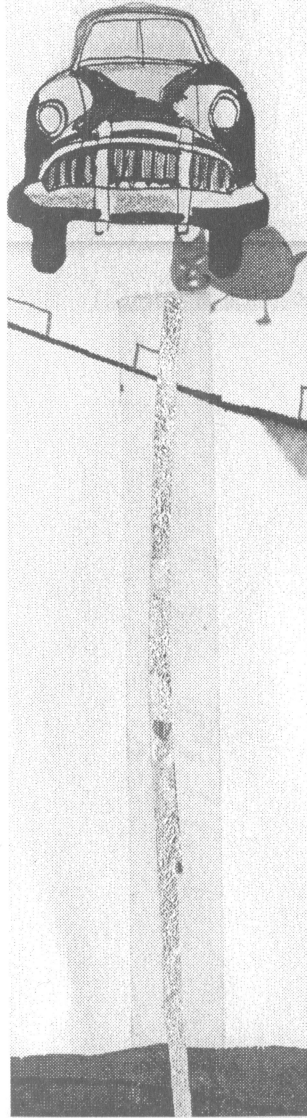


SHOW-STORIES

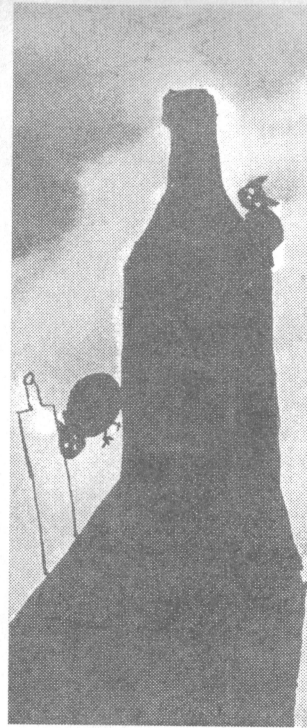


Telling stories, painting stories, drawing stories seems almost prohibited in contemporary art. When artists draw upon ideological topics in order to elaborate on statement-like (frequently opportunistic) position-art, they are likely to be highly praised for their social, political, environmental etc. commitment. The same is valid for those artists involved in the kind of current technological investigation and experimentation, using high-tech, most recently developed instruments of communication and processing the information. They too appear as directly linked and synchronous with a thought as progressive stance on current, up to date human affairs, complying with the ideally envisaged state of facts of individuals and communities nowadays.

Beside these two categories ultimately backed by a utopian and primitive, meliorist evolutionism, assembling most of the art placed at the very core of

ongoing debates and theoretical research, one single issue is projected and kept open for the rest of the remaining art. That is the aesthetic, or rather aesthetic (And therefore thought as rather commercial, cynical) issue, in its twofold, ultimately convergent variants. On the one hand there is the formalist one, be it abstract, minimalist, or simply optically beautified *objets d'art*, and on the other hand there is its apparent opposite counterpart, the expressionistic, bowels-boasted, invading and aggressive, even repelling (and consequently aesthetically-enhanced, subliminally appealing) *bad art*.

A widespread fallacy in global culture takes as granted that the art is mainly designed to bring either ideas or beauties (even tainted by nastiness) before the eyes. Happenings, life scenes and concrete occurrences appear as marginal, not really significant for the inner project of the nowadays art. Yet, proper life and actual, active knowledge of it is essentially made up of happenings, of scenes on improvised stages, on the street, in the house, weaving acts and facts occurring between individuals. Images and visual memories of collisions and fusion, mixtures of human beings and objects, relationships in given environments, amid cars and furniture, shops and trees, into the nature as it is or it was modified by humans. These are the common dealings of immediately being in the world.

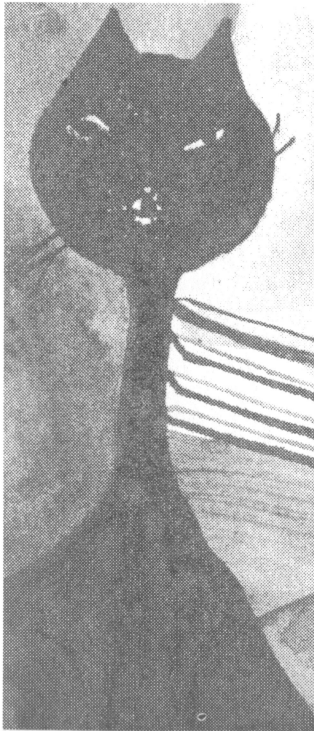


Neither ideas nor beauties play a prominent part in everyday experience. Daily life is substantial, fleshy, and is not thoroughly formatted by thinking or beauty. The acting, circulating blood in that flesh is happening and it is *the happening*.

