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Craftsmanship from the World Before

Artisanal Skills in Ana Lupas's Participatory Actions

Conceptual art has been thought of in recent decades as a movement that went beyond the Anglo-American framework and emerged in different parts of the world simultaneously. The role played by the exhibition *Global Conceptualism* in broadening the conceptual corpus cannot be overlooked. Held at the Queens Museum of Art in New York in 1999, this exhibition sought to present artistic practices from all continents, and was divided into several geographical sections, with invited curators entrusted to cover each region. The curator of the Eastern European section, László Beke, included work by Romanian artist Ana Lupas, who took advantage of Beke's invitation to present photographs of *Humid Installation* from the early 1970s. Born in 1940 in Cluj, a city in Transylvania in western Romania, Lupas studied at the Ion Andreescu Institute of Fine Arts in Cluj from 1956 to 1962. Starting in the late 1960s, her work was regularly shown in national and international exhibitions and has become more widely known only recently. A broader public began to take an interest in her practice starting in 2016, when her installation *The Solemn Process* (1964–2008) entered the collections of the Tate Modern.

Although the inclusion of *Humid Installation* in *Global Conceptualism* might suggest that it is a conceptual work, Lupas was utterly unaware of the existence of a movement called "conceptual art" while developing it. The aim of this text, however, is not merely to examine the relevance of retrospectively positioning certain of the artist's works under the umbrella term of conceptual art. My primary objective is to question the place of manual and artisanal craftsmanship in a practice that, ultimately, may also have conceptual characteristics. During her studies at the Institute of Fine Arts in Cluj, Lupas specialized in weaving, and a large part of her subsequent artistic production was related to the field of fiber art. Her work was shown twice in the International Tapestry Biennial in Lausanne, affirming her position as a textile artist. With the understanding that her activity was carried out on a double foundation of weaving and what the artist called "actions," I will study the existing relationships between them. By exploring the articulation between hand and concept, my intention is more specifically to shed light on how Lupas made use of her solid manual and artisanal skills in her conception of collective actions.

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1. The International Tapestry Biennial in Lausanne

Starting with its title, Mildred Constantine and Jack Lenor Larsen's 1973 book *Beyond Craft: The Art Fabric* highlights what the authors considered a major shift in the fiber art movement during the 1960s. Although it shared weaving's history, vocabulary, tools, and materials, the new textile practice that Constantine and Larsen called the "art fabric" movement set itself apart:[1] while weaving is a craft, art fabric was elevated to high art. In 1969, Constantine and Larsen had already focused on bringing this revolution to light in *Wall Hangings*, which they organized at the Museum of Modern Art in New York[2] and is generally considered to be the first exhibition to present weavings as veritable works of art. Both the exhibition design and the venue itself were critical in this respect. The show was presented in MoMA's Department of Painting and Sculpture—rather than that of the applied arts, the Department of Architecture and Design—and the hanging and lighting were comparable to the way paintings and sculptures were habitually displayed.[3]

In the 1960s, another change occurred in the field of fiber art, one that was specifically related to the creative process. Two different ways of working thus found themselves in direct competition. The best place to observe this contrast was undoubtedly the International Tapestry Biennial in Lausanne. The first technique, which had been in use in France since the mid-twentieth century, consisted of two steps.[4] The artist began by preparing a *carton*, or tapestry cartoon, a same-size painting of the planned tapestry. A craftsman called a *lissier*, or weaver, then executed the work by copying this guide as faithfully as possible. Conception and execution were thus distinctly separate. This approach was turned upside down in 1962, when Polish artists, who didn't use the *carton*, were invited to participate in the first edition of the Lausanne Biennial. From that moment on, two different camps existed.[5] Those using tapestry cartoons gathered around Jean Lurçat, a renowned figure who was president of the Association des peintres-cartonniers (The Association of Cartoon Painters) and one of the founders of CITAM (Centre lnternational de la Tapisserie Ancienne et Moderne, or the International Centre of Ancient and Modern Tapestry), the institution that organized the Biennial. This group was in opposition to those who advocated other modes of creating tapestries.

For Swiss writer and art critic André Kuenzi, the future of tapestry entailed abandoning the cartoon. In his book *La nouvelle tapisserie*, he even offered up an often unflattering image of Lurçat. He wrote that many weavers saw Lurçat as too "old-fashioned."[6] To define tapestry, as Lurçat did, as a "cartoon executed by some specialized craftsmen, the weavers,"[7] was at odds with the essentially Eastern European practices visitors discovered in the first editions of the Lausanne Biennial. From the start, Kuenzi supported "artists who, working without the cartoon . . . develop their ideas as they go along, on the loom, inside the material itself."[8] Kuenzi's encounter with Magdalena Abakanowicz was decisive in this respect. He had the opportunity to visit her studio during a trip to Poland in 1963, accompanied by Pierre Pauli, founder of the Lausanne Biennial. The artist's process, as she herself explained, was clearly a departure from the techniques defended by the tapestry-cartoon painters: "I start from a

1 Ana Lupas, *Tapis volant (l'œuf rouge dans le nid)* (Flying Carpet [the Red Egg in the Nest]), 1970. Wool, wire, leather, mirrors, and wood, 350 × 238 × 150 cm

model that I interpret while I'm weaving. I don't put a template under the loom, and as a guide, I have only the broad outlines of my composition, sketched out in black and white."[9] In relating her words, Kuenzi added that Abakanowicz showed him her starting point: "[A] tiny piece of paper on which a few lines had been drawn . . ."

