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Memoria de los materiales

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Abstract:	The Memoria de los Materiales exhibition is a collaboration between Mexican artists-in-residency, Kees Ouwens and Carmen Jacobo, and students from the Ceramics Department (coordinated by Assistant Professor Ramona Biciucă) and Painting Department (coordinated by the undersigned) within the Faculty of Visual Arts and Design in Iasi; the project consisted of a few installations and chromatic interventions on the architectural structure of the exhibition space. The act of assembling both the modular ceramic pieces and the fragmented materials found in the abandoned building located on Ghica-Vodă street belonging to Costache Corjescu, supervisor and politician in the 19th century, is based on the concept of interhuman intercultural connection that crossed like a red thread and supports the artists' dialogue. The exhibition becomes an attempt to revive the past by exhibiting pieces of furniture found in the abandoned building, together with the series of monotypes, thus creating a nostalgic atmosphere amplified in the 24 photographs illustrating the experimental interventions made by students. The direct contact with the structure becomes the leitmotif of this exhibition and offers a sensory experience of simultaneous strength and refinement. The traditional Romanian motifs painted in a decorative style are harmoniously combined with visual structures that maintain, in a coherent way, the identity narrative of the visual discourse.
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MEMORIA DE LOS MATERIALES

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Abstract: *The Memoria de los Materiales exhibition is a collaboration between Mexican artists-in-residency, Kees Ouwens and Carmen Jacobo, and students from the Ceramics Department (coordinated by Assistant Professor Ramona Biciușcă) and Painting Department (coordinated by the undersigned) within the Faculty of Visual Arts and Design in Iași; the project consisted of a few installations and chromatic interventions on the architectural structure of the exhibition space. The act of assembling both the modular ceramic pieces and the fragmented materials found in the abandoned building located on Ghica-Vodă street belonging to Costache Corjescu, supervisor and politician in the 19th century, is based on the concept of interhuman intercultural connection that crossed like a red thread and supports the artists' dialogue. The exhibition becomes an attempt to revive the past by exhibiting pieces of furniture found in the abandoned building, together with the series of monotypes, thus creating a nostalgic atmosphere amplified in the 24 photographs illustrating the experimental interventions made by students. The direct contact with the structure becomes the leitmotif of this exhibition and offers a sensory experience of simultaneous strength and refinement. The traditional Romanian motifs painted in a decorative style are harmoniously combined with visual structures that maintain, in a coherent way, the identity narrative of the visual discourse.*

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I. CHAPTER I/ CERAMICS PROJECT

Kees Ouwens and Carmen Jacobo are two visual artists who have made their home in Presa de Umecuar, Morelia, Mexico. Together, they manage *La Coyotera Taller Estudio* Art Residency. Ouwens, who hails from the Netherlands, is a multifaceted artist specializing in painting and sculpture, working with both stone and marble. His artworks have been showcased internationally, including exhibitions in the United States, South Korea, Germany, and Japan. Jacobo, originally from Mexico, is a versatile artist whose practice encompasses painting, ceramics, and installation art. In 2013, she participated in the *Festival Arte de la Tierra*, held at the *O-Huis* studio in Seiyō, Japan. During this event, she engaged in a landscape intervention project and experimented with Japanese glazing techniques.

In the final month of 2023, Kees Ouwens and Carmen Jacobo took part in the *UNAGE Iași Art Residency*. This program was orchestrated by the *Painting – Contemporary Visual Practices* Cultural Center and overseen by the Painting Department at the *George Enescu*

THE XXVIII-th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
"INVENTICA 2024. Science of Creativity"

National University of Arts, Faculty of Visual Arts and Design in Iași. Their participation was made possible through a financial backing supported by the *Erasmus+* international program. Throughout their three-week residency, Ouwens and Jacobo immersed themselves in a diverse range of artistic endeavors. Their activities included: creating a ceramics installation, conducting a ceramics workshop, performing art interventions within an abandoned structure, mounting an exhibition of their work and delivering an artist talk. This multifaceted approach allowed the artists to engage with the local community, share their expertise, and explore new creative avenues within the context of Iași's cultural landscape.

1.1 Work-in-progress

In a joint effort with the Ceramics Department students, Carmen Jacobo crafted a modular ceramic installation comprising around 1,500 petite rectangular elements. Each segment was fired in a kiln, laced together with twine, and distinctively adorned with text or particular color schemes. This endeavor was realized with the mentorship of Assistant Professor and visual artist Ramona Biciușcă.



Fig.1, 2. Carmen Jacobo working in the studio at the ceramics pieces together with the students from Ceramics Department, Faculty of Visual Arts and Design, Iași

1.2 Burning ceramics pieces in Mexican style

The pair of visual artists coordinated a ceramics workshop for students from the Ceramics and Painting Departments, with the collaboration of Miss Felicia Balan, the *Erasmus+* international program's delegate, who supplied a suitable location for the gathering. The ceramic creations were nestled into a pit excavated in the earth, enveloped with smoldering coals, and then capped with a metal cover. Several hours later, the items were carefully retrieved with tongs and set upon a stand. While the ceramics were still radiating heat, just before they began to cool, individual lines were etched onto their surfaces using a wooden stick, bestowing a personalized touch and distinct character to each piece.



