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**ARTISTS OF BOTH BANKS OF THE PRUT RIVER  
PARTICIPATING IN THE EXHIBITIONS OF THE BIENNALE  
OF ILLUSTRATIONS BRATISLAVA (1967–2015)**

*Rezumat*

**Pictori-ilustratori de pe ambele maluri ale Prutului, participanți la expozițiile Bienalei de ilustrații din Bratislava (1967–2015)**

Acest articol este consacrat artei grafice din spațiul cultural românesc prezentată la expozițiile BIB de originale ale graficii de carte pentru copii, evenimente culturale de importanța internațională. Tema nu a fost examinată anterior din cauza lipsei de interes științific manifestat în republică față de grafica de carte pentru copii.

Autorul analizează opera artiștilor plastici de pe malul stâng al Prutului (Republica Sovietică Socialistă Moldovenească / Republica Moldova), precum și de pe cel drept (Republica Socialistă România / Republica România), fapt determinat de aceea că patrimoniul folcloric ilustrat al celor două state este unitar. Operele sunt examinate atât din punctul de vedere al evoluției tradițiilor naționale în ilustrarea literaturii pentru copii, cât și de cel al impactului artei europene.

De la bun început, participarea artiștilor la concursul BIB a fost condiționată de publicarea foilor grafice. Astfel, orice ilustrație prezentată la BIB poate fi examinată ca o opera de artă individuală și, de asemenea, ca o piesă de design al cărții.

Drept călăuză organizatorilor BIB i-au servit prevederile Declarației drepturilor copiilor (1959), ale Convenției UNESCO privind drepturile de autor (1952) și ale Consiliului Internațional al Cărții pentru Copii și Tineret (International Board on Books for Young, fondat în 1953) în ceea ce privește publicarea și distribuirea cărților pentru copii în toată lumea.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** ilustrație, carte pentru copii, poveste, acuarelă, guașă, tuș-peniță, linogravură, tehnica mixtă, stilizare, stilul decorativ.

*Summary*

**Artists of both banks of the Prut river participating in the exhibitions of the Biennale of Illustrations Bratislava (1967–2015)**

The paper provides data on the almost fifty-year-long participation of artists from the Romanian cultural region in the BIB exhibitions, one of the world's most prestigious. The issue has not been studied earlier because of the lack of scholarly interest in children's book illustration.

The paper examines artworks executed by professional artists from the left bank of the Prut or the Prut-Nistru area (the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic / the Republic of Moldova) and the right bank of the Prut (the Romanian Socialist Republic / the Republic of Romania). Both regions are considered since they have a common literary folk heritage. In the paper, the illustrations are examined both in terms of the evolution of national traditions in illustrating children's literature, and in terms of the impact of European art.

Since the very beginning, the participation of artists has been conditioned by the publication of illustrations. Thus, any illustration presented at the BIB could be examined as an individual artwork, and also as a piece of book design.

The organizers of the contest have been guided by the provisions of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959), the Universal Copyright Convention (1952) and also the statements of the International Board on Books for Young (founded 1953) concerning support in publishing and distributing books for children around the world.

**Keywords:** illustration, folk tale, watercolor, gouache, pen-and-ink drawing, linocut, mixed technique, stylization, decorative style.

Among the international cultural events attended by Moldavian artists and writers there is one little-known that is nevertheless very important for the history and development of the visual arts of the Romanian cultural region (spread within the territory of the two Eastern European republics, Moldova and Romania, divided by the Prut river). It is the Biennial of Illustrations Bratislava (abbreviated BIB with the addition of the year of its organization), hosted by Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia in odd years since 1965 in September and October. The main event in the framework of the Biennale is an exhibition of original illustrations for children which has throughout its history been the premier site for the review of artworks and exchange of professional information.

Many trends and styles of children's book illustration, especially of European children's books are represented at BIB exhibitions. Overtly propagandistic illustrations (e.g., Soviet-style patriotic picture books) or commercial ones (e.g., "The Walt Disney Company" productions) have never appeared here. The author's design and the originality of his or her artistic expression have been the main criteria for the selection of works [1].

