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ARTICLE

THE PICTURE AS A RESULT OF MEMORY IN NEMERE KEREZSI'S ART

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THE PICTURE AS A RESULT OF MEMORY IN NEMERE KEREZSI'S ART

Abstract

In this paper I focus on a case study concerning Nemere Kerezsi's artistic approach presented in the exhibition *Nemere Kerezsi: Thiemann-Etüde* (Quadro Gallery, Cluj-Napoca, 13th of May – 24th of June 2022). The aim of this article is to analyze the close relationship between memory and image, starting from the way the artist observes and researches the memory and narratives created around places, which he claims as the central resource for the creation of his works present in the *Thiemann-Etüde* exhibition.

The artist systematically starts from the micro framework of personal memories and narratives, which are then recorded and reproduced, through suggestive images, for the macro framework of the Anthropocene topic of the current history.
Thus, the theoretical debates on the issue of the Anthropocene are relevant in this context, because the artist captures through a diversified visual language (video, photography, sculpture, installation etc.) the cultural-artificial intervention of man on nature and the consequences of this intrusion.

Starting from the premise that the natural environment and history present themselves more and more as a result built on the basis of the interconnection of people who fabricate communities, Nemere Kerezsi developed his artistic approach similar to anthropological research.

Namely, the artist collects subtle data about the personal memory of different places he's visited, in order to generate the "image of an experience".

Keywords

contemporary art

Nemere Kerezsi: Thiemann-Etüde exhibition

Quadro Gallery

individual memory

collective memory

places of memory

Anthropocene

INTRODUCTION

PREMISES - STRUCTURE AND METHODS OF THE CASE STUDY

This article has as its main purpose an analysis of the memory-image relation as a resource for artistic creation, in the case of Nemere Kerezsi's visual approach. A main objective of this research is to investigate to what extent memory can serve as a source of inspiration and determining point of the artistic process in Nemere Kerezsi's case. The option to dedicate a particular case study to the *Thiemann-Etüde* exhibition at the Quadro gallery from Cluj-Napoca is related to the fact that Nemere Kerezsi's artistic career is suggestive of the way in which the contemporary artist can re-actualize the memory of 'places' with the help of different work media and materiality. With greater reason, the heterogeneous visual language of Nemere Kerezsi proves to be more relevant within the proposed discussion because his approach illustrates the different images that personal memory can acquire and the way it can stick to a cultural-historical narrative much more extensive. The premise that memory is a factor of inspiration for Nemere Kerezsi's works and, at the same time, a conceptual binder of the various forms of artistic expression found in the context of the *Nemere Kerezsi: Thiemann-Etüde* exhibition will be verified during the elaboration of the present article. To prove this idea, the present research is based on my direct personal experience as a spectator in the exhibition of Nemere Kerezsi at Quadro Gallery, as well as the use of materials such as: photographs, the curatorial text, fragments of text written by the artist accompanying the works in the exhibition, video with the artist etc. All these resources are useful in applying in the case study other working methods such as image analysis or close reading on the text (explanations related to the works provided by the artist, the curatorial text) from an aesthetic and hermeneutic perspective which, in turn, adheres to the interdisciplinary theoretical discourse of Visual Culture Studies.

The contribution I want to make with this research is to clarify key features of Nemere Kerezsi's individual and complex artistic approach. Also, throughout the article I will bring arguments that emphasize the relevance of memory as an essential factor in the configuration of the artist's works, as a connecting thread between the artistic objects and the various themes of interest presented to the public in the Quadro exhibition. To strengthen this reasoning, the study of the *Thiemann-Etüde* exhibition will be structured on three directions of analysis of the involvement of memory as a working tool in the realization of artworks.

A first direction of analysis will take into account the artist's works that are based on individual memory resulting from personal subjective experience. The second point of inquiry will be located around the examination of the works in the exhibition that connect the narratives resulting from personal memories with those embodied into a much wider 'memory of place'. For the artist, the problematization of the manner in which the geological time of the Anthropocene leaves its mark on the 'memory of places' becomes a topic of interest. The third track of analysis will assess the contribution and relevance of the archive as a way of storing memory, alongside the subsequent appropriation of the archive as a working tool within Nemere Kerezsi's artistic process. Finally, in order to observe how the 'memory of the place' becomes for the artist the primary resource in generating the "image of an experience" (György, 2022), through the prism of the memory-image relationship, I will apply in the case study concepts and theories of authors such as: Paul Ricoeur, Joan Gibbons, Pierre Nora, Ross Poole, Hal Foster, Maurice Halbwachs, Boris Groys. An interdisciplinary theoretical perspective, based on the conceptions of the listed authors will help to better understand and frame Nemere Kerezsi's distinctive approach in the context of contemporary artistic creation.

