

Horizons of Modern Romanian Sculpture (online/Bucharest, 28–29 May 26)

Bucharest, “G. Oprescu” Institute of Art History, May 28–29, 2026

Deadline: Mar 1, 2026

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The year 2026 marks the 150th anniversary of Constantin Brâncuși's birth (1876–1957), Karl Storck's bicentenary (1826–1887), and the centenary of Carol Storck's death (1854–1926). On this occasion, the „G. Oprescu” Institute of Art History organizes the international conference Horizons of Modern Romanian Sculpture: from Karl Storck to Constantin Brâncuși.

Sculpture, as understood in the Western tradition, emerges later in Romanian culture, in the second half of the 19th century, alongside the accelerated modernization of society and the institutionalization of artistic education. Within the framework of Byzantine artistic traditions, where sculpture was confined to a minor decorative role, Karl Storck introduced the neoclassical conception of sculpture centered on the human figure. A sculptor of German origin, active in Bucharest since 1849 and permanently settled here after the Unification of the Romanian Principalities, Karl Storck was the major author of public monuments, a creator of court portraits and funerary works, and the founder of the national school of sculpture. He chaired the sculpture department at the School of Fine Arts for two decades, training the first generations of Romanian sculptors.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Constantin Brâncuși, a graduate of the same school where he studied under Ion Georgescu (himself a student of Karl Storck) and with Wladimir Hegel, radically reshaped traditional conceptions of statuary. After arriving in Paris in 1904, Brâncuși quickly moved beyond naturalistic modeling and Rodin's aesthetic, and later deliberately broke with figurative conventions through the practice of direct carving (*taille directe*). Turning to the archaic sources of Romanian art as well as to those of Far Eastern art, Brâncuși inaugurated, between 1907 and 1910 (with works such as *The Prayer*, *The Kiss*, *The Wisdom of the Earth*, *The Sleep*), a new regime of sculptural form based on geometrization, essentialization, and a rethinking of the relationship between sculpture and the surrounding space.

The conference aims to examine modern sculpture through the double genealogy of its formative phases: on the local level, Storck and the academic generations that established public statuary, funerary art, and neoclassical monumentality; on the universal level, Brâncuși and his revolutionary body of work, which shifted the emphasis from tradition to modernity, from representation to form, and from gesture to spirituality. The notion of Horizon, symbolically defining the openness towards the future, calls for reflection on the dynamics of research on the historical past, as well as on the present conditions that are shaping it. Against this interpretative background, the conference sets out to broaden the frameworks through which modernity in sculpture is conceptualized, between the two poles of Romanian sculpture represented by Storck and Brâncuși, laying the groundwork for a complex understanding informed by the “fusion of horizons” (Hans-Georg

Gadamer) and by the convergence of multifaceted perspectives on a broad subject.

The conference organizers propose the following thematic focus, while welcoming contributions beyond it:

- The institutionalization of Romanian sculpture: the School of Fine Arts, chairs of sculpture, official exhibitions, public commissions, funerary and commemorative sculpture, architectural projects with sculptural decoration.
- Artistic genealogies and professional networks: artistic families, the Storck dynasty of sculptors, networks of friendship, professional association, including artistic societies and groups.
- Transfers and influences: models of the French and German Academies, the circulation of aesthetic ideas across Europe, and their impact on the development of sculpture in Romania.
- Modernity in sculpture: stylistic evolution (the succession of isms) understood as a transformation of the relationship between form, material, space, urban environment, and corporeality, articulated through concepts such as the language of sculpture, the condition of sculpture (William Tucker), and form in space (in the tradition of Henry Moore).
- Modernity and archaism: the fusion of themes, typologies, and formal vocabularies derived from premodern art (Byzantine, traditional, or Eastern) within modern sculpture.
- The Brâncuși paradigm: predecessors, contemporaries, and successors; the continuity and discontinuity of the Brâncuși model in modern and contemporary artistic creation.
- Women sculptors: status, identity, practices, and gendered stylistic hierarchies within a field traditionally perceived as masculine.
- Established historiographies and new research directions: the reassessment of the artistic peripheries and lesser-known figures, the re-examination of the canon of Romanian sculpture; innovative interpretations at the intersection of aesthetics, philosophy, and art theory.

We invite scholars in the fields of art history and theory, history, museum and curatorial studies, as well as other related disciplines, to submit paper titles accompanied by abstracts (300–500 words), together with a short narrative CV (150–200 words) by March 1, 2026, to the following email addresses:

virginia.barbu@gmail.com, ioana.alexandra.apostol@gmail.com, ralucamariamail@gmail.com

The proposed papers will be subject to a peer-review process for selection. Applicants will be notified of the outcome in the second half of March 2026.

N.B.: The conference will be held in a hybrid format (in-person and online).

Reference:

CFP: Horizons of Modern Romanian Sculpture (online/Bucharest, 28-29 May 26). In: ArtHist.net, Feb 8, 2026 (accessed Feb 9, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/51696>>.