

CURRENT ISSUES IN HUNGARIAN CONTEMPORARY ART

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DÉLIA VÉKONY
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FOREWORD
BY THE EDITOR

How much do we know about the art of the former Eastern Bloc? What is available in English language about the practices of the region? Aside from specific conferences and workshops addressing the subject, is it possible to get a thorough and deep understanding of what is actually happening in the field of contemporary art in, for instance, Hungary?

Hungarian Contemporary is a journal of contemporary Hungarian art in English language, and it is aimed to enable the international audience to engage with art in Hungary. It often happens that language barriers prevent proper engagement with certain local context, therefore the purpose of this publication is to abolish these linguistic boundaries and give an insight *through local eye but via an international language* to Hungary's complex, diverse and lively art scene.

This first volume presents five studies by selected art professionals, ranging from international, recognized experts to young voices in the art scene. All authors work in Hungary, and therefore have primary insight on what is going on. The volume addresses *current issues in Hungarian contemporary art*. Just what is it that matters for Hungarian artists these days, what is it that they are caught up with, what triggers them and why? Each author was asked to choose a theme that they think characterizes the present artistic practices.

Although most of the studies focus on artworks, the first text introduces the reader to the institutional structure of the Budapest art world. Hungary is a centralized country, so much of the activities of the contemporary art scene take place in Budapest.

The text by **Zsófia DANKA** provides guidelines, some kind of a 'map' for the reader to orientate themselves in the Hungarian art world. The diverse institutional structure has complex roles and it is good to know who to turn to if there is an intention to deepen one's knowledge or if thinking of collaboration.

The second study introduces the reader to the concept of post-communist iconology. **Sándor HORNYIK** frames artistic initiatives that are references to the past and present consequences of communism within iconology, and argues that the artistic work with these old icons and the visual consequences of communism is a unique voice not only locally, but it is also an important chapter for the study of iconology in general.

Róza Tekla SZILÁGYI's text about precarious conditions and contemporary art continues the proposition outlined by Hornyik, namely that socio-cultural conditions have always been visible in art. However, the Hungarian artists explored by Hornyik as well as those referred to by Szilágyi found a unique, local voice that is nonetheless comprehensible for an international audience. In her text, Szilágyi explores how the lifestyle, financial insecurity, project-based labour and the lack of a secure physical background puts the artist into the social class of the precariat. This inevitably defines not only the means how art is produced but also the issues that the artworks actually address.

Gerda SZÉPLAKY looks upon how post-feminism influences artistic practices in Hungary. It is again a unique position, as the communist past has influenced the

development of feminism very differently in the region compared to Western Europe. Furthermore, because of the Kádár-regime, Hungarian feminism took yet another turn, and it differs significantly from feminist practices in other countries of the region.

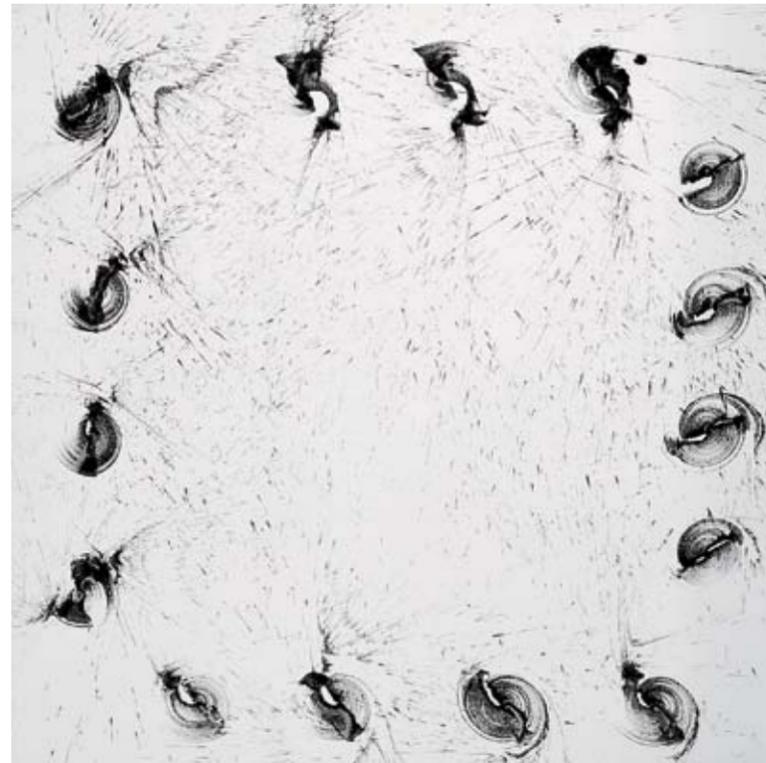
Finally, the study written by **Attila SIRBIK** takes the publication to yet another level. Sirbik practices the kind of art history in which the author does not create an analytical distance between himself and the artwork, but rather uses the text as a tool that takes the reader closer to art and facilitates an 'other-than-cognitive' engagement. The tone of Sirbik's text corresponds perfectly with the art he writes about, addressing the question of the body and its organs as the only site of certainty, the sole place of security in times when everything else is subjected to superimposed structures and the working of the speculative mind.

Thus, throughout the texts we experience a journey that starts with the practical matters of what to see, where to go, and who does what in Hungary, which is followed by an exploration of the art inspired by the communist past and its consequences as well as its place in iconology. Then the current social and financial status of the artist and the consequences of living conditions on art production is explored, followed by the role of women artists, addressing a new tone of femininity characteristic of the 21st century. Finally, we arrive to the human condition inspired by the physical rawness of the body, that, regardless of languages and national boundaries, defines all of us as human beings ■

current
issues
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contemporary
art



Dóra MAURER: Seven Twists VI/V, 1979/2011, silver print, 20x20cm, ed5 collection of Tate



István NÁDLER: Rotating to music III, 1982, acrylic on canvas, 120x120 cm

ZSÓFIA DANKA

ARTS VENUES FROM THE NEO-AVANT-GARDE TO THE PRESENT

The dynamics of the contemporary Hungarian art scene can be best understood by exploring its arts venues and the professional directions of operation they are taking. Knowing the works and professional goals of the artists associated with each institution will help one understand the exhibition trends of galleries and museums. The international attention surrounding Hungarian artists is highly dependent on their debut as well as their professional environment in their home country.

