on the scheduling of the plays comes from the Bucharest National Theatre 1925-26 register of performances, Romanian National Archives, fond 2345 Teatrul Național București, files 62/1925 and 2/1925.

on a mainstream stage. Interviewed in *Rampa*, both Minulescu and Voinescu declared themselves flattered to see their creations onstage in Yiddish translation.¹⁰⁶

Although Maxy designed sets for both of the productions, no visual material or detailed descriptions about *The Detective* have come to light. *The Sentimental Mannequin* is better documented, as Maxy's designs have been preserved in the collection of the National Museum of Art of Romania, and will thus provide the focus of this analysis. It is a particularly useful case study, as the National Theatre production was documented through photography and illustration and can serve as a comparative example of mainstream Romanian theatre during this period. The designer of this production was Traian Cornescu (1885-1965), who had been the National Theatre's main scenographer since 1919. Trained in Munich and Paris, Cornescu was skilled if not innovative and his main quality seems to have been adaptability. Working with a wide range of directors, he was able to adjust his execution and techniques to individual creative visions.¹⁰⁷ In the case of *The Sentimental Mannequin*, it was perhaps Minulescu's vision he was accommodating, as the playwright included detailed stage directions in his script. Furthermore, a selection of Cornescu's designs were printed as illustrations in the published version of *The Sentimental Mannequin*, which was bound inextricably with the National Theatre production. Dedicated by Minulescu to Marioara Voiculescu, the volume included details of the premiere, including the cast and the director, veteran theatre professional Paul Gusti.¹⁰⁸

Minulescu's wish was for the play to resemble a puppet show. The characters were described as 'mannequins' exposed in displays that reflected Romania's present-day social classes, and included a young and ambitious playwright, a high-society dame and her ageing millionaire husband. The play was to be performed through a shop window, obscured by a blind in-between scenes as though closed for business, and framed by a sign inscribed 'La Dernière Mode pour Dames et Messieurs. Confections, Opinions, Sentiments'. (Fig. 4.33)

Furthermore, the play's scenes were to be called 'vitrines' instead of acts.¹⁰⁹ *The Sentimental*

106. 'Literatura românească în idiș'.

107. Ion Cazaban, 'Scenografi ai teatrului românesc interbelic (II)', *Studii și cercetări de istoria artei. Teatru, muzică, cinematografie*, no. 41 (1994): 77–86.

108. Ion Minulescu, *Manechinul sentimental* (București: Cultura nationala, 1926).

109. Minulescu, *Manechinul sentimental*, 9-10.

Mannequin was thus a clear product of its age, reflecting both contemporary social mores and current theories of experimental theatre, including an interest in marionettes and an emphasis on the illusory quality of the stage. It also provided a commentary on the performative potential of domestic interiors, which in the *The Sentimental Mannequin* are more than a backdrop, becoming a reflection of the characters that inhabit them. The first ‘vitrine’ for example, is the garret room of playwright Radu Cartian, decorated with good taste, yet exhibiting a bohemian disarray, while the next two acts take place in the luxuriously modern dwelling of socialite Jeana Ionescu-Potopeni.

In Maxy’s vision, Radu’s dwelling is full of jagged edges, geometric furniture and curious angles. (Fig. 4.34) The walls slope in different directions and a latticed triangular shape hovers over the room connecting to the doorframe via a long beam that suggests a skylight roof. If in *Shabbsai Tsvi* the traditional theatrical backdrop was still employed, albeit with a near-abstract design, in *The Sentimental Mannequin* Maxy seems to have done away with it altogether utilising the three dimensional potential of the stage space. The interplay of surfaces that are both solid and transparent render Cartian’s home spatially plausible, yet also evidently illusory. This apparent contradiction is particularly manifest in Maxy’s sketch. The lines that dissect the floor and the walls recall a perspectival grid, yet they lead the eye in strange and disorienting directions. By contrast, Cornescu’s design for the same scene carefully replicates a self-contained puppet theatre stage where the fourth wall is clearly in place. In his illustration, the characters are standing in recognisably realistic living room with contemporary furniture and colourful posters and paintings decorating the walls. (Fig. 4.35) Minulescu’s shop sign slogans surround this tableau, allowing the audience to voyeuristically peer through the make-believe glass. The archival records of the Bucharest National Theatre reveal that costumes and props for productions were frequently bought from domestic suppliers, and so spectators would have been faced with a mirror image of themselves and their urban environment.¹¹⁰ If in Cornescu’s vision this environment appears contained and stable, Maxy’s interpretation distorts it like a carnival mirror with the walls and the furniture spouting strange jagged excrescences and lop-sided edges. Disregarding Minulescu’s instructions, Maxy does away with the shop sign framing and the bold colours, opting instead for a plain colour palette. Furthermore, together with the geometric furniture, the functional wall niche and uncluttered space, it suggests that perhaps the artist was using the opportunity

110. Romanian National Archives, fond 2354 Teatrul National București.

to educate the public about the clean lines of modern interior design. After all, the permanent selling exhibition of the Academy of Decorative Arts had only just opened in October 1926 under the directorship of Mela Maxy.

If Maxy dispensed with the shop window framing in first act, in the second ‘vitrine’ he boldly turned the entire stage into a stylish boutique with flowing curtains and constructivist home accessories seem from ‘outside’ its window. (Figs. 4.36 and 4.37) The two surviving designs, both from the collection of MNAR, may have been produced at different times. One is part of the series of highly finished works on paper that Maxy probably produced in the 1960s for his retrospective. (Fig. 4.37) The other however is much more plausible as a sketch made for the production itself. (Fig. 4.36) The pencil underdrawing is visible and the light ink wash has been loosely applied, in contrast to the opaque, well-defined colouring of other Maxy theatre sketches. Hebrew lettering is visible on the small plinths that frame the stage, although it forms no meaningful words. The objects dotted around the display would not be easily identifiable – they could be construed as abstract sculptures perhaps – if they did not resemble objects available for sale at the Academy of Decorative Arts. The distinctive shapes recall the sharply geometric vases designed first by Vespremie and subsequently by Maxy, which are immediately recognisable as the inspiration behind the objects that crowd the imaginary shop window. (Fig. 4.32b) As in the case of Maxy’s sketch for Act II of *Shabbsai Tsvi*, this may be a retrospective attempt to appropriate the design of these items. However, given the date of this production in November 1926, that is to say several months later than *Shabbsai Tsvi*, and post-dating Maxy’s involvement with the Academy, the appearance of Vespremie’s vases in the play itself is more plausible. After all, Chapter Two has shown that Vespremie had been commissioned to work on the decoration of the 1925 Festival of Jewish Romanian Writers and Artists and that those particular designs had been executed in the studios of the Academy.¹¹¹ Whether the items in *The Sentimental Mannequin* were simply props made in the image of modernist design objects or whether they were the Academy’s actual output, Maxy’s gesture (or more likely Mela’s) reveals both commercial acumen – this is after all a sort of advertorial – as well as a willingness to embrace the concept of synthesis in every possible manner.¹¹² The stage set thus becomes both a real and a fictitious shop

111. As documented in the programme for the Festival of Jewish Romanian Writers and Artists, 11 April 1925, held at the Harvard Library Judaica Division, Judaica ephemera collection, Theater/B/1/Romania.

112. The borders between stage performance and commerce were frequently blurred during this period. Theatre

window, mirroring the Academy's newly opened showroom, and both of these interiors fulfil an openly performative function rather than a private one.

This section of the play is set in the living room of Jeana, the woman whom Cartian wishes to use as inspiration for the leading lady in his new play. According to Minulescu, it should be 'a luxurious room with few pieces of furniture in a pure style', perhaps an antithesis to the cluttered interiors of Bucharest's middle classes.¹¹³ A photograph of Cornescu's stage design exists in the collections of the National Theatre Museum.¹¹⁴ (Fig. 4.39) The walls of the living room resemble a folding screen with abstract patterns that delineates the space where the action is taking place. Wearing contemporary dress, the actors portraying Radu and Jeana face each other on a stage that is largely devoid of props, with the exception of a few pieces of art deco furniture. Although the staging might not be termed exactly avant-garde, it was certainly a departure from recent National Theatre productions such as *Anuța*, directed by Gusti only three months earlier, in November 1925.¹¹⁵ (Fig. 4.40) In *Anuța* the stage space was virtually undistinguishable from an upper class Bucharest dwelling, with heavy wooden furniture, oriental-style carpets, an oversized chandelier and even a glimpse into a dining room ready to welcome guests. In this respect, Cornescu's depiction of a contemporary living room for *The Sentimental Mannequin* probably chimed quite closely with Maxy's vision, although Cornescu's bulky bulbous flower vases still revealed an attachment to the traditional.

One key difference however is the shop sign itself. Cornescu's design, with its cursive decorative lettering, oblique positioning and symmetrical framing of the 'shop window', is

programmes, including those of the Vilna Troupe, were filled with the advertisements of local businesses. Occasionally, product placement even took place on stage, as was the case with Rhein champagne and Follas baked goods during a 1926 music-hall revue. See Vera Molea, *Un regizor uitat. Aurel Ion Maican* (București: Fundația Culturală Camil Petrescu, 2012), 26.

113. Minulescu, *Manechinul sentimental*, 53.

114. Album of stage designs, National Theatre, 1925-26 theatrical season. Archives of the National Theatre Museum, Bucharest.

115. Ibid. *Anuța* (1925) is a morality play by Lucreția Petrescu in which the innocent daughter of a kept woman is introduced to her mother's environment but succeeds in escaping the same fate. The play's main dichotomy is between the urban and the rural: *Anuța* was brought up in the countryside and returns there to live a 'pure' life, whereas her mother has been corrupted by Bucharest's bourgeois urbanity.

more akin to the signage employed by the knick-knack emporiums targeted by the German Werkbund's campaign against poor display practices. By contrast, Maxy's sans serif lettering changes size and form to create an eye-catching composition, as well as playing with light and dark in a manner that suggests electric lighting, thus incorporating modern technologies of shop signage. One of Maxy's sketches also includes the entrance to the shop, its design replete with modernist architectural detail, suggesting a metal frame with rectangular patterns and a cubist-inspired door handle. (Fig. 4.36) The inspiration probably came from Sonia Delaunay's boutique at the 1925 Paris Exhibition. The signage of the store on the Pont Alexandre III combined similar vertical and horizontal sans serif lettering above a doorway positioned, just like Maxy's, on the right-hand side of the shop window and divided into equal segments by its metal frame. (Fig. 4.41) Maxy's composition also evokes the cover of *Integral*'s December 1926 issue, in which Vespremie's vase can be glimpsed amongst the elegant assemblage of objects in the Academy's showroom, above the caption 'Modern Interior by M. H. Maxy: Furniture, Cushions, Carpets, Paintings'. (Fig. 4.38) Although this particular sign may not say 'La Dernière Mode', it certainly implies it.

Whereas Minulescu and Cornescu only alluded to the modernist intersection between the theatrical stage and the shop window, Maxy created a literal depiction of this phenomenon. He may have been aware of Frederick Kiesler's recent exhibit which had opened in New York some months earlier, in February 1926. Kiesler's own interest in the cross-over between performance and display techniques resulted in an installation entitled *Railway Stage for Department Store (The Endless Stage)* in which the theatre stage was replaced by a shop that the audience could visit. As Barbara Lesàk observes, 'the department store represented to him a site of theatrical adventure; it could therefore be designed in a scenic way'.¹¹⁶ The reverse was also true in Maxy's estimation, with the construction of both theatrical and domestic spaces now observing the same Integralist parameters. In a strange blurring of art and life the stage design for *The Sentimental Mannequin*, which took place in the fictitious living room of a society lady, resembled a stylish boutique, whereas the commercial space of the Academy was staged so as to perform the role of a domestic interior.

116. Lesàk, 'Visionary of the European Theatre', 43.

The Neophyte and The Thought (1926)

Although no photographs are known to exist of the Vilna Troupe's *The Sentimental Mannequin*, its claim to theatrical modernity can be discerned from other contemporary sources, as we have seen. Some of Maxy collaborations with the Yiddish ensemble have proven even more difficult to recover, however. They are mentioned here as an antidote to the ephemerality that has affected the Vilna Troupe's Bucharest sojourn, both as an unavoidable condition of the performative arts and as a consequence of Romania's historical destiny.

The first of these plays was *The Neophyte* (*Neofitul*), a title coined for the Romanian premiere of Alter-Sholem Kacyzne's *Dukus* (1925).¹¹⁷ It was the opening performance of the short-lived season during which the troupe was known as Tragedy and Comedy, in the autumn of 1925. For this run of performances the sets were designed by Arthur Kolnik, another artist who collaborated with the troupe. His decors were judged to be the only positive aspect of the performance, which failed to find critical acclaim.¹¹⁸ An article in *Rampa* looking back over the theatrical year, qualified it 'a disaster without precedent'.¹¹⁹ Reviews suggest this was mainly due to the play itself, criticised for being over long, rambling and confusing, and failing to meaningfully explore its main theme, the conflict between individual and community.¹²⁰ In *Contimporanul*, Sergiu Milorian took the opportunity to bemoan the state of stage design in Romania which in his view had fallen behind Western developments since the departure for Paris of Russian émigré artist George Pogedaieff in 1922.¹²¹ Cornescu, the National Theatre's designer, although versatile, was not an innovator. In Milorian's view, the art of scenography had now been transformed into 'a

117. Alter-Sholem Kacyzne (1885-1941) was a writer and photographer from Vilnius, whose work depicted and documented the life of European Jewry. His play *Dukus* was first performed in Warsaw in 1925 and published the following year.

118. Sergiu Milorian, 'Neofitul și Kolnik', *Contimporanul*, no. 62 (October 1926): 7-8. According to Bercovici, *O sută de ani*, 134, it lasted only ten performances.

119. Scarlat Fronda, 'Anul teatral 1925', *Rampa*, 2 January 1926.

120. L.B. Wechsler, 'Societatea de Dramă și Comedie. Ansamblul Trupeii din Wilna. Neofitul de A. Katzisne', *Renasterea*, 10 October 1925.

121. Milorian, 'Neofitul si Kolnik'. George Pogedaieff (c.1897-1971) was an artist and theatre designer who left Russia in 1920. In Bucharest, Pogedaieff worked for the National Theatre, designing sets for productions such as Hugo von Hofmannstahl's *Elektra* or Victor Eftimiu's *Înșir-te mărgărite*.

science’, better described as ‘scenic architecture’, and Kolnik had proven his credentials through this project. In *Renașterea*, L. B. Wechsler agreed that Kolnik’s decors showed potential and posited that it was the first time a play with a completely expressionist mise-en-scène had graced Bucharest’s theatrical stages.¹²² This seems an odd assertion, as the Vilna Troupe had been in Romania since 1923 and expressionism was their trademark style before they began to integrate constructivist elements into their productions. Unfortunately, no visual evidence of Kolnik’s *Neophyte* has emerged to provide a clue to its stylistic kinship and when the play was revived the following year, it returned to the stage with decors by Maxy.¹²³ Its premiere on 19 October 1926 must have been underwhelming, as reviews in the period press are conspicuous by their absence and no visual material has yet come to light.

The second play that has left very little evidence is a staging of Russian writer Leonid Andreyev’s 1902 short story *The Thought* (*Gândul*), in which a doctor simulates madness to absolve himself of murder, but discovers he can no longer distinguish between his two states of mind.¹²⁴ Premiering on 6 December 1926, less than a week before the more prominent production of Pirandello’s *Man, Beast and Virtue*, *The Thought* may have found itself overshadowed.¹²⁵ In an interview given prior to the opening by Alexander Stein, the director and protagonist of the play, Maxy’s name is not mentioned. According to Stein, ‘... the sets and the whole mise-en-scène will provide strictly the support necessary for the action, without distracting the spectators with exterior details’.¹²⁶ Perhaps this was Stein’s reluctance to allow set design to take centre-stage, so to speak, in yet another production, as had been the case with *Shabbsai Tsvi*. Furthermore, after languishing in Buloff’s shadow since joining the troupe, Stein was now finally its de-facto leader and took the opportunity to raise his own profile, giving interviews to local newspapers and revealing plans to open an acting school.¹²⁷ His performance in *The Thought* was well received, with reviews focusing on Stein to the exclusion of the other actors or the play’s designer, yet the production had a short run. Maxy’s next collaboration with the Vilna Troupe placed him back in the limelight, however.

122. Wechsler, ‘Societatea de Dramă și Comedie’.

123. ‘*Neofitul* la Teatrul Central’, *Rampa*, 18 October 1926.

124. Andreyev (1871-1919) was a Russian writer, particularly known for his short stories. The Vilna Troupe’s repertoire also included his 1914 play *He Who Gets Slapped*, in which Stein played the protagonist.

125. ‘*Gândul* la Teatrul Central’, *Rampa*, 6 December 1926.

126. Rep., ‘*Gândul* de Andreiev la Teatrul Central’, *Rampa*, 25 November 1926.

127. M. Schweig, ‘Trupa din Vilna. De vorbă cu Alexe Stein’, *Curierul Israelit*, 17 October 1926.

***Man, Beast, and Virtue* (1926)**

The production that caused a stir was Luigi Pirandello's *Man, Beast, and Virtue* which premiered on 11 December 1926. The Italian playwright was an important figure for the Romanian avant-garde, and had been interviewed in *Integral* in November 1925 by Maxy's colleague, Mihail Cosma.¹²⁸ According to Pirandello, his ultimate goal was to uncover the scenic potential in any situation, transforming 'any street corner' into a theatrical stage and any passers-by into 'characters in search of an author'. Pirandello's wish for a closer collaboration between the arts sparked Cosma's infamous definition of Integralism as a synthesis of art movements past and present, which he offered to the playwright as a solution. Pirandello elegantly declared himself against rules or demarcations of any kind in art, thus avoiding aligning himself with Integralism, whilst appreciating its attempt to crystallise the spirit of the age in order to surpass it.¹²⁹ Despite Pirandello's reputation, his plays had not been widely performed in Romania and the Vilna Troupe's production was only the third work by the playwright to see the light of the stage in Bucharest.¹³⁰ *Man, Beast, and Virtue*, Pirandello's so called 'tragi-farce', was first published in 1919, and has a simple plot: Signora Perella, the wife of a sea-captain, falls for Paolino, her son's tutor. She becomes pregnant and conspires with her lover to make the husband believe the child is his. There is only one problem: the sea-captain prefers to avoid his wife even on the rare occasions when he is ashore. Thus, the scheming couple have only a small window of opportunity to induce the captain to accept his wife's amorous advances.

Perhaps due to its subsequent success, *Man, Beast, and Virtue* is one of Maxy's better documented plays. As well as a front cover and feature in *Integral*'s January 1927 issue, further visual material is located within the MNAR collections: two photographs and two set designs from the same group of highly finished works on paper by Maxy that probably date from the 1960s.¹³¹ The sketch for Act I reveals a domestic interior similar to the opening

128. Cosma, 'De vorbă cu Luigi Pirandello'. Pirandello (1867-1936) was an Italian writer best known for his innovative work in dramaturgy and for receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1934.

129. Ibid.

130. 'O piesă de Pirandello la Teatrul Central', *Rampa*, 2 December 1926.

131. Romanian National Art Museum, Documentation department, fond M. H. Maxy and Graphic Arts collection, fond M. H. Maxy.

scene of *The Sentimental Mannequin*. (Figs. 4.42) Maxy took one step further in this case, dispensing with walls altogether, and opting instead for a structure so permeable that the latticed panels edging one side seem almost compact by comparison. The interior is sparsely decorated with bookshelves, a table, chair and carpet, elements common to both productions, as are the jagged edges and the underwhelming colour palette. The juxtaposition of flat and three-dimensional elements positions this space, like that of Act I in *The Sentimental Mannequin*, somewhere between the real and the illusory. Furthermore, the uncanny proportions of the objects in this sketch – the chair towering over the table and the oversized plant pot – propel this further into the realm of the surreal. The existence of photographs in the case of *Man, Beast, and Virtue* reveal how such a design was translated into reality. (Figs. 4.43 and 4.44) Maxy placed the characters in a simulacrum of a home with walls that were present yet invisible, so that their trials and tribulations, though contained within, were visible for all to see. The structures that sketched out the walls, although geometric, were uneven, creating a disorienting, distorted perspective that mirrored both the naval theme of the play and its moral morass. The front ‘wall’ sloped upwards while the back ‘wall’ sloped downwards, as did the latticed door attached to it, a device Maxy previously experimented with in *The Sentimental Mannequin*, but which evidently came to fruition in the structurally lighter design for *Man, Beast, and Virtue*.

In the design for Act II a second interior was sketched out with beams forming an octagonal shape that enclosed a table with four chairs, a shelving unit for dishes and several potted plants. (Fig. 4.45) According to *Integral*’s reviewer:

The sea captain’s room is constructed from naval elements: the table slopes like the crest of a wave, the chairs are capped by anchors, the lamp is an anchor, the shelves are made from the sterns and prows of ships...¹³²

The same spatial instability is present in this second mise-en-scène, with surfaces that slope when they should be balanced and walls that are permeable when they should be solid. Although Maxy’s sketch suggests that the view from the sitting room towards the zig-zagging surface of the sea could be a painted backdrop, photographs reveal this was not the case. (Figs. 4.44, 4.46) The latticed balcony doors and the anchor-shaped chandelier were free-

132. Gheorghe Dinu, ‘Teatrul Central. Încenări moderne’, *Integral*, no. 10 (January 1927): 5.

standing elements of the decor, while a small rectangular panel with abstract shapes – barely visible behind the actors on stage – was perhaps suggestive of the water’s turbulent surface. As we have seen with *The Sentimental Mannequin*, Maxy’s sets were fully transitioning into the realm of the three-dimensional, yet nonetheless producing disorienting illusions of reality that slipped away from spectators just like the mirage of a painted backcloth. A review of the play published in *Rampa* praised the ‘bizarre cubist-expressionist’ mise-en-scène, as well as explaining the presence of the flower pots with their stylised blooms attached to grid-like structures.¹³³ (Fig. 4.46) Signora Perella was to move the five plants from one window to another as a signal to her lover that their stratagem has succeeded. In the archival photograph, she stands on a stool in the pose of a mock Madonna between her husband and the tutor Paolino, who is offering her one of the plants as tribute. The potted plants, or rather the pots, hold further significance. Like the mystery objects in *The Sentimental Mannequin*, they are the product of the Academy of Decorative Arts and appear, holding real plants, in the images of the institution’s selling exhibition. Most likely these are not the same items – the ones in the play have a more rudimentary, satirical aspect – but they are clearly linked. The labels in the selling exhibition are too unclear to provide an authorship for the pots, but a ‘sold’ sign can be seen in one of the images suggesting that these were popular with the Academy’s patrons (Fig. 4.47).

Furthermore, the interaction between Signora Perella and the potted flowers advanced the action of the play in a physical sense: her movements and by extension that of the plants signalled both a change in the spatial relationships between the objects on stage and in the psychological relationship between the characters of the play. This recalls a concept that we have previously encountered in Maxy’s writings in *Integral*, namely that in a successful scenic construction the sets and the actors merge together, becoming part of the same dynamic mechanism that conveys the drama.¹³⁴ According to an article in *Rampa* that outlined preparations for the production, the props used to furnish the play’s interiors would not be there simply for ambiance, but would purposely re-enforce the dramatic action and constitute a ‘continuation’ of the actors’ hands.¹³⁵ The article, reporting a conversation between the writer and Maxy, also revealed that wooden beams were being used to construct

133. Scarlat Fronda, ‘Cronica dramatică. *Omul, bestia și virtutea*’, *Rampa*, 16 December 1926.

134. Maxy, ‘Regia scenică - decor - costum’.

135. ‘O piesă de Pirandello la Teatrul Central’.

the see-through structures. These would ensure that ‘the movement of the actors is visible to the public at all times, and the room resembles a bird cage in which the poor beings move according to Pirandello’s plan and sense of irony’.¹³⁶ A later review in *Integral*, although largely a paean devoted to Pirandello, made some further comments concerning Maxy’s decors. Emphasising their spatial innovation, the reviewer observed that the on-stage rooms ‘do not have 3 walls, but 4’ which being ‘schematic, transvisible’ are not an obstacle to the spectator who becomes privy to Maxy’s ‘Roentgen eye’.¹³⁷ The constructions so plastically described were illustrated by two photographs which demonstrated how the play’s environments were present on-stage only through their outlines, so that the actors operated inside transparent structures populated by equally sketchy and geometric props. (Fig. 4.44) The Vilna Troupe, concluded the article, was the only ensemble experimenting locally with the new trends in stage design.¹³⁸

In a second version of the sketch for Act II, which exists only in an undated archival photograph, the sloping table and the anchor-capped chairs are placed on a circular carpet exhibiting the markings of a compass. (Fig. 4.48) The illusory space of the theatrical stage thus expands outwards to encompass the realities of geographical space, in a manner reminiscent of *Shabbsai Tsvi* and its representation of urban architectural ambiguities. It is a concern articulated by Maxy himself to *Rampa*’s reporter. Discussing an upcoming production of Charles Dickens’s 1845 novella ‘The Cricket on the Hearth’, he describes how the modest dwelling of Caleb the toymaker would be contrasted on stage with the ‘skyscraper factory’ of his employer Mr. Tackleton.¹³⁹ His description of the set includes the intriguing detail that the wooden beams would be coloured, although this practice is not evident from the visual materials related to *The Sentimental Mannequin* and *Man, Beast, and Virtue*. A further paragraph linked Maxy’s interest in constructivism with his work in the theatre:

Constructivism can be perfectly achieved through the techniques of stage design, destroying the visual illusion of objects heretofore represented through pictorial

136. Ibid.

137. Dinu, ‘Teatrul Central. Încenări moderne’.

138. Ibid.

139. ‘O piesă de Pirandello la Teatrul Central’.

imitations. The planar architectonic is animated solely through a balance of colour which can be organically transmitted to the spectator. The expanding field of scenic possibilities is gradually transforming the use of the stage.¹⁴⁰

Although ‘The Cricket on the Hearth’ was never transformed into a Vilna Troupe production, Maxy’s musings were evidently already informing his work for the theatrical stage. The final section of the article dealt with the rise of cinema and its potential for technical innovation that theatre would never be able to match. Accepting this would lead theatre towards a new practice of ‘pure’ manifestations, emptied of unnecessary content.¹⁴¹ Perhaps this realisation guided Maxy in his route from the technically unrealisable *Saul*, to the trickery of *Shabbsai Tsvi* and finally to the complete transparency of *Man, Beast, and Virtue*. Nonetheless, an interest in new technologies was an important element of modernism and a closer look at *Integral*’s fifteen issues reveals several articles that ponder the relationship between film and theatre. The majority of them, published in *Integral*’s issues from 1925, were written by Maxy’s colleague Barbu Florian. The author was critical of theatre, which he repeatedly termed ‘unilateral’, that is to say incapable of capturing the fullness of modern human experience and implicitly the opposite of ‘integral’, and we might add ‘synthetic’.¹⁴² Cinema could fulfil this remit, he believed, but after its early days when it successfully exploited its defining feature, namely the technology of movement, it has recently developed an over-reliance on the human element. According to Florian, the importance of the ‘star’ performer or director harked back to the age of theatre, diluting the strength of the cinematographic medium which should be ‘collective and anonymous’.¹⁴³ Despite his misgivings, he reviewed a number of such ‘star’ vehicles, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that the name of Douglas Fairbanks appeared in the pages of *Integral* more often than that of say, Picasso, Marinetti or Tairov.

Amongst the films discussed were those of French director Marcel L’Herbier, whose calling card were the modernist set designs created by artists such as Sonia Delaunay, Alberto Cavalcanti or Fernand Léger. L’Herbier’s 1924 film *L’Inhumaine*, one of the earliest to

140. Ibid.

141. Ibid.

142. Florian, ‘Teatru și cinematograf’.

143. Barbu Florian, ‘Cinematograful’, *Integral*, no. 3 (1 May 1925): 13.

espouse this aesthetics, was mentioned in two issues of *Integral*, with Florian revealing that it was being shown in Bucharest cinemas. The distinctive sets by Cavalcanti culminated in a scene where the heroine held a banquet in her living room, sitting her guests at an island-like table in the middle of a pool of water. Her high-backed chair culminated in a pointed triangle shape. (Fig. 4.49) As well as the evident aquatic parallels of interiors that appear to be ‘at sea’, the chair’s distinctive shape has a direct correspondent in Act I of *Man, Beast, and Virtue*. In Maxy’s sketch, the back of the chair has one sloping edge and a circular cut-out, but the final version visible in archival photographs is much more sharply angular: the backrest is pointed with two cut-out diamond shapes (Figs. 4.42 and 4.43), having seemingly borrowed something of the anchor-topped chairs from Act II (Fig. 4.45). Such cinematic inspiration was not limited to the sets for *Man, Beast, and Virtue* and, for example the multi-layered geometric shapes and structures of *Shabbsai Tsvi* mirrored the designs of Léger for *L’Inhumaine* (Fig. 4.50), while the selling exhibition of the Academy was probably indebted to Sonia Delaunay’s interiors in L’Herbier’s 1926 film *Le Vertige*. But whereas the gaze of the camera could give the viewer the illusion of being immersed in a certain space, the theatrical stage traditionally separated the audience from the action happening in front of them. Nonetheless, Maxy’s ‘Roentgen eye’, as termed by *Integral*’s reviewer, attempted to dissolve this barrier, literally removing walls and replacing them with transparent structures that furthermore suggest the even vaster landscapes stretching outside the theatrical realm. Together with the unitary aesthetics of Maxy’s design, this practice, based on modern technological advances, created an immersive effect that perfectly illustrated the synthetic nature of Integralism.

This chapter has outlined the collaborations that Maxy had with the Vilna Troupe during their time in Bucharest in 1925 and 1926, from Gide’s *Saul*, which never reached the stage, to Pirandello’s *Man, Beast, and Virtue*, which became a critical success. Through newly uncovered archival material it has been possible to reconstitute several productions in order to analyse the changing nature of the collaboration as well as the practical application of Maxy’s ideas regarding modern artistic developments. The manipulation of actors’ bodies, the multi-functional sets, the flat backdrops with cubist shapes, and the three-dimensional spaces with echoes of modernist design are just some of elements that align these productions with contemporary developments in stage design and performance across Europe. Moreover, the integration of signifiers of urban contemporaneity, from the shop window to the cinema

screen, reveals a sophisticated understanding of avant-garde artistic practices, blurring the boundaries between modern life, modern commerce, and the theatrical stage. If we return to the view expressed by Romanian scholars in the introduction to chapter, that truly avant-garde theatre had no significant presence in interwar Bucharest, we can respond that exciting theatrical experimentation did take place, its existence obscured by the ephemerality of the performative and by the scarcity of comprehensive scholarly accounts.

The risk of practices and practitioners that do not fit a particular national narrative being resigned to an art historical no-man's land is thus very real, as Debra Caplan has also remarked. In her work, she refers to the Vilna Troupe's 'Transnational Theatre Paradigm' which 'operated in the total absence of a national infrastructure'.¹⁴⁴ As the 1927 theatrical season drew to a close, the Vilna Troupe left its Romanian base, gravitating towards Poland. It continued to tour extensively under the management of Mordechai Mazo until 1935, although its make-up changed with great frequency. Alexander Stein for example left to form his own troupe which performed to some acclaim in Vienna and Berlin in the early 1930s, frequently repurposing earlier productions such as *The Singer of His Sorrows*, the Vilna Troupe's famous Bucharest success.¹⁴⁵ A revival of this same play was the centrepiece of Joseph Buloff's own return to the Romanian capital in 1931, with Luba and Leib Kadison as part of his troupe.¹⁴⁶ This was only a brief tour however, the Buloffs having made their permanent home in the United States. Bucharest was thus in need of some new theatrical experimentation.

144. Caplan, 'Nomadic Chutzpah', 300.

145. Caplan, *Yiddish Empire*, 202-4, 209.

146. Buloff's Bucharest tour was the subject of a special issue of *Cronica teatrală*, 9 July 1931.

Chapter 5. MAXY'S THEATRICAL COLLABORATIONS WITH DIDA SOLOMON AND IACOB STERNBERG, 1927 - 1934

The departure of the Vilna Troupe from Romania gave rise to local initiatives that continued their theatrical legacy. Maxy engaged in collaborations with two of the driving forces behind these initiatives, Dida Solomon-Callimachi and Iacob Sternberg, producing set designs and graphic identities for them. The performances Maxy designed took place over a number of years, from 1927 to 1934, and ranged from oppressive Strindbergian dramas to Yiddish classics and contemporary music hall revues (Appendix L). If Maxy's collaboration with the Vilna Troupe has been discussed in scholarship, albeit sparsely and erroneously, his theatrical activity after their departure is almost entirely absent. This chapter is thus the first attempt to reconstitute these productions and the circumstances in which they were created, and it does so with various degrees of success. In some cases new visual material has been identified, allowing a thorough analysis of the techniques used on stage or on the page. In other cases, primary material is still patchy, consisting mainly of press articles of the period. At the very least it is now possible to bring to the fore the achievements of Solomon and Sternberg, who have been too seldom present in accounts of the Romanian avant-gardes, theatrical or otherwise. Furthermore, it becomes evident from this analysis that avant-garde theatre in Bucharest continued to exist and to develop after the departure of the Vilna Troupe, engendering new and fruitful artistic experimentation.

The chapter opens with an account of Maxy's collaboration with Dida Solomon-Callimachi, an actress and producer who in 1927 opened her own theatre. For Solomon, Maxy designed a graphic identity that gave a modern streamlined air to the theatre's programmes and correspondence. He also worked on two productions, joining other avant-garde practitioners such as Marcel Iancu, Sandu Eliad or Sternberg himself, who participated in Solomon's experimental performances. The theatre lasted only three months and Maxy's next encounter with Solomon was not until 1932 when he designed the sets for a contemporary French play that was once again independently staged. The chapter continues with an analysis of Sternberg's Bukarester Idishe Theater Studio project, another short-lived initiative that was nonetheless extremely influential. A reconstruction of the two Yiddish plays that Sternberg and Maxy staged in the spring of 1930 is made possible by newly emerged visual evidence that highlights their innovative approach. The chapter concludes with Sternberg and Maxy's

music hall productions, a genre they embarked on in 1933 and 1934 and to which they brought a similar experimental quality.

Dida Solomon (1927 and 1932)

Maxy's first theatrical collaboration after the departure of the Vilna Troupe was in the autumn of 1927 with Dida Solomon-Callimachi, whose fame rested on her 1922 debut as the titular character in Strindberg's *Miss Julie* at the National Theatre in Bucharest.¹ Solomon was also a close collaborator and friend of the Bucharest avant-garde, participating in the landmark *Contimporanul* exhibition of 1924 and publishing graphic works and poems in *Contimporanul* and *Punct*. Yet she is rarely mentioned in this context, being considered primarily an actress and sometimes muse, the subject of portraits by Victor Brauner and Marcel Iancu, and wife of the writer and anti-fascist activist Scarlat Callimachi. (Fig. 5.1a and 5.1b)

In the theatrical realm, Solomon took the initiative of setting up her own organisation in 1927. She named it the Caragiale Theatre (Teatrul Caragiale) after Romania's prominent 19th century dramaturgist.² From the very beginning, she drew her collaborators from the ranks of the avant-garde. Marcel Iancu undertook the refurbishment of the auditorium and the stage, which had previously housed the Alhambra revue theatre.³ Furthermore, the troupe's first production reunited the team that had given *The Merry Death* a modern re-imagining in 1925: Sandu Eliad as director and Iancu as designer.⁴ The 'stylised stage sets, with doorless thresholds and ceilingless rooms' were judged to be unsuited to the Caragiale Theatre's first play, a contemporary political satire by Romanian playwright Gheorghe Brăescu entitled *The Minister* (Ministrul).⁵ The production flopped and was hastily replaced by *Miss Julie*, Solomon's star vehicle, in an attempt to plug the gap in the troupe's repertoire.⁶ Many years later Eliad recalled the subversive intentions of *The Minister*, which probably led to its

1. Dida Solomon, *Amintirile domnișoarei Iulia* (București: Cartea Românească, 1974), 53.

2. Ion Luca Caragiale (1852-1912) is Romania's most famous playwright, whose perceptively satirical work is so widely known that numerous quotes from his plays have entered common parlance.

3. Sandu Eliad, 'Un teatru Caragiale în 1927', *Teatrul* XVII, no. 11 (November 1972): 59-61, 60.

4. 'Știri artistice', *Dimineața*, 2 September 1927.

5. Scarlat Froda, 'Teatrul Carageale. *Ministrul*', *Rampa*, 21 September 1927.

6. Scarlat Froda, 'Cronica dramatică', *Rampa*, 26 September 1927.

downfall. Not only did it court political controversy, but it also employed the type of sparse design seen in Maxy's own productions, as well as referencing the freeze-frame potential of modern photography:

I would have liked to direct the play in a setting representing the Triumphal Arch as it was then - a wretched construction, unfinished, supported for years by some rotting scaffolding.⁷ The author had feared, however, that the production would be censored. Therefore, together with the architect Marcel Iancu I created a fixed structure crowned by slogans which framed a series of alternating background panels that set the scene. Critics at the time found this too "modernist"; the panels had only empty spaces in the place of windows and doors, and the actors paused at certain moments, as if their actions were being captured by the camera lens.⁸

The next premiere, which took place in October 1927, was August Strindberg's *Comrades* (*Camarazii*), for which Solomon collaborated with Sternberg and Maxy. The play, supposedly selected by Sternberg, was a somewhat odd choice.⁹ Published in 1888, it was considered by critics as one of Strindberg's weakest works, as well as being vitriolically misogynistic in its portrayal of an artist couple in which the emancipated yet talentless woman exploits her more gifted partner for money and professional success. Reviewers in the Romanian press objected to this subject matter and to the play itself, heavily criticising the production.¹⁰ In *Rampa*, Scarlat Froda expressed concerns about the Caragiale Theatre's progress so far and its choice of repertoire, having initially been supportive of Solomon's new venture.¹¹ Some of his hostility however was directed towards Sternberg's theatrical approach. Recalling his 1925 staging of Gogol's *Marriage* with the Vilna Troupe, Froda balked at way in which actors had been lowered onto the stage from above, harnesses attached 'above the coccyx', whilst the

7. Bucharest's Triumphal Arch had its origin in the celebrations that followed the end of the First World War and the creation of Greater Romania. The structure was not a sturdy one however and it soon began to deteriorate. Eliad's statement can thus be construed as a critique of Romania's post-war government, equated with the crumbling monument.

8. Eliad, 'Un teatru Caragiale în 1927', 60.

9. Solomon, *Amintirile domnișoarei Iulia*, 87.

10. A. de Herz, 'Cronica teatrală. Teatrul Caragiale. *Camarazii*, piesă în 4 acte de Strindberg', *Dimineața*, 14 October 1927; Scarlat Froda, 'Cronica dramatică', *Rampa*, 14 October 1927.

11. Froda, 'Cronica dramatică', 14 October 1927.

backdrop spun around like a fairground wheel. For *Comrades*, Sternberg had toned down his vision, yet Froda still objected to the minimalist wooden slats that constituted the set's background, whose permeability threatened the audience's suspension of disbelief.¹² In this, the contribution of Maxy is detectable if not explicit, his interest in on-stage transparency having reached its peak in the 1926 production of *Man, Beast, and Virtue* with its skeletal house sketched in with wooden beams. For *Comrades*, no photographs or detailed descriptions of the sets have emerged and Maxy is credited as the production's 'painter' in Froda's review. The only other tantalising information comes from a pre-premiere announcement in *Dimineața* stating that the 'furniture and decor' for *Comrades* were in preparation in the studios of the Caragiale Theatre under the supervision of Maxy.¹³

Savaged by critics, the play did not survive for more than a handful of performances despite Sternberg's direction being described by Solomon in her memoirs as moving and masterful.¹⁴ By now, the troupe's financial situation was so dire that one morning the cashier had barely enough change for Sternberg to buy a cup of tea.¹⁵ A new production was needed and Solomon chose French dramatist Henri-René Lenormand's *The Failures* (*Ratașii*), a 1920 play about struggling artists.¹⁶ The production was directed by Eliad and designed by Maxy, who had to contend with some technical difficulties. Lenormand's drama required eleven scene changes, but the Caragiale Theatre lacked the mechanical wherewithal and the backstage space that would allow a seamless interchanges. The solution, perhaps inspired by Frederick Kiesler's 'mechanical stage scenery', was a stage set composed from a small number of stylised architectural elements that could be easily manipulated between scene changes.¹⁷ *The Failures* opened in early November and was the Caragiale Theatre's much needed first success. Eliad's approach was praised for its light touch, unlike Sternberg's distinctive vision, and Maxy's sets were described as 'simplified with great scenic effect'.¹⁸

12. Ibid.

13. 'Știri artistice', *Dimineața*, 3 October 1927.

14. Solomon, *Amintirile domnișoarei Iulia*, 87.

15. Ibid., 89.

16. Lenormand (1882-1951) was a playwright interested in the human subconscious. *Les Ratés* (The Failures) became his best-known work.

17. Eliad, 'Un teatru Caragiale in 1927', 61.

18. Scarlat Froda, 'Cronica dramatică', *Rampa*, 4 November 1927; A. de Herz, 'Cronica teatrală. Teatrul Caragiale. *Ratașii*, dramă în 11 tablouri de H.R. Lenormand', *Dimineața*, 5 November 1927.

In his review, the writer A. De Hertz went as far as to draw comparisons with Karlheinz Martin's production of Osip Dymov's *Nju*, which had taken Bucharest's theatre world by storm in 1922 with its pared-back approach.¹⁹ Furthermore, it was not only the reviewers who approved of *The Failures*, as the production found favour with the general public. Performances were sold out and drew lengthy and enthusiastic applause every night.²⁰

Although visual evidence is lacking also for this production, Maxy's collaboration with the Caragiale Theatre may have left its mark in a different context. As with the Vilna Troupe, he seems to have offered his design services not only on stage, but also in the creation of a visual identity for the troupe. Solomon's correspondence with the Arts Ministry has survived in the Romanian National Archives and it is topped with a distinctive monochromatic letterhead.²¹ (Fig. 5.2) The interplay between the negative and positive spaces of the design, the flash of jagged edges, and the repetition of simplified masks representing tragedy and comedy are devices used by Maxy in his graphic work, such as the Cabaret programme and Vilna Troupe programme from 1925, indicating him as the likely author. (Fig. 4.4) In this more elaborate design a theatre's facade is suggested through the horizontal elements, whilst the vertical column of faces and the lightning-bolt shape recall the night-time draw of the neon sign. It is a motif that evokes the performative potential of urban spaces and modern advertising utilised by Maxy so successfully in *The Sentimental Mannequin*. The composition continues towards the left, incorporating the name of the theatre, its address, and the name of its director, Dida Solomon. In the opposite corner of the sheet a thick black line completes the ensemble, awaiting the date to be inscribed in between the diagonally disposed location and year. The same graphic identity was used for the theatre's programme cover.²² (Fig. 5.3) In this case, the line on the composition's left hand side is extended downwards and then towards the right, creating a framing effect. The design is completed by a vignette indicating that the brochure was part of the 1927-28 season. The circular frame around the years is reminiscent of a musical record or perhaps a wheel in motion, in keeping with the themes of urban entertainment suggested by the larger composition.

19. de Herz, 'Cronica teatrală. Teatrul Caragiale. *Ratajii*'.

20. 'Știri artistice', *Dimineața*, 11 November 1927; 'Știri artistice', *Dimineața*, 17 November 1927.

21. Romanian National Archives, fond 652 Direcția Generală a Artelor, dosar 38/1927.

22. The cover image can be seen in Michael Ilk, *Maxy. Der integrale Künstler* (Ludwigshafen: Michael Ilk, 2003), 173, but the location of the programme itself is unknown.

Despite Maxy's attractive graphics and the success of Lenormand's play, the Caragiale Theatre did not survive beyond November 1927. The debts incurred during the troupe's disastrous first two months could not be met and Solomon and her husband were faced with multiple legal actions and even the threat of their home being repossessed.²³ Thus, the potential of a home-grown initiative that gathered together Bucharest's avant-garde theatre proponents was never fulfilled. Amongst Solomon's plans that never came to fruition was a collaboration with expressionist director Karlheinz Martin and a production of Sholem Asch's scandalous play *The God of Vengeance*.²⁴ Solomon's vision for a more audacious local theatre stemmed not only from her association with Bucharest's avant-garde but also her travels. Before setting up the Caragiale Theatre she had travelled to Hungary, Austria and France, meeting Max Reinhardt and Arthur Schnitzler, among others, and witnessing the Habima Theatre's first European tour and its famed production of *The Dybbuk* in Paris.²⁵ After her project's demise, Solomon returned to Paris where she impressed Lenormand by showing him Maxy's set designs for *The Failures*, and also met Simon Gantillon, whose play *Maya* became her next undertaking.²⁶

First staged in Paris in 1924 by director Gaston Baty, *Maya* had grown into an international, if somewhat controversial, success. The tale of a Toulon prostitute and the clients who find in her *la femme universelle* had been translated into more than sixteen languages and performed across Europe and the United States, occasionally being banned for indecency.²⁷ Unable to find a theatre in Bucharest willing to stage the play, Solomon created her own troupe once more and premiered *Maya* on 22 April 1932. The set designs had been created by Maxy and

23. Solomon, *Amintirile domnișoarei Iulia*, 92.

24. 'Ultimele informațiuni. Teatrul Caragiale', *Rampa*, 23 October 1927; 'Ultimele informațiuni. Teatrul Caragiale', *Rampa*, 13 October 1927.

25. 'Cu Dida Solomon-Calimachi despre ea și despre alții', *Rampa*, 13 May 1932; S. D., 'Paris! D-1 Scarlat Calimachi ne povestește impresiile sale', *Rampa*, 17 September 1926.

26. 'Cu Dida Solomon-Calimachi'. Gantillon (1887-1961) was a French playwright and screenwriter.

27. Ioan Massoff, *Teatrul românesc. Privire istorică*, vol. VII (București: Minerva, 1976), 39-40. *Maya* was banned in the United Kingdom in 1927 and in the United States in 1928. See Ivor Noël Hume, *A Passion for the Past. The Odyssey of a Transatlantic Archaeologist* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 123, and John H. Houchin, *Censorship of the American Theatre in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 105.

the play was directed by Marietta Sadova, a well-known actress, based on the detailed instructions given to Solomon by Gantillon and Baty in Paris.²⁸ *Maya* was a success and ran for more than 25 performances until the middle of May, with a re-run planned for the autumn season.²⁹ Maxy's sets were described as 'admirable', the interior of Maya's room 'realistic and evocative', with a maritime backdrop suggestive of the sea and ship's sails.³⁰ Visual material has not come to light, but the set's description and even the amorous plot recall the Vilna Troupe's *Man, Beast, and Virtue*.³¹ Maxy's sets for that 1926 production could not be described as realistic, so a change had evidently ensued, however the juxtaposition of an interior with a naval background glimpsed through a window must have been a familiar challenge for the artist.

Maxy's three collaborations with Dida Solomon are amongst the least well documented of his theatrical endeavours, so it is difficult to evaluate them with accuracy. They do however provide evidence of his continued involvement with the proponents of avant-garde theatre in Bucharest, not only as decorator but also as graphic designer. His approach continued to use elements developed during his collaboration with the Vilna Troupe, such as an interest in transparency and a talent for illustrating domestic and naval themes. A newly found preoccupation with realism may also be glimpsed not only in *Maya*, but also in *The Failures* where the comparison with Martin's production of *Nju* suggests simplicity but not necessarily stylisation.

The Bukarester Idishe Theater Studio (1930)

Jacob Sternberg was already a well-respected theatre director and producer of Yiddish theatre in Romania when in 1930 he took the initiative of creating an organisation dedicated to its

28. 'Vineri *Maya* la Teatrul Liber', *Rampa*, 19 April 1932; 'Repetițiile piesei *Maya* la Teatrul Liber', *Rampa*, 14 April 1932.

29. 'Cu Dida Solomon-Calimachi'; '*Maya* de Simon Gantillon la Teatrul Liber', *Dimineața*, 5 May 1932. The revival never took place however.

30. A. Munte, 'Cronica teatrală. Teatrul Liber. *Maya* de d. Simon Gantillon', *Dimineața*, 27 April 1932.

31. In her autobiography, published in 1974, Solomon mentions that Maxy's original designs had been lost and her only souvenir of this performance was a programme that survived in the possession of Mme Gantillon who gifted it to Solomon in 1964. See Solomon, *Amintirile domnișoarei Iulia*, 100.

development.³² (Figs. 5.4) Under the umbrella of an association entitled Jüdische Volksbühne, Sternberg created the Bukarester Idische Theater Studio, known as BITS.³³ (Appendix M) The initiative itself was short-lived, but it did engender two particularly innovative productions directed by Sternberg and designed by Maxy. These ephemeral bursts of theatrical experimentation can now be recovered through visual and textual material held in a number of international archives, including the Centre for the Study of Jewish History in Romania (CSIER) and the Yivo Institute for Jewish Research in New York.