Ana Lupas participated twice in the International Tapestry Biennial in Lausanne: in 1969, she exhibited a tapestry in which she turned away from figuration; and in 1971, the work shown took the form of a gigantic nest in which the artist placed a red egg (fig. 1). Suspended from the ceiling by cables, it moved away from the wall to become a three-dimensional object freely articulated in the space. Showing her textile works alongside those of Magdalena Abakanowicz, Jolanta Owidzka, Jagoda Buić, and Ritzi and Peter Jacobi, Lupas seemed unquestionably to be a member of the group of Eastern European textile artists that had formed in large part thanks to the Lausanne Biennial. They all shared the same approach.

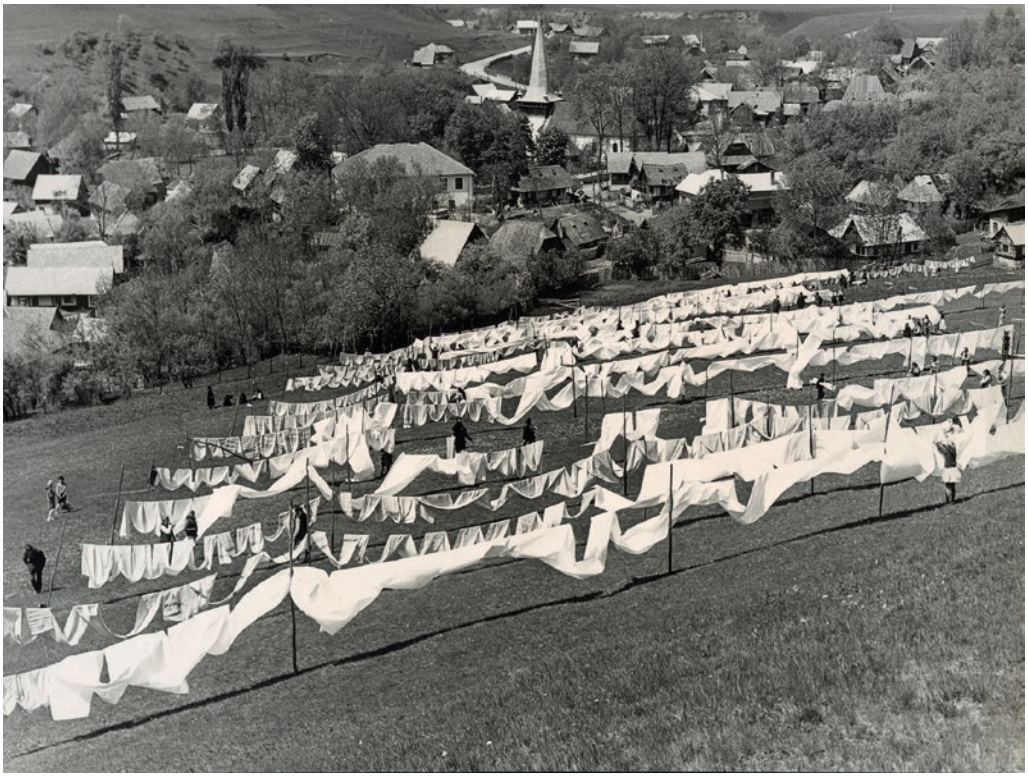
On each of the applications Lupas submitted to the Biennial's selection committee, she stated that she had done the weaving by herself in her studio.[10] The execution of her works had never been delegated to weavers.

Lupas was also connected to the Polish[11] or Yugoslav artists via another aspect of her work: her education. Unlike the French tapestry-cartoon painters, Lupas never studied to become a painter. Like her peers from other Eastern European countries, she had been working with textiles since her student years. She enrolled at the Institute of Fine Arts in Cluj in 1956 and spent six years there studying weaving with the artist Maria Ciupe, whose importance she has often acknowledged.[12] In addition to various theoretical courses, her studies included technical courses in weaving run by professional craftspeople.[13] Furthermore, the weaving department there was not associated with applied arts. On the contrary, it was offered by the school of fine arts, thus granted the same status as painting and sculpture. Thus, Lupas's career is particular in that she acquired solid weaving skills within the framework of a visual arts education.

2. Tapestry and Conceptual Art

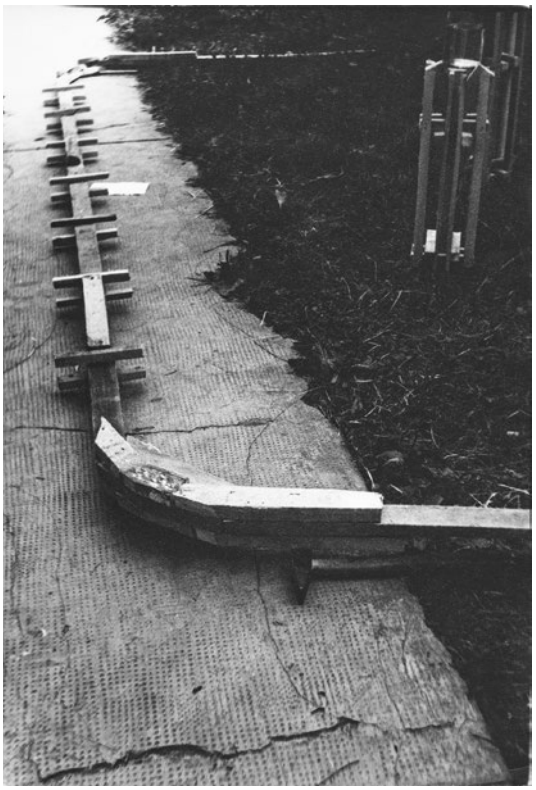
While Lupas's weaving culture has much in common with those of other Eastern European artists, her name is not closely linked to the history of fiber art in the same way as those of Abakanowicz, Owidzka, Buić, or the Jacobis. After participating in the fourth and fifth iterations of the Lausanne Biennial, she repeatedly tried to show her work there again. From 1973 to 1981, she submitted four applications to the selection committee. All of them were rejected. The impossibility of exhibiting her work at the Biennial undoubtedly lowered her chances of being perceived as a fiber artist in Western Europe and the United States. How can these multiple rejections be understood? Perhaps they resulted from Lupas's decision to move beyond the realm of weaving. Freed from the frontality of painting, fiber artists moved their works away from the medium to which it was historically attached, coming closer to sculpture and installation. But Lupas, no longer satisfied with working in ways rooted solely in fiber art, went beyond than creating textile works in three dimensions and turned toward other means of artistic expression.

