BRÂNCUȘI-GEROTA “ÉCORCHÉ” – 120TH ANNIVERSARY SINCE ITS COMPLETION

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(Abstract): The Écorché or “Ecorșeul”, is the first of the many works of art done by Constantin Brâncuși, the world-renowned Romanian artist. It was achieved in collaboration with the famous anatomist Prof. Dr. Dimitrie Gerota and represents a national premiere in being the first anatomical work conceived in such detail in 20th century Romania. The debutant artist assimilated knowledge about the human anatomy from the dissection of human bodies, this being a process which harmoniously binds art with the study of anatomy. Inspired by Antinou’s statue, Brâncuși used, in his work, its stature and flamboyant pose. Awe-inspiring are the copies of Brâncuşti’s Écorché, which, worked in plaster and attentively supervised by Brâncuși. They were donated later to Medical Schools and Art Schools around Romania for academic study. The Écorché, which was realized with intense efforts, brings national and international renown to the young sculptor, at the very start of his carrier, which became, with the passing of time, a work linked closely to his name, despite the modernist and abstract current which embodied his whole carrier. Keywords: CONSTANTIN BRÂNCUȘI, DIMITRIE GEROTA, ÉCORCHÉ, HUMAN ANATOMY, HISTORY OF MEDICINE.

EARLY LIFE

Constantin Brâncuși, the absolute artist of Romania, a faithful militant of the infinity he created with his own hands, is considered the parent of modern international sculpture.

The genius with magic hands, has learned his trade at the beginning of the 20th century, when he finished his studies at the National Arts School in just four years, where he cultivated his perseverance and workmanship.

The pinnacle of his career, however, was to be found in Paris, where after great sacrifices, he managed to be admitted to the “Ecole Nationale Superior des Beaux Arts”.

It is here, in Paris, where he spent a large part of his later years, after having completed some of his greatest works and after having received a substantial number of distinctions awarded by multiple French art association.

THE ÉCORCHÉ, MORE THAN A WORK OF ART

The “Écorché”, or “Ecorșeul”, in Romanian, represented the first large-scale
Brâncuși-Gerota “Écorché” – 120th anniversary since its completion

work of young Brâncuși and it is an art piece which proves his artistic genius to this day. It was realized during his studies in Bucharest and represents one of Brâncuși’s most different and impressing work of art.

The Romanian word “Ecorșeu” comes from French and has the same root word as in English, namely “Écorché”. It means a representation by drawing, painting, or sculpture of the human body devoid of skin and its three layers.

As stated in the abstract, the work was done under the careful guidance of Prof. Dr. Dimitrie Gerota, who helped young Brâncuși acquire the foundations of anatomical knowledge, so essential for the correct realization of the “Écorché”.

In this regard, Prof. Dr. Dimitrie Gerota, procured the dissection materials “according to nature, directly human, the bodies being recovered from the Bucharest Faculty of Medicine, from professional works and from the city’s mortuary” relates the “Brâncușian exegesis expert” V. G. Paleolog.

The work of dissection was carried out by both Brâncuși and Prof. D. Gerota, the goal of which was the establishment of the perfect proportions for the anatomical casts, which were later used to create the baseline through which the “Écorché” was made.

Brâncuși received his ideas from “The Artistic Anatomy” of Paul Richet and from the dissection courses which he follows at the Bucharest Faculty of Medicine, with the goal of bettering his knowledge (1).

The genius sculptor does all these works in a spirit of sacrifice, “for art’s sake”, which after morbid experiences, he begins to detest “the carnal”, and even calls the human flesh “biftec” (Romanian word for beefsteak) (1).

The repulsion, which the artist develops, will be reflected in his future sculptures in which human traits are replaced by perfection, shaping the human ideal according to his aesthetic eye.

The “Skinned” (as Brâncuși nicknames the Écorché) was a subject that, indeed, treated the human body from both the perspective of art and the perspective of anatomy. This conviction is reinforced by the very model that Brâncuși will be inspired by, namely a copy of the sculpture ‘Hermes Capitoline’, located at the Capitoline Museum in Rome. This replica is present at the School of Fine Arts in Bucharest (fig. 1), and it was known as “Antinous” at the time. It was made available to the young sculptor who, will use the stature and pose of the statue, to achieve the “Écorché” (2).

From the artist’s account to V. G. Paleolog, we learn that the muscles on some bodies were dissected individually and compared directly to the statue of Antinous. Therefore, we can say that the “Écorché” is an “ecorched” “Hermes Capitoline”, or as Brâncuși would say, skinned (2).

In the summer of 1901, with the anatomical study soon to be completed, Brâncuși is rewarded at the Anatomy Competition (judged by Prof. Gerota) with the Bronze Medal.

The distinction seeming to have, indeed, been a thorough encouragement for the young artist. There were also some scholarships that he subsequently obtained for the carrying out and completing of the work.

It bears reminding that with the completion of the Écorché, he receives national notoriety, from which point on he is rewarded a number of distinctions at Artistic Youth exhibitions in Romania (3). This is
the moment when he becomes consecrated, in the minds of, if not the international public, yet, certainly the national one, as a master sculptor in his own rights.

The completion of the work takes place sometime in 1902, the exact date being unknown until nowadays.

