

## **DISTANT REALITIES**

### (Imagination and Odyssey in the Art of Tincuta Marin)

“What is admirable about the fantastic is that there is  
no longer anything fantastic: there is only the real.”  
André Breton, Manifesto of Surrealism (1924)

The imagination is surely an instrument of precarious certitude, for that which appears fantastic is at times real, while that which is real sometimes feels fantastic. In the art of Tincuta Marin, through drawing and collage, painting and sculpture, the imagination takes on the role of first principle. For the artist's work is constituted of a unique and personal fusion of reimagined sources and ideas that might initially appear as distant realities.<sup>1</sup> While the term 'distant realities' owes in some respects a debt to Surrealism it has been extended and expanded into wider realms of creative suggestion and imaginings over the last sixty years.<sup>2</sup> This being said a number of Romanian artists played a significant role in the Internationalisation of Surrealism from the 1930s, most notably the artists Victor Brauner (1903-1966) and Jacques Hérold (1910-1987) among several others. The latter Hérold was born in Piatra Neamt, Western Moldavia, and from early childhood lived in Galati as the son of a candy manufacturer, the same city coincidentally as Tincuta Marin.<sup>3</sup> It follows similarly that the expressive paintings of Marin are born of the subjective imagination rather than any systematic compositional conceptualisation. Her expressive paintings are a poetic compendium of sources that not only conjure up distant realities but also fantasies and myths that are very Rumanian in origin. In fact her sense of synthesis of the surreal, fantasy, myth and the folkloric, were characteristic also of another Galati born figure, the surreal poet and children's writer Iordan Chimet (1924-2006), someone who Marin greatly admires.<sup>4</sup> The tendency

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#### ENDNOTES

“It is living and ceasing to live that are imaginary solutions. Existence is elsewhere.” This is the final sentence of André Breton, *First Manifesto of Surrealism*, Paris 1924. See online <http://www2.hawaii.edu/~freeman/courses/phil330/MANIFESTO%20OF%20SURREALISM.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> The last Surrealist International Exhibition of Surrealism, entitled '*Eros c'est la vie*' focused on erotic drives, and took place at the Daniel Cordier Gallery in Paris (December 1959-February 1960) André Breton the leader of Surrealism died in 1966, and all subsequent exhibition have been codicils or larger scale historical assessments of the movement, see *Surrealism desire unbound* (20 September, 2001—1<sup>st</sup> January, 2002), Taze Modern, London, Tate Publishing, 2001.

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Jacques Hérold's real name was Harold Blumer, he studied at the Art Academy in Bucharest from 1927-29, but left soon after for Paris using a fake identity card in 1930, and thereafter changed his name. He was a friend of Constantin Brancusi, but soon became a friend of André Breton and Surrealism, leaving the group after 1951, becoming more abstract, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9I31EKmh8F0> See also Sarane Alexandrian, *Jacques Hérold. Étude historique et critique*, Paris, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> Iordan Chimet was an anti-communist dissident writer, who often set poems and children's stories in the settings of Galati, as in 'Old City or his "Lament for Baltazar the Little Fish" (*Lamento pentru peștișorul Baltazar*), actually written in the 1940s, but not published until 1968. Chimet's subversive position was, though characterised as child fantasy literature, they could equally be read by adults in an allegorical and subversive manner as writings by Antoine Saint-Exupéry or J.R.R Tolkien

towards the fantastical and to the re-appropriations of childhood imagining is evoked by various personae of associative identity, such figures as Bigfoot, Gagafu and several others that appear in her paintings.. A child's imaginary life can also be seen in toy-like references shown throughout her paintings, seen in positions and placements to extraneous unrelated objects in impractical visual spaces—otherwise distant realities born of the mind's fancy. However, when viewing the painting *When we enter the lair of Bigfoot, Gagafu and Dracovenie* (2022), we notice a transposed pictorial relationship to the idea of painted collage.<sup>5</sup> For collage is a primary invention of Dada and Surrealism, in distinction to Cubism's formalist adoption known as papier collés, simple cut and pasted everyday materials that affirm allusions to the world of reality. Whereas a surreal use of collage stresses the onirist or magical and fantastical juxtapositions of materials, in pursuit of what André Breton defined as the merveilleux (marvellous) or convulsive beauty.<sup>6</sup> This is also relatable to the 1960s surrealist Romanian literature of dream and stream of consciousness. As a result the Bucharest onirist poets and their magazine *Luceafărul*, were deemed subversive, closed down and censored by the authorities.<sup>7</sup> Seen in this light Tincuta Marin's collages form a discrete but significant body of work within her wider artistic practice. In using the cut out idea her collages-cum-photomontages interface specifically with drawn or painted elements worked up through image accumulation, juxtaposition and superimposition. We see that heads, faces, fantastical masks, fetishes, toys and dolls proliferate. Like her paintings, space is intentionally compressed and often visually upended, the artist favouring expression and presence over asserted composition. In fact the collages are as much reminiscent of post-war 'bricolage' or Arman's 'accumulations' as they are of conventionally structured collages.<sup>8</sup> It is these particular qualities that come to greater fruition and realisation in the painting and sculptures of Tincuta Marin.

