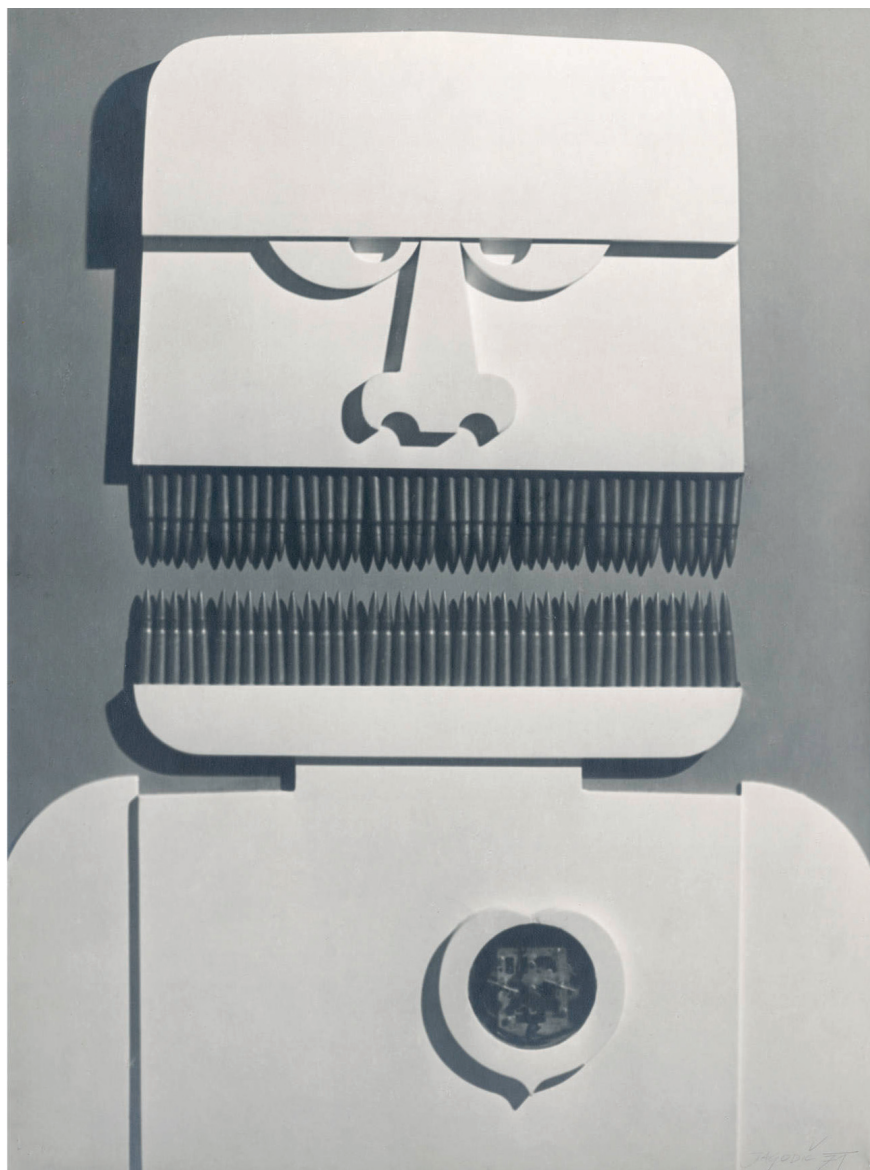


Peace Policies and Practices in Yugoslavia and Beyond



PEACE, UNCONDITIONAL!

Edited by
Sanja Petrović Todosijević and Martin Pogačar

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Edited by
Sanja Petrović Todosijević and Martin Pogačar

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UNCONDITIONAL!



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in Yugoslavia and Beyond

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Sanja Petrović Todosijević and Martin Pogačar

Belgrade, Ljubljana
2025

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Ovidiu Țichindeleanu*

On Seeing the Socialist Culture of Peace**

Abstract In the summer of 2017, a newly formed curatorial group, the Committee for Resurrection, organized in Bucharest *The Veil of Peace*, a research exhibition dedicated to the iconography of peace in the cultural and political experience of socialist Romania. The article revisits the conjuncture of the exhibition and summarizes its findings, arguing that the idea of peace in socialism took on a life of its own and became a real cultural ground for renewal, only to be thwarted in the 1980s.

Keywords socialist culture of peace, negative peace, positive peace, internal difference, Romania

Seeing *The Veil of Peace*

In the iconography of real-existing socialism, peace reigns supreme over all the other symbols. Even more than the peace dove, which has been drawn at some point by the hand of each child of the former socialist bloc, the very word PEACE, as in 'peace between peoples' ['pacea între popoare'], is a word that has become image. Peace was the highest symbol of the communist life. And yet, the 'Free World' only saw a veil in the communist peace, believing that other intentions were lurking behind it. After the removal of the Iron Curtain, from the beginnings of the post-socialist transition with the wars in ex-Yugoslavia, to

* Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-3786-5378>

** Thanks to Raluca Voinea and Igor Mocanu for opening the ark of peace and to Martin Pogačar for his patience and power of ethical imagination.