THE CONTEXT OF THE ORGANIZATION OF THE EXHIBITION
NEMERE KEREZSI: TIEMANN-ETÜDE

Since 2008, Quadro Gallery has built a commercial profile on the Cluj-Napoca (Romania) art scene, mainly focused on selling and promoting lesser-known modern art from Transylvania. The clear stake of the Quadro Gallery to capitalize on modern art, later materialized in the establishment of the Quadro auction program. In a pragmatic sense, Quadro gallery's entry into the secondary

art market has allowed this organization a sustainable existence and development. In addition to this practical aspect necessary to ensure the longevity of Quadro, the art historian Szekely Sebestyén György – the founder and director of Quadro – conceived the gallery's program focused predominantly on modern art and from an ideal that wants to understand the context of the artistic production in Central and Eastern Europe. However, over time, Quadro has not remained an active space only within the parameters of a commercial gallery dedicated to modern art from the region. Since 2016, the Quadro Gallery has increasingly started to present to the public contemporary art exhibitions that explore the neo-avant-garde direction and reach the most original visual and thematic concerns of the current artistic generations.

The opening of the Quadro Gallery to the technical and conceptual pluralism that characterizes contemporary art (Rațiu, 2011, pp. 23-36) in recent times can be noted perhaps most obviously in the exhibition *Nemere Kerezsi: Thiemann-Etüde*.

The exhibition eloquently captures *Nemere Kerezsi's* over 20 years of artistic activity, through his heterogeneous thematic and technical interests. Kerezsi's concern for distinct mediums of artistic expression also results from his artistic-academic training at the University of Fine Arts in Budapest. In his career so far, his artistic activity has been characterized by interdisciplinarity on the border between sculpture, intermedia art, video, photography, graphic arts, installation and other media. As the curatorial text suggests, the works selected by the artist (himself participating in the curating process), together with the curator Szekely Sebestyén György, are „based on a direct observation of reality and, in many cases, on its long, in-depth research" (György, 2022). The assumption of a research approach, which resides in a rather methodological and less intuitive artistic approach, could be noted in the Quadro exhibition by the way the artist follows the stages of a scientific research to get closer to the subject that concerns him: like the ecosystem of bees, the optical phenomenon, the consequences of Anthropocene on the environment and even in our way of living together, our present relation with the past through the memory of a place, and not only. Nemere Kerezsi's methodological artistic process takes shape starting from the study and direct documentation of the subjects that concern him by means of: video or photo camera, images from archives (photos, maps, postcards etc.). Then, the artist follows and records the manner of creative transposition of the subject concerned, by recording and noting some empirical observations and ideas. They emerge as his artistic process evolves. Such explanations accompanied the works also present in the exhibition at the Quadro Gallery, from the author's intention to help the public decode the unitary vision behind his artistic agenda. Despite the very different works both as topic and also as artistic medium, there is a holistic approach which is the center of Kerezsi's artistic agenda: "interconnectedness and the search for connection or alliance" (György, 2022), which, finally, is able to build a functional community.

A particular aspect that this study wants to capture is that the diversity of themes of artistic interest in Nemere Kerezsi's eclectic approach have their common origin in the factor of memory as a creative resource, whether we are discussing the contribution of individual or collective memory. As we will see, in some works of the artist, the interconnection and the sense of a community can be triggered by accessing the collective memory present in the structure of some events and places.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMES: FROM MEMORY TO IMAGE, PICTURE AND ART

Paul Ricoeur argues in his phenomenological approach to memory that it is more than a simple rational 'apparatus' for storing information. Memory is also a form of accessing the past, it is always of the past and, despite all this, not to be confused with history, because one of its components intervenes, namely: imagination (Ricoeur, 2004, pp. 5-6). Memory is the one that has the power to change the concrete data of the past because, in the process of remembering, memory occurs together with an association of ideas, via imagination. It can be altered through deformations, interpretations, uncertainties being in constant evolution as an integral part of our individuality. Throughout the history of ideas, memory has been conceptualized through dichotomies such as individual versus collective memory.

The early paradigms of modern thought that tended towards a "subjectivist radicalization" (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 94) rejected the possibility of a collective subject. The idea of collective memory aroused a great deal of skepticism, until the progress of the humanities in the 20th century. With the advancement of disciplines such as sociology, psychology, anthropology or history, the opposition between individual memory and collective memory started losing ground. New reasonings on memory, such as "sites or […] environments of memory" (Nora, 1989, p. 7), appeared on the horizon and began to blur the much-disputed philosophical opposition between individual and collective memory. Paul Ricoeur finds that, despite the inevitable distinction between the two, both of these dimensions of memory are equally valid and also, there is a "constitution of individual memory and of collective memory reciprocal and interconnected" (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 95). Through individual memory our past and present are reconciled as part of identity impacting our emotions and morality that make up our subjectivity. Instead, collective or cultural memory, as it is also called, does not belong exclusively to a single individual, it has a social character because it is revealed "in social practices and artifacts, as well as in public discourse" (Poole, 2008, p. 155). Moreover, all these characteristics of the collective memory keep the traces of individualities summed up, while the individuality is affected by the socio-cultural and historical load contained in a certain environment or accessed within some communities.