Fig. 3, 4. Kees Ouwens and Carmen Jacobo burning ceramics pieces in Mexican style together with the students from Ceramics Department, Horlești village, Romania

II. CHAPTER II/ PUBLIC ART IN ABANDONED BUILDING

Kees Ouwens and Carmen Jacobo embarked on a captivating initiative within a derelict structure situated on *Ghica-Vodă* Street, predominantly engaging students from the Painting Department. This dilapidated edifice, a legacy of Costache Corjescu—a distinguished agrarian and proponent of the *League for the Defense of the Rights of Moldova*—stood on the brink of ruin after years of neglect. The building, which was once part of the *Leon Ghelerter* Sanatorium, came into the possession of the *Fraterna Israelita* Society from Păcurari after 1909. This society, a Jewish group with philanthropic aims, was instrumental in the founding and support of the Israeli Hospital in Iași, inaugurated in 1875. The historical context was contributed by Mr. Marius Checu of the *A.D. Xenopol* History Institute. Permission to utilize the premises was provided by architect Gabriel Etcu, the mind behind *ESQ Village*, a firm dedicated to the development of residential communities.



Fig. 5, 6, 7. Artists doing experimental art interventions together with the students from Painting and Ceramics Department, in the abandoned building located on Ghica-Vodă street, Iași

This endeavor involved multiple artistic interventions within the forsaken building, such as the revitalization of its walls, windows, and doors through painting; a room was transformed into a gallery for a collage of photographs, a collection of vintage items was curated and displayed to narrate the building's past, innovative light bulb fixtures were installed within certain wall sections to examine the interplay of light, transparency and reflection on various surfaces and through the door windows. A student produced charcoal sketches along some of the wall edges, while Kees assembled a prominent wooden structure

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in the heart of a room. Carmen, on the other hand, arranged pieces of glass found scattered on the floor into a circular form. Furthermore, Kees crafted a series of unique monotypes by pressing painted old door windows onto paper; these prints were then framed and showcased in the gallery. Students interacted with the environment, employing mediums like oil paints, acrylics, and industrial paints. The entire process was meticulously captured through professional photography and local TV channels were invited to conduct interviews with the resident artists and participating students.

This venture proved to be highly beneficial, as it allowed the students to explore innovative methods, delve into experimental activities and venture beyond their usual boundaries. It was an exercise in making their mark in a novel environment, in becoming acquainted with and absorbing the distinct energy of the space.

III. CHAPTER III/ EXHIBITION

The *Memory of Materials* exhibition was held at the apARTE Gallery on December 19th, featuring an array of photographs displayed along the left side, complemented by colorful interventions and monotypes on the neighboring wall. The gallery was divided into two distinct areas: to the right, an assemblage of vintage items fashioned into an installation by Kees Ouwens, and to the left, a ceramics display crafted by Carmen Jacobo in collaboration with students, under the tutelage of Assistant Lecturer Ramona Biciușcă.



Fig. 8, 9, 10. *Memory of materials* exhibition at apARTE Gallery, December 19th 2023, Faculty of Visual Arts and Design, Iași. (ceramics installation, old found objects installation, wall painting and photography)

The photography exhibition offers a visual chronicle, displaying a curated set of images capturing student endeavors within a forsaken structure. Alongside, a wall is adorned with traditional Mexican and Romanian designs, artistically interwoven with a mosaic of uneven ceramic shards affixed to its surface. Amidst these, subtle charcoal sketches in an artistic manner are observable. A collection of monotypes, vivid in hue, portrays the intricate patterns of door windows, echoing the essence of abstract art. The ceramic display comes alive with its ground-level arrangement, where pieces rise from the floor on pedestals of assorted heights, tapering down to create an engaging, dual-path formation that lends the installation its harmonious symmetry. Kees's artistic arrangement features a medley of vintage furnishings, including a scale, a metal grill, a curtain, assorted glass bottles, a door frame,

wires, and an array of items reflective of Israeli heritage. These elements are thoughtfully amalgamated, achieving unity in their variance of shape, substance, color, and function, suggesting an inherent sense of belonging amidst their diversity.

Ultimately, an array of artistic mediums—ceramic art, painting, installation art, and photography—were seamlessly integrated, culminating in a masterful collective work. This grand ensemble was the sum of many individual pieces, each a product of the aforementioned artistic endeavors.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The partnership with Kees Ouwens and Carmen Jacobo proved to be remarkably productive. Their presence enriched our community in two significant ways:

1. They shared a treasure trove of inspiring experiences, both from their artistic pursuits and personal journeys.
2. Despite their brief stay, they orchestrated a series of intricate activities that deeply engaged our students.

The importance of such international collaborations cannot be overstated. These interactions provide both students and faculty with opportunities to expand their cultural perspectives. This exposure often paves the way for future travel opportunities and artistic collaborations, which are crucial for our growth as creative professionals.

Moreover, these experiences encourage us to step beyond our comfort zones, embracing the challenge of engaging with diverse cultures and viewpoints. This willingness to take risks and immerse ourselves in unfamiliar territory is an invaluable asset in the artistic world. It fosters innovation, broadens our creative horizons and ultimately contributes to our development as well-rounded artists and individuals.



Fig. 11 Kees Ouwens and Carmen Jacobo together with the students from Painting and Ceramics Departments, Faculty of Visual Arts and Design, Iași

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