Stane Jagodič, *Tinned Cry*, collage, 1992

the ending of the transition with the war in Ukraine, the former socialist bloc has become an open 'area of conflict'. Thus it has been re-integrated into the world of capitalism and coloniality. Peace has disappeared from social life under the disrupting power of wars, crises, and infinite austerity. The veil of peace has been replaced with the armours of war. So how can we dematerialize the war, in order to regain the time of peace? How could we re-distribute the capital of the image into a commoning sense?¹

This press release, dated June 2017, accompanied the opening of the exhibition *The Veil of Peace*, curated at the gallery tranzit.ro/Bucharest by the Committee for Resurrection (Igor Mocanu, Ovidiu Țichindeleanu, Raluca Voinea).² The phrase "the war in Ukraine" might seem misplaced to the reader in 2025, but it reflects an ongoing concern and the attention given to the reality of neighbouring Ukraine in the spirit of regional solidarity. The deteriorating situation in Ukraine had been closely followed since 2012, together with the independent journalist collective *CriticAtac*: following a series of meetings and conversations, a book was published in 2014,³ and a string of articles followed.⁴ One of the common concerns was the region-wide anti-neoliberal protests from 2012–2013, which, after becoming influential, had come under pressure from the authorities. In Ukraine, the reaction had taken a deadly turn in January–February 2014, when 49 Maidan protesters were killed in cold blood by police snipers on rooftops.⁵ The massacre added fuel to the ongoing internal power struggles, civil war threats, far-right ultra-nationalism⁶ and the geopolitical interferences from the West and the East, which kept on making things worse, further detracting from local social issues that had initially spurred the movement.⁷

1 "Vălul Păcii," tranzit.ro/Bucharest, 9 July 2017, accessed 6 June 2025, <https://ro.tranzit.org/ro/expozitii/0/2017-06-09/valul-pacii>.

2 *The Veil of Peace*, 9 June–7 July 2017, tranzit.ro/ București. Partners: The National Film Archive of Romania, The Visual Art Museum Galați, The Art Museum Cluj-Napoca, The Art Museum Piatra Neamț, The County Museum Satu Mare, Radio Romania Cultural, ARTA Magazine, the Union of Visual Artists of Romania. The main partner of tranzit.ro is ERSTE Foundation.

3 Florin Poenaru, Vasile Ernu (eds.), *Ucraina live. Criza din Ucraina: de la Maidan la război civil* (Cluj: Tact, 2014).

4 See, for instance, Ovidiu Țichindeleanu, "Blood and Soil or Communal Power?," *LeftEast*, 21 February 2014, <https://lefteast.org/blood-soil-or-communal-power>. See the series of articles in Romanian in CriticAtac: <https://www.criticatac.ro/tag/ucraina/>.

5 Ivan Katchanovski, *The Maidan Massacre in Ukraine: The Mass Killing that Changed the World* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024).

6 Ivan Katchanovski proposes the following conclusion: "Far right organizations, such as the Right Sector and Svoboda, and oligarchic organizations, such as Fatherland, which formed the Peoples' Front after the 'Euromaidan', were directly or indirectly involved in this massacre of the police and the protesters"; Ivan Katchanovski, "The Maidan Massacre in Ukraine: Trial and Investigation Revelations," *Russian Politics* 8, no. 2, (July/August 2023): 181–205. Right Sector (Pravy Sector) is a coalition of Ukrainian nationalist groups which was active in the right-wing sector of the Euromaidan protestors in 2013 and evolved into a political party in 2014 with its own paramilitary wing, the Ukrainian Volunteer Corps. Svoboda is an ultra-nationalist and neo-fascist political party founded in 1995, with a paramilitary wing known as the Sich Battalion, which participated briefly in the Ukrainian government in 2014.

7 Volodymyr Ishchenko, *Towards the Abyss. Ukraine from Maidan to War* (London: Verso, 2024), especially the first part.



Călin Pojar, *Peace*, 1975, oil on canvas, 64.5 x 84.5 cm. Courtesy of the Art Museum of Cluj-Napoca.

Back in Bucharest, Igor Mocanu, Raluca Voinea, and I were united in the observation that, by 2017, the local culture industry had filled the Romanian public space with "security experts" talking day after day about war and war scenarios. Nobody was talking about peace anymore. In our conversations with different people in the process of doing research for the exhibition, we noticed that the simple idea of talking about peace initially elicited bemusement and condescending smiles. It was as if only hippies and naïve folk ever talked about peace. Peace was already dead, culturally. And yet, as soon as we insisted that this was a research exhibition and asked about the cultural materialities of peace, such as the paintings, books, songs and the like that people could remember from socialist times, our respondents opened up in distinct ways, also going through very different feelings. All of a sudden, with the lid of the "contemporary" out of the way, they had so much to say, remember and retrieve from oblivion: music, visual art, novels, poems, everyday objects, memories and anecdotes that kept on coming in response to our inquiries. Also, everyone confirmed that they have at some point drawn with their own hands an image of the peace

dove – a shared experience which pointed to a forgotten “universal” of the socialist bloc. The initial affects of condescension and derision thus gave way to warmth and curiosity, a desire to help and contribute and a genuine appreciation of the wealth of materials that kept popping up.



Ladislau Feszt, *The Symbol of Peace*, 1967, aquaforte, 47 x 34 cm.
Courtesy of the Museum of Visual Arts Galați.

The exhibition tried to reflect this wealth in the space that was available. A special place was given to a quote found in Miko Ervin's unique book of interviews about peace, *Întîlnire cu anul 2000* [Meeting the Year 2000], published in the fall of 1989, historical seconds before the collapse of the socialist bloc. The book asked different socialist writers from Romania and painter Marc Chagall about their hopes for the future of the world, which was imagined to be a future of peace. The featured quote came from poet Franz Hodjak. Set by artist Eduard Constantin on the welcoming wall, it stated:

On one hand, there is final peace, which arrives after the bombs will have shut everybody's eyes. On the other hand, there is daily peace, needed by people to breathe freely as long as they can see. There are forces fighting for the final peace, and then there are forces committed for the daily peace.⁸

The format of the exhibition was imagined as a visual tool for actively seeing daily peace, as opposed to representing it. The point was to begin re-worlding peace in Bucharest as an initial location of this inquiry by way of activating local people's memories and resurrecting mortified cultural materialities, whose fate had been worse than museumification. There is a specific intensity to the ethical gravitas of peace, which can be easily forgotten in the contact with cultural materialities: when talking about peace, one does not deal only with reification, commodification and alienation but with a war against life itself.