The fact that there is a close relationship between memory and image, and that memories often come back to us in the form of images, is nothing new. The already mentioned Paul Ricoeur remarks: "It does appear that the return of the memory can only take place in the mode of becoming-an-image" (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 7). However, images are not limited to the memory frame. In his distinction between image and picture, W.J.T. Mitchell classifies memory as a mental image alongside dreams or fantasies, and linguistic expressions can represent images as well. What Mitchell wants to draw our attention to is that an image is the result of an abstract creation of the intellect, which without a support, remains only a mental image. Instead, "the picture is the image plus the support; it is the appearance of the immaterial image in a material medium. That is why we can speak of architectural, sculptural, cinematic, textual, and even mental images..." (Mitchell, 2005, p. 85). Therefore, the artistic image becomes an expression of the total union between the mental image of the artist and the material support that he attributes to it. At the same time, in its capacity as a mental image, the memory is valued artistically and aesthetically only when it is transferred by the artist to the working medium to share it with the Other, his audience in this case.

A study that traces the transformation of current cultural conceptions of memory and the way in which they are reflected in contemporary visual art is that of Joan Gibbons. Her text can still produce a serious debate around the various uses of memory as a source of creation in contemporary art. As the author shows us, the reflection of memory in art is much older and can be seen indirectly including from the self-portraits of Rembrandt or Van Gogh, later, those of Frida Kahlo, due to the autobiographical character of their artworks. However, a truly assumed concern of artists towards the subject of memory is clearly displayed starting with contemporary art from the 70s (Gibbons, 2007, pp. 9-15). Moreover, the amplification of pluralism in the contemporary art of the 90s due to the development of new technologies which, at the same time, caused the increasingly present intersection between art and technology, produced an expansion of the artistic perspectives in transposition of the memory.

In her book, *Contemporary Art and Memory Images of Recollection and Remembrance*, Gibbons does not necessarily insist on the aspect of memory as a cognitive function of 're-cognition' and storage of data and information that can be updated. Rather, following the course of some inevitable features of memory such as its flexibility or fallibility in rendering the past accurately, the author seeks to highlight the emotional side of memory, which can be "a key to our emotional understanding of ourselves and the world" (Gibbons, 2007, p. 5). Furthermore, art is able to work with the emotional aspect of memory. Starting from Proust's example in literature, Joan Gibbons understands memory as a creative force capable of tracing a channel of communication between the past and the present, where the artist can use this to link his/her "personal truths to a wider audience or readership" (Gibbons, 2007, p. 3). Therefore, the appropriation of memory as a creative resource within the artistic process can be a connection within the aesthetic appreciation, which connects the artist to his/her audience.

Throughout her book, Gibbons presents the various ways in which contemporary artists use memory in their work, whether they do so in a consciously assumed way, in which memory becomes a subject of interest, or, indirectly, memory is already embedded in the aesthetic and conceptual qualities of their work. Starting from the work of contemporary artists such as Louise Bourgeois or Tracey Emin, Gibbons observes their specific self-referential way of exploring their own past through memory and, thus, their works acquire an autobiographical character. Then, the author offers the example of the works of Rachel Whiteread, Nan Goldin, Miyako Ishiuchi, to demonstrate that a potential stage of manifestation of memory in contemporary art can be detected "through an indexical relationship with the subject represented" (Gibbons, 2007, p. 29). Rather, this indexical relationship implies the configuration of the works with the help of some elements, called by Gibbons 'memory traces', which are parts contained directly in the artist's original memory or that refer to it. The indexical relationship of art and memory that Joan Gibbons sustains is more obvious if we return to Paul Ricoeur's assertion that "the final referent of the memory remains the past" (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 15). Another method of exploring memory in contemporary art is that of revising history, through which artists like Keith Piper or Doris Salcedo "recycle" socio-political narratives of the past that they re-actualize via their own works. Then, the idea of recovery of history is even more extended by Gibbons, by applying Marianne Hirsch's concept of 'postmemory' to the work of contemporary artists. These artists, proposed by Gibbon in her book, touch on the sensitive subject of the need for collective healing in the face of traumas that have persisted throughout history. The idea of postmemory refers to the sensitive issue of the perpetuation of individual or collective traumas on subsequent generations who did not directly go through those violent events and emotions. But these recent generations inherit the consequences of the perpetuation of these wounds to which they have access a posteriori due to: the family, the environment of formation, images, texts or stories transmitted orally (Hirsch, 2012, pp. 31-33). The following aspects of the types of use of memory that Joan Gibbons identifies at the level of contemporary artistic practices consist of: re-actualization of memory through the dimension of participatory art, artistic representation as a form of criticism addressing the way in which the process of knowing and storing data is organized in museums and archives and testing the limits of memory and reclaiming the theme of forgetting in the case of artists like Michael Landy or Becky Shaw (Gibbons, 2007, pp. 118, 141-157).