From the mid-1960s, Lupas started to bring aspects of manual and artisanal craft into the realm of performance. In 1964, she initiated a collective project entitled *The Solemn Process,* which she continued for more than a decade. In the early 1970s, Lupas executed another participatory "action" titled *Humid Installation* in collaboration with peasant women (fig. 2). She submitted a proposal to the selection committee for the seventh Lausanne Biennial in 1975 for a large-scale woven piece based on *Humid Installation*. The application was rejected, implying that it may not have been entirely convincing. Another proposal for the Biennial's 1981 iteration, this time linked to *The Solemn Process,* was also refused, but this rejection most likely stemmed from its unfeasibility within the parameters of the Biennial. Rather than limiting herself to textile work, this time Lupas's proposal included a performance.



2 Ana Lupas, *Humid Installation*, 1970. Collective action, Mărgău (Romania). On the back of the photograph, the initial title of the work is indicated ("Flying Carpet, Symbol of Peace: Object Obtained through Action, Action of a Festive Nature"), along with another date of creation (1973)

In a handwritten note attached to her application, the artist specified that the performance would take place over a period of twenty-four hours. It was to involve two fixed, "preparatory" times, the first at 12:30 pm and the second at 12:30 am. What was Lupas intending to use this time for? What were the preliminary steps in the work? What were the "preludes to the Last Supper" described by the artist on her application? It is difficult to know more on this subject.[14] What is certain is that Lupas did not intend to pay less attention to the physical execution of a material artwork simply because she had turned to the medium of performance. There is no doubt that her proposal for the 1981 Biennial included an object. Based on the photographs sent to the selection committee (figs. 3–4) and the formats indicated in her application, we can identify this object as one of the monumental wheat wreaths crafted by villagers in Transylvania following the artist's instructions for *The Solemn Process*. By using performance, Lupas intended not to dematerialize her practice, but rather to provide insight into the work involved in making the wreaths. In this last application for the Lausanne Biennial, she sought to bring together, by means of performance, both the object that resulted from the project and the process of making in which it was rooted.



3 Ana Lupas, photograph of *The Solemn Process* project, proposed at the 10th International Tapestry Biennial Lausanne, 1981

The 1981 application was not Lupas's first attempt to show *The Solemn Process* in this way. Claude Ritschard's invitation to present a solo exhibition at the Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts in Lausanne two years earlier had given her the opportunity to think about the ways in which this long-term project could be presented to the public. The artist and curator had met in 1978 at the International Triennial of Tapestry in Lódź, where Lupas was showing her work. Although the exhibition in Lausanne, *Rencontre avec . . . Ana Lupas* (Meeting with . . . Ana Lupas), did take place, visitors never saw the performance imagined in connection with *The Solemn Process*. In this case, the inability to present the project was not due to its performative dimension, as it had been at the Tapestry Biennial in Lausanne. What was challenging for the Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts was the inclusion of objects in the performance. In her letters to Lupas, Ritschard informed her that the institution could not afford the costs of shipping the works.[15] The artist was willing to bear the expenses of transporting the wheat wreaths herself. But how would she repatriate them when she did not have foreign currency? Lupas thought about putting them up for sale in Lausanne, although she would have had to make sure that the buyer could keep the works in an outdoor space, protected

4 Ana Lupas, photograph of *The Solemn Process* project, proposed at the 10th International Tapestry Biennial Lausanne, 1981

from birds and rodents. Ritschard could only state that the situation was "very complicated." She suggested that the artist envisage an "action," emphasizing the word, and that it should be based on documents.

Lupas ultimately took her advice. She simply asked that the gallery in which the two-week-long exhibition would take place be equipped with a large table, a slide projector, and a 16mm film projector. Her works were shown only in reproductions. Her intervention mainly took the form of a reading-performance. She put books on the table that told the story of her family and read aloud long excerpts from them. The modifications made to her initial proposal did not prevent the Swiss art critic Françoise Jaunin from writing in the *Tribune de Lausanne* that Lupas had found a form likely to convey the "ferment of dynamism and communication" anticipated in the *Rencontre avec . . .* series, but which until then had not been achieved.[16] In her review, entitled "Tapisserie conceptuelle" (Conceptual Tapestry), she aptly described the situation, depicting the close link that existed between the two aspects of the artist's work. Lupas had taken a decisive turn that Jaunin saw as conceptual "without, however, abandoning the textile support."[17]

Yet how could she have produced conceptual art when she knew nothing about it? This movement had certainly not been visible in Romania in the 1960s and 1970s.[18] Very few Romanian artists at the time were even aware of its existence. When she was imagining her actions, Lupas had no knowledge of what was happening simultaneously in American or British art. And this is not the only difficulty in linking her practice to conceptual art. In addition, an entire aspect of her work went against the current of the conceptual art movement. Sol LeWitt, the first to use the term "conceptual art" in an article in 1967, wrote primarily about the separation between coming up with an idea for a project and executing it.[19] The division of labor into two steps that he wrote about is not dissimilar to Lurçat's conception of weaving, first prepared by cartoon painters, then executed by craftsmen.[20] This way of working was completely foreign to Lupas. The weaving technique she and her Polish or Yugoslav peers used did not conform to that of French tapestry. Those artists carried out all aspects of the process. They thus seemed to trace a path that was completely opposite the one conceptual artists would create some years later.