The exhibition unpacked the worlds of “daily peace” with paintings and sculptures resourced from local art museums, thus initiating interesting conversations (from the cities of Piatra Neamț, Galați, Cluj and Satu Mare); with a selection of films and videos, including *Festivalul prieteniei* [The Festival of Friendship] (1958), *Raidul păcii* [The Peace Raid] (1959), *Baladă pentru o mărgică albastră* [Ballad for the Blue Planet] (1983) and Ion Popescu Gopo's amazing *S-a furat o bombă* [A Bomb Was Stolen] (1961); a listening nook with vinyl recordings of Romanian bands and artists singing about peace (1974–1988); a wall with archival materials – journals, magazines, stamps and illustrated plates; and a selection of news reels about the international peace movement (1952–1962). In the middle of the space, the exhibition also set up a study place. The curatorial collective assembled four study dossiers on the iconography of peace, set in expanding ring binders, in which the visitors were able to take or add their own materials. The dossiers gathered photocopies of archival materials from the internationalist peace journals *Orizonturi* [Horizons], *În apărarea păcii* [Defending Peace], and *Pentru apărarea păcii* [For the Defence of Peace] (1955–1973), which discussed international peace movements while also introducing national liberation and decolonization movements (Study Binder #4); on

⁸ Franz Hodjak, “Eu cred în viață și nu în cărți,” in *Întîlnire cu anul 2000*, ed. Miko Ervin (Cluj: Editura Dacia, 1989), 68.

several international events that gathered visual artists from different countries to work on the theme of peace (Study Binder #3); on the production of local literature on peace, both for adults and children (Study Binder #1); and, last but not the least, on the internal stages of the official discourse on peace of the Romanian Communist Party between 1964–1984 (Study Binder #2).



Images from the exhibition.

The culture of peace

In my previous studies offering a cultural analysis of the socialist experience, I pleaded for the simple method of considering the distinctions between the four decades of real socialism (in the Romanian case) to counter the monolithic projections about “communism” as a homogenous past. The research process started by admitting our own ignorance: not only had the idea of peace been rendered meaningless and useless and stripped of cultural materialities in our working environment, which can be described as the post-socialist public sphere of Romania, but our political subjectivity was also reduced: we did not know the internal differences described by the idea of peace in the history of real socialism. Identifying and understanding the internal differences distinguishable in the cultural life of a concept was the crucial methodology that allowed one to re-open oneself to the experience of real socialism on its own terms, beyond the accumulated preconceptions we still face.

The analysis of the internal differences formed within the concept of peace immediately revealed two major regimes of meaning. The post-war peace indeed tended to be defined negatively, as an expression of anti-war and anti-fascist movements, learning from the previous inter-war experience of international activism poised to “defend” the peace. Thus, the World Congress Against War, founded in 1932 by Romain Rolland and Henri Barbusse, was followed up in 1933 by the establishment of the National Committee for the *Defence of Peace* (*my italics*) in Romania. In the context of rising fascism and ever-growing repression, peace activism offered an opportunity for doing politics outside the limits of the formal political sphere and connecting internationally across borders. Visual arts had a prominent role in facilitating communication across cultural differences. After the end of the Second World War, inter-war peace activism was hailed as a cultural ground for the desired renewal of societies, and prominent scientists, philosophers and writers, such as Frédéric Joliot-Curie, Bertrand Russell, Louis Aragon, Pablo Neruda, Nâzım Hikmet and Paul Éluard, became global peace activists. The iconography of peace in the visual and sculptural works of the two decades after the Second World War clearly evidenced an initial regime of meaning, with peace being the common rallying call for various movements against war and for the defence of peace.

Although the anti-war and anti-fascist dimension was predominant, ideas of positive peace were also present from the outset, in works around the slogan “Peace, Land and Bread” (*Pace, pământ și pâine*), as well as in works on the socialist concept of “friendship among peoples”. The former continued the tradition of the popular slogan with which the Bolsheviks had won the support of soldiers, peasants and workers in the October Revolution of 1917, while the latter was the Eastern bloc’s alternative to the Western liberal concept of multiculturalism, yet set outside the state, in the field of internationalism. Traian Vasai’s lithograph *We Are Imposing the Peace* (1960), Mariana Popa’s linocut *Peace and Bread* (1967) and Nicolae Spirescu’s painting *Peace and Justice* (1970) spoke to the anti-war and anti-fascist sense of peace.



Traian Vasai, *We Impose the Peace*, 1960, lithography, 53 x 43 cm.
Courtesy of the Art Museum of Piatra-Neamț.

However, in contrast to the “Never Again!” enthusiasm of the 1950s, some of the paintings on the theme of peace that we received from Romanian museums across the country were not in the best shape, to put it mildly. The anti-communist drive after 1989 had drawn a material veil of neglect and oblivion over peace. We learned that, with some exceptions, the works on peace were now to be found in basements, taken out of the display of the museum’s permanent collection, and basically left to rot. Interestingly enough, in our cases, the rot particularly affected later-period visual works, which were more invested in the second regime of the meaning of peace. The latter, emerging in the late 1960s and especially during the 1970s, featured visual representations of friendship among peoples, as well as speculative interpretations of a peaceful world, both abstract and set in scenes of good everyday life.