The theoretical reference to the classification of visual forms of appreciation and use of memory in contemporary artistic practices made by Joan Gibbons is not accidental and deserves to be discussed in the context of the present article. As we will see, Nemere Kerezsi's highly varied artistic approach results in the intersection of several conceptual and visual planes of memory transposition. Within different works, or even in the same work, for Nemere Kerezsi, several artistic formulas of memory integration similar to those examined by Gibbons can be found connected, such as: the autobiographical character, memory as a trace and its indexicality, the aspect of revision of the past and the one that finds itself involved in the artist's work process, in a practical sense – the archive.

MEMORY AS A CREATIVE RESOURCE IN NEMERE KEREZSI'S ARTISTIC PROCESS

ARTISTIC NARRATIVES IN THE WORKS RESULTING FROM PERSONAL MEMORIES

A first example where individual memory becomes a relevant factor in the elaboration of works for Nemere Kerezsi is *Three Shoes* (Figure 1). In the case of this work, what is specific in its relationship with memory as the source of the artistic act is the fact that it has a significant autobiographical character and stems from a personal memory of the artist. The artist starts from the memory of the workshop and shoe shop of his grandfather, who worked as a shoemaker. He takes as a prototype for the work the model of the wooden shoe made by his grandfather, which he displayed in the window of his shop as a commercial. With the reference of this wooden model, Nemere Kerezsi seeks to reproduce the memory of his grandfather and his workshop in the present through a sculptural reproduction that explores three types of materiality of that model: a wooden shoe (according to the original material used by his grandfather), one shoe of wax and one of bronze. It is quite clear that this work contains in itself an autobiographical nature being a way for the artist to establish "a personal post-mortem relationship" (György, 2022) with someone close to him from his past.

Three Shoes sums up the idea that one's individual existence and history takes on meaning after death to the extent that it is remembered by others. Also, in this work there are component parts that present a relationship of indexicality with memory. One indicator is the act of the artist to reproduce the original wooden model of the shoe created by the grandfather and frame it as a constituent part of his work to refer to the personal memory of the grandfather. Therefore, the sculptural elements present in Kereszi's work become a medium for accessing the memory of a loved one who marked the formation of his identity.

Figure 1. Nemere Kerezsi, *Three Shoes* (wood, wax, bronze), 2003, *Nemere Kerezsi: Thiemann-Etüde* exhibition, Quadro Gallery, Cluj-Napoca, 13th of May – 24th of June 2022.

Another relevant work in the context of the relationship between the indexicality of art and memory, from the artistic process of Nemere Kerezsi, is *Vertical Independent* (Figure 2).

For this work, the call to memory is necessary and produces a synthesis between the past moment, when the artist actually created the work, and the fact that, due to its ephemeral nature, the work no longer exists. Originally conceived by the artist when he was a student 23 years ago, the work itself consisted of extracting a piece of farmland from the garden of the University of Art in Budapest and exposing it vertically.

The piece of farmland was exposed by the artist in such a way that, through artificial human intervention on it, the piece of soil would gradually disappear. It was made as a work in progress, which lasted for 19 years, but very recently the piece of soil disappeared in a mysterious and unknown way. What remained of this "solution of individual freedom" (György, 2022) is only a photograph that was exhibited in the Quadro Gallery space.

This photo further points to the indexical relationship between art and memory, in Gibbons' terms. The photograph of the work is among the few remaining traces that can attest to the existence of the *Vertical Independent* work, both for the artist and for the public.

Figure 2. Nemere Kerezsi, *Vertical Independent* (soil), 2003, in progress till 2021, disappeared under unknown circumstances, *Nemere Kerezsi: Thiemann-Etüde* exhibition, Quadro Gallery, Cluj-Napoca, 13th of May – 24th of June 2022.

THE MEMORY AS A TOOL TO PASS FROM THE PERSONAL NARRATIVES TO HISTORICAL ONES

A series of works that gradually make the transition from the valorization of individual memory through art towards the collective one is *In the Apiary*. Also, in these artworks, the artist has as a reference point the memory of his grandfather who was a practicing beekeeper. The memory of assisting his grandfather at his apiary and also a dream from 2010 with Nemere Kerezsi's intervention in the apiary influenced the artist to create this series that captures man's intervention in nature. In his dream, he was placing different geometrical forms in the beehives, but, during that dream, before observing what the bees might do with the solid geometric forms, the artist woke up. After that, the memory of this dream continued to stay with him for a long time and that's how *In the Apiary* series appeared, made in very different artistic techniques (Nemere Kerezsi, 2015). Using shapes like square, triangle or pentagon, the artist wanted to create a cell grid which fitted the expectations and the characteristics of a bee's life in the hive.