A brochure which presents the goals and *raison d'être* of Jüdische Volksbühne is to be found in the CSIER archives, as well as in the Romanian National Archives where it accompanies a number of requests, such as tax reliefs or approval to perform throughout the Romanian territories, made by Sternberg to the local authorities to facilitate the association's activities.³⁴ (Fig. 5.5) This pamphlet was certainly designed by Maxy using a similar format to a 1925 publication created for Tragedy and Comedy (*Drama și Comedie*), the Vilna Troupe's short lived Romanian branch. (Fig. 4.4) The two brochures share the same square shape and cover layout: the word 'Prospect' [Prospectus] runs down the left-hand side of the page, where it meets the name of the organisation running across the lower margin. The space that forms in-between is blank, except for one vignette that enlivens the page and whose design contains the initials of the organisation in question: D and C in one case, and three Hebrew characters that denote the words 'Jüdische Volksbühne' in the other. Furthermore, the text of the 1930 brochure is in fact an updated version of the 1925 text, both containing the manifest intention to position the organisation in question as the latest venture in a long line of exceptional Jewish theatrical initiatives taking place on Romanian territories. (Appendices K and M) A

32. For further information about Sternberg and Yiddish culture in Bucharest during this period see Camelia Crăciun, 'Bucureștiul interbelic, centru emergent de cultură idiș', *Revista de istorie a evreilor din România*, no. 1 (16-17) (2016): 65-81.

33. In the contemporary press and even within its own documentation, the Studio is sometimes titled 'Judische' instead of 'Idische' and the spelling of its entire name can vary depending on the source. Sternberg's concept was based on the German Volksbühne movement, which functioned through a membership system and aimed to bring theatre to the working classes. See Cecil Davies, *The Volksbühne Movement. A History* (London; New York: Routledge, 2013).

34. Centre for the Study of Jewish History in Romania, fond Iacob Sternberg; Romanian National Archives, fond 817 Direcția Generală a Artelor, file 4/1930. Some of these documents are discussed in Anca Mocanu, *Avram Goldfaden și teatrul ca identitate* (București: Fundația Culturală Camil Petrescu, 2012), 100-101.

mark of the success, cultural if not financial, of the 1925-26 Vilna Troupe season, is its inclusion in the 1930 brochure, having now become part and parcel of this lineage. Maxy himself had now become integral to this heritage: in the 1925 text he is listed as one of a number of 'painters – decorators' who was to bring a fresh aesthetic to the productions; in the 1930 text 'the decorative creations' of Maxy are described as 'not only a local chapter in the achievements of this ensemble [the Vilna Troupe], but a defining moment for its subsequent evolution' in other countries such as Poland.

The brochure does not contain a list of upcoming BITS productions, however these are listed in the documentation submitted by Sternberg to the Romanian authorities.³⁵ The first two productions, and as it turned out the most memorable, were *A Night in the Old Marketplace* (Noaptea în târgul vechi) by Isaac Leib Peretz and *The Bewitched Tailor* (Croitorul fermecat) by Sholem Aleichem.

A Night in the Old Marketplace

BITS debuted in late January 1930 with the premiere of *A Night in the Old Marketplace*.³⁶ According to Yiddish theatre scholar Debra Caplan, I.L. Peretz's 1907 play had only been staged twice before this date: 'in 1925 by the Moscow Yiddish Art Theatre [and], in 1928 by the Vilna Troupe' in Warsaw.³⁷ The Bucharest production, so far unknown in international scholarship, is thus a significant moment in theatrical history, joining the small number of attempts to bring Peretz's drama to the stage. As Caplan explains:

At Night in the Old Marketplace was difficult to produce, and so rarely was. Even with double- or triple-casting, dozens of actors would still be required. Peretz also

35. Romanian National Archives, 817/4/1930.

36. The title of this work is sometimes translated from Yiddish as *At Night in the Old Marketplace*. I have used the text, and thus the title, of the Hillel Halkin translation: I.L. Peretz and Hillel Halkin, 'A Night in the Old Marketplace', *Prooftexts* 12, no. 1 (January 1992): 1-70.

37. Debra Caplan, 'Love Letter to the Yiddish Stage: Peretz's *At Night in the Old Marketplace*, Reconsidered', *PaknTerger*, no. 72 (Winter 2015), accessed 26 June 2017, <http://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/language-literature-culture/pakn-treger/love-letter-yiddish-stage-peretzs-night-old-marketplace>. Peretz (1852-1915) is one of the most prominent Yiddish literary figures, championing the Yiddish language as a vehicle for modern literature.

called for an enormous and exceedingly complex set that included eight shape-shifting buildings (stable enough for actors to climb upon), a hidden catapult, giant movable tombstones, a floating cemetery that emerges in mid-air, and a remote-controlled mechanical rooster.

Interviewed in the newspaper *Dimineața* for the launch of BITS, Sternberg also listed the two productions of the previous decade and positioned his own interpretation as 'a new type of staging'. According to him, *A Night* was such a rare presence on stage because it did not suit the trend for theatrical realism, however it would be well-served by a 'synthetic' staging such as that proposed by BITS.³⁸ The production was extensively photographed and several images have emerged during the research for this thesis. The avant-garde periodical *Adam* dedicated its February 1930 issue to the production, printing three photographs alongside a host of articles praising the innovative staging.³⁹ Two further photographs can be found in the collections of the Romanian National Art Museum (MNAR) and the Yivo Institute for Jewish Research in New York.⁴⁰ The most comprehensive material however is in the possession of the Centre for the Study of Jewish History (CSIER) in Romania, which holds five photographs of the production. Four of these were printed directly from the original glass plate negatives, also in the collection, and are thus of excellent quality, revealing the production in great detail.⁴¹ The fifth image has a stamp on the reverse revealing that its author was the prominent interwar photographer Iosif Berman, who had also immortalised the Vilna Troupe's performances as revealed in Chapter Four. Both the number of extant images, and the interest of a well-known figure such as Berman, indicate the importance of this production.

The ten images can be divided into two groups. The first group of photographs, four from CSIER and one from MNAR, have a certain work-in-progress quality. (Figs. 5.5-5.9) The lighting is uniform and natural and cropping has not been applied to the composition, so that the theatrical illusion is shattered. Advertising banners are visible above the stage, as is the

38. Rep., 'Inaugurarea studio-ului evreesc. De vorbă cu regisorul I. Sternberg', *Dimineața*, 31 January 1930.

39. *Adam* I, no. 16 (1 February 1930).

40. Romanian National Art Museum, Documentation department, fond M. H. Maxy; Yivo Institute for Jewish Research, Esther-Rachel Kaminska Theater Museum collection, RG8.

41. Centre for the Study of Jewish History in Romania, Photography collection.

orchestra pit with chairs and a sheet music stand. The second group of photographs focus closely on the action and employ dramatic lighting effects, perhaps unsurprisingly as three of them are published in print. (Figs. 5.10-5.11, 5.13-5.15) The confirmed authorship of Iosif Berman of one of the photographs from this group, raises the possibility that he may have taken some of the others, perhaps the images published in *Adam*.⁴² Furthermore, compositional similarities exist across a number of the images, some suggesting that the work-in-progress photographs could be preparatory studies for the more intricate shots. For example, the cover of *Adam* is held by a striking image in which two characters face the half-drawn stage curtains whilst a beam of light dissects the space behind them, highlighting two strange glowing shapes. A second photograph of this scene, which lacks the close cropping and chiaroscuro shading, reveals these shapes to be a lamp and the upper body of a man carrying it. (Figs. 5.13 and 5.9) The Berman photograph also displays a compositional focus and judicious use of lighting that underscore the dramatic gestural ballet on stage. Its unattributed pendant from the Yivo collection appears to show the same scene and almost the same gestures but without these finishing touches. (Figs. 5.10 and 5.11) Thus, although the Berman authorship of all the photographs may not be established with any certainty, visual analysis suggests they may show the working process behind a single photographic portfolio. Furthermore, what is evident from all existing images is the desire to emphasise the radical aesthetics of the production beyond the stationary design elements, through the dynamism of the actor's movements and the use of modern stage lighting techniques.

In a further departure from theatrical traditions the set itself is simple, allowing these human and technical elements to establish their domination over the stage. The images reveal a base structure that remains on stage throughout the production. It is the titular 'old market place', edged on both sides by hollow structures stacked in irregular fashion to suggest the buildings surrounding it. A slatted balcony, a street lamp and a trade sign add to the illusion, while in the background two further buildings – a church and a synagogue – are sketched out naively in white as though on a blackboard. The entire structure appears haphazard and lopsided. The edges curve or slide, the balcony slats are bent, the sketched buildings lean forward as though wishing to meet in the middle. This clearly is part of the illusion, as the set is vigorously put through its paces in the photographs, with actors scaling its various structures.

42. The name 'E. Marvan' which appears in the bottom left hand corner of these photos is a printer's mark and not an indication of the photographer.

The stage design, attributed to Maxy by existing literature, was most likely a collaborative product.⁴³ The overall vision and direction of the production appear to have been Sternberg's, a fact acknowledged by the contemporary press. In fact, Maxy's name was conspicuous by its absence, both in press reviews and in the special issue of *Adam* dedicated to the performance. According to A. Toma, it was Sternberg who 'spatially project[ed] the author's vision', while Tudor Arghezi praised the director's 'theatrical constructions' and visually arresting scenic tableaux.⁴⁴ Moreover, a flyer advertising the company on tour in June 1930 announced that 'the sets, costumes, music and dances [for *A Night* were] created by the Studio [i.e. BITS]', while at the same time crediting Maxy with the sets for *The Bewitched Tailor*.⁴⁵ (Fig. 5.16) This may simply mean that creative control over the design of the latter play was solely Maxy's while that of *A Night* was distributed amongst the members of BITS, however further scholarly accounts must now treat Maxy's involvement in this production with caution. Maxy's overall involvement in the BITS project is nonetheless supported by other evidence, such as the graphics for the company's prospectus, his designs for the subsequent production of *The Bewitched Tailor*, and his presence at the mock trial debating *A Night*, discussed below.

Other factors that determined the conception of the staging were Peretz himself, who had included very detailed stage directions in his text, and in all likelihood, the two previous productions.⁴⁶ Photographs of the 1928 staging in Warsaw reveal a set built from similar structures with curved openings and ramps, steps and even a balcony that are similarly positioned, itself inspired by the constructivist aesthetics that had first segmented the stage space through the use of platforms, ladders and modular frameworks or similarly arched apertures.⁴⁷ (Fig. 5.17) Furthermore, the church and the synagogue are also two-dimensional

43. See for instance the list of theatrical productions in Ilk, *Maxy*, 176. It is also listed in Petre Oprea, *M. H. Maxy*, București: Meridiane, 1974, 30 and Israel Marcus, *Șapte momente din istoria evreilor în România*, Haifa: Glob, 1977, 54 but in both of these the year given for the production is incorrect. In 1970 Maxy did work on a revival of *A Night in the Old Marketplace* at the Jewish State Theatre in Bucharest.

44. A. Toma, 'Însuflețitorul', 1-2 and Tudor Arghezi, 'Studio Teatrul Idiș, din București', 4-6, in *Adam* I, no. 16 (1 February 1930).

45. Yivo Institute for Jewish Research, Esther-Rachel Kaminska Theater Museum collection, RG8.

46. Peretz and Hillel, 'A Night', 3-4.

47. See for example Vladimir Tatlin's *Zangezi* (1923), Liubov Popova's *Romeo and Juliet* (1921) or Alexandra

presences in the background, lopsidedly positioned, and the dynamic contortions of the actors fill the stage.⁴⁸ It is certain that Sternberg was familiar with the Vilna Troupe's earlier effort, especially that at least two of the actors from the Warsaw performance were directly involved in his own staging: the names of Ruth Taru and David Licht can be found in the cast lists for both the Warsaw and the Bucharest productions of *A Night*.⁴⁹ A portrait photograph of David Licht in character, taken at a Bucharest photographic studio, shows his costume, face painting, and prosthetic nose.⁵⁰ (Fig. 5.12) Although clearly inspired by the Warsaw production, Sternberg took his experimentation further, eschewing the traditional costumes and decorative painterly touches favoured by director David Herman.⁵¹

A Night does not have a clear narrative structure and thus the sequence of the existing photographs is more difficult to decipher than in the case of *The Bewitched Tailor* below. The play is an ensemble piece that follows a string of nocturnal activities in an atemporal marketplace where the worlds of the living and the dead collide. The prologue reveals that we are watching a play within a play, as several theatre staff appear at work on an imminent production, its set obscured by 'a scrim of black gauze'.⁵² Soon however the fictional world takes over the ostensibly 'real' one and the audience is plunged into the action, together with the make-believe Theatre Director and Stage Manager. A further playfully surreal dimension is revealed in a photograph where Sternberg, the genuine theatre director, stands on stage next to the drama that unfolds. (Fig. 5.6) This may well be a promotional photograph, or he may be on stage playing Peretz's fictional 'real' Theatre Director, however no complete cast sheet has yet come to light that confirms such a conjecture.⁵³ Sternberg is joined on stage by

Exter's designs for the film *Aelita* (1924).

48. Yivo Institute for Jewish Research, Yiddish Theater Photographs collection RG119. One photograph can be seen online, accompanying Caplan's article 'Love Letter'.

49. Yivo Institute for Jewish Research, Esther-Rachel Kaminska Theater Museum collection RG8. It should be noted however that this branch of the Vilna Troupe did not have the same composition as the one that had been active in Bucharest a few years earlier, although Mordechai Mazo was still its manager.

50. Yivo Institute for Jewish Research, Yiddish Theater Photographs collection RG119.

51. The team for the Warsaw production included Herman as director, Władysław Weintraub as designer and Lea Rotbaumowna as choreographer. For more information about the Vilna Troupe's Warsaw production see Caplan, *Yiddish Empire. The Vilna Troupe, Jewish Theater, and the Art of Itinerancy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018), 181-186.

52. Peretz and Hillel, 'A Night', 5.

53. For instance, Maxy also appeared in photographs of the Vilna Troupe productions he designed in 1926.

three characters, two of whom appear recurrently in the existent images. They are two of the *dramatis personae* that frame and reflect on the action, perhaps the Jester, the Wanderer or the Narrator.⁵⁴ In many images, they also provide a physical frame, standing on opposite sides of the stage. The centerpiece of the narrative and of the physical space of the marketplace itself is the well, sometimes topped by an abstract sculptural form representing the Gargoyle, which acts as a mystical catalyst for the nocturnal exploits. It can be most clearly seen in the image where the two recurring characters appear to be drawing the curtain, to either reveal or conclude the narrative, while in the background the Night Watchman wanders through the marketplace with his lamp. (Fig. 5.9)

As the images reveal, the simple modular structure of the set serves as a background for the intricate movement patterns created by the actors. Several photographs show the ensemble cast in carefully constructed formations. Peretz's abundance of characters that fleetingly flood the marketplace makes it difficult to identify with any certainty the figures on stage, aside perhaps from the Musicians, who appear in two connected images. (Figs. 5.8 and 5.15) The original victims of the magical Gargoyle, they have now joined the ranks of the 'Souls from Purgatory', according to the list of *dramatis personae*. A drummer and a fiddle player perform led by a bowler-hatted bassist whose stringless instrument displays human features.⁵⁵ Around them female characters, living or dead, appear to be dancing. This human composition which appears in the unedited image – with glimpses of an advertising hoarding above the stage – was cropped, streamlined and dramatically lit for the version that was published in *Adam*. Although the actors' poses remained largely the same, some of their positions were changed to add more fluency to the image. The drummer and the fiddler for instance were moved down to fill a gap in the composition, suggesting that after the first 'test' image was taken, adjustments were made to produce the version that would be published.

The emergence of the dead from their graves and their subsequently frenzied *dance macabre* must have been amongst the most dramatic scenes that the audience encountered. In one image from *Adam* hands rise up from behind a parapet framed by two beams of light engaging in a gestural ballet whose shadows fall, ghostly, upon the backdrop. (Fig. 5.14) The

54. One of these is played by David Licht, as evidenced by the studio portrait previously mentioned.

55. The actual music would have come from the orchestra in the pit which is visible in some images.

dance itself, captured in two photographs, shows bodies merging and contorting, leaning and arching in gravity-defying fashion. (Figs. 5.10 and 5.11) Although visual evidence exists of similar movement techniques being used in the Warsaw production, Sternberg's (and maybe Berman's) approach differs through its vibrant dynamism. In the Warsaw photograph, the bodies of the actors form a compact triangular composition that lends a static, monolithic quality to the scene. (Fig. 5.17) By contrast, the dance scenes of the Bucharest production have the linear progression of a Futurist painting in which the eye is drawn across the canvas at breakneck speed, with movements blurring and succeeding each other. According to contemporary reviews, the ingenious use of movement was one of the main innovations of the production. In *Adam*, A. Toma writes:

[Sternberg's] great magic resides in his understanding of the fact that the characters are ghosts, schemas and symbols, and thus in his ability to confer upon them the automatism of puppets, and in that automatism, the whole plastic eurhythmic, typical and essential of the symbol they embody for a moment.⁵⁶

In Toma's view, the actors are like robots because they embody a bleak vision of the world in which humankind has no agency, recalling perhaps Karel Čapek's *R.U.R.* Yet the man as machine and by extension the mechanical actor had frequently been an aspiration of the artistic avant-gardes. Maxy himself envisaged this in an article already mentioned, published five years earlier in *Integral*, in which he outlined the tenets of constructivist theatre, singling out the ideas of Alexander Tairov and Vsevolod Meyerhold.⁵⁷ He discussed the mobility of the actor, who must interact with the set in almost acrobatic fashion, and how the set itself must be suited to this by presenting a multi-level, three-dimensional environment. Furthermore, rhythm, dance and movement were to become an essential part of the collective performance. Sternberg shared Maxy's admiration for the two Russian directors and the staging of *A Night* may well have been one of the most decisively constructivist productions in Romanian theatrical history.⁵⁸ According to Toma, Sternberg tamed Peretz's chaotic vision

56. Toma, 'Însuflețitorul'.

57. M. H. Maxy, 'Regia scenică - decor - costum', *Integral*, no. 2 (April 1925): 4-5.

58. He writes about their modern methods in a 1929 article quoted in Israil Bercovici, *O sută de ani de teatru evreiesc în România* (București: Integral, 1998), 149-150.

through stylised gestures and architectonic on-stage formations.⁵⁹ These, as the photographs also suggest, are reminiscent of Meyerhold's biomechanics, a technique that enabled 'harmonic interaction of large groups' so that 'instead of individual actors on stage, the audience saw two-bodied, three-bodied, and multiple-bodied characters'.⁶⁰ As well as the dance images already discussed, this technique is particularly visible in one of Sternberg's ensemble scenes where the actors in the central group merge together, moving in unison as a many-bodied, gesturing creature. (Fig. 5.7)

Sternberg's approach cultivated not just a blending of actors' bodies, but also of other branches of the arts. Prior to the official opening of BITS, probably in order to create anticipation and bring in income, he had organised a series of staged readings. These took place in the autumn of 1929 and included texts by Aleichem and Peretz, one of them being *A Night in the Old Marketplace*. The expressive interpretation of the readings was reinforced through judicious use of repetition and musical accompaniment, including choral passages, and was received with enthusiasm by the public and critics alike.⁶¹ The full staging of *A Night* which included specially composed music, choreography, lighting, costumes, make-up, and decor, all interacting harmoniously, left an indelible impression on many contemporary commentators. The theatre reviewer of Jewish newspaper *Curierul Israelit* recounted being profoundly moved along with the rest of the audience who could not bring themselves to leave after the curtain fell, sitting silently together. He described the performative melding together of 'plastic arts, decor, gesture' in which 'music was words, words were music, dance was both words and music'.⁶² A more pragmatic commentator observed that the impression

59. For a more comprehensive analysis of what constitutes constructivist performance, in particular in terms of movement, see also Alexandra Chiriac, 'Fedor Lopukhov and *The Bolt*', *Studies in Theatre and Performance* 36, no. 3 (2016): 242-256.

60. Mikhail Kolesnikov, 'The Russian Avant-Garde and the Theatre of the Artist', in Nancy van Norman Baer, ed., *Theatre in Revolution. Russian Avant-Garde Stage Design 1913-1935*, ed. Nancy van Norman Baer (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 84-95, 90. Meyerhold's first production to incorporate his new actor-training techniques was *The Magnanimous Cuckold* (1922), see Alma H. Law and Mel Gordon, *Meyerhold, Eisenstein and Biomechanics. Actor Training in Revolutionary Russia* (Jefferson, North Carolina; London: McFarland & Company, 2012), 42.

61. Gab. Sch., 'Cronica teatrală. Studioul de la Central', *Curierul israelit*, 3 November 1929; Ury Benador, 'Sternberg', *Adam* I, no.16 (1 February 1930): 2.

62. Gab. Sch., 'Cronica teatrală. Un triumf artistic', *Curierul Israelit*, 2 February 1930.

of 'harmony, unity, and rhythm' was achieved despite the limited scenic, and one might add financial, means available to Sternberg.⁶³

In mid-February the production stopped due to a prior engagement of the space they had been renting in the Lipscani Theatre.⁶⁴ In the meantime, there was to be a mock literary trial to debate the merits of the production and its critical reception at the Barașeum theatre on 2 March. This was a prominent event, attended by numerous artistic personalities and requiring the actors to be on hand to re-create parts of the play. An article in *Dimineața* on 5 March described the proceedings, which were said to resemble an authentic jury trial.⁶⁵ The plaintiffs were Camil Petrescu, Barbu Lăzăreanu and Mișu Weissman.⁶⁶ Of the three, Lăzăreanu made the most impassioned and relevant plea, if a little surreal, accusing Sternberg of 'altering Peretz's work through an orgy of ossified horrors and monosyllables which created a continuous impression of the lugubrious and the hyper-transcendental'. Petrescu and Weissman criticised the modernist influences which, according to them, made the play incomprehensible. As the reporter observed, the defence did not have a difficult task in responding to such a weakly presented case. Maxy, together with Ilarie Voronca and Sandu Tudor, vigorously 'defended [Sternberg's] considerable effort of synthesis and vision'.⁶⁷ Finally, the accused himself spoke, making the case for a modern theatrical vision aligned with modern life itself. The jury absolved Sternberg of all accusations and encouraged the theatre-going public to support this worthwhile venture in expectation of other such performances.

The Bewitched Tailor

A Night did return for a further run in the spring of 1930, but BITS also introduced a new production. Adapted by Sternberg for the stage from a short story by Sholem Aleichem, *The*

63. I. H., 'Bukarester Idischer Studietheater. *Noaptea în târgul vechi* de I. L. Peretz', *Hasmonaea* XII, no. 9-10 (February-March 1930): 42.

64. 'Știri artistice', *Dimineața*, 21 February 1930.

65. G. Miror, 'Un interesant proces literar', *Dimineața*, 5 March 1930.

66. Barbu Lăzăreanu was a writer and literary critic with left wing sympathies, while Mișu Weissman was a lawyer and politician, and a member of the Jewish Party of Romania.

67. Sandu Tudor was a poet and literary theorist with strong Christian Orthodox sympathies, as well as a contributor to *Contimporanul*.

Bewitched Tailor premiered in mid-April 1930.⁶⁸ Although it left a lesser mark than *A Night* in the contemporary press, it was an equally impressive production, as demonstrated by the surviving images in the CSIER and MNAR archives.⁶⁹

The newspaper *Dimineața* billed the play as a comedy, although it ends poorly for the titular character.⁷⁰ Aleichem's fable, based originally on a folk tale, recounts the journeys made by a tailor goaded by his spouse into purchasing a nanny goat from the neighbouring village. The owner of the animal is the local teacher, but it is his wife who conducts the transaction. The tailor and his new animal make the return journey, stopping on the way at the tavern that lies mid-way between the two villages. However, when the tailor finally reaches his home, it transpires that he has received a billy goat and thus no milk is to be had for the family. To rectify the situation, he travels back to the neighbouring village and seeks judgement before the rabbi. As the villagers assemble for the verdict, the teacher's wife successfully milks the animal, now evidently a nanny goat. The tailor barely escapes the angry villagers and returns to his home, stopping at the tavern on the way. Once again, in the tailor's backyard, the troublesome creature is revealed to be a billy goat and the whole village, led by the rabbi, enters into the dispute with their neighbours. As the situation escalates towards imminent violence, one thing saves the day: the goat runs away, thus denying everyone the evidence to try the case. The tailor, tormented by the idea that supernatural forces are at work, descends into a feverish state and dies.

Part fable, part comedy of errors, the story was adapted by Sternberg using thoroughly modern means. One commentator observed the 'almost cinematic' series of images, the specially composed soundtrack based on Jewish folklore, as well as the introduction of two 'compères' who announced and narrated the scenes.⁷¹ The production was thus more reminiscent of the music hall than traditional theatre, a form of performance in which

⁶⁸ Sholem Aleichem was the pen name of Sholem Rabinovitz (1859-1916), a prolific chronicler of Jewish shtetl life and one of the creators of modern Yiddish literature. His stories about Tevye the Dairyman were later adapted into the well-known musical *Fiddler on the Roof*.

⁶⁹. Centre for the Study of Jewish History in Romania, Photography collection; Romanian National Art Museum, Documentation department, fond Maxy.

⁷⁰. 'Croitorul fermecat la studioul din Lipsani', *Dimineața*, 18 April 1930.

⁷¹. Ibid.

Sternberg was well versed, and to which he would return before long.⁷² Like in the case of *A Night*, the décor did not change between scenes. Sternberg and Maxy, who in this case is recorded as the play's set designer, opted for a simultaneous presentation of all the geographical and temporal planes of the narrative. (Figs. 5.18-5.22) The dwellings of the tailor and the teacher stand on opposite sides of the stage, their interiors obscured between scenes by curtains bearing the names of the rival villages. Above the sloping roofs of the two households, a medley of geometric shapes rises, jutting corners pointed in every direction, painted with near-abstract forms hinting at chimneys, windows, fields, clouds and what appears to be an enormous celestial body with a swirling polygonal shape – perhaps a signifier for the all-encompassing temporal framework – all tumbling vigorously across the stage. Between the two villages thus imagined, diagonal ramps construct the winding path travelled by the tailor, a space that is rendered both borderline and central by the play's narrative.

The five surviving images are of very good quality and thus capture with crisp clarity Maxy's and Sternberg's vision and several key moments from the play. In what might be one of the first scenes of the production, a musical number appears to be taking place in which the narrators reveal the premise of the plot: on the right the tailor's wife is flanked by her two hungry offspring, whilst on the left a curtain rises to reveal the goat in the teacher's house beyond the path. (Fig. 5.18) A studio portrait of David Licht, found in the Yivo archives, shows him in the guise of the tailor, collar slightly askew, wearing a mask that extends upwards, giving his head a bulbous appearance, and sporting a naively benevolent smile.⁷³ (Fig. 5.23) In the next photograph he appears at the top of the path, on his way to buy the goat. (Fig. 5.19) Behind him some broken windows and a smirking man may well represent the down-at-heel ale house and its wily owner, who may or may not be the play's culprit. The modernity of the staging is very evident in this image, with ramps, ladders and sloping planes constructing the kind of multi-level performative space first developed by Meyerhold and Liubov Popova in their 1922 production of *The Magnanimous Cuckold*. Furthermore, the two

72. In 1917-18 Sternberg produced a number of cabaret and music hall performances as part of his first forays into Yiddish theatre in Bucharest. See Bercovici, *O sută de ani*, 117-119 and Crăciun, 'Bucureștiul interbelic', 73-74.

73. Yivo Institute for Jewish Research, Yiddish Theater Photographs collection RG119. The mask for the play were by made artist Arthur Kolnik, who had previously collaborated with the original Vilna Troupe in Bucharest.

suites and bowler-hatted narrators sheltering under an umbrella bring an element of the cabaret to the stage, as well as recalling the similar narrative and physical framing device used in *A Night*. In the next image the tailor is leading the goat away, as the teacher's wife clutches her earnings. (Fig. 5.20) Here the set shows its full potential, as our hero, his troublesome animal, its former owner, and the two narrators, form an upward moving human construction, while the left curtain is raised to reveal the teacher, his home, and two curious pupils who are seemingly suspended in mid-air. The fourth image captures the play's most crucial moment: the teacher's wife milks the goat in front of the rabbi and the assembled villagers, thus proving it is indeed a nanny goat, while the tailor recoils in dismay. (Fig. 5.21) Like a pair of magicians, the teacher and his wife gesticulate towards the audience, who find themselves faced, as though in a mirror, with ascending rows of curious spectators. The ramp has been transformed into a rudimentary auditorium for the goat's trial. The final photograph shows the tailor surrounded by three women who form a threatening pyramid around him and the goat, pointing and staring, while sleeping or drunken men are slumped all around the different levels of the stage. (Fig. 5.22) This may be the scene of the tailor's descent into madness. Having heard a supernatural tale from the landlady of the village pub, he wanders the streets, imagining that he is chased by malevolent spirits.

Reviews in the contemporary press highlighted the elements that differentiated Sternberg's vision from traditional theatre, in particular the expert melding of art forms that was also evident in *A Night*. In the Yiddish-language Warsaw magazine *Literarische Bleter*, Shlomo Bikel described the 'plastic' movements and 'flexibility' of the actors, as well as praising the harmonious combination of prose, poetry, and song. *Dimineața* noted the use of 'decor, lights, and music' that set the performance aside from banal theatrical productions, as well as the dream-like atmosphere populated by 'hallucinating and hallucinated figures'.⁷⁴ As in the case of *A Night*, a realist approach was considered unfitting for purveying the spirit of Aleichem's story, with Sternberg's 'synthetic' staging deftly bringing out its every nuance.⁷⁵ According to Gheorghe Dinu, writing in the avant-garde magazine *Unu*, Sternberg achieved an 'almost cinematographic synthesis' through a 'succession of images and ideas' imbued with a burlesque atmosphere.⁷⁶ Dinu's verdict on Maxy's sets was not as enthusiastic

74. Both articles are quoted in Bercovici, *O sută de ani*, 151.

75. 'Croitorul fermecat la studioul din Lipsani'.

76. Gheorghe Dinu, 'Studioul Teatrului de artă evreiesc. Croitorul fermecat', *unu* III, no. 25 (May 1930): 8.

however, suggesting the designer may have been hindered by the dimensions of the stage:

In his work Sternberg was helped by the stage sets of M. H. Maxy, which were perhaps somewhat dissonant in places with the essence of the play. Perhaps Maxy was restrained in this respect by the insufficient dimensions of the stage. He was obliged to synthesise the multiple fields of vision, leaving scarce space for the actors' expansive and acrobatic performance. The decors of M. H. Maxy are admirable on paper and would have been equal to the director's vision on an appropriate stage...⁷⁷

The reviewer of the magazine *Hasmonaea* however suggested this cramped aesthetic may have a particular intent, as 'there is nothing more Jewish than this congestion of people, dwellings, and objects' where free space is limited to a bare minimum and movements are stunted. Men, women, children and make-believe animals, as well as 'two villages and the road in-between, a hill, and an inn [have been] thrown together with the most natural air on a stage not bigger than a handful of square meters'.⁷⁸ Maxy and Sternberg were no strangers to economy of means in a visual sense, such as their minimalist staging of Strindberg's *Comrades* critiqued for its pared-back aspect. The cramped, higgledy-piggledy agglomeration in *The Bewitched Tailor* with its stage space filled to the brim from side to side and top to bottom must have been a conscious artistic decision, albeit one prompted by practical constraints.⁷⁹ Furthermore, constructing the progression of the narrative not through a succession of changing backdrops, but through the manipulation of a multi-functional set already on stage and the movements of the performers themselves who became an extension of that set, interacting with its every surface, was the theatrical future envisaged by Maxy in his 1925 article.⁸⁰ The montage of scenes thus created hovered, like *A Night*, somewhere between the magical and the mechanical, bodies and ramps precisely aligned, yet narrating a dream-like fable whose multiple temporal and geographical planes coexisted side-by-side.

77. Ibid.

78. H. Herscorici., 'Croitorul fermecat la Bukarester Idische Theater Studie', *Hasmonaea* XII, no. 11 (April 1930): 27-28.

79. Moreover, this was probably the same stage that had been used for *A Night in the Old Marketplace* as both productions took place in the Lipscani Theatre.

80. Maxy, 'Regia scenică - decor - costum'.

Although the two productions were critically acclaimed and attracted much attention, this did not make them profitable. In May 1930 Sternberg petitioned the authorities for financial support to continue his innovative theatrical programme, enclosing a balance sheet that revealed a sizeable deficit. The response was a regretful no, despite the 'artistic quality' of the productions, as subsidies were only available for Romanian state theatres.⁸¹

In October 1930, while the troupe was on tour, a fire destroyed their sets, costumes and light equipment in the town of Buhuși, in north-east Romania. A short article in *Dimineața* does not indicate any suspicion of wrong-doing, but it does paint a bleak picture for the future of the company.⁸² The artists, writes Adrian Maniu, were hoping to raise sufficient funds during the tour to return with further innovatively designed productions. However, the fire scuppered their plans and left them in a difficult financial situation. Maniu hoped that some fund-raising initiative might be organised so that the troupe might continue their work. Unfortunately, this was not to be and the activity of BITS ceased after this first and only season. Although BITS was short-lived and its two most elaborate productions saw the light of stage for a few brief months in 1930, the echo they created in the contemporary press is proof of their impact on the Romanian artistic community. Sternberg's repertoire choices were ambitious – *A Night* is still considered a difficult play to stage – and his productions pioneering despite the limited means.⁸³

Two Music Hall Revues (1933-34)

After the demise of BITS, Maxy and Sternberg worked together on two further productions, bearing the hallmarks of their innovative partnership in design, movement and sound. These were a new direction for the partnership: not plays from the international theatrical repertoire,

81. Romanian National Archives, 817/4/1930. Sternberg petitions the Minister for Labour, Health and Social Welfare, Department for the People's Education [Ministerul Muncii, Sănătății și Ocrotirilor Sociale, Direcția Educația Poporului].

82. Adrian Maniu, 'Focul din târgul vechi', *Dimineața*, 25 October 1930.

83. *A Night in the Old Marketplace* has been most recently adapted for the stage by composer Frank London, writer Glen Berger and dramaturge Alexandra Aron, whose 2007 New York production made use of similar theatrical devices to those of Sternberg, such as cabaret influences, a specially-composed score that combines klezmer with jazz, and modern technologies (video projections in this case). In 2017 the production was revived for an international tour.

but music hall revues written by Sternberg in collaboration with writer Moyshe Altman.⁸⁴ If experimental theatre in Romania has been insufficiently examined by scholarship, the musical revue genre has been almost entirely neglected, perhaps from a misguided judgement regarding its artistic value. Yet, during the interwar period, this vibrant and ephemeral art form brought on-stage innovation to the masses with greater success than the theatrical experimentation of the avant-garde.⁸⁵ Sternberg was aware of the radical potential of revue theatre, having begun his exploration of the genre as early as 1917 when creating a string of productions in partnership with the writer Yankev Botoshansky.⁸⁶ Sternberg later recalled this important moment in his career:

I understood that the only means of attracting the Jewish masses was a traditional-cultural theatre. Not a literary theatre, even though I was its proponent at that time. That is why I created a social-political theatre, a revue theatre, which I think was the first such theatre in the Yiddish language at the time. This theatre born in Bucharest on the eve of the October Revolution consciously contained ideologically militant tendencies. On the stage, we [...] fought for a progressive Jewish culture, for the emancipation of Jews, for their civil rights...⁸⁷

Although the ideological bent of this interview is clear, having been given in 1956 when Sternberg was a staunch supporter of the communist regime, it is also possible to establish the reasoning behind his interest in an apparently frivolous theatrical genre: the potential to bring up-to-the-minute social and political issues to the fore to a large captive audience,

84. Moyshe Altman (1890-1981) was a Yiddish language writer and poet who was based in Romania during the 1920s and 1930s.

85. Romania's most successful and innovative proponent of the music-hall genre was performer, writer and impresario Constantin Tănase (1880-1945). He invited avant-garde artists such as George Löwendal to design his sets, adopted the latest on-stage technologies, and brought Josephine Baker to perform in Bucharest.

86. See Bercovici, *O sută de ani*, 117-119 and Crăciun, 'Bucureștiul interbelic', 73-74. Botoshansky (c.1895-1964) was a writer and playwright who shared Sternberg's socialist sympathies. He was based in Romania between 1914 and 1926. See Camelia Crăciun, 'Virtually *ex nihilo*. The Emergence of Yiddish Bucharest during the Interwar Period' in *Catastrophe and Utopia: Jewish Intellectuals in Central and Eastern Europe in the 1930s and 1940s*, Ferenc Laczó and Joachim von Puttkamer, eds. (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2018), 133-152, 144-145.

87. Interview given by Sternberg in 1956 to the Parisian Yiddish newspaper *La Presse nouvelle*, quoted in Israil Bercovici, *O sută de ani*, 118.

something difficult to achieve through traditional literary theatre. Thus, following the demise of BITS Sternberg returned to the musical hall. In this he did not abandon his ambitions for experimentation, enlisting an eclectic roster of collaborators alongside Maxy himself.

For the first production, entitled *Skotzl Kimt*, Sternberg chose choreographer Floria Capsali, composer Max Halm and the vaudeville troupe of Maurice Siegler. The revue opened in the summer of 1933 at the Jignița open air theatre, a location with a long tradition of Yiddish performance, as well as the place where ten years earlier the Vilna Troupe had started their Bucharest career.⁸⁸ A programme has survived in the archives of the Yivo Institute for Jewish Research, providing a rare opportunity to examine the contents of the revue which had a prologue and two acts divided into a string of comedic sketches and musical numbers.⁸⁹ (Fig. 5.24) As well as more generic acts such as a 'Dance for the Moon', the production included commentary on contemporary events with a lengthy number on the economic crisis, an imagined dialogue with Albert Einstein, a musical number entitled 'The Beautiful Adolf', and even a sketch in which Lady Chatterley converts to Judaism. Such content suggests that the revue's title was itself political. The Yiddish term 'shkotzim' has a pejorative connotation and can refer to insolent persons who are also non-believers. *Skotzl Kimt* or 'skotzl is coming' could thus have been a reference to Hitler's recent appointment as Chancellor of Germany and the rise of the National Socialists.⁹⁰

The revue was a huge success, drawing crowds every night with memorable musical and comedic creations. Max Halm's tango-infused numbers launched the career of Sevilla Pastor, one of the Siegler daughters, who performed as Greta Gabroveni and the Blonde Vice, humorous characters inspired by contemporary cinema culture.⁹¹ Even the magazine *Hasmonaea*, which as the mouthpiece of Romania's Society of Zionist Students might have

88. Vera Molea. *Hai, nene, la Iunion! Teatrele din grădinile de vară ale Bucureștilor de altădată*. (București: Vremea, 2014), 82.

89. Yivo Institute for Jewish Research, Esther-Rachel Kaminska Theater Museum collection, RG8.

90. From the contemporary sources I have found, it is unclear in what language Sternberg's revues were being performed. The print programme for *Skotzl Kimt* for example, which gives information on all the acts, is entirely in Romanian.

91. Bercovici, *O sută de ani*, 158. Greta Gabroveni is a play on Greta Garbo, substituting the star's surname for the name of an area in Bucharest's old town centre. Originally an eighteenth-century inn, Gabroveni became a hub for Jewish commerce and banking in the early years of the twentieth century.

been expected to eschew such frivolous entertainment, dedicated a glowing full page review to *Skotzl Kimt*.⁹² Regretfully recalling the demise of BITS and the innovations of Sternberg's *A Night in the Old Marketplace*, the reviewer nonetheless acknowledged that such high-brow productions had appealed to relatively limited audiences. By contrast, the revue genre had delivered Sternberg's greatest victory yet, offering him a large and receptive public. The magazine *Adam* was equally enthusiastic, hoping that *Skotzl Kimt* heralded a revival for Jewish cultural life in Bucharest.⁹³ The production did indeed enjoy a long run, with performances still taking place in the second half of September 1933.⁹⁴

As no photographic evidence or comprehensive descriptions of the sets have yet come to light, one can only wonder whether Maxy made any allowances for his expanding audience. A music hall revue in an open-air theatre required popular appeal and avant-garde design was perhaps too opaque for this purpose. On the other hand, the audiences of a summer-time revue may have been more accepting of visual innovation: there were precedents for audacious on-stage experimentation and the expectations that imbued literary theatre were absent. The caricaturist Dor immortalised a scene from *Skotzl Kimt* for the cover of *Adam*, which suggests that Maxy took the latter approach.⁹⁵ (Fig. 5.25) In the foreground stands a duo, perhaps Sevilla Pastor as Greta Gabroveni forlornly puffing on a cigarette and her husband Moshe Pastor as the King of Hunger.⁹⁶ They are framed by a circular border dissected by a geometric construction. Its upper section, in which circular and angular shapes overlap, hovers above Sevilla's head, mirroring the curvilinear structure of her hat. The background verges on the abstract, with intersecting horizontal and vertical lines, yet there is also the suggestion of neon signage previously encountered in the design for Dida Solomon's theatre. Although the meaning of the letters is not clear, they could represent both product advertising – appropriate in a sketch on the state of the economy – and cinema signage, in tune with Greta's character. The horizontal lines of the backdrop could indicate the type of slatted structure Maxy has previously used, in Dida Solomon's *Comrades* for example, yet the wavy line that seals the lower part of the drawing suggests a painted cloth backdrop.

92. L. Adrian, 'Skotzl Kimt', *Hasmonaea* XV, no. 1-2 (July-August 1933): 36.

93. 'S Kotzl Kimt', *Adam* V, no. 63 (15 August 1933): 15.

94. 'Skotzl Kimt', *Rampa*, 18 September 1933.

95. I have not been able to find any information as to the identity of 'Dor'.

96. The number on the economic crisis included a duo between Greta Gabroveni and the King of Hunger set to waltz music by Max Halm.

Either way, the overall composition of the set is most reminiscent of *The Bewitched Taylor*'s overlapping geometric construction, as well as Maxy's earlier carpet designs with their intersecting curvilinearity.

If Sternberg's collaboration with Maxy was to be expected, the involvement of Floria Capsali (1900-1982) was in some ways unusual. (Fig. 5.26) Capsali, who had studied in Paris with Ballets Russes ballet masters Enrico Checchetti and Nicolas Legat, had opened her own Bucharest dance studio in 1924.⁹⁷ She was particularly interested in Romanian classical composers and traditional Romanian dance and had gathered choreographic data during the ethnographic campaigns of the sociologist Dimitrie Gusti, which resulted in the first modern corpus of studies on Romania's rural culture.⁹⁸ Based on her field research, Capsali choreographed dances based on Byzantine iconography and folk dance patterns, aiming to develop a national style for modern choreography akin to similar movements in the visual or literary arts.⁹⁹ Her interest in Romanian national narratives, as well as her high profile recitals – in the same year as *Skotzl Kimt* for instance she performed at the Romanian Opera – might not herald an involvement in popular entertainment, especially one drawn from a minority culture.¹⁰⁰ Yet between the years 1931 and 1938 Capsali had a steady flow of work in the revue genre, collaborating with impresario Constantin Tănase and with the Alhambra Theatre.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, Capsali already knew Sternberg and his colleagues, performing at a festival he had organised in February 1931: she provided a 'rhythmic interpretation' of a Tudor Arghezi poem read by Sandu Eliad.¹⁰² Capsali was equally well-versed in collaborating with visual artists to create on-stage performances. As a young student in Paris she had

97. Tilde Urseanu, Ion Ianegic, and Liviu Ionescu, *Istoria baletului* (București: Editura Muzicală, 1967), 292; Al. Robot, 'Cu Floria Capsali despre ea și despre alții', *Rampa*, 22 May 1933.

98. The campaigns, which took place between 1925 and 1948, involved many of Romania's intellectuals from a wide spectrum of disciplines and political convictions. Floria Capsali's husband, sculptor Mac Constantinescu, also participated, as did theatre director and playwright Victor Ion Popa, scenographer and artist Lena Constante, and photographer Iosif Berman.

99. Rep., 'Floria Capsali despre stilul coreografic românesc', *Rampa*, 4 April 1930.

100. Al. Robot, 'Cronica spectacolelor. Opera Română. Recital Floria Capsali și Gabriel Negry', *Rampa*, 4 May 1933.

101. Mitița Dumitrescu, *Amintiri despre Floria Capsali* (București: Editura Muzicală, 1985), 22 and 27.

102. Sașa Pană, 'Acvarium. La Festivalul...', *unu* IV, no. 34 (March 1931): 12.

witnessed the complexity of Ballet Russes productions and subsequently she worked together with her husband sculptor Mac Constantinescu to design costumes for her shows.¹⁰³

The collaborative creation of *Skotzl Kimt* was a natural progression from the melding of art forms that Sternberg had employed during the existence of BITS and the modernity and flexibility of the revue genre was the perfect platform for such experimentation. The following summer, in August 1934, Sternberg premiered a new revue, *Rojinkes mit Mandlen*.¹⁰⁴ Billed as an 'art revue' ('revistă de artă' in Romanian), it was another collaboration with Altman, Halm and Maxy, as well as new recruit composer Elly Roman, but without the Siegler or Capsali.¹⁰⁵ Although few details about the production have come to light, a short description in *Rampa* offers a glimpse of how Sternberg's collaborations functioned:

The music of Messrs. Elly Roman and Max Halm and the plastic art of Mr. M. H. Maxy bring rhythm and harmony to a performance in which the director's approach achieves balance between word, light, melody, and colour.¹⁰⁶

This sense of harmony and balance between the different elements of the production – textual, visual, and musical – was becoming a trademark for Sternberg's productions. *Rampa* reported that the production had attracted the curiosity of the capital's art lovers and art makers due to the literary quality of its text and the 'Sternbergian vision' of the stage direction which veered away from the usual formulas.¹⁰⁷ Perhaps the musical talents of Halm and Roman, whose compositions were extremely popular at the time, sweetened the experimental nature of Sternberg's direction and his more high-brow texts, or perhaps Bucharest's revue audiences had become more discerning. Either way, the production was considered by critics the best revue on stage during the summer of 1934.¹⁰⁸

103. Dumitrescu, *Amintiri despre Floria Capsali*, 16-17.

104. Like *Skotzl Kimt*, the title remained in the original Yiddish in all references to the production. The expression, which is translated as 'raisins with almonds', is the Romanian transliteration of the title of a well-known Yiddish folk song first popularised by Abraham Goldfaden in the 1880s.

105. 'Spectacolele Capitalei. Teatrul Nou', *Rampa*, 5 August 1934.

106. 'Teatrele. Nou', *Rampa*, 5 August 1934.

107. 'Teatrele. Nou', *Rampa*, 13 August 1934.

108. Bercovici, *O sută de ani*, 159.

Perhaps this was a fitting swan song for Maxy's involvement in the music hall, as well as in the theatre, at least for a while. For the rest of the decade he did not undertake any theatrical projects. In the early 1940s, under the fascist regime led by Ion Antonescu, Jewish staff and performers were removed from Romanian theatres, but were permitted to create their own organisation. Maxy joined a group of over two hundred artists and intellectuals in setting up a Jewish theatre in Bucharest. The Barașeum Theatre opened its doors in March 1941 and Maxy's return to set design and his collaboration with this institution continued sporadically until the end of his life.¹⁰⁹ Paradoxically perhaps, the Barașeum Theatre fulfilled Sternberg's earlier dream of a permanent organisation to support Jewish theatre, and still does, being one of the last remaining professional Yiddish-language theatres in Europe at present.¹¹⁰ As for Sternberg himself, he continued to produce notable theatrical performances until the late 1930s when he emigrated to the Soviet Union. Not long before his departure, in 1938, the theatrical community celebrated his twenty-year career in Romania. In his speech, Sternberg remarked that his time in Romania was 'not simply a cultural battle between influencing or being influenced, but a mutual exchange', thus encapsulating in a single sentence the still current debates of the art historical discipline.¹¹¹

109. Ibid., 174-179; Ilk, *Maxy*, 176.

110. Kit Gillet, 'Keeping Alive a Haven for Yiddish Culture in Modern Romania', 15 January 2017, New York Times, accessed 24 May 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/15/world/europe/romania-jewish-theater-bucharest.html>.