Nonetheless, associating Lupas's practice with conceptual art is not unjustifiable. One can look to several elements of her work, starting with the way the artist referred to her collaborative projects as "actions." The word seems to have been used spontaneously, without any connection whatsoever to American or Western European art.[21] It was part of the original title of *Humid Installation*: "[A]n object produced by means of an action."[22] A full range of notions that resurfaced during the conceptual art movement thus appear relevant to Lupas's work. As soon as she initiated projects whose realization required the participation of numerous people, Lupas found herself in the position of providing instructions, plans, and sketches. She was the bearer of an idea that would lead to an artwork, so long as others agreed to execute them. Doesn't this accurately describe the separation between conception and execution made by Lurçat or LeWitt? If not, it is for the simple reason that Lupas circulated freely between these two poles and did not see her work as limited to the project stage. Another distinction from conceptual art involves the question of technique. According to LeWitt, art is conceptual insofar as it is "free from dependence on the skill of the artist as a craftsman."[23] In 1981, writing about this same period, Ian Burn was less enthusiastic, even suggesting that conceptual art was responsible for a loss of manual skills among artists.[24] Delegating the execution of a work of art, he explained, eliminated the artist's desire to acquire those skills through rigorous practice and extended training.

But Lupas's art bears no trace of the "deskilling," to use Burn's own term, that he blamed on conceptual art. On the contrary, her works are based entirely on her technical skill. The specificity of her practice is that her craft served not only in producing her weavings but deeply informed her entire practice, in particular her collective projects. While her works are not without what might be called conceptual qualities, their dissimilarities to conceptual art seem to predominate. In addition, when Lupas used the word "action," she hardly planned to dematerialize her practice. The object made through artisanal processes was at the origin of her actions. Despite these differences, is it possible to situate Lupas's work in the conceptual

art movement? As previously mentioned, in 1999, five photographs of her *Humid Installation* were presented in the exhibition *Global Conceptualism*.[25] With the word "conceptualism," the exhibition undoubtedly succeeded in emphasizing the differences between Anglo-Saxon conceptual art and artistic practices in Latin America. It is less clear whether the term does sufficient justice to works produced independently of the conceptual movement.[26] It is as if, in order to be shown, they had to conform to norms of which their creators were unaware while making them. However, if drawing connections between Lupas's actions and conceptual art is instructive, it not only underlines the elements that approximate conceptual art. It also, and above all, enables us to observe how this example can act upon the framework into which it is retrospectively introduced. What we understand as "conceptual art" actually changes when we include works like Lupas's as part of the movement. It then becomes necessary to stop opposing conceptual art to technique, craft, and skill, in order to closely link conception to manual or artisanal execution.

3. *The Solemn Process*

The main mission of the Transylvanian Museum of Ethnography as it was conceived by its first director, Romulus Vuia, in the 1920s was the preservation and restoration of the traditional peasant culture in Romania and its neighboring countries.[27] Significantly, preservation and restoration were precisely the goals Lupas set for herself when, two years after completing her studies, she went to a Transylvanian village to begin her project *The Solemn Process*. Her intention was to revive, with the villagers' help, a regional custom that consisted in making wreaths out of ears of wheat to give thanks for the abundance of the harvest. In 1964, when she began this action, the custom had become obsolete; only the village elders remembered the skills needed to create these objects. The artist thus had to focus on reconstituting these gestures and techniques. She stayed with the villagers so that they would learn from her how to make the wreaths. The work recommenced every autumn, with those who had mastered these gestures teaching the others. Lupas would have liked to pass this knowledge from one generation to the next indefinitely. Her wish was not realized, but, according to the artist, the farmers' interest in wreath-making persisted for more than ten years.

Lupas's practice clearly hearkens back to the issues that inspired the establishment of the first ethnographic museum in Romania back in 1923.[28] But the difficulties the artist had been forced to confront were completely unknown at the time. While Vuia feared farming culture might disappear due to urban homogenization,[29] the world that Lupas sought in part to save had already vanished. It was a victim of the collectivization of Romanian agriculture carried out from 1949 in close collaboration with the Soviet Union.[30] This campaign officially ended in 1962, when the communist leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej declared it was complete.[31] A very small number of peasants may have benefitted from the establishment of this agricultural system.[32] For most, collectivization constituted a major trauma of the Socialist

period.[33] It is generally considered responsible for destroying the fabric of the social relationships typical of rural life, and for the transformation of peasants into rural proletarians.[34]

The Solemn Process could only take place in one of the few villages that had escaped collectivization. Since the reform of Romanian agriculture was contingent upon major territorial variations,[35] mountainous or hilly regions were often spared because the soil's poor quality and the fields' limited size clearly reduced the farms' productivity;[36] in this context, Transylvania had the lowest rate of collectivized arable land in the country.[37] To execute her project, the artist thought it best to go to the native village of her grandfather, the historian Ioan Lupas, where she still had family. Since the wheat yield was depleted there, she needed to find another location. During her frequent visits to the Museum of Ethnography, she met a teacher living in Mărgău, a village near Cluj, who invited her there to continue her project.[38] It was there that *The Solemn Process* would take place each autumn until 1976. The endless repetition in which Lupas wished to inscribe her project was not inspired by exaggerated ambition but reflected the artist's commitment to saving what little she could from the past before it completely disappeared.

