

GHEBALY

MARIUS BERCEA



Review: Marius Bercea at Francois Ghebaly Gallery

Christopher Knight | May 7, 2016



Marius Bercea, "Fellow Biologists," 2016 (detail) (Francois Ghebaly Gallery)

Fourteen recent paintings by Romanian artist Marius Bercea are filled with languorous beauty, negotiating a conflicted intersection between sincere, profound yearning and deep psychological distress.

This is Bercea's third solo show at Francois Ghebaly Gallery and his most impressively resolved. Form and content merge in one of the year's most affecting gallery exhibitions.

Born in the Transylvanian city of Cluj-Napoca, where he still lives and works, Bercea, 37, grew up during tumultuous times. He experienced childhood during a grinding era of severe austerity, when four decades of Utopian Communism crashed on the rocks of cruel reality. Following the 1989 revolution – a blood-spattered episode in the political, social and cultural collapse of Eastern Europe, which elsewhere simply tipped over and shattered – the upheaval culminated in the hasty trial and sudden execution of brutal dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu.

Nowhere in Bercea's new paintings are these events depicted. He instead represents a sulfurous yet tenaciously poignant world – a kind of post-expulsion Eden, which could as easily be 21st century Caracas or Beijing, Los Angeles or Johannesburg.

"Fellow Biologists" is emblematic. Two serene, bikini-clad women float face-down on inflatable rafts in a large indoor swimming pool. The once-modern, now-crumbling glass-walled natatorium overflows with tropical plants – dense, untidy and somehow too lush.

It's all vaguely threatening, the failed modernity even somehow sinister.

Tall palms and spiky dracaena look like aerial explosions. The pool's water glows an unnerving blue. Through the windows, a luminous sunset sky blazes in purples and acrid chlorophyll green.

The ensemble is like a pleasurable public recreation hall crossed with the melting core of a nuclear reactor, the local Y as Chernobyl.

Bercea puts himself squarely among the “fellow biologists” of his painting’s title, studying living organisms in their environment. His painterly technique, marvelously well-handled, carries the complex visual motif.

Alternately extravagant in their plush brushwork and scraped dry across the canvas tooth, thinned acrylics coexist with thick, moist oil paint and vaporous aerosol spray. The pigments refuse to harmoniously mix, all while layering to evoke the ancient encrustations of ruined walls. The beautiful discord, beguiling and bleak, is what it is and always has been.

Most of the paintings are large (“Fellow Biologists” is about 6 feet by 5 feet) and of a scale relatively standard in the contemporary repertoire for engaging a viewer’s bodily senses. That means a bit taller than the average person and just wider than outstretched arms.

But even Bercea’s small works carry heft.

A small, simple floral still-life sets the lance-shaped, yellow-edged green leaves of an upright sansevieria, colloquially known as snake plant or mother-in-law’s tongue, against a dense, horizontally scraped background of mottled grays. Visually, the grim background abstraction demands the same attention as the airless foreground. The plant is both fierce pictorial protagonist and toxic warrior.

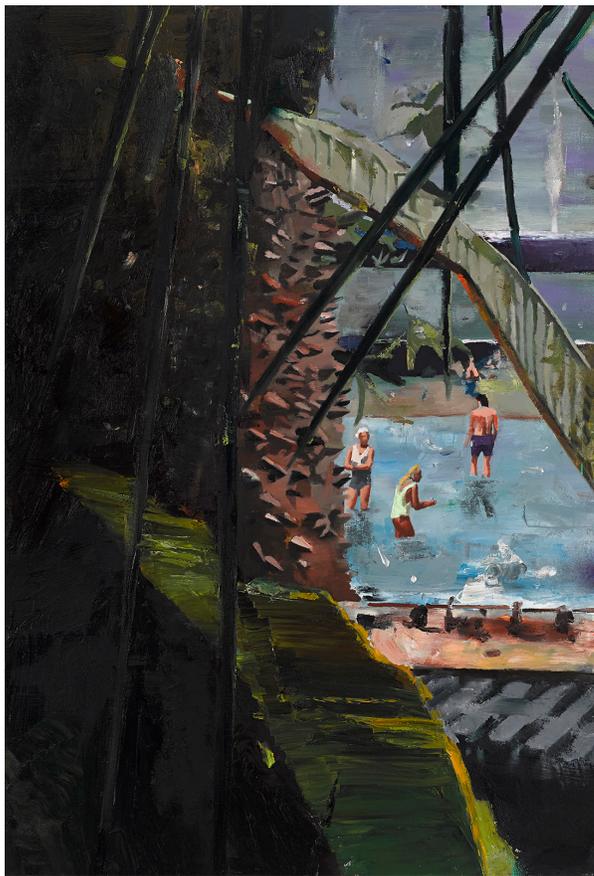
You don’t need to know the plant’s reputation as an antiseptic home remedy to see its lovely endurance amid a wholly leaden environment. Bercea, as he does throughout this memorable show, balances one against the other in a lithe display of utterly routine determination.

Francois Ghebaly Gallery, 2245 E. Washington Blvd., (323) 282-5187, through May 14. Closed Sun. and Mon. www.ghebaly.com

Marius Bercea. (on) relatively calm dispute.

