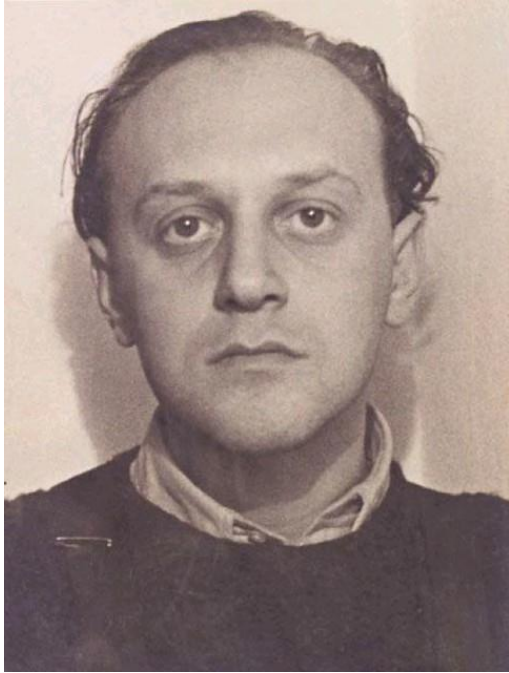


Adrian Grauenfels

In the footsteps of Victor Brauner

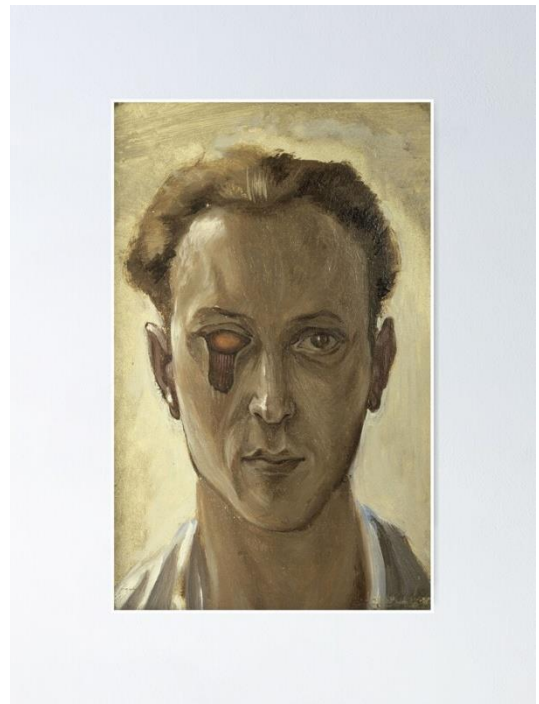
- A critic book -

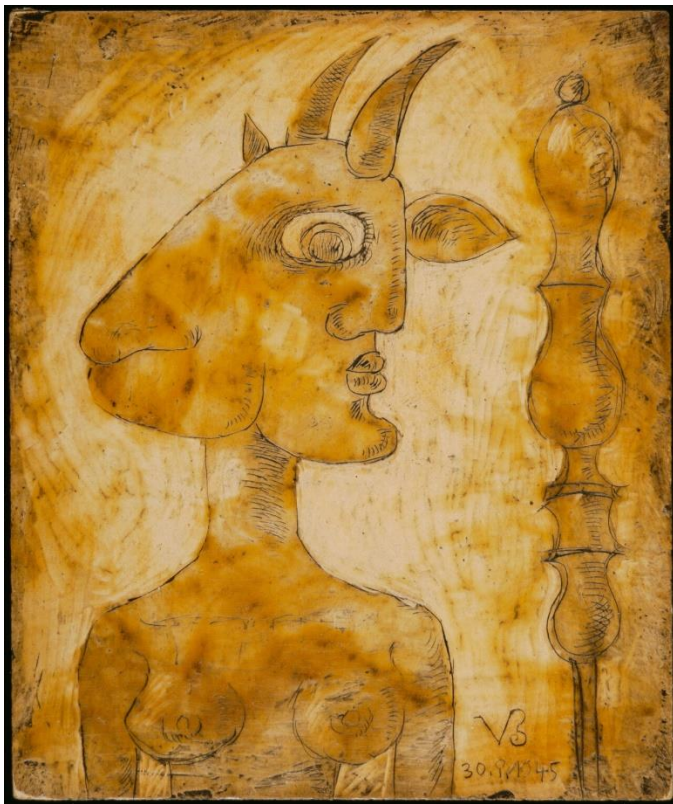


Victor Brauner is the most important painter of the Romanian avant-garde. After his first impressionist and expressionist works, he contributed to every avant-garde movement or group. However, most of his works/the biggest part of his work aligns with/ falls into surrealism, Brauner being considered one of the most important surrealist painters of the pre- and post-war period.