The first exhibit of the Écorché, towards the greater public happens at the Romanian Athenaeum, in Bucharest, in 1903, it enjoyed nation-wide recognition ever after.

We shall now mention the friendship that Prof. Gerota and Constantin Brâncuși have had, because of their collaboration (4).

**Fig. 1.** Original photo held by Brâncuși, depicting the écorché, in progress, next to the statue of Antinous (taken from: Dumitrescu E, “Ecorşeul Brâncuşi-Gerota istoria unei lucrări realizate la Şcoala de Belle Arte din Bucureşti”) (1)

Despite the age difference of nine years, the two continued their relationship after the artist left for Paris, with the remaining correspondence proving this. The connection between them may well be due to their common origin, the two being from the same region of Romania, Oltenia.

**DIMITRIE GEROTA’S CONTRIBUTION**

Prof. Dimitrie Gerota (fig. 2) was considered the first radiologist in Romania, offering a huge contribution to the foundation of this discipline in our country. At the same time, he was a passionate anatomist, being the founder of a museum of anatomical-surgical casts for students. Prof. Gerota, a true teacher, supported Brâncuși’s work with the desire to offer a model of anatomical study at the level of the entire Romanian University Community.

And that he did, ordering faithful copies of the Écorché, recreated in plaster, which were donated/sold to medical schools all over the country.

One of the most well-known and well-preserved specimens is still in Iassy, where it was sent by Prof. Gerota through the Ministry of Cultural Affairs in June 1903.

This colorful mold was used both at the Faculty of Medicine in Iassy and, at the School of Fine Arts for the studies of plastic anatomy.

The renowned anatomist from Iassy, Dr. Ștefan Possa had bought the Écorché for the sum of 10,000 lei, a considerable amount at that time (4).

Since two World Wars followed the purchase, it was assumed that the location of the Iassy “Écorché” has been changed many times, without appearing on the inventory recorded by the educational institutions.

It appeared in several archives from the interwar period, and then only in 1966 is it recalled in a letter accompanied by a photograph.
Over time, small reconditioning took place on this specimen, but the most important was carried out in 2012 under the guidance of Felix Aftene. Both arms/hands of the mold were restored, these having been the most altered components. Today, the faithful copy of the Écorché (fig. 3) is located at the Anatomy Museum of the “Grigore T. Popa” University of Medicine and Pharmacy from Iasi, along with other “ecorched” pieces and anatomical preparations, which constitute an impressive heritage of this prestigious institution.

Significant for the Iassy copy, is the mold socket, where the two authors were signed: “Prof. Dr. Gerota and Brâncuși” in 1902.

Today, there are known to be four authentic copies, which are located throughout Romania, in Iassy, Cluj-Napoca, Craiova and in Bucharest. The Original (fig. 4) can be seen till today, at the entrance of the National Art University in Bucharest, its dimensions being 177 x 52 x 32 cm (5).

As a mention, at the exhibition organized at the Brummer Gallery in New York, in the year 1933, Brâncuși especially wanted that on one of the walls to be placed a photo of the “Écorché”, a work that all biographers catalogued as a “schoolwork” (5). This was done to show the critics of his art style, that the evolution of his artworks had a natural course and that all the synthesis capacities he had attained through his masterpieces were derived from a deep and thorough knowledge of the human body.

CONCLUSIONS
We can firmly affirm that the joint work of Constantin Brâncuși and Professor Doctor Dimitrie Gerota revolutionized the study of myology in Romania, taking on a vital importance for Anatomy schools and
Fine Arts schools throughout the country. We cannot imagine the learning difficulties that the Romanian students of the 20th century would have gone through in the absence of materials such as the “Écorché” and its special copies. Today, young people have at hand the technology that, through various 3D applications, presents the anatomy of the human body at the click of a button, but then, in the absence of teaching materials, it was almost impossible to provide an overview of the “skinned” body, of human myology, and as a result, Brâncuși’s creation was like “a breath of fresh air” for the anatomical study in Romania at the time.

Undoubtedly, the “Écorché” has become an anatomical and artistic symbol that will endure over the centuries.

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND FUNDING**

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**REFERENCES**


**THE IMPACT OF VIRTUAL REALITY IN EATING BEHAVIOR**

Obesity prevalence has increased in the last decade all over the world. Environment is one of the many factors that have an impact on eating behaviors and the prevalence of obesity. In reality, eating behavior such as of portion size perception, energy density, and taste, has changed over the years, as a result of the decrease of home-cooked meals consumption. Virtual reality can be used as a tool to study the impact of environments on eating behaviors, offering sensory information, as well as environment change. In this study participants masticatory cycles, heart rate, as well as skin temperature were tested in various scenarios: a restaurant and an empty room with a table. In both scenarios participants consumed pizza, masticatory rhythm and heart rate modification, as well as skin temperature variation, occurring only amongst those exposed in the restaurant context. Thus, virtual reality can conduct to a better understanding of environments impact on eating behaviors (Oliver JH, Hollis JH. Virtual Reality as a Tool to Study the Influence of the Eating Environment on eating Behavior: A feasibility Study. *Foods* 2021; 10(1): 89 / doi: 10.3390/foods10010089.).