About the Photographer

Antip Petronela is a graduate student at the University of Bucharest and the National School of Political and Administrative Studies, where she is presently completing a Masters degree in Anthropology. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Communications and Public Relations from the National School of Political and Administrative Studies, and has previously worked as a Project Assistant at the TERRA Milenium III Foundation, and a Volunteer Coordinator for a material heritage project with the Save Bucharest Organization in Bucharest, Romania. Petronela grew up in Romania, and became interested in visual anthropology as an exchange student in Spain. She was originally attracted to photography by the intriguing ways the medium is able to communicate ideas about culture, and has found it an excellent way to explore many of the contradictions inherent in post-socialist life in Romania.

In this series of photographs, Petronela explores the modern material and cultural expressions of Romanian identity. Highly influenced by communism and the transition to capitalism that occurred in the post-socialist era, Romania is a country of competing identities. Religion, tradition, and a newly capitalist economy all influence modern material culture and social practices, and Petronela’s photographs are visual representations of how modern Romanians are navigating a transitional economy and culture.
Television Set in a Sewer, 2009

Near an industrial area in the village of Pantelimon, just outside of Bucharest, Romania, an old television set lies shattered in a gutter. The television in the photo is a model that was very common during communist times in Romania, and would originally have been a well cared-for source of pride for its owner. Now, discarded in a street near an industrial area, it is symbolic of the rejection of old social and cultural traits as Romanians embrace a new identity as a capitalist country.

As Romania undergoes an economic rejuvenation in the wake of post-socialist change, attitudes towards commodities are changing quickly. Shortly after the fall of communism, many material items that had seemed special and were prominently displayed, like television sets, were put aside and ignored. Where certain commodities had once seemed important because of their scarcity, they soon became reminders of an era viewed with disfavor. Today, there is a new emphasis on displaying very modern and high-tech items in the home, as people are eager to replace the remnants of communism with items that better reflect their emerging status in a capitalist, commodity-based society.
Bride on a Mountain, 2009

Family members surround a “stolen” bride on a mountain lookout in Zarnesti, Romania.

A long-standing cultural tradition in Romania, bride stealing originated with the idea that a young man had to prove his worth through a series of tests before being allowed to marry. Family members would abduct the bride before the wedding, and hide with her in a remote or significant place. To have her returned, the groom would sometimes have to answer riddles or negotiate a price. While the tradition has endured, its meaning has mostly been lost. In the present day, bride stealing is seen as a competition among family members to see who can bring their relative to the most inventive place. Modern brides are frequently brought to discos, downtown cores, historic monuments, and rooftops. Indicative of culture change in Romania, the emphasis today is on public performance rather than meaningful ritual.
Crucifix in a Courtyard, 2009

A crucifix stands in a private courtyard in Pantelimon, near Bucharest, Romania. The inscription says: “Romanians have always loved their country and had faith in God.”

*Troita*, or public monuments, have been erected in the form of crosses since the 14th century introduction of Christianity to Romania. The goal of *troita* is to connect the earth and sky, and purify the space in which they are placed. Originally located in public squares, near fountains, in graveyards, and in other socially important spaces, crucifix *troita* served as a public reminder of faith and belonging.

During communist rule, many rural villagers were displaced to the cities, where, despite bans on open expression of religion, they continued to erect intricately carved and decorated crucifix *troita* in urban areas, hidden in courtyards or behind buildings. These sites became meaningful despite having no previous religious significance.

In the present day, remaining public *troita* are often forgotten and neglected, and new *troita* are usually located on private, closed off properties, erected only by families that can afford them. The crucifix in this photo is located in a small private yard, and is an example of how the public display of belief has become a status symbol, representing the relative wealth of the family. *Troita* like this one have become an expression of how a private commodity has been made out of a symbol that once bound a community together.