

The Cluj Collective

10 - 27 April 2024



'The Fountain of Youth' by Marcel Rusu

The vibrant cultural tapestry of London is about to welcome 'The Cluj Collective' at JD Malat Gallery, an exhibition featuring the works of a group of talented Romanian artists from April 10th to April 27th, 2024.

'The Cluj Collective' brings together seven Romanian artists, all alumni of the esteemed University of Arts and Design Cluj-Napoca in north-western Romania, a pioneer in visual arts in the region. United by their shared educational background and passion for figurative painting, these artists bring with them a wide range of influences, experiences, and perspectives. Each artwork invites viewers on a journey through the complexities of the human experience; exploring the themes of identity, nature, freedom, power, spirituality and reality, inspired by the distinct culture of Cluj-Napoca.

Shaped by the experience of living in Post-Communist Romania following the Romanian Revolution of 1989, the artists make subtle yet powerful links between history and the present. The participating artists include: Dragoş Bădiţă (b.1987), Oana Fărcaş (b.1981), Botond Gagyi (b.1992), Cristian Lapusan (b.1976), Dan Maciuca (b.1979), Marcel Rusu (b. 1989) and Cătălin Tăvală (b. 1996).

Cluj-Napoca, a dynamic cultural centre of Transylvania, has gained a reputation for being the focal point for burgeoning artists over the years. The University of Arts and Design Cluj-Napoca has embraced an increasing number of successful Romanian artists who have spread their talent and reputation globally. Alumni include internationally renowned luminaries such as Adrian Ghenie, Victor Man, Şerban Savu, Mircea Suci, Ciprian Mureşan and Marius Bercea, signalling the strong influence of the stimulating cultural and artistic scene of the city on its students. As the success of the previous generation of alumni reaches new heights, this exhibition aims to highlight Cluj-Napoca as a bedrock for new artistic talent and a space for an evolving global art movement.

The exhibition is co-curated by esteemed collector Catalin Necula, who has a continuous pursuit towards delving into Cluj's artistic tapestry. "As a proud Romanian, realising this dream is an incredible honour, and I am grateful to be a part of this exhibition. Embarking on the art journey years ago, I find myself now curating a captivating group show at the prestigious JD Malat Gallery", he said.

The artists' narratives are predominantly influenced by two areas; grander socio-political circumstances of Romania and more recently, contemporary life. The former is shaped by the experiences in the post-communist era, presenting itself in Dragoş Bădiţă and Dan Maciuca's works. Dan Maciuca blends familiar religious stories and art historical motifs such as 'The Annunciation, after Fra Angelico', challenging conventional readings of symbolism and history painting within a contemporary framework. Similarly, Dragoş Bădiţă examines and questions historical narratives and conventions of biblical art while revealing the feelings of vulnerability and the sublimity of nature.

The latter offers a contemporary lens to human experience through a rich variety of symbols, metaphors and evocative narratives, as seen in the works of Cătălin Tăvală, Botond Gagyi, Cristian Lapusan, Oana Fărcaş and Marcel Rusu. Cătălin Tăvală turns

animals into a metaphor for the modern man to highlight freedom, spirituality and simplicity, reflecting the challenges of the contemporary world. Likewise, Botond Gagyi's melancholic, sombre compositions of dark silhouetted figures prompt viewers to reflect on the realities and complexities of contemporary life. Cristian Lapusan's dark, city landscapes symbolise the fragile and inseparable relationship between man and its nature, as well as contemplations of the past and unexplored ambitions for the future. In a similar manner, Oana Fărcaş explores the materialistic and mass media cultures of urban life, investigating the facets of female identity. Fărcaş uses once esteemed symbols of prestige such as furs and silk dresses to illustrate the substantial shifts in our contemporary visual language. To this end, Marcel Rusu also depicts a utopian image of an ideal green city through examining the relationship between humans and the environment.

"We are thrilled to bring the vibrant energy and unique perspectives of Romanian art to the heart of London," said Jean-David Malat, founder of JD Malat Gallery. "The Cluj Collective represents a convergence of talent, creativity, and cultural exchange, and we cannot wait to share this extraordinary experience with art enthusiasts across the city", he added.

The playful and emancipatory pieces featured in this exhibition delve into the intricacies of both our conscious and subconscious thoughts, encouraging the audiences to reflect on broader historical and political changes, as well as ontological questions that extend beyond Romania. This, coupled with the mutual emphasis on human experience, figurative elements and cultural perspectives, underscores the enduring fascination of the university with audiences worldwide and amplifies its significance and relevance in contemporary times. Since the establishment of the institution in 1925, Cluj-Napoca has been a crucial hub for the emergence of influential artist generations in Southeastern Europe, and will remain so in the present and future. We extend a warm invitation to all in the opening reception of the exhibition on April 9th between 6.30 - 8.30pm at the gallery to be immersed in the stories of 'The Cluj Collective'.

For more information, images and comments, please contact: press@jdmalat.com

Opening hours: 10am - 6pm Monday - Friday, 12pm - 6pm Saturday

JD Malat Gallery, 30 Davies St, Mayfair, London, W1K 4NB