April 13, 2016

Artistul clujean Marius Bercea prezinta *(on) relatively calm dispute*, cea de-a treia expozitie solo gazduita de Galeria Francois Ghebaly din Los Angeles. Aceasta poate fi vizitata pana pe 14 mai 2016, iar pentru cei care nu avem ocazia sa o vedem live, online-ul ne aduce o parte din ea mai aproape. Picturile recente reprezinta o continuare a seriei Transylfornia, initiata in 2014, in perioada de aproape un an pe care artistul a petrecut-o pe Coasta de Vest a Statelor Unite, alaturi de sotia lui, Smaranda Almasan. De aceasta data, insa, artistul vine cu o perspectiva noua asupra experientelor care l-au impresionat.

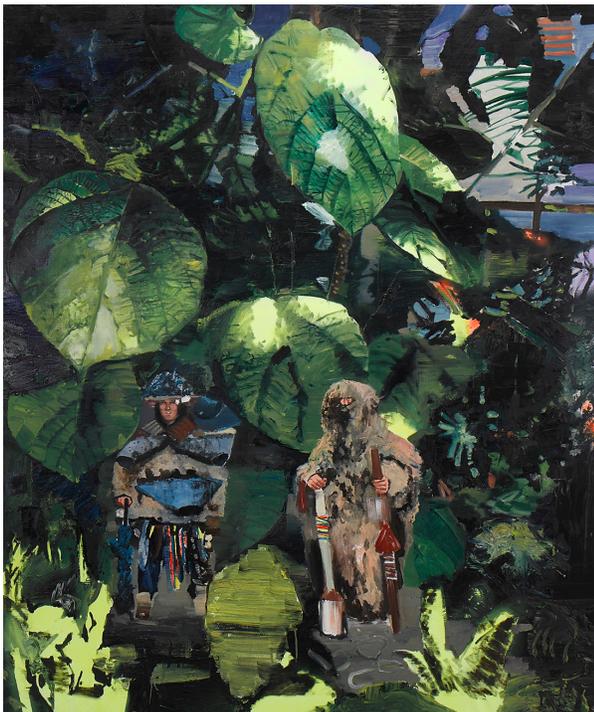


personified wildness 80 x 116 cm, ulei pe panza, 2015,
Marius Bercea

Daca *Transylfornia* sugereaza mai degraba ideea de contopire a doua lumi ce au impartit la un moment dat rolul de "acasa" - Transilvania si California, *(on) relatively calm dispute* scoate la iveala contradictiile remarcate de artist.

Tablourile aduc impreuna elemente alese parca din decoruri ce apartin mai multor scenografii. Considerata emblematica pentru viziunea artistului, utilizarea transanta a culorilor defineste si noua serie de picturi. Pastelat, crud, stralucitor sau intunecat, verdele domina de aceasta data paleta cromatica. Pe aceeasi panza, isi gasesc locul atat constructii cu o arhitectura moderna, cat si zone cu vegetatie exuberanta, astfel incat devine imposibila identificarea unui anumit spatiu geografic sau a unui anumit moment. Aceasta ambiguitate a cadrelor defineste si personajele din interiorul lor. „*Identitatile sunt mai mereu fie fragmentare, fie imprecise, fie contradictorii. Intr-un decor incoerent ca spatiu si care are structura unui vast studio de productie cinematografica, in care fragmente din lumi diferite si straine unele de altele se juxtapun implauzibil, un cowboy - surfer se distinge ca <erou principal>. Care e adevarata identitate si care e masca? E un cowboy care face surf sau un surfer costumat in cowboy? Si, mai ales, mai are sens intrebarea intr-o civilizatie contemporana occidentala supusa atat de masiv proceselor de <californication> si <hollywood-izare>?*” mentioneaza criticul Bogdan Iacob despre expozitie. In lucrarile din *(on) relatively calm dispute*, Marius Bercea ilustreaza ceea ce ramane odata ce experientele si observatiile care le insotesc se decanteaza. Rezultatul acestui proces ofera, deopotriva, raspunsuri si intrebari.

Marius Bercea s-a nascut in 1979, la Cluj-Napoca, oras in care locuieste in prezent. Pe parcursul anilor, lucrarile lui au fost prezentate in diferite expozitii internationale, atat solo cat si de grup. Printre cele mai recente proiecte, se regasesc *Young Collectors 2* - Elgiz Museum of Contemporary Art, Istanbul (2015), *Hypernova* - Blain|Southern, London (2014), *Concrete Gardens* - Francois Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles (2012), *Remains of Tomorrow* - Blain|Southern, London (2011) si *Time will Tell* - Chungking Project, Los Angeles (2009).