Mariana Popa, *Peace and Bread*, 1967, linocut, 81.5x 66. Courtesy of the Museum of Visual Arts Galați. Down: Natalia Matei-Teodorescu, *For Peace*, 1982, color aquaforte, no. 6 /10, 61.5 x 47 cm. Courtesy of the Art Museum of Cluj-Napoca.



Mihai Rusu, *The Message of Peace*, 1982, oil on canvas, 100 x 116 cm. Courtesy of the County Museum Satu Mare.

The most prominent work in this sense was Valentina Rusu-Ciobanu's *Prietenie* [*Friendship*] (1974). We visited the Moldovan painter, then 97 years old, at her home in Chişinău, and she gracefully confirmed the anchorage of the work in the social and cultural life of then-Soviet Moldova. Yet again, it seemed that most interpretations could not take even this notorious work seriously for what it is, at face value, looking instead for hidden codes and a distancing irony. However, faced with the high costs and material impossibility of bringing the work of the Moldovan painter from Chişinău to Bucharest, we commissioned the Chişinău-based artist Mark Verlan instead to create a homage replica. The smiles and general happiness of the represented crowd powerfully contradict Western and internalized post-1989 stereotypes about communism. The eye for fashion, the design of the purses, the vinyl record and photo camera, the cigarette, the implied loudness, and the presence of no less than three mixed-race couples pointed to the cultural life of a Moldovan "province" that was at home in the changing world of the internationalist movements of socialism, decolonization and national liberation. The peace dove and the painted word "peace" (written in Romanian with Cyrillic letters), hanging seemingly from the sky above the scene, showed a symbol of a world beyond racial discrimination and in the process of the renewal of the city and of its society.



Mark Verlan, *Friendship* – after Valentina Rusu-Ciobanu, 2017, oil on canvas, 95 x 56 cm.

The internal differentiation of the two regimes of meaning was confirmed by the iconography of peace found in other cultural forms. The journals of the peace movement were fully invested in a renewal of the post-war and post-colonial societies, being conceived as platforms for the production of a new cultural ground. By the end of the 1950s and early 1960s, publications such as *În apărarea păcii* [In Defense of Peace] and *Orizonturi* [Horizons] not only discussed the imperial and colonial violence and resistance against them but popularized science, publishing reports from the daily life of other peoples, translating authors from the Global South, introducing articles on the critical race theory, the psychology of colonial oppression or innovative forms such as the popular revolutionary theatre in India, the communal transmission of knowledge in Haiti or other experiments in popular education.⁹ The worlds of stamps, pop and rock music, children's literature, and the multitude of poetry and prose books, re-established contact with a cultural life that humbled the exhibition itself. Thus, the show featured only a small selection from the abundance of visual and textual materials on peace one could find in popular magazines for youth such as *Şoimii patriei* and *Cutezători*, in widely known poetry books such as Lucia Olteanu's *Liniştea cri*, or on stamps, such as the ones celebrating the International Year of Youth (1985) and the International Year of Peace (1986).

Contemplated across these cultural materialities, it was obvious that the idea of peace flourished in socialist cultures beyond official propaganda. Peace, the word that became image, was the overarching symbol of a process of renewal and freedom which was open-ended and thrived in socialist culture. Yes, it was prone to idealization, but the material culture of peace was a produced environment that existed as a terrain for encounters across cultural differences, with specific tools for learning to listen and to see. Across paintings, music and poetry, we noticed a significant presence of women authors and authors of mixed ethnicity who did collaborative work. Contrary to Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer's reflections on the symbol as a cultural materiality that requires instant comprehension that de-historicizes,¹⁰ the symbol of peace seemed to open a process of re-thinking and relating differences. In particular, the few years of the détente after 1969 proved very inspiring. The question of whether the socialist culture of peace tamed the difference, commonizing it or bridging other differences would require a dedicated investigation and other tools for seeing from the standpoint and history of different localities.

⁹ The examples are from articles published in: *Înapărareapăcii*, year IV, November 1955; *Orizonturi*, Year V, November 1956; *Orizonturi*, Year VI, August–September 1957. Study Binder #4. "Horizons" of Peace 1955–1973. Edited by The Committee for Resurrection / Ovidiu Țichindeleanu, *Vălul Păcii* / *The Veil of Peace*, tranzit.ro/ Bucharest, 9 June–7 July 2017.

¹⁰ Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London: Verso, 1998 [1925]). Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1995 [1927]).

It became clear that we could not ignore the official discourse, the very place where peace was a slogan. In our attempt at re-worlding peace, the dominant discourse on peace was re-introduced in the exhibition within much larger material cultures of peace. It was one of the four study dossiers left on the table.

The official discourse on peace

In the official discourse, the analysis of the internal differences that had emerged in the understanding and definition of the concept of peace revealed an even more complex conceptual landscape, with significant turns and changes during the four decades of the experience of real socialism in Romania.

