

## Interview with Dan and Lia Perjovschi

### Interviews

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Lia Perjovschi is an artist living and working in Sibiu and Bucharest. Her multidisciplinary practice recovers, collects, and disseminates information that has been inaccessible to Romania until 1989. A highly developed personal archive, Contemporary Art Archive, is formed through objects, diagrams, texts, images and film. She exhibits elements from this archive in different forms as her artistic project.

Dan Perjovschi is an artist, writer, and graphic artist living in Sibiu and Bucharest. Over the past two decades, Perjovschi has created drawings in museums, art centers, and public spaces. The drawings present political commentary in response to current events.

**Olga Stefan:** You have been a fundamental part of Romania's burgeoning post-1989 art scene as artists, as well as activists. What were the challenges you faced before 1989, and what were the challenges you faced after?



Dan Perjovschi working. Image courtesy of the author.

**Lia Perjovschi:** Before 1989, the stillness of a closed society, the lack of freedom, and lack of perspective. After '89, the noise, the chaotic movement from communism to capitalism.

**Dan Perjovschi:** Before 1989, it was basic survival. After '89, it has been about managing and maintaining freedom of expression. First, the scene went neo-orthodox; now, it is a full art market. We had priests at the openings, now we have DJs.

**OS:** Your practice has always been political. Who is your public? What would you like your work to achieve? What do you feel it has achieved?

**LP:** I address people like myself. I am interested in new possibilities, in what is different, honest. I think I made a bit of a difference in the context in which I was moving.

**DP:** I have a political agenda and a political placement at a political, independent think-tank magazine as a job, no function or position in any state or private art institution, and make uncollectible works. But I am a commentator; I am not in the avant-garde, Lia is. She is revolutionary; she is changing the scene. I adapt to the scene. I function in a pre-established system finding its blind spots or cracks, and then reinvent expression where it was just conformism. My work is about keeping one aware. I work with news, the quotidian, and humor. I think I did what I wanted, big time.

**OS:** Rampant capitalism and consumerism have taken root in Romania. How have the political and economic changes impacted Romania's artists and art scene?

**LP:** In the same way that it impacts the entire society: by altering high ambitions, fragmenting, inverting values, by transforming citizens into amateur actors. Commercial art is dominant; resistance is a result of this situation, not an attitude, with a few exceptions.

**DP:** We live the paradox of an overblown, ultra-hip art market in a context with no funds, grants, or basic artist institutions. Everybody outside of the country is excited; everybody inside is depressed. Research, experimentation, and critical attitudes are postponed or accidental. The Romanian art scene lives the moment; the past is foggy and the future is unclear.

**OS:** What do you feel are the most pressing societal problems in contemporary Romania, and how are these problems affecting the cultural/artistic realm?

**LP:** The lack of contemporary culture and a perspective that leads to the ability of having the right institutions plan strategies and effect.

**DP:** Poverty, inequality, vulgarity, the tabloid social life and the education mess up. We are a second-hand society with dreams replaced by plastic copies. We cannot aggregate. But we are the masters of self-deprecation and constant complaining. We do nothing but talk.

**OS:** Do you feel that artists growing up after 1989 also have a responsibility to comment on political, social, and economic issues? What can we hope would be the result of their activism?

**LP:** We all have our effect on society, whether we intend it or not. It's not a special moment when you get involved. Society looks how it looks also because of the new generations.

**DP:** Every artist must have it. If one sets out to just produce nice objects (sculptures, teapots, oil paintings, videos), he can simply call himself a designer. The artist must be somebody who combines thinking, craft, criticality, and an intellectual attitude. We are the whistle blowers badly needed in a conformist and consumerist society.

**OS:** What has been one of your most consistent critiques in the last twenty-three years in Romania, and one that you feel is still relevant today?

**LP:** In general, I am for engagement (with responsibility) for a better society for all. In art in particular, I am for state institutions to have, at the very least, a minimum budget for contemporary art and professional criteria in a global context. Education (with empathy and modesty) is the key word.

**DP:** The egoism, the lack of a grand vision and long-term planning, self-indulgence, and the lack of pride. Good enough is not good enough. One should seek excellence in art, administration, and economy.

**OS:** I have admired your tenacity and your dedication since I met the both of you for the first time in 2001. From the outside, your impact on the art and intellectual community in Romania is very evident. Do you feel your work and efforts have made a difference, or are you discouraged?

**LP:** Yes, as others have made an impact on me, I am sure I helped others in turn. Also, we have to be flexible and open to not make mistakes; things are in constant change, relative.

**DP:** I am discouraged but I am not stepping down.

**OS:** What should Romania's art scene look like for it to be considered functional and stable?

**LP:** Autonomous, intelligent, courageous. The thing is not what work will fit the living room or the toilet of the collector, but how we can help and contribute to the local/global context to make better.

**DP:** Institutions and local funding. Regional museums of art must be reformed, curatorial positions updated, artistic research acknowledged and funded. We are good at exporting (the Romanian Cultural Institute), but we ignore the production. This system cannot survive.

**OS:** It has been discussed that the general public is largely absent from contemporary art events. Who is to blame for the lack of interest in art and culture? What is to be done (in Lenin's words)?

**LP:** What do we give them? And how? There is too much bad art. The producers and the mediators have to read a bit more, look around, relax (we are not exceptions, we have the chance to be visible), and be honest. They need to pay attention to what they really feel and not think about the general trend all the time.

**DP:** In this order: institutions, directors, and staff who are supposed to fight this problem; curators who ignore reality; artists with no clue about society; and last, but not least, the public itself. The white night of museums, galleries, and now cultural institutions are zombifying events, showing very clearly how art is communicated, used and understood in a consumerist society. Nobody visits the museums the entire year and then, suddenly, everybody goes on one single night. What is to be done? Like what you do and understand your public. Never give up and constantly be open. Do not lie. Do not copy. Be sincere and focused. Use all the means at your disposal. Create coalitions (individuals, institutions, media and civic platforms). In other countries they made revolutions on Facebook. Why should we just exchange kitten pictures?

**OS:** You have been instrumental in creating a coherent position of critique vis-à-vis the political and power structures in Romania from your studio in Bucharest and through the Contemporary Art Archive/Center for Art Analysis (CAA). Over the last two decades, you hosted most of the foreign curators and art professionals coming to Romania at this studio. I feel this studio has an important historical position in the development of Romania's art scene. Tell me about CAA now and about its future.

**LP:** Being located in the center of the town, in the yard of the Art Academy Bucharest, and due to the general corruption and lack of vision for the future, we lost the space. The Art Academy took it (they want to establish an archive that they now know how to do). For the past ten years, I have been looking for a public space for the archive to function without me. Instead of a public space, we understood that we have to go for a private one (we are building a small storage space in Sibiu). Parts from the archive are recycled into my Knowledge Museum project – I go where I am invited with a kit tailored to the different issues based on the interest of the host. The rest is in boxes. The CAA is becoming a nomadic archive. It will take time to reorganize and reshape the whole data to be open again all the time to anyone (now we have to pay for the construction of the space). But whoever really needs to, finds the way to the information.