
OF MEN AND THE PATH OF HEROES¹

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Abstract: *CONSTANTIN BRÂNCUȘI DEEPEST DESIRE WAS TO LEAVE THE PEOPLE IN TÂRGU JIU A MONUMENT TO REMIND THEM OF THE GORJ SOLDIERS' SACRIFICE WHO DEFENDED THE TOWN IN 1916, ACCORDING TO A GOVERNMENTAL DOCUMENT (6). THE PRESENT ARTICLE IS GOING TO EXPLORE THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH LED TO THE HEROES' PATH IN TARGU JIU. THUS, THE “CIRCUMSTANCES” ENCOMPASSED THE SCULPTOR WHO EXECUTED THE MONUMENTAL ENSEMBLE IN TÂRGU JIU, BRÂNCUȘI, THE NATIONAL LEAGUE OF GORJ WOMEN, WHO ENABLED ITS EXECUTION FINANCIALLY SPEAKING, GEORGE NICULESCU, UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR, WHO IMAGINED THE HEROES' PATH AND MARCEL ROMANESCU, THE MAYOR OF TÂRGU JIU, WHO PUT INTO PRACTICE BRÂNCUȘI' S WISH IN 2023.*

Keywords: BRÂNCUȘI, GEORGE NICULESCU, CALEA EROILOR, THE HEROES' PATH, SCULPTURAL ENSEMBLE IN TÂRGU JIU, MONUMENTAL ENSEMBLE OF TÂRGU JIU

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1. Introduction

Brâncuși's greatest wish was to leave the people in Târgu Jiu a monument to remind the sacrifice of the Romanian soldiers in the First World War. At first, our endeavour wanted to be an homage to George Niculescu, university professor. Yet, on thorough research, it is an homage to Brâncuși, the sculptor who executed the Monumental Ensemble, the National League of Women in Gorj County, who brought their contribution by helping the project Calea Eroilor, financially, finally to Marcel Romanescu, the mayor who put into practice the idea of the great sculptor. To comply with our endeavour, we did some research on documents of the time and recent ones and the bibliography is enlightening in this sense.

¹ Calea Eroilor



2. The Heroes' Path

"Things are not hard to do. You only have to put yourself in the mood to do them", said the great Brâncuși. I complied and "put myself in the mood" to write an article in homage to George Niculescu, professor of management at UCB. It was in October 1995, when, fresh graduate of the Faculty of Letters, University of Craiova, I entered the doors of the Faculty of Engineering. The building was on Geneva Street, in the extension of the "Tudor Vladimirescu" High School, now the College of the same name. The building of the Faculty of Engineering also housed the Faculty of Sciences, as it was then called, which included the Law Faculty and the Faculty of Economics.

Since at that time I was the first English professor, about to become the first tenured professor, I had classes in both the Engineering and Science faculties. The two faculties were on different floors, on the first floor, the Law Faculty and on the ground floor, the Economics. At that time, the Faculty of Economics had two sections, Finance-Banking and Tourism-Services.

Professor George Niculescu had classes of management at the Tourism-Services department. Born in January, like our national poet, professor George Niculescu possesses something of our Eminescu: the desire to know and the soul of an artist. For this reason, I will examine the man George Niculescu from the perspective of an article published in the Annals of UCB in 2019.

The article is entitled BRÂNCUȘIAN INFLUENCES ON EDUCATION OF PERSONAL BECOMING. Constantin Brâncuși is our passport, the passport of Romanians, of Târgu Jiu people in the whole world. Therefore, it is not surprising that the professor chose to write about Brâncuși. The professor's admiration for the sculptor from Hobița, who has come to surpass his teachers in Paris, goes back a long way. The drafts of the projects of George Niculescu bear witness to this. The latest project (imagined by him) has already become a reality. As if in a secret and sacred dialogue with the great sculptor, Professor Niculescu set out to fulfil the master's wish: the Heroes' Path as the great Brâncuși thought of it, starting from the Silent Table, along the Alley of Chairs, passing under the Gate of Kiss, along the Heroes' Path, and then reaching the Endless Column.

But the professor chose to speak not about the art of Brâncuși, but about the philosopher Brâncuși, who left us a collection of aphorisms. The definition of aphorism in dextonline is a noun of the neuter gender, meaning "a thought expressed in a concise, memorable form". Certainly, Brâncuși's aphorisms are memorable. But memorable, in a pragmatic way, remains his art, immortalized in Calea Eroilor, which will become reality through the power of Professor Niculescu's mind and the efforts of Târgu Jiu City Hall.