Many illustrations from the first BIB exhibitions were executed in the mid-1960s [2]. A separate group of exhibits of the Romanian section were pen-and-ink outline drawings. Due to the subtleties of lines, the mood and character of literary narrative can be conveyed through a minimal use of expressive means. The presentation of expressive fugitive sketches (pen and wash) in the spirit of avant-garde art of the early 20th century includes contour drawings by Constantin Baci (1930–2005), Geta Brătescu (b. 1926), Anghi Petrescu-Tipărescu (b. 1922), which are characterized by dynamic schematization and slightly mannered stylization. Naïve children's drawings are important primary sources for illustrations by G. Brătescu and A. Petrescu-Tipărescu. The unique outline drawings by Lygia Macovei (1916–1998) to the poems by M. Eminescu, the great Romanian poet, are especially interesting for the florid intertwining of contour lines (often shapes' hints only) conveying the impulsivity and Romantic spirit.

In the 1960s, xylographic illustration gained currency in Eastern European art, as proven by Val Munteanu (1927–1996), the brilliant illustrator of „Gargantua și Pantagruel” by F. Rabelais, a classical work of French literature. Other works by V. Munteanu, mainly illustrations of the Romanian ancient legends and folk tales, suggest that the artist based his creative approach on reinterpreting Renaissance art.

In 1968 in Moscow, the Soviet section of the International Board on Books for Young was created. For the first time, Soviet artists were given the possibility to take part in exhibitions on children's books outside the country.

In the Moldavian arts, the desire for enhancing the emotional sense of reality clearly emerged. Petru Mudrac (1933–2005), an experienced graphic artist, was the first of the Prut-Nistru region to take part in the Biennial of Illustration Bratislava exhibition (BIB '71) [3]. In the illustrations presented, a trend toward satire is expressed in the enlarged schematic forms created.

In the first half of the 1970s, there were especially numerous illustrations of Romanian folk tales at the BIB, for example, those by Ileana Ceaușu-Pandele (b. 1927) to the famous folk tale „Capra cu trei iezi” by I. Creangă, the great Moldovan storyteller. Modern trends in book illustration – distinguishing features of national art, the grotesque, and decorative stylization – were visually synthesized in the art of Val Munteanu and also Stan Done (b. 1937), the most eminent Romanian children's book artists of those times. Adriana Mihăilescu (b. 1930), an illustrator of Romanian classical and contemporary literary works, debuted at the BIB with illustrations based on subtle gradations of light and shade accentuating three-dimensional shapes.

Children's book illustrations were becoming distinct bearers of the international grotesque, which was clearly manifested in the works of Leonid Domnin (1936–2014), best known as a cartoonist. Watercolor drawings to Amintiri din copilărie, a classical autobiographical story by I. Creangă, stand out due to their refined colors and the liveliness of characters [4], and those of the Moldavian folk tale „Dafin Voinicul” are distinguished by the caricaturesque exaggeration of squat shapes, borrowed from folk art [5]. The art of L. Domnin is representative of the Soviet art of the 1970s, featuring a deepening of creative thinking.

The year 1972 was officially declared by UNESCO the International Year of the Book. In 1973, VAAP – the All-Union Agency for Copyrights – was founded in Moscow. The policy and further activities of the organization were based on the statements of the Universal Copyright Convention (adopted by Western countries only in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1952) concerning the international exchange of information in the postwar world. For the first time book illustrations published in the USSR (and the MSSR) were designated in the publication with the © international mark, opening the way for the publication of the artwork abroad.

As a whole, illustrations in Romanian children's books of the 1970s and early 1980s feature the influence of the Modern style (Art Nouveau, Secessionstil, Jugendstil). In illustrations by Adriana Mihăilescu, shapes and their proportions appear exaggerated (extended in height), but the distortion is of a Romantic nature, transferring an ironic sense to what is happening. Another artist, Vasile Socoliuc (1937–2008), resorted to combining a thin decorative design with a planar generalization of image fragments.

For the first time, illustrations by Romanian artists, Roni Noël (1912–1984) to a folk tale by P. Ispirescu, and Val Munteanu, to „Tartarin din Tarascon” by A. Daudet, were endowed with the BIB '77 Plaque and the BIB '79 Plaque, respectively [6, p. 279]. Both artists were committed to the principles of narrative illustration, built on a subtle blend of colors, with a typical portrayal characteristic of the children's books of the early XXth century.

In the early 1980s, many illustrations by Romanian artists were executed in watercolor. Striking examples of appealing Art Nouveau can be found in the illustrations by Elena Boariu (b. 1942) of „Coiful de aur” by V. Voiculescu, which are distinguished by the masterful use of only two colors in their composition (green and brown) and by the focus on natural motives conveying the romantic mood of the narrative. For these illustrations, E. Boariu received a BIB '83 Plaque – the third time a BIB award was given to illustrations composed by the Romanian artist.