Analyses of *The Solemn Process* often emphasize its temporal indeterminacy. They posit the project as untethered to temporality and open "at both ends."[39] Intended to go on indefinitely, it also reached back into a world before, eluding any notion of time. The word "ancestral" often reappears in describing the craft she was trying to rescue from oblivion.[40] Sebestyén Székely wrote that Lupas's actions are defined by their anti-historical character.[41] However, *The Solemn Process* does provide temporal reference points. The communal rituals that Lupas revives in this project are specific to Transylvania's history. In Austria as well as in Hungary, monumental wreaths made of ears of various grains were crafted for harvest festivals. In the late 1960s, Helmut Fielhauer sent a questionnaire about these objects (*Erntekronen*) to many villages in Lower Austria as part of his research on folklore.[42] The wreaths he described from the information he obtained clearly resemble those in Lupas's work.[43]

Unlike in Austria, it was certainly impossible to reproduce imperial wheat wreaths with crosses on top in the context of a communist regime. However, several aspects, including their vertical structures arising from a circular base, their presentation suspended from beams and their large format, show that the objects Lupas produced with Transylvanian villagers do not differ significantly from those made in the Austrian (and also Hungarian) countryside. The wreaths crafted in the context of *The Solemn Process* are therefore not ahistorical objects. They pertain to a specific cultural framework and bring to mind the period when Transylvania was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. But Lupas's project has a more modern temporal reference point in Romanian ethnography of the interwar period.[44] Her sensitivity to the interconnectedness of the region's material cultures resonates with Vuia's attempt to account for the mutual influences of the Romanian, Magyar, and Saxon populations of Transylvania in terms of craft.[45]

The wreaths also evoke the whirlwind of the harvest festival. Lupas's hands were rather tied, and even if she had wanted to, she would not have been able to resurrect a great number

of festive rituals. It is therefore interesting to note that of all possible activities—processions, dances, games, songs, meals[46]—she selected the wreath-making process. She proposed that villagers learn how to make these objects, then keep them to decorate their yards and houses. Their pleasure was limited to the acquisition of technical knowledge. Lupas produced over a hundred drawings to guide the participants. Her documents detail the various steps in forming the wreaths: assembling wooden elements to form skeletal support structures, using knotting patterns to attach the wheat bales, fixing a wire mesh skin over fabric padding, creating sheaves to be sewn onto the mesh. Since diagrams were not sufficient for teaching the villagers the necessary skills and techniques, Lupas worked alongside them, passing from group to group, showing them her own way of working.

Precisely which gestures did the artist wish to rescue from oblivion? How did she come to understand them? Where did she find them? In the proposal she submitted to the selection committee for the tenth Lausanne Tapestry Biennial, she included a list of materials intended for the performance related to *The Solemn Process*, indicating how these objects had been produced. Some were traditional peasant crafts; others were woven industrially. The only thing the artist described as a "personal manual technique" was the work made with ears of wheat. What does this mean? At the beginning of the project, the wheat wreaths were probably no more than a memory. Lupas probably knew less about the process than what it led to. And in order to realize objects that exist only as mental images, it is not enough to reconstruct gestures from the past. It is necessary to invent new processes. The artist thus had to find "personal" ways to bring the wheat wreaths back to life.

4. *Humid Installation*

In Mărgău, where *The Solemn Process* was repeated year after year, Lupas organized another collective project in the early 1970s. Women villagers agreed to remove laundry from their closets, dampen it, and hang it in a meadow to dry in the sun (fig. 5). The work is currently titled *Humid Installation*; its title was undoubtedly changed in the early 1990s, when the artist wanted to emphasize the water flowing down from the damp fabric.[47] The original title, "Flying Carpet," evoked the motif of flight. Lupas returned to this theme often, exploring it in several of her weavings and textile sculptures, including *The Flying Machine on a Holiday* (1971). However, "Flying Carpet" does not seem sufficient to describe the action carried out with the women from Mărgău. When the Romanian journal *Arta* published two images of this work in 1974, this first part of the title was accompanied by the words "symbol of peace."[48] In fact, this apposition was a strategy. It served to circumvent censorship by making it appear that the work addressed one of the communist authorities' favorite themes. To complete the text, Lupas specified that "the object was produced by means of an action" and that "this action had a festive character."[49]

5 Ana Lupas, *Humid Installation*, 1970. Two photos printed on paper in the 1970s, artist's original text, 70 × 100 cm each; original cloth roll, 50 × 720 cm

Object and action: Wasn't the artist plainly naming here the two poles around which she intended to organize her practice? She succeeded in bringing together terms that in conceptual art are most often at odds with one another. What do they mean specifically in relation to *Humid Installation*? A photograph taken during this action shows fabric sheets spread out along fifteen parallel clotheslines that fill an entire meadow,[50] while below one can see the bell tower and houses of Mărgău. Women are busy with their laundry or chat in small groups. Lupas created a convivial moment, perhaps imagined as a village fair, using the yards of heavy, handwoven cloth the women kept in their homes. Unlike *The Solemn Process*, *Humid Installation* does not depend on making something, since the fabric already exists. The sheets do not become the object that Lupas names in her description of the work until they are activated,

by being unfolded and set in motion. They are flying carpets once hung on the clothesline, swelling in the wind.

The fact that Lupas gathered women together for a supposedly feminine activity may have suggested that she had a feminist agenda. In 1981, the American magazine *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics* published a photograph of *Humid Installation*.[51] The image was printed alone, without any article discussing or even mentioning the work. It was reproduced in a rather unexpected spot: at the bottom of a page, at the end of an interview in which three Vietnamese women, exiled in the United States, explain the reasons leading to their decisions to have children.[52] Including a photograph of *Humid Installation* in *Heresies* was tantamount to assigning a political meaning to Lupas's action, in that its simple inclusion implicitly linked the work to the feminist movement. The caption below the image, followed by some biographical information on Lupas, showed that the editors were not totally uninformed—but it seems clear that the editorial team had no direct contact with the artist. Their lack of knowledge about the specific conditions in which the work came about led them to assume that Lupas's work had been encouraged by the government, even though, in reality, the artist had been obliged to carry out her project covertly. The caption in *Heresies* ended with a reference to an improbable "communist collective near Cluj" that the editors believed had helped Lupas to build her large-scale sculptures.[53] And their enigmatic description of "indigenous bread-making and hay-stacking forms" can perhaps be identified as the wheat wreaths in *The Solemn Process*.