That is why I will start my approach to talk about George Niculescu by telling you about a memorable date - 20 October 1937 - in order to link this date to Brâncuși and the subject-matter, Professor Niculescu. What happened on that date, you may ask. But I will answer by giving you another clue: 20 October 2021. Well, on 20 October 2021, it was 83 years since the inauguration of the "Calea Eroilor", Monumental Ensemble in Târgu Jiu. At risk of telling you about something you already knew, I will inform the reader and listener about the circumstances in which the idea of the Calea Eroilor was born and with documents I will demonstrate who was behind it. We will remember or rather read together a page from the history of our city. This is because "you have to keep trying to climb very high if you want to see very far", as Brâncuși said in one of his aphorisms.

The article in the Gorjenul newspaper of 28 October 2021, refreshes our memory with information about the Calea Eroilor Ensemble, which makes the inhabitants of Târgu Jiu proud heirs of Brâncuși. Thus, on 20 October 1937, the National League of Women from Gorj, in its address no. 6330, informed the City Hall of Târgu Jiu that it had decided to donate to the city "a column and a stone portal, work of the great sculptor Brâncuși, who in this way pays tribute to his native county" (3). The above-mentioned article tells us about the League's intention, quoting from the relevant dossier "The creation of a street to be named "Calea Eroilor", a path which will start from the area



around the Jiu River, passing through the public garden, and go as far as the present soldiers' barracks [...] At the beginning of this path, the portal mentioned above will be placed, and on the promontory near the soldiers' barracks, the column of gratitude will be raised, thus linking the memory of the places for which the Heroes of Gorj fought, with the idea of endless gratitude symbolized by the column". Interestingly, the league backs up its words with deeds. Thus, the league will provide the sum of 750,000 lei to pay for the expropriations in question. The financial contribution of the Women's League of Gorj does not stop there. The amount with which the league backs up its words amounts to 2. 200.000. With this sum it is intended to pay for the monuments, the column and the portal, but at the same time the league assumes responsibility for the construction of the church of Holly Apostles on the street dedicated to the deeds of valour of the heroes of Gorj.

Having thoroughly researched (4), I learned from a publication for tourists in our county, I find that the church of Holly Apostles was built on the site of another church dating from 1777. The building was rebuilt between 1927 and 1938 and inaugurated at the same time as the Brâncușian monumental complex. The neo-Byzantine style painting was executed in fresco by the painter Iosif Keber from Gorj, and the work was closely supervised by the architects Ion Antonescu, Anghel Păunescu and Iulius Doppellreiter. Nothing to say, a monument to the church itself, but was it really Brâncuși's wish that it should not come between Calea Eroilor and the Column?

As regards the Brancusi ensemble, it is important to point out that the National League of Women of Gorj understands "that the city of Târgu Jiu must always respect the donation in the form in which it was made". On the back of the address we find the holographic decision of the Municipal Council no 151 of 12 November 1937 (3) accepting the League's donation.

Going further with the documentation and stopping on the monumental book, I call it, by Ionel Jianu, "Brâncuși", published in 2003 by Dacia Publishing House, Cluj Napoca, I find out that the monumental ensemble of Târgu Jiu is "the last masterpiece of Brâncuși" (Jianu: 69). Reading further in the section dedicated to the commemorative monument, I learn that the idea of the ensemble had in fact belonged to the great Brâncuși, only that it could only become reality with the help of the political forums of the time. And then he used the opportunity to leave us, the people of Târgu Jiu, an unparalleled legacy. The question arises, is it really ours? But that is another story.

According to Jianu, the Monumental Ensemble of Târgu Jiu is made up of four parts: the Table of Silence, the Gate of the Kiss, the Endless Column and, absolutely amazing, the Path of the Heroes, which starts from the banks of the Jiu River and runs from one end of the city to the other, ending in the oval square where the Endless Column is located. Thus conceived, this ensemble brings together three arts: sculpture, architecture and town planning and can rightly be considered the most important monument, an homage to the heroes dead in the First World War (Jianu: ibidem).

The author also mentions that for a quarter of a century after its inauguration in 1938, the monument was ignored by critics, and the first mentions are found in *Brâncuși's Introduction à la sculpture* in 1976. The story of the ensemble begins like this. Brancusi had long been thinking about a monument dedicated to the heroes of the First World War, which the Gorjeanu does not mention. Jianu says the project had been in Brâncuși's mind since 1922. He had started drawing the gateposts, then engraving the motif of the kiss. He then carved several versions of the Endless Column.