Figure 3.
Nemere Kerezsi, The Hexagon Program
In the apiary series (wax, wood), 2011 – in progress,
Nemere Kerezsi: Thiemann-Etüde exhibition,
Quadro Gallery, Cluj-Napoca,
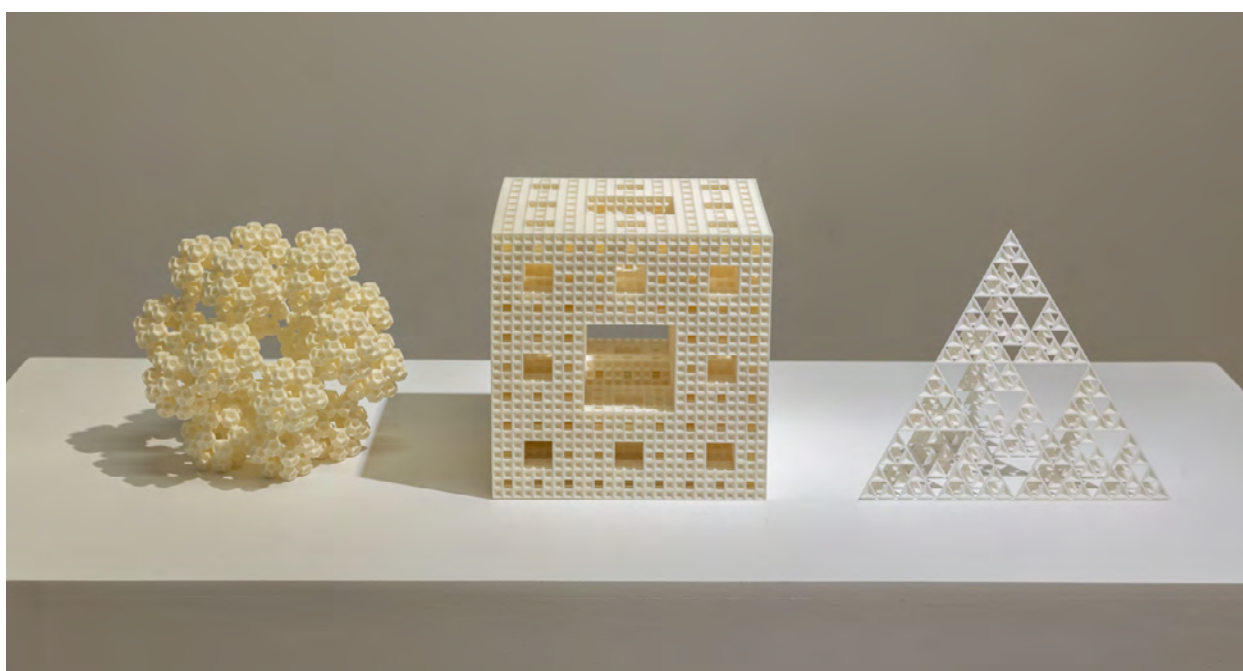13th of May – 24th of June 2022.

Figure 4. Nemere Kerezsi, The Hexagon Program – *In the apiary* series (3D printed plastic objects), 2011 – in progress, *Nemere Kerezsi: Thiemann-Etüde* exhibition, Quadro Gallery, Cluj-Napoca, 13th of May – 24th of June 2022.

After creating three types of 'cells' he placed them in the hive and the bees began to rebuild over their usual wax cells in a very organized manner (Figure 3), almost mathematically we could say. The final artworks that resulted practically unified Nemere Kerezsi's intervention with that of the bees. Other works from the *In the Apiary* series were also present in the exhibition: objects that reproduce cells created by the artist in 3D (Figure 4) and a video documenting the life of bees in the hive. The video also captured how the bees removed the drone from the hive (Figure 5).

Figure 5.
Nemere Kerezsi,
Drone eviction (video), 2016,
*Nemere Kerezsi: Thiemann-
Etüde* exhibition,
Quadro Gallery, Cluj-Napoca,
13th of May – 24th of June 2022.

From the artificial intervention in the ecosystem and including the social structure of the life of bees, Nemere Kereszi goes to the intrusion of the camera into the ecosystem of ants. The artist creates a video in which he removes the gravestone of the German air scout Walter Thiemann (Figure 6), who died at the age of 26 in 1917 in the First World War after his plane crashed in the city of Brăila. After this gesture, the few minutes of the video capture the habitat built by the ants under the funerary monument, and how they and their cocoons completely disappear from the frame the moment they sense the presence of the human intruder (Figure 7).

