

# From static oblivion

## Ion Grigorescu



published by  
Giuliana Prucca - AVARIE

There is no inside, no mind, no outside, no conscience, nothing but the body as one sees it, a body that doesn't cease to be, even when the eye drops who sees it. And this body is a fact. It's me.

[Antonin Artaud]

*From static oblivion*, an artbook in line with Avarie's previous publications, aims to deepen, starting from Ion Grigorescu's rich artistic production, the reflection about the status of the image as a balance of forces in tension (statics), as form and design of what is in continuous movement (rhythm) and as a paradoxical act of cancellation of the body through its own representation (oblivion).

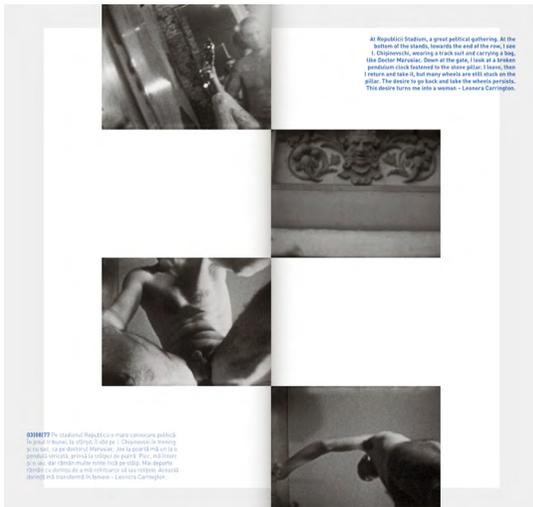
In Grigorescu's work, as in the book, the body is continually shown in different ways - from photography to film, from performance to drawing - and yet it remains absent, suspended, obscuring its own identity in an attempt to question the collective one. The persistent use of the mirror not only reflects the need to escape the solitude of his own body and to find the other in the multiplication of points of view, but it comes from the necessity to objectify the only material that is available to him. As it is impossible to carry out his performances and show his art during the dictatorship, the body of Grigorescu ends up hiding, disappearing inside the image. Instead of showing, the image conceals, because it is non-documentary and non-transmittable (this will change only after the revolution); nevertheless, it is constitutive and executive, it is an act of birth. It is an ethical fact, and not an aesthetic one, it is proof of the artist's resistance and therefore existence, especially as a human being inside (or against) any geographical or historical background. There is no art, says Deleuze, without release of a life force: in the rituals of his gestures and in the symbolism of his performances, Grigorescu finds a way to stay alive, preserving his own intellectual status while also defending the dignity of everyday life. And, by reversing and mirroring converse perspectives, he shows that art is the only way of overcoming any physical limitations and of freeing oneself from those constrictions of public life which have invaded the private sphere and even found their way into people's unconscious.

*From static oblivion* traces, with circular, nearly spiral movements, the progression, both expansive and inclusive, of Grigorescu's work, which, starting from the intimacy of a room or a kitchen, opens itself up to the structure of a house with its inhabitants or to the architecture of an entire city with its population, while moving through the urban transformations of a strongly rural and traditional Romania, in order to return and inscribe itself into the space of the body and into that of the world, in a complete superimposition (or indeed doubling) of micro and macrocosm. By enlarging his own field of vision, Grigorescu in effect circumscribes and simultaneously absorbs elements of his surrounding reality, showing us a continuity between art and life which translates itself, inside the frame of an image, into an interplay between work and

work space or space of daily experience: Grigorescu's act of dissidence is not an outcry of provocation, nor is it extreme or ostentatious; it is an anti-aesthetic operation which uses experimentation and rough or limited techniques to uncover the fiction of art and to denounce the artifice of representation, leaving us with the ambiguity between truth and falsehood, not only within the process of creation, but also within society. There is no trespass, Grigorescu's performances are part of an ongoing and "contained" interrogation of the relationship between the body and the space which the book is trying to match with the choice of its images whose measured surface tries to "keep inside" all that's possible: the composition appears dense yet fluid, "cursive", though never imposing.