### The Past in the Present

It quickly becomes evident that Marin is familiar and engages with sources taken from art history and different iconographies or civilisations from the past. But it is just as relevant to state that her uses of them carry forward no

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<sup>5</sup> May Ernst (1891-1976) was among the first to fully translate collages into paintings in Paris in the first half of the 1920s, see Werner Spies, *Max Ernst, A Retrospective: Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York, Newhaven and London, Yale University Press, 2005

<sup>6</sup> Louis Aragon (1897-1982) *Les Collages*, Paris, Hermann Glassin, (1965) 2003. Aragon was a founding figure of Surrealism who later left the movement, but who traces the history of surreal collages from Max Ernst onwards, through art, film, and literature.

<sup>7</sup> For important texts on the aesthetical movement of onirism in Bucharest, first founded by Leonid Dimov and Dimitru Tepeneag ,see Corin Braga *Momentul oniric*, Bucharest. Ed. Cartea Românească, 1997. For a discussion of suppression, see Denis Deletant, *Ceaușescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania 1965-89*, London, C Hurst & Co, 1995, p. 202

<sup>8</sup> Germano Celant, *Arman 1955-74*, Milan, Silvana, 2021. This book presents an extensive overview of Arman's post-war development of accumulation. Picasso also commonly used *bricolage* from the 1940s

particular symbolic, allegorical, or indexical intentions on the part of the artist. Her paintings are far from history paintings, and neither are they images with a sense of moral import, or for that matter any intended narrative consistency. The resources remain a picture store of sorts, commensurate with those immediately accessible on the Internet, an appropriative compendium (an imaginary *wunderkammer*), of inventive cross-temporal materials adopted for her own unique pictorial purposes and painterly synthesis. A space where comical Egyptian gods and goddesses painted and transposed, or simply drawn in outline with sun or lunar disks, appear in strange hybrid anonymous room environments. A frequent allusion to medieval panel painting sources is also evident, one painting shows the gaping mouth of hell, alongside the Sphinx, surmounted by a fetish mask, and faceless attendant wing panel, of perhaps the Madonna.<sup>9</sup> All are oil painted and shown as if they were actually an assembly of stacked paintings displayed and resting against the wall of the studio. The same faceless Madonna appears in another painting sitting before an artist's easel foreground left, in the position occupied by the painter Velasquez in *Las Meninas*, a witty parody of the Madonna as woman painter (*pace* St Luke) displacing the famed Spanish master.<sup>10</sup> The artist's spatial construction also adds to the confusion such that it echoes an archaic monocular perspective when used, while the architectural arcade motifs seem to be drawn from the famed vistas of De Chirico, and the uncanny spaces of the Scuola Metafisica.<sup>11</sup> The artist has acknowledged a specific affinity and love of Italian painting traditions. However, her chamber interiors are just as readily adorned with strange anthropomorphic dolls and hybrid animals—creatures monstrous or otherwise—sculpture fetishes, also totemic figures with ritualistic and magical associations.<sup>12</sup> The represented objects and sculptures shown in these painted spaces are usually located in the foreground with intentional theatrical poses and jarring juxtapositions. They crowd into claustrophobic settings that makes the viewer feel as if they were in some cramped anthropology storeroom, or alternatively trapped in the back room of a junk shop.<sup>13</sup> But my use of 'chamber' further connotes the 'magic chamber' a major strand within Surrealism explored by the Rumanian surrealist Viktor

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The blue robe is synonymous with depictions of the the Virgin Mary, see Melissa R, Katz, and Robert A. Orgi, *Divine Mirrors: The Virgin Mary in the Visual Arts*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001

<sup>10</sup> Suyanne L. Stratton Pruitt, *Velásquez's 'Las Meninas'*, Cambridge and London, Cambridge University Press, 2003. The publication is analytic overview of the painting and its role in Western art history.

<sup>11</sup> The Italian artists Carlo Carrá, Giorgio de Chirico and his brother Alberto Savinio were the founders of the Scuola Metafisica, in 1917, it was to powerfully influence the early development of Surrealism in Paris, see [http://www.tonymaridakis.com/Tony\\_Maridakis\\_-\\_Fine\\_Arts/Rise\\_of\\_Surrealism.html](http://www.tonymaridakis.com/Tony_Maridakis_-_Fine_Arts/Rise_of_Surrealism.html)

<sup>12</sup> For an overview of the historical role of magic, see the catalogue *Spellbound: Magic, Ritual & Witchcraft*, (31 August, 2018—January 6, 2019), Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, 2018.