Another technique that became widespread in the Romanian art of the 1970s and early 1980s was collage, with allusions to the avant-garde art of the 1910s and 1920s. The idea of appealing collage can be considered as an attempt to bring back the futuristic view of childhood, introduced into the Romanian cultural tradition by, among others, Tristan Tzara, a Romanian writer, artist and co-founder of the Dada movement in 1916 in Zürich. In S. Done's new collage illustrations of the „Aventurile baronului Munchausen”, the shapes' lines, shading colors, and fragments of different textures are intricately combined. Collage illustrations by V. Munteanu of the fairy tales of Ch. Perrault were made from scraps of photographic reproductions and are interesting in the way they present palace interiors and costumed personages.

The boundaries between styles of illustrations were gradually losing their original sharpness. The year 1983 was declared by UNESCO the International Year of Communication. It was understood that playful jokes (of the character of games, not of satire) created a dialogue between the reader and the

book, and in a broader sense, forged connections between people and nations. In the MSSR, Anatoli Smyshlyaev (b. 1949), an experienced cartoonist, promoted the aesthetic essence of modern cartoons, as shown in the illustrations to „Foișorul vesel”, an anthology of poems by contemporary Moldavian poets, edited by A. Ciocanu [7].

In the second half of the 1980s, a great many noteworthy illustrated books and picture books appeared. The artistic techniques became increasingly complex and unique, leading to the spread of the term “author's technique” instead of “combined technique”. Thorough “narrativeness” and nuances of romanticism were often synthesized, as shown in the illustrations by S. Done of the Romanian folk tales. The new illustrations by L. Domnin to famous Moldavian folk tales were awarded the BIB '87 Golden Apple (it was for the first time that a BIB award was given to an artist from the Prut-Nistru region) [8].

The active, unprecedented distribution of translated literature in the Soviet Union and the regular participation of Moldavian artists in the Moscow International Book Fair resulted in the practice of issuing outstanding books (with illustrations of high artistic value) that were translated into the languages of international use. The Moldavian fairy tales illustrated by L. Domnin were published in Russian, English, and French. Another Moldavian edition, published in translation in these languages (and also in Spanish) [9], was a collection of miniatures by Spiridon Vangheli, a famous Moldavian contemporary writer for children [10].

Once the two republics of the Romanian cultural region had become independent democratic states (the one on the right bank of the Prut in 1989, and the one on its left bank in 1991) a new era for book illustration began. According to the Law on the National Language and Its Romanization adopted in Chisinau in 1989, the Roman alphabet, the original alphabet for Romanian, was introduced, replacing the Cyrillic, in all the publications of the left bank of Prut (the MSSR and the Republic of Moldova).

Artists enjoyed freedom in the choice of means of expression and ways of presenting material, with grotesque language being still in vogue. The spirit of time found expression in illustrations either in playful jokes or in satire and sarcasm. Cartoon elements were freely combined with romantic intonations and documentary details, as shown in the illustrations by Lică Sainciuc (b. 1947) [11], Alexandru Macovei (b. 1954) [12], Vitalie Coroban (b. 1965) [13].

In 1997, the Moldavian IBBY was established in Chisinau. Under the auspices of the organization,

the International Children and Youth Book Fair, the only fair event dedicated to children's books in the country, is held annually in Chisinau. In the framework of the Fair, the best books published in the Republic of Moldova are selected. Original illustrations are selected for the BIB out of these. The national IBBY section nominates entries for competition. Traditionally, only the prize-winning illustrations are sent to Slovakia [14].

The main trends of contemporary Moldavian book illustration for children are experiments with decorative stylization of shapes, and exploring various visual effects. For example, images by Vasile Movileanu (1955–2011) are compelling due to their grotesque type and the incorporation of the stylistic elements of old popular engravings [15].

Since 2001, illustrations of the objectual-narrative type have been presented at the BIB. These are essentially realistic in style and are executed by highly successful Moldavian book illustrators of the older and middle generations: Ion Severin (b. 1954) [16], „Aventurile baronului Munchausen” by R. E. Raspe [17], Alexei Colîbneac (b. 1943), „Pungața cu doi bani” by I. Creangă [18], Simion Zamșa (b. 1958), „Alexandru Lăpușneanu” by C. Negruzzi [19], Violeta Diordiev (b. 1966) [20], „Winnie-the Pooh” by A. A. Milne and „Alice in Wonderland” by L. Carroll [21]. Pen-and-ink fine line illustrations by V. Diordiev to „De la facerea lumii citire” by Cl. Parole, a contemporary Moldavian writer for children [22], received the BIB '07 Honorary mention for the publisher, this BIB award being the first one given to a Moldavian book of the post-Soviet period.