Following Max Herman Maxy and Marcel Ianco, the vanguard representative of the Romanian art is Victor Brauner, who, in the same time, is a representative of the international modern art due to the Parisian school he belonged to, starting from 1938. He was born in Piatra Neamtz, in 1903. His father was involved in spirituality/spiritualism and sent Brauner to the evangelical school in Brăila from 1916 till

1918. He enrolled in 1919 in the Academy of Fine Arts in Bucharest, where he remains/remained till 1921, when he continues/continued his studies at the private painting academy of H. Igiroșianu. He participates in 1924 in the international exhibition of "The contemporary" and again, in the exhibitions of the same group, in 1929 and 1930. In 1921, he attended for a short time the School of Fine Arts in Bucharest where he painted Cezanne-like landscapes. He exhibited paintings in his expressionist style at his first solo exhibition, at Mozart Gallery in Bucharest in the year 1924. The catalogue features 16 paintings with a verse, with a surrealist image, delightful in their insolite, maybe creations of an automatic dictation and, precisely, without any reference to the respective work. They are redacted in French language. Their savor is maintained through the Romanian translation as well. The exhibition caused the appearance of numerous, interesting critical articles in newspapers and magazines and attitude taking regarding surrealism in arts and literature.





During the same period he becomes friend with the poet **Benjamin Fondane**, and **Yves Tanguy**, the latter will introduce him in the circle of the surrealists, in the year 1933. He lives on Moulin Vert road, in the same building with Giacometti and Tanguy. During this year he paints " Self-portrait with plucked eye", a premonitory theme.

In 1934, his first personal exhibition takes place in Paris, at "Galerie Pierre", presented by André Breton, who wrote an enthusiastic introduction to the catalogue that accompanied the exhibition. A series of works are exhibited, in which the eye theme is always present: " The power of concentration of mister K" and "The strange case of mister K" are works that André Breton compares with the play " Ubu Roi" by Alfred Jarry, "an immense caricature satire of the bourgeoisie". The exhibition was not

Other commentaries mentions about Brauner's participation in surrealist exhibitions:

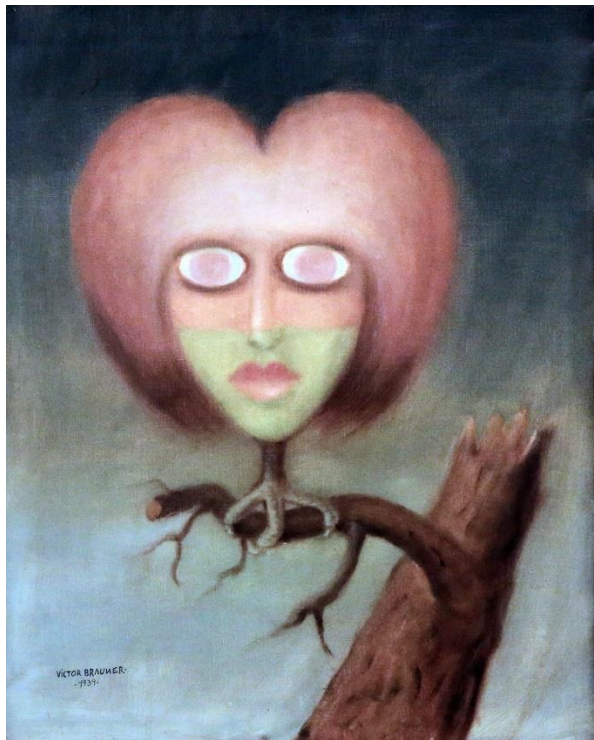
"This current with its total appearance of an absurd formula...it's a transiting point towards the art that is coming." (D. Frost, in "Rampa" of April 14, 1935). In the ("Cuvântul Liber") "Free Word" of April 20, 1935, in the article "The exhibition of Victor Brauner", Miron Radu Paraschivescu wrote: "Compared to - for example - what we can see in the exhibiting halls near Victor Brauner, his painting means integration, attitude which, in the artistic dimension, is social, because V. Brauner takes attitude through the character and the ideology of his own art ." Also in 1935, he created the illustrations for the collection of poems by the poet Gellu Naum "The incendiary traveler" and "Freedom to sleep on the forehead". Since 1930, Brauner has settled in Paris. He becomes friends with his compatriot **Constantin Brâncuși**, who initiated him into the art of photography.



