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Ion Grigorescu

ANGELS BARCELONA

Ion Grigorescu has recently received well-deserved recognition, the culmination of which—following his participation in Documenta 12, 2007, and other big international exhibitions—was the first retrospective of his work, at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, Poland, this past year. Such reevaluations of the Romanian artist's long career, though, have centered on his production from the 1970s, paying particular attention to the political context of the rule of the Ceausescus, which deeply affected Grigorescu's videographic work and even his isolated and marginal performances. Nonetheless, what was truly of interest about this exhibition in Barcelona, "The Poor People Are Fending for Themselves," was the opportunity it offered to understand the specificity and range of Grigorescu's current work. Though his previous performance pieces explored the limits of the body and celebrated the refuge offered by natural environments—and in doing so questioned the conventions of contemporary art—the artist's newer practice focuses on very simple, sincere actions in small, well-made works. These are wholly removed from scholarly research, from television-style documentaries, from technological experiments, and from ironic comments on art; Grigorescu now limits himself to

Ion Grigorescu, *Wax Cherry Tree*, 2009, color photograph and text printed on paper, 32 3/4 x 43 3/4".



exhibiting pieces that are produced with resounding humility. For that very reason, they nourish the spirit more than the intellect.

In a diary entry from 1962, Grigorescu stated that art exists beyond all possible specific actions, that it is a priori. That statement seems to take on new force in these most recent works. Photographs showing the fruit of a fallen tree resting calmly before us (*Wax Cherry Tree*, 2009), or depicting the skills and resources devised to survive in conditions of scarcity and poverty (*The Poor People Are Fending for Themselves*, 2009) are here precious evidence of the daily and ordinary dimensions of the aesthetic. The small acts of lifting up a fallen cart, as seen in *Returned Cart*, 1978/2009, or gathering fruit in the woods (*Spread on Earth Plums*, 2009) touch on fundamental forces of gravity and weather and are keyed to the earth's vital cycles. Art is able to render visible what has been hidden, to channel new imaginaries, and to refute the orthodoxy of convention. But, above all, art is a territory in which to develop the modalities of being free—free even from the supposed truths of progressive culture. With a certain echo of Tolstoy, the rural Romanian landscape in Grigorescu's recent work is less a pastoral of frozen time than an ode to the craftlike nature of living itself.

—Martí Peran

Translated from Spanish by Jane Brodie.