In 1935, Milița Pătrașcu, a former apprentice of Brâncuși in 1920, invited Arethie Tătărăscu, the wife of Gheorghe Tătărăscu, then President of the Council of Ministers, to present a project for a monument dedicated to the heroes of the First World War to be erected in Târgu Jiu. Jianu's book gives us an extract from Brâncuși's letter to Milița Pătrașcu, dated 11 February 1935, which I will quote below:

I would so much like to see again our plains covered with white blankets of snow that I haven't seen since my childhood!...I decided to come in the middle of May and you can't imagine how



happy I will be to raise a monument in our country. Thank you and please send Mrs Tătărescu my deepest gratitude for the opportunity she is giving me (to fulfil my wish n.n.). At the moment, the work, which has long been underway, is almost finished and I feel like an apprentice about to become a craftsman, so my proposal is welcome. (Jianu: 73)

So it was Brâncuși's wish to create a monument to remember the sacrifice of the Romanian soldiers, a wish that could not have been realized without the contribution of the National League of Women from Gorj, led by Arethie Tătărăscu, wife of Gheorghe Tătărăscu, President of the Council of Ministers, and therefore without the contribution of politics. But, I think it is less important to point out who and how, rather the fact that an important monument was to be raised, made by the great Brâncuși himself. Where? Here, in Târgu Jiu. I must confess that whenever I am near any of the parts of the ensemble, I am overcome by a spiritual force that puts me in a state of trance (strange, isn't it?). And whenever I cross the Calea Eroilor towards Strada Griviței, I greet the great Brâncuși and bow down to his works, as if before an altar. And now, Calea Eroilor can be visited by anyone who wants to see the monumental Brâncușian Ensemble! This is truly an important achievement for our city!

Going on with our story, we must also say that it took another two years for the Brâncuși projects to be accepted. Presenting a photographic montage of the column to the League Committee, Brâncuși was met with disappointment. Arethie herself would have preferred the Rooster for this monument (Jianu, *ibidem*). Brâncuși, however, intransigently stuck to his opinion that only the Endless Column could express a monument in memory of the fallen dead (which the women of the League considered a huge pillar similar to those of the houses in the area of Oltenia).

On 12 November 1937, the Communal Council of Târgu Jiu approved Brâncuși's project and he himself supervised the work. But he also makes a change. He includes in the project Masa Tăcerii, which originally did not exist. The gate marks the entrance and ends with the Column of Gratitude. Thus, in Brâncuși's design, the three component parts were supposed to be on the same axis. But there was one impediment, Jianu reports: the Church of the Holy Apostles. I wonder? Was it really Brâncuși's will that there should not be a church in the Heroes' Way to infinity? A church that, according to Christian doctrine, would perform a memorial service for the departed of this world? So says Jianu:

But there was an impediment. In the middle of this alley is the Church of the Saints Apostles, which stands in the way of the perspective between the gate and the column. So Brâncuși took action, approached Arethie Tătărăscu and obtained a promise to move the church to another location. [...] But when Brâncuși returned in October 1938 for the inauguration of the new complex, to his great disappointment he discovered that nothing had been done. The church had not been moved, the railway had not been diverted, and the trees that were supposed to surround the column had not been planted. (Jianu: 74)².

What else is to be said? Our co-citizens did not agree with the project. Maybe it was too costly? I wonder, the sacrifice of the soldiers dead on the battlefield was not costly. The press unleashed a violent campaign against the degeneration of modern art and the waste of public money. We are astonished to learn that the monument was donated by the National League of Women of Gorj and that Brâncuși received no remuneration for the project because "he wanted to show his gratitude for his native land".

² Jianu mentions that all these details were mentioned to him by V.G. Paleolog and Tretie Paleolog in a letter from 15.01.1971. The letter also mentioned the distance between the elements of the Monumental Ensemble.



1/2023

3. Conclusions

But no matter how things were at the time, the fact is that the inhabitants of Targu Jiu and not only, can admire at will the elements of the Brâncușian Ensemble, and rofessor Niculescu by the fruit of his mind thought of the Brâncușian project. We know this, because I was in charge of the translation of an important part of the project. Yet, most importantly, the mayor, Marcel Romanescu took care of making Brâncuși's dream come true, based on another project. They gave us all the Heroes' Path.



1/2023

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