Figure 6.
Nemere Kerezsi'
Thiemann-Etüde – *Side notes
to a sentence, to the memory
of an aerial scout and two
cities* (Project), Thiemann grave
(video), 2020-21, *Nemere Kerezsi:
Thiemann-Etüde* exhibition,
Quadro Gallery, Cluj-Napoca,
13th of May – 24th of June 2022.

Both the *In the Apiary* series and this video extrapolate from the artist's personal narrative to the shared Anthropocene narrative as they capture the effects of human involvement in the natural environment. Not only as a scientific paradigm, but also as a topic of thought, the Anthropocene demands an even wider adjustment of the actual perspective regarding our relationship with nature. The discussion about the human footprint in the geological structure and ecosystems of the Earth is becoming impossible to ignore nowadays, if we observe "human emergence as a great force of nature in the historical record of Earth" (Ellis, 2018). As mentioned in the curatorial text, through this video with Tiemann's grave, which is the core of the *Thiemann-Etüde* project, Nemere Kereszi captures with the video camera "the metaphor of intrusion" which, later on, he exploits in the context of social relations. The other works that make up the Thiemann study demonstrate that there is a constant intrusion of us into the lives of others. This intrusion is either directly through the way we connect and influence each other, or indirectly through our actions that have consequences on the natural and human socio-cultural environment.

The works that make up the rest of the *Thiemann-Etüde* art project are actually aerial photos with Brăila made by Thiemann himself and plans of the city of Brăila (located in Eastern Romania, on the left bank of the Danube), plus a second video of the city filmed by the artist with a drone in April of this year. The drone acquires a double meaning, that of "artistic and military tool" (György, 2022) when it captures, at night, illuminated frames from the border with Ukraine (Figure 8).

The entire process of the artist in this project creates a personalized map of the collective memory of the place through the way he revisits traces of the historical past and relates them to the current geo-political situation.

Figure 7.
Nemere Kerezsi,
Thiemann-Etüde (Project),
Map of the city Brăila (paper),
1917-1923, 60 x 44 cm;
Thiemann grave (video), 2020-21,
Nemere Kerezsi: Thiemann-Etüde exhibition, Quadro Gallery,
Cluj-Napoca, 13th of May – 24th
of June 2022.

Figure 8.
Nemere Kerezsi,
Thiemann-Etüde (Project), Brăila descendant (video), 2022,
Nemere Kerezsi: Thiemann-Etüde exhibition,
Quadro Gallery, Cluj-Napoca,
13th of May – 24th of June 2022.

A last series of works from the exhibition that enter the area of revisions of history, and even come close to the idea of postmemory, is *Caprices de Berlin*. According to Joan Gibbons, contemporary art uses memory to revise history when it: "maps a number of recovered social and political histories and puts them into the context of the current tendency to privilege memory over history" (Gibbons, 2007, p. 8). Then, in the particular case of this text, the question arises, how does *Caprices de Berlin* series manage to revise history and prioritize memory over it? With a meticulousness typical of a scientist, Nemere Kerezsi researches the various forms of appearance of the halo phenomenon in public space. For 9 months, with perseverance and patience, the artist visits the same monuments relevant to the historical past of the city of Berlin and seeks to capture with the camera the phenomenon of the halo. The final artistic result is more than simple research of the halo phenomenon. Part of the works of the *Caprices de Berlin* series joins in the same visual frame the photograph with the halo, immortalized by the artist, with the postcards of the symbolical and historical sites, taken before the respective places were affected by political conflicts (Figure 9).

Thus, through this hybridization of images that reveal the sensitive cultural-historical charge of the place, Nemere Kerezsi captures "historical trauma inflicted by the Nazis and Soviets in Berlin" (György, 2022). *Caprices de Berlin* project is more than 'imprinting' history. It is an a posteriori formula for accessing the collective consciousness through memory, which captures the need to heal a community in the face of past traumas. This series prioritizes memory over history as it reassembles history for new generations by appealing to postmemory. The ultimate stake of Nemere Kerezsi's artistic agenda, that of interconnecting people through art, of creating an alliance to remind us that we are not alone, is rendered through these series and works from the *Nemere Kerezsi: Thiemann-Etüde* exhibition that we analyzed, because it suggests the presence of a collective memory.
As Maurice Halbwachs, the father of collective memory studies, observed: "Our memories remain collective, however, and are recalled to us through others even though only we were participants in the events or saw the things concerned. In reality, we are never alone. Other men need not be physically present, since we always carry with us and in us a number of distinct persons" (Halbwachs, 1980, p. 23). As an addition to Halbwachs observation, we can argue that our collective memory is not only constructed through others, but it can be accessed together, in communities, when we relate as groups to events and symbols of the past.

Following the theoretical perspective suggested by Pierre Nora, collective memory can be accessed through "places of memory" or "sites of remembering" (Szpociński, 2016, p. 246) as other theorists have recently renamed them. Places of memory are those spaces "where memory crystallizes and secretes itself has occurred at a particular historical moment" (Nora, 1989, p. 7). Within "places of memory", memory and history are in an interdependent relationship. In order for these sites of memory not to be confused with sites and historical artefacts, as recommended by Nora, there must be present a 'will to remember'.