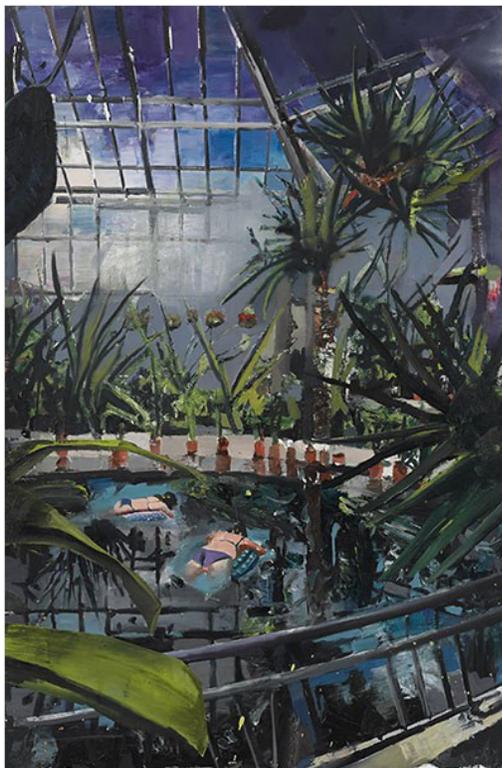
40 x 50 cm, oil on canvas, 2015, Marius Bercea



40 x 50 cm, oil on canvas, 2015, Marius Bercea

Stranger than Paradise

by IOANA CHIRA on Apr 8, 2016



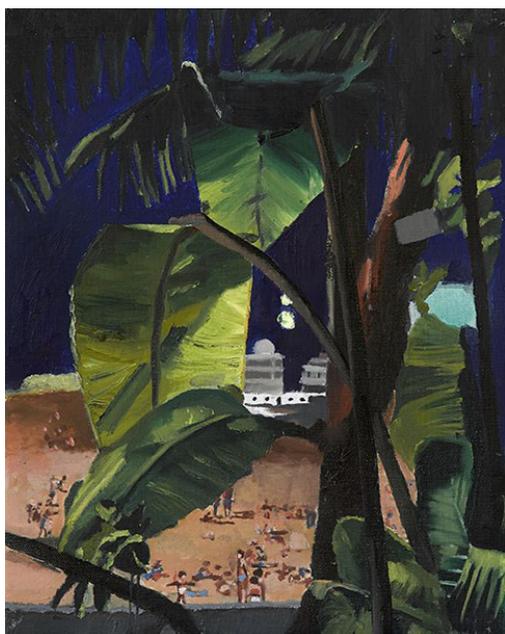
Marius Bercea, *The Botanists*, 2015, ulei pe panza, 85 x 130 cm. Prin amabilitatea artistului -

Piscine amplasate in mijlocul unei sere coplesite de vegetatie luxurianta sau al unei gradini acoperite de un luminator modernist, personaje care par sa inainteze printre decorurile unei productii cinematografice sau sa fie ultimii supravietuitori ai unor dezastre, ritualuri intr-un decor straniu, deopotriva magic si amenintator – cu lucrarile sale recente, Marius Bercea adauga noi dimensiuni „Transylforniei“, colajul vizual si simbolic ce-l preocupa de cativa ani.



Marius Bercea, *Body Toner Satire*, 2015, ulei pe panza, 160 x 190 cm. Prin amabilitatea artistului -

Artistul care locuieste la Cluj si a calatorit de mai multe ori pe Coasta de Vest a Americii, unde Hollywoodul a recreat de atatea ori orice loc de pe planeta, discuta astfel despre ce mai inseamna acum „acasa“. „Cred ca ne-am pus cu totii de acord cat de confortabila si lejera e prima intalnire cu un oras precum New York, San Francisco sau Los Angeles. Acest tip de familiaritate cauzata de cultura si inflatia vizuala de tip Hollywood sparge foarte multe bariere ale perceptiei“, spune el. „M-am intebat deseori daca mai are sens, intr-o civilizatie contemporana occidentala supusa atat de masiv proceselor de «californication» si «hollywoodizare», sa aflam care e set up-ul cinematografic si de unde incepe realitatea. Insa aceasta noua serie de lucrari experimenteaza si exprima dificultatile contemporane ale gasirii unui loc (deopotriva in sensul fizic, ca si in sensul de spatiu simbolic), care sa poata fi numit si asumat ca fiind acasa. Patria mea simbolica am numit-o Transylfornia, o medie vizuala dintre Transilvania si California.“



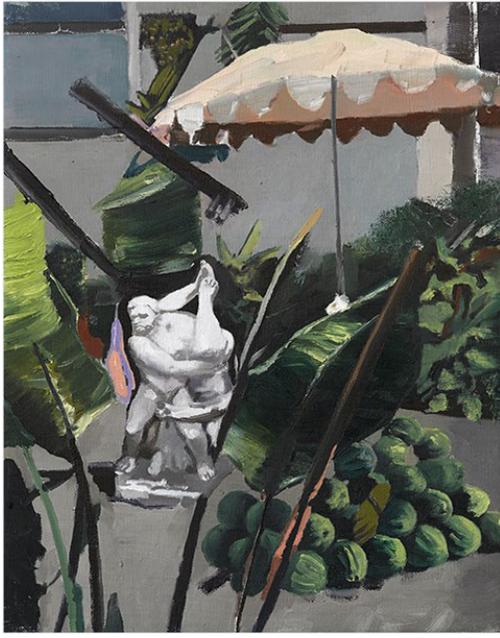
Marius Bercea, *Relative Germination*, 2016, ulei pe panza, 40 x 50 cm. Prin amabilitatea artistului

In noile picturi, vegetatia exuberanta si formele arhitecturale moderniste sunt adesea cele doua elemente principale care „se confrunta“ sau „se tatoneaza“. In sudul Californiei, artistul calator a regasit modernismul vienez pe care-l stia din Transilvania. La randul lor, fragmentele naturii sunt fie organizate, fie neatnse de dezvoltarea urbana.