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The flea market (*marché des puces*) and the junk shop were favourite haunts of the Surrealists, because it was there you could find extraneous objects whose anonymous meanings were *merveilleux* and magical.

Brauner in his paintings.<sup>14</sup> In fact the use of interrelated figures in chambered spaces adheres throughout Marin's paintings. While the distinct Cezannist viewpoint of looking slightly downwards on the painted contents reveal further the staging of the subject matter, as is clear in the genre still life paintings. When working in three dimensions the artist's sculptures follow the clay model, cast and bronze tradition. Her large figures again draw upon Ancient Egypt's sunken relief sculpture, taking a form that is loosely related to the enthroned figure tradition. And like Egyptian sculpture Marin relief figures are hieratic, less focused on aesthetic issues (something secondary) and directed toward theatrical solemnity. In Surrealist terms that look back to the late sculptures of Max Ernst whose 'figures of judgment' works carry the same funerary eschatological associations.<sup>15</sup> In another sculpture that is free standing the artist takes quite another approach and expresses a sort of totemic *bricolage* somewhat closer to her paintings. The relationship between sculpture and painting is indicative, since in the given instance the totemic figure actually embraces a painting within its structured armature. The easy elision between painting and sculpture again draws an affinity to Italian precursors like Enzo Cucchi and Mimmo Paladino of the Transavanguardia, who in the 1980s similarly integrated painting and appended sculpture armatures into their work.<sup>16</sup>

### Child's Play, Expression and the Vitalities of Colour

The artist's vivid use of colour, her celebration of colour, the wonder of colour, immediately strikes the eye of the viewer in her recent paintings. Marin's use of a rich oil paint suggests that colour is something she is the midst of developing further in her art. In first works from 2017-19 we find that they are more in the graphic tradition marked by strong emphasis on pictorial fantasy and monster-like creatures, executed with powerful linearity, sometimes giving off a sense cloisonné in which limbs or extended figure parts are delineated and enclosed within heavy or pronounced black lines.<sup>17</sup> In the same early works also there is a crowded and cacophonous overlapping of different figurative elements. While the lines form boundaries, the use of colour in these works is loosely configured in that it often does not abut directly up against the drawing

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<sup>14</sup> See *Surrealismus und Magie; Verzauberte Moderne*, Museum Barbarini, Potsdam, Munich, Prestel Verlag 2022, and Will Atkin, *Surrealist Sorcery: Objects, Theories, and Practices of Magic in the Surrealist Movement*, London, Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2023. Also see, *Victor Brauner: Inventions and Magic*, Timisoara Art Museum, (17 February—May 1), Timisoara, 2023.

<sup>15</sup> See Werner Spies *op. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> See Achille Bonito Oliva, *Italian Transavanguardia*, Milan, 1980, and Ida Gianelli, *Transavanguardia*, Milan, *Skira*, 2002. For Enzo Cucchi, see *Enzo Cucchi Retrospective*, Solomon R. Guggenheim, New York, 1986, and for Mimmo Paladino, see Flavio Arensi, *Paladino at Palazzo Reale*, with essays by Arthur Danto and Germano Celant, Firenze, Giunti, 2011.

<sup>17</sup> The use of cloisonné or **Cloisonnism** (1888-94) that confined contents within drawn linear contours in painting attributed to its use by Emile Bernard (1868-1941), Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) and Louis Anquetin (1861-1932) and others. Hence it is traditionally associated with the Pont Aven School of painters. see Judy le Paul and Charles Gy Le Paul, *Gauguin and the Impressionists at Pont-Aven*, New York Abbeville Press, 1988

