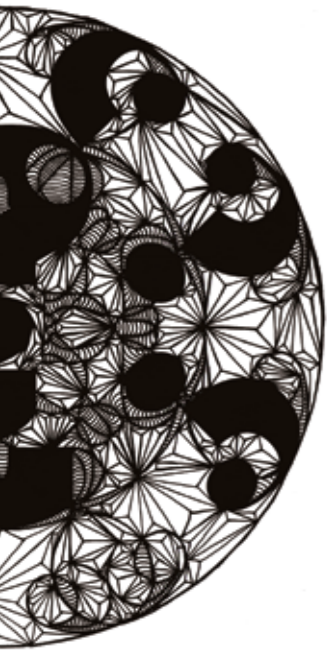


• Satan comes to Bucharest (Via TV news)



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN ART ATTACKS
AND THE SATANISTS SNEAK IN
THROUGH THE BACK DOOR?

WORDS Richard Unwin



Faced with this Manga-like scene on the streets of Bucharest, the Romanian TV News found it logical to draw only one conclusion; the city was under attack from Satan worshippers.

**ou will be able to picture
the scene but in the age
of mass-advertising.**

the viral spread of graffiti (good or bad) and the blurring of the two, you probably don't retain the innocence to be shocked. The city has been attacked. No one really knows who by, or what damage has been done, but the signs are there. Pink plaster cocoons have appeared on the concrete walls. A round face stares out from the top of each of these strange creations; whether they are meant to be babies or some kind of alien worm, people are unable to agree. From some of these brightly coloured parasites, which jar against the everyday grey, a white trickle oozes, as though they mean to infect the city. Maybe it is a poison to attack the citizens, or maybe they seek to spawn a multitude of ungodly creatures. Whatever it means, no one can deny that the cocoons are there, quietly waiting for the panic to follow.

Faced with this Manga-like scene on the streets of Bucharest, the Romanian TV News found it logical to draw only one conclusion; the city was under attack from Satan worshippers. These evildoers had apparently chosen the cocoons as the most hair-raising means of announcing their malevolent presence. It was a prospect taken seriously enough for cable channel Antena 1 to dedicate an entire prime-time segment to the story. Chocily presented by a reporter with the requisite damsel-in-distress looks, billowing red smoke and the music from Halloween playing in the background, this was B-movie journalism at its finest.

According to experts the satanic threat was real, with the 'Z' on the cocoons supposedly signalling some kind of end-game. There was also the influx of outsiders, stemming back to the arrival of Ukrainian Satanists in 1992. Could the burgeoning cult groups be using these cocoons to mark their territory like mafia clans?

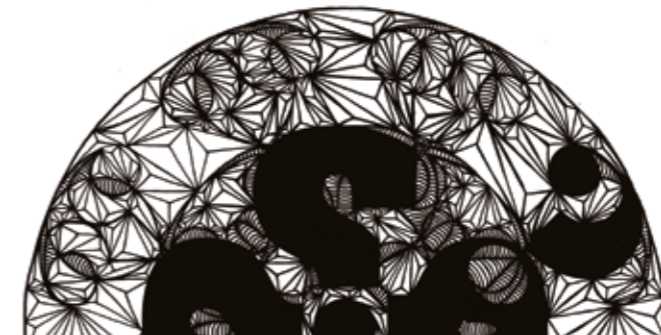
Or, perhaps these markers designated ritual sites where Satanists engaged in bloodletting, orgies and devil worship? A little unlikely since many of the cocoons were openly placed in the centre of the city, but this wasn't allowed to deter the news angle.

Unfortunately the team behind this fantastic story they had become victims of a hoax which was largely of their own making. There never were any Satanists involved here, just one artist - the admittedly mystically titled Gorzo - and an experiment in exhibiting art beyond its regular gallery environment. Quite where the Satanist angle came from only the news team can explain. For Gorzo's part, there was no attempt to lead people's perception of what these cocoons might be. He quite simply produced a batch of copycat figures, placed hundreds on walls around the city, and waited to see what happened.