The only kind of art that can affect us is the kind that we can connect to in some way. However, understanding contemporary art and getting close to it does not happen overnight. As we find ourselves in a white cube space or in a huge museum, it can be quite frustrating to be suddenly faced with the challenge of having to learn a complex language that combines art history, aesthetics, sociology and history at the same time. That is why it is important to be aware of the nature of the sociocultural changes of the local, that is, the examined community. If we go even further, and specifically try to understand the art of this small Central Eastern European country today, we need to look back over the last fifty years. The global visibility of outstanding representatives of contemporary Hungarian fine art as well as the international success of the young generation of artists all prove that it is worthwhile and important to pay attention to what is happening in our country.

In the first part of this article, I outline the history and evolution of Hungarian fine art from the neo-avant-garde to the regime change (i. e. the end of Communism in Hungary). The heroic rebellion of the seventies, the progressive subcultures of the eighties, and the softening pop culture of the nineties put contemporary Hungarian fine art on an internationally sound footing. The arts venues, the creative communities, and the opportunities and visions of professionals from public institutions play a key role in presenting valuable examples of contemporary art. This was the case during the years of the socialist dictatorship, and it is still the case today.

Following this introduction to a very unique part of our cultural history, I will look into the most important art institutions, galleries and museums any traveller coming to Budapest must visit as well as the professional events one can attend. Moreover, the list includes a couple of venues that could be considered 'underground' (i. e. a bit farther away from the mainstream) – visiting those practically makes one a native insider.



Imre BAK: Charleston 1987, acrylic on canvas, 200x150 cm
Photo: Miklós Sulyok

FROM THE neo-avant-garde TO THE regime change

Hungarian neo-avant-garde art is quite difficult to understand without knowing its political background. Between 1957 and 1989, during the years of the socialist dictatorship led by János Kádár, the artists of the era faced many challenges. The ideological structure of the system greatly influenced their lives and career opportunities. Hallmarked by György Aczél, the gradually loosening state cultural policy of the communist era was determined by the system of three T's, namely "Tiltott, Tűrt, Támogatott" (Forbidden, Tolerated, Supported). While some artists were eligible for state sponsorship, others had to make a living in more unofficial ways. Manuscripts ready for publication were returned to the bottom of the drawer, many exhibitions were banned, houses were searched, and many people were fired from their jobs. Some sensitive issues for the government, including criticism of the dictatorship, the issues of the working class, poverty, the country's debt, the 1956 revolution, the Soviet occupation, the situation of ethnic Hungarians living outside the borders, as well as the persons of János Kádár and the main party and state leaders, were taboo. Tolerated artists had only the opportunity to organize exhibitions at their own expense, without any "advertising", at the Adolf Fényes Hall or at the Young Artists' Club (FMK), a significant semi-public venue of the era.

The Adolf Fényes Hall served as an official exhibition space for artists who were not considered worthy of support by cultural policy. The system of the so-called "self-paid" exhibitions was established here, which meant that unsupported artists and their experimental endeavors were also given a chance of public visibility. The Adolf Fényes Hall, whose exhibitions were organized by the Műcsarnok (Kunsthalle) from 1954, was home to exhibitions by such notable artists as Béla Kondor (1960),

János Fajó (1968), Lajos Kassák (Picture Architecture, 1967), Imre Bak and Gyula Konkoly (1970), or György Jovánovics and István Nádler (1970).

In addition to FMK, the Young Artists' Studio (FKSE), founded in 1958, was the most important organization for artists at the beginning of their career. The studio primarily helped fresh college graduates through scholarships, studio use, and by providing exhibition opportunities. The organization's own exhibition space, the Stúdió Gallery, opened in the summer of 1972 at 52 Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Road. Prior to this, members were only rarely able to arrange a solo exhibition through the Studio, so the association's management applied to the State Arts Fund (Művészeti Alap) to provide them with their own exhibition space. The unsupported avant-garde artists of the era were also exhibited in the István Csók Gallery in Székesfehérvár several times. As a culmination of her entire oeuvre, for instance, one of the most talented sculptors of the time Erzsébet Schaár composed a large-scale environment, entitled *Street*, for the upstairs space of the gallery in 1974. The exhibition was opened by poet János Pilinszky with his poems written for the occasion. The most exciting places during this period were the Bercsényi Street Dormitory of the Faculty of Architecture of the Budapest University of Technology and Economics, the Ganz Mávag Community Center, and the Béla Balázs Studio.

Outside these exhibition spaces in Budapest, members of the avant-garde art scene could organize their exhibitions in the ceremonial halls of culture houses or exhibition spaces in the countryside, but most often they were held in the artists' own studio. This is where the concept of "the second public" comes from, as the works

"criticism of the dictatorship, the issues of the working class, poverty, the country's debt, the 1956 revolution, the Soviet occupation, the situation of ethnic Hungarians living outside the borders, as well as the persons of János Kádár and the main party and state leaders, were taboo"



The opening of painter of István Zámbo's exhibition at the Young Artists' Club, 1983
Photo: Fortepan/ Péter Várkonyi



Erzsébet SCHAÁR: Street
1974, installation view
Istvan Csók Gallery

“Artists were united in their stand against official directives as well as the desire to find new ways of artistic creation.”

of countless artists could not reach the general, wider public; they could only be presented semi-officially, to a smaller audience. Of course, the concept of the second public is often very problematic, as the formal and informal art scene intertwined many times and in many ways. The prohibition of the works of certain artists was at times completely illogical and inconsistent, since it also depended heavily on the arbitrary decision of the government official in action.¹

Open only for a few days in 1968 and 1969, the so-called Iparterv exhibitions have become the eponym for a whole generation of artists. The tragicomic nature of cultural politics is marked by the fact that this progressive exhibition was stuck in the hall of a construction company headquarters, hence their name (Iparterv is short for Ipari Épülettervező Vállalat, i. e. Industrial Building Design Company). A freshly graduated art historian, curator Péter Sinkovits invited eleven young avant-garde artists to the first exhibition, namely Imre Bak, Krisztián Frey, Tamás Hencze, György Jovánovics, Ilona Keserü, Gyula Konkoly, László Lakner, Sándor Molnár, István Nádler, Ludmil Siskov and Endre Tót. The following year, András Baranyay, János Major, László Méhes and Tamás Szentjóby joined the list of artists. Ever since then, these canon-making exhibitions have been present as reference points in Hungarian art history. In February 2019, the Ludwig Museum opened its large-scale exhibition entitled Iparterv 50+ on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the second Iparterv exhibition. The exhibition was accompanied by a number of guided tours, talks and lectures, which were held by members of the Iparterv generation among others.