111. Quoted in Bercovici, *O sută de ani*, 171.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

‘There is no going back to the fantasy that once upon a time there were settled, coherent, and perfectly integrated national or ethnic communities. [...] The reality, for most of the past as once again for the present, is more about nomads than natives.’¹

The concept for this thesis started out rooted in the prospect of carving a space for Romanian modern applied arts within histories of art and design and in revealing M. H. Maxy’s importance as a member of the European avant-gardes. As my research progressed, I began to understand the flaws in this plan, in particular the limiting use of national perspectives and the dangers of misplaced hubris in one’s research subjects. I thus allowed the thesis to be shaped instead by the narratives that emerged, crossing continents and disciplines, and revealing unexpected protagonists, events and connections. Most of all, I tried to suspend the art historian’s impulse to weigh, measure and pass judgement upon artworks and artists. Increasingly, parameters such as ‘originality’, ‘influence’, ‘autonomy’ or ‘aesthetics’ are being contested by new approaches in the discipline and I wanted to assess the potential for increased objectivity, especially when research findings lead to the downfall of one’s prized protagonists. In short, I wanted to avoid what Jeremy Howard has identified as ‘the hidebound myopia’ extant within the art historical discipline ‘which has diminished our ability to grasp the wider picture’.²

Throughout this process, I pondered the theoretical underpinnings appropriate for such an approach. More than three decades since Andrzej Turowski asked ‘Existe-t-il un art de l’Europe de l’Est?’ the debate about the region’s place within the established narratives of art history continues, encompassing a breath of historical periods.³ Piotr Piotrowski, a tireless advocate for Central and East European modernism, supported a drive towards a ‘horizontal history of art’.⁴ Howard has questioned the perceived division of the European continent,

1. Stephen Greenblatt et al., *Cultural Mobility. A Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 2 and 6.

2. Jeremy Howard, *East European Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1.

3. Andrzej Turowski, *Existe-t-il un art de l’Europe de l’Est? Utopie et Ideologie* (Paris: Editions de la Villette, 1986).

4. Piotr Piotrowski, ‘Towards a Horizontal History of the European Avant-Garde’, 49-58 in *Europa! Europa?*

utilising an intracultural and cross-media approach to explore three centuries of artistic activities.⁵ Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, whose focus is the early modern period, has proposed an awareness of artistic geographies in order to challenge the monolithic classification by national schools and styles that still dominates museum displays and scholarly publications.⁶ Useful frameworks have also been proposed from outside the region and the discipline. Writing about the Balkan region, historian Maria Todorova posited that a state of ambiguity and marginality need not be a weakness.⁷ In this she was echoed by Indian art specialist Partha Mitter, who concluded that ‘the most exciting aspect of modernisms across the globe is their plurality, heterogeneity, and difference, a ‘*messy*’ [my italics] asymmetrical quality that makes them all the more vital and replete with possibilities’.⁸

Casting peripheries as margins where positive interactions can occur, with the added benefit of turning ambiguity into a force for good, may seem a suitable place to start tearing down the vertical axis of art history. Yet the practical application of such methodologies still has its pitfalls and the question of legitimacy remains: can the peripheries of art history offer more than the creative melding of recognised styles or movements? Mitter may have identified this as ‘the Picasso manqué syndrome’, but how are we, as art historians of the marginal, to find a remedy? This thesis tests a framework underpinned by two recent approaches. The first, coming from art history, is the concept of ‘circulations’ developed by Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin, and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel.⁹ The second comes from the field of performance studies and is based on Erika Fischer-Lichte’s new aesthetics of performance.¹⁰ This framework was an attempt to render art history comfortable with non-linear narratives. Thus, although the so-called Romanian avant-garde was the point of

The Avant-Garde, Modernism and the Fate of a Continent, Sascha Bru, ed. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009).

5. Howard, *East European Art*.

6. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Toward a Geography of Art* (Chicago; London: Chicago Press, 2004).

7. Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

8. Partha Mitter, ‘Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery’, *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 90, No. 4, Dec 2008, 531-548, 540. For further debates on the centre-periphery relationship in modernism see also Per Bäckström and Benedikt Hjartarson, eds., *Decentering the Avant-Garde* (Amsterdam/ New York: Rodopi, 2014).

9. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin, and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, eds., *Circulations in the Global History of Art* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

10. Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance. A New Aesthetics* (London/ New York: Routledge, 2008).

departure, I chose to follow the trajectories of border-crossing artists and artworks outside national boundaries.

In the case of the Academy of Decorative Arts, such an approach resulted in its most comprehensive history to date, compiled in Chapters Two and Three of this thesis.

Previously, the presumed ‘foreignness’ of Andrei Vespremie and the supposed association with the modernist stalwart that is the Bauhaus, had given rise to a truncated and largely inaccurate account of the Bucharest institution. In this thesis, it was shown that the Academy was created by Vespremie based on the curriculum of the Schule Reimann, which he had attended in Berlin. Worthy of a separate study itself, the Reimann was a large and successful institution that focused on the commercial aspects of design, amongst other achievements pioneering the field of window display design in collaboration with the German Werkbund. Vespremie’s link to the Reimann, the founding of the Bucharest Academy and his subsequent pedagogical career in Riga, were revealed for the first time in this thesis, largely as a result of documents preserved in the Latvia State Historical Archives. Furthermore, it was proved that Vespremie was a well-respected member of avant-garde circles in Bucharest and that he not only influenced Maxy, one of its core members, but also introduced him to a number of design techniques and materials that became an integral part of his artistic oeuvre. This was shown through a thorough investigation of the Academy’s outputs and by identifying and closely examining surviving objects in museum and private collections. An outcome of this investigation was the brief catalogue raisonné compiled in Appendices F, G, and H, a first step towards recovering the history of modern design in Bucharest, an area that at present is seldom touched upon in Romanian museums.

The Academy’s history was explored not only through its pedagogical activities and artistic outputs, but also through its commercial endeavours. Drawing on Fischer-Lichte’s theories of the performative, this thesis acknowledged the ‘autopoietic feedback loop’, or the relationship between the artist and its audience, inherent in an institution of this kind.¹¹ The connection between theatre/ theatricality, commerce, and modern design was apparent to Vespremie and Maxy’s contemporaries. Figures such as Sonia Delaunay or Frederick Kiesler, and institutions such as the German Werkbund or the Bauhaus, successfully utilised and embraced this connectivity, which was judged unbecoming to modernism only in later

11. Ibid., 161-180.

scholarship. Drawing on the work of scholars such as Tag Gronberg and Robin Schuldenfrei, this thesis (re)placed the Academy within this context of interwar urban modernity, investigating the use of graphics to create a visual identity, the interest in window displays and show interiors and the opening of the selling exhibition space under the directorship of Mela Maxy, a heretofore unacknowledged contributor to the venture.¹² Other frequently unacknowledged participants were the Academy's clients and supporters, such as A. L. Zissu, Heinrich Fischer-Galați or Ion Minulescu, and in the absence of a history of collecting in Romania, this thesis hopes to instigate further explorations of their activities and influence.

The performative aspect of modern design is also found on the theatrical stage and once again it entails collaboration. Following the path of Maxy's on-stage artistic partnerships, this thesis highlighted innovative practitioners whose contribution to the European interwar avant-garde have been obscured by the gaps between disciplines or national narratives. The Vilna Troupe's importance on the international theatrical stage has been shown by Debra Caplan in a publication that appeared during the writing of this thesis.¹³ The present work complements Caplan's narrative, zoning in on the ensemble's formative time in Romania between 1923 and 1927 and reconstructing a number of performances from contemporary accounts, photographs, ephemera, press articles and reviews. The case studies shaped around these plays challenged previous scholarly narratives. *Saul* was revealed to be an ambitious avant-garde project that did not make it to the stage, questioning the over-reliance of scholarship on avant-garde periodicals as source material. *Shabbsai Tsvi*, the production that crossed the Atlantic, demonstrated the importance of following artists, artworks and archives across borders in order to fully capture their histories. *The Sentimental Mannequin* explored the interconnectivity between the design showroom and the theatre stage, joining together the two halves of this thesis. The short interlude about *The Neophyte* and *The Thought* raised the issue of ephemerality in researching and documenting performance. Finally, *Man, Beast and Virtue* re-iterated the modernity of these theatrical productions though their affinity with scientific advances and with the cinema screen. Altogether, the Vilna Troupe's collaborations

12. Tag Gronberg, *Designs on Modernity. Exhibiting the City in 1920s Paris* (Manchester University Press, 2003); Robin Schuldenfrei, *Luxury and Modernism. Architecture and the Object in Germany 1900-1933* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

13. Debra Caplan, *Yiddish Empire. The Vilna Troupe, Jewish Theater, and the Art of Itinerancy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018).

with Maxy were shown to be resolutely modern, from their potential for cross-continental itinerancy to their reflection of contemporary artistic and technological developments, hence their agency.

Following the Vilna Troupe's departure, the thesis presented further bursts of theatrical innovation which have been overlooked. In particular, Dida Solomon's contribution to Bucharest's avant-garde has been long overdue for assessment. Although a full account was beyond the scope of the present work, her theatrical entrepreneurship was highlighted and examined through the case study of the short-lived Caragiale Theatre of 1927, a truly avant-garde local initiative. Memoirs, press reports and the recovery of Maxy's designs for a modern graphic identity contributed to the fullest analysis of this institution to date, despite the fact that visual material of its performances is still sorely lacking. In this respect, the work of Iacob Sternberg fared better, with the discovery of several unpublished photographs in the archives of the Centre for the Study of Jewish History in Romania during the research of this thesis, and further ephemera at the Yivo Institute for Jewish Research. Sternberg was shown to be an innovative and influential maker of theatre, whose connection to the Yiddish stage and the music hall has probably impeded the recognition he deserves as an important contributor to the avant-garde. Sternberg's projects of the early 1930s, some of which were designed by Maxy, built upon the experimentation of the Vilna Troupe, taking avant-garde theatre in Bucharest to new heights. His multi-disciplinary productions incorporated choreography and movement, lighting, specially-composed music and cinematic framings. Furthermore, his work in the music hall was imbued with social and political commentary at a troubling time for Europe and its Jewish population.

Taken as a whole, this thesis has brought to light the rich artistic life of modern Bucharest, a heretofore mostly peripheral location in histories of art. It has shown the importance of widening the parameters of the discipline in order to reveal untapped potential outside its main narrative. In particular, it has challenged the categories of 'avant-garde' and 'modernism' and their restrictive usage, advocating for a more inclusive approach that eschews binaries and normalises liminality and transitional states. James M. Harding has proposed that encompassing performance as part and parcel of modernism could support the 'move from a Eurocentric to a transnational conception of the avant-garde'.¹⁴ Throughout this

14. James M. Harding and John Rouse, eds., *Not the Other Avant-Garde. The Transnational Foundations of*

thesis, the performative has been utilised as a framework not only in the literal sense of the theatrical stage, but also in the inherent performativity of other aspects of modernism such as the urban commercial display. Not only are the concepts of originality and influence more fluid in this context, and the involvement of the audience is acknowledged, but the collaborative aspects of performance frequently contest national narratives. Transnational practitioners such as Andrei Vespremie or Iacob Sternberg, or itinerant ensembles such as the Vilna Troupe, have often been exiled to a scholarly no-man's-land, and important segments of the history of the international avant-gardes have thus been obscured. Throughout this thesis, the recuperation of visual and textual material relating to artists such as these and their collaborative ventures has revealed a vibrant array of artistic experiments, heretofore concealed both by the ephemerality of the performative and by the fluidity of their border-crossing narratives. Furthermore, it has been shown that casting a wider net to incorporate outputs outside the realm of the fine arts may be more conducive towards a disruption of the art historical canon and its established narratives, which are otherwise resistant to change.

Thus, this thesis indicates some avenues for contesting Mitter's 'Picasso manqué syndrome' induced by the West-centric periodisation of art history. The existence of artistic products and practitioners that defy the traditional categorisations of nation, school, or medium, pose a challenge to the discipline and its established hierarchies. They also raise problems of a practical kind, as materials are dispersed geographically and come in many different languages. Adopting a model based on circulations and points of encounter, although more demanding in this respect, is a task worth undertaking and one that may well lead to a more inclusive and collaborative art historical discipline. As this thesis has advocated, by accepting cross-media and cross-cultural slippages as an integral part of a 'new aesthetics', the result is not a weaker modernism, but an infinitely more enriching and exciting one.

Avant-Garde Performance (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 2.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Biographies of individuals connected to the Bucharest avant-garde

Victor Brauner (b. 1903, Piatra-Neamț - d. 1966, Paris) was a painter and surrealist poet. After attending lessons at the School of Fine Arts in Bucharest, he made his debut in 1924 with an exhibition in Bucharest. The same year he published the magazine *75HP* with Ilarie Voronca and Stephan Roll, one of the key works of the avant-garde in Romania due to its graphic conception and the invention of ‘picto-poetry’. He continued to collaborate with other Bucharest avant-garde printed periodicals throughout the 1920s. In 1930, he moved to Paris where he joined the surrealist group and presented his first exhibition in the city in 1933 with the support of André Breton. During the last decades of his life he lived and worked in various locations in France, becoming increasingly interested in mythology and ritual.

Joseph Buloff (b. 1899, Vilnius – d. 1985, New York) was an actor and theatre director. He became a member of the original Vilna Troupe in 1917 and played an instrumental role in its early European tours, being part of extremely popular productions such as *The Dybbuk* (1920) and *The Singer of His Sorrows* (1925). In 1926, he emigrated to the USA together with his wife **Luba Kadison** (b. 1906, Vilnius – d. 2006, New York), also a member of the Vilna Troupe. They had many successes on and off-Broadway, including the first Yiddish-language production of Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* in the 1950s.

Ion Călugaru or **Ștrul Leiba Croitoru** (b. 1902, Dorohoi - d. 1956, Bucharest) was a writer and journalist. He collaborated with the journals *Contimporanul*, *unu*, and *Integral*. In the 1920s he published short stories, including his 1926 volume *Paradisul Statistic* (The Statistical Paradise) under the imprint of *Integral*.

Mihail Cosma or **Claude Sernet** or **Ernest Spirt** (b. 1902, Tîrgu-Ocna - d. 1968, Paris) was a writer. He collaborated with the periodicals *Punct*, *unu*, and *Integral*, most famously interviewing Luigi Pirandello in 1925 and discussing the definition of Integralism with him. In 1928 he relocated to Paris where he remained until the end of his life, continuing to publish his poems and writings.

Sandu Eliad (b. 1899, Botoșani – d. 1979, Bucharest) was an actor, theatre director and theorist. He was active in several short-lived theatrical collaborations of the Bucharest avant-garde, including the group *Insula* (The Island, 1922-23) and the *Contimporanul* Demonstrations of New Art in 1925. He collaborated as director with Dida Solomon’s Caragiale Theatre in 1927 and worked alongside M. H. Maxy at the Jewish Barașeum Theatre. He also had a prolific career as a journalist.

Heinrich Fischer-Galați (b. 1879, Galați - d. 1960, La Tour de Peilz) was an industrialist and philanthropist. He was particularly interested in fostering graphic and applied arts initiatives. In the mid-1910s in Bucharest he created the societies Grafica and Bibliofilia, which were joined by many Romanian artists and which promoted the graphic arts with exhibitions, a library, and other resources. He was the main financial supporter of the Academy of Decorative Arts (1924-1929). His other interest lay in popularising Esperanto in Romania and he founded several societies to this effect throughout the years.

Benjamin Fundoianu or **Fondane** (b. 1898, Iași – d. 1944, Birkenau) was a Romanian writer, poet and philosopher. He was a supporter of the Bucharest avant-garde and a leader of the short-lived theatrical group Insula (The Island), active between 1922 and 1923 in Bucharest. After moving to Paris in 1923 continued to collaborate with Romanian avant-garde journals, in particular *Contimporanul*, *Integral*, and *unu*.

Marcel Iancu or **Janco** (b. 1895, Bucharest – d. 1984, Ein Hod) was an artist and architect. Together with Tristan Tzara and Ion Vinea he collaborated on short lived symbolist magazines *Simbolul* (1912) and *Chemarea* (1915). During the First World War he relocated to Zürich where he became one of the founders of Dada, frequenting the Cabaret Voltaire with Tzara. In 1922 he returned to Romania and became prominent member of the Bucharest avant-garde. He ran the periodical *Contimporanul* and organised the Contimporanul international avant-garde exhibition in 1924 alongside M. H. Maxy. In 1927 he completed his first architectural project, one of many buildings he created in the modernist style in Bucharest. In 1941 he relocated to Palestine, continuing to his artistic work.

George Löwendal (b. 1897- d. 1964) was a Russian painter and stage designer who settled in Romania after 1921. His most experimental work was conducted during his time as designer of the National Theatre in Czernowitz between 1926 and 1934, which at the time was located in the Romanian territories. Thanks to his many innovations in stage design, formal as well as technological, he collaborated with many prestigious Romanian theatre directors and had a long and successful career.

Arthur Kolnik (b. 1890, Stanislawow – d. 1972, Paris) was an artist and illustrator. He trained at the School of Fine Arts in Krakow under Jacek Malczewski and Józef Mehoffer. Between 1919 and 1931 he was based in Czernowitz, at this time part of Romania. During this period, he also travelled to New York where he exhibited his work and gained the support of Alfred Stieglitz. Subsequently he emigrated to Paris which remained his base for the rest of his life, although he travelled extensively for work.

Hans or **János Mattis-Teutsch** (b. 1884, Brașov – d. 1960, Brașov) was a painter, sculptor and graphic artist. After training in Budapest, Munich and Paris, he settled in Brașov. He participated in exhibitions all around Europe and collaborated with many avant-garde magazines, including *MA*, *Der Sturm*, *Das Ziel* and *Punct*. He exhibited at the Academy of

Decorative Arts and sold his applied art objects there. He published the volume *Kunstideologie. Stabilität und Aktivität im Kunstwerk* (Postdam: Müller u.J. Kiepenheuer Verlag, 1931), outlining his theoretical standpoint.

Sigismund Maur (b. 1894 – d. 1965) was an artist and graphic designer. He was based in Germany and Romania, but few details about his life are known. Based on the Romanian interwar press, he appears to have had a prolific career as a designer of advertisements for Bucharest businesses. He was also frequently responsible for producing reproductions of artistic works to be included in print periodicals. He taught at the Academy of Decorative Arts.

M. H. or Max Herman Maxy (b. 1895, Brăila – d. 1971, Bucharest) was an artist, designer and museum director. He trained in Bucharest and then in Berlin, exhibiting at Der Sturm gallery and becoming a member of Novembergruppe in 1922-23. On his return to Romania he curated the 1924 Contimporanul exhibition with Marcel Iancu and published the periodical *Integral* (1925-1928). In 1926 he joined the Academy of Decorative Arts and subsequently took over its leadership from Andrei Vespremie. In the late 1920s and early 1930s he ran his own design business under the name Studio Maxy. During the period 1941-44, when Jewish professionals were excluded from Romanian state institutions, he contributed to the newly formed Jewish theatre and Jewish art school. From 1950 until his death he held the directorship of the Romanian National Art Museum, being especially instrumental for the creation of the modern Romanian art gallery.

Mela or Ana Melania Maxy, neé Braun (b.1893, Câmpina - d. 1938, Bucharest) was an arts manager and salon host. She married M. H. Maxy in 1922 and accompanied him to Berlin where their daughter Liana was born in 1923. On returning to Bucharest, she collaborated with Andrei Vespremie and Heinrich Fischer-Galați to create the selling exhibition space of the Academy of Decorative Arts, which she managed from 1926 to the Academy's closure in 1929. She hosted a weekly artistic salon in the Maxy household in Bucharest throughout the 1920s and 1930s, visited by the local avant-garde and by guests such as Constantin Brancusi and Joseph Buloff.

Ion Minulescu (b. 1881, Bucharest – d. 1944, Bucharest) was a writer, poet and government official. Best remembered as a symbolist poet, Minulescu was also a highly successful novelist. He published the symbolist magazines *Revista celorlați* (1908) and *Insula* (1912). From the 1920s onwards he held many posts in the Romanian government, including Minister for the Arts (1922-1940) and director of the National Theatre in Bucharest (1926). He was a supporter and patron of the Romanian avant-garde and amassed a vast art collection which is currently on display in his memorial house museum in Bucharest.

Sașa Pană or Alexandru Binder (b. 1902, Bucharest - d. 1981, Bucharest) was a writer and memorialist. Trained as a military doctor, he chose to focus on literature instead and his first

volume of poetry was published in 1926. He was the creator of the magazine *unu* (1928-1932) and alongside developed an imprint for publishing the work of other avant-garde writers. In 1973 he published *Născut în '02* (Born in '02), a 700-page memoir of his life amongst Bucharest's vanguard artists.

Milița Petrașcu or **Militza Pătrașcu** (b. 1892, Chișinău - d. 1976, Bucharest) was a sculptor. She trained in Moscow and Munich, subsequently joining the studios of Henri Matisse and Antoine Bourdelle in Paris. In 1919 she met Constantin Brancusi who became her mentor. From 1925 onwards she settled in Bucharest, joining the ranks of the avant-garde and exhibiting widely. In the 1930s, she became a highly sought-after portraitist.

Stefan Roll or **Dinu Gheorghe** (b. 1904, Florina – d. 1974, Bucharest) was a poet and journalist. Alongside Victor Brauner and Ilarie Voronca he published the avant-garde magazine *75HP*, and was constant collaborator of vanguard publications, including *Punct*, *Integral*, and *unu*.

Dida Solomon or **Solomon-Callimachi** (b. 1898, ? – d. 1974, Bucharest) was an actress, artist and theatre producer. She was closely connected to the Bucharest avant-garde and participated in the 1924 *Contimporanul* exhibition, as well as publishing graphic works and poems in *Contimporanul* and *Punct*. The latter was edited by her husband **Scarlat Callimachi** (b. 1896, Bucharest – d. 1975, Bucharest), a writer, journalist and anti-fascist activist. Solomon's debut in 1922 as the titular character in Strindberg's *Miss Julie* at the National Theatre in Bucharest was a great success, but she subsequently struggled in her theatrical career due to her Jewish origins and political activism. In 1927, she created the experimental Caragiale Theatre in collaboration with members of the avant-garde such as Sandu Eliad, Marcel Iancu, Iacob Sternberg, and M. H. Maxy.

Alexander or **Alex Stein** (b. ?, Vilnius – d. 1940s, Soviet Union) was an actor and theatre director. Having joined the original Vilna Troupe in 1917, he travelled with them around Europe in the early 1920s. During the ensemble's time in Romania, he became its star actor and director after the departure of Joseph Buloff and the Kadison family. In 1930, he created his own branch of the Vilna Troupe which successfully toured Berlin, Vienna, and Prague until 1933.

Iacob Sternberg or **Jacob** or **Yankev Shternberg** (b. 1890, Lipcani – d. 1973, Moscow) was a poet, writer, and theatre professional. Based in Romanian between 1913 and 1939, he shaped the Yiddish theatre scene in the country. In the 1920s he became artistic director of the Vilna Troupe and in 1930 created his own troupe, the Bukarester Idishe Theater Studio. His most famous productions were modern reinterpretations of Yiddish literary classics, however he was equally interested in the potential of popular culture and the music-hall revue to raise awareness of social and political issues. He emigrated to the Soviet Union at the beginning of

the Second World War, continuing his career in both literature and theatre, but was sent to a labour camp in 1949 for five years.

Ion Vinea or **Ion Eugen Iovanaki** (b. 1895, Giurgiu – d. 1964, Bucharest) was a poet and editor of avant-garde publications. Together with Marcel Iancu and Tristan Tzara he created the short-lived publication *Simbolul* (1912). Subsequently trained as a lawyer, he never practiced, choosing to become a poet instead. He was the editor of the long-running periodical *Contimporanul* (1922-1932), which connected the Bucharest avant-garde to the vast network of European vanguard print culture.

Ilie Voronca or **Eduard Marcus** (b. 1903, Brăila - d. 1946, Paris) was a poet and collaborator of the avant-garde. He published his work in the magazines *Contimporanul*, *Integral* and *Punct*. In 1924, together with Victor Brauner and Stephan Roll, he published the single-issue publication *75HP*, a landmark for Bucharest's avant-garde movement. He published his poetry in France from the mid-1920s onwards, collaborating with artists such as Robert Delaunay who illustrated his works. In 1933 he relocated to Paris and continued to publish prolifically.

Andrei Vespremie or **Andor Veszprémi** (b. 1898, Covasna – d. 1943/4, Kaiserwald) was a designer and pedagogue. Trained at the Schule Reimman in Berlin (1920-1922), he utilised his experience with German design education to open the Academy of Decorative Arts (1924-1929) in Bucharest under the financial patronage of Heinrich Fischer-Galați. The Academy was the first institution in Bucharest to offer a modern design education, with classes in both making and designing objects. In 1927, Vespremie left Bucharest for Riga, where he continued to teach, design and exhibit his work. In 1934 he became a Latvian citizen. During the Second World War, he was held in the Riga Ghetto and subsequently moved to the Kaiserwald concentration camp where he was murdered.

Abraham Leib Zissu (b. 1888, Piatra Neamț - d. 1956, Tel Aviv) was a writer, industrialist and Zionist activist. He used his personal wealth, which came from the sugar industry, to fund and run a number of publications with Zionist agendas. He was also a frequent collaborator of avant-garde and cultural publications of the 1910s and 1920s and published several works of fiction, including his 1926 novel *Spovedania unui candelabru* (Confession of a Candelabrum) first issued under the *Integral* imprint and then translated into French by Benjamin Fondane. He was a supporter and patron of the Bucharest avant-garde, and in the late 1920s he also commissioned architect Michael Rachlis to build him a modernist mansion in Berlin. During the communist period he was repeatedly arrested and jailed, until being allowed to emigrate to Israel in 1956. Unfortunately, he died a few weeks later.

APPENDIX B: A comparison between the curriculums of the Academy of Decorative Arts, the Schule Reimann, and the Bauhaus

Courses at the Academy of Decorative Arts in 1924 and 1926	Courses at the Reimann Schule and year when they were first introduced	Courses at the Bauhaus and year when they were first introduced
1924. Metalwork 1926. Metalwork	1905. Metalwork (Attended by Vespremie)	1920. Metal workshop
1924. Batik 1926. Batik & painted textiles	1922. Batik (Not attended by Vespremie, but perhaps by his wife Victoria)	-
1924. Ivorywork 1926. Ivorywork	1905. Ivorywork (Attended by Vespremie)	-
1924. Drawing & Painting 1924. Life drawing 1926. Drawing & Painting	1919. Drawing, painting, composition etc. 1920. Colour theory (Life drawing, Painting & drawing fundamentals, and Colour theory attended by Vespremie)	1919. Preliminary course 1920. Form theory 1922. Form & colour theory 1922. Life drawing
1924. Ornament & Lettering 1926. Ornament & Lettering	1913. Ornament & Lettering (Attended by Vespremie)	1925. Typography
1924. Bookbinding 1926. Bookbinding 1926. Leatherwork	1913. Bookbinding (Attended by Vespremie)	1921. Bookbinding workshop (to 1922 only)
1924. Carpets 1926. Carpets	-	1920. Textile workshop
1924. Sculpture & Composition 1924. Decorative sculpture 1926. Sculpture 1926. Woodcarving	1902. Sculpture & Modelling (Attended by Vespremie)	1919. Sculpture workshop
1926. Graphic arts: lithography, etching, woodcut, print-making 1926. Book illustration	1913. Graphic arts & printing (Etching class attended by Vespremie)	1919. Printing workshop
1926. Poster & advertising graphics	1920. Poster & advertising graphics (Attended by Vespremie)	1925. Advertising
1926. Decorative painting & composition	-	1920. Wall painting workshop
1926. Religious art	-	-
1926. The architecture of interior design	-	1921. Furniture/ carpentry workshop 1927. Architecture
1926. History of Art and Artistic Styles	1924. History of Art and Artistic Styles	-

APPENDIX C: Andrei Vespremie's report card from the Schule Reimann (with English translation)

Source: Latvia State Historical Archives, f. 1623, inv. 1, file 23144.

Noraksts. 22

SCHULE REIMANN
PRIVATE
KUNST- UND KUNSTGEWERBESCHULE
BERLIN W 30
Landshuter Str. 38

Abt. A: Kunst- und Kunstgewerbeschule
B: Höhere Fachschule für Theaterdekoration
C: Höhere Fachschule für Dekorationskunst

Z E U G N I S S

Herr Andor Vesprémi aus Kowasna
war vom 15. Oktober 1920 bis zum 30. Juni 1922 Schüler unserer Schule
und hat am Unterricht in folgenden Fächern teilgenommen:

Unterrichtsfach	Gesamtzahl der Unterrichts- Monate	Zahl der von wöchentlichen Unterrichts- stunden	Lehrer	Begabung	Fleiß	Fortschritte
Akt	18	6	Prof. Tappert	gut	sehr gut	
Buchbinden	17	8	Maetzke	sehr gut	sehr gut	gut
Elfenbein	6	2	Heubler	sehr gut	sehr gut	gut
Farbenlehre	3	4	Plürnecke	genügend	genügend	sehr gut
Metall	10	15	Heubler	sehr gut	sehr gut	genügend
Modellieren	19	14	Bauroth	gut	sehr gut	sehr gut
Ornament	6	13	Hertwig	sehr gut	sehr gut	gut
Plakat	2	6	Gadau	fast gut	genügend	sehr gut
Radieren	5	4	Oesterle	gut	gut	fast gut
Schrift	12	12	Hertwig	gut	sehr gut	gut
Studien	3	9	Plürnecke	fast gut	gut	gut

Anzahl der versäumten Unterrichtstage: _____ Bemerkungen: _____


Berlin W 30, den 30. Juni 1922

Adolf Plürnecke m.p. Maetzke m.p.
Prof. Tappert m.p. Hertwig m.p.
Oesterle m.p. Gadau m.p. Heubler m.p.

Albert Reimann m.p.
Schulleiter

Rundstempel:
Verwaltung der Schule
Reimann
Berlin W 30

Regist
Es, spēki parakārtījos, R
apliecinājuma šīvoāi norak
man mēsi kārto, Rīdā, Kaļķu
iēā 8:35 de 14 dēvājas
Salūzin
notārs abas neuzādija.
niska Melnī, 18"
No



English translation

Certificate

Mr. Andor Veszpremi from Covasna was a student in our school from 15 October 1920 to 30 June 1922 and undertook the following studies:

Subject	Total duration of classes attended, in months	Number of required weekly lessons	Instructor	Talent	Diligence	Progress
Life drawing	18	6	Tappert	Good	Very good	Good
Bookbinding	17	8	Maetzke	Very good	Very good	Good
Ivorywork	6	2	Heubler	Very good	Very good	Very good
Colour theory	3	4	Plünnecke	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Metalwork	10	15	Heubler	Very good	Very good	Very good
Modelling	19	14	Bauroth	Good	Very good	Good
Ornament	6	13	Hertwig	Very good	Very good	Very good
Poster design	2	6	Gadau	Almost good	Satisfactory	Almost good
Etching	5	4	Oesterle	Good	Good	Good
Lettering	12	12	Hertwig	Good	Very good	Good
Painting & drawing fundamentals	3	9	Plünnecke	Almost good	Good	Almost good

APPENDIX D: Brochure of the Academy of Decorative Arts, 1924 (with English translation)

Source: Latvia State Historical Archives, f. 1623, inv. 1, file 23144.

ADAOS LA PROGRAM.

S'au mai format următoarele cursuri :

63

XI. *Clasă de sculptură decorativă*
Prof. Sculptor Medrea

XII. *Clasă de sculptură și compoziție*
Prof. D-na M. Petrașcu

XIII. *Clasă de exerciții grafice (Ornament, scris artistic)*
Prof. Andrei Vespemie.

XIV. *Clasă pentru covoare*
Prof. D-na Jeanette Scăueru-Teclu

Orariul cursurilor la 1 Noembrie 1924

Luni	Marți	Miercuri	Joi	Vineri	Sâmbătă	Ore
Curs de metal	Curs de metal	Curs de metal	Curs de legătorie	Curs de legătorie	Curs de legătorie	9-1 a. m.
	Batik	Desen și pictură		Batik		9-1 a. m.
				Curs de legătorie		2-3 p. m.
	Curs de sculptură în fildeș	Exerciții grafice (ornament)		Curs de legătorie		3-5 p. m.
	Curs de nud	Exerciții grafice (scris)		Curs de nud		5-7 p. m.
				Curs de legătorie		8-10 p. m.

Pe măsura înscrierilor, vor începe să funcționeze și celelalte cursuri.

Opt burse instituite de Societatea „Bibliofila” și de D-l A. C-ș, se vor împărți la elevii săraci și talentați.



LA 1 NOEMBRIE SE DESCHID SUB PATRONAGIUL

Doamnei Isabella Sadoveanu

Directoarea Școlii Normale de fete „Elena Doamna”

Sub direcțiunea: D-nei S. Șerbănescu-Șăineanu, Profesoară la Liceul „Regina Maria”, a D-lui A. Vespemie, Directorul Academiei de Artă Decorativă, — și cu concursul: Doamnelor M. Petrașcu, sculptor; Harriet Follender, pictor; Jeanette Scăueru-Teclu și a D-lor A. R. Pawlowlitz, fost profesor la Academia de Arte Decorative din Viena și C. Jankowski, prof. la Academia de Artă Decorativă.

Cursurile pentru Copii și Tineret

de desen, pictură, modelaj, lucrări artistice în carton, metalo-plastie, ceramică, lucrări în piele, silhuate, jucării artistice, compoziție, etc.

Sub drăgăstoasa conducere a acestor artiști, copii vor învăța să-și construiască singur jucăriile și li se vor preda artele decorative sub o formă ușoară și plăcută, care le va desvolta gustul și priceperea pentru frumos.

În timpul cursurilor, după ce artiștii își vor fi apropiat suficient elevii, copii vor fi tratați cu totul individual, aptitudinile lor personale cultivate și îndrumați spre ramura unde dovedesc însușiri deosebite, urmărindu-se o pregătire serioasă a copilului, pentru a putea urma mai târziu clasa corespunzătoare în Academie.

Se primesc copii de la 6 ani în sus. Copii de același vârstă vor fi instruiți la un loc. Durata cursurilor după dorință.

Comitetul de pruișiere a copiilor: D-na Clara Dan

D-na Victoria Vespemie.

English translation: Recto

Additions to the programme.

The following courses have also been convened:

XI. Decorative sculpture - the sculptor Medrea

XII. Sculpture and composition - Mrs. M. Petraşcu

XIII. Graphic exercises (ornament, artistic lettering) - Andrei Vespremie

XIV. Carpets - Mrs. Jeanette Scăueru-Teclu

The timetable as at 1 November 1924:

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Time
Metalwork	Metalwork	Metalwork	Book-binding	Book-binding	Book-binding	9 -1 am
	Batik	Drawing and painting		Batik		9-1 am
				Bookbinding		2-3 pm
	Ivorywork	Graphic exercises (ornament)		Bookbinding		3-5 pm
	Life drawing	Graphic exercises (lettering)		Life drawing		5-7 pm
				Bookbinding		8-10 pm

Based on further students registering, additional courses may begin to run.

Eight bursaries offered by the 'Bibliofilia' Society and Mr. A. C.-B. will be made available to poor but gifted students.

English translation: Verso

Under the patronage of Mrs. Isabella Sadoveanu, Director of the 'Elena Doamna' School for Girls and under the direction of: Mrs. S. Şerbănescu-Şăineanu, teacher at the 'Regina Maria' High School, Mr. A. Vespremie, Director of the Academy of Decorative Arts, and with the support of: Mrs. M. Petraşcu, sculptor; Mrs. Harriet Follender, painter; Mrs. Jeanette Scăueru-Teclu; Mr. A. R. Pawlovitz, former teacher at the Academy of Decorative Arts in Vienna; and C. Jankowski, teacher at the Academy of Decorative Arts, will be open as of 1 November:

The Classes for Children and Young People, in drawing, painting, modelling, artistic work in pasteboard, metaloplastics, ceramics, leather, silhouette, artistic toys, composition etc.

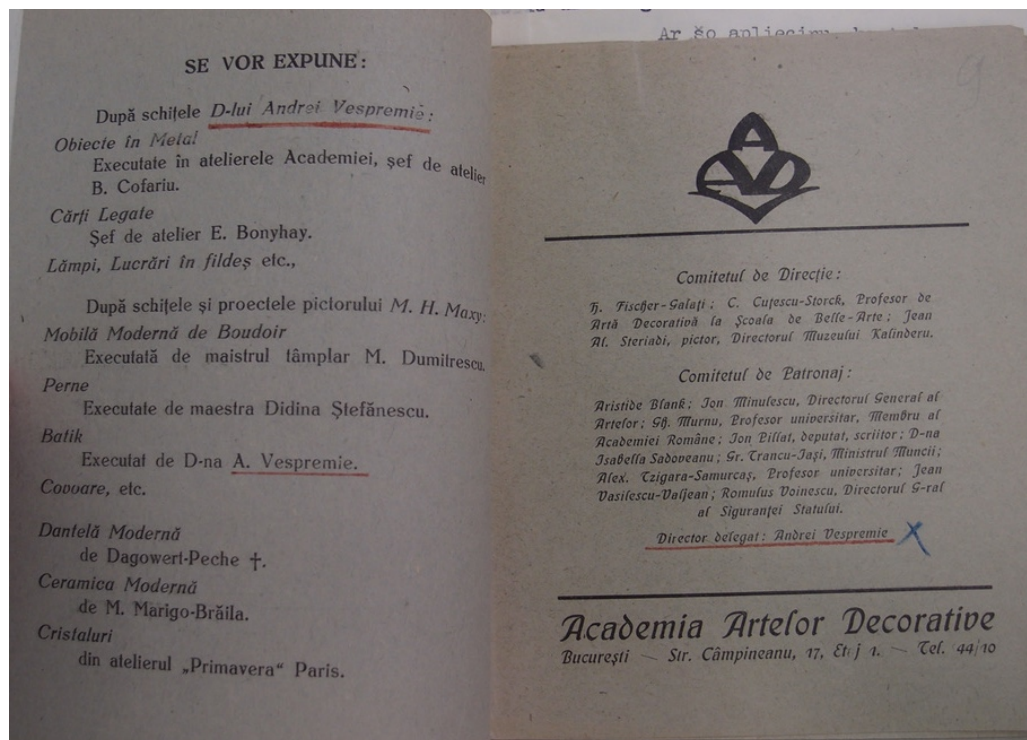
Under the caring supervision of these artists, children will learn to create their own toys, and will be taught the decorative arts in an easy and pleasant manner, which will develop their taste and understanding for beauty. During the classes, once the artists have become familiar with the students, each child will be treated as an individual, their personal aptitudes will be cultivated, and they will be guided towards the craft in which they can excel. The goal is to prepare each child thoroughly, so that they may later join a suitable adult class at the Academy.

Children from 6 years of age may be enrolled. Children will be taught in similar age groups. The length of the courses is flexible.

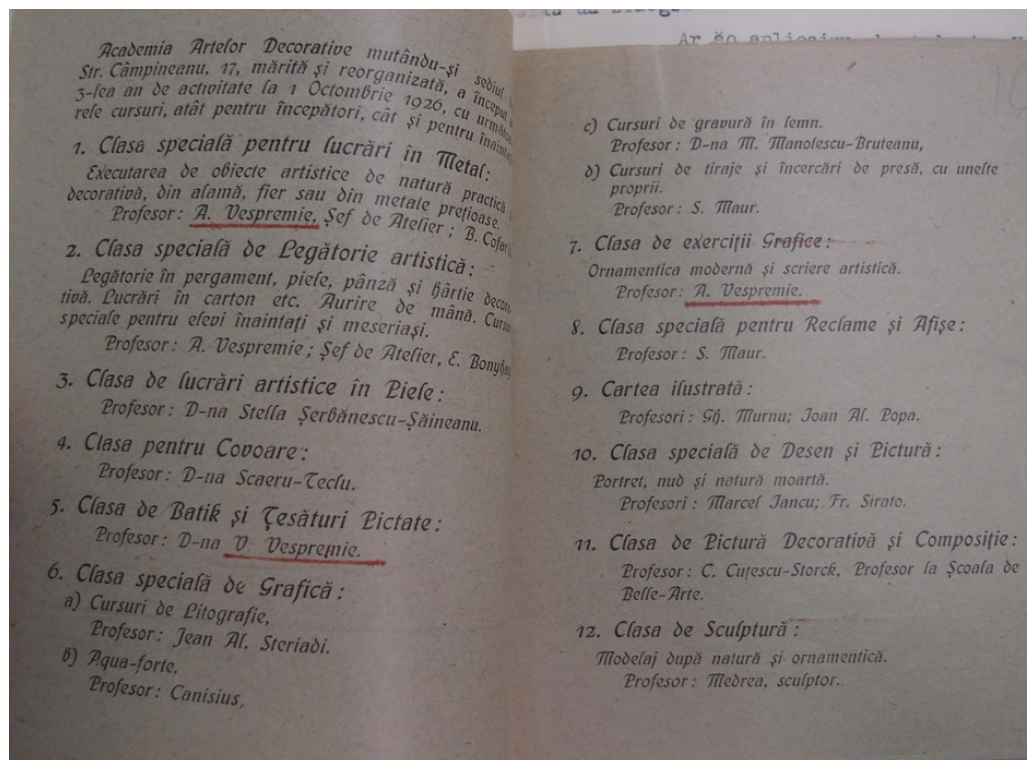
The committee for supervision of the children: Mrs. Clara Dan, Mrs. Victoria Vespremie.

APPENDIX E: Brochure of the Academy of Decorative Arts, 1926 (with English translation)

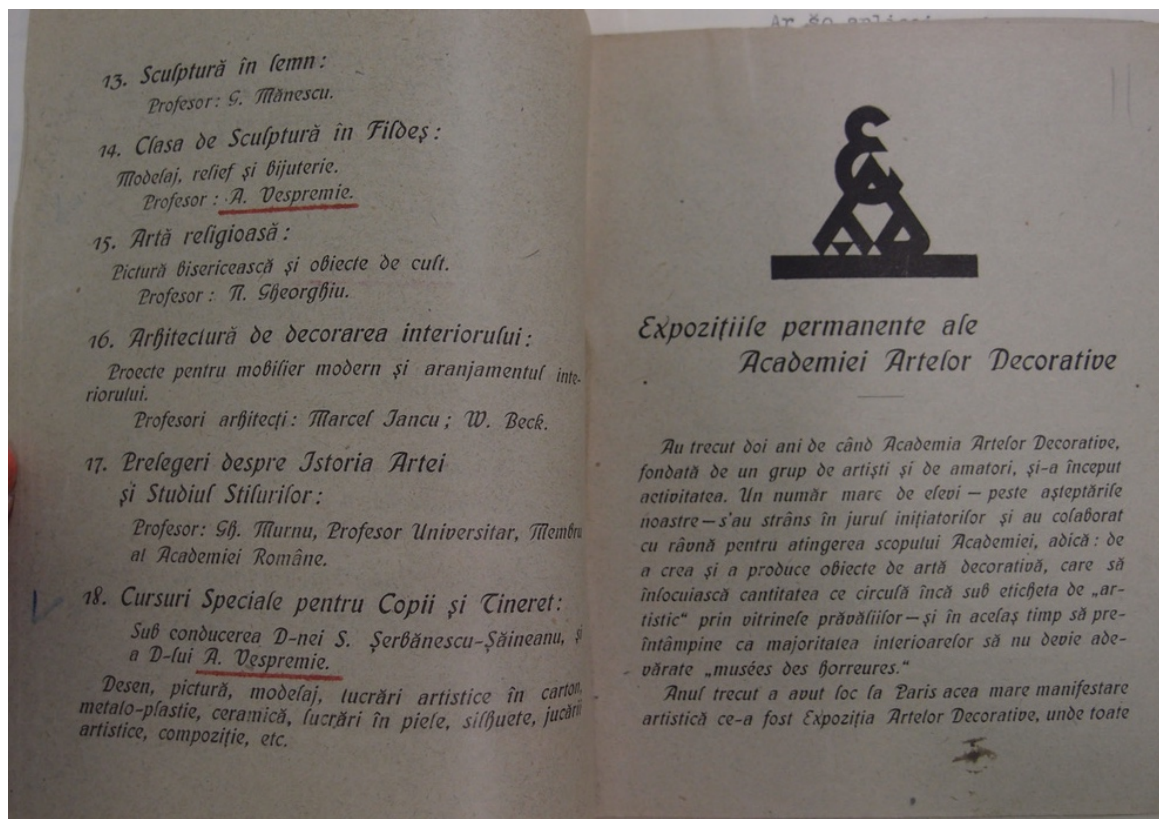
Source: Latvia State Historical Archives, f. 1623, inv. 1, file 23144.



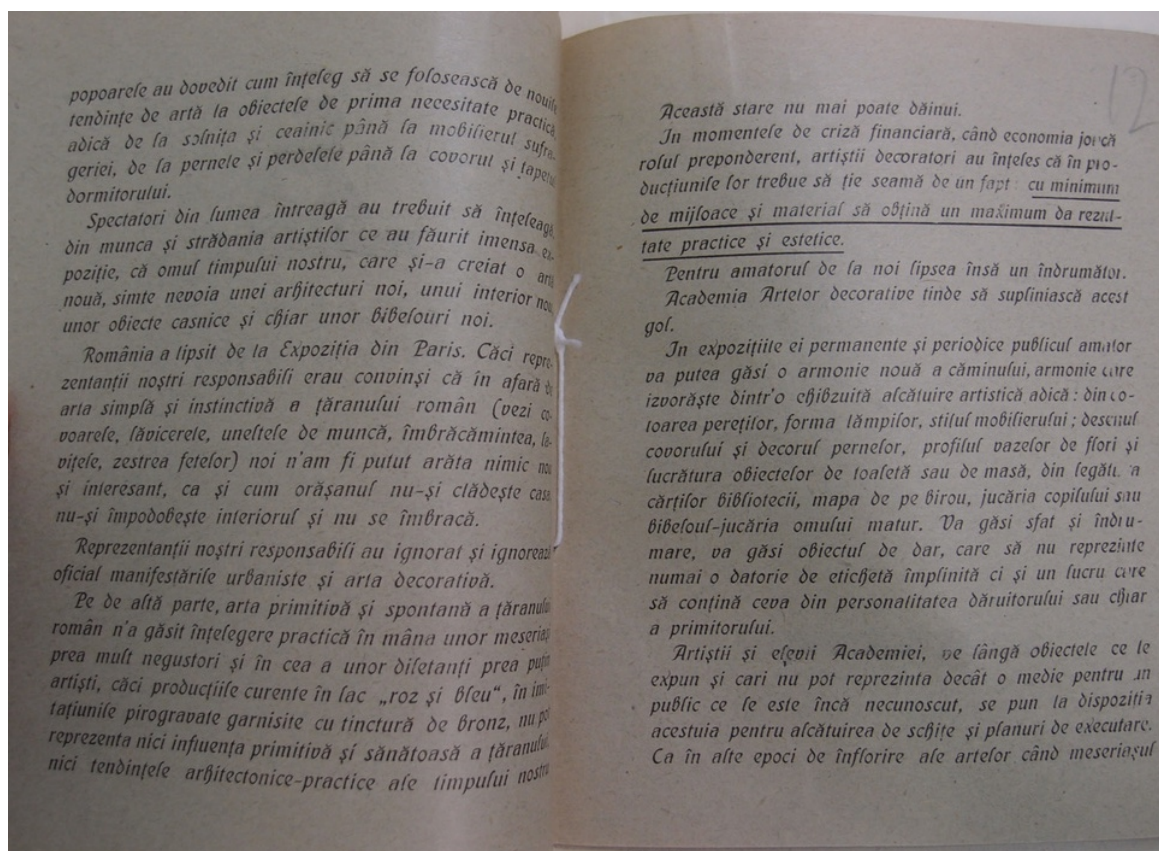
Pages 1-2



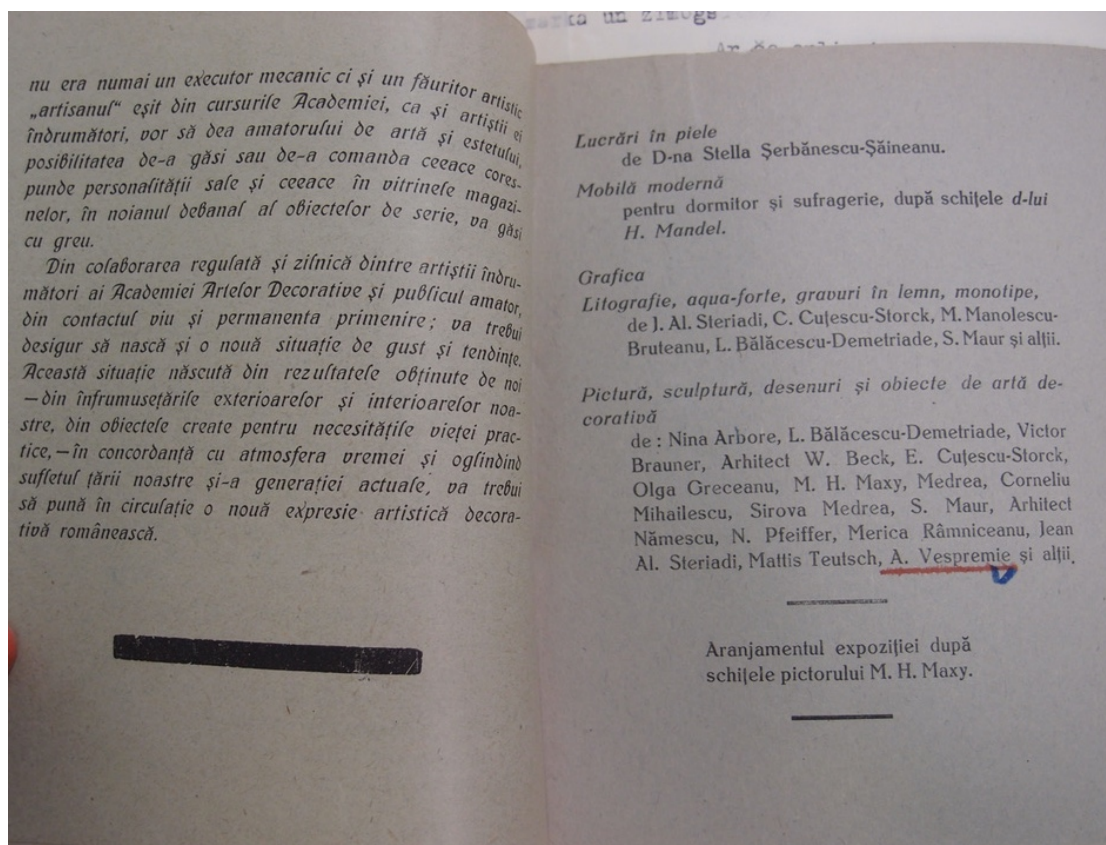
Pages 3-4



Pages 5-6



Pages 7-8



Pages 9-10

English translation: Exhibition catalogue, pages 1 and 10

The exhibition includes:

After the designs of Mr A. Vespremie:

Metal objects, made in the workshops of the Academy, under the supervision of master B.

