

MARCEL IANCU (JANCO) (1895-1984)

The name **MARCEL JANCO** is tied to the most spectacular adventure of this century, the Dada movement.

In 1915 he was studying architecture at the engineering school in Zurich. There he met Arp and made friends with his fellow countryman, Tzara, who was studying philosophy. In the concert-café of Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings, the Cabaret Voltaire, painters and poets came to give concerts, make speeches, offer poetry recitals and read manifestos. Hugo Ball, Emmy Hennings, Tzara, Janco, Arp and Huelsenbeck were the main participants in those bizarre evenings.

In 1916 Tzara published *La première aventure céleste de Monsieur Antipyrine* (*The First Celestial Adventure of Monsieur Antipyrine*), with six colored engravings by Marcel Janco. After that first Dadaist publication, the Romanian artist contributed to the *Cabaret Voltaire* magazine (June 1916), replaced with *Dada*, I-V, Zurich, 1917-1919. In 1916, ten wood engravings

by Janco, with a foreword by Tzara, were published in the *Dada* collection. Janco's activities in the Dada movement were paralleled by his art research (sculpture, collage, relief), to find more direct ties between architecture and the abstract art.

In 1918 Janco participated in the foundation of the *Das neue Leben* group, with Arp, Baumann, Giacometti, Täuber, etc. That group exhibited in various towns of Switzerland and organized conferences and demonstrations-manifestos. That same year he participated in the *Groupe international des Artistes Radicaux* with Arp, Giacometti, Richter, Eggeling, Helbig, etc. The following year that group published manifestos and organized an exhibition in Zurich, with Janco's reliefs incorporated in the walls.



M. IANCU, *Poster for the "Black Song"*,
Cabaret Voltaire (1916)

In 1921, Janco followed Tzara to Paris, where he contacted the future surrealists. After “a few dramatic fights” with Tzara, and disappointed with “the surrealists in the making, who were never interested in anything else except bad jokes and scandal,” Janco decided to start out as “a missionary of the new art” in his native country.

In Romania, Marcel Janco’s activity was protean. He was a co-founder (with Ion Vinea) of the first Romanian avant-garde magazine, *Contimporanul*, in 1922. From 1924 until the eve of World War II, he organized and participated in annual exhibitions of the group. He published engravings and many portraits of Romanian and French writers in *Contimporanul* and in other avant-garde magazines.

After having contributed “to a large extent in building the image of Dada in Zurich,”¹ Marcel Janco greatly contributed to the image of the Romanian avant-garde in its beginnings. Other young artists, like M.H. Maxy, Corneliu Michailescu, Perahim, Victor Brauner came in and accompanied Janco.

Like the other artists of his time, Marcel Janco proved to be a very sophisticated theoretician. He wrote theoretical notes in the form of aphorisms on Cubism (*Contimporanul*, no. 66, May 1926) and more elaborated articles on architecture. A double issue of *Contimporanul* (53-54, February 1925) dealt entirely with modern architecture. On Marcel Janco’s initiative, *Contimporanul* published excerpts from the book *Vers une architecture* by Le Corbusier Saugnier.

For two decades, Marcel Janco was one of the guiding lights of the artistic avant-garde in Romania.

“Already, there was an entire world separating us from Dada poets, who went on with their mystification and jokes for the pure pleasure of nonsense. After having met Picabia, good Ernst, Dali and Tanguy, after the common events we had with the American Dadaists, who had managed to create the fine-arts joke, and the perspective of the dream, which appeared to me at the time as a criminal heresy, after a few dramatic fights with Tzara and useless conversations with surrealists in the making, who were never interested in



Victor BRAUNER, *Marcel Janco*

anything else except bad jokes and scandal, I decided to find my own way and start out as a missionary of the new art in my native country.”

Marcel Iancu, 1921. In *Catalogue de l'exposition MARCEL JANCO* (*Catalogue of the MARCEL JANCO Exhibition*) October-November, 1963, Galerie Denise René, 124, Boétie St., Paris.

*Translated from French
by Monica VOICULESCU*

NOTE

1. Marc Dachy, *Dada et le Dadaïsme (Dada and Dadaism)*, Paris, Gallimard, Folio/Essais, 1994, p. 94.