Despite his intellectual greatness, his astonishing versatility and prolificacy as an artist, one of the most vehemently banned artists of the time was Lajos Kassák. A world-renowned representative of historical avant-garde, he did not live to see the Iparterv exhibitions; however, his personality and doctrines have left an enduring imprint on the art world. Kassák was the original leader of Hungarian avant-garde, a multi-talented writer, poet, literary translator and artist. His artistic approach and manifestos have for generations shaped the thinking of Hungarian artists: “We can no longer fit into the traditional limits, either in society or in art. We do not want to compose something new from the old. Our age is the age of constructivists. Art, science, technology come together at one point. The new form is the architecture [architektúra].”²

The artistic principles introduced by Kassák were revived in the endeavours of New Constructivists. Unique painting techniques have emerged, such as hard edge painting, painting on molded canvas, or the deconstruction of traditional panel painting. János Fajó’s vibrant colors, Ilona Keserü’s folk motifs, Imre Bak’s geometric structures, and István Nádler’s lyrical abstraction have evolved around these ideas. The grip of Communism was loosening, and artists were given more and more opportunities to show their works.

It is here that we have to mention one of the most important movements of the era to which countless great artists were able to connect: concept art (or conceptual art), which opened up whole new perspectives for artists. Instead of the market value of the works of art, total ‘immateriality’ has taken precedence. The spread of conceptualism has brought about a paradigm shift that changed the earlier conception of art. The main figures

1 Beke, László: Tűrni, tiltani, támogatni – A hetvenes évek avantgardja [Tolerating, forbidding, supporting – The avantgard (sic!) of the seventies], in: Második nyilvánosság – XX. századi magyar művészet [The Second Public – Hungarian art in the 20th century], ed. Hans Knoll, Enciklopédia Kiadó, Budapest, 2002.

2 Kassák, Lajos: Előszó [Introduction], in: Kassák, Lajos – Moholy-Nagy, László (eds.): Új művészek könyve [The Book of New Artists], Vienna, 1922. (Editor’s note: “architektúra” in the original text translates as architecture, but also refers to the gist of architecture that is the constructivist spirit, namely the coming together of art, science and technology in building a new vision of the world.)



Endre TÓT:
I am glad if I can stare at the wall
1975, silver gelatin print, 11,9x9 cm

of conceptualism were Tamás Szentjóby and Miklós Erdély, but a number of artists, including Dóra Maurer and Gyula Pauer, had conceptualist periods in their oeuvres. Conceptualism has emerged in Hungary in the 1960s, reaching its ‘golden age’ in the mid-70s. Its enormous impact is mainly due to the change of attitude that can still be felt in the works of numerous artists. Sometimes directly, sometimes more indirectly, but it had a great influence on the works of Emese Benczúr, Balázs Beöthy, Antal Lakner, Attila Menesi, Gyula Várnai, Pál Gerber, Gábor Gerhes, Szilvia Seres and János Sugár.³

One of the most prominent informal art venues of the time, was the Chapel Studio in Balatonboglár (Balatonboglári Kápolnaműterem). After finding the abandoned chapel, painter György Galántai decided to found an exhibition space that would house progressive exhibitions that were often banned in Budapest. He rented the chapel for fifteen years from the Catholic Church. Following a series of lengthy bureaucratic procedures, the first exhibition opened in 1970. Over time, “traditional” exhibitions originally falling into the ‘tolerated’ category, were gradually replaced by increasingly progressive ones featuring actionist and performative events experimenting with various media, as well as

projects expressing criticism of the current institutional and political system. The Chapel Studio soon became the most important meeting and creative base of neo-avant-garde art; in addition to Hungarian artists, it also had a significant number of international guests. Various experimental art events were held over three summers: the venue hosted Dóra Maurer’s poetry presentation, Péter Halász’s theatre productions, László Beke’s lectures and Tamás Szentjóby’s happenings. The ever-suspicious, often “unmanageable” events and exhibitions did not go unnoticed by cultural politics. At first, they tried to undermine the activities, then in August 1973, the lease for the chapel was terminated and Galántai, who was living there at the time, was evicted.⁴

The government has made it difficult for artists to emerge and to thrive, but politics have also greatly contributed to catalyzing modern art trends. Artists were united in their stand against official directives as well as the desire to find new ways of artistic creation. The emerging genre of mail art at that time provided an opportunity for international connections. A new kind of interdisciplinarity was emerging, with strictly defined genres being gradually replaced by a transmedial artistic attitude.

3 Hegyi, Lóránd: Utak az avantgárdból – Tanulmányok kortárs művészekről [Ways from the Avant-garde – studies about contemporary artists], Jelenkor Kiadó, Pécs, 1989.

4 Klaniczay, Júlia – Sasvári, Edit: Törvénytelen avantgárd [Illegal Avant-garde], Artpool-Balassi, Budapest, 2003.



László FEHÉR: Green Stairs (Dégi memories series)
1987, oil on fibreboard, 200x180 cm
Photo: Miklós Sulyok

Along with the mixing of genres and the spread of new mediums, the dimensions of painting have also widened. Surnaturalism (a combination of surrealism and naturalism) was replaced by hyperrealism, although that was typical of only a certain period of time for most artists. Hyperrealism appeared primarily in the oeuvres of Tibor Csernus, László Fehér and Ákos Birkás. In the second half of the 1970s, performance art emerged as a continuation of body art and happening. The most notable artist of the genre was Tibor Hajas, whose artistic searchings revolved around the aesthetics of life and death. Hajas, like his contemporaries, experimented in several genres; he primarily considered himself a poet, but it was his performances that made him widely known to posterity. As the desire to capture the unrepeatably moment was always an important goal of his art, his performances were always accompanied by photographic documentation. A recurring elements of these photographs is the flashing light of magnesium or a modern flash. His most common topics were the suffering of the body, self-sacrifice, and the destruction of the ego, an idea borrowed from Eastern philosophy.⁵

In the eighties, the previous system of values changed considerably. Rejection and overwriting have been replaced by a consistent reassessment of artistic legacies and tradition. Lóránd Hegyi, the most prominent curator and art historian of the period before the regime change, divided this decade into three coexistent trends. The first is individual mythology, the second is new painting or new sensibility, and the third is the post-geometric trend. The constant search for identity, confrontation with cultural history and subjective historicism are all the more characteristic of this period. From a formal point of view, pluralism and eclecticism were the most prominent, and were vigorously present until the early nineties. According to Lóránd Hegyi's typology, the "new sensibility" brought with it much more resigned, introverted, almost sensual works in contrast with avant-garde modernity and conceptualism. Artworks proclaiming the cult of individuality were born, and the members of the group of New Sensitivity had numerous exhibitions both in Hungary and abroad.