The body of Ion Grigorescu runs (through) the entire book: like a line that gradually takes on volume, it transforms itself from eye to lens until it becomes screen or page onto which internal and external visions are projected, converting itself from a subject taking photographs into an object that's being photographed and observed. In the last section of the book the artist leaves the mirror to pose directly in front of the camera which thereby assumes the same function and the same reflecting feature: in the transparency of the lens he no longer looks for himself but for an identification with the viewer/reader of the future, who will return, however, a mirror image of something else. Like the narrative of an "imago", the parable of the body traces a return not to the body itself but to its image. This provides not only a time lag, but an important shift of meaning, an authentic abstraction: Grigorescu's body is never a real body whose actions are performed in front of a public; instead it appears as an image and only as such can it present itself to the other. The body "loses body" in the image, it deserts, it abstracts itself, and makes thereby, in a transitive way, each image abstract. The entire book intends to bear traces of this flux "ex-corpore", favouring a structure that reduces the body to its essential and primary elements and mitigates the subjectiveness of any emotional material in order to allow for a more objective and universal analysis or reading, not least supported by the camera's mechanical eye and its first, absolute





and neutral, gaze. In an attempt to meld the conceptual and minimalist orientation of Grigorescu's work with the secret practice of body art, the book tries to "temper" its own, deeply organic and poetic, content by placing it in a more geometric ad epic framework.

The layout of the book and the sequencing of the photographs follow a series of reiterations, where the repeated image slightly differs from the preceding one in terms of perspective, temporality and technique, as inspired by Tarkovski's rhythm-based way of filming: within one and the same long take, the Russian director lets his camera return and close up on the same starting image while bringing in a slight yet significant mutation (1-2-4). Besides, many elements of the book are often "extracted" elements, elements taken out of larger figurative compositions and therefore capable of conveying a continuous sense of déjà-vu and of forcing the reader to stop, to go back eventually and to move back and forth inside the volume, engaging him in a reading that is just as performative: this is the case for example with the pictures taken out of a photo series, with the frames taken out of a film, or with the title of the book which derives from the verses of a poem.

To disrupt the rhythm, or else to provide it, images taken from the 1976 performance *Masculin Feminin* have been spread throughout the book; the performance is shown nearly in its entire form, but its original sequence has been dismantled and reassembled to allow also for a reverse reading, starting from the end of the volume. Ion Grigorescu's actions, naked in front of the mirror or in front of the camera, come with a transcription of his nocturnal dreams from the 1970s and 80s which feature elements of the political and historical situation he was at the time confronted with. Apart from the paradoxical possibility of narrating reality through a dreamscape, these pages demonstrate how much a place that should have been intimate and personal has been contaminated by the dominating ideology. Questions of gender and of sexual identity caused by such "performative-photographic" work go hand in hand with doubts over an identification with the forces in power and with fears of an influence of propagandist elements entering dreams.

Grigorescu however worked in the secrecy of his studio, defying prohibitions and risking denunciations, thereby showing that art can be a universe which is freer than the world of dreams and which is capable of representing the true space of desire as a critical category. When we see, at a certain point in the film and through a particular cross play between camera and mirror, the artist as he holds an image of himself in his hand, we are not only seeing an affirmation of the body as an image, but also an affirmation of the image as an instrument of a subversive power.



Therefore, in the end, *From static oblivion*, opens with the discontinuous deployment of another important film, here considered as a kind of "manifesto": *Trap trap de potcoave* contains, like an index, nearly all the themes that are developed visually and graphically throughout the book, above all the assertion of auto-representation, the disclosure of the artifice, and the reversibility of art. In this first part some of the sequences are in fact assembled in a specular way to allow, from the beginning, for a crossover-mirroring between artist and reader, capable of reactivating the performance with each reading of the book.

Functioning in the same way, like little manuals of instruction or "activity booklets" in the style of Allan Kaprow, there will be, throughout the corpus of the book, a series of descriptive and informative texts captioning the artist's drafts, drawings and lithographies: they also call for an active participation of the reader who in turn can make the book "happen" every time as if it were an event or the 25th image of a film, the inexistent or ghost image which results from a break ("Avarie" in French) of the film strip and which we made visible in this book.