This misunderstanding was mainly due to the belief that Lupas was a feminist in the American sense of the term.[54] The feminist movement organized from the 1960s onward in the United States and in Western Europe did not, in fact, have any authority in communist Romania. Before 1990, feminist ideology was not diffused in the country in any way.[55] And this is not the only reason that feminism in its Western form could not exist in Romania. In a communist regime, it was unthinkable to fight for individual rights, for access to personal autonomy.[56] But the emancipation of women was part of the collective Marxist program. It was therefore the government's role to enact it. Rather than coming about as a result of social demands or expectations, equality between men and women was imposed from the top down.[57] What the editors at *Heresies* saw in the photograph of *Humid Installation* was certainly not the work's specific content. Instead, they thought they recognized in it the questions that concerned them. Still, their perspective is not uninteresting, since it testified to the open-endedness of Lupas's action and its capacity to speak to others, even outside the context in which it had been realized.

Although there is probably no justification to speak of feminism within the context of Eastern European communism, specific measures did enable Romanian women to achieve relative economic independence.[58] Their emancipation as produced by communism came via a unique path: that of professional activity.[59] The working world in Romania provided an anchor for the principle of equality between men and women. Mihaela Miroiu has noted that at least in the early days of communism, women did not define themselves as mothers, wives,

or daughters.[60] What prevailed in their identity construction was their function as electricians, tractor operators, lawyers, and teachers. Lupas seems to have turned away from this "state proto-feminism," to use Miroiu's expression,[61] when she asked the peasant women of Mărgău to hang their linen in the sun. In the countryside, roles were clearly differentiated and determined.[62] To ask the men of the village about domestic matters would have been an aberration. However, it is unlikely that Lupas was trying to show in *Humid Installation* that domestic tasks were exclusively the responsibility of women. Her intentions certainly lay elsewhere.

Lupas did not intend to carry out an action that dealt primarily with the place of women in Romanian society. As present as the women may be in *Humid Installation*, their presence happened implicitly. The first impulse for the work thus came from the object. At the artist's request, the peasant women did not remove clothes, sheets, or linens from their closets; in most cases, they brought out fabric provisions from which they would draw, when needed, extra rolls of cloth that they and other women in their families had handwoven in hemp, linen, or cotton threads. To participate in Lupas's action, it was most likely enough for them to wet the cloths they had in storage. The acts of washing, bleaching, and softening the fabric were effectively carried out only once, when the weaving was completed.[63] In *Humid Installation,* Lupas was thus working with an object that she knew would soon become obsolete. The domestic production of textiles involved labor that farm women had been increasingly able to avoid since the 1960s.[64] They had stopped weaving when it became possible to procure industrial materials. *Humid Installation* thus joins *The Solemn Process* in that both actions were driven by the artist's attempt to withstand the oblivion she saw lurking just around the corner for the villagers' craft.

Lupas had always tried to preserve the memory of what she knew was in danger of disappearing. In this way, her work is a memorial. But the grounds on which this was accomplished were variable. For several decades, the artist endeavored to preserve the memory of her own work, and her concern for the preservation and restoration of her artworks marked a turning point in her production.[65] Still, it would be inaccurate to think that Lupas was involved only in conservation. To transform an action into a perennial work constitutes a veritable artistic project, all the more so since an object in its final form must tremble with the fragility of transience. Lupas also gave her work a more clearly commemorative side when she used her *Humid Installation* to create a monument. In 1991, she installed her *Memorial of Cloth* on Bucharest's University Square in memory of the protesters who had clashed violently the previous year with police and coal miners brought there from the Jiu Valley by the government. Twenty years after it was installed in Mărgău, the artist covered the sheets with bitumen. The fabric was no longer hanging in the wind: blackened and weighed down, it was suspended from iron bars.

It was to rescue whatever she could from oblivion that Lupas turned to the peasant world after completing her studies. In the 1960s, the upheavals this world had undergone since the end of World War II predicted the failure of its traditions to survive. Both *The Solemn Process* and *Humid Installation* arose from shaping this ethnographic material. It does not

seem impossible to link them retrospectively to conceptual art. On the one hand, unlike LeWitt, Joseph Kosuth, or Lawrence Weiner, Lupas had little pretense of remaining at the idea stage in her work;[66] in addition, the materiality of the object seems to take on an importance for her that it did not have for these conceptual American artists. On the other hand, *The Solemn Process* and *Humid Installation* could have been considered conceptual works as soon as Lupas conceived them without the need to execute them herself. Ultimately, however, we should not limit ourselves to inscribing them in conceptual art. We should instead observe how their inclusion calls into question our understanding of the conceptual art movement. While LeWitt believed that conceptual art "is usually free from the dependence on the skill of the artist as a craftsman,"[67] Lupas's actions did not owe their existence solely to the knowledge she derived from manual and artisanal craft. They also went beyond it, as celebrations of the crafts and skills of the peasant world that were in the process of disappearing.