Cum ramane cu oamenii? „Ca in peisajele sau in unele dintre scenele de gen ale epocii tarziu renascentiste si baroce, dar si ca in pictura grandioasa si grandomana din perioada romantica, personajul uman este mai degraba secundar, aparent vulnerabil descris in acest tip de exotism.“

Daca exotismul din lucrari sugereaza paradisuri private ale ultrabogatilor sau scene postapocaliptice ramane la latitudinea privitorului. Cert e ca in subiectele care l-au interesat in timpul calatoriilor sale – precum „ghost town-urile si comunitatile itinerante din parcurile de caravane de la periferia L.A.-ului, fuga de consumerism, terenul de joaca a lui Charles Bukovski si John Fante, impreuna cu traseele generatiei beat de pe Pacific Coast, reportajul lui Ilf si Petrov despre calatoria lor in America“ –, Marius Bercea gaseste in continuare inspiratie.

Expozitia personala a lui Marius Bercea, *(On) Relatively Calm Disputes*, se va deschide pe 9 aprilie la François Ghebaly Gallery, din Los Angeles.



Marius Bercea, *Polimorphic Rococo*, 2015, ulei pe panza, 40 x 50 cm. Prin amabilitatea artistului

VOLTA NY

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MARIUS BERCEA

Born 1979 in Cluj, Romania

Marius Bercea draws inspiration for his lively and engaging figurative paintings from what he describes as 'an intensely personal archive'. Family photographs, newspaper clippings and tales from his family's history are woven together with memories of childhood games, school trips and the daily rituals of childhood routine.

Far from banishing us to the role of outsider or voyeur, Bercea's uniquely personal and nostalgic approach elicits empathy and a sense of longing for our own pasts. The prompt for us to begin searching our own memories might be a sensitively described scene, an exchange between figures or a spontaneous gesture (it differs from painting to painting), but the consistent factor is that each depicted subject possesses a particular significance for Bercea – a trace to an actual experience - and it is the grounding of each work in an historical event that both lends weight and helps us to forge a connection.



Apr 8, 2014

Review: Marius Bercea at Blain|Southern

LOWENNA WATERS

This exhibition of works by the Romanian artist Marius Bercea (b. 1979), all dating from 2013, brings an explosion of neon brights to Blain|Southern's galleries on Hanover Square. The result of a road trip from his Transylvanian hometown Cluj-Napoca to Los Angeles, his dreamscape canvases meld the flotsam of Americana with traditional Romanian cultural motifs, the rural with the urban, and thick daubs of impasto oil with light washes of neon.

At the age of 10, Bercea was witness to the 1989 Romanian Revolution, and the collapse of the USSR. This historical moment, and the subsequent dissolution of divisions between east and west, is explored in these works. The rural landscape of post-Soviet Transylvania, where Bercea grew up, collides with the neon-fronted buildings of free market California.

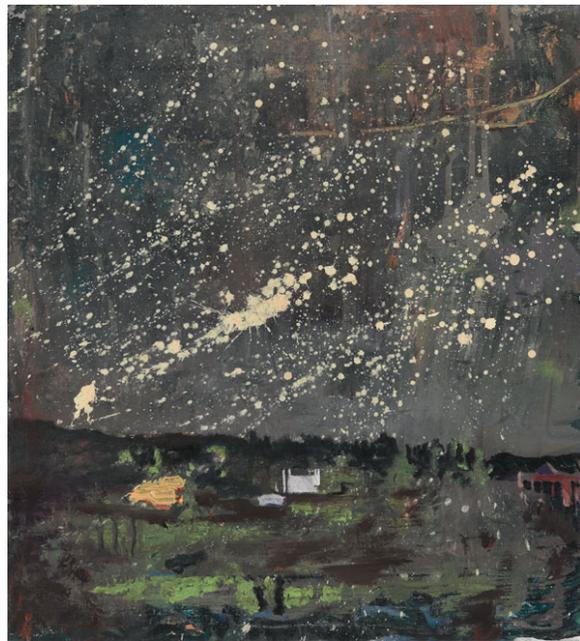


Seasonal Capital of Itinerant Crowds (2013), Marius Bercea © Marius Bercea.
Courtesy Marius Bercea and Blain|Southern

In *Seasonal Capital of Itinerant Crowds* (2013), the largest painting in the exhibition, the foreground is sketchily rendered with impermanent structures, caravans, and cluttered items of everyday life recalling itinerant communities he encountered while travelling in the desert. On the right, bleached-out palm trees blur into a pink and blue sky.

Framing these to the left is a large, modernist architectural block that characterised many 20th-century European cities. This ubiquitous architecture melds into the Hollywood sign depicted across the top of the canvas: a historical and pictorial joining of cultural iconography.

In the next room, *Spies of the Angels* (2013) is a kaleidoscope of luminous colours pulled down across the back of the canvas: pink, blue, yellow, orange – reminiscent of bright neon signs flashing over an American cityscape. Over this are sketched a patchwork of palm trees and archetypal American figures: the Marlboro cowboy, a skater girl and a surfer boy filled out in peachy skin tones, and at their feet, a star.



Spies of the Angels (2013), Marius Bercea; *Suspended Animation* (2013), Marius Bercea © Marius Bercea. Courtesy Marius Bercea and Blain|Southern

Accompanying them are two spectres, or ‘zombies’, as Bercea refers to them. A large, bear-like creature fills the centre of the canvas and a ghostly figure stands next to the surfer. Surrealism meets realism, the incomprehensible with sun drenched Americanisms.