The exhibition *Eclecticism*, held in the Hungarian National Gallery in 1986, is of outstanding importance in the context of the Hungarian art scene, since new artistic trends were now allowed to appear in a state institution. It was at this time that a change of attitude has started: the strict opposition to contemporary art began to dissolve. The Knoll Gallery and the TAT Gallery in Vienna exhibited more and more Hungarian artists, and several previously prohibited publications were printed.⁶

The soft dictatorship of the 1980s came to an end, and in 1990 a change of regime took place, which triggered huge changes in society. The Berlin Wall was torn down, Moscow's central governing power weakened, free elections were called, and the Czech Republic and Slovakia split up. The principle of the three T's has finally been abolished in the press and in the arts. The precondition for the creation of art projects was not the ideological or political support, but the financial background. State support for art remained, albeit significantly reduced. The distinction between the "first" and "second public" dissolved, and the search for identity began again among Hungarian artists. This particular quest is all the more justified as the opposition to power became obsolete, and new goals and visions had to be found.

PLACES, MISSIONS, OPPORTUNITIES – THE VENUES AND THE ROLE OF CONTEMPORARY ART IN BUDAPEST

During the Communist oppression, progressive artists were mostly excluded from state institutions and could exhibit only in the ceremonial halls of cultural houses and their own studios. With the loosening of the system and the softening of dictatorship, the banning of artists have become increasingly rare. In the period immediately following the change of regime, private galleries such as Knoll

or Várfok also played an important role in contemporary research: without their work, it would be much more difficult to reconstruct the fine art trends of the 1990s in Hungary.

The change of regime also meant a change for the art scene in the financial sense: although state support for art was reduced, artists could apply for numerous grants, while for-profit galleries also started to flourish. In 2004, Hungary joined the European Union, which also led to newer and easier applications for grants and fellowships as well as residency programs and international cooperations.

Similarly to other countries, the scarcity of public institutions' annual budget for buying new artworks still does not allow them to provide stable financial support for artists. The canon-making power of the most important state-run institutions of contemporary art in Hungary, the Ludwig Museum, the Hungarian National Gallery, the Capa Center, the Modern in Debrecen, the Budapest Gallery on the domestic scale is indisputable. However, many times politics, the maze of administration and bureaucratic hurdles prevent them from realizing a truly progressive and generous program. In municipal galleries and exhibition spaces artists usually receive little or no financial support for the organization of their exhibitions. Being an artist in the nineties could only be a part-time job – just as it was in the neo-avant-garde. This trend is slightly improving as we are headed towards 2020.

The art market is growing considerably, many contemporary artists are supported by the Derkovits Scholarship Program, the Esterházy Art Award, or the collectors of the gallery that represents them. Still, younger artists are often only able to support themselves fully by holding down multiple jobs, which typically includes teaching and applied graphic design jobs. Curator Tamás Don has dealt with the financial difficulties and social image of beginning artists at several exhibitions, such as *Time of Our Lives?* (Modern, 2018) or *Therapy* (Centrális Gallery, 2018). It is indeed a difficult topic, as making a living as a contemporary artist is nowhere near easy.

⁵ Beke, László: Neoavantgárd magatartásformák [Neo-avant-garde behaviors], in: Magyar művészet 1800-tól napjainkig [Hungarian art from 1800 to the present], Corvina Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 2002.

⁶ Hegyi, Lóránd: Új helyzetben új identitás – A nyolcvanas évek magyar művészete [New situation, new identity – Hungarian art in the eighties], In: Második nyilvánosság – XX. századi magyar művészet [The Second Public – Hungarian art in the 20th century], ed. Hans Knoll, Enciklopédia Kiadó, Budapest, 2002.



Esterházy Art Award 2017
Esterházy Privatstiftung,
Hungary



Tilo SCHULZ: Thin red line and Curtain
(skin colour red), exhibiton: There is a hole
in the back of my head and I enjoy looking out of it
Budapest, acb Gallery, 2015
Photo: Uwe Walter

“Today, for-profit galleries in Budapest are the most prominent in the spreading of new trends and the representation of young Hungarian artists abroad.”

However, this trend is not only true for artists. Most of the theoreticians who leave public institutions find new employment in private galleries. This is partly due to the increasing amount of research and publications financed by for-profit galleries.

Since the millennia, the Western European and American idea of a well-established, accomplished artist’s mindset being much closer to that of a manager or entrepreneur than to a creator quietly working alone in their specific field is not completely foreign to our country either. Today, for-profit galleries in Budapest are the most prominent in the spreading of new trends and the representation of young Hungarian artists abroad. Participation in art fairs abroad, artist exchange programs and increasing sales put Hungarian artists on the map of the international art world.

It is beyond the scope of this article to present a complete list of art venues of the present, but below there is a list of the most remarkable private galleries in Budapest, the must-visit state institutions and the most exciting off-spaces.

There is no doubt that acb Gallery is currently the most successful for-profit contemporary art gallery in Hungary. Acb opened in 2003 to represent neo-avant-garde and contemporary artists in Hungary and abroad. At the start, their resident artists included Imre Bak, Katalin Ladik, Tamás Hencze, Gyula Pauer, Tamás Komoróczy, Marcell Esterházy, Gábor Gerhes, Ferenc Gróf, etc.

Since 2016, the gallery has been organizing exhibitions in three different spaces: the acb Gallery, the acb Attachment, and the acb NA. In addition to the operation of the three exhibition venues, they cooperate with several state art institutions, so they often lend artworks and organize exhibitions at external venues as well. Foreign guest curators and artists are often invited to the exhibition spaces, on the one hand, for the purpose of constantly expanding the circle of acquaintances, and, on the other hand, keeping track of international art paradigms.