Cofariu

Bound books, master E. Bonyhay

Lamps, ivory objects, etc.

After the designs of painter M. H. Maxy:

Modern boudoir furniture, made by master carpenter M. Dumitrescu

Cushions, made by master Didina Ștefănescu

Batik, made by Mrs. A. Vespremie.

Modern lace, by Dagobert Peche.

Modern ceramics, by M. Marigo-Brăila.

Crystal, from the Primavera atelier in Paris.

Leatherwork, by Mrs. Stella Șerbănescu-Șăineanu.

Modern furniture for the bedroom and drawing room, after the designs of Mr. H. Mandel.

Graphic arts: lithographs, etchings, woodcuts, monotypes by J. Al. Steriadi, C. Cuțescu-Storck, M. Manolescu-Bruteanu, L. Bălăcescu-Demetriade, S. Maur, and others.

Paintings, sculptures, drawings and decorative arts objects by: Nina Arbore, L. Bălăcescu-Demetriade, Victor Brauner, architect W. Beck, E. (sic) Cuțescu-Storck, Olga Greceanu, M. H. Maxy, Medrea, Corneliu Mihailescu (sic), Sirova Medrea, S. Maur, architect Nănescu, N. Pfeiffer, Merica Râmnicăneanu, Jean Al. Steriadi, Mattis Teutsch, A. Vespremie, and others.

Exhibition displays after the designs of painter M. H. Maxy.

English translation: Patrons of the Academy, page 2

Directors: H. Fischer-Galați; C. Cuțescu-Storck, Professor of Decorative Arts at the School of Fine Arts; Jean Al. Steriadi, painter, Director of Kalinderu Museum.

Patrons: Artistide Blank; Ion Minulescu, General Director of Arts; Gh. Murnu, University professor, Member of the Romanian Academy; Ion Pillat, Member of Parliament, writer; Mrs. Isabella Sadoveanu; Gr. Trancu-Iași, Minister for Labour; Alex. Tzigara-Samurcas, University professor; Jean Vasilescu-Valjean; Romulus Voinescu, Minister for State Security.

Acting director: Andrei Vespremie.

English translation: Course catalogue, pages 3 to 5

The Academy of Decorative Arts, expanded and reorganised, has moved its premises to Str. Ion Câmpineanu 17 and has begun its third year of activity on 1 October 1926, offering the following courses for everyone from beginners to advanced learners.

1. The special class for metalwork

Making artistic objects of a practical and decorative nature, from brass, iron or precious metals. Instructor: A. Vespremie, Workshop master: B. Cofariu.

2. The special class for artistic binding

Binding in vellum, leather, cloth and decorative paper. Works in pasteboard etc. Hand-applied gold decoration. Special classes for advanced students and craftsmen. Instructor: A. Vespremie, Workshop master: E. Bonyhay.

3. The class for artistic leatherwork

Instructor: Mrs. Stella Șerbănescu-Șăineanu.

4. The class for carpets

Instructor: Mrs. Scaeru-Teclu (sic).

5. The class for batik and painted textiles

Instructor: Mrs. V. Vespremie.

6. The special class for graphic arts

a) lithography. Instructor: Jean Al. Steriadi.

b) etching. Instructor: Canisius.

c) woodcut. Instructor: Mrs. M. Manolescu-Bruteanu.

d) print-making with own tools. Instructor: S. Maur.

7. The class for graphic exercises

Modern ornamenting and artistic lettering. Instructor: A. Vespremie.

8. The special class for poster and advertising graphics

Instructor: S. Maur.

9. Book illustration

Instructors: Gh. Murnu, Ioan Al. Popa.

10. The special class for drawing and painting

Portrait, life drawing, still-life. Instructors: Marcel Iancu, Fr. Șirato.

11. The class for decorative painting and composition

Instructor: C. Cuțescu-Storck, Professor at the School of Fine Arts.

12. The class for sculpture

Modelling from nature and ornamental work. Instructor: Medrea, sculptor.

13. Woodcarving

Instructor: G. Mănescu.

14. The class for ivorywork

Modelling, relief, and jewellery. Instructor: A. Vespremie.

15. Religious art

Church painting and religious objects. Instructor: M. Gheorghiu.

16. The architecture of interior design

Projects for modern furniture and decorating the interior. Instructors architects: M. Iancu, W. Beck.

17 Lectures on art history and artistic styles.

Instructor: Gh. Murnu, University professor, Member of the Romanian Academy.

18. Special classes for children and young people

Under the supervision of Mrs. S. Șerbănescu-Șăineanu and Mr. A. Vespremie. Drawing, painting, modelling, artistic work in pasteboard, metal-plastics, ceramics, leather, silhouette, artistic toys, composition etc.

English translation: Text attributed to Maxy, pages 6 to 9

The permanent exhibition of the Academy of Decorative Arts

It has been two years since the Academy of Decorative Arts, founded by a group of artists and dilettantes, started its activity. A large number of students – far exceeding our expectations – have gathered around the initiators and have collaborated zealously to reach the academy's goals, namely: to create and produce decorative arts objects that will replace the quantities still filling shop windows under the label 'artistic', and at the same time to prevent the majority of interiors from becoming true 'museés des horreures'.

Last year in Paris took place the great artistic event that was the Exhibition of Decorative Arts, where all peoples showed how they understand the application of new artistic trends to everyday objects of necessity, from the salt-cellar and the teapot to drawing room furniture, from cushions and curtains to carpets and wallpaper for the bedroom. Spectators from the whole world understood from the work and the efforts of the artists who made this enormous exhibition that the man of our time, who has created a new art, also feels the need for a new architecture, a new interior, new household goods and even new decorations.

Romania was not present at the Paris Exhibition. Those responsible for this decision were convinced that other than the simple and instinctive art of the Romanian peasant (such as their carpets, textiles, work tools, clothing, wooden furniture, dowries) we could have nothing new or interesting to show, as if our urban dwellers do not build their homes, decorate their interiors or clothe their bodies.

Those of our representatives responsible for this decision have ignored and continue to ignore in their official policies urbanism and the decorative arts.

Furthermore, the primitive and spontaneous art of the peasant has not been understood by those craftsmen who act more like merchants or those dilettantes who lack artistry, with their present wares in 'pink and blue' lacquer, their pyrography imitations garnished with traces of bronze, which do not represent either the healthy primitive influence of the peasant neither the practical-architectonic tendencies of our time.

This state of affairs cannot continue.

In moments of financial crisis, when the economy plays the most important role, decorative artists have understood that their outputs must take one thing into account: obtain maximum practical and aesthetic results with minimum means and materials.

For the layperson interested in this, we lacked a guide.

The Academy of Decorative Arts aims to fill this role.

In its permanent and temporary exhibitions, the general public will be able to find a new harmony for the home, a harmony that stems from a thoughtfully constructed assemblage that includes the colour of the walls, the shape of the lamps, the style of the furniture, the design of the carpet and the patterns on the cushions, the form of the flower vases and the craftsmanship of items for the dinner table or the toilette, the binding of the books in the library, the folder on the desk, the child's toy, or the bibelot, the adult's toy. Here, they will find advice and guidance, they will find the most suitable gift, one which is not only an obligation fulfilled, but an object that reflects the personality of the receiver and even that of the giver.

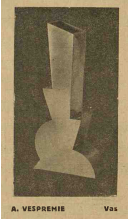


As well as the objects on display, which have been designed for the general public, the artists and the students of the Academy are available for personalised plans and designs. As in other eras of artistic flowering, when the craftsman was not a mechanical producer but an artistic maker, the 'artisan' who follows the Academy's classes, as well as its artists-instructors, wish to offer the art-lover and the aesthete the opportunity of finding or commissioning items that correspond to their personalities and which will be hard to find in the window displays of shops and the banal stacks of serial objects.

From the regular encounter of the artists-instructors of the Academy of Decorative Arts and the interested public, from this continuous contact and permanent transformation, new tastes and trends will be born. Such developments, brought forth by the results obtained by us, from the enhancement of our exteriors and interiors, and the objects created for everyday needs consistent with the atmosphere of our times and mirroring the soul of our country and its current generation, a new artistic expression for Romanian decorative arts will materialise.

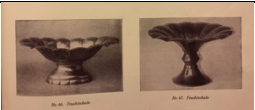
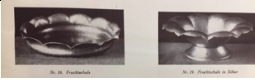

APPENDIX F: A catalogue raisonné of metalwork produced at the Academy of Decorative Arts

All dimensions are given in centimeters, in the following order: height x width x length or height x diameter.



VASES

 <p>A. VESPREMIE Vas</p>	<p>A. Vespremie. (Fig 3.2) Unknown metal, probably silver-plated. Unknown dimensions. Whereabouts unknown, illustrated in <i>Integral</i>, December 1926.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy. (Fig 3.3) Metal, possibly silver-plated. 40 x 5.5 x 23. Signed. Undated. Currently in the collection of the Brăila Museum.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy. (Fig. 3.4) Silver-plated metal. Unknown dimensions. Whereabouts unknown, illustrated in <i>Tiparnița literară</i>, January 1929.</p>

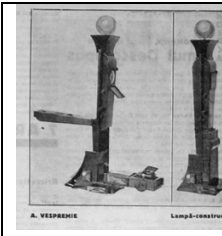
BOWLS AND TRAYS




	<p>A. Vespremie, or Schule Reimann workshop. (Fig. 3.13) Unknown metal, probably brass. Unknown dimensions. Whereabouts unknown, illustrated in <i>Farbe und Form</i>, December 1923.</p>
	<p>A. Vespremie, or Schule Reimann workshop. (Fig. 3.14) Unknown metal, probably brass. Unknown dimensions. Whereabouts unknown, illustrated in <i>Farbe und Form</i>, November 1921.</p>
	<p>A. Vespremie. Unknown metal, probably brass. Unknown dimensions. Whereabouts unknown, identified in a photograph of the Academy of Decorative Arts, 1926.</p>

	<p>A. Vespremie. Unknown metal. Unknown dimensions. Whereabouts unknown, identified in a photograph of the Academy of Decorative Arts, 1926.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy. (Fig. 3.5) Hammered brass. 15 x 25. Signed 'Maxy'. Undated. Currently in the collection of the Brăila Museum.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy. (Fig. 3.6) Hammered brass. 15 x 35. Signed 'M. H. Maxy'. Undated. Currently in the collection of the Brăila Museum.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy or A. Vespremie. (Fig. 3.7) (attributed to M. H. Maxy within the museum's inventory) Hammered brass. 9.5 x 39. Unsigned. Undated. Currently in the collection of the Romanian National Art Museum.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy. Hammered brass. Unknown dimensions. Whereabouts unknown, illustrated in <i>Tiparnița literară</i>, January 1929.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy. (Fig. 3.8) Hammered brass. 14 x 33.3. Signed 'Maxy'. Undated. Currently in the collection of the Ion Minulescu Memorial Home.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy or A. Vespremie. (Fig. 3.9) (attributed to M. H. Maxy within the museum's inventory) Hammered brass. 2.5 x 39.3. Unsigned. Undated. Currently in the collection of the Ion Minulescu and Claudia Millian Memorial House Museum.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy or A. Vespremie. (Fig. 3.10) (attributed to M. H. Maxy within the museum's inventory) Hammered brass. 1 x 30.5. Unsigned. Undated. Currently in the collection of the Ion Minulescu and Claudia Millian Memorial House Museum.</p>





	<p>M. H. Maxy or A. Vespremie. (Fig. 3.11) Hammered brass. 14 x 46. Unsigned. Undated. Currently in the collection of the Ion Minulescu and Claudia Millian Memorial House Museum.</p>
	<p>A. Vespremie. (Fig. 3.16) (attributed to M. H. Maxy within the museum's inventory) Metal, possibly brass. 2.2 x 47.5 x 47.5. Signed 'A. Vespremi'. c.1924-1927. Currently in the collection of the Ion Minulescu and Claudia Millian Memorial House Museum.</p>



LAMPS AND CANDELABRA

	<p>A. Vespremie. (Fig. 3.27) Unknown material. Unknown dimensions. Whereabouts unknown, illustrated in <i>Contimporanul</i>, July 1926.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy. (Fig. 3.32) Unknown material. Unknown dimensions. Whereabouts unknown, illustrated in <i>Tiparița literară</i>, November 1928.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy. (Fig. 3.33) Wrought iron and parchment. Unknown dimensions. Whereabouts unknown, illustrated in <i>Tiparița literară</i>, January 1929.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy. Wrought iron. 67 x 47 x 63.5. Unsigned. Undated. Currently in the collection of the Romanian National Art Museum.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy. Nickel- or silver-plated metal. 22.5 x 6.5 x 35. Unsigned. Undated. Currently in the collection of the Brăila Museum.</p>


	<p>M. H. Maxy. Nickel- or silver-plated metal. 24 x 17 x 36. Unsigned. Undated. Currently in a private collection.</p>
	<p>Unknown maker, possibly M. H. Maxy or A. Vespremie. Metal. 41.5 x 19 x 27. Unsigned. Undated. Currently in the collection of the Brăila Museum.</p>
	<p>H. Mattis-Teutsch (?) (Fig. 3.31) Wood, painted black. 40,5 x 10,5 x 11. Unsigned. Undated. Currently in a private collection.</p>

OPENWORK

	<p>A. Vespremie, or Schule Reimann workshop. (Fig. 3.17) Unknown metal. Unknown dimensions. Whereabouts unknown, illustrated in <i>Farbe und Form</i>, December 1923.</p>
	<p>A. Vespremie. (Fig. 3.18) Unknown metal. Unknown dimensions. Whereabouts unknown, identified in a photograph of the Academy of Decorative Arts, 1926.</p>
	<p>A. Vespremie. (Fig. 3.19) Unknown metal. Unknown dimensions. Whereabouts unknown, identified in a photograph of the Academy of Decorative Arts, 1926.</p>
	<p>A. Vespremie. [5 similar openwork items] Unknown metal. Unknown dimensions. Whereabouts unknown, identified in photographs of the Academy of Decorative Arts, 1926.</p>

	<p>A. Vespremie. (Fig. 3.20) Brass. 8 x 7.5. Unsigned. c.1927. Currently in a private collection.</p>
	<p>A. Vespremie. (Fig. 3.21) Brass. 7 x 9. Unsigned. c.1924-1927. Currently in a private collection.</p>

TEA SETS AND SMALL CONTAINERS





	<p>M. H. Maxy Silver-plated brass and wood. 19 x 6.5 x 6.5. Signed 'Maxy'. Undated. Currently in the collection of the Brăila Museum.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy Silver-plated brass and wood. 28 x 8.5 x 24.5. Signed 'Maxy'. Undated. Currently in the collection of the Braila Museum.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy. (Fig. 3.37) Silver plated brass. 18 x 15 x 28. Unsigned. Undated. Currently in the collection of the Brăila Museum.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy. (Fig. 3.39) Unknown metal, probably silver-plated brass. Unknown dimensions. Whereabouts unknown, illustrated in <i>Tiparnița literară</i>, November 1928.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy. (Fig. 3.40) Silver-plated brass. 4 x 14. Signed 'Maxy'. Undated. Currently in the collection of the Brăila Museum.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy. (Fig. 3.38) Brass. 1 x 7.5 x 10. Unsigned. Undated. Currently in the collection of the Brăila Museum.</p>

	<p>M. H. Maxy. (Fig. 3.35) Brass. 4.3 x 4 x 4. Unsigned. Undated. Currently in the collection of the Brăila Museum.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy. Brass with traces of silver. 6.7 x 9.2 x 21.7. Signed 'Maxy'. Undated. Currently in the collection of the Brăila Museum.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy. (Fig. 3.41) Brass and wood. 4.5 x 10 x 18.5. Signed 'Maxy'. Undated. Currently in the collection of the Liviu Rebreanu Memorial Home.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy. Nickel-plated brass. 3.5 x 7 x 10.5. Signed 'Maxy'. Undated. Currently in a private collection.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy. Nickel-plated brass. 5.5 x 9 x 16. Signed 'Maxy'. Undated. Currently in a private collection.</p>
	<p>A. Vespremie. (Fig. 3.42) Brass. 9 x 13. Unsigned. Undated. Currently in a private collection.</p>
	<p>A. Vespremie. (Fig. 3.43) Unknown metal, probably brass. Unknown dimensions. Whereabouts unknown, identified in a photograph of the Academy of Decorative Arts, 1926.</p>
	<p>A. Vespremie, or Schule Reimann workshop. (Fig. 3.44) Unknown metal, probably brass. Unknown dimensions. Whereabouts unknown, illustrated in <i>Farbe und Form</i>, December 1923 and November 1921.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy. Unknown materials. Unknown dimensions. Whereabouts unknown, illustrated in <i>Tipariņa literară</i>, October-November 1929.</p>

APPENDIX G: A catalogue raisonné of textiles produced by M. H. Maxy

All dimensions are given in centimeters, in the following order: width x length or width x length x thickness.

	<p>M. H. Maxy (Fig. 3.46) Wool and cotton. 86 x 152. Unsigned. c.1926. Currently in the collection of the Brăila Museum.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy (Fig. 3.47) Wool and cotton. 258 x 344. Signed 'Maxy'. Undated. Currently in the collection of the Brăila Museum.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy (Fig. 3.48) Wool and cotton. 225 x 337. Signed. Undated. Currently in a private collection.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy (Fig. 3.49) Wool and cotton. Unknown dimensions. Whereabouts unknown, illustrated in <i>Tiparnița literară</i>, November 1928.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy (Fig. 3.50) Ink and watercolour on graph paper. Composition 19 x 28 on sheet 25 x 32. Signed 'Maxy'. Undated. Currently in a private collection.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy (Fig. 3.51) Wool and cotton. 171 x 272. Unsigned. Undated. Currently in the collection of the Brăila Museum.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy (Fig. 3.52) Wool and cotton. 98 x 194. Unsigned. Undated. Currently in a private collection.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy (Fig. 3.54) Wool and cotton. 187 x 279. Unsigned. Undated. Currently in a private collection.</p>

	<p>M. H. Maxy (Fig. 3.56) [6 cushions] Unknown materials. Unknown dimensions. Whereabouts unknown, identified in a photograph of the Academy of Decorative Arts, 1926.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy (Fig. 3.57) Wool and cotton. 31 x 38 x 9. Unsigned. Undated. Currently in a private collection.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy (Fig. 3.58) Wool and cotton. 34 x 40 x 7. Unsigned. Undated. Currently in a private collection.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy (Fig. 3.59) Printed cotton. 35 x 39 x 8. Unsigned. Undated. Currently in a private collection.</p>

APPENDIX H: A catalogue raisonné of bookbindings produced at the Academy of Decorative Arts and Studio Maxy

All dimensions are given in centimeters, in the following order: height x width.

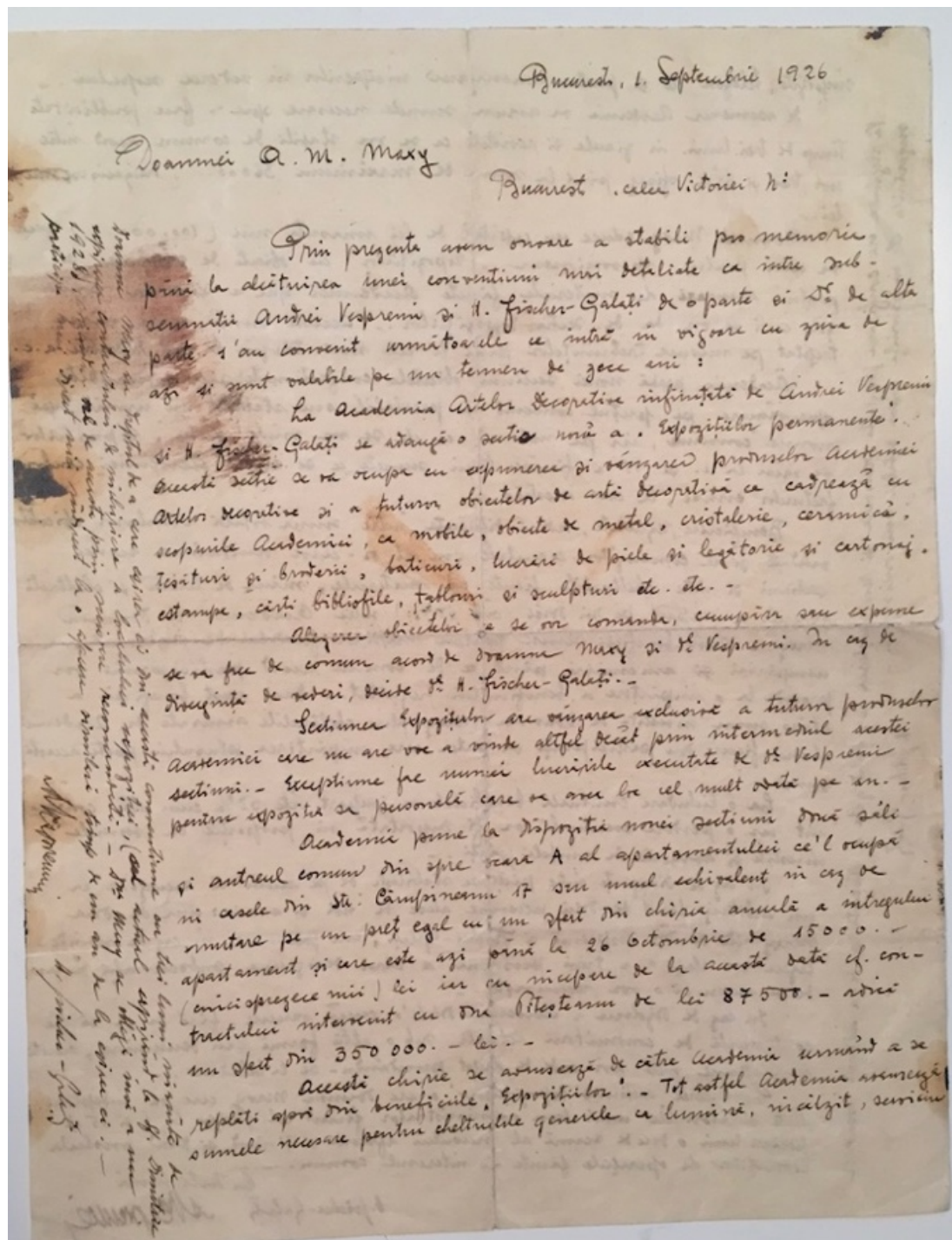
	<p>M. H. Maxy. (Fig. 3.64) Anatole France, <i>Oeuvres complètes (Les désirs de Jean Servien, Le livre de mon ami)</i>, vol. III, Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1925.</p> <p>Leather and gold tooling. 26 x 20.5. Marked 'Maxy' and 'Artele Decorative Bucuresti'. c.1928-9 Currently in a private collection.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy. (Fig. 3.65) Anatole France, <i>Oeuvres complètes (Nos enfants, Balthasar)</i> vol. IV, Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1925.</p> <p>Leather and gold tooling. 26 x 20.5. Marked 'Maxy' and 'Artele Decorative Bucuresti'. c.1928-9 Currently in a private collection.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy. (Fig. 3.66) Anatole France, <i>Oeuvres complètes (La vie littéraire)</i>, vol. VII, Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1926.</p> <p>Leather and gold tooling. 26 x 20.5. Marked 'Maxy' and 'Artele Decorative Bucuresti'. c.1928-9. Currently in a private collection.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy. (Fig. 3.67) Anatole France, <i>Oeuvres complètes (Histoire contemporaine, L'Anneau d'amethyste, Monsieur Bergeret à Paris)</i>, vol. XII, Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1927.</p> <p>Leather and gold tooling. 26 x 20.5. Marked 'Maxy' and 'Artele Decorative Bucuresti'. c.1928-9. Currently in a private collection.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy. (Fig. 3.68) Ion Minulescu, <i>Strofe pentru toată lumea (Verses for Everyone)</i>, București: Cultura Națională, 1930.</p> <p>Leather (and gold tooling?). 21 x 17.5. Marked 'Studio Maxy' and 'Relieur Kollarick'. c.1930-35. Currently in the Ion Minulescu and Claudia Millian Memorial House Museum.</p>

	<p>A. Vespremie (?) (Fig. 3.69) (attributed to M. H. Maxy within the museum's inventory) Ion Minulescu, <i>Romanțe pentru mai târziu</i> (Songs for Later), București: Leon Alcalay, 1908.</p> <p>Cloth and artificial leather. 16.5 x 16.5. Unsigned. c.1924-7. Currently in the Ion Minulescu and Claudia Millian Memorial Home Museum.</p>
	<p>A. Vespremie (?) (Fig. 3.70) (attributed to M. H. Maxy within the museum's inventory) Ion Minulescu, <i>De vorbă cu mine însu-mi</i> (Conversing with Myself), București: Albert Baer, c.1913.</p> <p>Artificial leather. 21 x 24. Unsigned. c.1924-7. Currently in the Ion Minulescu and Claudia Millian Memorial Home Museum.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy and A. Vespremie. (Fig. 3.71) A. L. Zissu, <i>Spovendania unui candelabru</i> (The Confession of a Candelabrum), București: Integral, 1926.</p> <p>Leather and metal. 22 x 18. Marked 'Academia Artelor Decorative'. c.1926-7. Currently in a private collection.</p>
 <p><small>M. H. Maxy: copertă de album.</small></p>	<p>M. H. Maxy. (Fig. 3.72) Album.</p> <p>Unknown material. Unknown dimensions. Whereabouts unknown, illustrated in <i>Contimporanul</i>, January 1929.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy (?). (Fig. 3.74) (attributed to M. H. Maxy within the museum's inventory) Ion Călugăru, <i>Paradisul statistic</i> (The Statistical Paradise), București: Integral, 1926.</p> <p>Cloth and leather with gold-tooling. 21 x 16. Unsigned. Undated. Currently in the collection of the Brăila Museum.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy (?). (Fig. 3.76) Ion Călugăru, <i>Paradisul statistic</i> (The Statistical Paradise), București: Integral, 1926. This copy made for A. L. Zissu.</p> <p>Leather and metal. 20 x 16. Signed 'M. H. Maxy'. c.1926-7. Currently in a private collection.</p>

	<p>M. H. Maxy. (Fig. 3.77) Maurice Raynal, <i>Anthologie de la peinture en France de 1906 à nos jours</i>, Paris: Éditions Montaigne, 1927.</p> <p>Leather. 15 x 20. Unsigned. Undated. Currently in the collection of the Brăila Museum.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy (?) (Fig. 3.78) Gustave Coquirot, <i>Cubistes, futuristes, passéistes</i>, Paris: Ollendorff, 1914.</p> <p>Leather and gold tooling. 14 x 21. Unsigned. Undated. Currently in the collection of the Brăila Museum.</p>
	<p>M. H. Maxy (?) (Fig. 3.79) Jean Cocteau, <i>Poésie</i>, Paris: Gallimard, c.1925.</p> <p>Leather. 13 x 19. Unsigned. Undated. Currently in the collection of the Brăila Museum.</p>

APPENDIX I: Contract between Mela Maxy, Andrei Vespremie, and Heinrich Fischer-Galați expanding the Academy of Decorative Arts in 1926 (with English translation)

Source: Private collection.



impozite, telefon etc și pentru amenajarea nicipitilor în vederea școlului. -

De asemenea Academia va asigura sumele necesare spre a face publicitate timp de trei luni în ziarele și revistele ca se vor stabili de comun acord între noi trei și prin afișaj până la suma de maximum 36000.- (treizecișase mii) lei.

Doamna Maxy aduce un capital de lei mii (100.000.-) care va servi pentru aprovizionarea 'Expozitiilor' cu obiecte de vînzare și pentru achiziția de materiale făcute Academiei spre a executa comenziile ce i se vor da de către 'Expozitiile'. Aceste sume se vor rînsa treptat pe măsura trebuințelor până la cel mai tîrziu la 15. Noiembrie a.c.

Academia prete noii secțiuni obiectele confecționate sau comandate spre vînzare pe prețul convenit în prealabil sau stabilit în urma după norme convenite, iar pe măsura ce de se vor vinde sechii, 'Expozitiile' se rînsa la 1. și 15 a fiecîra lună sumele ce se curîm Academiei conform facturilor emise, la casa acesteia. -

Beneficiile rezultate, adică diferența între suma totală a tuturor obiectelor vîndute și ale comenzilor executate sau al or-cîror venituri a acestei secțiuni și între cheltuielile făcute cu materiale, mîna de lucru și cheltuieli generale se împart pe din două (cîte 50%) între Academia și Doamna Maxy. - Aceste beneficii servesc pentru mîsirea fondului de pulment, cumpărări și amenajări pînă ce de comun acord participanții vor proceda la o împărțire a beneficiului rezultat. - Dacă acest beneficiu a atins suma investită de Doamna Maxy plus cheltuielile asumate de Academia atunci fiecare din participanți va putea cere împărțirea plusului peste aceste sume. -

La o lichidare eventuală beneficiile se împart cîte 50% cum este convenit iar o pierdere eventuală va fi suportată în proporție cu sumele investite și asumate de ambele părți. -

În caz de divergențe între părți se stabilește de pe acum că recurgem la un arbitraj făcut de trei persoane alese de noi și anume: una de Doña Maxy alta de Doña Vespreni și Frîcher-Galet, cele persoane în caz de neînțelegeri vor alege o a treia persoană a cărei decizie subscrisă declară de pe acum că o vor recunoaște. -

În caz de dizolvare a Academiei dintr-o cauză oricare, fîră ca ea să fie continuată de constructorii actuali sub o altă formă sau denumire, acest consens este între noi cade de drept procedîndu-se la lichidare. -

Comenzile secțiunii 'Expozitiilor' o are Doamna Maxy care va îndeplini toate obligațiile unui bun administrator făcînd cel puțin la 1 și 15 de fiecare lună o decizie de semn al maroului afacerii și ținînd și fiind ostentiv asociatilor de operațiile făcute în interesul comun. - Cu toate acestea

Frîcher-Galet
Maxy

În paginile a se confirma paginile revizuite și numerotarea și, fiind gata a fi citite și de-a adunat cererile
 angajate și în privința unor detalii sau omisiuni -
 Frîcher-Galet

English translation

Bucharest, 1 September 1926

To Mrs. A. M. Maxy

Bucharest, Calea Victoriei, nr. [blank]

The present document acts as an agreement, until such a date a more detailed document is drawn up, between the undersigned Andrei Vespremie and H. Fischer-Galați on one side, and Mrs. [Maxy] on the other, confirming that as of today the below comes into force and is valid for ten years [from the present date]:

A new section for 'Permanent Exhibitions' is heretofore added to the Academy of Decorative Arts established by Andrei Vespremie and H. Fischer-Galați. This section will be responsible for the display and sale of products made within the Academy of Decorative Arts, and all other decorative arts objects that fit within the scope of the Academy, such as furniture, metalwork, crystal, ceramics, textiles and embroideries, batik, leatherwork, bookbinding, works on paper, rare books, painting and sculpture etc. etc.

The choice of objects that will be ordered, bought, or displayed will be decided between Mrs. Maxy and Mr. Vespremie. In case of disagreement, Mr. Fischer-Galați will decide.

The Exhibitions Section has exclusive right of sale for the products of the Academy, which may not be sold elsewhere. The exception is constituted by the works of Mr. Vespremie for his own personal exhibition which will take place at most once a year.

The Academy provides the Exhibitions Section with two rooms and the shared vestibule near building A of the apartment it occupies within the buildings at Str. Câmpineanu 17, or an equivalent space in case of relocation with a value of a quarter of the annual rent of the entire apartment which up to 26 October of the current year amounts to 15,000 lei, and from that date forward according to the contract signed with Mrs. Piteșteanu 87,500 lei, representing a quarter of 350,000 lei.

This rental amount is advanced by the Academy and will be repaid from the revenues of the Exhibitions Section. The Academy also advances the necessary amount for running expenses such as lighting, heating, service charges, taxes, telephone costs, and for the preparation of the spaces for this purpose.

Likewise, the Academy will advance the necessary amounts to advertise for three months in newspapers and magazines that will be agreed upon by the three signatories, and through posters, up to the sum of 36,000 lei.

Mrs. Maxy brings a capital of 100,000 lei which will serve to supply the Exhibitions Section with items for sale and to provide the Academy with materials for the making of items commissioned by the Exhibitions Section. This amount will be made gradually available as required until 15 November of the current year at the latest.

The Academy provides the new section with the objects made or commissioned for prices that are to be agreed between the parties and as the items begin to sell the Exhibitions

Section will pay the Academy on the first and fifteenth day of every month the amounts due according to the invoices drawn up.

The profits that result, that is to say the difference between the total sales made and the commissions executed or between the revenues of the Exhibitions Section and its expenses, be they materials, man-hours or general expenses, shall be divided equally (50% each) between the Academy and Mrs. Maxy. Such profits will be added to the working capital, or used for purchases and preparing the exhibition space, until the parties will jointly consent to sharing out the profits. When such profits reach the sum invested by Mrs. Maxy plus the amounts advanced by the Academy, then any of the parties can ask for the surplus to be divided out.

In case of liquidation, revenues will be equally split as discussed, and any losses will be covered by the parties in equal proportion to the amounts invested.

In case of disagreement between the parties, it is hereby agreed that a mediation be made by two chosen individuals, one chosen by Mrs. Maxy and the other chosen by Mr. Vespremie or Mr. Fischer-Galați. In case of further disagreement, the chosen mediators will select a third person whose decision will be final as hereby agreed by both parties.

In case of dissolution of the Academy for whatever reason, and without it being maintained by the current parties under another designation, the current agreement will be liquidated.

The directorship of the Exhibitions Section belongs to Mrs. Maxy, who will take on the duties of a good administrator, presenting the section's activities on the first and fifteenth day of each month, and keeping records of all the operations made in the common interest.

With kind regards,
H. Fischer-Galați and A. Vespremie

Note 1: We ask that you confirm receipt and agreement of the present document. At the same time, we are amenable to discussing and including your suggestions in case of any omissions.

Note 2: Mrs. Maxy has the right to withdraw from this agreement three months before the current contract expires and the lease for the exhibition space is renewed (the current one expiring on the feast day of St Dimitrie 1928), by giving notice through recommended letter. Mrs. Maxy must however agree not to participate directly or indirectly in another similar venture for the period of one year.

APPENDIX J: Vilna Troupe productions designed by M. H. Maxy, 1925-26

SAUL (Saul)

Author: André Gide

Designer: M. H. Maxy

Director: I. M. Daniel

Premiere: n/a

SHABBSAI TSVI (Sapsai Zwi)

Author: Joseph Buloff after Sholem Asch & Jerzy Żuławski

Designer: M. H. Maxy

Director: Joseph Buloff (Alexander Stein for the revival in October 1926)

Premiere: 24 February 1926

THE NEOPHYTE (Neofitul)

Author: Alter-Sholem Kacyzne

Designer: M. H. Maxy (Arthur Kolnik for the October 1925 staging)

Director: Alexander Stein

Premiere: 19 October 1926

THE SENTIMENTAL MANNEQUIN (Manechinul sentimental)

Author: Ion Minulescu

Designer: M. H. Maxy

Director: Alexander Stein

Premiere: 3 November 1926

THE THOUGHT (Gândul)

Author: Leonid Adreyev

Designer: M. H. Maxy

Director: Alexander Stein

Premiere: 6 December 1926

MAN, BEAST AND VIRTUE (Omul, bestia și virtutea)

Author: Luigi Pirandello

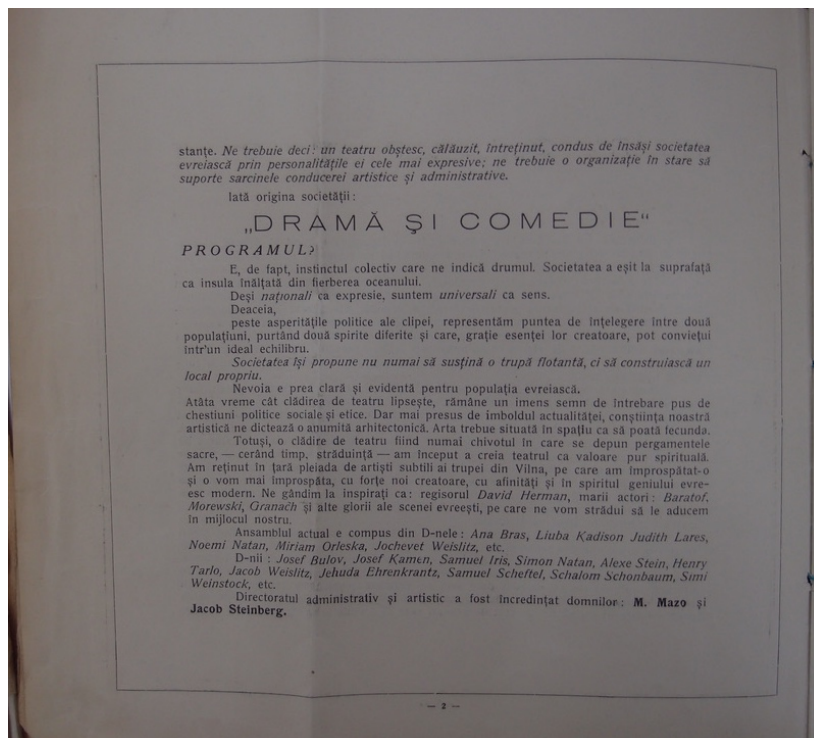
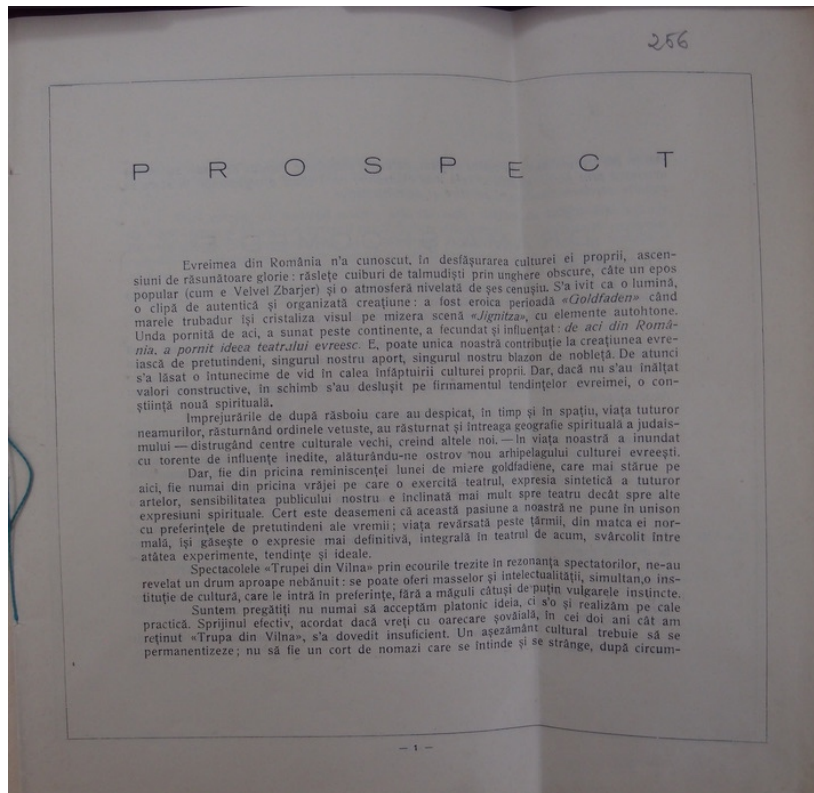
Designer: M. H. Maxy

Director: Henrik Tarlo

Premiere: 11 December 1926

APPENDIX K: Prospectus for the Tragedy and Comedy ensemble, 1925 (with English translation)

Source: Romanian National Archives, fond 652 Ministerul Artelor, file 13/1925.



English translation (partial)

[...]

The theatrical productions of the Vilna Troupe have revealed to us an unexpected path, through the echoes they have awoken in the spectators who resonated with them: it is possible to offer simultaneously to the masses and to the intelligentsia a cultural institution that meets their preferences without succumbing at all to vulgar instincts.

We are ready to not only platonically accept this idea, but to realise it through practical means. The support given with some reluctance to the Vilna Troupe over the past two years which they have spent here has proven insufficient. A cultural institution must find a permanent place; not be a nomad's tent that put up and taken down according to circumstance. We therefore need: a people's theatre guided, supported, led by the Jewish society itself through its most eloquent personalities; we need an organisation able to undertake the tasks of artistic and administrative leadership.

This is the origin of the society:

TRAGEDY AND COMEDY

Its programme?

It is in fact the collective instinct that guides our path. Our society has come up to the surface like an island rises from the ferment of the ocean.

Although national in expression, we are universal in sense.

Therefore, over the political aspersions of the day, we represent the connecting bridge between two populations who have different spirits but thanks to their creative essence can live together in an ideal equilibrium.

Our society proposes not only to support an itinerant ensemble, but to build our own venue.

The need is clear and evident for the Jewish population. As long as the theatre building is lacking, there remains a question mark raised by political, social, and ethical matters. But above the impetus of the present, our artistic conscience dictates to us a certain architectonic. Art must be situated in space in order to flourish.

However, a theatre building being only the ark in which the sacred scrolls are deposited – as it requires time and effort – we have begun by creating a theatre of pure spiritual value. We have kept in the country the Vilna Troupe's array of subtle artists, which we have refreshed and will refresh with new creative forces, with affinities to and in the spirit of the modern Jewish genius. We think of inspirations such as: the director David Herman; the great actors Baratof, Morewski, Granach, and other glories of the Jewish scene whom we will endeavour to bring amongst us.

The current ensemble is composed of Mmes. Ana Bras, Luba Kadison, Judith Lares, Noemi Natan, Miriam Orleska, Jochevet Weislitz, etc. and Messrs. Joseph Buloff, Joseph Kamen, Samuel Iris, Simon Natan, Alexe Stein, Henry Tarlo, Jacob Weislitz, Jehuda Ehrenkrantz, Samuel Scheftel, Shalom Schonbaum, Simi Weinstock, etc.

The administrative and artistic directorship have been given to Messrs. Mordechai Mazo and Jacob Sternberg.

An artistic committee will select the repertoire, and their ideal will be to offer performances of pure art: the stage turned into a pulpit.

The two extreme poles of our artistic belief are classicism and modernism. We consider Sholem Aleichem and I. L. Peretz most representative for Jewish dramaturgy and we will experiment with contemporary Yiddish works that follow this evolving trail of collective comedies and mysteries started by great precursors; and within the universal repertoire we will be guided by Aristophanes, Shakespeare, Molière, Goethe.

It will be an avant-garde theatre, a theatre of synthesis, which will aim to imbue acting, direction and text with the rhythm of contemporary innovation. There will be no tasteless compromise, not any compromise in bad taste.

[...]

We will call upon all the bright forces and intelligence of this country to support us in counsel and deed.

Tragedy and Comedy, although an avant-garde theatre, does not wish to a clique. And most of all does not wish to be only a theatre for the capital; the goal is to be a theatre of the whole country. Therefore, we will strive to connect all the provinces with the cerebral centre not only through touring, which merely represents a sort of excursion, but through a perpetual exchange of values.

We have gathered around us until now a group of painters-decorators like Marcel Iancu, M. H. Maxy, Arthur Kolnik, Z. Rubin, the Baron Löwendal etc. We will likewise gather the modern Jewish composers from the country and from abroad, and in general all the intelligentsia of good taste.

The curtain of our theatre is made after the sketches of the famous painter-decorator Ernst Stern; we are also in possession of a great stock of decorations and theatrical supplies which we will continue to add to.

For our programme to become a reality we call for the intelligentsia to collaborate with us and the masses to give us their support.

