

Laudation
Kristine Stiles

Your Royal Highnesses, Excellencies, distinguished Laureates, and guests, it is an honor to offer the laudation for Dan and Lia Perjovschi, and I salute the wisdom of the jury for recognizing the exceptional quality of the Perjovschi's artistic breadth and cultural accomplishments. Let me now speak to the character and conditions of what the Perjovschi's call their "fight" and "survival."

I remembered vividly the day in February 1992 when I first stepped into Dan and Lia's Bucharest studio. It was very different from the one that you just viewed in the 2013 film of their Sibiu studio. Twenty-one years ago, they had one room assigned by the art academy on the second floor of a dilapidated, once elegant, nineteenth century Beaux-Arts building: it had no heat, intermittent electricity, a common toilet for the building, and a host of homeless, hungry dogs seeking shelter from the street and threatening anyone with the temerity to enter the first floor hall and attempt to ascend the stairs. But then, as now, their studio was full of drawings, sculptures, photographs of their performances, boxes of books and papers, piles of the newspapers they produced, and plans and projects for installations. Then, as now, they were welcoming and generous; their energy was palpable and electric; and their work was alive with their genuine engagement in the world. Most of all, the significance of their art and aesthetics was as unmistakable as the refinement and sophistication of their thought.

While on the surface Dan and Lia's art and personalities appear very different, their similarities run deep. For example, in her performances of the late 1980s and 1990s, Lia soberly addressed the psychological and social consequences of the communist era, and, in her conceptual work, she expressed a hunger for new information and a credulous desire to "change Romania," a hope that matured into a wish to "change the world." In his drawings and installations, Dan confronted the secrecy and repression of Ceaușescu's cultural affect in drawings that demonstrated his piercing criticality of politics and his audacious willingness to visualize and verbalize social and cultural hypocrisy. Now as then, both artists approached art from a determined conceptual position producing idiosyncratic, personal work augmented by their incisive attention to social and political

issues. Both relentlessly examine inequities, injustices, and insincerity, and no topic has ever been taboo for the Perjovschis. They balance scrutiny of culture with a self-critical attitude that has justifiably earned them worldwide respect for the integrity and ethical efficacy of their art and social interactions. Dan and Lia have never abandoned their keen sense of irony, and both utilize the subversive power of humor in their art and lives: Dan is renowned for his acute sensitivity to and analysis of human behavior, talents that result in compassionate and wise drawings of human folly and self-contradiction; and Lia's humor suffuses her investigations of the eccentric associations of ideas and the irrationality of historical objectivity. Neither artist suffers fools lightly, and both are as suspicious of sentimentality and praise as they are of duplicity and inequality.

Dan and Lia Perjovschi were both born in 1961, met as children, fell in love in their teens, and married in 1983. Many years of hardship and living apart followed while Dan did mandatory military service, attended the Iași Art Academy, and worked in a museum in Oradea. They remained apart when Lia was finally admitted in 1987 to the Bucharest Art Academy after being blacklisted since 1983 from entrance to any Romanian art academy for having openly confronted corruption in a factory where she worked painting ornamental Christmas balls. Once in the Bucharest art academy, Lia courageously organized collective happenings, earning her the reputation of a non-conformist leader. Both artists participated in the revolution, stealing out under the cloak of night to give blood for the wounded. After the revolution when Lia was approached to take a position in the newly organized Youth Department of the new Romanian Ministry of Culture, she nominated Dan instead. He was hired, and they were finally reunited in Bucharest.

Dan soon began making his now world-renowned large-scale, site-specific drawing installations, a new form of drawing that changed the very conception of what drawing can be. He also published drawings and writings in *Revista 22*, a cultural magazine established by Romanian dissidents who founded the Group for Social Dialogue to which Dan still belongs. Lia challenged the notion of what an archive is and might be, going on to draw maps of how the mind charts relationships gleaned from all manner of contradictory information. This project led her to investigate how

epistemology shapes the individual and, by extension, the world, research that led to her plans to create a “Knowledge Museum,” and today she researches the concept of work.

For nearly thirty years, this couple has opened their studio to anyone in search of aesthetic and social knowledge, inviting an interdisciplinary range of intellectuals from artists and poets to politicians to share their ideas with the public. Tirelessly teaching, organizing exhibitions, writing, publishing, and making art that is by its very nature activist because of its social and political address, the Perjovschi's even designed and hosted a series for Romanian National Television (TVR 1) in 2000, which ran for three hours each Saturday for ten weeks, introducing the Romanian public to radical and experimental art and a broad range of cultural, social, and political topics. In the 21st century, Dan and Lia have ceaselessly travelled throughout the world, addressing hard truths and challenges of a changing global community. Without pretense or moralizing and with humor and self-effacement, these two gifted artists have made art dedicated to the evolving human condition. Internationally recognized for their artistic originality, ferocious authenticity, dignity, integrity, and the commitment and dedication of their lives to art and society, the Perjovschis are ideal ambassadors of European culture, as well as citizens of the world, who have changed the ways we understand the very purpose of art in society. It has been a profound privilege to work with Dan and Lia for over two decades and to have the great joy of commending them for their art today. Thank you.