

## ***Urban Globalism versus Rural Artisans: Sustainable Practices of Making***

This text discusses the regeneration and re-evaluation of the crafts and the handmade as a means of sustaining the cultural heritage and identity of Moldavian, Transylvanian and Maramuresan artisan communities.

The political changes of communism and the 1989 revolution, industrialisation and urban living effaced the regional individuality and disembedded craft and living practices developed and evolved by tradition in Moldavia, Transylvania and Maramures. These transformations encouraged the proliferation of industrial goods dictated by outside markets, leaving cooperative local craft centres without resort. Before communism, craft production was at the core of all regional centres, and manual labour was the mainstay of rural society. After the revolution many industries failed to produce goods as a result of economic crisis, giving way to a return to sustainable co-operative systems of craft practice. Despite the Western import of textiles and clothing, and although most remaining porcelain factories cater for an international commercial market, artisan works resurfaces and circulates in folkloric markets throughout the Romanian country every year. In a few regions of Moldavia, Transylvania and Maramures, the production of ceramics and textiles, for example, is still practiced in its pre-industrial form, when hand-woven and hand-decorated cloth held social, political and religious implications for everyday or ritual affairs within the local community. Hand-decorated ceramic and textile production contributed to the local colour of village life, distinguishing social roles and marking local, individual and group identities - a production that preserved the meanings related to life, use, and symbolic thought<sup>1</sup>.

However, in the current climate of change, the objects generated by contemporary craft communities are only marginally adopted in practices of living, becoming expressions of fine artistry and thus acquiring the status of art objects (collected by those who know their history). Whether they re-enter practices of domestic use, (especially in rural households), thus reproducing sustainable forms of living and traditional practices of making that are centuries old; or whether they are elevated to art objects (becoming an expression of cultural capital), these objects permeate the rehabilitation of cultural and social forms of everyday life generated by craft. Using Nicolas Bourriaud's concept of relational aesthetics, the text investigates how craft practices have reinvented their symbolic value, acting as cultural signs and key components of regional identity in a socially and culturally divided society.<sup>2</sup> The case-studies introduce a series of craft objects and the practices of Moldavian, Transylvanian and Maramures artisans (potters, weavers, embroiders); considering their contact with materials and techniques, with the objects and tools of their making.

The paper aims to show that the recent circulation of craft objects in Moldavia, Transylvania and Maramures allows traditional folkloric practices to preserve the initial cultural values of objects through notions of use and functionality, whilst regenerating the aesthetics and beliefs of a relational socio-economy. Thus, Eastern-European crafts can be considered central components in the production of modern sensibilities, as new forms of inhabiting global culture.

---

<sup>1</sup> For Siegfried Giedion, the form of the object-world articulates the deep social structure of the past.

<sup>2</sup> Bourriaud, N. 2002 [1998]. *Relational Aesthetics*. Dijon Quetigny: Les Press du R\_ÉEL.