The Tragedy and Comedy Society

APPENDIX L: M. H. Maxy's theatrical collaborations with Dida Solomon and Iacob Sternberg, 1927-34

THE COMRADES (Camarazii)

Author: A. Strindberg

Designer: M. H. Maxy

Director: I. Sternberg

Premiere: 7 October 1927

THE FAILURES (Ratații)

Author: Henri-René Lenormand

Designer: M. H. Maxy

Director: Sandu Eliad

Premiere: 2 November 1927

A NIGHT IN THE OLD MARKETPLACE (Noaptea în târgul vechi)

Author: Isaac Leib Peretz

Designer: Iacob Sternberg & BITS

Director: Iacob Sternberg

Premiere: 30 January 1930

THE BEWITCHED TAYLOR (Croitorul fermecat)

Author: Iacob Sternberg after Sholem Aleichem

Designer: M. H. Maxy

Director: Iacob Sternberg

Premiere: 18(?) April 1930

MAYA (Maya)

Author: Simon Gantillon

Designer: M. H. Maxy

Director: Marietta Sadova

Premiere: 22 April 1932

SKOTZL KIMT/ SKOTZL IS COMING (Skotzl Kimt)

Author: Iacob Sternberg & Moyshe Altman

Designer: M. H. Maxy

Director: Iacob Sternberg

Premiere: 23(?) August 1933

ROJINKES MIT MANDLEN/ RAISINS WITH ALMONDS (Rojinkes mit Mandlen)

Author: Iacob Sternberg & Moyshe Altman

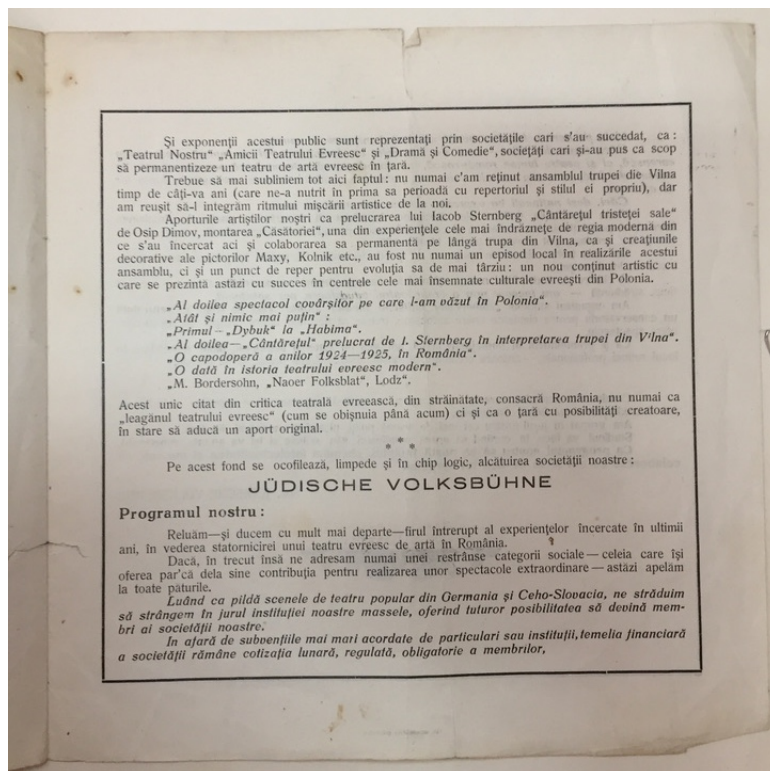
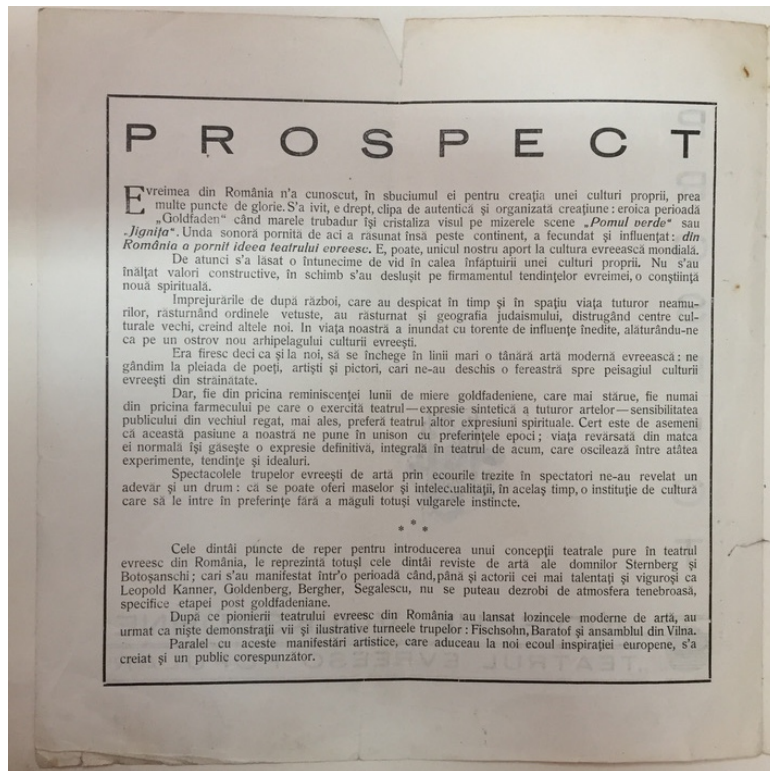
Designer: M. H. Maxy

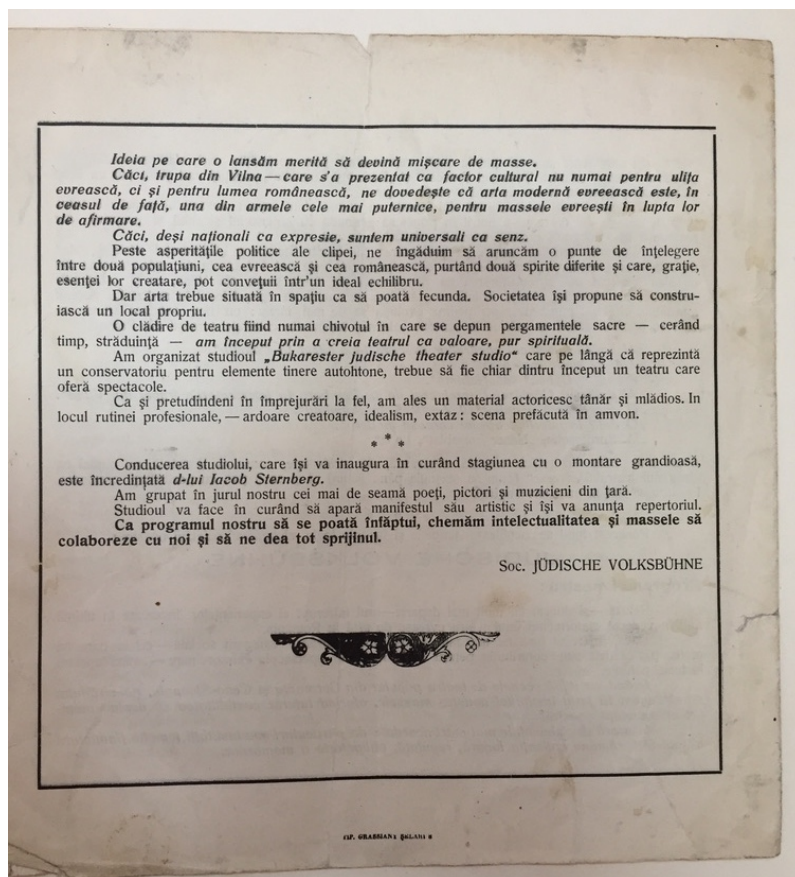
Director: Iacob Sternberg

Premiere: 27(?) July 1934

APPENDIX M: Prospectus for the Bukarester Idishe Theater Studio, 1930 (with English translation)

Source: Romanian National Archives, fond 817 Ministerul Artelor, dosar 4/1930.





English translation (partial)

[...]

The theatrical productions of the Jewish art troupes have revealed to us a truth and a path: that it is possible to offer simultaneously to the masses and to the intelligentsia a cultural institution that meets their preferences without succumbing at all to vulgar instincts.

The first points of reference for the introduction of a pure theatrical concept in the Jewish theatre in Romania were the music hall revues of Messrs. Sternberg and Botoshansky; which occurred during a period when even the most talented and dynamic actors such as Leopold Kanner, Goldenberg, Bergher, Segalescu could not rid themselves of the tenebrous atmosphere typical of the post-Goldfaden period.

Once the pioneers of Jewish theatre in Romania deployed the slogans of modern art, there followed the live and illustrative demonstrations of the Fitzjohn and Baratoff troupes and the Vilna ensemble.

At the same time as these artistic manifestations, which brought to us the echo of a European inspiration, an appropriate public was also formed.

And the exponents of such a public are represented by the societies which were formed such as Our Theatre, The Friends of Jewish Theatre, and Tragedy and Comedy, societies that had as aim the creation of a permanent Jewish theatre in this country.

Here, we must emphasise the fact that not only did we retain the Vilna Troupe here for several years (which at the start nourished us with its own repertoire and style), but we also succeeded in integrating it within the rhythm of our own artistic movements.

The contribution of our artists, such as Iacob Sternberg's production of Osip Dymov's *The Singer of his Sorrow*, or his staging of *Marriage*, one of the most daring experiments in modern theatre direction that occurred here, and his continuous collaboration with the Vilna Troupe, as well as the decorative creations of the painters Maxy, Kolnik, etc. were not only a local chapter in the achievements of this ensemble, but a defining moment for its subsequent evolution: a new artistic content that they are now successfully presenting in the most important Jewish cultural centres in Poland.

'The second overwhelming production I have seen in Poland. This and nothing less: the first, the Habima troupe's *Dybbuk* and the second, *The Singer* produced by Sternberg and the Vilna Troupe. A masterpiece of the 1924-25 season in Romania. A landmark in the history of Jewish modern theatre.' M. Bordersohn, 'Neuer Volksblat', Łódź.

Quotes such as this from Jewish theatre critics abroad establish Romania not only as 'the cradle of Jewish theatre' (as it has been considered until now) but also as a country with creative possibilities capable of bringing an original contribution.

These are the circumstances that surround the creation of our society: JÜDISCHE VOLKSBÜHNE (The Jewish People's Theatre).

Our programme:

To resume and take further the interrupted thread of the experiments of the past few years, in order to create a permanent Jewish art theatre in Romania.

If in the past we addressed only a limited social category – that which of its own accord offered its contribution to the realisation of some extraordinary productions – today we call upon all social classes.

Taking as our example the popular theatre movements of Germany and Czechoslovakia we attempt to gather the masses around us, offering everyone the possibility of becoming members of our society.

Aside from the larger donations given by private patrons or institutions, the financial base of our society will remain the compulsory monthly subscription given by our members.

The idea we are proposing deserves to become a mass movement.

The Vilna Troupe, which became a significant cultural factor not only for the Jewish community but also for the Romanian society, proves that modern Jewish art is at present one of the strongest weapons for the Jewish masses in their struggle for affirmation.

Although national in expression, we are universal in sense.

Over the political aspersions of the day, we represent the connecting bridge between two populations, the Jewish one and the Romanian one, who embody two different spirits and who, thanks to their creative essence, can live together in an ideal equilibrium.

But art must be situated in space in order to flourish. Our society proposes to build our own venue.

However, a theatre building being only the ark in which the sacred scrolls are deposited – as it requires time and effort – we have begun by creating a theatre of pure spiritual value.

We have organised the Bukarester Judische Theater Studio which, as well as representing a hothouse for the young local artistic elements, must also be from the very beginning a theatre that produces shows.

As everywhere around us, we have chosen a youthful and flexible body of actors. Instead of professional routine, creative ardour, idealism, ecstasy: the stage turned into a pulpit.

The leadership of the Studio, which will soon inaugurate its first season with a grandiose production, has been entrusted to Mr. Jacob Sternberg.

We have gathered around us the most notable poets, painters and musicians in this country.

The Studio will soon publish its artistic manifesto and will announce its repertoire. For our programme to become a reality we call for the intelligentsia and the masses to collaborate with us and to give us all their support.

The Jewish People's Theatre Society

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- Fig. 3.91** Cover of *Integral*, no. 9 (December 1926). Detail of Fig. 3.1.

Fig. 3.92 A. Vespremie, letterhead design by for the Academy (1926). Private collection. Detail of Fig. 3.86.

Fig. 3.93 The Academy of Decorative Arts selling exhibition (1926). Romanian National Art Museum. Details of Figs. 2.10a and 2.10b.

Fig. 3.94 The window display for the Omnia photo studio at the Academy, printed in *unu*, no. 11 (March 1929).

Fig. 4.1 The Vilna Troupe in Bucharest (1923). Luba Kadison is centre foreground, with Alexander Stein and Chanah Kadison behind her. Joseph Buloff is far left in the back row, with Leib Kadison in front of him. Yivo Institute for Jewish Research.

Fig. 4.2 Carte de visite of Constanța Cantacuzino with hand-written request for a box at an upcoming performance of the Vilna Troupe's *The Singer of His Sorrow* (c.1925). Yivo Institute for Jewish Research.

Fig. 4.3 M. H. Maxy, Sketch by for a poster design for the Tragedy and Comedy troupe (1925). Ink, pencil and watercolour. 20 x 15 cm. Romanian National Art Museum.

Fig. 4.4 M. H. Maxy, Cover design (and detail) for a brochure advertising the Vilna Troupe's new incarnation as the Tragedy and Comedy ensemble (1925). National Archives of Romania.

Fig. 4.5 M. H. Maxy, Graphic vignettes representing Jacob Sternberg and Mordechai Mazo in the prospectus for the Tragedy and Comedy troupe (1925). National Archives of Romania.

Fig. 4.6 M. H. Maxy, *Tragedy and Comedy*, illustration by Maxy printed in *Integral* no. 6-7 (October 1925).

Fig. 4.7 M. H. Maxy, 'Scenic Construction' for *Saul*. Illustration from *Integral* no 2 (April 1925).

Fig. 4.8 M. H. Maxy, Set design for *Saul* (1960s). Pencil, watercolour, ink and gouache. 16.5 x 20.5 cm. Romanian National Art Museum.

Fig. 4.9 M. H. Maxy, Costume designs for Saul, David, Iohel in *Saul*. Illustration from *Integral*, no. 2 (April 1925).

Fig. 4.10 M. H. Maxy, Costume designs for the Devils in *Saul*. Illustration from *Integral*, no. 2 (April 1925).

Fig. 4.11 Maxy, Costume designs for the Devils in *Saul* (1960s). Pencil, ink and gouache. 22 x 38 cm. Romanian National Art Museum.

Fig. 4.12a M. H. Maxy, *Electric Madonna*. Illustration from *Integral*, no. 8 (November-December 1925).

Fig. 4.12b M. H. Maxy, *Electric Madonna* (1960s?). Oil on cardboard. 70.5 x 46.5 cm. Romanian National Art Museum.

Fig. 4.13 M. H. Maxy, Portrait of Constantin Brancusi. Illustration from *Integral*, no. 2 (April 1925).

Fig. 4.14 M. H. Maxy, Portraits of Max Reinhardt, Sandu Eliad and Vsevolod Meyerhold. Ink drawings exhibited in the 1965 Maxy retrospective in Bucharest. *Expoziția retrospectivă M. H. Maxy*, exh. cat. (București: Arta Grafică, 1965).

Fig. 4.15 M. H. Maxy, Programme for the Cabaret at The Festival of Jewish Writers and Artists (11 April 1925). Romanian National Art Museum.

Fig. 4.16 Marcel Iancu, The Doctor, Pierrot, Death, Harlequin and Columbine from Nikolai Evreinov's *The Merry Death*. Illustrations and page showing details about the production from the programme for The Festival of Jewish Writers and Artists, 11 April 1925. Harvard Library Judaica Division.

Fig. 4.17 Marcel Iancu, Costumes for Harlequin and the Doctor. Photographer and location of photographs unknown.

Fig. 4.18 Marcel Iancu, Stage design for Nikolai Evreinov's *The Merry Death*. Illustration from the programme for The Festival of Jewish Writers and Artists (11 April 1925). Harvard Library Judaica Division.

Fig. 4.19 Marcel Iancu, Stage set for Nikolai Evreinov's *The Merry Death*. Illustration from *Contimporanul*, no. 59 (25 May 1925).

Fig. 4.20 Joseph Buloff and M. H. Maxy on the set of *Shabbsai Tsvi* (February 1926). Photographer unknown. Harvard Library Judaica Division.

Fig. 4.21 The Vilna Troupe in *Shabbsai Tsvii*, Act I (1926). Photograph by Iosif Berman. Romanian National Art Museum.

Fig. 4.22 M. H. Maxy, Set design for *Shabbsai Tsvi*, Act I (1960s). Ink and ink wash, silver, pencil, watercolour, gouache. 24.5 x 23.5 cm. Romanian Academy.

Fig. 4.23 The Vilna Troupe in *Shabbsai Tsvi*. Act I (1926). Photograph by Iosif Berman. Harvard Library Judaica Division.

Fig. 4.24 M. H. Maxy, Set design for *Shabbsai Tsvi*, Act II (1960s). Ink, silver, pencil, gouache. 22 x 22 cm. Romanian Academy.

Fig. 4.25 The Vilna Troupe in *Shabbsai Tsvi*. Act II (1926). Photograph by Iosif Berman. Harvard Library Judaica Division.

Fig. 4.26 The Vilna Troupe in *Shabbsai Tsvi*. Act II (1926). Photograph by Iosif Berman. Harvard Library Judaica Division.

Fig. 4.27 The Vilna Troupe in *Shabbsai Tsvi*. Act II (1926). Photograph by Iosif Berman. Harvard Library Judaica Division.

Fig. 4.28 M. H. Maxy, Set design for *Shabbsai Tsvi*, Act III, (1960s). Ink and ink wash, silver, pencil, watercolour. 20 x 17.5 cm. Romanian Academy.

Fig. 4.29 The Vilna Troupe in *Shabbsai Tsvi*. Act III (1926). Photograph by Iosif Berman. Harvard Library Judaica Division.

Fig. 4.30 Programme for Josephs Buloff's Chicago revival of *Shabbsai Tsvi* (1927). Harvard Library Judaica Division.

Fig. 4.31 Joseph Buloff and Luba Kadison in *Shabbsai Tsvi* in Chicago (1927). Photographs by Matthews, Chicago. Harvard Library Judaica Division and Yivo Institute for Jewish Research.

Fig. 4.32a A comparison between the Sultan's hookah pipe in Maxy's sketch and on stage. Romanian Academy and Harvard Library Judaica Division. Details from figs. 4.20 and 4.24.

Fig. 4.32b A vase by Vespremie (left) illustrated in *Integral* (December 1926), and a vase by Maxy (right) illustrated in *Tipariņa literară* (January 1929).

Fig. 4.33 Traian Cornescu, Set design for *The Sentimental Mannequin*. Illustration from Ion Minulescu, *Manechinul sentimental* (București: Cultura națională, 1926).

Fig. 4.34 M. H. Maxy, Set design for *The Sentimental Mannequin*, Act I (1960s). Pencil, ink and watercolour. 14 x 20 cm. Romanian National Art Museum.

Fig. 4.35 Traian Cornescu, Set design for *The Sentimental Mannequin*, Act I. Illustration from Ion Minulescu, *Manechinul sentimental* (București: Cultura națională, 1926).

Fig. 4.36 M. H. Maxy, Set design for *The Sentimental Mannequin*, Act II (undated). Pencil, ink and watercolour. 21 x 25 cm. Romanian National Art Museum.

Fig. 4.37 M.H Maxy, Set design for *The Sentimental Mannequin*, Act II (1960s). Pencil, gouache, watercolour and ink. 17.5 x 23 cm. Romanian National Art Museum.

Fig. 4.38 The cover of *Integral*, no. 9 (December 1926), showing the selling exhibition at the Academy of Decorative Arts.

Fig. 4.39 Traian Cornescu, Set for *The Sentimental Mannequin*, Act II (January 1926). Unknown photographer. National Theatre Museum.

Fig. 4.40 Unknown designer, Set for *Anuța*, Act III (November 1925). Unknown photographer. National Theatre Museum.

Fig. 4.41 Sonia Delaunay's boutique on Pont Alexandre III during the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, Paris (1925).

Fig. 4.42 M. H. Maxy, Set design for *Man, Beast and Virtue*, Act I (1960s). Pencil, ink and watercolour. 18 x 23 cm. Romanian National Art Museum.

Fig. 4.43 The Vilna Troupe in *Man, Beast and Virtue*, Act I (1926). Unknown photographer. Romanian National Art Museum.

Fig. 4.44 M. H. Maxy, Sets for *Man, Beast and Virtue*. Illustrations from *Integral*, no. 10 (January 1926).

Fig. 4.45 M. H. Maxy, Set design for *Man, Beast and Virtue*, Act II (1960s). Pencil, ink and watercolour. 24 x 18.5 cm. Romanian National Art Museum.

Fig. 4.46 The Vilna Troupe in *Man, Beast and Virtue*, Act II (1926). Romanian National Art Museum.

Fig. 4.47 Details from photographs showing the selling exhibition at the Academy of Decorative Arts. The sold ('vândut') sign can be glimpsed inside the pot on the left. Romanian National Art Museum. Detail of Figs. 2.10a and 2.10b.

Fig. 4.48 M. H. Maxy, Set design for *Man, Beast and Virtue*, Act II (undated). Romanian National Art Museum.

Fig. 4.49 Alberto Cavalcanti's set design for Marcel L'Herbier's *L'Inhumaine* (1924).

Fig. 4.50 Fernand Léger on the set of Marcel L'Herbier's *L'Inhumaine* (1924).

Fig. 5.1a Dida Solomon by Victor Brauner in the avant-garde journal *Punct*, no. 12 (7 February 1925).

Fig. 5.1b Dida Solomon in a photograph from the late 1920s.

Fig. 5.2 M. H. Maxy, Letterhead for Dida Solomon's Caragiale Theatre (1927). National Archives of Romania.

Fig. 5.3 M. H. Maxy, Programme cover for Dida Solomon's Caragiale Theatre (1927). Location unknown.

Fig. 5.4 M. H. Maxy, Cover design for a brochure advertising Iacob Sternberg's Jüdische Volksbühne (1930). National Archives of Romania.

Fig. 5.5 The BITS production of *A Night in the Old Marketplace* (1930). Photograph by Iosif Berman (?). Romanian National Art Museum.

Fig. 5.6 The BITS production of *A Night in the Old Marketplace* (1930). Sternberg is on the far right. Photograph by Iosif Berman (?). Centre for the Study of Jewish History in Romania.

Fig. 5.7 The BITS production of *A Night in the Old Marketplace* (1930). Photograph by Iosif Berman (?). Centre for the Study of Jewish History in Romania.

Fig. 5.8 The BITS production of *A Night in the Old Marketplace* (1930). Photograph by Iosif Berman (?). Centre for the Study of Jewish History in Romania.

Fig. 5.9 The BITS production of *A Night in the Old Marketplace*, (1930). Photograph by Iosif Berman (?). Centre for the Study of Jewish History in Romania.

Fig. 5.10 The BITS production of *A Night in the Old Marketplace* (1930). Photograph by Iosif Berman. Centre for the Study of Jewish History in Romania.

Fig. 5.11 The BITS production of *A Night in the Old Marketplace* (1930). Photograph by Iosif Berman (?). Yivo Institute for Jewish Research.

Fig. 5.12 David Licht in the BITS production of *A Night in the Old Marketplace* (1930). Photograph by Foto-Nowak, Bucharest. Yivo Institute for Jewish Research.

Fig. 5.13 The BITS production of *A Night in the Old Marketplace* illustrated in *Adam*, no. 16 (February 1930).

Fig. 5.14 The BITS production of *A Night in the Old Marketplace* illustrated in *Adam*, no. 16 (February 1930).

Fig. 5.15 The BITS production of *A Night in the Old Marketplace* illustrated in *Adam*, no. 16 (February 1930).

Fig. 5.16 Flyer advertising the two BITS production on tour (1930). Yivo Institute for Jewish Research.

Fig. 5.17 Scenes from the Vilna Troupe's *A Night in the Old Marketplace*, Warsaw (1928). Photographs by Foto Dager. Yivo Institute for Jewish Research.

Fig. 5.18 The BITS production of *The Bewitched Taylor* (1930). Unknown photographer. Romanian National Art Museum.

Fig. 5.19 The BITS production of *The Bewitched Taylor* (1930). Unknown photographer. Centre for the Study of Jewish History in Romania.

Fig. 5.20 The BITS production of *The Bewitched Taylor* (1930). Unknown photographer. Centre for the Study of Jewish History in Romania.

Fig. 5.21 The BITS production of *The Bewitched Taylor* (1930). Unknown photographer. Centre for the Study of Jewish History in Romania.

Fig. 5.22 The BITS production of *The Bewitched Taylor* (1930). Unknown photographer. Centre for the Study of Jewish History in Romania.

Fig. 5.23 David Licht in the BITS production of *The Bewitched Taylor* (1930). Photograph by Foto-Nowak, Bucharest. Yivo Institute for Jewish Research.

Fig. 5.24 Programme for the music hall revue *Skotzl Kimt* (1933). Yivo Institute for Jewish Research.

Fig. 5.25 Dor, A scene from the revue *Skotzl Kimt*, illustrated in *Adam*, no. 64 (October 1933).

Fig. 5.26 Floria Capsali during a performance. Photograph printed in *Rampa* (22 May 1933).

ILLUSTRATIONS

Chapter 2



Fig. 2.1a Programme for a Festival of Jewish Romanian Writers and Artists (11 April 1925).
Harvard Library Judaica Division.

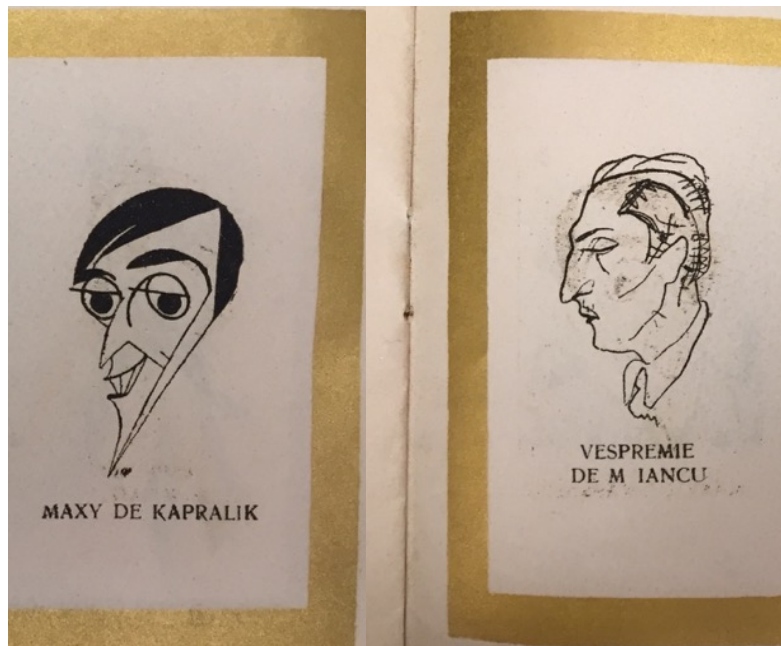


Fig. 2.1b The caricatures of Maxy (by Jacques Kapralik) and Vespremie (by Marcel Iancu) inside the festival programme.

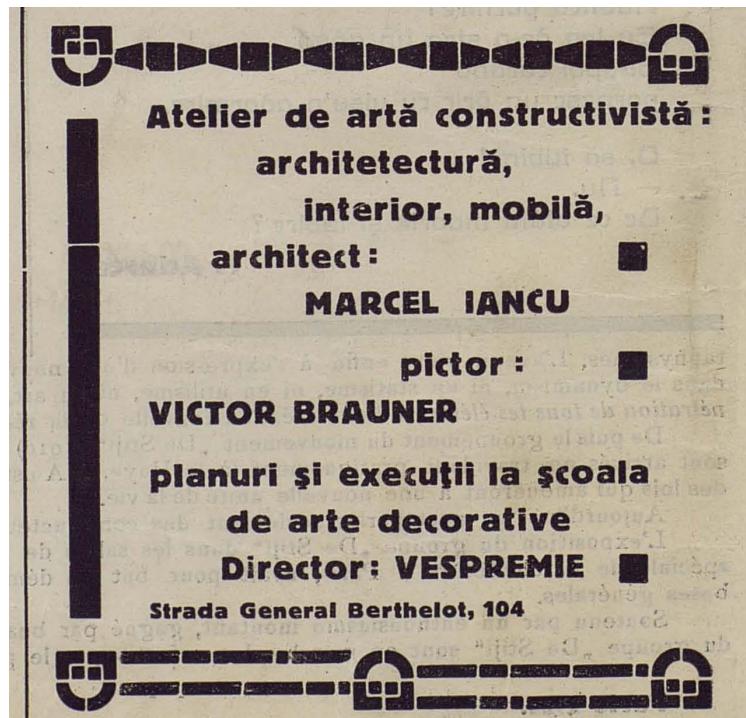


Fig. 2.2 Advertisement for an 'Atelier of constructivist art' in *Punct* (9 January 1925).



Fig. 2.3 Advertisement the 'Atelier of Integral Magazine' in *Integral* (October 1925).



Fig. 2.4 Andrei Vespremie with a primary school class on their annual school trip (1934). Yad Vashem.



Fig. 2.5 Andrei Vespremie (front row, first from left) with students and teachers from the Ezra gymnasium (1937). Museum of Jews in Latvia.



Fig. 2.6 Andrei Vespremie (front row, third from left) with students and teachers at the end of the school year (May 1939). Yad Vashem.



Fig. 2.7 Andrei Vespremie (front row, first from left) with the Latvian Jewish Artists Society (May 1928). Museum of Jews in Latvia.



Fig. 2.8 The memorial wall of the Riga Ghetto Museum.
 Photograph by the author, taken April 2017.



Fig. 2.9 Andrei Vespremie (back row, first from left) with teachers from the Ezra gymnasium (1930s). The Riga Ghetto Museum. Photograph by the author, taken April 2017.



Fig. 2.10a The Academy of Decorative Arts selling exhibition (1926).
Romanian National Art Museum.



Fig. 2.10b The Academy of Decorative Arts selling exhibition (1926).
Romanian National Art Museum.



Fig. 2.10c The Academy of Decorative Arts selling exhibition (1926).
Romanian National Art Museum.



Fig. 2.10d The Academy of Decorative Arts selling exhibition (1926).
Romanian National Art Museum.



Fig. 2.11 Staff and apprentices of the Academy of Decorative Arts (October 1926). In the middle row, third from left, is Mela Maxy, then Vespremie with Liana Maxy, and M. H. Maxy). Romanian National Art Museum.



Fig. 2.12 The patron and staff of the Academy of Decorative Arts (October 1926). Front row from left to right: Maxy, Mrs. Vespremie, Mrs. Maxy, Fischer-Galați, Vespremie, Iancu and Maur. Private collection.



Fig. 2.13a The Fanny and Liviu Rebreanu Memorial House Museum.
Photo by the author, taken March 2017.



Fig. 2.13b The Fanny and Liviu Rebreanu Memorial House Museum.
Photo by the author, taken March 2017.



Fig. 2.14a-b The Ion Minulescu and Claudia Millian Memorial House Museum.
Photos by the author, taken June 2017.

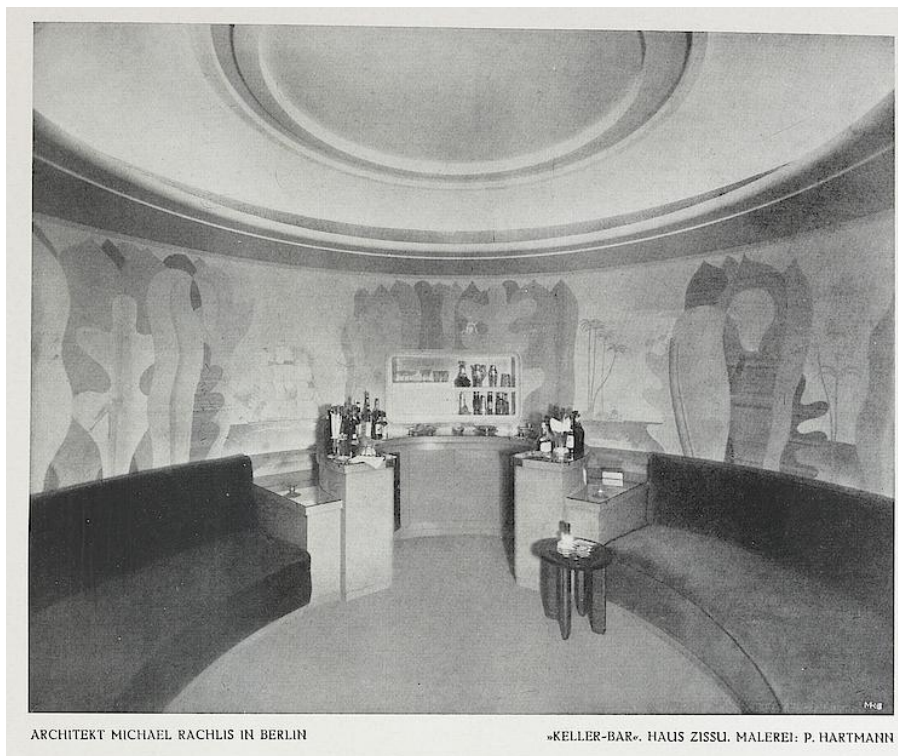


Fig. 2.15 The Ion Minulescu collection (1960s).
Colecția Ion Minulescu (București: Arta Grafică, 1968).



MICHAEL RACHLIS-BERLIN. »BLICK IN DIE MARMOR-HALLE, HAUS ZISSU«

Fig. 2.16a A. L. Zissu's Berlin home by architect Michael Rachlis in *Innendekoration* (April 1930).



ARCHITEKT MICHAEL RACHLIS IN BERLIN

»KELLER-BAR«, HAUS ZISSU. MALEREI: P. HARTMANN

Fig. 2.16b A.L. Zissu's Berlin home by architect Michael Rachlis in *Innendekoration* (April 1930).

artele decorative
academie de artă
modernă aplicată

prezintă duminică 4 noembrie
ora 11 a. m. în saloanele din
strada câmpineanu no. 17,
creațiunile pictorului m. h. maxy
în domeniul interiorului modern.

Fig. 2.17 Advertisement for the Academy of Decorative Arts
in *Tiparnița literară* (October 1928).



Fig. 2.18 Interior by Maxy in *Tiparnița literară* (January 1929).



Fig. 2.19 The decorative arts section in the Romanian pavilion at the Barcelona International Exhibition (1929). *La Roumanie à l'Exposition Internationale de Barcelone 1929*, exh. cat. (Barcelona: J. Horta, 1929).



Fig. 2.20 The trade and craft schools section in the Romanian pavilion at the Barcelona International Exhibition, 1929. *La Roumanie à l'Exposition Internationale de Barcelone 1929*, exh. cat. (Barcelona: J. Horta, 1929).

Chapter 3

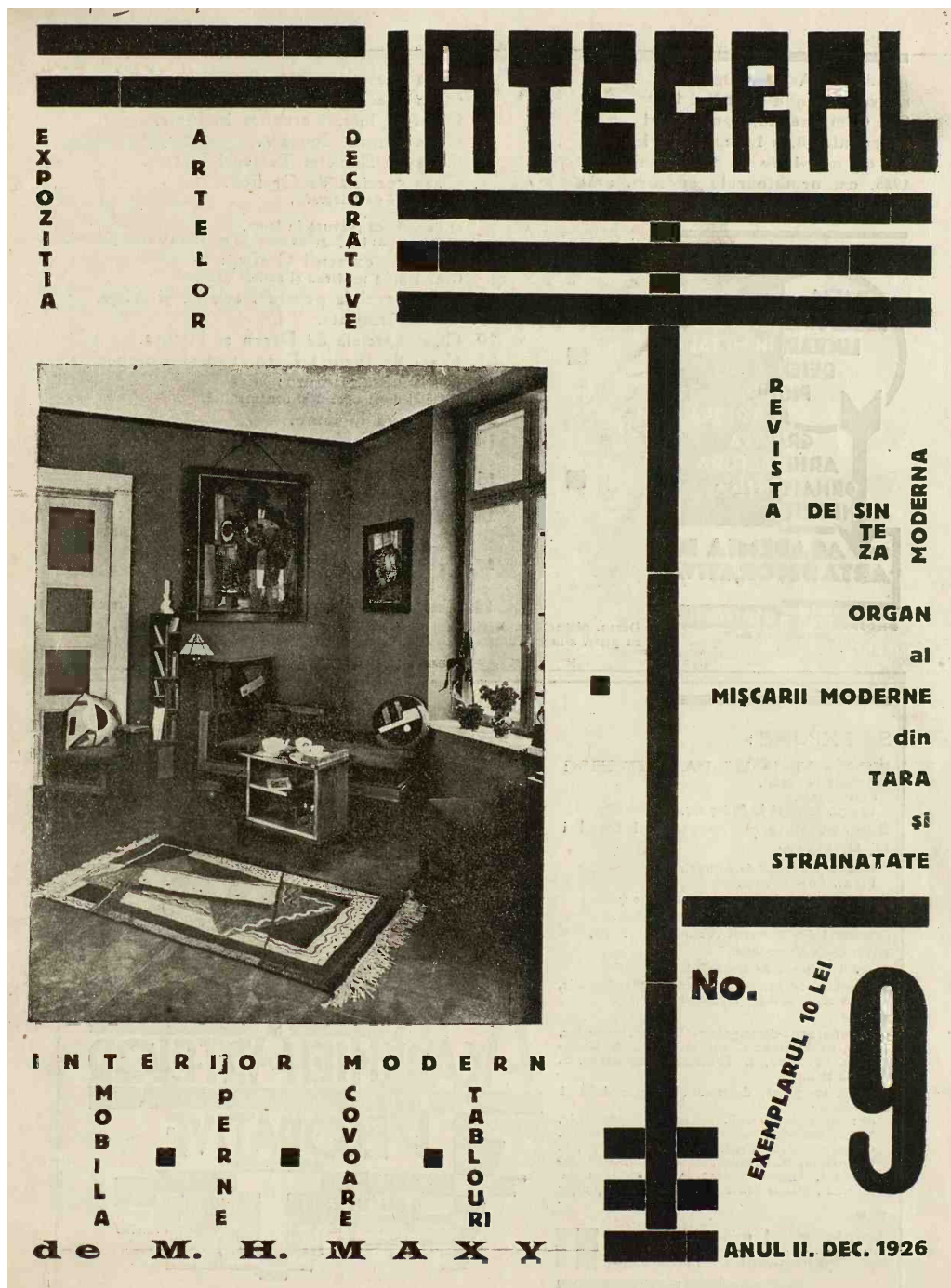


Fig. 3.1 Cover of *Integral* (December 1926).



Fig. 3.2 A. Vespremie, vase illustrated in *Integral* (December 1926).



Fig. 3.3 M. H. Maxy, vase (undated).
Brăila Museum.



Fig. 3.4 M. H. Maxy, vase illustrated in *Tiparnița literară* (January 1929).



Fig. 3.5 M. H. Maxy, bowl (undated). Brăila Museum.



Fig. 3.6 M. H. Maxy, bowl (undated). Brăila Museum.



Fig. 3.7 M. H. Maxy or A. Vespremie, bowl (undated).
Romanian National Art Museum.



Fig. 3.8 M. H. Maxy, bowl (undated).
Ion Minulescu and Claudia Millian Memorial House Museum.



Figs. 3.9 and 3.10 M. H. Maxy or A. Vespremie, two trays (undated).
Ion Minulescu and Claudia Millian Memorial House Museum.



Fig. 3.11 M. H. Maxy or A. Vespremie, bowl (undated).
The Ion Minulescu and Claudia Millian Memorial House Museum.



Fig. 3.12 The Academy of Decorative Arts selling exhibition (1926). Detail of Fig. 2.10a.

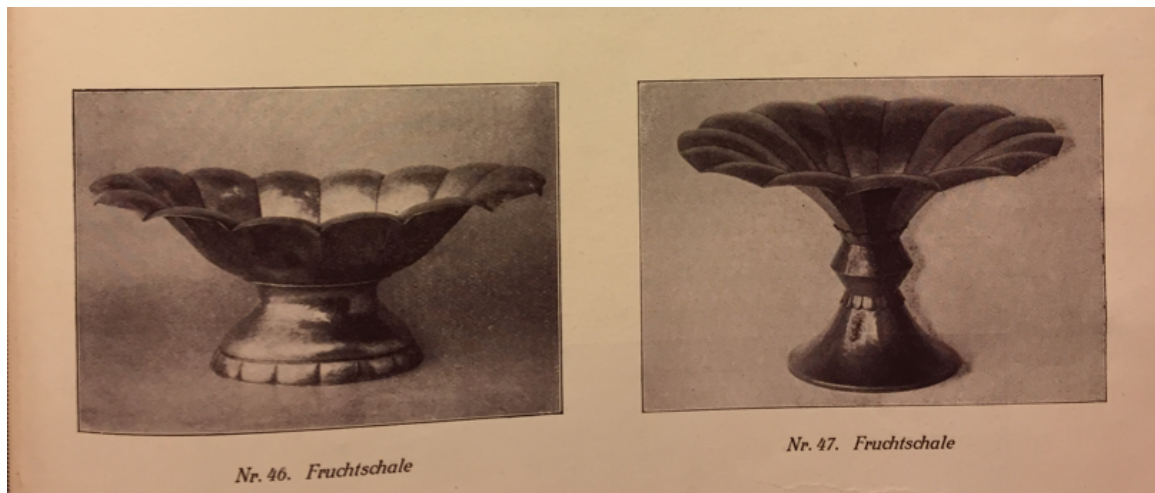


Fig. 3.13 A. Vespremie (?), two bowls illustrated in *Farbe und Form* (December 1923).

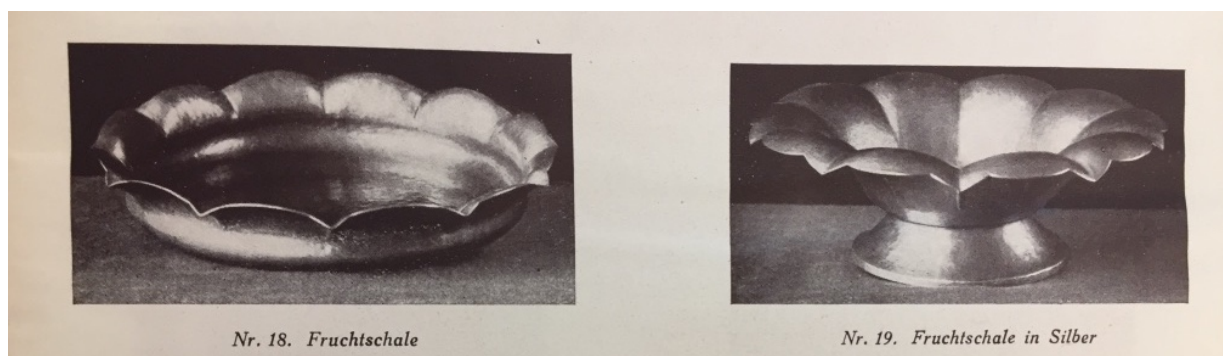


Fig. 3.14 A. Vespremie (?), tray and bowl illustrated in *Farbe und Form*, (November 1921).



Fig. 3.15 The Schule Reimann display at the Frankfurt Spring Trade Exhibition 1924, illustrated in *Farbe und Form* (October 1924).



Fig. 3.16 A. Vespremie, tray (c. 1924-27).
The Ion Minulescu and Claudia Millian Memorial House Museum.



Fig. 3.17 A. Vespremie, openwork candelabrum illustrated in *Farbe und Form* (December 1923).



Fig. 3.18 A. Vespremie, openwork candelabrum from the Academy of Decorative Arts selling exhibition (1926). Detail of Fig. 2.10d.



Fig. 3.19 A. Vespremie, openwork radiator cover from The Academy of Decorative Arts selling exhibition (1926). Detail of Fig. 2.10c.



Fig. 3.20 A. Vespremie, openwork jewellery (c.1924-27). Private collection.



Fig. 3.21 A. Vespremie, openwork bookmark (c. 1927). Private collection.



Fig. 3.22 A. Vespremie or Schule Reimann workshop, openwork and ivory items illustrated in *Farbe und Form* (November 1921 and December 1923).



Fig. 3.23 A. Vespremie, openwork items from the Academy of Decorative Arts selling exhibition (1926). The label with Vespremie's name can be seen in the first image. Details of Fig. 2.10d.



Fig. 3.24 Dagobert Peche, ivory handbell and comb (1920).

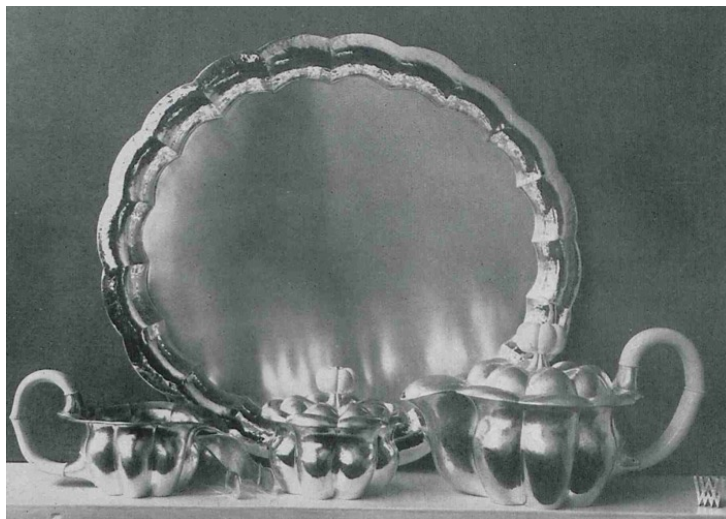


Fig. 3.25 Joseff Hoffmann, metalwork items (1922).

EXPOZIȚIA
ACADEMIEI ARTELOR DECORATIVE

Strada Câmpineanu No. 17, Etaj 1

De sub patronajul D-lor: Miniștru Gr. Trancu-Iași, Ion Minulescu, Romulus Voinescu, Al. Tzigara-Samurcaș, Aristide Blank, Jean Vasilescu-Vâljean, Isabella Sadoveanu, Gh. Murnu, Jean Al. Steriade, G. Cufescu-Stork, Ion Pilat și alții.

DESCHIDEREA

DUMINICA 24 OCTOMBRIE 1926, orele 11 a. m.

Vernisagiul, Sâmbătă 23 Octombrie 1926. ora 5 p. m.

SE VOR EXPUNE:

Obiecte în metal, Cărți legate, Lucrări în fildeș, Batik, Ceramică modernă, Covoare, Perne, Dantelă modernă, Cristaluri, Lucrări în lemn, Jucării pentru copii, Lucrări în piele, Mobile modernă, Litografie, aqua-forte, gravura în lemn, Desenuri, Pictura, Sculptura.

Lucrări originale, proiecte și schițe de artiștii:

Nina Arbore, L. Bălăcescu-Demetriade, Arhitect W. Beck, V. Brauner, C. Cufescu-Stork, Olga Greceanu, H. Mandel, Marigo-Brăila, M. H. Maxy, Medrea, Corneliu Mihailescu, Sirova Medrea, S. Maur, N. Pfeiffer, Arhitect Naumescu, Dagowert Peche †, Merica Râmnicianu, J. Al. Steriadi, D-na Stela Șerbănescu-Șăineanu, Mathis Teutsch, A. Vespremie.

Obiectele expuse sunt executate în Atelierele Academiei sub conducerea D-lor șefi de ateliere B. Cofariu, E. Bonyhay, maistră Didina Ștefănescu, maestru tâmplar M. Dumitrescu, M. Ghiulay și alții.

Fig. 3.26 Poster advertising the opening of the exhibition of the Academy of Decorative Arts (October 1926). Private collection.

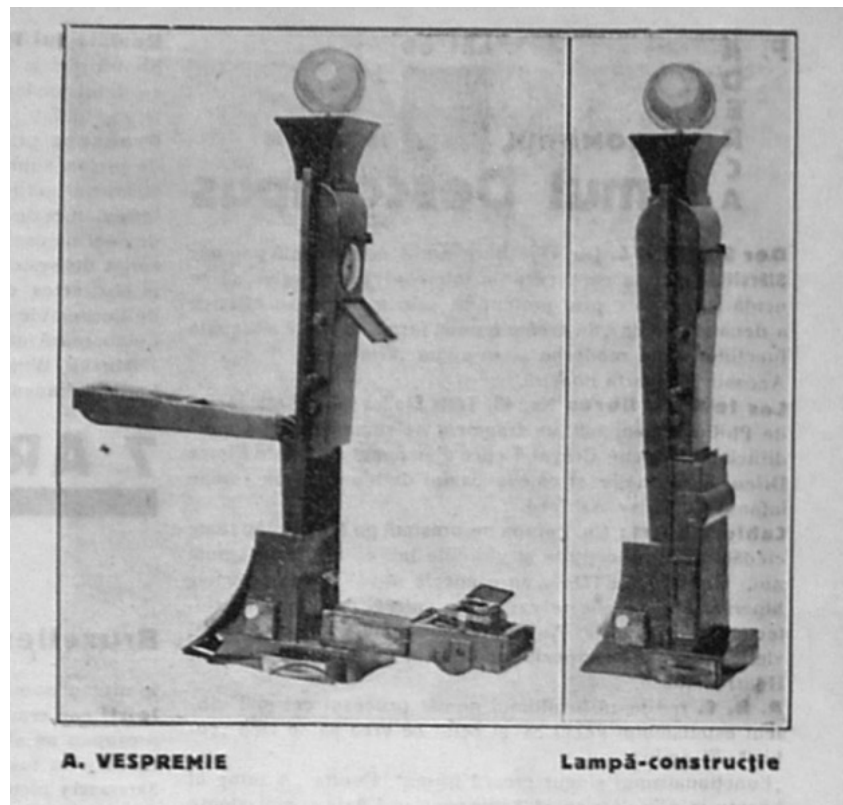


Fig. 3.27 A. Vespremie, multi-functional lamp illustrated in *Contimporanul* (July 1926).

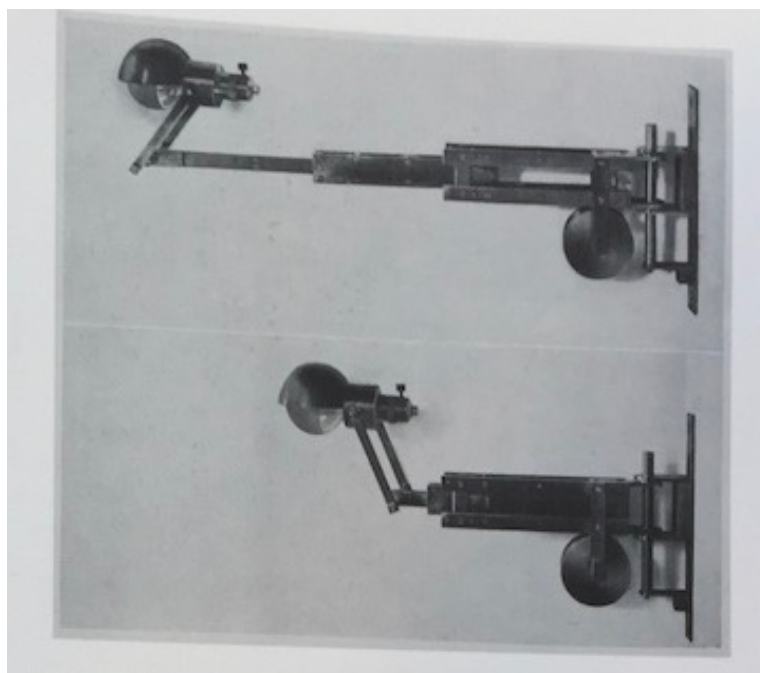


Fig. 3.28 Carl Jacob Jucker, extendable lamp illustrated in *Staatliches Bauhaus Weimar 1919-1923*, exh. cat. (Weimar; München: Bauhausverlag, 1923).