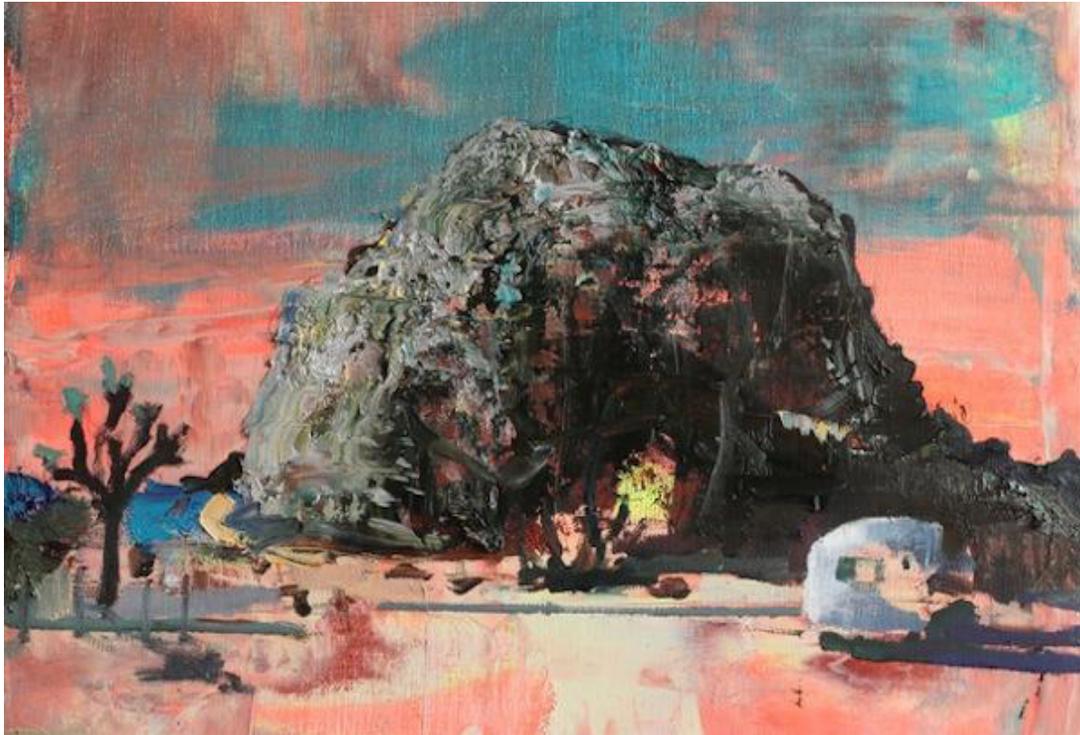
Suspended Animation (2013) depicts a dark Transylvanian landscape punctuated by sketched architectural forms. Juxtaposed with this is a star-studded Californian sky. Yellow paint is spattered across the sky to represent the stars, perhaps a reference to the quintessential American Abstract Expressionist, Jackson Pollock.

Bercea doesn't hide the fact that he paints: he revels in it. He pulls, drips, scrapes and splodges it across his canvases. Bristling with energy and excitement, his dystopian, often downright surreal landscapes are strikingly original.

‘Marius Bercea: Hypernova’ is at [Blain|Southern, London](#) until 17 April 2014.

Art Review

Tale Of Two Cities, Blain|Southern



Tale Of Two Cities: An Artist's Pilgrimage From Transylvania To LA

11-04-2014

The paintings of Marius Bercea, which are presented in Blain | Southern's current show, recalls the artist's personal pilgrimage from his home in Cluj, Transylvania to Los Angeles, California. Hypernova is split into two rooms; the hang in the first room is of concrete places from his travels, while the paintings in the second room are more surreal with mystical characters and themes. Both the mundane and the fantastical accurately depict the reality of arriving in a new place, where the overload of new visual information is both surreal and disorienting. The show is not only a presentation of beautiful paintings but is also a narrative.

Though Bercea's often using the technique of building up abstract colour and ignores traditional perspective, his paintings use iconic images of both California and Transylvania. The Seasonal Capital of Itinerant Crowds depicts the Californian architecture that was historically influenced by that of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which in the early twentieth century was also in Romania. The jagged architecture collides into the Hollywood sign, reflecting the psychology of culture shock.