well received, and in 1935 Brauner returned to Bucharest, where he remained until 1938. Breton dedicates to him a full chapter in his book "Surrealism and painting". In 1935 he returned to Romania to take part in the first surrealist exhibition in Romania, artistic

orientation to which he adhered totally, after in the first period of creation he had opted for an insistently expressive portraiture painting, followed by a less known "iserian" phase - of landscapes with Dobrogean and Transylvanian scenery's.

În 1938, s-a întors în Franța. În același an, a cunoscut-o pe Jacqueline Abraham, care avea să-i devină soție. A creat o serie de tablouri numite licanthropice sau, uneori, chimere.



A părăsit Parisul în timpul invaziei Germaniei naziste a Franței în 1940, împreună cu Pierre Mabilie. A locuit o vreme la Perpignan, la Robert Rius, apoi la Canet-plage, în Pirineii Orientali și la Saint-Féliu-d'Amont, unde a fost izolat cu forța. Cu toate acestea, a păstrat legătura cu suprarealiștii care se refugiaseră la Marsilia. În 1941, i s-a acordat permisiunea de a se stabili la Marsilia. Grav bolnav, a fost spitalizat la clinica "Paradis".

A pictat *Preludiu la o civilizație* în 1954, care se află în prezent la Metropolitan Museum of Art din New York. Tabloul este în encaustică pe masonit. După război, a participat la

Bienala de la Veneția și a călătorit în Italia. Brauner came back to Paris in 1945. He was included in the *"International Exhibition of Surrealism"* at Maeght Gallery in Paris, in 1947. His post war painting incorporated forms and symbols based on Tarot cards, Egyptian hieroglyphs and antique Mexican codices.



In the fifties, Brauner travelled to Normandy and Italy, and his work was exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 1954 and 1966. In 1965, he created an ensemble of object-paintings full of inventiveness and liveliness, grouped under the titles "Mythology" and "Mothers feasts". The mythology of the modern world, where man is pictured with humour, tenderness and also pessimism, estranged from his new "mothers" that are "L'automoma" and "L'aeroplapa". Here is a critique or an acceptance of this world, formerly "so frightening" and in which "reality becomes a terribly harmful thing", but that life made it more acceptable. It is considered that these works, painted at Varangéville, in 1964 at Athanor, where Victor Brauner retreated, are visions full of humour and fantasy of the world to come, which he wanted to leave for us, as a gift. In this "Mythology" is also found the last storytelling painting "The end and the beginning" (made in 1965) reminding

that "if the painter's life is over, his work starts living". He died in Paris, in 1966. He is buried in the Montmartre cemetery, his tomb stone having the epitaph: "Painting is life, real life, my life".