Fig. 3.29 Two lamps from the Academy of Decorative Arts selling exhibition (1926). The lamp on the left is probably by Hans Mattis-Teutsch, as is the sculpture on the right-hand side of the cabinet. The lamp on the right is by Vespremie. Detail of Fig. 2.10d.



Fig. 3.30 H. Mattis-Teutsch (?), lamp from the Academy of Decorative Arts selling exhibition (1926). Detail of Fig. 2.10c.



Fig. 3.31 H. Mattis-Teutsch (?), lamp (undated). Private collection.

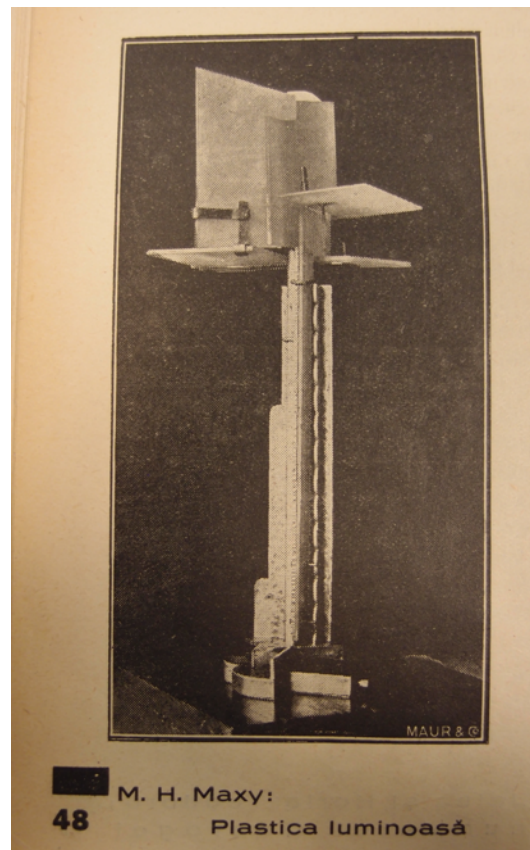


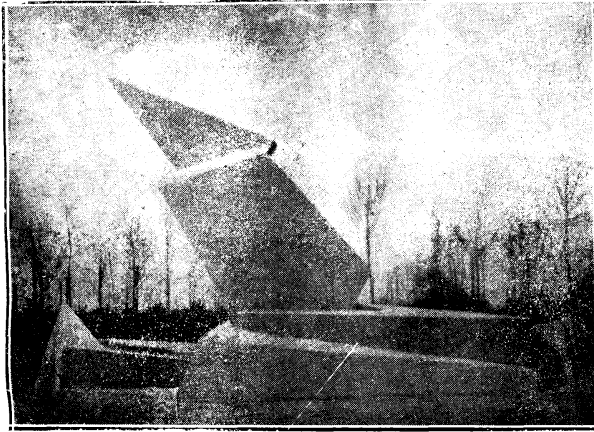
Fig. 3.32 M. H. Maxy, lamp illustrated in *Tipanița literară* (November 1928).



Fig. 3.33 M. H. Maxy, lamp illustrated in *Tipanița literară* (January 1929).

Leti... gApare S a m b a t a

CONTIMPORANUL



narea omului e o lume. Până atunci crezuseră că au spinare pentru că trebuie să aibă ceva pe dindărăt. Tot astfel monedele, au un revers. O numiau, dosul. Cel mult putea servi să ducă poveri. Simțiră cât de bogată e firea. Desălarea care îi cuprinse, nu fu unul din acele rele care se abat pe o regiune a trupului și o îndurerează în întregime. Ci se conduse cu o mare delicatete. Nu părăsia locul pe care-l alesese și de îndată își lărgia moșia și radia asupra împrejurimilor. Se apuca de mușchi, știa să descopere nerv după nerv, știa să-i creieze, fără îndoială, acolo unde nu erau nervi, căci simțea că spinarea lor crește și se populează cu mii de făpturi tipătoare. Se apuca de oase, de acea substanță pe care o crezuseră pietroasă, a oaselor, și pietrele însăși se însurlețeau sub pașii ei. Venia în atingere cu regiunile adânci, înconjura stomacul, îl supraveghea ca un stăpân, îi impunea disciplina ei de fier, ca nu putea rezista, și încerca să scape, într'un groaznic sughit. Părea ca trebuia să-l verse.

Cel din urmă care încă se împotriva mai avu curajul să zică:

-- Pe vremuri aveam o altfel de spinare.

Dar cellalt nu putu decât să-i răspunda:

-- Sunt bolnav, taci din gură.

Cunoscuseră acele rivalități cum exista între briganzi, avuseră adesea de dușman pe câte unul din oamenii aceia cari samănă spaimă în jurul

Fig. 3.34 Walter Gropius, Monument to the March Dead (1920-22), illustrated in *Contimporanul* (April 1923).



Fig. 3.35 M. H. Maxy, small container (undated). Brăila Museum.

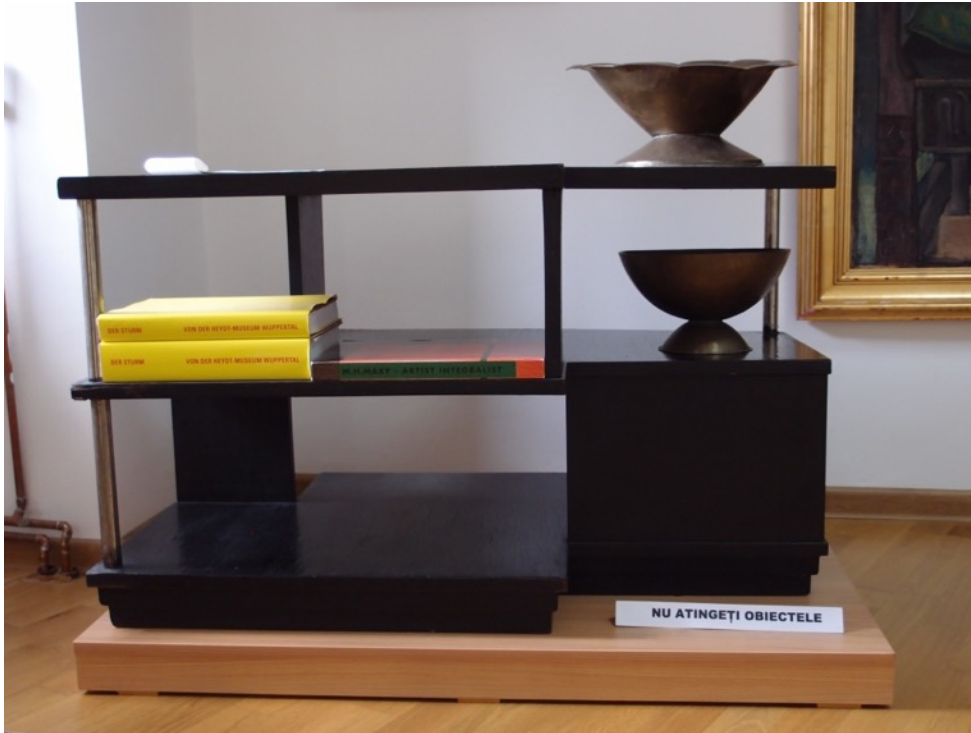


Fig. 3.36 M. H. Maxy, bookcase (undated). Brăila Museum.



Fig. 3.37 M. H. Maxy, Table with removable tray and teapot (undated). Brăila Museum.



Fig. 3.38 M. H. Maxy, ashtray (undated). Brăila Museum.

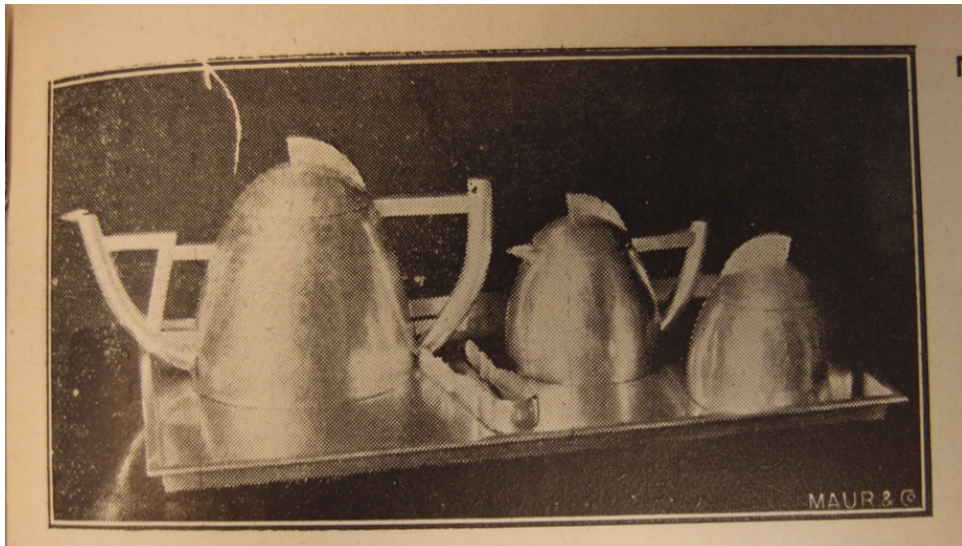


Fig. 3.39 M. H. Maxy, tea set illustrated in *Tipanița literară* (November 1928).



Fig. 3.40 M. H. Maxy, sugar tongs (undated). Brăila Museum.



Fig. 3.41 M. H. Maxy, tobacco box (undated.) The Fanny and Liviu Rebreanu Memorial House Museum.



Fig. 3.42 A. Vespremie, small container (undated). Private collection.



Fig. 3.43 A. Vespremie, small container from the Academy of Decorative Arts selling exhibition (1926). Detail of Fig. 2.10d.

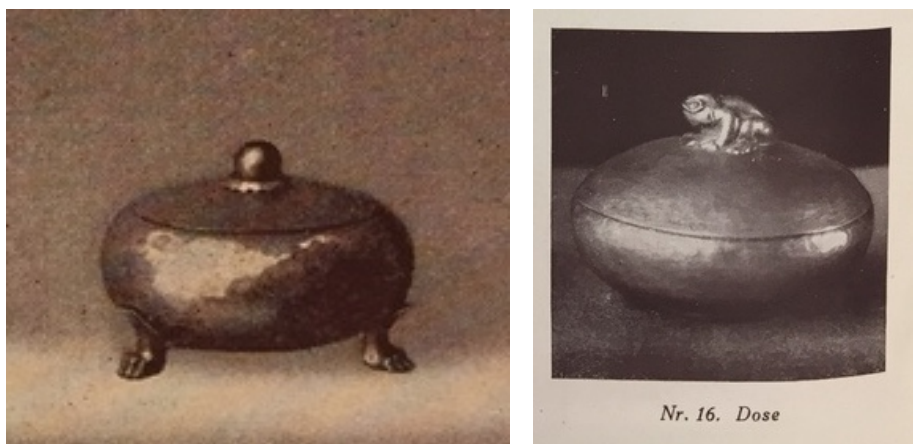


Fig. 3.44 A. Vespremie or Schule Reimann workshop, small containers illustrated in *Farbe und Form* (December 1923 and November 1921).



Fig. 3.45 M. H. Maxy, carpet from the Academy of Decorative Arts selling exhibition (1926). Details of Fig. 2.10a, also appears in Figs. 2.10b, 2.11, and 2.12.



Fig. 3.46 M. H. Maxy, carpet (c.1926). Brăila Museum.



Fig. 3.47 M. H. Maxy, carpet (undated). Brăila Museum.



Fig. 3.48 M. H. Maxy, carpet (undated). Private collection.

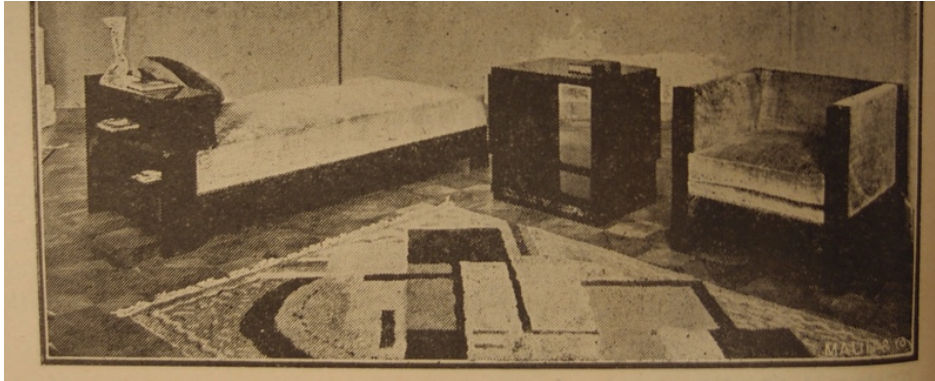


Fig. 3.49 M. H. Maxy, carpet illustrated in *Tiparnița literară* (January 1929).
Detail of Fig. 2.19.



Fig. 3.50 M. H. Maxy, carpet design (undated). Private collection.



Fig. 3.51 M. H. Maxy, carpet (undated). Brăila Museum.



Fig. 3.52 M. H. Maxy, carpet (undated). Private collection.

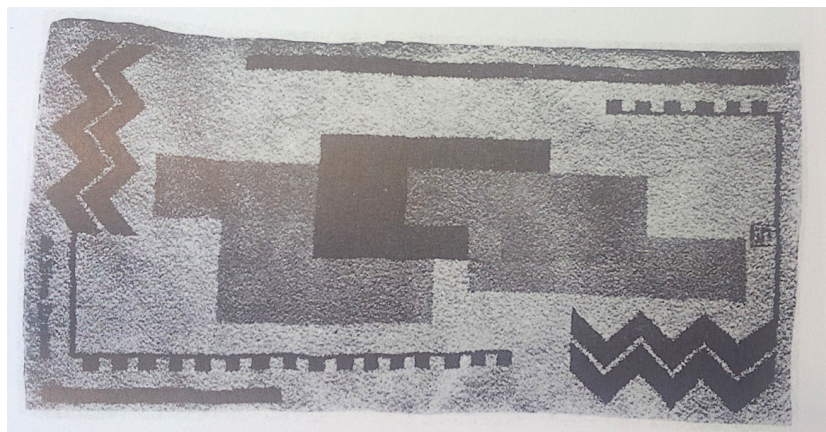


Fig. 3.53 Ivan da Silva Bruhns, carpet (c.1925-6).



Fig. 3.54 M. H. Maxy, carpet (undated). Private collection.

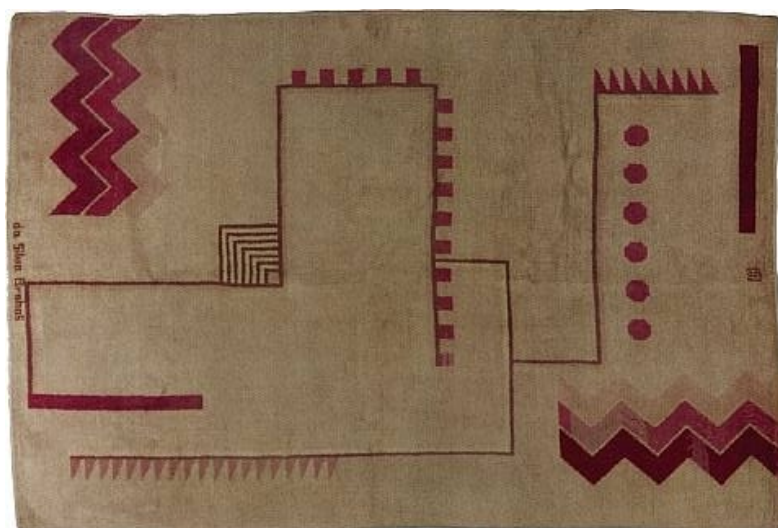


Fig. 3.55 Ivan da Silva Bruhns, carpet (c.1925).



Fig. 3.56 M. H. Maxy, cushions from the Academy of Decorative Arts selling exhibition (1926). Detail of Fig. 2.10a.



Fig. 3.57 M. H. Maxy, cushion (undated). Private collection.



Fig. 3.58 M. H. Maxy, cushion (undated). Private collection.



Fig. 3.59 M. H. Maxy, cushion (undated). Private collection.

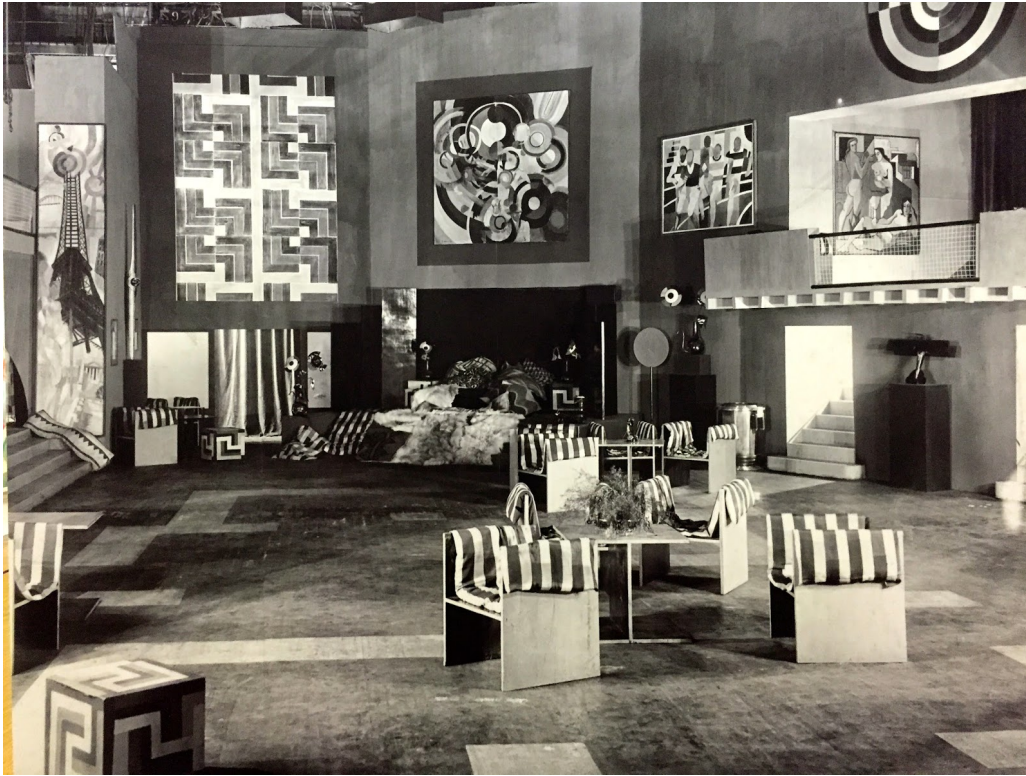


Fig. 3.60 Apartment designed by Robert Mallet-Stevens and decorated by Sonia Delaunay for the film *Le P'tit Parigot* (1926).



Fig. 3.61 Boudoir alcove designed by Robert Mallet-Stevens and decorated by Sonia Delaunay for the film *Le Vertige* (1926).

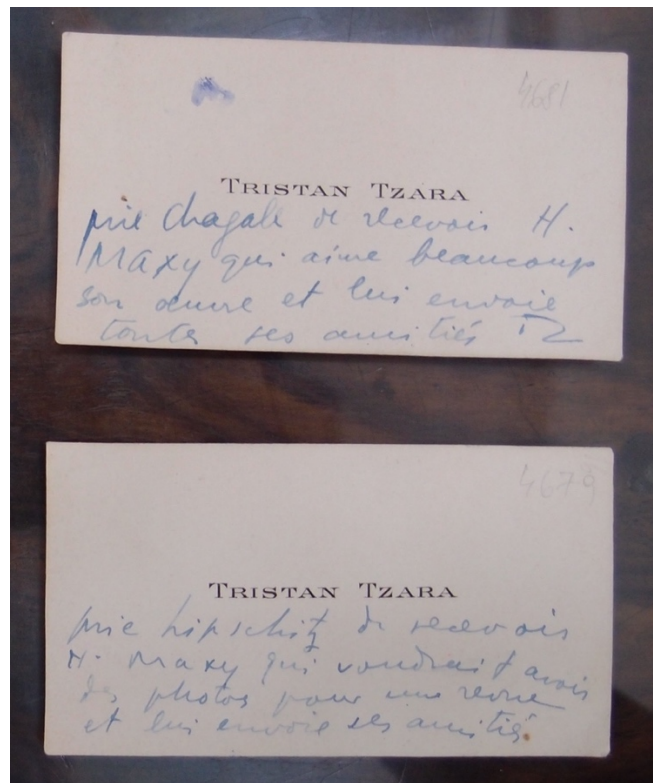


Fig. 3.62 Two of Tristan Tzara's calling cards with handwritten notes asking Marc Chagall and Jacques Lipschitz to receive Maxy (c.1926).
 Romanian National Art Museum.

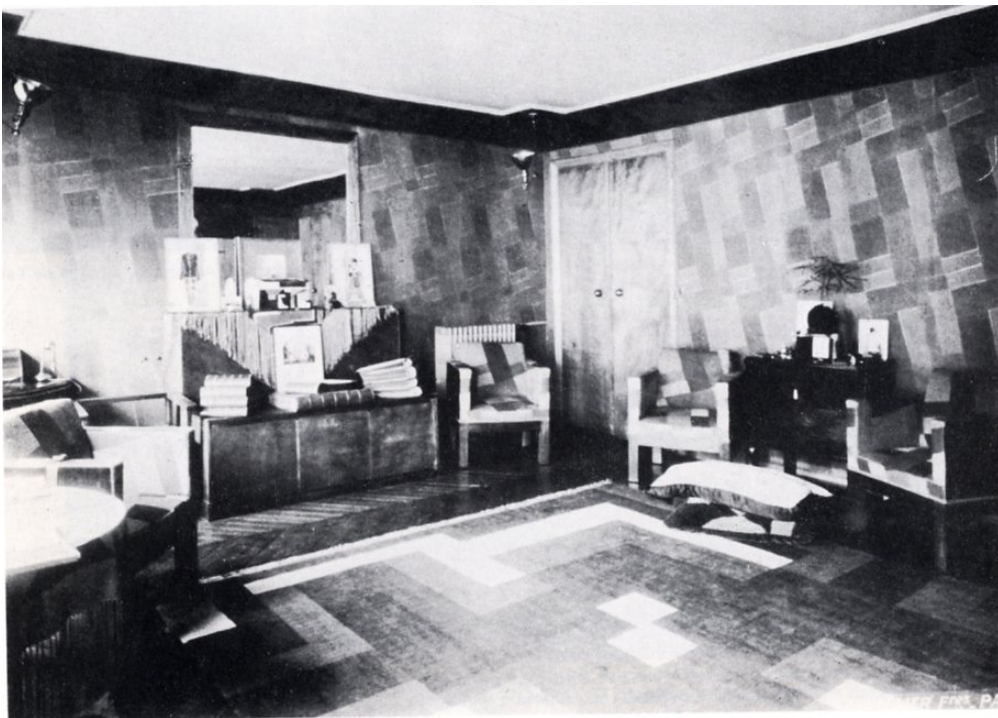


Fig. 3.63 Sonia Delaunay's living room in her Paris apartment (c.1925).



Fig. 3.64 M. H. Maxy, binding for Anatole France, *Oeuvres complètes: Les désirs de Jean Servien, Le livre de mon ami*, vol. III (c.1928-9). Private collection.

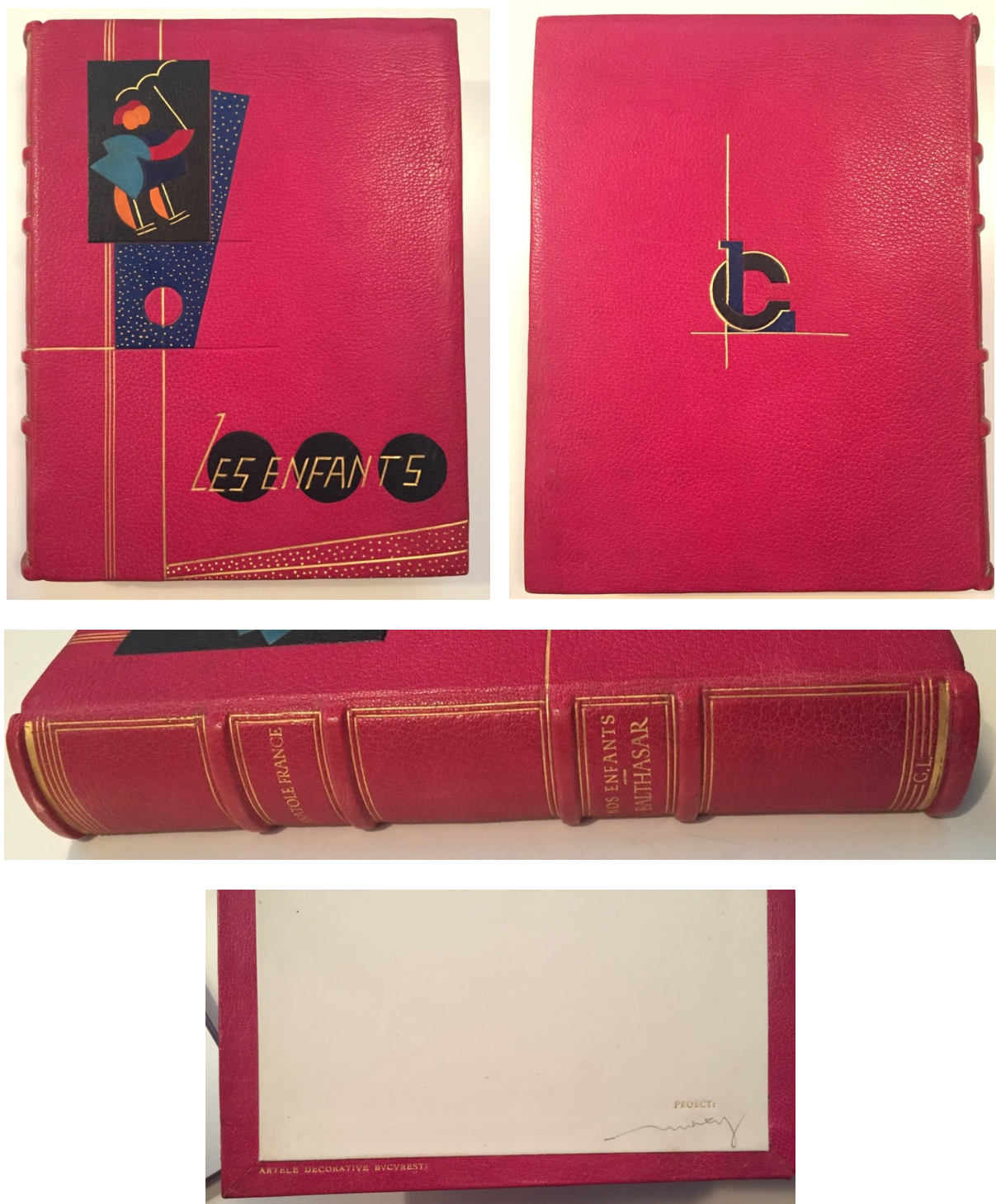


Fig. 3.65 M. H. Maxy, binding for Anatole France, *Oeuvres complètes: Nos enfants, Balthazar* vol. IV (c.1928-9). Private collection.

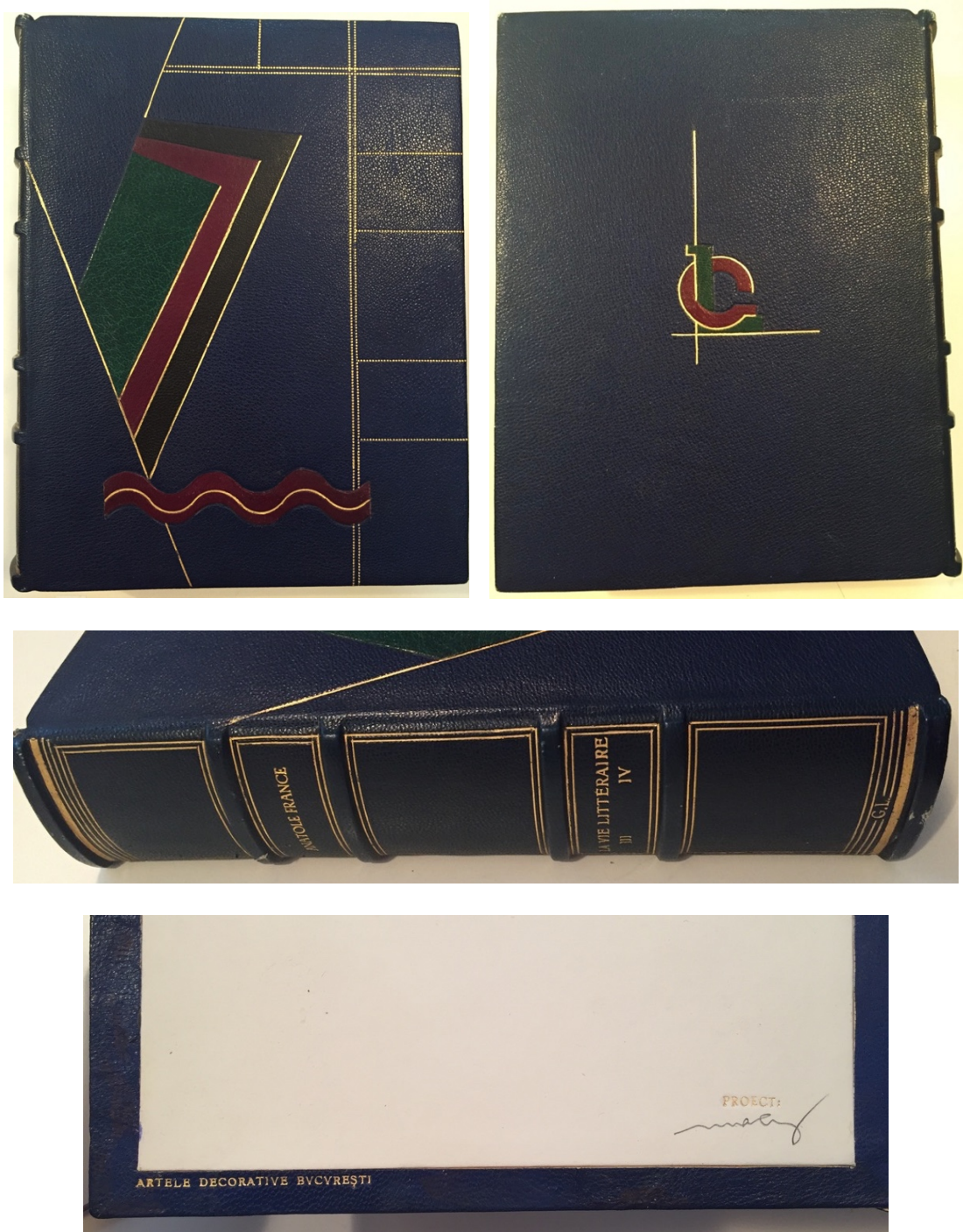


Fig. 3.66 M. H. Maxy, binding for Anatole France, *Oeuvres complètes: La vie littéraire*, vol. VII (c.1928-9). Private collection.

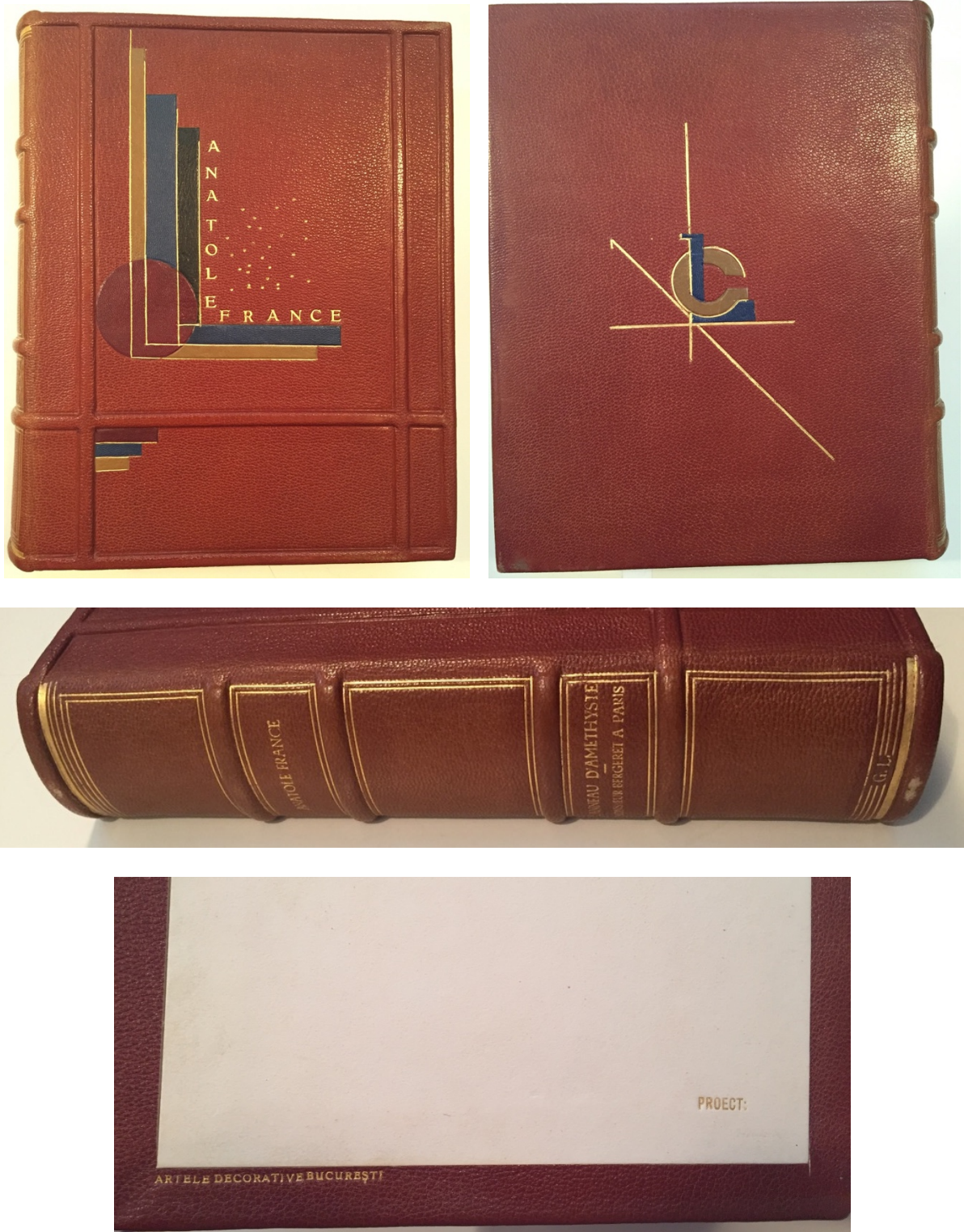


Fig. 3.67 M. H. Maxy, binding for Anatole France, *Oeuvres complètes: Histoire contemporaine, L'Anneau d'amethyste, Monsieur Bergeret à Paris*, vol. XII (c.1928-9). Private collection.

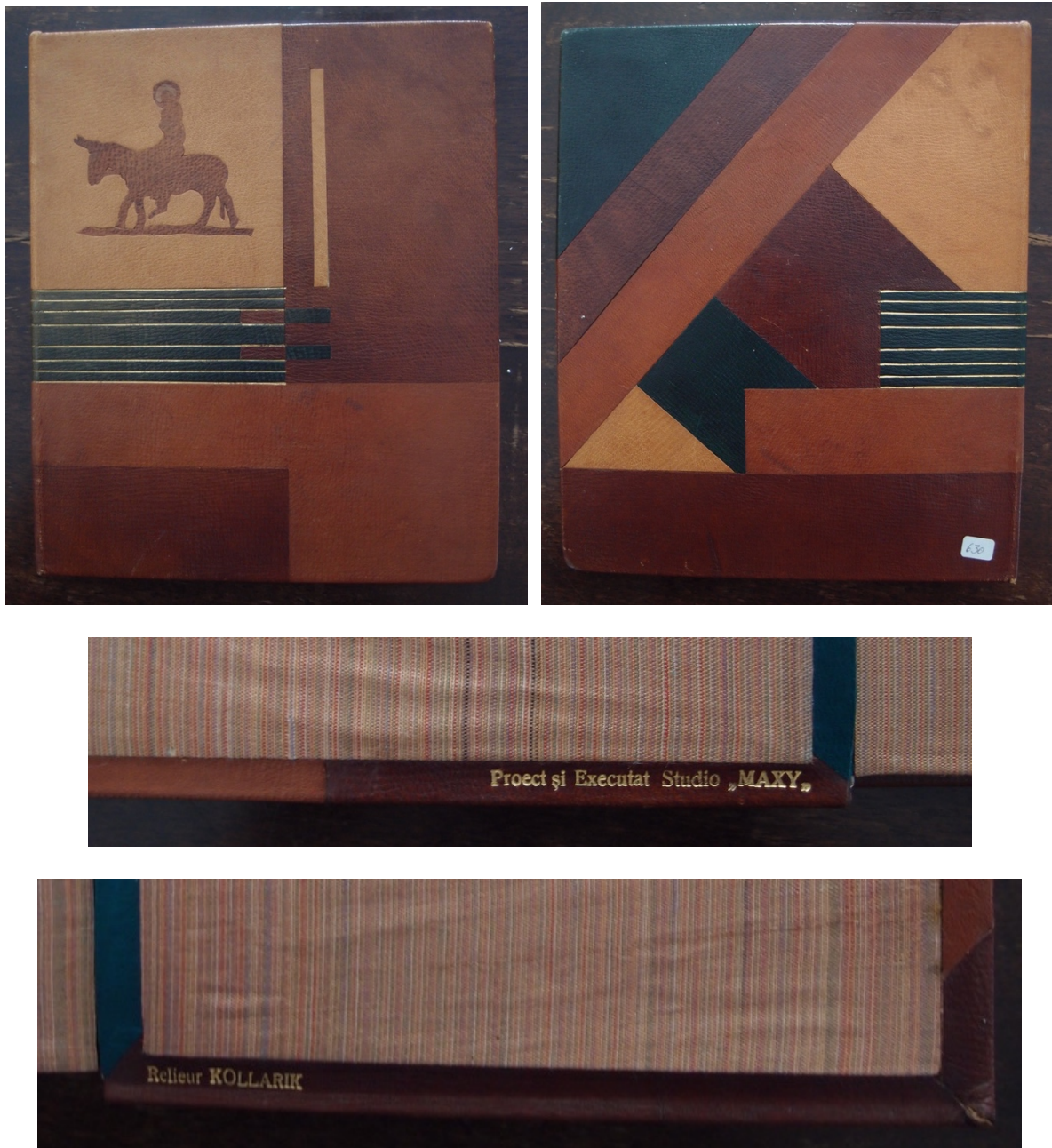


Fig. 3.68 M. H. Maxy, binding for Ion Minulescu, *Strofe pentru toată lumea* (c.1930-35).
The Ion Minulescu and Claudia Millian Memorial House Museum.



Fig. 3.69 A. Vespremie (?), binding for Ion Minulescu, *Romanțe pentru mai târziu* (c.1924-7). The Ion Minulescu and Claudia Millian Memorial House Museum. Comparison with an advertisement by Vespremie printed in *Contimporanul* (March 1926).



Fig. 3.70 A. *Vespremie* (?), binding for Ion Minulescu, *De vorbă cu mine însu-mi* (c.1924-7).
The Ion Minulescu and Claudia Millian Memorial House Museum.

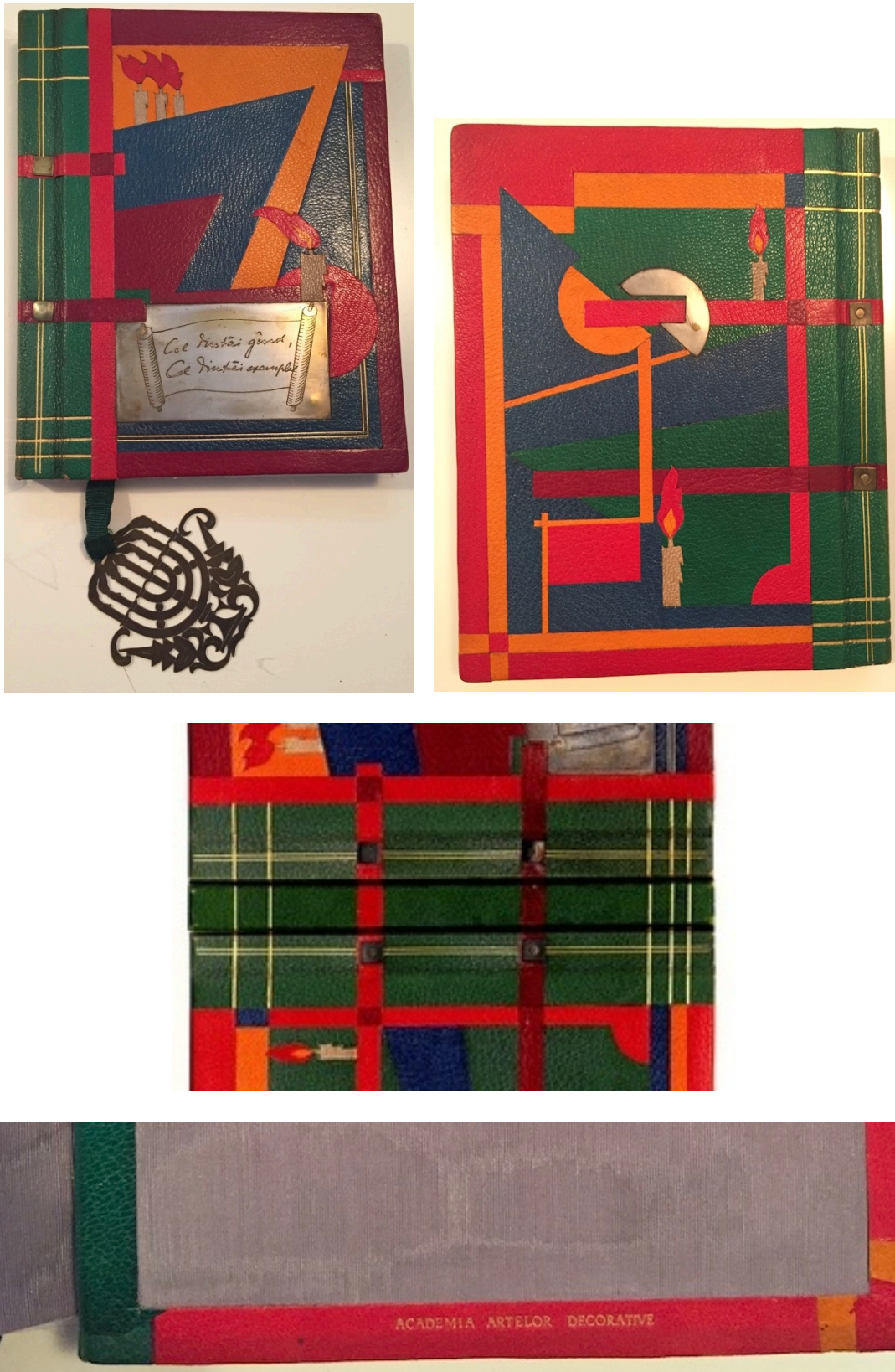
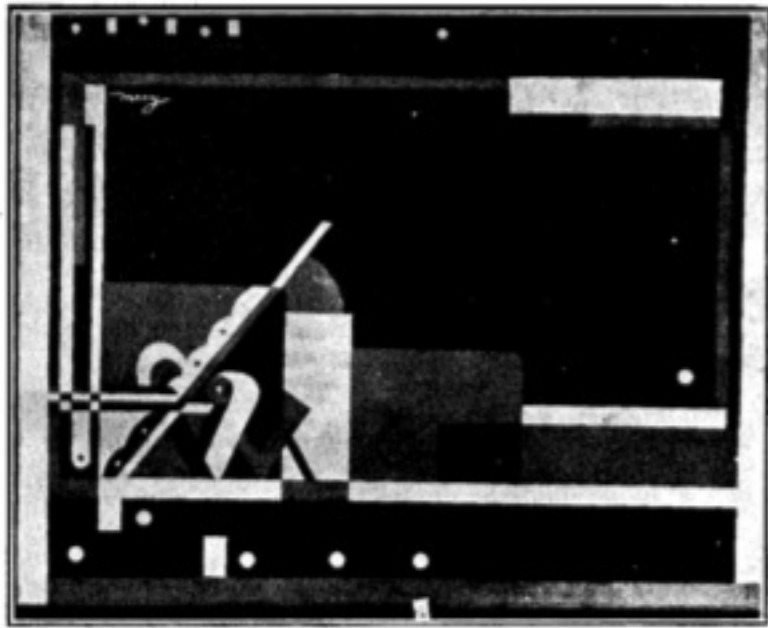


Fig. 3.71 M. H. Maxy and A. Vespremie, binding and metal bookmark for A. L. Zissu, *Spondania unui candelabru* (c.1926-7). Private collection.



M. H. Maxy: copertă de album.

Fig. 3.72 M. H. Maxy, binding for an album printed in *Contimporanul* (January 1929).

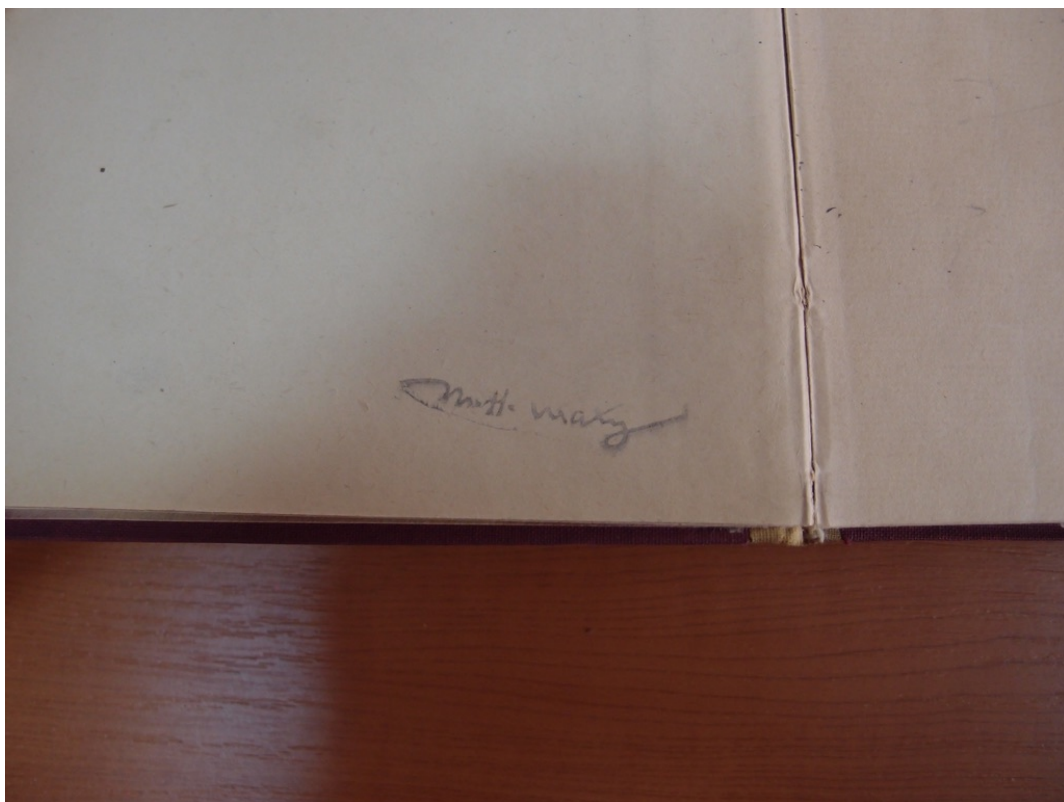


Fig. 3.73 Stamp with Maxy's signature found inside several volumes in the Brăila Museum collection.



Fig. 3.74 M. H. Maxy (?), binding for Ion Călugăru, *Paradisul statistic* (undated). Brăila Museum.



Fig. 3.75 Maxy's illustrations for Ion Călugăru, *Paradisul statistic* reproduced in *Integral* (January 1927).



Fig. 3.76 M. H. Maxy (?), binding and slipcase for Ion Călugăru, *Paradisul statistic*, made for A. L. Zissu (c.1926-7). Private collection.



Fig. 3.77 M. H. Maxy, binding for Maurice Raynal, *Anthologie de la peinture en France de 1906 à nos jours* (undated). Brăila Museum.



Figs. 3.78 and 3.79 M. H. Maxy (?), bindings for Gustave Coquiote, *Cubistes, futuristes, passésistes* and Jean Cocteau, *Poésie* (both undated). Brăila Museum.



Fig. 3.80 A. Vespremie, design for a brochure advertising the educational programme of the Academy of Decorative Arts (November 1924). Latvia State Historical Archives.



Fig. 3.81 A. Vespremie, design for an advertisement printed in *Contimporanul* (March 1926).