The form behind this story is deep, and almost goes to the heart of Romania's transitional period as it shed its communist skin. Under Nicolae Ceausescu, city-planning in Bucharest was a form of building megalomania, where vast boulevards and the giant blocks of the new city provided a physical manifestation of his warped ideology. The result is a bewildering architectural sprawl; Ceausescu's modernist and neo-classical monoliths checked by relics of a more elegant style and the meditative lobes of the Orthodox Church. It ought to be the ideal canvas for a graffiti explosion. Surprisingly though, Bucharest is not significantly marked by the swathe of impromptu decoration that can be seen in other modern cities. The bare walls bear witness to the lingering influence of communist rule, when only the brave or reckless would have felt free to express themselves so brazenly.

In 2003, when Gorzo installed his sleeping figures, Bucharest's art scene had yet to blossom and was largely an underground phenomenon. It was in this relative vacuum that Gorzo's experiment was able to have such an amazing impact. The news story itself ran in October 2004, a year after the cocoons had first appeared. In the intervening period, common public reaction had linked the figures to the abortion debate, cult sects, or even earthquake warnings. Antena 1 ultimately ran a story revealing the truth behind the cocoons, though they never really explained or apologised for their satanic fantasies.

Gorzo is now an established artist, splitting his time between Bucharest and New York. Marrying rural influences from the Maramures region with pop sensibilities, his striking, stylistic paintings have continued to shock, breaking taboos of sexual representation and poking fun at national heroes. According to his Bucharest gallerist, Dan Popescu, however, the moment of artistic innocence for the Romanian people - exposed by the Satanists debacle - has now passed. For Popescu, Romania is now beginning to see the cultural fruits of a generation who have spent their teenage and adult years after the fall of Ceausescu.





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In our age of mass news media - with its repetitive bulletins and ratcheting of threat - the light hearted tale of Gorzo and his cocoons is as good an indication as any of where face-value facts will get you. Currently, all (including the uber-threat; terrorism) sit quietly as economic confusion fills the media output. Like many difficult issues, it is a debate that few can fully grasp. America of course, and perhaps the world, now has its new knight. The inauguration of Barack Obama joins the ranks of televised history. As

The Guardian said, this was 'the day, the hour, even the second' - comparable to the fall of the Berlin Wall or the first moon-landing. Romania's equivalent event came with the live coverage of the 1989 revolution, and the filmed execution of both Ceausecu and his wife. In what has been seen as a manifestation of national 'original-sin', TV was able to visualise the birth of freedom. It is a scale of drama to which Romania's media has subsequently strained to return, even if that means pulling Satanists out of hats. •

• White Lies

WORDS Rachel Edwards



or a band surrounded

by big expectations

(from a standing start precisely a year to the day ago), White Lies have got the musical year off to a flying start. The day is February 23rd and it's the height of London Fashion Week. Hunched in the backroom of the newly opened and highly anticipated Levis concept store on Carnaby Street, the stocked up mini bar can vouch for more elbow room than the four of us combined.

As they prepare for a sold out gig that evening, Jack Brown, Charles Cave and Harry McVeigh seem to have taken to the fashion/music overlap with surprising ease for a band whose performance palette extends no further than black.

Eager to sidestep the generic 'indie' tag bestowed upon them, White Lies are working towards a darker rock sound that they hope will shake things up a bit. "I would say we had more of a low-fi, scuzzy sound; a darker edge," speaks drummer, Jack, of their constantly evolving style. Working extensively with the Swedish music video director, Andreas Nilsson, who has worked with The Knife, Moby and Goldfrapp, his style, Charles explains, "encapsulates our style perfectly." White Lies will soon release their single Farewell To The Fairground, with the kind of anthemic lyrics that are expected from their collaborative efforts. Harry, the lead singer says the song is about escape; "Escape from things that have dried up, gone to waste, it's about moving on and going forward." Performing at their own sold out gigs in the forthcoming months, it's not at all bad for a 365 day turn around. •

Farewell To The Fairground is out on 23 March on Fiction. The new Levis concept store is at 51 Carnaby Street, London.

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