A watershed moment in the local understanding of peace was the locally famous “Declaration of April 1964” of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers Party (renamed Communist in 1965; RCP).¹¹ In the wider context of the Sino-Soviet split, but also of the US aggressions in Vietnam, Laos and the Dominican Republic, an increasingly heated exchange of letters took place during 1962–1964 between high representatives as well as directly between the heads of the state of the Soviet Union (Khrushchev) and Romania (Gheorghiu-Dej). The most heated moment of the exchange was followed by a speedily organized visit of the high representatives of the Romanian Workers Party in March 1964 to Mao Zedong’s China, Kim Ir Sen’s North Korea and, on the way back, to Khrushchev’s Soviet Union. Romania’s leaders took the decision to support China’s position, work in close partnership with the non-aligned Yugoslavia and openly oppose the Soviet Union’s attempt to reorganize the international communist institutions under a form of central planning. Socialist Romania rejected the Valev Plan for reforming the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON, 1949–1991)¹² under central coordination, refused subordination to the Soviet Union and accused the Soviet Union in internal discussions of nothing less than displaying colonial attitudes. The writing of the Declaration of 1964 was clearly inspired by decolonization movements and the emergence and strong self-affirmation of the Non-Aligned Movement. The spirit of the Declaration was to be continued and reinforced after the death of RCP leader Dej in 1965, notably

through new leader Ceaușescu’s world-famous refusal to obey the directive line of the Warsaw Pact during the Soviet Union’s invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Ceaușescu opposed the invasion in the name of peace, breaking thus the camps of the Cold War, and for a while, the gesture catapulted him onto the world stage of international politics. The Romanian Communist Party itself had taken a turn at the historical IX Congress of 1965, which took place in Bucharest a few days after the World Congress on Peace, National Independence and General Disarmament in Helsinki,¹³ in the presence of numerous peace delegates who took the trip to Bucharest. Notably, the IX RCP Congress declared that Marxism was a “living science”.¹⁴

In the momentous analysis of the members of the Romanian Central Committee, the state of international peace was troubled in 1964 by the main contradiction between the group of capitalist countries on one side and the rest of the world on the other. From their standpoint, the former were looking to preserve the status quo, while the latter were working for social and national liberation of peoples. On one side of the contradiction was the international concentration of capital through the establishment of monopolies and supra-state organisms such as the European Coal and Steel Community (established in 1952) and the European Common Market (1957), but also the international intensification of inter-imperialist contradictions that were hurting the sovereignty of weaker states from the sphere of influence of greater powers. On the other side of the contradiction were the socialists in various “stages of development”, as well as all the struggles and movements trying to remove the consequences of colonial domination (from occupation to underdevelopment). Because of this main contradiction, peace was the only possible political cause of entire humanity.¹⁵

The actual meaning of peace was defined both negatively and positively. Negative peace meant simply avoiding the nightmare of a third world war by drafting complex disarmament treatises, through the creation of denuclearized zones and through the politics of *détente/destindere/razryadka* in international relations.¹⁶ Positive peace meant “developing international relations on the fundamental principle of *peaceful*

11 *Declarație cu privire la poziția Partidului Muncitoresc Român în problemele mișcării comuniste și muncitorești internaționale adoptată de Plenara lărgită a C.C. al P.M.R. din aprilie 1964* [Statement on the Stand of the Romanian Workers Party Concerning the Problems of the World Communist and Working-Class Movement Endorsed by the Enlarged Plenum of the C.C. of the R.W.P.] (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1964). Study Binder # 2. “CEAUȘESCU – PACE!”. Contexts and Stages of the Official Discourse on Peace in Socialist Romania 1964–1984. Edited by The Committee for Resurrection / Ovidiu Țichindeleanu, *VăluPăcii / The Veil of Peace*, tranzit.ro / București, 9 June–7 July 2017.

12 The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) was founded in 1949 by the USSR, Bulgaria Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and Romania, joined within one year by Albania and East Germany. China, North Korea, North Vietnam and Yugoslavia became observers in 1956–1957 but withdrew in 1958–1960.

13 The World Congress on Peace, National Independence and General Disarmament in Helsinki, 10–15 July 1965, was convened by the World Peace Council and attended by ca. 1500 people from 98 countries and many representatives of international organizations. The World Peace Council was formed during the rising tensions in Berlin in 1948–1949, when politicians, writers and scientists from both the East and West reacted against the imminent danger of war and the spectre of weapons of mass destruction, urging the worldwide formation of groups of “defenders of peace”. The first World Peace Congress took place at the same time in Paris and Prague in 1949, while the second was held in Warsaw, Poland (16–22 November 1950), when the decision was taken to form the World Peace Council. The latter held congresses and sessions in Rome, Paris, Stockholm, London, Prague, Warsaw, Geneva, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Vienna, Oslo, Berlin, Budapest, Colombo, New Delhi, Moscow and Bucharest.

14 *Congresul al IX-lea al Partidului Comunist Român, 19–24 Iulie 1965* (Bucharest: Editura Politică 1965). The Congress was attended by delegates from 56 countries. Study Binder #2 “CEAUȘESCU – PACE!”.

15 *Declarație*, 1964, 7–9.

16 *Ibid.*, 18–22, *passim*.

coexistence between countries with different social systems”.¹⁷ Significantly, the members of the Romanian Central Committee boldly pleaded in the frames of negative peace for dismantling all military blocs, explicitly naming both NATO and the Warsaw Pact, while emphasizing that they were committed to a politics of transforming the Balkans into a “zone of peace and international collaboration”.¹⁸ Applying the positive principle of peaceful coexistence meant explicitly having conversations across the greatest differences for the sake of peace interests. This meant, in particular, developing commercial relations based on reciprocal advantages, extending collaboration in technology and science and intensifying cultural exchanges.