In addition to the intersection between memory and history, places of memory are defined by other three characteristics such as: the material, symbolic and functional aspects (Nora, 1989, pp. 18-19). The purely material aspect, whether it consists of the physical or the intangible form, assumes the empirical character of a 'place of memory' which can be: an artifact, a historical site, a cultural landmark, an institution, certain cultural and social practices or experiences etc. Instead, the functional side of a 'place of memory' consists in the ability of this place to become the object of a ritual. That is, through the common will, this place is systematically revisited and remodelled at the same time. Then, we have the symbolic content, that could be a strictly symbolic action, which because of the 'will to remember', it makes a focused appeal to memory to give it meaning.

Figure 9. Nemere Kerezsi, *The Hexagon Program – Caprices de Berlin* (site-specific photo series plus old postcards), 2012, *Nemere Kerezsi: Thiemann-Etüde* exhibition, Quadro Gallery, Cluj-Napoca, 13th of May – 24th of June 2022.

If there wouldn't be a will to remember, present especially through the last two components of the places of memory (the functional and the symbolic one), they would remain just simple historical dates or places. Nora takes the concrete material example of an archive and suggests that it becomes a place of memory only to the extent that "imagination invests it with a symbolic aura" (Nora, 1989, p. 19).

In the sense of Pierre Nora's definitions, we can say that the *Nemere Kerezsi: Thiemann-Etüde* exhibition presents 'traces' of how Nemere Kerezsi artistically exploits 'places of memory' and works with them in his creative process. A first example is the *Caprices de Berlin* series which presents, through the pictures of the historical sites, the perpetuation of the traumatic burden of these places, thus becoming symbols of postmemory and its constant re-actualization.

Then, a second frame of approaching the artist to the idea of 'place of memory' is through the video that gives the start and the conceptual direction of the *Thiemann-Etüde* project. This time, a funerary monument less valued within a collective socio-cultural context, that of the German soldier Walter Thiemann, is approached by the artist from an archaeological and anthropological perspective, as he seeks to collect and decipher the traces of a memory of place.

As Pierre Nora points out, memory of a place is, in fact, a neglected memory site less revisited and updated in the collective consciousness (Nora, 1989).

With the help of his artistic project *Thiemann-Etüde*, the artist 'reclaims' this funerary monument and brings it into the institutional framework of the gallery, in an artistic effort that bridges across personal narratives and historical (or universal) ones.

As these narratives become accessible to the public (in the context of the gallery), they can be seen as a place of shared memory (historical 'memory' of a place, personal memory of the artist and personal experiences of the public relating, one way or another, to the art). In other words, through his artistic contribution, Nemere Kerezsi reconverts the 'memory of the place' in 'a place of memory' with aesthetic, cultural and symbolic value for the spectator.

THE CONCRETE TRANSPOSITION OF MEMORY: THE ARCHIVE AS AN ARTISTIC WORKING TOOL

A third degree in which the artist works with memory consists in the integration of the archive as part of the creative process. Following the intervention of the artist, the archive (this site of memory) takes on a new meaning, both for the artist and the public, as it becomes part of the artwork. It's just that, unlike the artistic uses of the archive exemplified by Joan Gibbons in her book, in the case of Nemere Kerezsi, the archive does not become a discursive-artistic form of institutional criticism. For Nemere Kerezsi, the archive becomes a method of artistic work to intersect personal memories with narratives that have a historical echo and are universally recognized.

In the early 2000s, art historian Hal Foster noted the effervescent and growing presence of 'an archival impulse' among contemporary artists. Foster uses this notion to describe the new figure of the artist as an archivist who integrates archival images, documents and texts as the essence of the elaboration of his works and organizes them in his own and alternative methods to the established ones of museum collections. Also, this archivist impulse of the artist is placed in the continuation of the model of the artist as curator (Foster, 2004, p. 5).

Foster's observation is not accidental, since in both types of approaches we have involved a process of selection and organization of materials. Both an archival impulse and an assumed curatorial behaviour of the artist emerge from the *Nemere Kerezsi: Thiemann-Etüde* exhibition at the Quadro Gallery. On the one hand, the artist himself is directly involved in the curatorial process, together with the gallerist Szekely Sebestyén György.

On the other hand, projects such as *In the Apiary*, *Thiemann-Etüde, Caprices de Berlin* or even *Vertical Independent* (whose existence is attested currently through a photograph of the work from the artist's personal archive) present at the core of their elaboration: archival photographs and plans (Fig. 10), illustrations from old beekeeping books (Fig. 11), postcards (Fig. 12), or the artist's notes on the side of the works which, over time, become an archive of the evolution of his own artistic approach.