Adrian Grauenfels - SAGA 2023

English translation:
Carmen Tatiana Onuorah

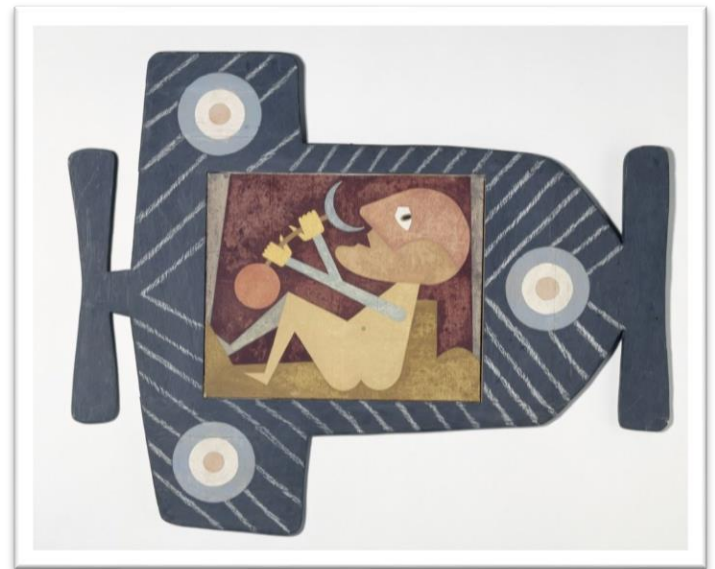
Kurt von Meier on Victor Brauner

Saul Steinberg, as a fellow native Roumanian who also lived and worked in Paris, in some ways shared both the interior and the exterior worlds of his friend Victor Brauner. In a 1959 conversation, Steinberg foresaw a new interest in Victor Brauner's mystical oils and subtly-hued encaustics, precisely because of the altered aesthetic stance engendered by the current hippie and teenage renaissance. This was further substantiated by Hedda Sterne, Steinberg's wife, who was also close to Victor Brauner in Paris. She felt that he would have loved today's youth, and also suggested that now perhaps (after it begins to realize some of the profound and pervasive implications of psychedelic phenomena) America may begin to open up more to Brauner's world of "interior space in its infinite grandeur."

This concern with the subconscious or preconscious life was, of course, no exclusive property. Nor is it a coincidence that a historical interest in the whole Surrealist movement should develop particularly in the last few years. Victor Brauner did exhibit with the Surrealists, from 1934 until 1949; Andre Breton and other Surrealists also



wrote about his work. After seeing a painting of his in the Salon des Surindépendents, **Yves Tanguy** met Brauner, and then introduced him to **Breton**. He was a "natural" Surrealist, whose archetypal images provided a perfect realization of Breton's theories. In fact, Brauner was a Surrealist even before Breton decided he was.



l- Aeroplava

Six years before coming to Paris, and ten before meeting Breton, Brauner showed his first paintings in Bucharest. There he also published an article entitled "Le Surrationalisme." This was in 1924, the same year in which the **Manifeste du Surréalisme** appeared in Paris. No direct connections between the two events have been established, although it is sometimes

forgotten that Bucharest hosted a lively, hip, intellectual scene at the time; it was strongly book-oriented, and any important or topical publication from Paris would appear (after an overnight train ride on the Orient Express) in Bucharest on the following day. Several other modern artists were nurtured in this vital climate, including **Marcel Janco** and **Tristan Tzara**, in addition to **Constantin Brancusi** two decades earlier. Brauner became a part of this literary scene in Bucharest, founding, together with the avant garde poet **Ilie Voronca**, an ephemeral revue entitled 75 HP, in which he published his own manifestoes. He also announced himself as the inventor of "Pictopoesie." Rather than being merely another tired metaphor based on the Horatian dictum, "Ut pictura poesis," Brauner defined his new concept thus: "La Pictopoesie West pas de la Poésie. La Pictopoesie n'est pas de la Peinture. La Pictopoesie est de la Pictopoesie." ["Western Pictopoetry is not Poetry. Pictopoetry is not Painting. Pictopoetry is Pictopoetry."]

After an earlier trip to Paris, Brauner decided to settle there in 1930, first developing friendships with his compatriots Brancusi and the philosopher **Benjamin Fondane**. Writers and poets, especially **Eugene Ionesco**, another Romanian who wrote under the invented name **Gherasim Luca**, came to be among his closest of friends, although he certainly did not try to match their literary work, nor indeed later, that of Surrealists like Breton. Brauner lived in a world of fantasy where the lines between his conscious and his subconscious were never clearly drawn. Significantly, perhaps, he rented the studio which had previously belonged to le **Douanier, Henri Rousseau**. He read a great deal in psychoanalysis; and according to Hedda

Sterne, developed an intense interest in extra-sensory perception. This is all the more understandable when we read that his father was a passionate devotee of spiritualism, magnetism, and hypnotism, who was in correspondence with some of the mediums of the time. But there are in Brauner's own biography several curious anecdotes that relate to a clairvoyant quality. The best-known of these was recounted by Pierre Mabile in the review **Minotaure**, and concerns a work painted shortly after Brauner established himself in Paris, "*Autoportrait*" a l'oeil enucleé".