The owner of the gallery, Gábor Pados is a true trendsetter of the Hungarian art scene. In his view, Hungary would have to overcome provincialism as well as the characteristic depressive attitude in order to have a really successful art scene – and we must admit, he is not wrong. Before the foundation of the gallery, Pados started to become acquainted with Hungarian art due to the influence of his childhood artist friends (later called the Újlak Group) from Szombathely. In 1988, his passion for collecting began by purchasing one of Péter Szarka’s oil paintings, which eventually evolved into a respectable selection called the Irokéz Collection. The current curator of the gallery is Áron Fenyvesi, whose main goals include, in addition to supporting the careers of young artists, exploiting the increased interest in the art trends of the 60s and 70s. Acb’s professional renown has been increasing even more since September 2015

with the establishment of the acb ResearchLab division. ResearchLab focuses on researching, processing and publishing neo-avant-garde and post-avant-garde oeuvres in Hungary in the context of current international discourses.

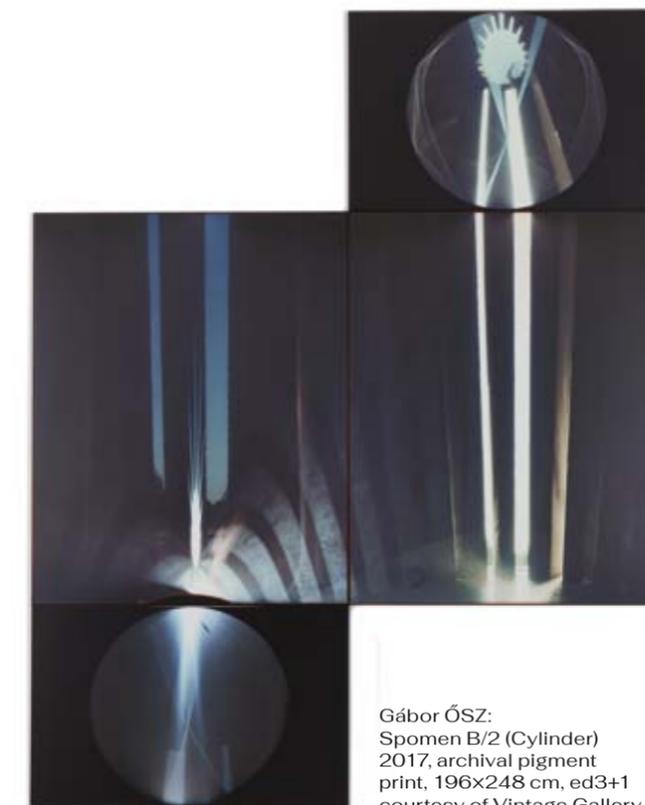
One of the oldest for-profit galleries in the country, the Várfok Gallery was founded in 1990 by Károly Szalóky, a charismatic personality of the Hungarian art scene. Located in the neighbourhood of the Buda Castle District, the gallery is divided into two units. In its larger, nearly 300 square meter exhibition space, exhibitions of accomplished contemporary artists are held. From the list of long-time loyal resident artists of the gallery we have to mention Péter Korniss, El Kazovszkij and János Szirtes, who probably had/have the greatest impact on the younger generations. The Project Room, located on the other side of the street, specifically features emerging artists, such as Máté Orr, known for his fascinating figurative paintings, László Gyórfy, famous for his horror-inducing paintings and objects, or Roland Kazi, an intermedia artist who explores human perception and identity.

Another notable commercial gallery in the capital is the Vintage Gallery, which is located next to the Károlyi Garden. Opened in 1996, their mission is to represent Hungarian modern and contemporary art both in Hungary and abroad. As photography inhabits an especially significant place in their portfolio, they have been exhibitors at the Paris Photo Fair from the 1990s to the present. Although, most of

the contemporary artists associated with the Vintage Gallery cannot be called photographers per se, photography is widely represented in the majority of their artists’ oeuvres. The owner of the gallery, Attila Pócze, started his career at the Mai Manó House of Hungarian Photography and opened his own gallery a few years later.

The Vintage Gallery covers three topics: modern Hungarian photography between the two World Wars, conceptual art from the 1960s to the change of regime, and contemporary art. Their team of artists includes, among others, Miklós Erdély, Kamilla Szíj, Gábor Ósz, Tibor Gáyor, Andreas Fogarasi, Vera Molnár, Péter Türk, and Dóra Maurer, an outstanding figure of Hungarian fine arts, whose solo exhibition opened at Tate Modern in London in the fall of 2019.

The Vintage Gallery also represents artists experimenting with new media (e. g. Gábor Ósz). An important part of the Gallery’s operation is the publication of books and various publications, which not only “extend” the duration of exhibitions, but also generate contact and new context for them.



Gábor ÓSZ:
Spomen B/2 (Cylinder)
2017, archival pigment
print, 196x248 cm, ed3+1
courtesy of Vintage Gallery

“The gallery also cooperates with foreign guest curators and artists, breaking open and reinterpreting the strict boundaries of art exhibitions to engage in dialogue on important social issues”

Perhaps the most professional in managing international presence, the Molnár Ani Gallery is also a significant point of reference in the Hungarian scene. The gallery mainly deals with installations, sculptures and paintings, but also shows great openness to transmedial arts. Integrating Hungarian art into the international scene was an important goal for them from the beginning. Economist Annamária Molnár, the owner of the gallery, has been selecting fine art pieces with impeccable taste for eleven years now. The list of exhibited artists include emerging artists like Sári Ember, Balázs Csizik or Dániel Bernáth; Emese Benczúr, Ottó Vincze and Ekaterina Shapiro-Obermair represent the middle generation, István Haász and Tamás Waliczky the older generation. Indeed, the experiences of gallerists show that survival in the international contemporary art market is only possible with an international team of artists and by cooperating with foreign galleries.