Stories are nothing more than the framed outcome of those happenings. Weaving stories equals perpetuating the infinite narrative of life. The frequently mythical, archetypal characters that inhabit the stories are the direct embodiment of those forces driving life: the unending search for a determinate, but elusive goal, the encounters with figures embodying lust, thirst, hunger, hope, good, evil, danger, power, wisdom. They are not ideas, but persons endowed not only with limbs and recognizable behavioral marks, but also with particular legends, unique endeavors, ordeals, and peregrinations.

People recount and, for that matter, wholeheartedly invent stories not only with the view of transmitting knowledge of facts or ideas, essentialized thinking, but mainly out of the real pleasure of fixing what is living, vivid and recurrent in life. Stories are mainly made to please, to create an aureole of *being in*, even if (and when) they furnish teachings, thus being sad or didactic finally.

Unfortunately, although still dominating common experience, nowadays stories are basically relegated to newspapers and a certain kind of literature that



satisfies its intimate disposition to fantasizing. It is precisely fantasy that is both feeding and exhausting, killing stories. More vivid, more living than life, fantasy gives contrasting clothes to any story, making it much more appealing and, because of that, basically unreliable. In a world in which reliability is a masterword, stories are thus bound to be doomed as a source of substantial knowledge. They live the place to information, to analysis and research even. Although most frequently not understood at all by the audience research is especially holding a better position facing the story as a source of world-view. Research is the top story nowadays.

However, it is precisely its unreliability as a credible paradigm of cognitive experience that makes the story an irreplaceable source for the imaginary. The imaginary does not content itself with what it takes from reality, and moreover, does not content itself with searching only for what is usable in reality. It is a powerhouse and a reservoir of gratuitous, free, even absurd, projections. The imaginary is not a collection of signs and symbols, but a tremendously intricate texture of stories, of fictitious narratives. One may call them differently, fantasy, dreams imagination, delirium, but in any case their main constituency is visualized stories, intermingling, frequently impossible, chaining images, projected happenings.



Paradoxical as it may seem, although apparently marginal, stories and visual narratives thus prove both to command the everyday grasp of reality and master the intimate, imaginary wanderings of one's mind. This is why visual storytelling, staging and scene-making was, and still is, so appealing for the artists, no matter if that is in fashion or not. **Ecaterina Vrana** ranges, in contemporary Romanian art, among the most fascinating storytellers. Her paintings and drawings are literally stuffed with show-stories. Recurrent, archetypal self-made mythical characters (like chickens, brides, doctors, cats, drunkards, rats) structurally reminiscent of those inhabiting popular stories, saturate her dense compositions. Desire and fear make them to collide or separate in strange circumstances, delineating mysterious scenes. There the basic framework of fantasy narrative is visible: somebody, be it a cat, a bride or a chicken is endangered by a car, a doctor or a rat. Or, conversely, a dead-like woman is cherished and enlivened by the gracious procession of birds, flowers and cats that overwhelm her body, that is her mortifying soul which is resurrected by the enchanting and warming, gentle scenes of sympathy that objectual world incessantly weave around her. When nothing succeeds in keeping alive the sense of life, the story is condensed in threatening, Anna Karenina-like scenes, in which fragile,



girlie women or fat rounded cats fell innocent victims of merciless trains or glamorous cars. **Ecaterina Vrana's** work is about saying, telling, picturing the inner landscape of the imaginary, of putting it on stage, on the flattened stage of a painting or a sheet of paper. Like in the real world, everything is there. The mythical characters are like the population on the street, and their frequently *abracadabrant*, incomprehensible dealings mirror those of the world as we know it, with its encounters and departures, with its welcoming kitchens and frightful railways, with its embarrassments and joys, with its captivating stories and unforgettable images.

Erwin KESSLER