In the 2000s, many picture books for preschoolers have appeared in the Republic of Moldova. The young illustrators Violeta Dabija (b. 1979) [23], Stela Damaschin-Popa (b. 1979) [24], and Victoria Rață (b. 1976) [25] have experimented with decorative styles, mixing watercolor, gouache, Indian ink and color pencils, providing a diversity of shapes and meanings. Their art is remarkable of a strong inclination to international patterns. Recent BIB exhibitions have featured books released in the UK, South Korea, and the USA brilliantly illustrated by V. Dabija [26].

In recent years, after a long pause, the BIB exhibitions have become interesting again for the artists from the right side of Prut (the Republic of Romania), who have illustrated books published in Bucharest, Zürich, Stockholm. Artworks by Livia Coloji (b. 1981), Cristiana Radu (b. 1976), Irina Dobrescu (b. 1980) are very original in style.

For five decades now, the Biennale of Illustrations Bratislava has provided an important role in the development of art of book illustrations for

children and in the history of contemporary book publishing. The BIB exhibitions are indicative of the evolution of the book art of the Romanian cultural region, as the artists have contributed to updating certain cultural codes and meanings, retreating national art, and modernizing visual language.

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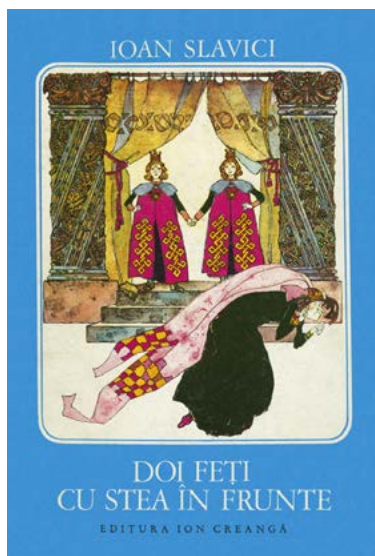


Fig. 1. Book cover by Roni Noël, 1976.



Fig. 2. Book cover by Val Munteanu, 1978.

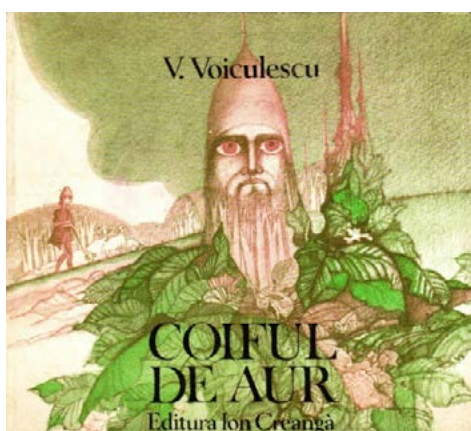


Fig. 3. Book cover by Elena Boariu, 1981.

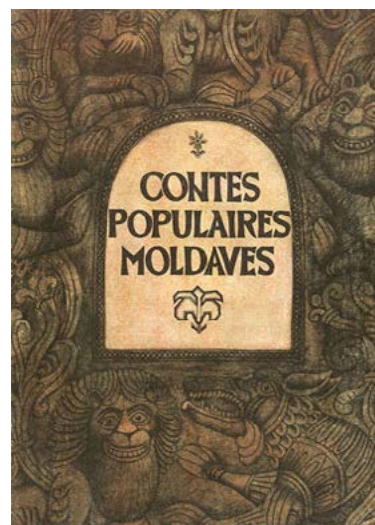


Fig. 4. Book cover by Leonid Domnin, 1986.

THE IMAGES PRESENTED HERE ARE FROM THE COLLECTION OF BIBIANA, THE INTERNATIONAL HOUSE OF ART FOR CHILDREN, BRATISLAVA, SLOVAKIA.



Fig. 5. Roni Noël. „Doi feți cu stea în frunte”. Mixed, 1976.

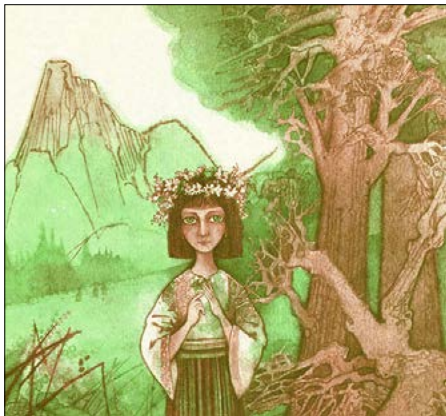


Fig. 7. Elena Boariu. „Coiful de aur”. Watercolor, 1981.