Figure 10.
Nemere Kerezsi, *Thiemann-Etüde* (Project), Thiemann aerial photos (3 photos), cca. 1917, 12 x 17; Postcard (photo), cca. 1917, 9 x 13 cm; *Nemere Kerezsi: Thiemann-Etüde* exhibition, Quadro Gallery, Cluj-Napoca, 13th of May – 24th of June 2022.

Figure 11.
Nemere Kerezsi, *The Hexagon Program - In the Apiary* series, illustrations from old beekeeping books, *Nemere Kerezsi: Thiemann-Etüde* exhibition, Quadro Gallery, Cluj-Napoca, 13th of May – 24th of June 2022.

Figure 12.
Nemere Kerezsi, *The Hexagon Program - Caprices de Berlin* (site-specific photo series plus old postcards), 2012, *Nemere Kerezsi: Thiemann-Etüde* exhibition, Quadro Gallery, Cluj-Napoca, 13th of May – 24th of June 2022.

In the particular case of Nemere Kerezsi, the archival impulse, which is visibly present in this exhibition, becomes a tool for updating the 'places of memory'. The use of the archive in the artistic process establishes a close relationship between memory and history. Therefore, in the artistic process of Nemere Kerezsi, the archive can be understood as a form of manifestation and attestation of memory, which becomes the very condition for history to exist and gain relevance in the present. Especially since, by using the archive as a working tool, the artist capitalizes on places with a cultural background, which may have been omitted in the context of history. Nevertheless, the archive is not only a mechanism for triggering history, but for memory it becomes, as Boris Groys claims: "a machine for the production of memories, a machine that fabricates history out of the material of non-collected reality" (Groys, 2012).

CONCLUSIONS

Through this case study, I tried to emphasize the relevance of Nemere Kerezsi's particular artistic approach within the segment of contemporary art that places memory at the core of the creative process. Following the analysis of the works summing up Nemere Kerezsi's 20 years of professional activity in the field of visual arts, presented in the context of the *Nemere Kerezsi: Thiemann-Etüde* exhibition hosted at the Quadro Gallery (Cluj-Napoca), we can conclude that in his artistic process there is an almost intimate relationship between memory and the artistic paths to produce the artworks, which results in a final picture that, also, the spectator can keep in mind after leaving the exhibition. Following Joan Gibson's conceptualization on the ways that contemporary artists are integrating memory in their artworks, we have seen that in Nemere Kerezsi's case there is more than one implication of memory. In many cases of Nemere Kerezsi's projects and series of artworks, the memory image precedes the picture (the image plus the material support in which the work is made, according to W.J.T. Mitchell). But what makes the memory image valuable in the context of his works are the different creative modes of using memory to produce the artworks, similar to those described by Gibson: autobiography, indexicality, history revisions and postmemory and the archive. Even within the same work or series, there is an interweaving of these ways of artistic use of memory found today in contemporary art.

As we could observe, in works like *Three Shoes* or *Vertical Independent*, memory is creatively explored from autobiographical and indexical perspectives. Instead, the series *In the Apiary* starts from the autobiographical discourse of memories and dreams, in order to finally arrive at a universal discourse on the consequences of human intervention in the structure of the Earth, that animates the debates around the most recent geological period, the Anthropocene. Also, the traces of human intervention in the natural ecosystem of other beings (but also in the socio-anthropological one of the effects of interaction and living with other people) are a central theme in the *Tiemann Etude* project. The shared (post)memories and (post)experiences that produce human interconnection and, implicitly, the creation of communities capable of adopting an attitude of solidarity in the face of the results of history can be perceived within the *Caprices de Berlin* series. As it follows from the analysis of the works in the exhibition, memory, as a triggering element of the artistic act, appears in Nemere Kereszi's work by combining its two segments: individual and collective memory. On the one hand, we have the visual plan for the elaboration of some works starting from the personal memories of the artist and, on the other hand, we have the memory of places culturally 'contaminated' by collective narratives and history. The communication between the two planes present in Nemere Kerezsi's artistic approach allows him to elevate the personal narrative built on the memory of individual experiences to a broad historical narrative framework preserved and re-accessed through collective memory.

Also, an actual tool that helps to fulfil this artistic 'mission' of Nemere Kereszi is the use of the archive as part of the process of developing the works. For the artist, the archive is not a form of institutional criticism on the side of a politicized problem, as it was in Gibbon's example. The use of archive is rather a form of artistic discursive engagement regarding the need to create a common place where memory connects with history. Nemere Kerezsi's artistic career is relevant in terms of the different ways of visual manifestation of the memory-image relationship in contemporary art. The varied transposition of some of the artist's personal memories related to moments in life, places, which interweave with history or cultural paradigms characteristic (of the present) on a large scale, has the purpose to construct through art an awareness towards the community and a care for the presence of the Other, as a form of self-care.

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