

PAST PRESENT

Fragments of memory. Bucharest-Pompeii-London

Ioana Marinescu with Smaranda Găbudeanu and Iulia Mărăcine

Collaborating artists: Andreea David, Hennie Lee, Katia Pascariu, Eliza Trefas, Hanna Gillgren, Phoebe von Held, Laurențiu Calciu, Thomas Goodey, Doru Apreotesei, David Crawforth

PAST PRESENT is a moving archive; a research project in motion, gathering history and evolving at each stage of its development. Its components include photographs, the written word, the spoken word, videography, soundscape, living bodies and choreography.

Its primary author is the architect and photographer Ioana Marinescu who recuperates cultural memories that have all but been forgotten, exploring ways to bring them to life.

The project starts in a London art school, where Marinescu conducts a series of performative experiments; where single black and white photographs of places that no longer exist dominate a room, projected large. Fellow researchers are invited to animate the still, archival images with their bodies, and by reading fragments of interviews with people who once lived in Bucharest's Uranus Hill quarter – a large residential area erased in the 80s by Romania's last communist leader Nicolae Ceaușescu, to make way for a new centre of power. Studio furniture throws shadows on the projections, like the ghosts of domestic chattels long gone – and in one experiment a church moves in front of our eyes. In March 2017, Marinescu subverts an advertising space on a billboard structure by installing a large archival image from March 1985 showing the Uranus Hill district under demolition. Workmen paste up a monochrome image of what once was, against the current architectural backdrop of Romania's parliament building. In 2019, Marinescu, together with architects Thomas Goodey, Costin Gheorghe and urban archivist Cristian Văraru, leads a student

workshop to rebuild the former Uranus Hill, in the form of a large map-model – like a giant jigsaw puzzle.

One fellow researcher notices an alignment of interests and invites Marinescu to experiment in the larger, historically charged space of Beaconsfield's gallery-come-studio during UK lockdown. Here, Marinescu turns her attention to another famously erased city, Pompeii, and for the first time invites a choreographer, Hanna Gillgren, to make more considered movement experiments in relation to the archival material: *PAST PRESENT. as if asleep ...* (2021). The following year, Marinescu and Gillgren, together with Romanian choreographers Smaranda Găbudeanu and Iulia Mărăcine, make on-site movement explorations of the body casts from Pompeii, documented by filmmaker Laurențiu Calciu. In autumn, a performative audio-visual installation, titled *PAST PRESENT. The Archive and the Body*, takes place at /SAC Gallery in Bucharest, with the support of PETEC and Cartier Uranus.

Now, returning to London, Marinescu, Găbudeanu and Mărăcine are joined by their collaborators – film maker Laurențiu Calciu, performers Andreea David, Hennie Lee and Eliza Trefaș, actress Katia Pascariu, choreographer Hanna Gillgren, dramaturg Phoebe von Held, architect Thomas Goodey, and sound artists Doru Apreotesei and David Crawforth – to collectively sculpt and install imagery that allows participants to inhabit a new imaginary space, connecting past with present, remembering with forgetting.

PAST PRESENT. Fragments of memory: Bucharest-Pompeii-London in the words of

the artists 'explores the movements between memory, archive and body – an oscillation between oblivion and remembering, removal and displacement, erasure and recovery'. Gestures of power and acts of displacement are re-enacted through archival imagery, live performance, its video record, and spoken testimony. An event as far away in time as the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD is indexed in collective memory by the naturally occurring body casts in molten lava of the citizens of Pompeii, while the erasure of Uranus Hill in 1980s Bucharest leaves only witness statements.

The project is returned to a more academic research format, with the one-day symposium *Dreams and Guilt. Exhibiting counter-narratives* where Jumana Abboud, Sohaila Baluch, Smaranda Găbudeanu, Hennie Lee, Ioana Marinescu, Iulia Mărăcine, Bindu Mehra, Roxy Rezvany, Naomi Siderfin and Shino Yanai make practice-led presentations, contributing to the formation of further ideas, both practical and intellectual.

PAST PRESENT. Fragments of memory: Bucharest-Pompeii-London represents a consolidation of these years of research, which are stamped into the galleries of Beaconsfield (also the historic site of a radical demolition) by the inter-disciplinary processes and physical presence of the collaborators, leaving an 'exhibition', or, to use my own research term, 'exhillation', since the process is not over. In Autumn 2023, the project returns to Romania with evolutions in Bucharest and Timișoara, European City of Culture 2023.

– Naomi Siderfin, Beaconsfield



Giorgio Sommer, *Human Imprint, Pompeii* (c. 1880)

Albumen silver photograph, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Open-source digital record: NGV Collection Online

former inhabitants to tell their stories over collective meals set in Izvor Park, on the site of the demolished former districts.

The performers' bodies negotiate time, from the geological time of Pompeii to the fast, indifferent rhythms of the present. New plaster moulds of body parts take shape as negative spaces where memory becomes tangible. Brought to London from Bucharest, where it was constructed by architecture students in 2019, the *Paper Hill*, a large model of Uranus Hill, becomes as transient as the churches in Bucharest had become in the 1980s – displaced from their foundations and transported on railway tracks. Drawings are re-imagined in the former classroom space of Beaconsfield's main gallery – a former Ragged School which lost two thirds of the building to the expansion of the railway. The connections between these 'crumbs' of personal and collective memories are revealed through fragments of spoken language.

PAST PRESENT. Fragments of memory: Bucharest-Pompeii-London plays with three situations caught up in the whirl of history, between a past about to disappear and the future tumbling in with devastating force.

— Ioana Marinescu

memory crumbs

The mould is the imprint of an object on a surface, the negative of form, palpable memory. To the ancient Greeks, memory was the imprint on the soul of a past event.

During the 19th century archaeological excavations in Pompeii, plaster was poured into the holes created by the organic matter decomposed under the hardened ash and lava, revealing nearly one hundred almost exact reproductions of the bodies of men, women, children, and animals, trapped as if in an eternal sleep.

Nearly 2000 years later, in 1980's Bucharest, the only inhabitable hill in the city – Uranus Hill – is flattened by order of Nicolae Ceaușescu in order to make place for a gigantic building called 'The People's Palace' and for the 'Victory of Socialism Boulevard'. Unlike Pompeii, which is extraordinarily preserved, from Bucharest we hardly have any tangible evidence left – only the stories of the witnesses and a few photographs. In pursuit of these fragile, fragmented memories, we collect interviews and memory drawings, we discover photographs and small objects. We invite

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Beaconsfield

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