Translated from the French by Laurie Hurwitz

Notes

1 Mildred Constantine and Jack Lenor Larsen, *Beyond Craft: The Art Fabric* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1973), p. 7.
2 Mildred Constantine and Jack Lenor Larsen, *Wall Hangings,* exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1969).
3 See Rossella Froissart and Merel van Tilburg, "De la tapisserie au *Fiber Art* : Crises et renaissances au XXe siècle," *Perspective*, no. 1 (2016): 138.
4 Katharine L. H. Wells, "Artistes contre liciers. La renaissance de la tapisserie française," in *Decorum : Tapis et tapisseries d'artistes,* exh. cat. (Paris: Flammarion; Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 2013), p. 56.
5 Giselle Eberhard-Cotton and Magali Junet, *De la tapisserie au* Fiber Art *: Les Biennales de Lausanne 1962–1995* (Milan: Skira, 2017), p. 48.
6 André Kuenzi, Erika Billeter, and Kuniko Lucy Kato, *La nouvelle tapisserie* (Lausanne: La Bibliothèque des Arts, 1981 [1973]), p. 32.
7 Ibid., p. 24.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., p. 185.
10 The questionnaires Ana Lupas filled out when applying to the Lausanne Biennial are kept in the archives of the Fondation Toms Pauli. I would like to express my thanks to Giselle Eberhard-Cotton, who headed the Fondation Toms Pauli until 2023, and its current director, Magali Junet, for allowing me to consult the archive of the Biennial.
11 See Marta Kowalewska, "Pologne : En quête de sens," in *De la tapisserie au* Fiber Art, p. 164. In her biography of Magdalena Abakanowicz, Joanna Inglot notes that the artist graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw in the department of textile design, not painting, as has often been stated. See Joanna Inglot, *The Figurative Sculpture of Magdalena Abakanowicz: Bodies, Environments, and Myths* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), p. 124, n. 28.

12 See Sebestyén György Székely, *Maria Ciupe: Textile Art of the 1960s and 1970s* (Cluj: Quadro Gallery, 2018), p. 34.
13 This information was provided by Marina Lupas Collinet during a video conference interview with the author on April 15, 2021.
14 Despite my research and interviews with Giselle Eberhard Cotton and Marina Lupas Collinet, the exact content of this performance remains unknown.
15 The correspondence concerning the organization of the exhibition *Rencontre avec . . . Ana Lupas* held from January 4 to 17, 1982, is kept in the archives of the Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts in Lausanne. I extend my thanks to Manuela Giovannini for allowing me to consult them.
16 Françoise Jaunin, "'Rencontre avec . . .' Ana Lupas : Tapisserie conceptuelle," *Tribune de Lausanne le Matin : TLM*, January 15, 1982 (translation by Laurie Hurwitz).
17 Ibid.
18 See Cristian Nae, "Notes on the Concomitant Subversion, Revision and Solidifying of an Alternative Art Canon," *Revista Arta*, nos. 20–21 (2016): 7.
19 Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), p. 12.
20 Katharine Wells claims that delegating the execution of the work to another party makes tapestry a precursor to both minimal and conceptual art. See Wells, "Artistes contre liciers. La renaissance de la tapisserie française," p. 55.
21 According to information provided by Marina Lupas Collinet during a video conference interview with the author on June 9, 2021.
22 The performance's original title, *Flying Carpet*, printed in a caption in the journal *Arta*, no. 2 (1974): 7, included the phrase "an object produced by means of an action."
23 LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," p. 12.
24 Ian Burn, "The 'Sixties: Crisis and Aftermath (or the Memoirs of an Ex-Conceptual Artist)," in *Conceptual Art*, p. 395.
25 *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s*, exh. cat. (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999), p. 268.
26 On the contrary, Piotr Piotrowski finds this exhibition is an excellent example of the horizontal practice of art history. See Piotr Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), p. 33.
27 Romulus Vuia, *Muzeul etnografic al Ardealului* (Bucharest: Impr. Fundației culturale Regele Mihai I, 1928), p. 3.
28 Lupas's relationship to Vuia's ethnographic project is not only intellectual and artistic but also familial. In 1929, an open-air ethnographic museum opened in Cluj thanks to the support of the artist's great-uncle, Iuliu Maniu, prime minister at the time. See Tudor Sălăgean, "'Grădina neamului': 90 de ani de la înființarea primului muzeu în aer liber din România," adevarul.ro, June 23, 2019, https://adevarul.ro/cultura/patrimoniu/gradina-neamului-90-ani-dela-infiintarea-primului-muzeu-aer-liber-romania-title-1_5d0fd951892c0bb0c6b6d28c/index.html. The artist's grandfather, the historian Ioan Lupas, was a specialist of the peasant world, especially that in Transylvania, on which he undertook much research.
29 Vuia, *Muzeul etnografic al Ardealului*, p. 4.
30 See Constantin Iordachi and Dorin Dobrincu, eds., *Transforming Peasants, Property and Power: The Collectivization of Agriculture in Romania, 1949–1962* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2009), p. 2.

