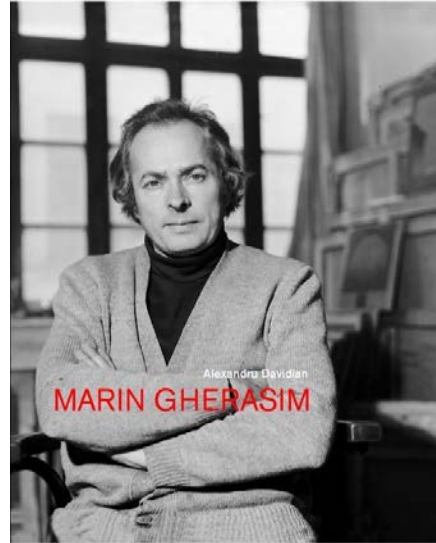


## **A Great Romanian Artist: Marin Gherasim**

**Adrian Stoleriu\***

Alexandru Davidian, *Marin  
Gherasim*, Vellant, Bucharest,  
2019, 440 pages



“Vellant” Publishing House offers a new book to the public who loves art and beauty; this time, it is the work of an important representative of the autochthonous creation of the last decades of the last century: the painter Marin Gherasim (1937-2017). The volume signed by Alexandru Davidian was printed in 2019, being a consistent monography of 440 pages, minutely worked upon, enriched with relevant texts and expressive images.

Even if the deep mark that he left in the history of Romanian Art is obvious, it is never too much to remind people who Marin Gherasim was, an aartist of inner depth and rich feelings whose life and career offered an unforgettable example for the generations of artists that came after him. In this respect, the work of Mr. Davidian can be considered a well-deserved tribute, an invitation to remember the artist and it is the necessary way to underline the creation of an artist who is a benchmark at the end of the 20th century.

The rich monography is structured in four distinct parts, *Trepte împotriva uitării [Steps Against Oblivion]*, *Desen și Pictură [Drawing*

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and Painting], *Repere biografice [Biographic Frames] and Bibliografie selectivă [A Selective Bibliography]*, each of them having a specific importance in the process of chronological sketching of the human and artistic portrait of the one who was Marin Gherasim, a painter whose personality is organically linked to the subtle expression of the dissent against the regime and of the official art during the communist period.

The author starts his work by launching a forget-me-not request, suggestively naming the first chapter *Trepte împotriva uitării [Steps Against Oblivion]*, describing important details of the beginning of the artist and of his development phases, from the miracle of childhood on the fields of Bucovina, he claims to be the son of a priest – this fact will essentially mark his artistic future, including the moment of admission to the Institute of Arts “Nicolae Grigorescu” from Bucharest. All these evolutive phases took place during the ferocious oppression of the communist regime against everything connected to religion and faith in God. What is interesting is the fact that the quality of student of the future great artist already predicted the attitudes and the ideological fights that he had against the oppressive anti-religious totalitarian system. He also lacked the support and understanding of professor Angheluță who remarked his student’s relative early detachment compared to his colleagues, among whom some of them remained tributary to their master for a long time. This is the moment when the personality of Marin Gherasim receives a specific shape and it becomes stronger, also due to the fact that he had a series of important meetings with the cultural personalities of that time. Alexandru Davidian mentioned seven of the people that shaped the personality of the great artist, among them we mention Petru Comarnescu, Catul Bogdan, Ion Țuculescu, Paul Gherasim, Ernest Bernea, Nicolae Steinhardt and Sofian Boghiu. Distinct, powerful and remarkable personalities, but different regarding their vision, ideals and ways of expression; their common ground was their Christian spirituality that Marin Gherasim would bring forward through his creation.

All these personalities left the seed of deep faith in the sensitive soil of the artist Marin Gherasim; this was the basis of his powerful painting that proved to be a true “messenger of hope” during the long period of oppression and quasi-total control on the act of creation. Marin Gherasim transferred the following elements to his paintings: the absolute spirit, mythology, history, the return to archeology, divinity

and hope, thus finding the uprightness of meeting his own self during the act of painting, as a form of his love for people, perceived from the Christian perspective. His artistic effluvia thus flooded several cycles of works, such as *Proteic*, *Urban I*, *Urban II* or *Drumul I* [*The Road I*] and *Drumul II* [*The Road II*]. Above all these creations, what the works of the artist Marin Gherasim transmit is a specific persistence of the icon having a Byzantine tradition whose forms and symbols have probably inspired beautiful cupolas, domes, thrones or apses, through them, he managed to express the (a)temporality of the creation act compared to eternity. Consequently, it is extremely powerful and deep the honest confession of the artist who remembered the time of communist tightness and he mentioned: „În anii când la noi se distrugeau biserici – până în 1989 – eu le construiam în chip simbolic în picturile mele” / “During the time when the churches had been raised to the ground – until the end of 1989 – I was building them back in a symbolic way in my paintings”.

The notes of the artist from the diaries he held bring to light less known details which are indented, keeping the reading interested, thus underlining the profile of a courageous perfectly lucid fighting artist ”who does not accept under any circumstances to abandon fighting, both against himself and the cultural models of this time” (p.170).

The reader of the work will also find interesting the part which recalls the activity as an essay writer and publicist of Marin Gherasim, pointing out the relevant aspects from exhibition chronicles, portraits or evocation of some personalities that were part of his social, cultural and artistic entourage. Thus, the written portraits of the following are brought again to light: Paul Neagu, Mircea Teodorescu and Florin Niculiu, Adela Petrescu, Cristian Paraschiv and Ion Grigorescu, Doru Covrig, Mihai Ispir, Alexandru Chira, Alexandru Țipoia and Florin Mitroi who are evoked in eulogistic terms, underlining the essence full of meanings of each creator’s work and exhibiting it or offering it to the public to be admired and contemplated. All these images recreated through the text determine the author of the interesting monography dedicated to the personality of the artist Marin Gherasim to state again, as a conclusion, the way in which his work managed to make a stand against the communist system and also to the consumerist one, without claiming for the dissident-revolutionary merits. In this way, according to Alexandru Davidian, ”Marin Gherasim is qualified to be the representative of alternative culture and of the resistance through

culture” (p.233), this is the rare quality of the ones who had the courage and found the means to oppose to the totalitarian ideology.

The second great chapter of the work is dedicated to the analysis of another important creation of Marin Gherasim, illustrating „*Fațetele neliniștii. Între expresionism și suprarealism*” [*The Facets of Intranquility. Between expressionism and Surrealism*], extraordinarily expressed through drawing and painting. In this case, what impresses us is the investigation power of the artist having the deep background of Christian spirituality, persistently reinterpreting major themes of the artist which are obviously against the trend of the official art dictated by the powerful people of those times.

In a nowadays cultural and social context which proves to be more and more dynamic, we consider that the publishing of this work in a bilingual format is utterly inspired, both in Romanian and English, this fact offers the possibility of discovery to a larger public interested in the work of Mr. Davidian, consequently it opens the road towards better knowledge and appreciation of the Romanian art from the second half of the 20th century, in general, but also to the artistic creation of one of the most talented artists of this period, that is the painter Marin Gherasim, in particular.

The reproduced images have an excellent printing quality, they offer unhindered access to the artistic heritage of this creator, his works definitely take him out of oblivion and convincingly propose him for eternity.

It is a work that fully deserves to be read and admired, offering a representative image of a defining moment from the history of Romanian art from modern and contemporary times.