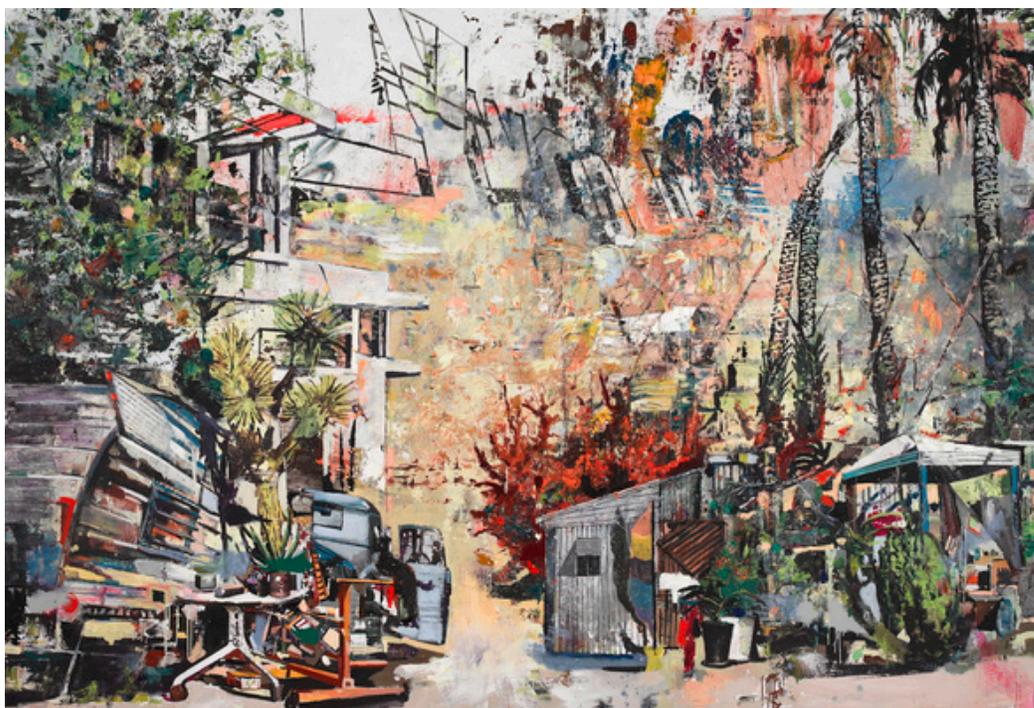
In Bercea's *Two Charmers on their Walk of Fame*, two small figures have a vaguely alien or gremlin-like appearance, because of the greenish colour of the right figure's complexion and the somewhat sinister stoop of figure on the left. They obviously do not belong in sunny California since both are dressed in winter clothes. The stooped figure stands at the end of a path of the iconic, Hollywood stars, triumphantly clutching a large starred sign or flag, while the left figure gazes up at it in awe. The pair looks like conquerors marking their territory in a new land. On the left are the Hollywood palm trees, while to the right is the Austro-Hungarian architecture, as seen in the *Seasonal Capital*. The piece is organized into four colour planes. The ground level is gray, which transitions into colour, then again into the gray mountains, and finally transforms into a colourful sky. The composition of two lonely wanderers is somewhat desolate and barren, however directly above them is an explosion of colour coming up from the Hollywood hills, almost like an erupting volcano, perhaps to show the grand significance of the strangers' exploration of an unknown land.

Electric Snow is one of Bercea's paintings least rooted in a tangible place, but rather shows a path bordered with a series of trees decorated with bright lights, or "electric snow." The background is an explosion of abstraction. The scene is both chaotic, but also grounded in the clearly outlined footpath. The painting represents the journey; the need to explore the unknown is clear and concrete, while the potential outcome can be scary and disorienting, but also exciting.

Words: Katherine Morais Photo: courtesy of Blain | Southern

Marius Bercea is at Blain | Southern until April 17th.

Exhibition of new work by Romanian painter Marius Bercea opens at Blain/Southern



Daivde Balula, Ember Harbor [installation view], Galerie Rodolphe Janssen, 2014. a Marius Bercea, Seasonal Capital of Itinerant Crowds, 2013. Oil on canvas, 280 x 395 cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Blain|Southern, © the artist.

LONDON.- Blain|Southern presents *Hypernova*, an exhibition of new work by Romanian painter Marius Bercea.

Recording the artist's travels from his Transylvanian hometown of Cluj to California and the city of Los Angeles, *Hypernova* illustrates a sensory, psychological journey as much as a geographical one. Amalgamating an array of iconic imagery that exists across Romanian and American culture, Bercea has created a diverse series of vibrant landscapes that fluctuate between the utopian and dystopian, between flux and stasis, blurring the boundaries between reality and imagination.

This body of work represents an overlapping of two topographical icons: Transylvania and California, in which the city of Cluj and the surrounding Carpathian mountains converge upon the canvas with a range of new and alien Californian environments, from the solitude of the Mojave desert to the hills of Hollywood. The show is divided into two sections; the first room displays grounded, tangible reflections of locations from Bercea's journey, whilst the second, through vibrant explosions of colour, reveals a more fantastical approach that becomes increasingly spiritual and mystical. Often verging on the surreal, these works bring together Bercea's sublime visions of the natural world with the jarring electric lights and sprawling architecture of urban developments.

Speed Sterility (2013) presents us with a series of highways leading out of Los Angeles into the desert. An earthy palette underlies dense areas of geometric structures, outlined in streaks of purple and black, or jutting upwards against a foreboding sky of crimson and dark blue. These modernist constructions dominate the skyline, and whilst their white sheen gives off a sense of once progressive design, Bercea simultaneously portrays them in states of seeming disappearance and decay. Slipping in and out of immediate focus, urban life is conveyed in a wash of dynamism and transience.

In Electric Snow (2013) both foreground and background glisten with radioactive colour. The scene could be night or day, indoors or out. Bercea's fascination with the melding of natural and artificial light is evident throughout the composition, in which the phosphorescent orange glow of the night sky is seemingly echoed in flashes of luminous colour across the suggestions of towering city buildings. In the midst of this scene, struggling for room to breathe, is the subtle presence of a traditional Romanian peasant house. The shapes of trees melt into their surroundings, glittering with specks of white light on beds of blue snow. Demonstrating a suffocation of the rural landscape by the electric lights of the city, Bercea presents himself as an emotional observer of the effects of the consumerist phenomenon.