31 See ibid., p. 11.
32 See Gail Kligman and Katherine Verdery, *Peasants under Siege: The Collectivization of Romanian Agriculture, 1949–1962* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 3.
33 See ibid.
34 See ibid.; Iordachi and Dobrincu, *Transforming Peasants, Property and Power*, p. 6; and Aurora Liiceanu, *Nici alb, nici negru: Radiografia unui sat romanesc, 1948–1998* (Bucharest: Nemira, 2000), p. 89.
35 See Kligman and Verdery, *Peasants under Siege*, p. 143.
36 See ibid., p. 144.
37 See ibid., p. 145.
38 This information was given to me verbally by Marina Lupas Collinet.
39 In the words of Marina Lupas Collinet in her unpublished text "*The Solemn Process* – Reliquary for Infinity," "timelessness is open at both ends."
40 See Marina Lupas Collinet, "Drawings Handbook," in *Ana Lupas: Drawing* The Solemn Process (Bologna: P420, 2021), p. XIII.
41 Sebestyén Székely, "On a Map, in a Different Time," in *Ana Lupas: Drawing* The Solemn Process, p. XIX.
42 Helmut P. Fielhauer, "Palmesel und Erntekrone: Zwei Folklorismus-Skizzen aus dem Niederösterreichischen Festkalender," in *Helmut P. Fielhauer: Volkskunde als demokratische Kulturgeschichtsschreibung: Ausgewählte Aufsätze aus zwei Jahrzehnten*, ed. Olaf Bockhorn, Reinhard Johler, and Gertraud Liesenfeld (Vienna: Institut für Volkskunde der Universität Wien, 1987), p. 309.
43 Ibid., p. 313.
44 In Romania, the interwar period was propitious for ethnographic studies. Under the direction of Dimitrie Gusti, a vast project of study of rural life was carried out at the time. It led to the creation of the National Village Museum in Bucharest in 1936. See Juliana Maxim, *The Socialist Life of Modern Architecture: Bucharest, 1949–1964* (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 129–35. Ramona Novicov notes that Ana Lupas's father was friends with ethnologist Ernest Bernea, a researcher at the Bucharest School of Sociology, which was founded by Gusti. His son, the painter Horia Bernea, reorganized the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant in Bucharest and was appointed its director in 1990. See Ramona Novicov, "Ana Lupaş: Soliloquies," Institutul Prezentului, November 2019, https://institutulprezentului.ro/en/2019/11/15/ana-lupas-soliloquies/.
45 Vuia, *Muzeul etnografic al Ardealului*, pp. 23, 35.
46 In comparison, most ethnographic studies of the harvest festival (*Erntedankfest*) focus very little on material culture. Claudia Elena Zidaru, in her article on fall rituals of the Saxons in Southern Transylvania, mentions religious ceremonies, decorating the altar and chants in German. Ingeborg Weber-Kellermann's extensive research on harvest customs in nineteenth-century Germany focuses on the ritual "Binden und Lösen." See Claudia Elena Zidaru, "Considerations on Autumn Traditions of Saxons in Southern Transylvania," *The Yearly Review of the Ethnographic Museum of Moldavia*, no. 9 (2009): 323; and Ingeborg Weber-Kellermann, *Erntebrauch in der ländlichen Arbeitswelt des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Marburg: N. G. Elwert Verlag, 1965).
47 Under the title *Humid Installation,* in 1994, Lupas presented another version of this work in the group exhibition *Europa, Europa: Das Jahrhundert der Avantgarde in Mittel- und Osteuropa* (Europe, Europe: The Century of the Avant-Garde in Central and Eastern Europe) held at the Bundeskunsthalle in Bonn.
48 "Covor zburător, simbol al păcii," *Arta*, no. 2 (1974): 6–8.

49 These four elements appear in French as the title of the work on the back of a photograph of the Mărgău action that Lupas included in her application to the scientific committee of the Lausanne Tapestry Biennial in 1975.

50 *Humid Installation* occupied a surface of some 3,000 square meters.

51 *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics* 4, no. 1 (1981): 73.

52 The photograph of *Humid Installation* was published in an issue devoted to the question of the links between feminism and ecology. The editors wanted among other things to shed new light on reproductive rights. "Editorial Statement 13," *Heresies* 4, no. 1 (1981): n. p.

53 Ibid., p. 73.

54 On the problems that an interpretive model based on American feminism may pose when applied to the Eastern European situation, see Agata Jakubowska, "The 'Abakans' and the Feminist Revolution," in *Regarding the Popular: Modernism, the Avant-Garde and High and Low Culture*, ed. Sascha Bru et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), pp. 253–65; Beata Hock, "Communities of Practice: Performing Women in the Second Public Sphere," in *Performance Art in the Second Public Sphere: Event-Based Art in Late Socialist Europe*, ed. Katalin Cseh-Varga and Adam Czirak (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 202–18.

55 See Mihaela Miroiu, *Drumul către autonomie: Teorii politice feministe* (Bucharest: Polirom, 2004), p. 188.

56 See ibid., p. 185.

57 See Petruța Cîrdei, "Femeia comunistă între realitate, doctrină și propagandă," *Annals of the University of Bucharest/Political Science series* 14, no. 2 (2012): 75–76.

58 See Miroiu, *Drumul către autonomie*, p. 188.

59 See ibid., p. 213, and Cristina Liana Olteanu, Elena-Simona Gheonea, and Valentin Gheonea, *Femeile în România comunistă: Studii de istorie socială* (Bucharest: Politeia-SNSPA, 2003), p. 78.

60 Miroiu, *Drumul către autonomie*, p. 213. These remarks resonate with Magdalena Abakanowicz's statements about the status of women in Poland. See Inglot, *The Figurative Sculpture of Magdalena Abakanowicz*, p. 68.

61 Miroiu, *Drumul către autonomie*, p. 211.

62 See Liiceanu, *Nici alb, nici negru*, p. 167.

63 See Tudor Pamfile and Mihai Lupescu, *Cromatica poporului român* (Bucharest: Socec și C. Sfetea, 1914), pp. 172–78.

64 See Magdalena Buchczyk, "To Weave or Not to Weave: Vernacular Textiles and Historical Change in Romania," *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture* 12, no. 3 (2014): 328–45.

65 Lupas devoted herself entirely to the preservation and restoration of her works from the 1980s onward. See Alina Şerban, "Ana Lupas," AWARE (Archives of Women Artists, Research and Exhibitions). https://awarewomenartists.com/artiste/ana-lupas/.

66 About the gap between the declarations of conceptual artists and the realization of their works, see Ileana Parvu, Jean-Marie Bolay, Bénédicte le Pimpec, and Valérie Mavridorakis, eds., *Faire, faire faire, ne pas faire : Entretiens sur la production de l'art contemporain* (Genève: Haute école d'art et de design; Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2021).

67 LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," p. 12.

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