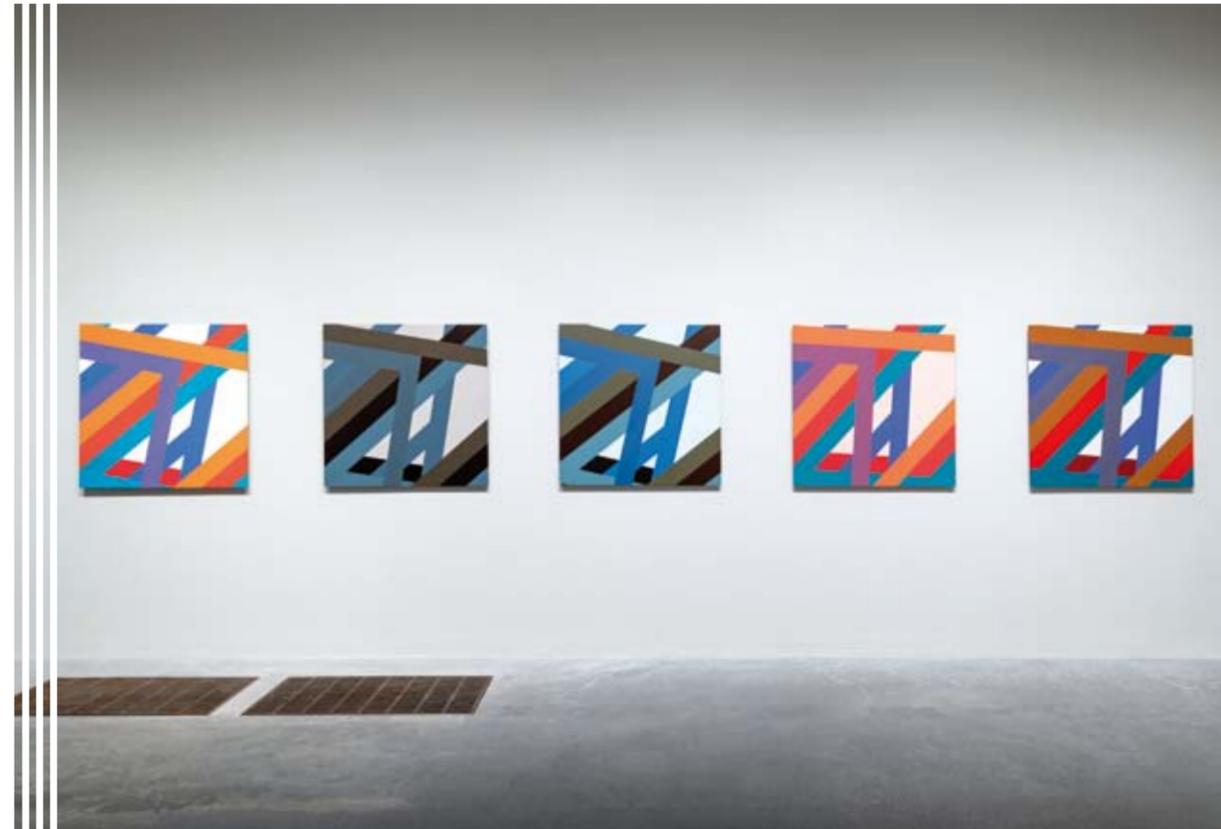
Gallery owner Erika Deák also attaches great importance to the creation and maintenance of international discourse. One of the prominent artists of her gallery, Attila Szűcs was contacted by the Federico Luger Gallery in Milan thanks to several years of fruitful cooperation. The Erika Deák Gallery was established in 1998 and has been an important part of the contemporary art scene in Budapest ever since. Since 2014, Zita Sárvári has been in charge of foreign relations and the development of the gallery's artistic profile. Erika Deák has attached great importance to mediation between the public and contemporary art from the beginning. In her view, the task of a gallery is to create a milieu that anyone can enter, and in which a connection between the viewer and the exhibition is born. In addition to his for-profit activities, Erika Deák participated in the Bátor Tábor Charity Auction for many years.

Starting her career at the prestigious Knoll Gallery, Margit Valkó founded the Kisterem

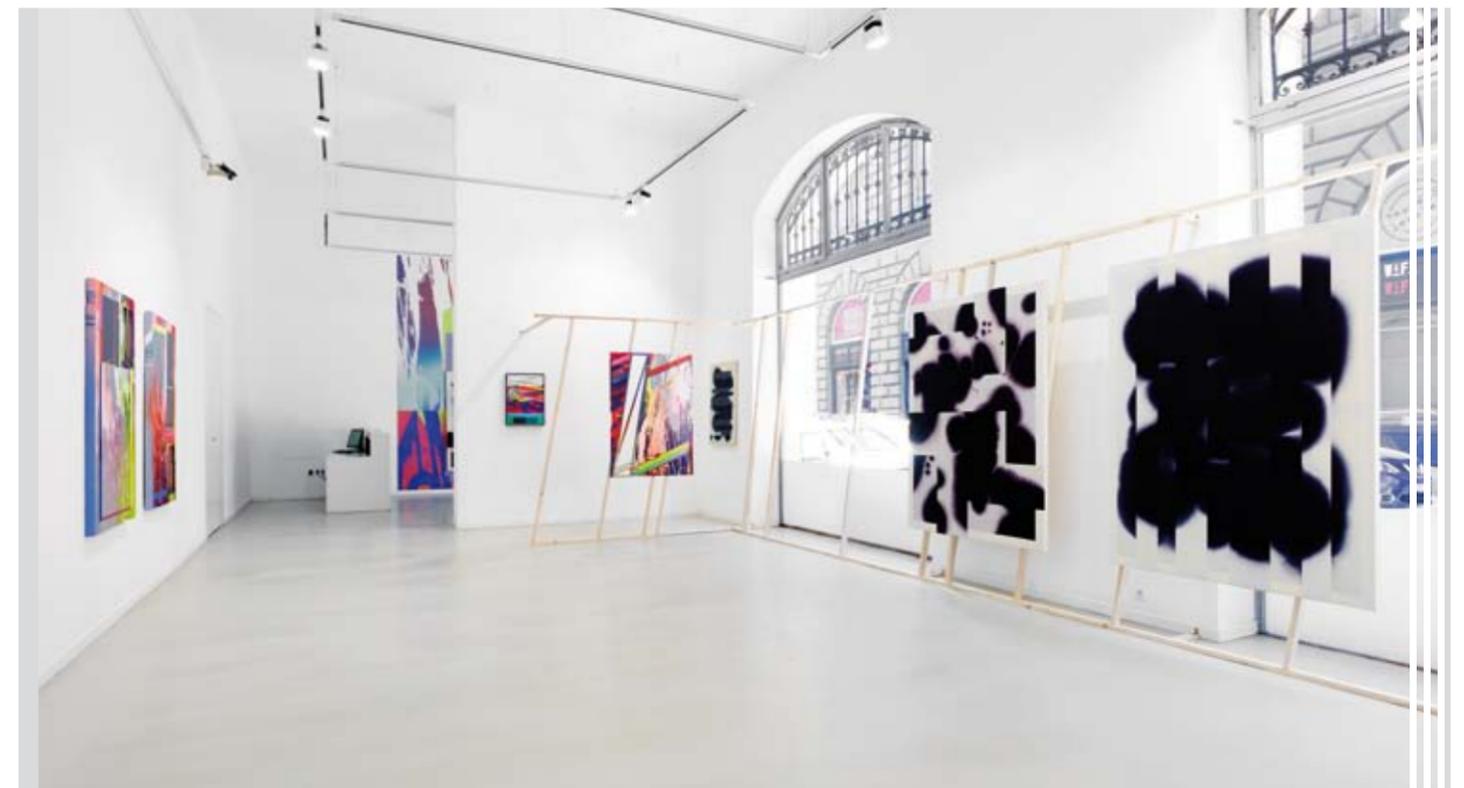
Gallery in 2006. She built up the small-sized commercial gallery patiently and very consciously, knowing that the vast majority of Hungarian art collectors were not used to consuming experimental contemporary art. Almost immediately after its establishment, Kisterem started to participate in art fairs. Since then they have appeared on Frieze, Liste and FIAC, several times as the only Hungarian gallery. Breaking into the international art scene and participating in fairs, however, is extremely costly and, in the short term, often quite unprofitable, but both the gallery and the exhibited artist(s) are propelled into a higher category after appearing at a high-profile fair like Frieze London. Getting into fairs is also made more difficult by the fact that Eastern European countries do not have a competitive class of buyers, therefore, many aspiring artists have to work harder to get into the professional scene than the already established artists whose works are already popular among collectors. Nevertheless, Hungarian artists are able to attend world-class fairs more and more often, moreover, with great success, such as Zsófia Keresztes at last year's Liste.⁷