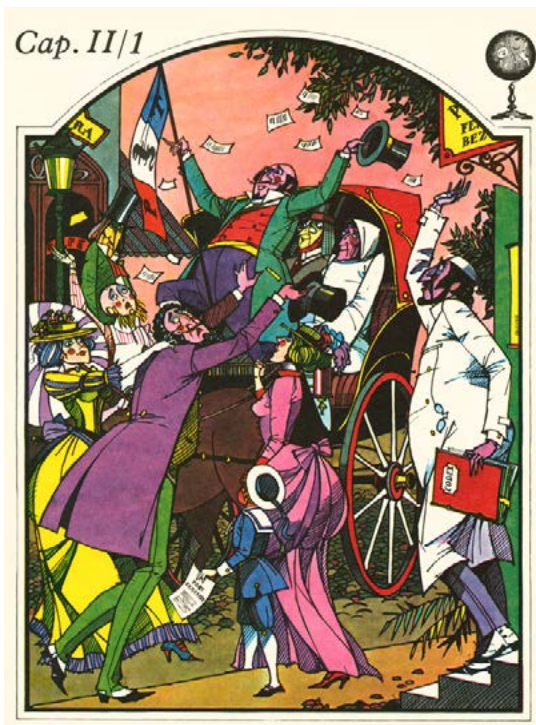


Fig. 8. Val Munteanu. „Tartarin din Tarascon”. Watercolor, pen and ink drawing, 1978.

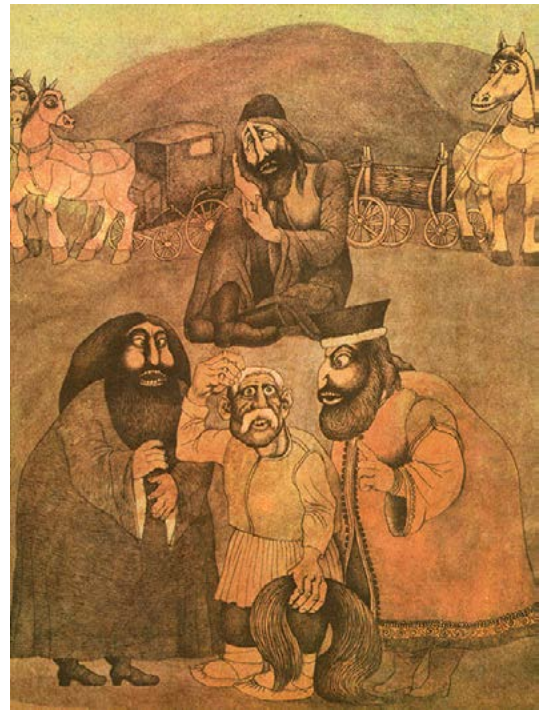


Fig. 6. Leonid Domnin. „Moldavian folk tales”. Watercolor, pen and ink drawing, 1986.

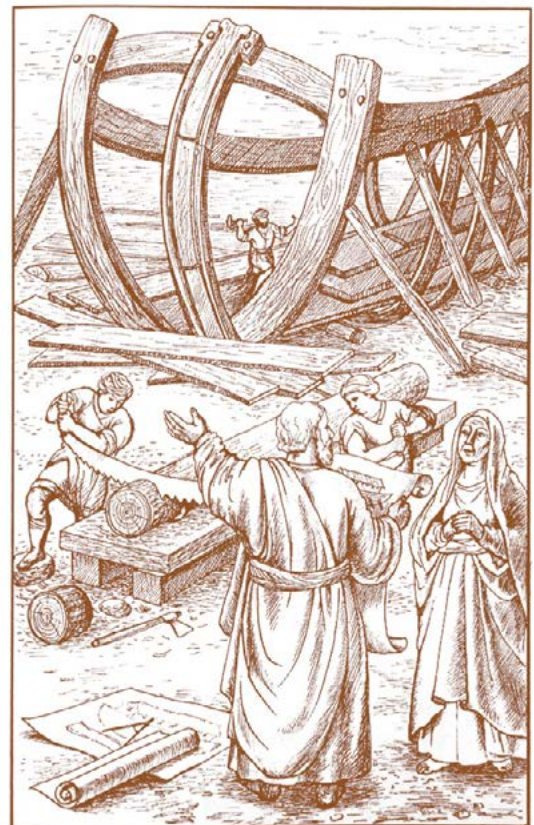


Fig. 9. Violeta Diordiev. „De la facerea lumii citire”. Pen and ink drawing, 2006.