contents, thereby furthering a sense of expressive graphism. In fact formally they are much closer to the early collages in terms of composition. However, we find in her early works the sources and emergence of the characters like Bigfoot (et al) that become part of the fantastical personal universe of the artist. As a result the works are intensely expressive of a saturated sense of emotion, and it is here that you find something of a neo-expressionist analogy that in some ways recalls the well known foot and limb paintings of Georg Baselitz executed in the early 1960s.<sup>18</sup> Marin's early graphic work is in most respects closer to Expressionism than to Surrealism, notwithstanding George Bataille's famous fascination with foot fetishism or more precisely the big toe.<sup>19</sup> As you contemplate the earlier work the more amplified the strands of historical Expressionism become, with imagined allusions to George Grosz, Otto Dix, Emil Nolde and no doubt others may come to mind. Yet in turn they are fused with famed sculptural depictions of Romanesque devils and demons, Gothic monsters and gargoyles, placed alongside fantastical late Medieval similes drawn from Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Brueghel the Elder. The move towards brighter and flatter colours sees the linear elements segregated having a distinct and separate autonomy within the artists' paintings. The shift seems to have happened during the Covid lock up period of self-quarantine. An expanded use of colour has added a different sense of emotive quality, and is further intensified by the compressed spaces in which the figural representations are compelled to exist. As earlier indicated a child's sense of play exists in many of the artist's recent depictions, and while some might seem grotesque and monstrous, others appear comical, a sort of 'the boogeyman will get you', for there has always been the childhood delight derived from situations of contained fright.<sup>20</sup> In many ways the images are also reminiscent of the CoBrA group of artists who broke away from Surrealism in Paris in the post-war period. They were particularly interested in the art of childhood, but unlike the earlier simplifications of Paul Klee, took it in a surreal Expressionist direction.<sup>21</sup> While the paintings of Tincuta Marin synthesises many of the ideas seen in CoBrA she nonetheless retains her own voice. Her work is perhaps

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The feet painting were in parallel with Georg Baselitz's **Pandemium Manifesto** (1962-2), and continued as an extended series from 1960-63 (no doubt influenced by Gericault), see *Baselitz Retrospective*, Centre Georges Pompidou (20 October 21—7 March, 2022), Paris, 2021. Many other artists have been interested in feet, such as Philip Guston and Horst Antes.

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George Bataille, who represented the so-called 'dark side of Surrealism' conflicted with André Breton, and produced his own Surrealist journal **Documents** (No. 6, 1929-30), he was particularly interested in the Marquis de Sade, eroticism, foot fetishism and transgression, see George Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-39*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1985.

<sup>20</sup> The importance of play in childhood and its continuity into later life is crucial for creative human development. See Donald Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (1971), London Routledge, 2005.

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The group was formed in the Café Notre-Dame in Paris, on the 8<sup>th</sup> November, 1948, and was made up of international artists from Denmark, Belgium and Holland. They stressed unfettered freedom, which, was seen ultimately as embodied by children and the expressions of children. See Willemijn Stokvis *Cobra: A History of a European Avant-Garde Movement: 1948-1951*, Rotterdam, 2017. While the group broke up in 1951, a great number of artists affiliated themselves to the group and their spontaneous ideas.

closest to that of Karel Appel the Dutch member of the group. Appel particularly stressed childhood fantasy and like Jean Dubuffet championed the spontaneous art of the untrained (Art Brut)- He painted with bright and vivid colours, which is also the general case with children.<sup>22</sup> His sculptures have the feeling of the child's playground, some of which he later designed.

I began this short essay by speaking of the power of imagination to bring together distant realities, to make the invisible reaches of consciousness visible, and throughout I have drawn analogous relationships to Surrealism and Expressionism. This said it would be a complete error to consider the paintings, sculptures, and collages of Tincuta Marin as some later form of derivative Surrealism, or Neo-Expressionism for that matter. Her work and artistic practice is purely her own, it takes on the epistemic character of her daily life born and shaped in Romania. While she may or may not have extensive knowledge of any or all of the sources I have alluded to, it has little relevance today when we can skim the internet and find countless resources in a near instant. What Marin does share with the artists cited, is a commitment to 'fancy' and the creative imagination. The analogies are to those artists that create an intensely personal and expressive inner life that is stocked with array of imagined personae. It is a site of endless possibility, where fact becomes fiction, and fiction becomes fact. Yet as precarious as it is at times, it remains a place of necessary uncertainty. For as Baudelaire observed on the creative life. *genius is no more than childhood recaptured at will, childhood equipped now with man's physical means to express itself, and with the analytical mind that enables it to bring order into the sum of experience, involuntarily amassed.* Tincuta Marin is an artist that is at the beginning of her career, but one who is self-evidently assured, and one that is both developing and advancing creatively at a rapid pace.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Karel Appel (1921-2006) rebelled against the Dutch formalism of **De Stijl**. His use of the primary colours particularly in celebration of the child, may have been a deliberate critique of Mondrian and his neo-plastic conceptualism, see Franz Kaiser (Ed.), Michel Ragon, Karel Appel, Klaus Ottmann and Rudi Fuchs, *Karel Appel: A Retrospective*, Walther König Buchhandlung, Cologne, 2026. His most known early work is famously called *Questioning Children* (1940)

<sup>23</sup> The citation is taken from Charles Baudelaire's famous essay **The Painter of Modern Life** (1864). See Baudelaire *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, London, Phaidon, 1995