Bercea's trip through the Californian desert is captured in the skies of both Suspended Animation (2013) and Roulette of the Night (2013). However, in both paintings the bottom section of the work represents scenes from Transylvania – the latter an industrial setting, the former a rustic green landscape, thus presenting an imperceptible fusion of two remote locations. Suspended Animation features a dark vista in which a blanket of stars lends emphasis to a dramatic sense of stillness and solitude, far away from the smoke and noise of civilisation – and perhaps signifying the presence of the artist himself, a Romanian sitting beneath the Californian night sky.

Bercea's largest canvas in the exhibition, Seasonal Capital of Itinerant Crowds (2013) presents a patchwork of disparate imagery, brought together against the backdrop of the Hollywood hills. West coast palm trees rise up against a field of thick impasto paint, which threatens to consume the letters of the Hollywood sign, now disrupted and nearly obscured – as if slipping into disrepair. In the foreground, an array of seemingly temporary structures have set up camp; caravans and huts crammed against each other upon unstable ground – alluding to the itinerant communities that Bercea witnessed first-hand across the desert. Opposite this sits a caravan with an open door – a direct homage to the myth of the traveller and the concept of the 'American road trip' that pervaded the writings of Ilif and Petrov, as well as 1950s beat literature, and the 1986 text America by Jean Baudrillard.

The composition is completed by the looming corner of a bleached white building, a reference to the modernist architecture of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire that appeared in cities across Romania in the early twentieth century. These structures would go on to influence the architectural urbanisation of Los Angeles, by figures such as Rudolph Schindler and Richard Neutra. The jagged walls of this building merge with the Hollywood sign behind it, creating a historical and pictorial conjoining of the cultural iconography of both California and Romania. By reinterpreting reality through the lens of abstract sensation, Bercea not only uniquely conveys the overwhelming sensory spectacle of his experiences, but also exposes the cultural crossovers between two distant worlds.

The exhibition will be accompanied by the artist's first monograph, including over 60 full colour plates, an interview with the artist and two new essays by Michael Bracewell and Barry Schwabsky.

Marius Bercea (b.1979) was born and grew up in Cluj, Romania. At the age of 10 years old he experienced the demise of the communist period as the USSR disintegrated and the 1989 Romanian Revolution took place. The effects of this history are evident in the pictorial space that Bercea creates as he alludes to a post-communist, early capitalist Romania. The artist's works are highly distinctive, as memory, recollection and reality seemingly merge upon the canvas surface, giving rise to a visual sensuality that has made Bercea one of the leading artists of the Cluj School. Recent solo exhibitions include: Concrete Gardens, François Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles (2012); Remains of Tomorrow, Blain|Southern, London, (2011); Time will Tell, Chungking Project, Los Angeles (2009); If Through the Copper Woods You Pass, Eleven Fine Art Gallery, London, (2009); Shorn lambs fall behind, Mie Lefever Gallery, Ghent (2008) and Yellow Side of Glamour/Melted Guidelines are

passé, Contemporary Gallery of Brukenthal Museum, Romania (2008). Group exhibitions include: Hotspot Cluj – New Romanian Art, ARKEN Museum of Modern Art, Denmark (2013); Nightfall, Modern Centre for Modern and Contemporary Arts, Debrechen (2012) which travelled to Galerie Ruldofinum (2013); Referencing History, Green Gallery, Dubai (2012); European Travellers, Mucsarnok Kunsthalle, Budapest (2012); Selektionseffekte, Blain|Southern, Berlin (2011); After the Fall, Hudson Valley Centre for Contemporary Art, Peekskill, New York (2011); No New Thing Under the Sun, Royal Academy, London (2010); Mircea Pinte Collection, Museum of Art, Cluj-Napoca, Romania (2010) and Prague Biennale 4, Prague (2009). Bercea's work is in several public and private collections, including the Hudson Valley Centre for Contemporary Art, New York, and the ARKEN Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen.

“Marius Bercea: François Ghebaly Gallery”

Jean Black, Ezrha

Summer 2012



A Tree, A Concrete, A Cloud, 2012, Photo: Robert Wedemeyer. Courtesy of the Artist and François Ghebaly Gallery.

IT WAS INEVITABLE THAT, FROM THE TIME PHOTOGRAPHY BECAME a tool of representational art, its inherent mimetic properties would become one of its subjects. Corollary to that, its capacities for taxonomy, verification, and reconstruction, quickly seized upon by everything from forensic sciences to entertainment media—in short, the photograph's utility as aide-mémoire, as *souvenir*—would themselves become subject to narrative manipulations.

Although Marius Bercea's work occupies a distinctly post-narrative domain, the 'corrected,' 'interrupted,' or otherwise manipulated 'souvenir' is critical to the direction he pushes what might otherwise be a very conventional mode of contemporary representational painting.