Fig. 3.82 M. Hertwig, logo designs illustrated in *Farbe und Form* (May 1924).

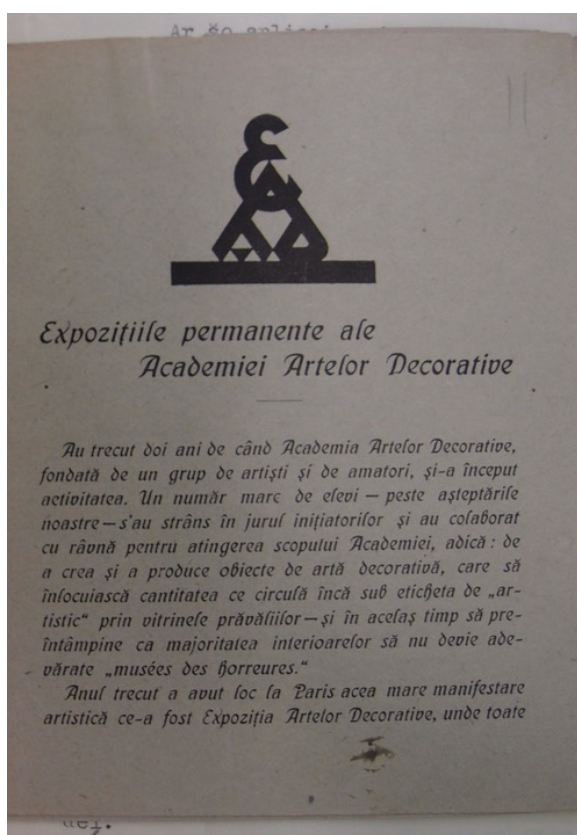
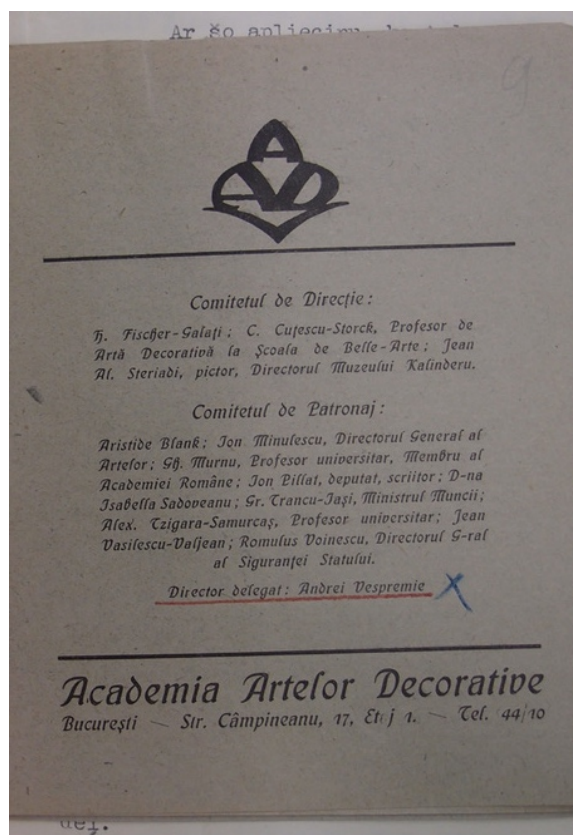


Fig. 3.83 A. Vesprenie, design for a brochure advertising the Academy (October 1926).
Latvia State Historical Archives.

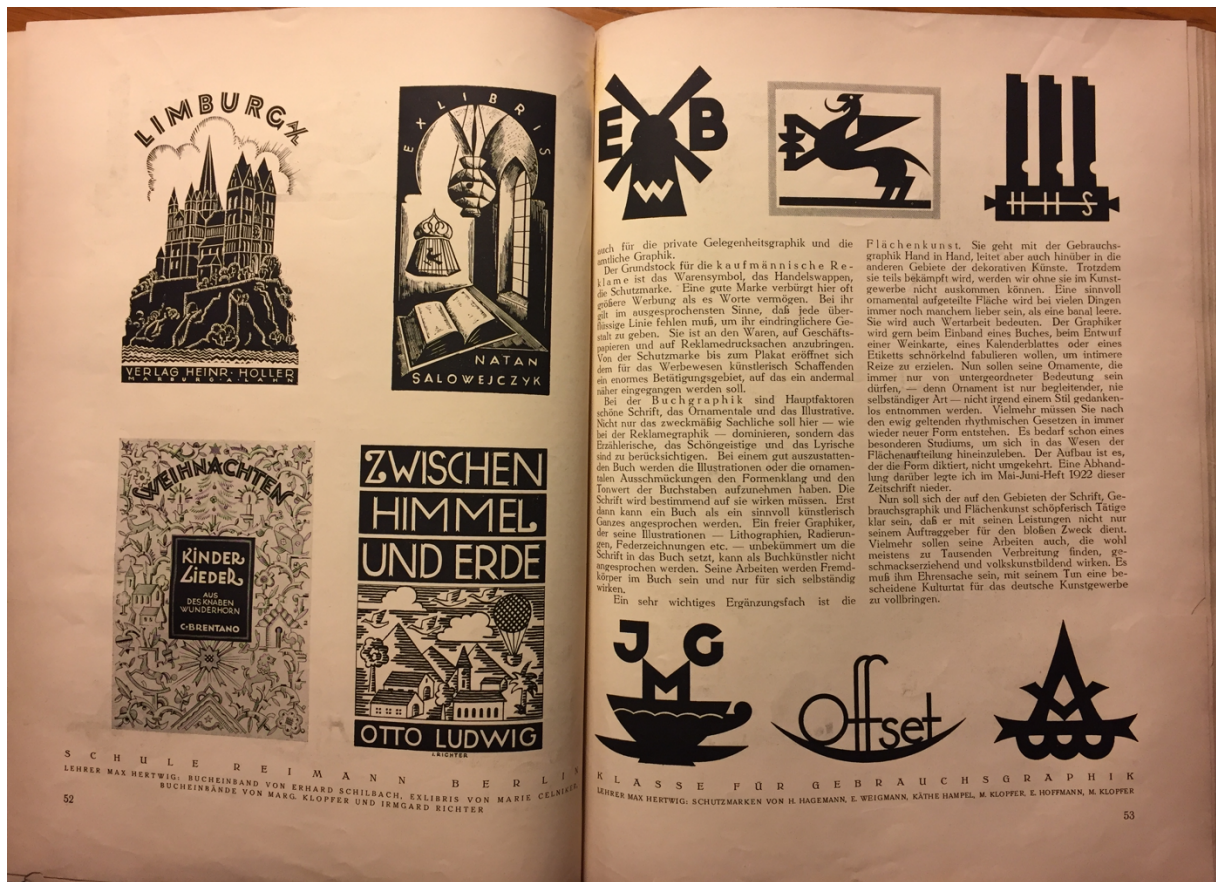


Fig. 3.84 Bookplates and logos designed by Max Hertwig's students at the Schule Reimann, printed in *Farbe und Form* (April 1926).

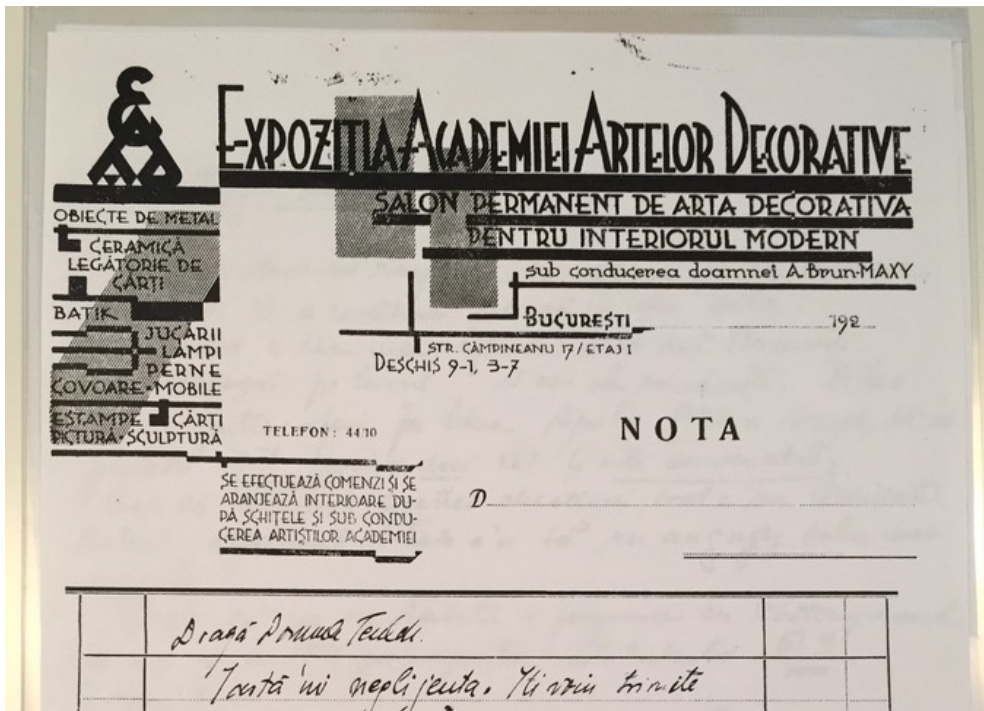


Fig. 3.85 A. Vespremie, letterhead design for the Academy (1926).

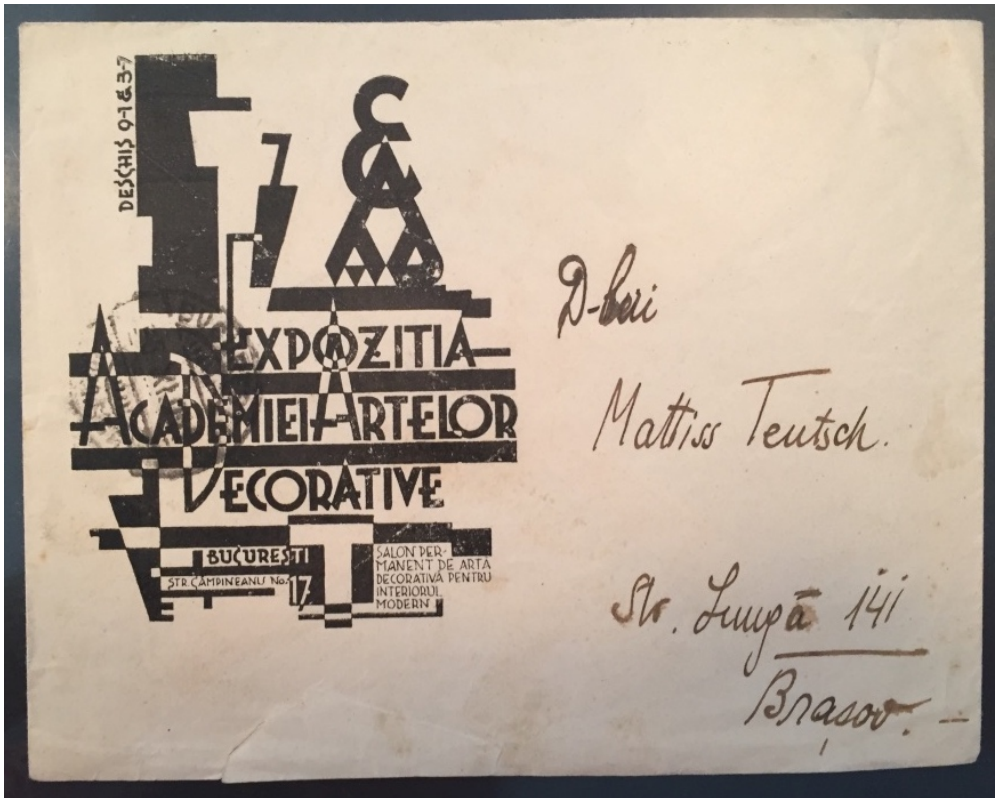


Fig. 3.86a A. Vespremie, envelope design for the Academy (1926).

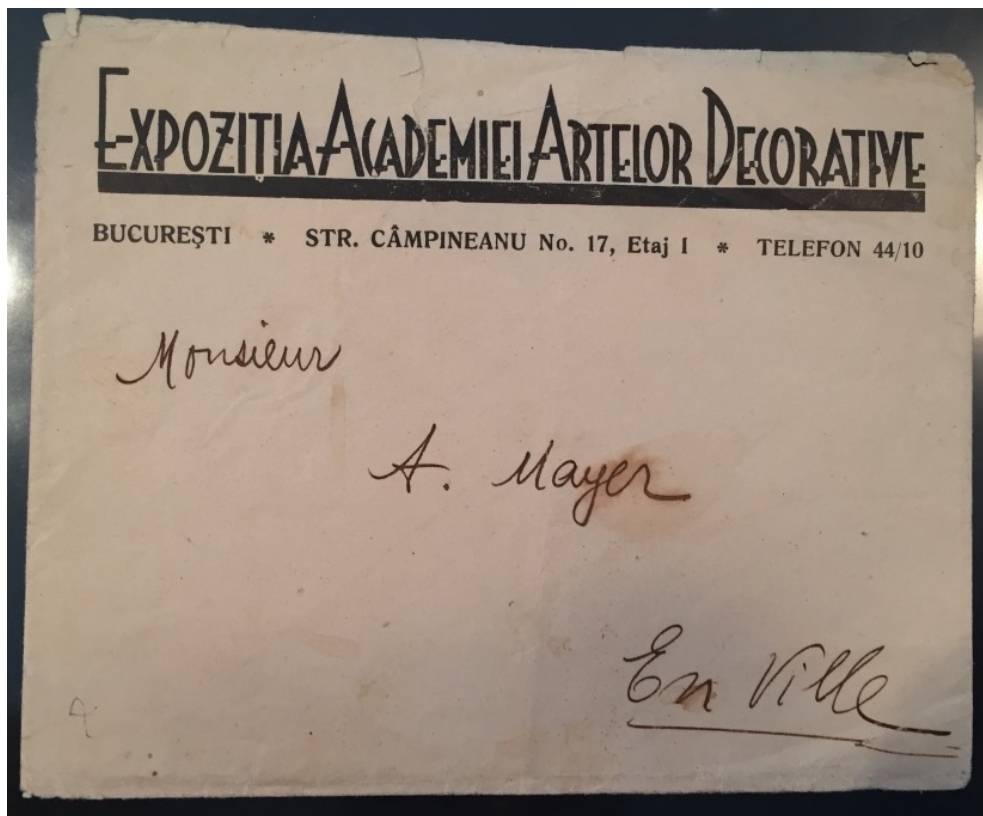


Fig. 3.86b A. Vespremie, envelope design for the Academy (1926).

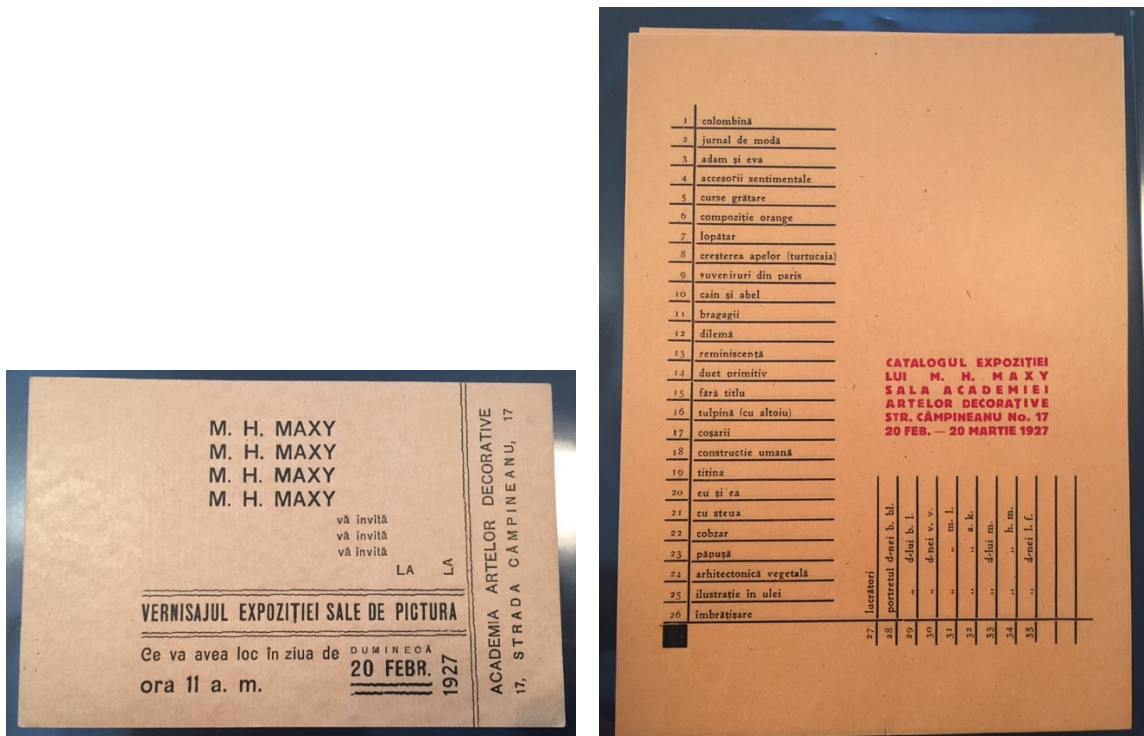


Fig. 3.87 M. H. Maxy, designs for the invitation and the catalogue of his own exhibition held at the Academy in February-March 1927.



Fig. 3.88 M. H. Maxy, design for an advertisement printed in *Integral* (June-July 1927).

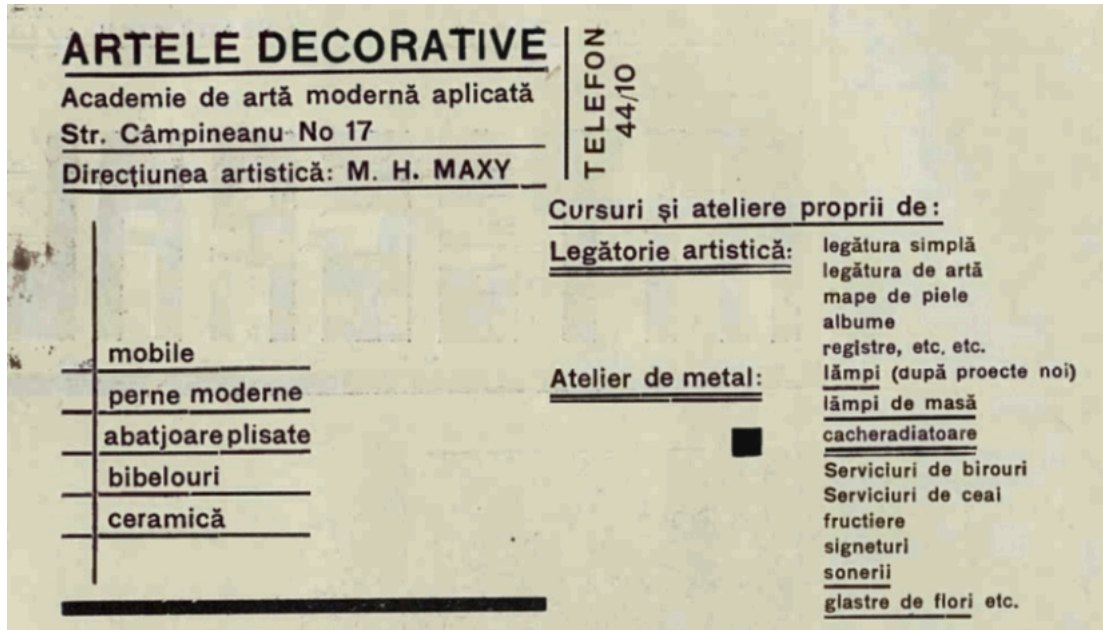


Fig. 3.89 M. H. Maxy, design for an advertisement printed in *Integral* (April 1928).

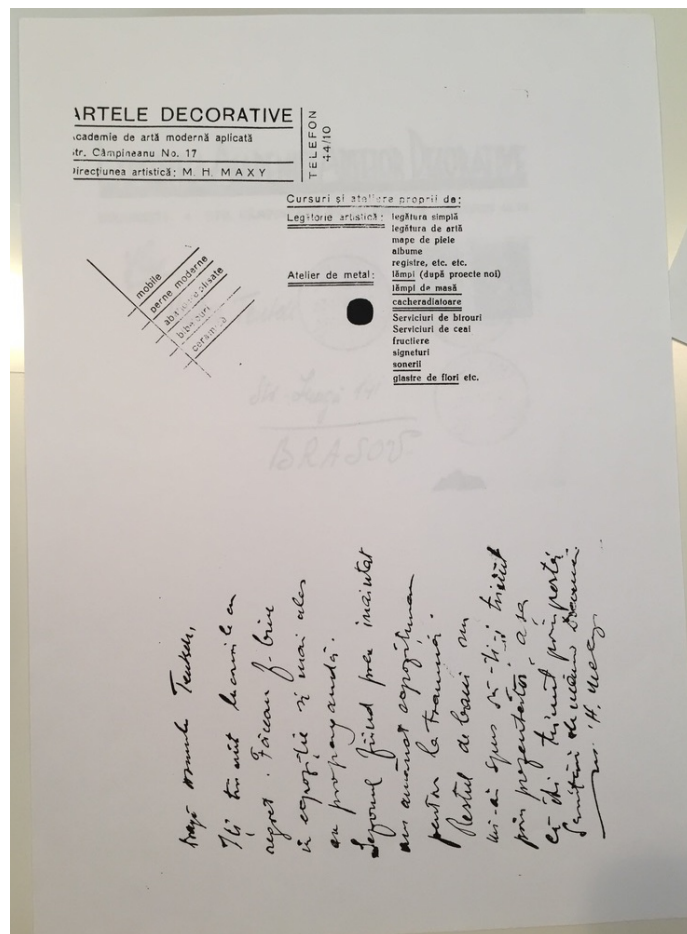


Fig. 3.90 M. H. Maxy, letterhead design for the Academy (1928). Private collection.



Fig. 3.91 Cover of *Integral* (December 1926). Detail of Fig. 3.1.

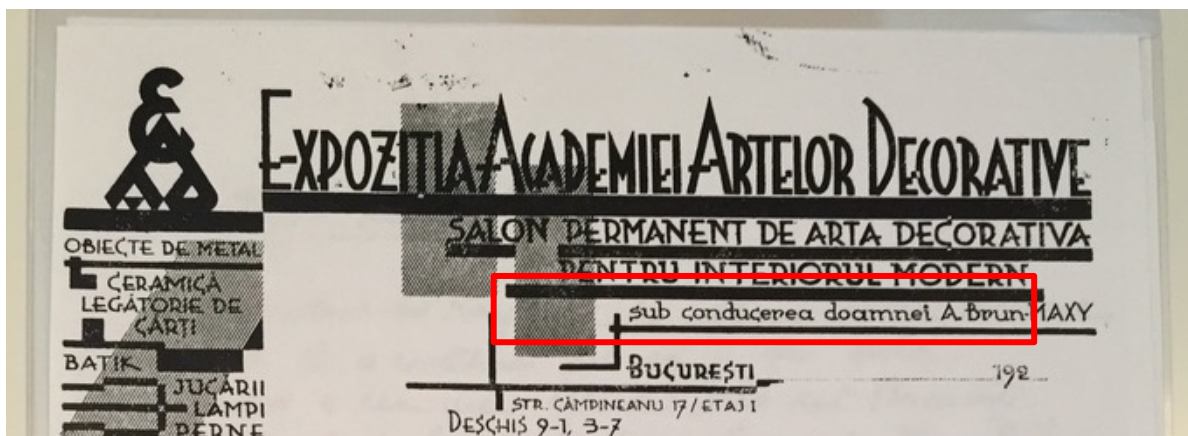


Fig. 3.92 A. Vespremie, letterhead design for the Academy (1926). Detail of Fig. 3.86.



Fig. 3.93 The Academy of Decorative Arts selling exhibition (1926).
Details of Figs. 2.10a and 2.10b.

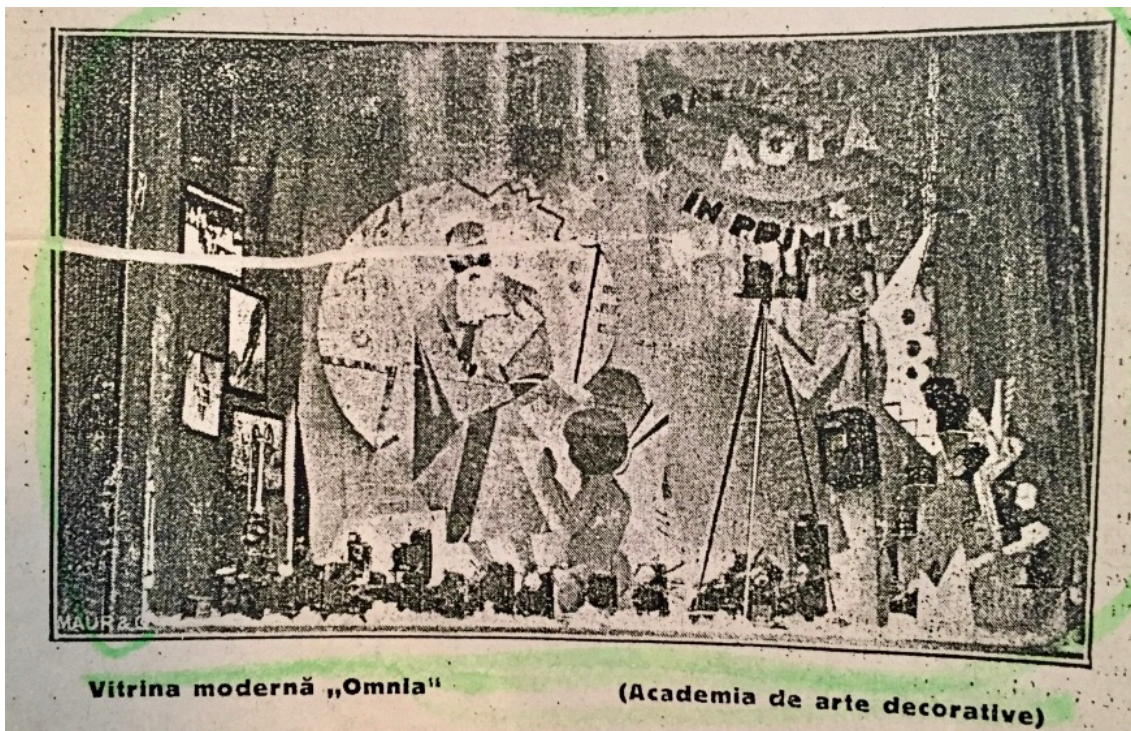


Fig. 3.94 The window display for the Omnia photo studio at the Academy,
printed in *unu* (March 1929).

Chapter 4

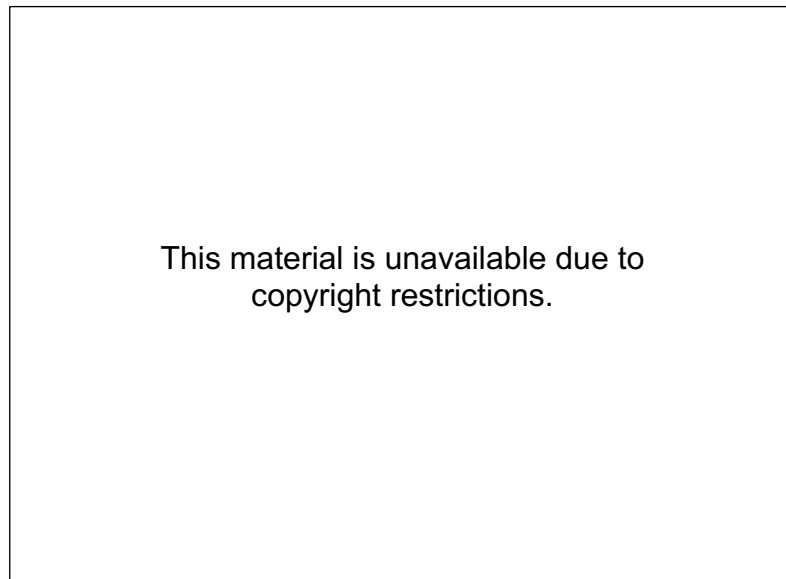


Fig. 4.1 The Vilna Troupe in Bucharest (1923). Luba Kadison is centre foreground, with Alexander Stein and Chanah Kadison behind her. Joseph Buloff is far left in the back row, with Leib Kadison in front of him.
Yivo Institute for Jewish Research.

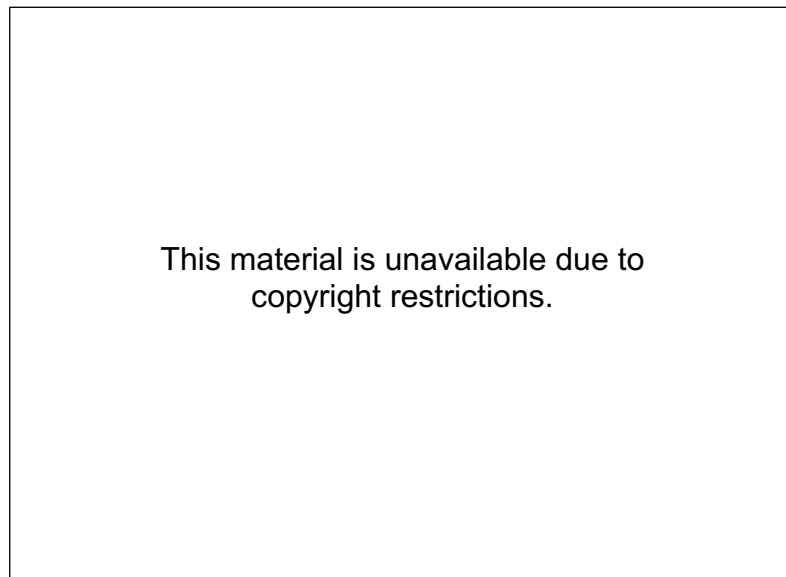


Fig. 4.2 Carte de visite of Constanța Cantacuzino with hand-written request for a box at an upcoming performance of the Vilna Troupe's *The Singer of His Sorrow* (c.1925)
Yivo Institute for Jewish Research.



Fig. 4.3 M. H. Maxy, Poster design for the Tragedy and Comedy troupe (1925). National Museum of Art of Romania.

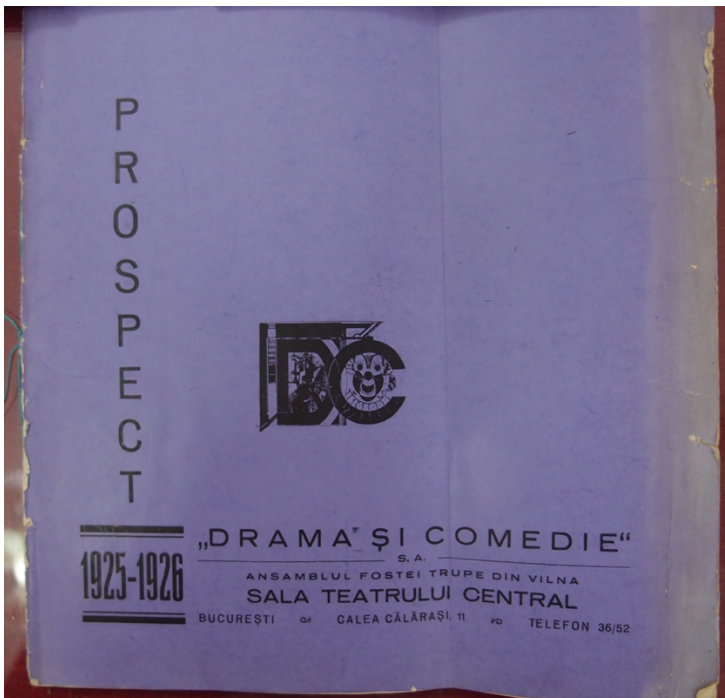


Fig. 4.4 M. H. Maxy, Cover design (and detail) by for a brochure advertising the Vilna Troupe's new incarnation as the Tragedy and Comedy ensemble (1925). National Archives of Romania.



Fig. 4.5 M. H. Maxy, Graphic vignettes representing Jacob Sternberg and Mordechai Mazo in the prospectus for the Tragedy and Comedy troupe (1925). National Archives of Romania.

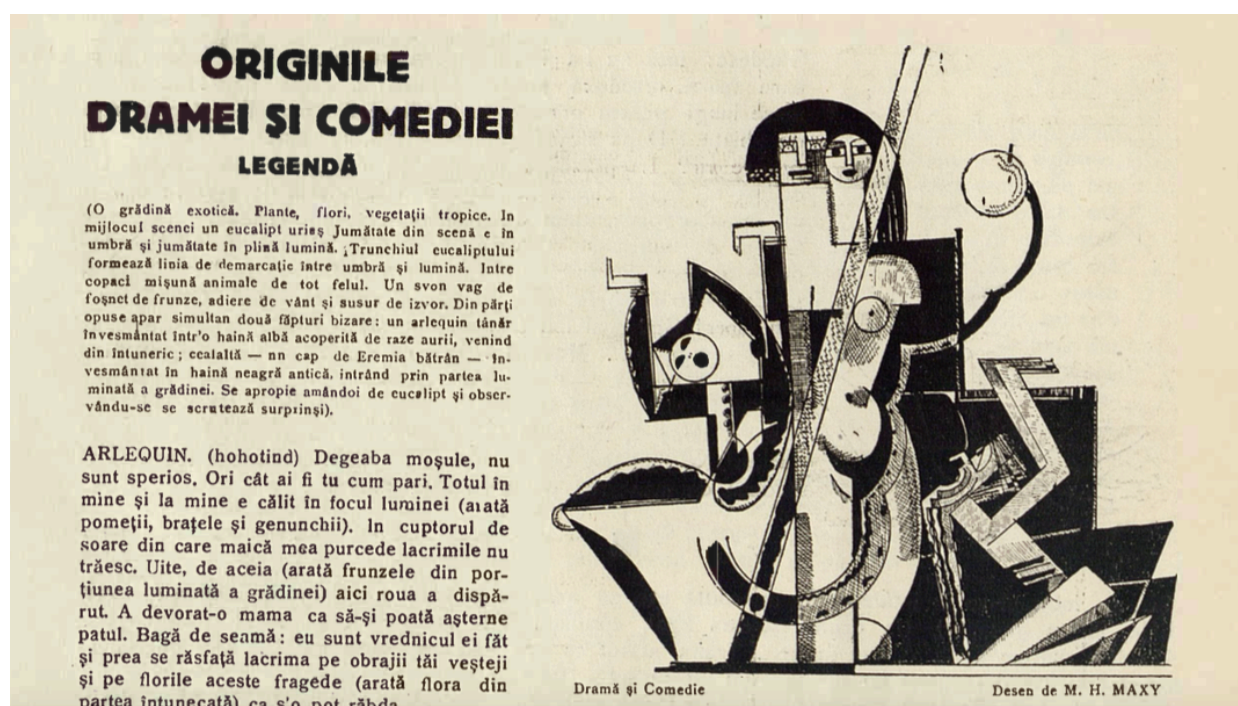


Fig. 4.6 M. H. Maxy, *Tragedy and Comedy*, illustration printed in *Integral* (October 1925).

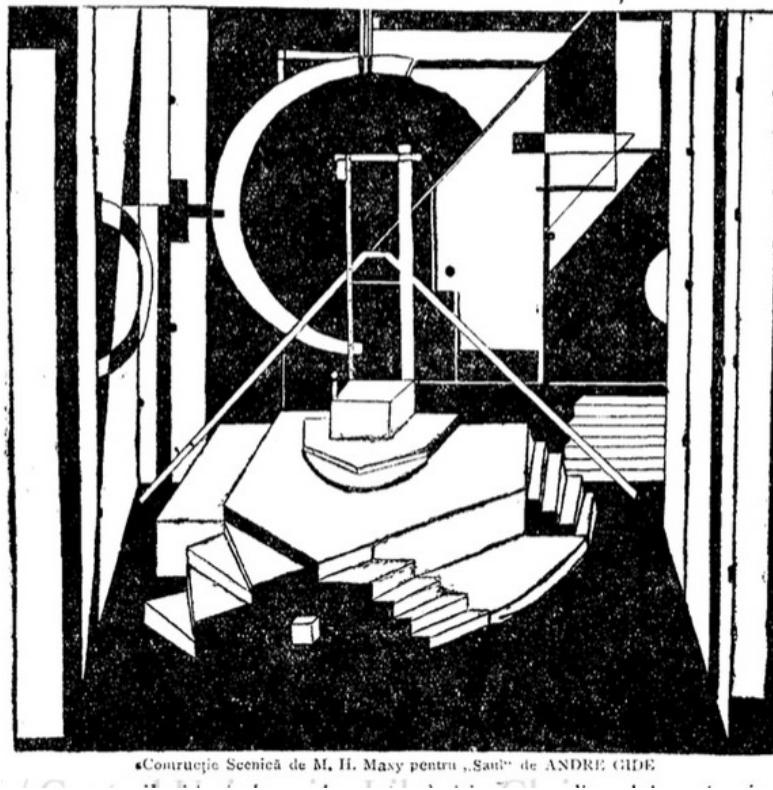


Fig. 4.7 M. H. Maxy, 'Scenic Construction' for *Saul*. Illustration from *Integral* (April 1925).



Fig. 4.8 M. H. Maxy, Set design for *Saul* (1960s). Romanian National Art Museum.



Fig. 4.11 Costume designs for the Devils in *Saul* (c. 1960s). Romanian National Art Museum.



Fig. 4.12a M. H. Maxy, *Electric Madonna*.
Illustration from *Integral* (November-December 1925).



Fig. 4.12b M. H. Maxy, *Electric Madonna* (1960s?). Romanian National Art Museum.



Fig. 4.13 M. H. Maxy, Portrait of Constantin Brancusi. Illustration from *Integral* (April 1925).

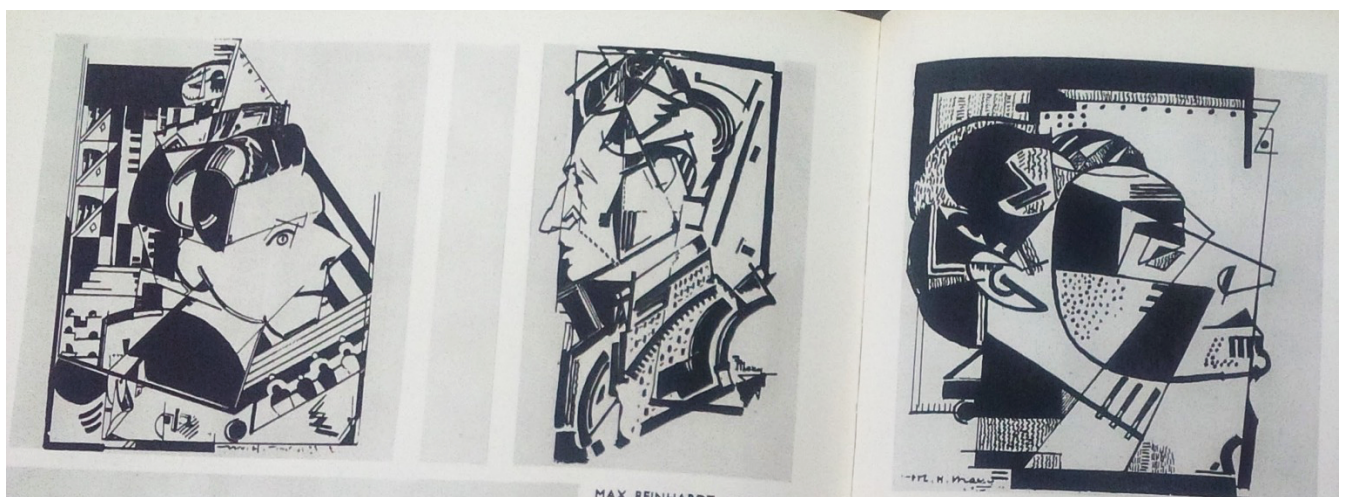


Fig. 4.14 M. H. Maxy, Portraits of Max Reinhardt, Sandu Eliad and Vsevolod Meyerhold. Ink drawings exhibited in the 1965 Maxy retrospective in Bucharest, image from the catalogue.

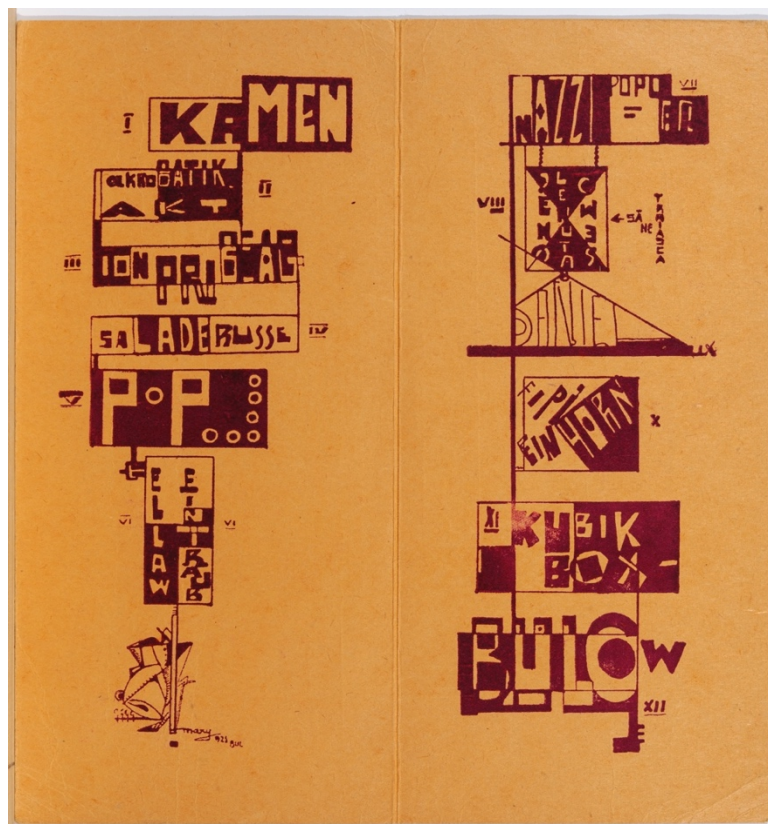
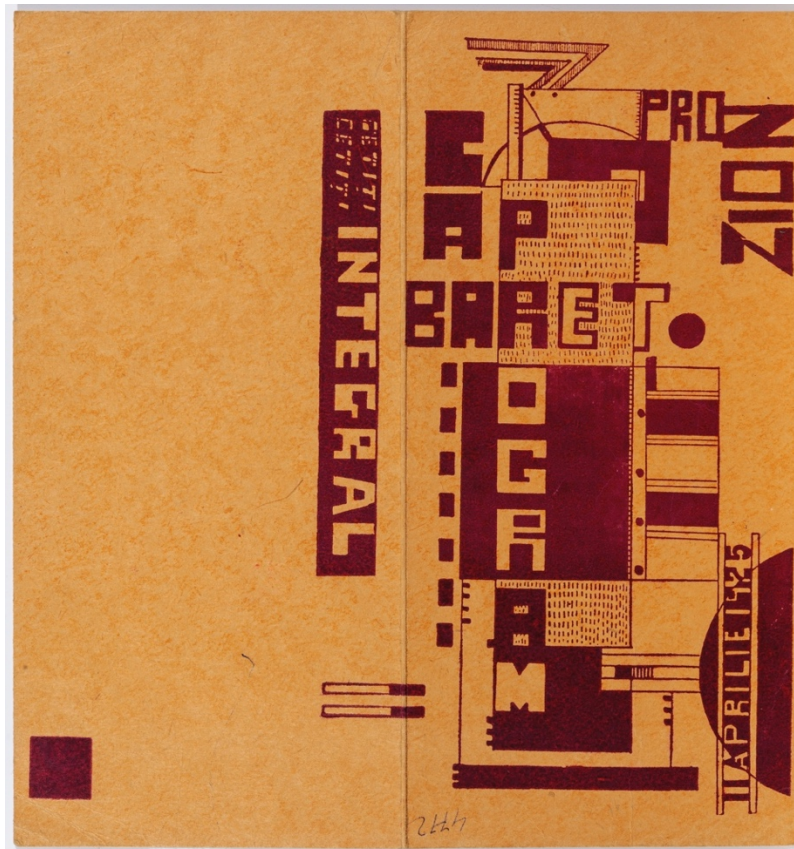


Fig. 4.15 M. H. Maxy, Programme for the Cabaret at The Festival of Jewish Writers and Artists (11 April 1925). Romanian National Art Museum.

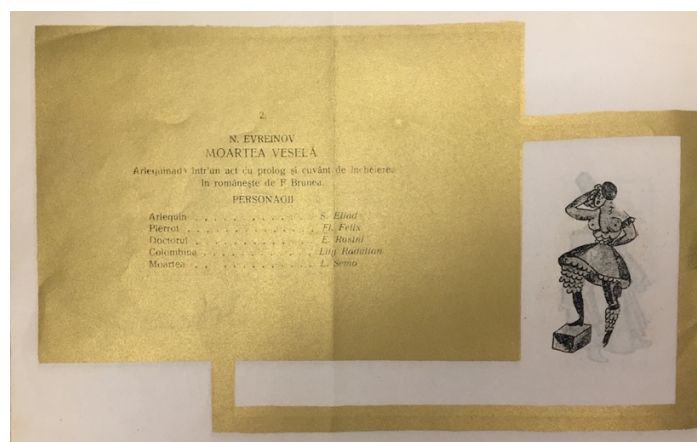
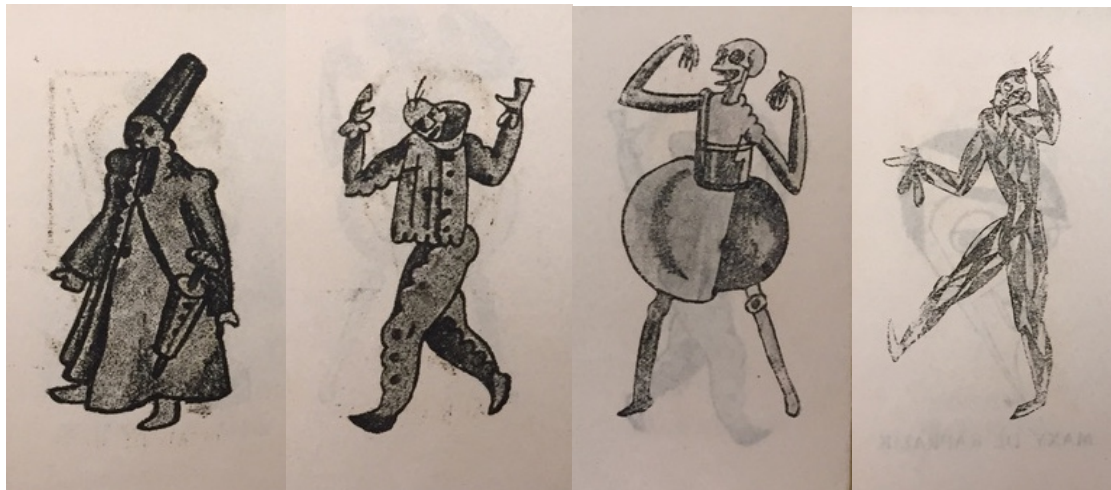


Fig. 4.16 Marcel Iancu, The Doctor, Pierrot, Death, Harlequin and Columbine from Nikolai Evreinov's *The Merry Death*. Illustrations and page showing details about the production from the programme for The Festival of Jewish Writers and Artists (11 April 1925). Harvard Library Judaica Division.



Fig. 4.17 Marcel Iancu, Costumes for Harlequin and the Doctor (1925). Location of photographs unknown.

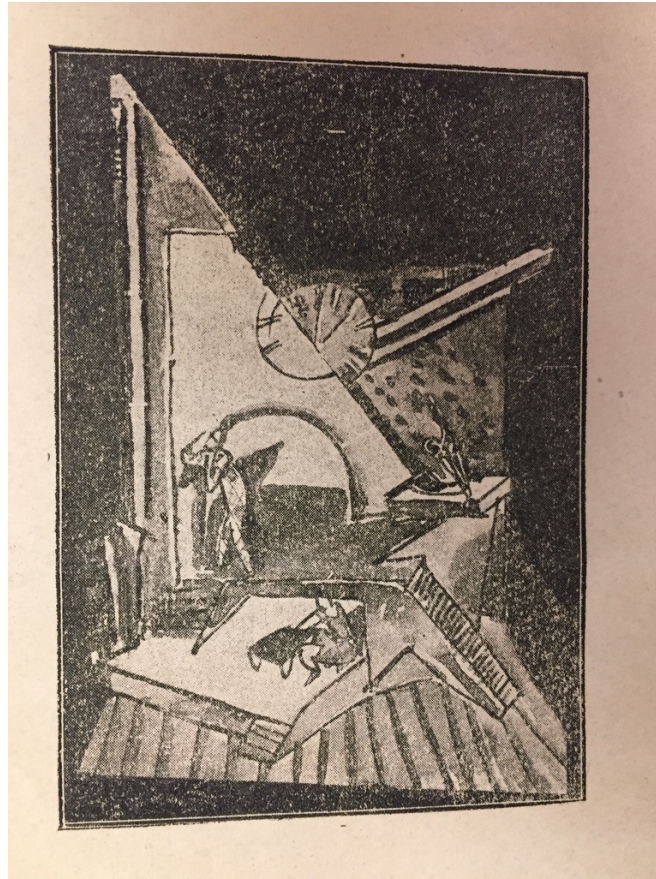


Fig. 4.18 Marcel Iancu, Stage design for Nikolai Evreinov's *The Merry Death*. Illustration from the programme for The Festival of Jewish Writers and Artists (11 April 1925). Harvard Library Judaica Division.