The Romanian communists did not repeat publicly the vehement accusation of the Chinese side that the Soviet Union under Khrushchev was becoming a “social-imperialist state” but pleaded with both sides to resolve the public quarrel. However, they did explicitly endorse China’s position, which emphasized the right to build socialism in different ways. They strongly rejected the Soviet attempts to re-centralize the socialist bloc through the Valev reform of COMECON, which proposed the creation of a single planning organ across the socialist bloc. Instead, they pleaded for recognizing the “diversity of the conditions of building socialism”. The position of the Romanians carried weight since they had been instrumental in the creation of COMECON in 1949. In terms of Marxism, they argued that Lenin’s invoked argument about the tendency to create one single global economy, regulated through a general plan elaborated by the proletariat of all nations, was only the projection of a later moment in history that “did not have any real basis in the present”.¹⁹

Further supporting Yugoslavia and China, they pointed out that not all 14 socialist countries were members of COMECON and that the latter should prioritize the “development of elastic external collaborations” rather than pushing for internal homogeneity.²⁰ Within the socialist bloc, positive peace was to be articulated by practising solidarity with respect for reciprocal differences. They also argued for the sovereign right to develop economic relations with all states, regardless of their social order. Regarding decolonization and national liberation movements, they declared themselves inspired by the independence gained by “more than a billion and a half people who broke the chains of colonial oppression”.²¹

By the early 1970s, the prolonged momentum of decolonization and national liberation movements strengthened the belief of the socialists that the old international order was crumbling. The “decade of decolonization” had brought to the international

space more than 80 new independent states. What the Romanian socialists understood as the “old international order” was the age of imperialism and colonial and neocolonial powers. The socialists pointed to the imperialist, colonial and neocolonial practices of nations exploiting other nations, the arbitrary right of states to start wars and the use of violence and power in international relations, naming this old order the “law of the jungle” or *Faustrecht* (the right of the fist). This type of international relations was to be replaced with a new international order, more equitable and rational, based on the democratic principles of international law and its universally recognized institutions. In their optimism, the socialists believed that they were witnessing the final dismantling of imperialism and colonial powers and, with it, a global transition from capitalism to socialism, which meant replacing the age of wars and conquest with an age of progress and open debate.

Legal reasons for optimism were especially the United Nations’ adoption of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples as late as 14 December 1960 and the Programme of Action for the Full Implementation of the Declaration as late as 12 October 1970, which for the first time named and condemned colonialism as a crime. These legal events were victories for positive peace and spelt important changes for the international order established by the big warring powers after the Second World War, which had kept colonial structures in place. Imperial giants like the US and socialist giants like the Soviet Union had defined in 1945 the conditions for negative peace, but, according to the Romanian socialists, positive peace was about to be defined in the 1970s by a different form of agency, which was brought into the international space by national liberation movements.²²

The optimistic view saw the direction of change, somewhat naively, as a natural process of the world becoming more mature. This “natural” process required the hard work of maintaining collaboration and solidarity among the developing countries, namely between the majority of humanity now represented by the Group of 77, the Non-Aligned Movement and the socialist countries.²³ The “unity among the developing countries”, regardless of their social order, was a new political goal, which was necessary in order to create a new agency of positive peace, able to move against both the reactionary interests of the old international order (i.e. the world under the US and the Western colonial

17 Ibid., 23–24.

18 Ibid., 27–28.

19 Ibid., 33–34.

20 Ibid., 36–37.

21 Ibid., 42–45.

22 *Congresul al X-lea al Partidului Comunist Român 6–12 August 1969* (Bucharest: Editura politică, 1969), 90ff. *Probleme internaționale* (Bucharest: Editura politică, 1976), 41–64, 132–151, 175–203. Study Binder #2 “CEAUȘESCU – PACE!”.

23 The Group of 77 at the United Nations was formed in 1964 by 77 non-aligned nations convening at the first session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in Geneva and was instrumental in the proposals of the Algiers Charter on the Economic Rights of the Third World in 1967 and the New International Economic Order (NIEO) in 1974, which was to be suppressed through the counter-formation of the Western cartel of the Group of Seven (G7) in 1973–1975 and the establishment of the neoliberal counter-direction in international political economy; Ilie Șerbănescu, Ilie Olteanu, *Grupul celor 77. Tendințe și semnificații* (Bucharest: Editura politică, 1978).

powers), as well as against the tendencies to divide the world into spheres of influence (i.e. under the Soviet Union). In other words, the political geography of the Cold War was changing from within under the growing influence of developing countries.²⁴

A new political divide was emerging, which was to be the main driver for bringing positive peace. On one side, there were the “advanced industrialized states” that wanted to keep their privileged position in the global market, the “imperialist and neocolonial powers and institutions” and “other reactionary forces” (the USSR included).²⁵ The common denominator of this side was the war against the free and independent development of peoples, which included openly violent acts such as military coups or wars of invasion, but also wider offensive gestures against national independence. According to the Romanian socialists, the capitalist part of the reactionary side was also in a process of internal change: their ideologues believed that the nation was an “antiquated category” that had to give way to newer forms, such as the “transnational corporation and other supra-national organizations”.²⁶ On the progressive side of the new divide, the developing countries did count on their progressive alliance with socialist giants like the Soviet Union, but invested hopes in smaller states such as socialist Romania, which was on a high after two decades of post-war recovery and unprecedented growth, as well all the new states that emerged through decolonization and national liberation struggles. Some of the latter had decided to build a different social order, according to their own “conditions” and philosophy of positive peace (good life). The Romanian socialists, meaning here both the leadership of the Romanian Communist Party giving reports at Congresses and groups of intellectuals, diplomats and analysts who formulated state policies, counted all these voices as forces in the global transition from capitalism to socialism, with the common denominator being not a party ideology but the aspiration for positive peace and international politics articulated from the standpoint of the “small and medium-size states”.²⁷ To make this newly emerging standpoint matter in the balance of international relations, peace activism was crucial, both in building solidarity and defending against the ongoing violence of imperialist, colonial and neocolonial aggressions, but especially in order to turn the newly gained independence into a meaningful process of building a specific social order. Unfortunately, just as the activism for negative and positive peace subsided after 1989, the crucial concept of the “small and medium-size states” has also been largely ignored or forgotten, not only by the big powers and the “advanced industrialized states”, but also in Marxist literature,

along with its genealogy related to the movements of socialist building, decolonization and national liberation.