Former director of the Ludwig Museum, Barnabás Bencsik, wandered into “uncharted territory” in 2017 – and what a great decision he made! Together with Tünde Csörgő, they founded the Glassyard Gallery, which in my opinion is one of the most progressive galleries in Budapest. Their artists have been selected with great taste, the quality of the exhibitions is quite balanced, while their narrative is relevant and visually striking. Among the contracted artists is the Lőrinc Borsos artist duo, known for their interdisciplinary work; Péter Puklus, who connects different mediums; Áron Kútvölgyi-Szabó, who deals with cognitive distortions and fake news; Antal Lakner, initially a member of the post-conceptualist generation; Szilvia Bolla, who is playing with the nature of light; and

Installation view of Dóra Maurer exhibition at Tate Modern, 2019
Photo: Tate Photography
Matt Greenwood



Márton NEMES and Małgorzata SZYMANEKIEWICZ: Exhibition Interior Erika Deák Gallery, 2019
Photo: David Biro



⁷ <http://zsofiakeresztes.com/user-experience/liste-2018-/> (Last downloaded: 27 October 2019)



Liquid Bodies Exhibition Interior
aqB Project Space, 2018
Photo: Áron Wéber



The Many Lives of Erik KESSELS
Exhibition Interior
Photo: Imre Kiss (Mai Manó Ház)



Back to the Future
- The 19th Century in the 21st Century
Exhibition Interior
Photo: Imre Kiss (Mai Manó Ház)

Attila Csörgő, who explores human perception. Each and every one of them create unusual, often surprising intermediary works, and are of prominent international importance. We hope that the gallery's initial breakthrough successes will continue.

Basically, every artist expects their gallerist to promote them, to connect them with foreign galleries, and provide them an opportunity to introduce themselves, so they can be discovered more quickly by both art professionals and collectors. For this reason, the majority of private galleries now strive to collaborate with several foreign artists to facilitate networking and cross-border discourse. Hungarian artists also need to see where the various creative trends are going abroad to be able to reflect on global issues as well as to examine their own situation and themes from different angles. In addition to their for-profit activities, the galleries mentioned above undertake a cultural mission. However, there are also spaces that, due to their dominantly unique profile, become refreshing spots of the scene. From the Budapest art scene, I would like to mention the outstanding feminist project gallery called FERi. Led by art historian and curator Kata Olta, this project space hosts extremely important art and community events. Talks, visual festivals, lectures, film screenings, exhibition openings and finissages, and even theses consultations, all connected to women's perspectives and gender studies, are happening here. The gallery

also cooperates with foreign guest curators and artists, breaking open and reinterpreting the strict boundaries of art exhibitions to engage in dialogue on important social issues. I would like to hope that more and more similar initiatives will be launched in Budapest in the future.

The idea of a large-scale, privately-owned, multifunctional arts centre in Europe has long been widespread; in Hungary, it is just beginning to take root. Located in the buildings of the old Haggemacher Brewery, the place closest to this model is Art Quarter Budapest, one of my favourite off-spaces.

It is true that it is located on the edge of the city, but what happens here always draws you out of your entrenched ways of thinking and from the anxieties of everyday life, which is especially uplifting. The huge brewery building offers plenty of opportunities for creative activity. In addition to contemporary art exhibitions, there are theatre and circus performances as well as concerts, conferences and other events. They also host a residency program and, not surprisingly, a studio. The spaces have been beautifully renovated, yet retain the ancient atmosphere of the place. Since its opening in 2015, the aqB Project Space has hosted many great projects both from Hungary and abroad.

Another large off-space is the Artkartell Project Space. Located in the former industrial site of the PP Center and spreading 45,000 square meters, its exhibitions are curated by Gábor Rieder in collaboration with Marcell Pátkai.

Among the institutions with a foundation as their background, the favourite refuge of many is the House of Hungarian Photographers in Nagymező Street, or as everyone calls it, the Mai Manó House. Built at the end of the 19th century, the magical studio house is the intellectual and professional centre of Hungarian photography. Primarily serving as an exhibition space, its objective is to introduce both classic and contemporary representatives of Hungarian and international photography to the Hungarian audience. In addition, they regularly organize conferences, guided tours, book and catalogue launches. It is worth checking out their tiny but immensely rich bookstore, where sometimes you can even buy unique numbered photographic publications. Thanks to Mai Manó House's professional embeddedness, they have been assisting the artistic, scientific and cultural activities of photography since 1995 as well as highlighting the professional and social status and role of Hungarian photography.

Across the street from Mai Manó House there is the Robert Capa Contemporary Photography Center, housed in the former Ernst Museum. Launched in 2013, the institution has been the leading visual centre in the country ever since. Thanks to its fresh-faced curatorial staff, the Capa Centre's exhibitions always provide a relevant and straightforward approach to global and local art issues.