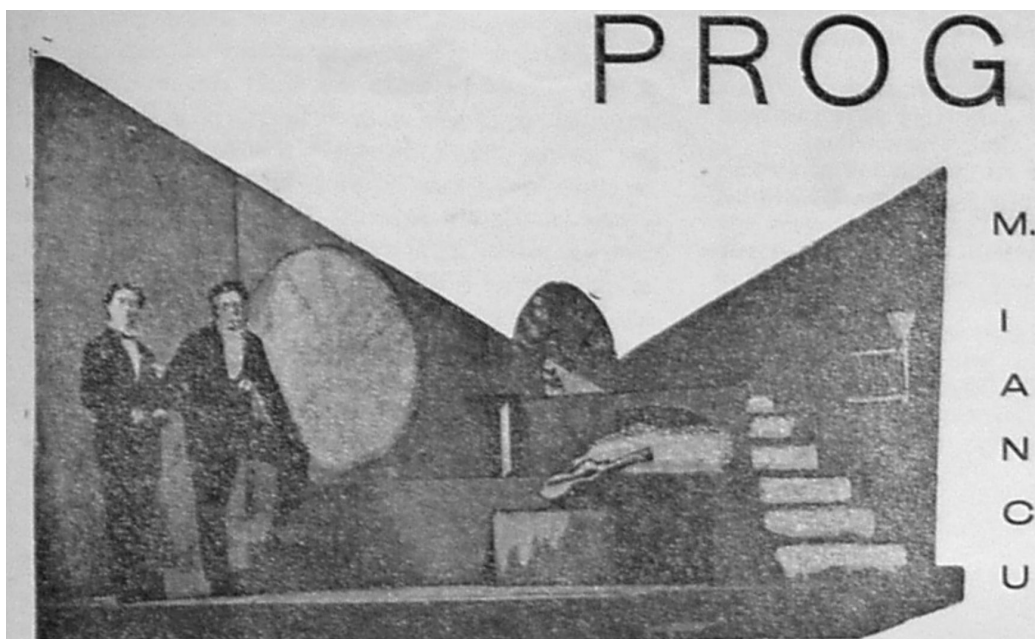


Fig. 4.19 Marcel Iancu, Stage set for Nikolai Evreinov's *The Merry Death*. Illustration from *Contimporanul* (25 May 1925).



Fig.4.20 Joseph Buloff and M. H. Maxy on the set of *Shabbsai Tsvi* (February 1926).
Harvard Library Judaica Division.



Fig. 4.21 The Vilna Troupe in *Shabbsai Tsvii*, Act I (1926). Romanian National Art Museum.



Fig. 4.22 M. H. Maxy, Set design for *Shabbsai Tsvi*, Act I (1960s). Romanian Academy.



Fig. 4.23 The Vilna Troupe in *Shabbsai Tsvi*. Act I (1926). Harvard Library Judaica Division.



Fig. 4.24 M. H. Maxy, Set design for *Shabbsai Tsvi*, Act II (1960s). Romanian Academy.



Fig. 4.25 The Vilna Troupe in *Shabbsai Tsvi*. Act II (1926). Harvard Library Judaica Division.



Fig. 4.26 The Vilna Troupe in *Shabbsai Tsvi*. Act II (1926). Harvard Library Judaica Division.



Fig. 4.27 The Vilna Troupe in *Shabbsai Tsvi*. Act II (1926). Harvard Library Judaica Division.



Fig. 4.28 M. H. Maxy, Set design for *Shabbsai Tsvi*, Act III (1960s). Romanian Academy.



Fig. 4.29 The Vilna Troupe in *Shabbsai Tsvi*. Act III (1926). Harvard Library Judaica Division.

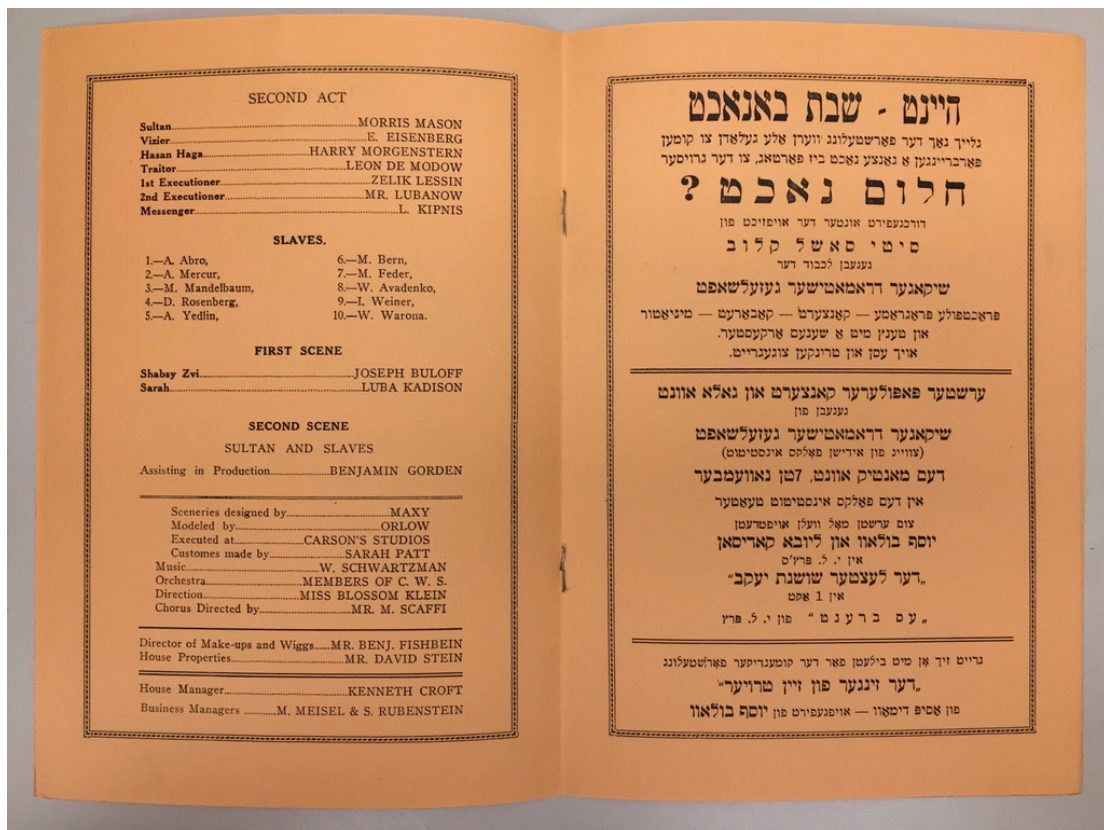
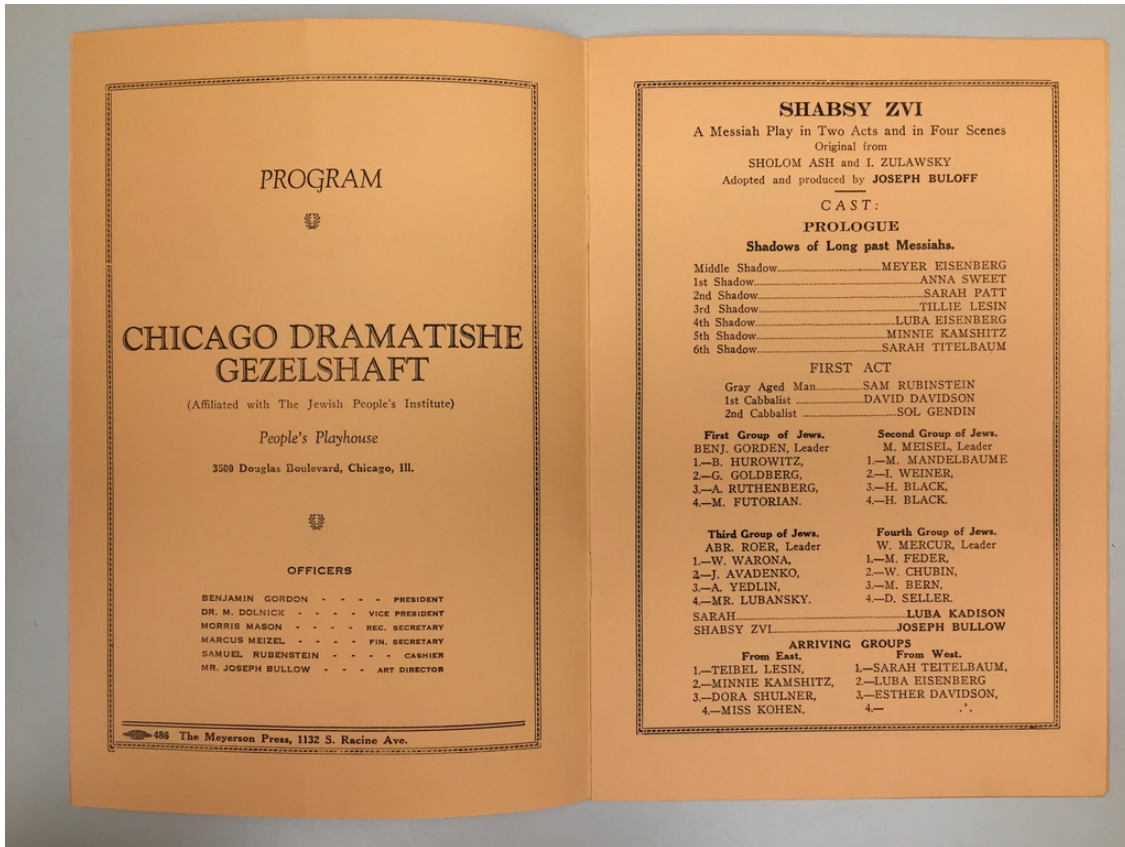


Fig. 4.30 Programme for Josephs Buloff's Chicago revival of *Shabbsai Tsvi* (1927). Harvard Library Judaica Division.

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copyright restrictions.



Fig. 4.31 Joseph Buloff and Luba Kadison in *Shabbsai Tsvi* in Chicago (1927).
Harvard Library Judaica Division and Yivo Institute for Jewish Research.



Fig. 4.32a A comparison between the Sultan's hookah pipe in Maxy's sketch and on stage. Details from figs. 4.20 and 4.24.

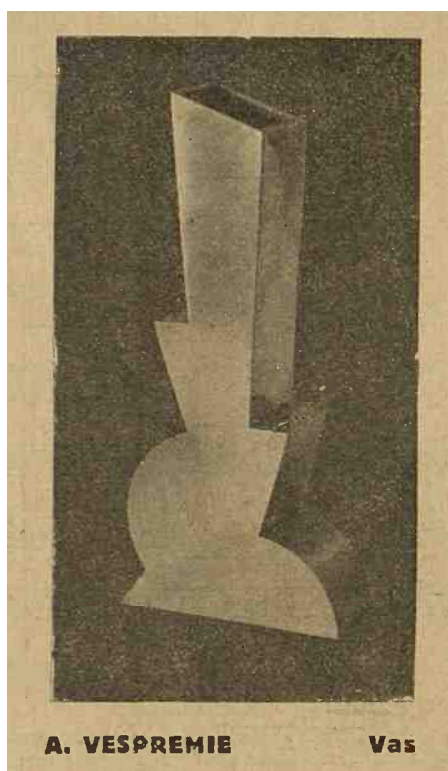


Fig. 4.32b A vase by Vespremie (left) illustrated in *Integral* (December 1926), and a vase by Maxy (right) illustrated in *Tipariņa literară*, (January 1929).



Fig. 4.33 Traian Cornescu, Set design for *The Sentimental Mannequin*.
Illustration from Ion Minulescu, *Manechinul sentimental* (București: Cultura națională,
1926).

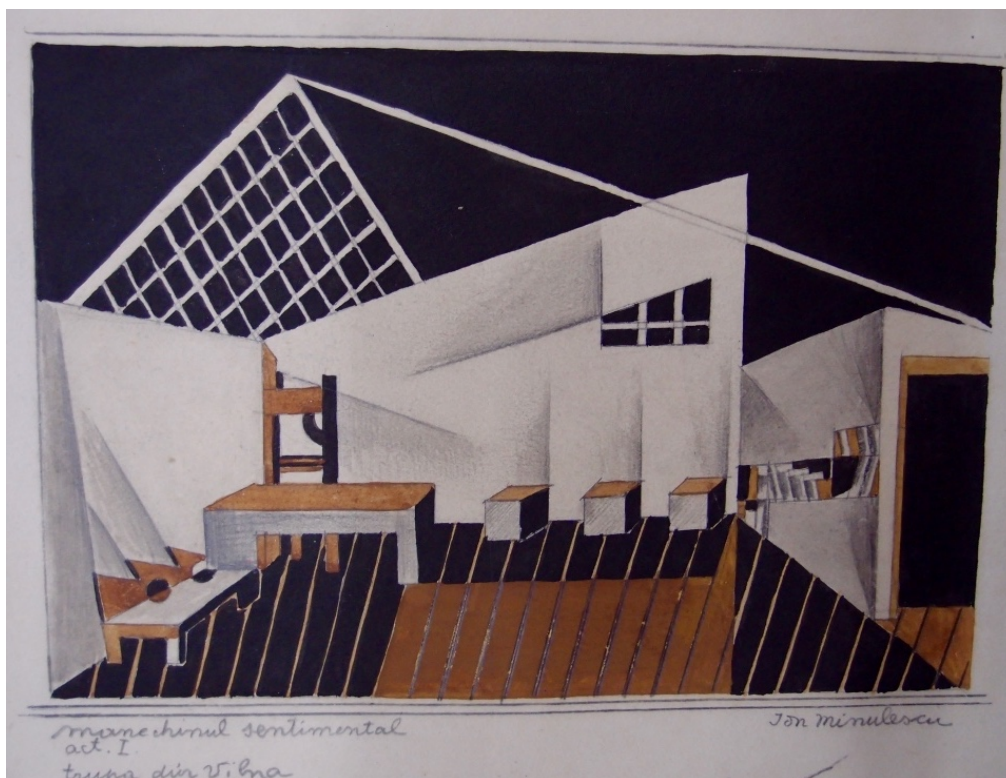


Fig. 4.34 M. H. Maxy, Set design for *The Sentimental Mannequin*, Act I (1960s).
Romanian National Art Museum.



Fig. 4.35 Traian Cornescu, Set design for *The Sentimental Mannequin*, Act I. Illustration from Ion Minulescu, *Manechinul sentimental* (București: Cultura națională, 1926).

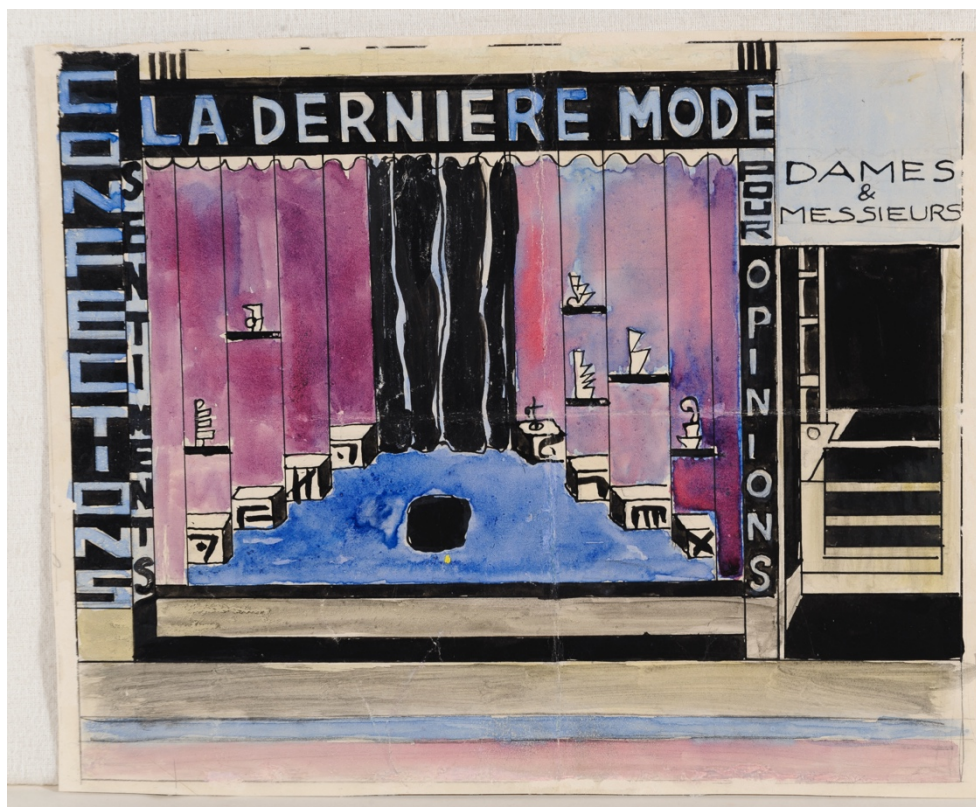


Fig. 4.36 M. H. Maxy, Set design for *The Sentimental Mannequin*, Act II (undated). Romanian National Art Museum.

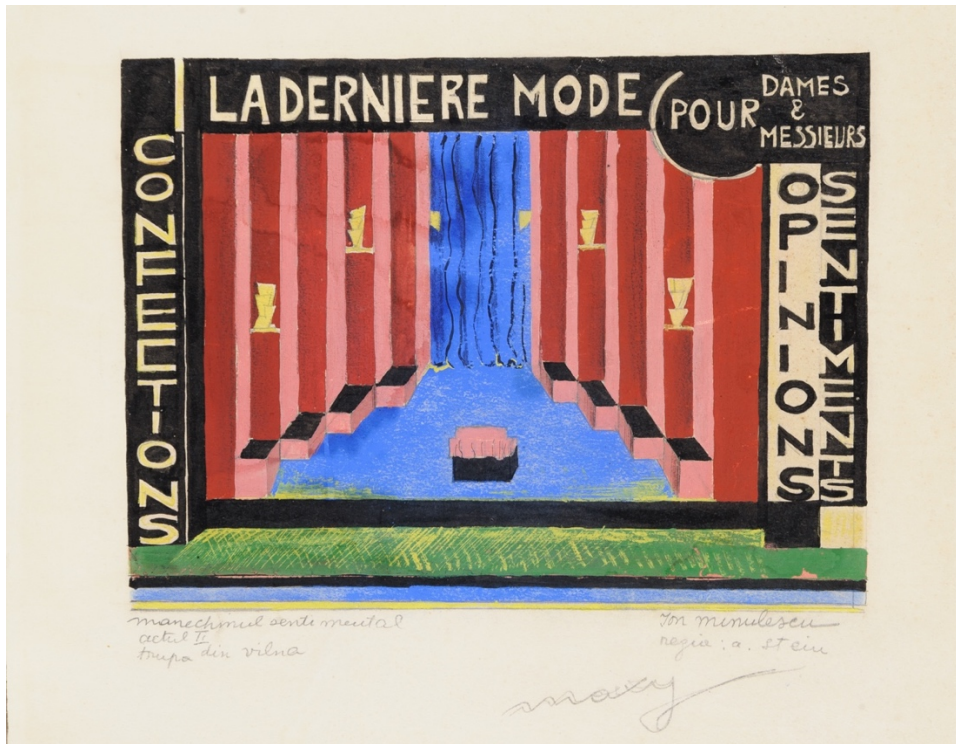


Fig. 4.37 M.H Maxy, Set design for *The Sentimental Mannequin*, Act II (1960s). Romanian National Art Museum.

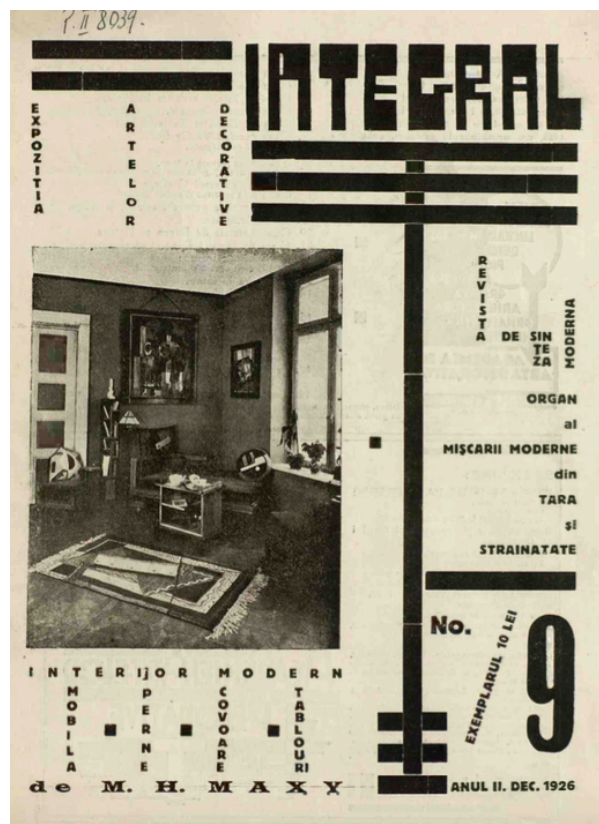


Fig. 4.38 The cover of *Integral* (December 1926), showing the selling exhibition at the Academy of Decorative Arts.



Fig. 4.39 Traian Cornescu, Set for *The Sentimental Mannequin*, Act II (January 1926). National Theatre Museum.



Fig. 4.40 Unknown designer, Set for *Anuța*, Act III (November 1925). National Theatre Museum.



Fig. 4.41 Sonia Delaunay's boutique on Pont Alexandre III during the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, Paris (1925).



Fig. 4.42 M. H. Maxy, Set design for *Man, Beast and Virtue*, Act I (1960s). Romanian National Art Museum.



Fig. 4.43 The Vilna Troupe in *Man, Beast and Virtue*, Act I (1926).
Romanian National Art Museum.

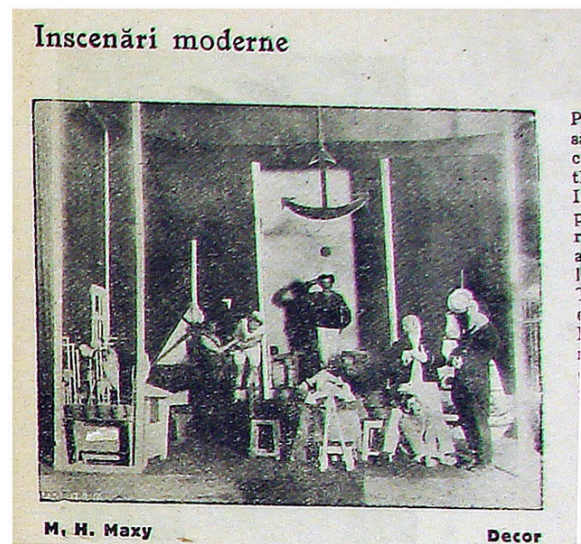


Fig. 4.44 M. H. Maxy, Sets for *Man, Beast and Virtue*. Illustrations from *Integral* (January 1926).



Fig. 4.45 M. H. Maxy, Set design for *Man, Beast and Virtue*, Act II (1960s).
Romanian National Art Museum.



Fig. 4.46 The Vilna Troupe in *Man, Beast and Virtue*, Act II (1926).
Romanian National Art Museum.



Fig. 4.47 Details from photographs showing the selling exhibition at the Academy of Decorative Arts. The sold ('vândut') sign can be glimpsed inside the pot on the left. Romanian National Art Museum. Detail of Figs. 2.10a and 2.10b.



Fig. 4.48 M. H. Maxy, Set design for *Man, Beast and Virtue*, Act II (undated). Romanian National Art Museum.

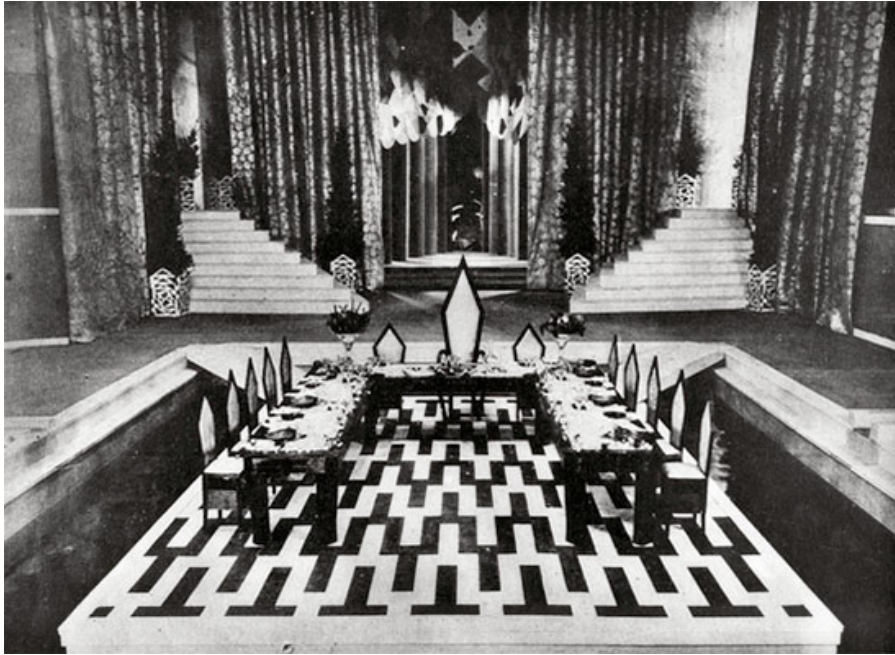


Fig. 4.49 Alberto Cavalcanti's set design for Marcel L'Herbier's *L'Inhumaine* (1924).

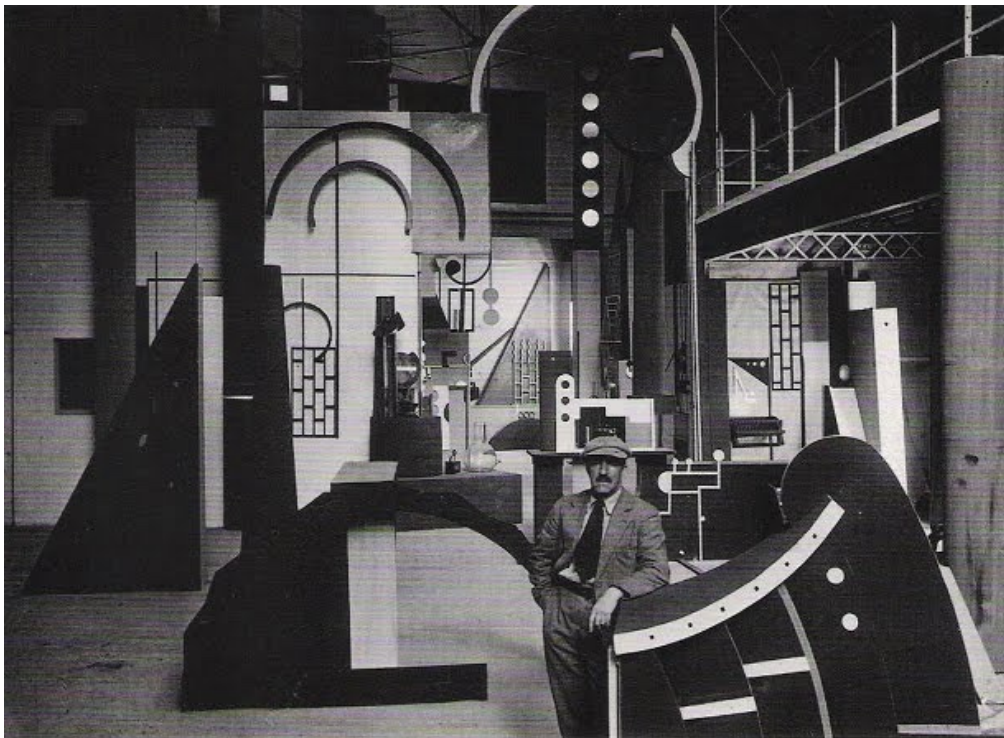


Fig. 4.50 Fernand Léger on the set of Marcel L'Herbier's *L'Inhumaine* (1924).

Chapter 5



Fig. 5.1a Dida Solomon by Victor Brauner in the avant-garde journal *Punct* (7 February 1925).



Fig. 5.1b Dida Solomon in a photograph from the late 1920s.

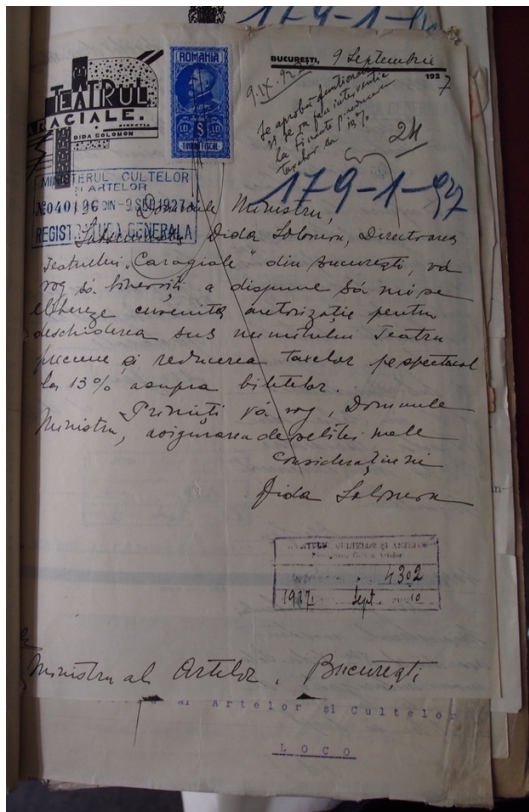


Fig. 5.2 M. H. Maxy, Letterhead for Dida Solomon’s Caragiale Theatre (1927). National Archives of Romania.



Fig. 5.3 M. H. Maxy, Programme cover for Dida Solomon’s Caragiale Theatre (1927). Location unknown.

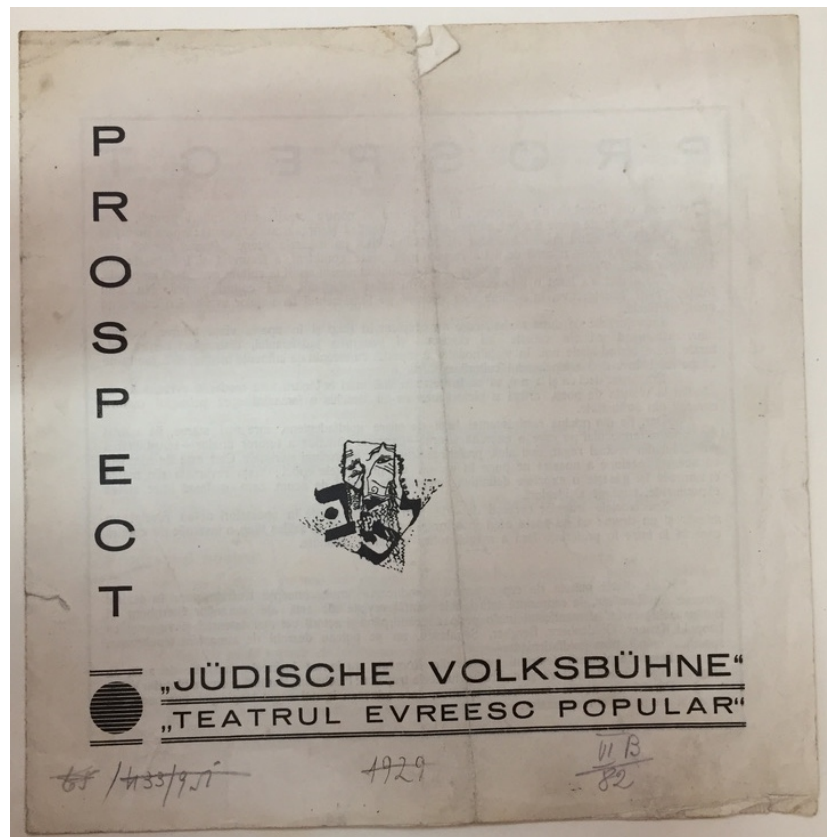


Fig. 5.4 M. H. Maxy, Cover design for a brochure advertising Jacob Sternberg's Jüdische Volksbühne (1930). National Archives of Romania.



Fig. 5.5 The BITS production of *A Night in the Old Marketplace* (1930). Romanian National Art Museum.



Fig. 5.6 The BITS production of *A Night in the Old Marketplace* (1930). Sternberg is on the far right. Centre for the Study of Jewish History in Romania.



Fig. 5.7 The BITS production of *A Night in the Old Marketplace* (1930). Centre for the Study of Jewish History in Romania.



Fig. 5.8 The BITS production of *A Night in the Old Marketplace* (1930).
Centre for the Study of Jewish History in Romania.



Fig. 5.9 The BITS production of *A Night in the Old Marketplace* (1930).
Centre for the Study of Jewish History in Romania.

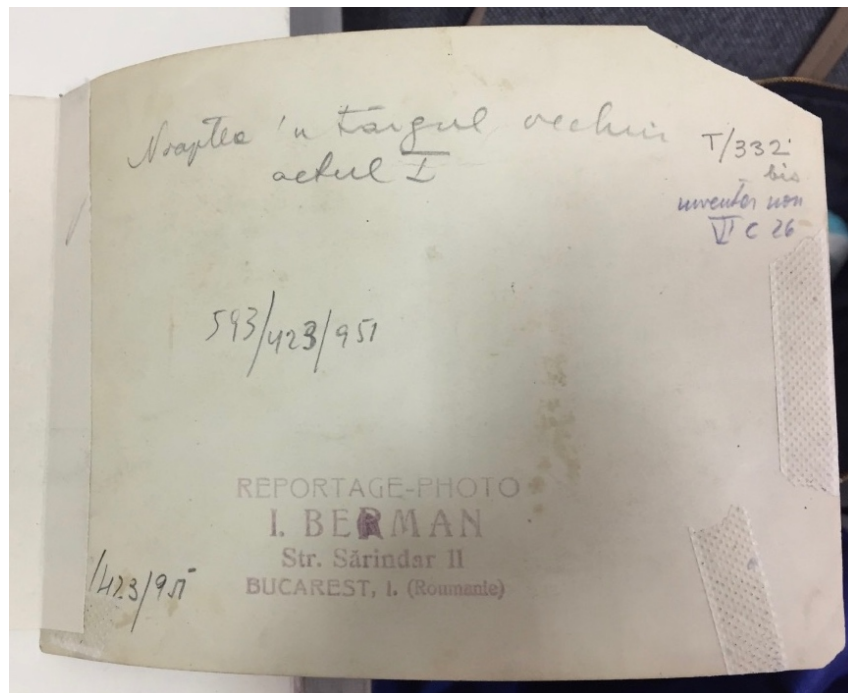


Fig. 5.10 The BITS production of *A Night in the Old Marketplace*, 1930, photographed by Iosif Berman. Centre for the Study of Jewish History in Romania.

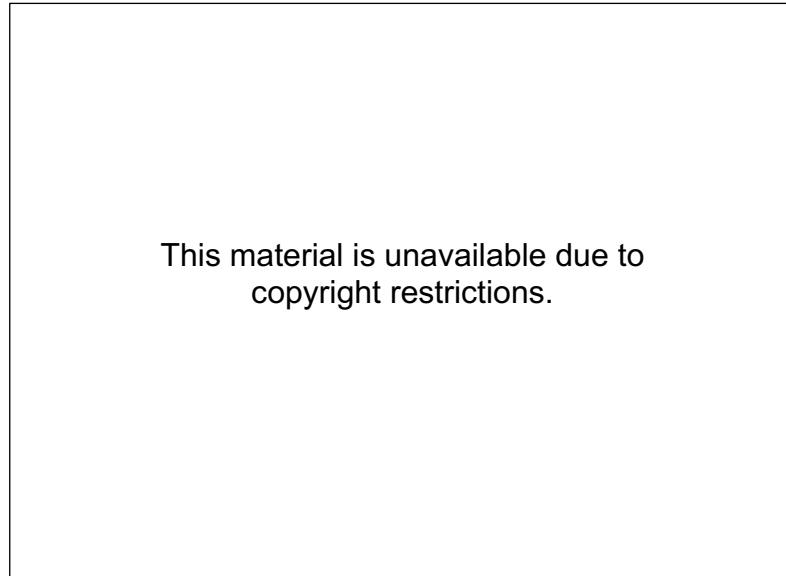


Fig. 5.11 The BITS production of *A Night in the Old Marketplace* (1930).
Yivo Institute for Jewish Research.

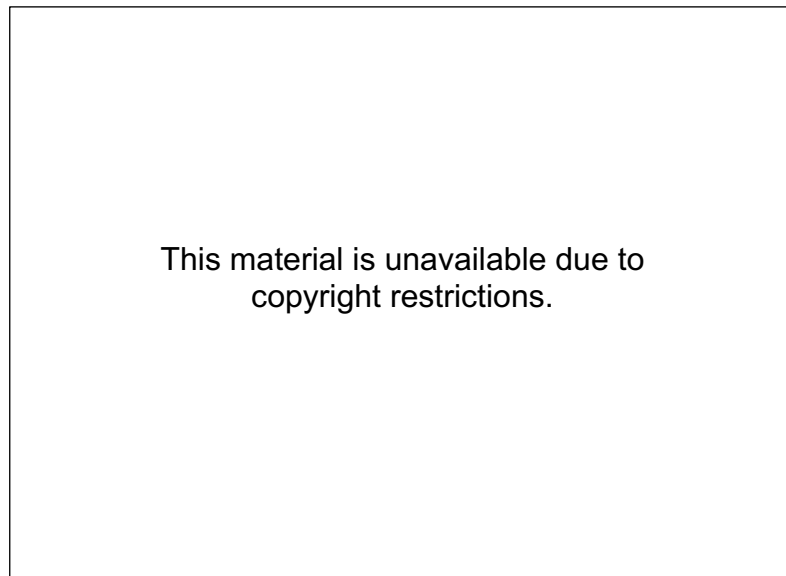


Fig. 5.12 David Licht in the BITS production of *A Night in the Old Marketplace* (1930).
Yivo Institute for Jewish Research.



Fig. 5.13 The BITS production of *A Night in the Old Marketplace* illustrated in *Adam* (February 1930).



Fig. 5.14 The BITS production of *A Night in the Old Marketplace* illustrated in *Adam* (February 1930).



Fig. 5.15 The BITS production of *A Night in the Old Marketplace* illustrated in *Adam* (February 1930).

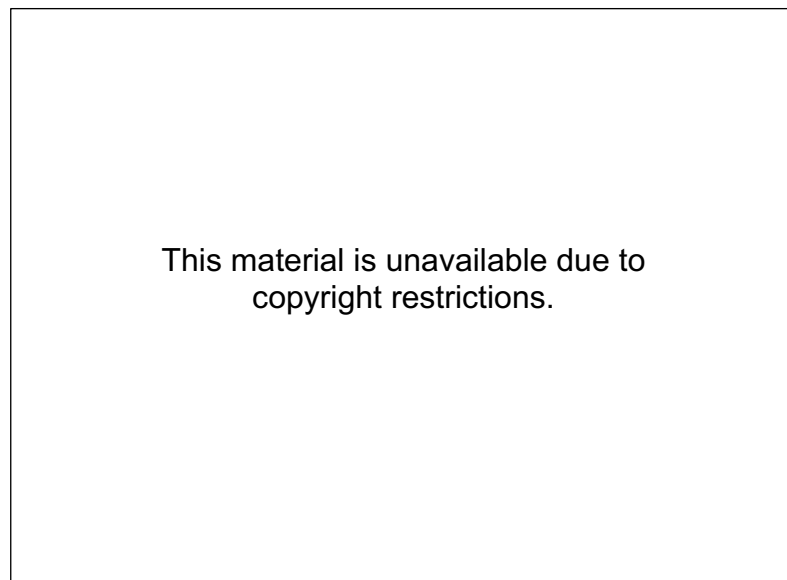


Fig. 5.16 Flyer advertising the two BITS production on tour (1930).
Yivo Institute for Jewish Research.

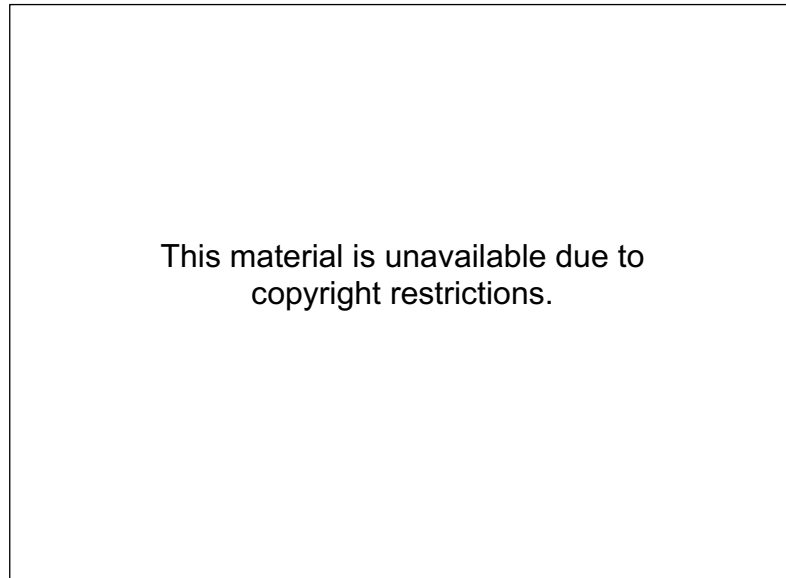


Fig. 5.17 Scenes from the Vilna Troupe's *A Night in the Old Marketplace*, Warsaw (1928).
Yivo Institute for Jewish Research.



Fig. 5.18 The BITS production of *The Bewitched Taylor* (1930).
Romanian National Art Museum.



Fig. 5.19 The BITS production of *The Bewitched Taylor* (1930).
Centre for the Study of Jewish History in Romania.



Fig. 5.20 The BITS production of *The Bewitched Taylor* (1930).
Centre for the Study of Jewish History in Romania.



Fig. 5.21 The BITS production of *The Bewitched Taylor* (1930).
Centre for the Study of Jewish History in Romania.



Fig. 5.22 The BITS production of *The Bewitched Taylor* (1930).
Centre for the Study of Jewish History in Romania.

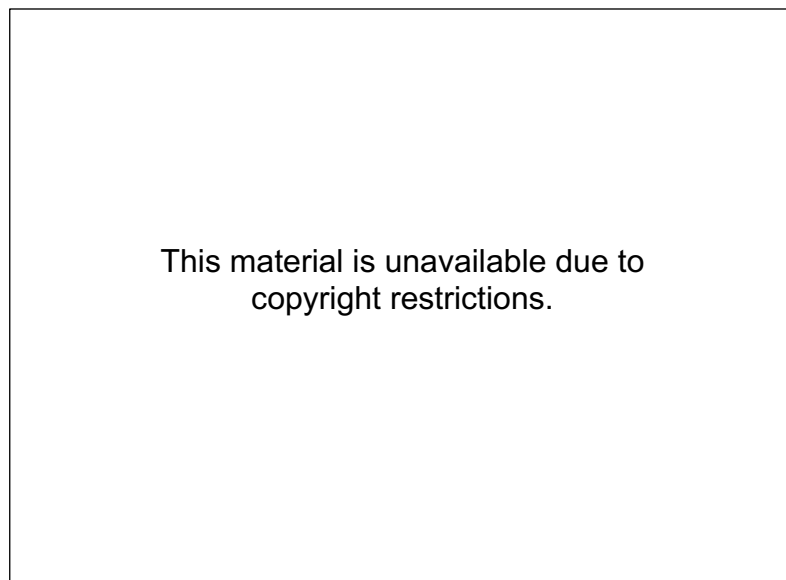


Fig. 5.23 David Licht in the BITS production of *The Bewitched Taylor* (1930).
Yivo Institute for Jewish Research.

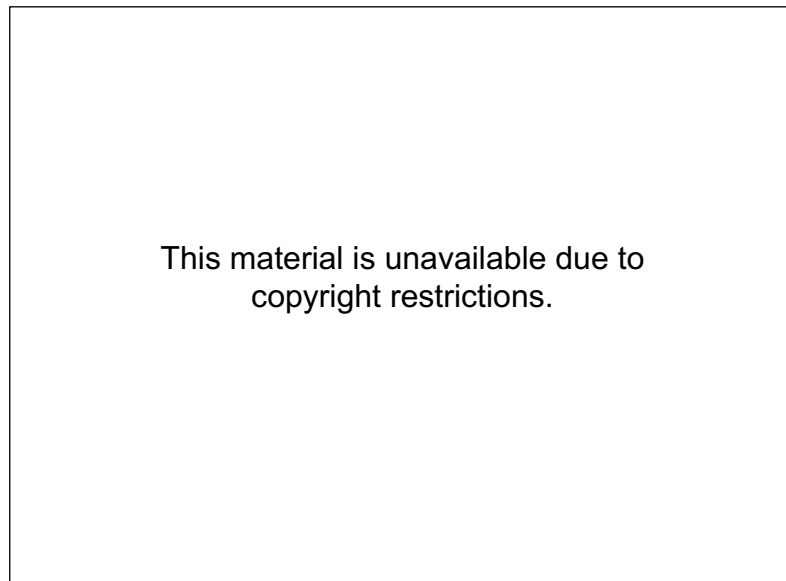


Fig. 5.24 Programme for the music hall revue *Skotzl Kimt* (1933).
Yivo Institute for Jewish Research.

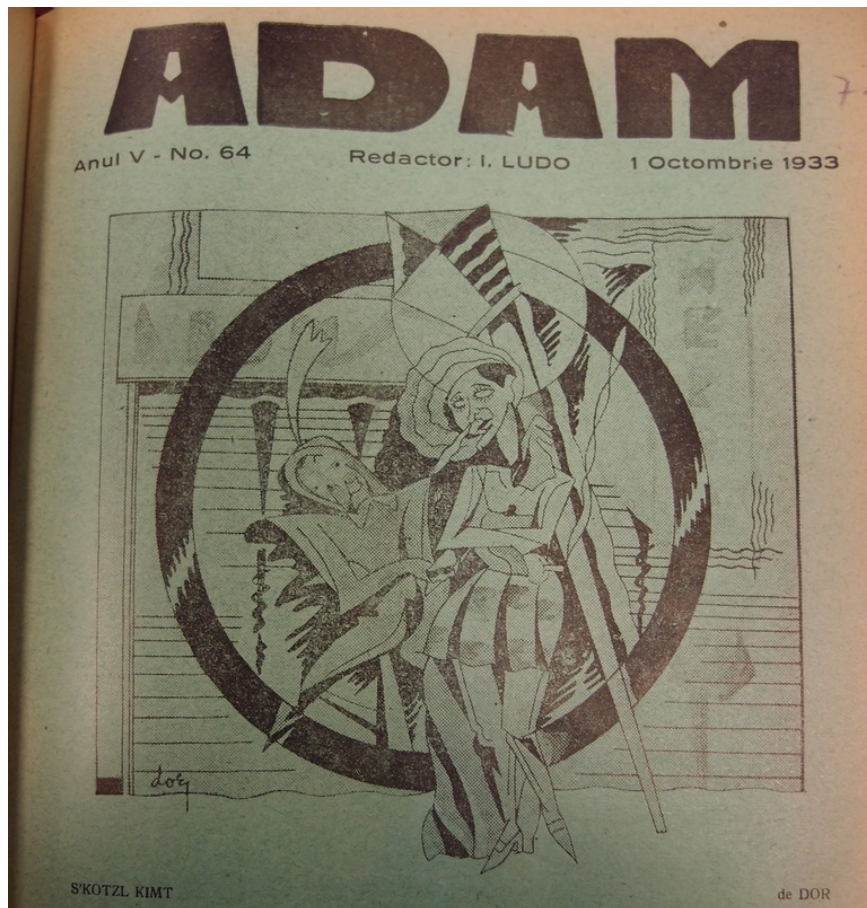


Fig. 5.25 Dor, A scene from the revue *Skotzl Kimt*, illustrated in *Adam* (October 1933).



Fig. 5.26 Floria Capsali during a performance. Photograph printed in *Rampa* (22 May 1933).