Nothing like a failed former totalitarian, or capital-rehabbed East European state to prompt a second look at the slick instruments of its propaganda or publicity. The show's evocative title, "Concrete Gardens," makes reference to the blocky, but frequently striking, post-Corbusier modernist buildings and grandiose civic spaces of Bercea's native Romania, among other Balkan and eastern bloc states; but it's not as if botanical life disappeared, nor the life of the imagination.

Bercea's paintings (all works in oil on canvas, all 2012) are an allusive and tactile performance on such souvenirs-elongated moments wherein the historical and the fantastical, rapture and alienation, the actuality revised by memory or dream, all converge and coexist.

Landscape of Ignorance presents one such moment—an uninhibited juxtaposition of scales: a figure which may be human or, more probably a sculpture, standing on a plinth, looming higher than a light standard; a platformed, multi-storey housing block, terraced with rectilinear balconies in pale sandstone-yellow; and in an ambiguous distance, a colonnade that flanks a stepped amphitheatre in the upper-right quadrant flecked with passages of red and mauve—all under a heavy purple sky. *Dusty Fairytale* might be another view of the same building, with a suggestion of neon and similarly toxic preoccupations.

The "cloud" of *A Tree, a Concrete, a Cloud*, a scumble of pale yellow and putty-beige, might stand in for human activity, suppressed or etherized in memory. An explosive purple-and-brown spatter of a poplar stands between foreground and background, further mediated by a shimmer of gray-and-bright-green eddying pools. In the middle ground behind the "poplar," a flat, gray rectilinear structure, pierced by lancets, the "concrete," backs into a flat, barely-there gray, flanked by a pink mass itself washed over with teal green, gray, pale yellow. The other paintings here share a similar quality of disturbed quietude.

Imperfect Pearls Shimmer at Dusk, by far the largest painting on view here, is a catalog of Bercea's subject and style, as exuberantly painterly as anything in the show, with a similar dream-logic relativity of scale, color and subject elements. You could almost lose sight of the Soviet modernist pyramid at the painting's center in the play of incongruities fore and aft: the socialist sculptural ode to politically correct physical pleasures—a deer grazing (or rutting) off to one side, an off-scale pavilion on the other—and so Bercea's improbable pearls string us toward a troubled twilight.

- Ezrha Jean Black

“18 Journeys Forged in Communism”
Schwendener, Martha
January 14, 2011



Art can be very good at illuminating history, showing how shifting geographies, ideologies and violent upheavals have real but often hidden effects on individuals. That, in a sense, is what the exhibition “After the Fall,” at the Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art in Peekskill, sets out to do. The show features 18 artists from six countries in Eastern and Central Europe, most of whom were born under Communist rule but came of age “after the fall.” It’s a great premise, but in the end a very academic show.

What do I mean by “academic”? One definition might include art based on the mediums, styles, techniques and theories espoused by art institutions. It can also mean methods and styles used so many times that they become stultifying templates: overly recognizable, ready-made devices that, in particularly bad moments, feel like gimmicks. “After the Fall” is in this latter category, with a large number of paintings borrowing the techniques and ideas developed by Gerhard Richter and Luc Tuymans.

For these two painters, who came of age during the postwar and postmodern periods, photography and print media became effective ways of mining traumatic histories. For Mr. Richter, it was Nazi Germany and later violent radical politics in 1970s West Germany; for Mr. Tuymans, a Belgian, it was the brutal colonialism practiced by King Leopold II of Belgium in the Congo, among other subjects.

Where Mr. Richter’s early paintings relied on a gray-scale palette that approximated black and white photographs and television screens, Mr. Tuymans’s coloring has tended toward the muted, sickly hues of faded snapshots or cheap print media. The paintings of Marius Bercea, a Romanian artist, seem very indebted to Mr. Tuymans, particularly works like “Ethical Ideal Cabinet,” from 2009, which suggests some kind of sinister goings-on at the voting station or party office, or the banal tourism of “Black Sea Tan,” from 2009.

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“City Report: Cluj”

Unwin, Richard

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A new gallery complex opens in the northern Transylvanian city’s thriving art community.

Over the last two years, Cluj, in northern Transylvania, has become strongly associated with contemporary painting, with the so-called Cluj School being compared to similarly productive periods in Leipzig and Dresden. While this label is seen by many as unrepresentative, it has helped focus international attention on the city, which has gained prominence over Romania’s capital, Bucharest.

At the heart of Cluj’s creative output is the recently opened Fabrica De Pensule (Paintbrush Factory), a multi-disciplinary venture which houses studios and exhibition spaces, alongside contemporary dance and theatre groups. Fittingly, the five-storey building was once one of Romania’s chief paintbrush producers; in the wake of the manufacturing exodus to China, the creative community swooped to re-populate this vertical maze of workshops and corridors. Opened to the public in October, the Factory’s gritty exterior retains the expected post-industrial hallmarks: rusting pipes, broken windows and crumbling facades. Inside, the galleries – of which there are currently four, with more to follow – have all succeeded in marrying elements of the building’s industrial fabric with white walls and professional lighting.



Another impressive painter now based in the Factory is Marius Bercea (b. 1979), who has recently exhibited at London’s Eleven Fine Art. Bercea is a founding member of Laika, an artists’ collective that coordinates exhibition space in both the Factory and Bucharest. Bercea’s own work is currently engaged with depicting the childhood world of the 1980s. As a part of this process, he replicates the tonal impression of a Polaroid, fabricating the sense of a time that has faded away.