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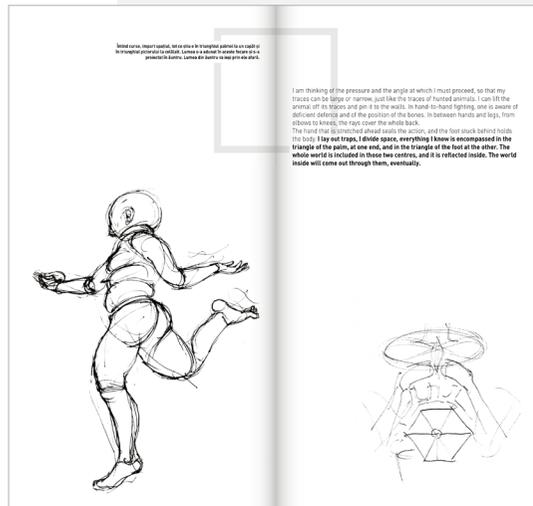




## Ion Grigorescu

Ion Grigorescu (1945, lives and works in Bucharest) is one of the most significant Romanian artists of the Post-War period and an iconic figure of the conceptual and performative art since the early 70s. He has been working on issues of sexuality, body and politics from both a communistic and capitalist point of view, based on historical changes. He is the author of numerous photographic series, drawings, paintings and collages, as well performances recorded on film, which concentrate on ritualized actions around his body and go beyond art, leading into a private and personal life.

He represented Romania at Venice Biennial in 1997 and 2011; his works are in the main public collections, such as MoMa, New York; Mumok and Erste Foundation, Vienna; Tate Modern and Deutsche Bank AG, London; Vehbi Koc Foundation, Istanbul; Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin. He has taken part in a number of international shows including *Chercher le garçon* (2015), Musée d'art contemporain du Val-de-Marne MAC/Val, Vitry-sur-Seine; *Mein Körper ist das Ereignis - Wiener Aktionismus und internationale Performance* (2015), MUMOK, Vienna; *Inside* (2014), Palais de Tokyo, Paris; *Performing Histories* (2012), MoMA, New York; *PhotoEspaña* (2012), Madrid; *Ostalgie* (2011), New Museum, New York; *Out of Place* (2011), Tate Modern, London; *Promises of the Past* (2010), Centre Pompidou, Paris; *6. Berlin Biennale* (2010), Berlin; *Performing the East* (2009), Kunstverein Salzburg; *Ion Grigorescu: In the Body of the Victim 1969–2008* (2009), Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw; *Documenta XII* (2007), Kassel; *Paradoxes: The Embodied City* (2005), Calouste Gulbenkian Cultural Centre, Lisbon; *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949–1979* (1998), Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, MUMOK, Vienna, MACBA, Barcelona, MOMAT, Tokyo. ([www.gregorpodnar.com/ion-grigorescu/](http://www.gregorpodnar.com/ion-grigorescu/))





# AVARIE

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## Ion Grigorescu From static oblivion

Soft cover  
Size: 30x16 cm  
Pages: 352  
Typeface: FF Din  
Paper: Buckram Light White 183 gsm, Duo Oktav 1,18 vol, 60 gsm

English, Romanian  
b/w and color images, drawings

Works and texts: Ion Grigorescu  
Concept and editing: Giuliana Prucca  
Graphic design: Vito Raimondi  
Publisher: Avarie

October 2016  
43 euros  
ISBN 978-2-9541974-2-5

info + orders: [info@avarie-publishing.com](mailto:info@avarie-publishing.com)

for updates + news: [www.facebook.com/Avarie.publishing](https://www.facebook.com/Avarie.publishing)

Nevertheless, the most irritating things – doing the laundry, washing the dishes, sweeping the floor, tidying up, throwing out the garbage, standing in queues, waiting for trams, getting into arguments – seem to me exemplary and constitutive. All daily tasks are performances, art, acts of survival.

*[Ion Grigorescu]*