After mediating the peaceful conclusion of the Vietnam War, from the cross-camp efforts in 1965 and 1966 to enabling the breakthrough talks by becoming “Washington’s principle channel to Hanoi” in 1967,²⁸ the Romanian leadership turned peace activism into its main line of foreign policy: they significantly intensified in the 1970s the relations with developing and Non-Aligned countries, as well as their peace activism.²⁹ They proposed 20 of the 64 amendments of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (1970), while also coming up with the UN initiative for a report on the social and economic consequences of the arms race (1970). From 1975 on, Romania participated officially in the Non-Aligned Foreign Ministers Conference. Previously, the relations with the Non-Aligned Movement were conducted by sending “observers” or even informal delegates, in line with Romania’s foreign policy of maintaining relations with all camps by signing bilateral agreements and through UNCTAD projects, such as the 1964 initiative of Romania, Egypt, Indonesia and Tanzania on the exchange of industrial machinery for quotas of the obtained production.³⁰ At the Third Ministerial Meeting held in Manila in February 1976, Romania officially entered the Group of 77.

Throughout this period, starting from 1962, the official discourse on peace incessantly distanced itself from the context created by the big powers at the end of the Second World War, focusing increasingly on the open future of internationalist solidarity among the “small and medium-size states”.³¹ This emergence of an internal difference in the discourse on peace and the associated practices, one not defined by the negation of war and violence, but by the vision of a world order and a future based on equitable and reciprocal relations across differences, was the main factor of renewal and hope. As the research for the exhibition clearly showed, this process of renewal was not limited to

24 Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Raportul Comitetului Central cu privire la activitatea Partidului Comunist Român în perioada dintre Congresul al XI-lea și Congresul al XII-lea și sarcinile de viitor ale partidului*, 19 November 1979 (Bucharest: Editura politică, 1979). *Congresul al XII-lea al Partidului Comunist Român 19–23 November 1979* (Bucharest: Editura politică, 1979). Study Binder #2 “CEAUȘESCU – PACE!”.

25 *Declarație*, 1964, 16–17. *Probleme internaționale* (Bucharest: Editura politică, 1976), 282–306.

26 *Declarație*, 1964, id. *Probleme internaționale* (Bucharest: Editura politică, 1980), 138–158. Study Binder #2 “CEAUȘESCU – PACE!”.

27 *Probleme internaționale* (Bucharest: Editura politică, 1976), 152–174, 175–203. *Congresul al XII-lea al Partidului Comunist Român 19–23 November 1979* (Bucharest: Editura politică 1979), 90–111. Study Binder #2 “CEAUȘESCU – PACE!”.

28 Larry Watts, “Mediating the Vietnam War: Romania and the First Trinh Signal, 1965–1966,” Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars, Working Paper #81, July 2016.

29 The official diplomatic visits of the Romanian head of state to the Non-Aligned and developing countries after the X Congress of the Romanian Communist Party (1969): Morocco (1970, 1973), Algeria (1972, 1973), Central African Republic (1972), Congo Popular Republic (1972), Zair (1972), Zambia (1972), Tanzania (1972), Sudan (1972), Egypt (1972, 1975), Senegal (1973), Libia (1974), Liban (1974), Iraq (1974), Syria (1974, 1975), Liberia (1974), Guinea (1974), Jordan (1975), Tunisia (1975), Iran (1969, 1971, 1973, 1975), India (1969), Pakistan (1973, 1975), Philippines (1975), Costa Rica (1973), Venezuela (1973), Colombia (1973), Ecuador (1973), Peru (1973), Argentina (1974), Brazil (1975), Mexico (1975), Portugal (1975), Greece (1976), Kuwait (1976). The same can be said about the visits to Romania of the heads of states from Non-Aligned and developing countries: Central African Republic (1970, 1973, 1975), Cambodia (1972, 1973, 1974, 1975), Colombia (1974), Congo Popular Republic (1973), Costa Rica (1974), Ecuador (1975), Egypt (1974), Gabon (1975), India (1973), Jordan (1974), Iran (1970, 1973), Sierra Leone (1974), Senegal (1975, 1976), Syria (1974), Sudan (1973), Tanzania (1975), Turkey (1970), Republic of Upper Volta (1973), Zair (1970), Zambia (1970, 1974), Sao Tome and Principe (1975), Guinea-Bissau (1976), *Probleme internaționale* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1976), 14.

30 Ilie Șerbănescu, Ilie Olteanu, *Grupul celor 77. Tendințe și semnificații* (Bucharest: Editura politică, 1978), 61.

31 For more documents and analyses of Romania’s foreign policy during the 1960s–1980s, see Elena Dragomir, *Opoziția din interior. România și politicile CAER față de CEE 1957–1989*, vol. 1–2 (Tîrgoviște: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2019); Constantin Hlihor, *Cu mîinile altora. România și războaiele prin intermediari în Africa 1970–1985* (Bucharest: Editura Corint, 2025).

foreign policy or economic activity: in the internal cultural sphere, these were also the years of an unprecedented boom of creativity in literature and the arts, producing translations, international exchanges and local works of literature, theatre, poetry and visual arts that to this day remain staples of the “national” educational curriculum, in spite of the purges of post-1989 anticommunism. It must be said here that it took an exhibition format to be able to evidence this cross-sectorial phenomenon, which had remained invisible in disciplinary approaches to socialist history.

However, not all internal differences were positive. The official documents presented in the study dossier testify to another gradual change during the 1970s: toward the end of the decade, the official discourse on peace began to shift away from the vast horizons of cultural renewal, being increasingly inscribed into the domain of economic development. Peace meant here primarily economic independence, and everything else became secondary. The domain of economy once again usurped, as it were, the sector of culture as the main source of value creation. As the decade neared its end, the idea of Marxism as a “living science” also disappeared from the proceedings of PCR’s congresses. In 1979, the slogan “Ceaușescu – Pace!” made its first appearance in the published proceedings of the XII Congress.³²

The 1982–1984 period marked a new turning point. In the context of NATO’s aggressive decision to install the nuclear ballistic missile Pershing II in Europe, peace activism re-intensified. However, it focused on Ceaușescu personally and on “Romania as a voice for peace”. Ceaușescu again tried to position himself as a frontman of international peace movements; however, the focus on “small and medium-size states” faded, and this period also saw the growth of the local military industry, an internal militarization of the state, and a turn towards radical austerity policies. More remarkable concepts of positive peace were proposed, but they had less resonance: the “Balkans as a de-nuclearized zone” and “desirable societies”.³³ In Romania, this moment in the early 1980s marked the beginning of endless public “manifestations for peace” in the cities of Romania, carefully orchestrated and full of banners with slogans more visible than the people. The ethno-nationalist image of “Romania” replaced the focus on an internationalist world, and images of Ceaușescu himself supplanted the image of peace, in the name of peace. Peace became an abstract quantity, decoupled from the reality of daily life.

The word that became image

Slogans are words that have been turned into image. Their ancient ancestor would be, of course, the two tablets of stone stipulating: “Thou Shall Not...” Those tablets brought together a vulnerable collective through the intense power of negation. What they forbid is forbidden. In the former socialist bloc, slogans were affirmative and present in daily life through numerous materialities: placards of orchestrated manifestations, illustrated plates in the corridors of institutions and messages written in huge letters and placed above factories or other buildings. These images aimed to intensify the local power of affirmation and consecrate the enduring power of local epistemologies as the frame of an emerging society. They spoke to a social world in transformation. They moved toward a different role of the image crafted in the socialist world, compared to the role of the image in the capitalist world. The abundance of images of peace turned the image into a porous part of the world. The word that becomes image does not so much give a final definition, the final word, as it provides the form of a definition, opening the social world for a life infused with meaning. This dialectical image is a tool for understanding while receiving. Even the refusal of the meaning of slogans is an intensified claim for meaning (though it also opens the confusion of criticism with cynicism). At its best moments of making a difference, the symbol of PEACE reigned above a social world that was open to unknown yet desirable potentials. The vision of creating a community of affirmation, in an international concert of different social orders moving together, with an ethics of listening to what other communities and different nations have to say no matter their size and power (or actually privileging smaller sizes) – was both idealist and pragmatic, for it generated culture and had real life consequences. The socialist vision of positive peace was undercut and contradicted by forces both from inside and outside the socialist state, yet that process belongs to the political history and therefore remains to our days a matter of political agency.

The current times of generalized consumption have tended to restrict the everyday presence of slogans to marketing adverts used for selling commodities and an occasional manifestation of electoral tumult. In the capitalist world, the image is more of a tool for capturing while receiving. It is designed to be out of this world and catch individuals from a mass rather than to prefigure the shape of a society. After going through the experience of making and opening this exhibition, the current uselessness and worthlessness of the image of PEACE shows itself to be only a veil of ignorance, barely hiding the abusive extraction of social potential and the preference for violence in the contemporary world. In order to begin re-worlding peace, autonomous internal differences would need to be re-learned and re-connected, from different standpoints and localities. A discussion about the redistribution of the social capital of the image itself would seem necessary but is yet to be held. Maybe the arts can still give peace a chance.

32 *Congresul al XII-lea al Partidului Comunist Român 19–23 November 1979* (Bucharest: Editura politică 1979), 5ff. Study Binder #2 “CEAUȘESCU – PACE!”.

33 Mihai C. Botez, Mariana Celac, “Undesirable versus desirable societies,” (Tokyo: United Nations University, 1983), online: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/47233?ln=en>.



Hortensia Puia Masichievici, *The Game of Peace*, 1959, color linocut, 35 x 27.5 cm.
Courtesy of the Art Museum of Piatra-Neamț.

Summary

The article opens with the circumstances of making a research exhibition about the iconography of peace in 2017 in Bucharest, in the context of the escalation of violence in neighbouring Ukraine and the rise of militarist discourses in the Romanian public sphere too. Contrary to the irrelevance of peace in the post-socialist context, the research for the exhibition evidenced a wealth of cultural materials and visual works about peace during socialism. The findings of the research are summarized in the internal differences between two major regimes of the meaning of peace: the negative, in the sense of the anti-war and anti-fascist defenders of peace, and the positive, in the sense of building a new social order based on national liberation. The article then details the research findings on the internal differences in the understanding of peace in the official discourse of the political and intellectual leadership of Socialist Romania. The article ends with a reflection on the role of the image in socialist culture.

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