A short distance from the city centre, there is the Ludwig Museum, Hungary's premier contemporary art institution, which can be reached by a pleasant journey by tram along the Danube quay. The museum was founded by Irene and Peter Ludwig, a German collector couple in 1989, and is currently directed by Dr. Júlia Fabényi. In addition to promoting contemporary art, Ludwig is engaged in a significant community building activity, with a particular focus on social responsibility. Instead of hosting travelling exhibitions, they organize their exhibitions with in-house curators, focusing on the domestic audience. Since 2015, the Ludwig Museum organizes both the art and architecture exhibitions of the Hungarian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

The main task of the Hungarian National Gallery, located in the Buda Castle, is to present Hungarian art from the Middle Ages to the 20th century, but its profile also includes contemporary art. The leader of the contemporary collection, Zsolt Petrányi, and his team are organizing outstanding exhibitions that are worth paying attention to.

The Hungarian contemporary art scene is becoming increasingly diverse and internationally acclaimed, to the delight of audiences and professionals alike. Many new art institutions and exhibitions will open in the near future, which we hope will expand the scope of domestic art and launch further international co-operations. ■

sándor HORNYIK

POST-COMMUNIST ICONOLOGY



János KÓSA: Offering
2010, oil on canvas, 190x200 cm
photo: Miklós Sulyok

If one thinks of Cesare Ripa or Nicolas Poussin, then perhaps it is not so difficult to see that the first iconologists were in fact artists whose work, deeply embedded in society and culture, inspired the first iconographers. However, in the name of scientific purposes, fuelled by the modern cult of positivism and rationalism, Erwin Panofsky and his followers sought to separate images from the personal desires and motivations of their creators.¹ Thus, according to many, iconology has become a mere tool of mapping, an illustration of the history of ideas, and the special potential, power and energy of images have been overshadowed. Then, in the last third of the 20th century, along with the postmodern critique of modernity, German, French, and American art historians rediscovered the specific (intellectual and emotional) logic of images from the perspective of social history and post-structuralism, which, as a kind of special psychohistory, reveals the unprecedented complexity of history and culture.²

A renitent iconologist and an enthusiastic reader of Nietzsche, Aby Warburg referred to images, even in the modern era of rationalism, as “canned energy that stores emotional and intellectual energies, desires, and motivations”³ whose power has always been recognized (albeit more on an emotional than an intellectual level) by politicians and merchants as by artists and designers.

The postmodern followers of Warburg and Panofsky thus expanded the iconological arch spanning from the Renaissance and Counter-Reformation to technical images and the World Wars for the era of the Cold War and global capitalism, when such reflected artists as Robert Rauschenberg and Jean-Luc Godard continued to shape our knowledge of how images operate. The second half of the twentieth century, however, did not enter history as the heyday of avant-garde, but of late

capitalism, when, despite the critical intentions of avant-garde art, its subversive creativity and innovativeness was integrated into the technologies of creating the capitalist and socialist spectacle, an ideologically organized imaginary worldview.⁴ Of course, the avant-garde itself reacted to the consciousness-shaping power of capitalist economy and politics by pointing out the cultural logic of recuperation in the footsteps of Roland Barthes and Guy Debord, and responded to the challenges with various programs of hijacking and appropriating popular images.⁵ Cubist collage and Dadaist photomontage, for example, were absorbed into consumer culture as quickly as the biomorphic shapes of surrealism, to which situationists and pop art responded by re-interpreting images of mass culture and daily politics (the former called this technique *détournement*, the latter *appropriation*).

- 1 In the first half of the 20th century, iconology sought to legitimize itself as a modern science based on facts and rational reasoning, while, on the other hand, to distance itself from populist political movements that appeal to emotions (i.e. fascism, Nazism, communism).
- 2 While German and French critical iconology, born in the eighties, was mainly inspired by the oeuvre of Aby Warburg, American iconology confronted the art history of Erwin Panofsky and Ernst H. Gombrich with post-structuralist epistemology and modern language philosophy. See Warnke, Martin et al. (ed.): Handbuch der Politischen Ikonographie I-II. Beck, München, 2014. Bredekamp, Horst: Theorie des Bildakts. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 2010. Didi-Huberman, Georges: L'Image survivante. Histoire de l'art et temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg. Minuit, Paris, 2002. Didi-Huberman, Georges: Quand les images prennent position. L'Oeil de l'histoire 1. Minuit, Paris, 2009. Mitchell, W. J. T.: Picture Theory. Essays on Verbal and Visual Representations. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1994.
- 3 See Warburg, Aby: Grundbegriffe, II, Notizbuch, 1929, p. 21. Quote from Gombrich, Ernst H.: Aby Warburg. An Intellectual Biography. Warburg Institute, London, 1970, p. 243.
- 4 Debord's complex and ironic interpretation of the spectacle can be simplified by combining Marx's interpretation of ideology (false consciousness) with Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis-based notion of the Imaginary, which is roughly the sum of mental images endowed with meaning. See Debord, Guy: La Société du spectacle. Minuit, Paris, 1967.
- 5 The medical and energetic concept of recuperation has been applied by Roland Barthes and Guy Debord to the process of capitalist economy and culture incorporating and reusing avant-garde criticism originally going against them. See Boltanski, Luc – Chiapello, Eve: The New Spirit of Capitalism. Verso, London, 2005.



Attila SZŰCS: Playground with Lightning
2005, oil in canvas, 200x240cm

Attila SZŰCS: Congress
2002, oil on canvas, 200x240 cm

The post-communist reinterpretation of communist iconography began in Hungary as early as the 1970s, with internationally well-known pieces (actions and photographs) by Dóra Maurer, Sándor Pinczehelyi and Bálint Szombathy. In the eighties, the process accelerated even further in the post-modern wave of New Wave, which had actually already crushed the original cultural context and pathos of communist icons. Later, the slow extinction of the socialist system made some elements of old communist iconography obsolete and even kitschy. However, the deeper interpretation of allegorical figures and symbolic forms, the visual processing of the past, the analysis of the optical unconscious of visual culture with a social-historical, anthropological or psychohistorical motivation, were not realized due to lack of interest, time and money. The real and (in the Derridean sense) imaginary ghosts of communism thus continued to permeate not only macroeconomics but also the personal dimensions of micro-history, because they could easily change shape and form.⁶ Perhaps this absence, or the paradoxically haunting situation (the past lived on, but in a different form) also motivated artists to breathe new life into communist iconography from the late nineties.

As one of the earliest exploitations of the memory confused by the change of regime, painter Attila Szűcs (an artist rooted in post-conceptualism) painted a picture of the number

one icon of socialism, the chief of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, János Kádár, who passed away not long before the regime change in 1989, in a manner that it also recalled the heyday of propagandistic Hungarian television of the seventies.

However, not only the propaganda and the politically controlled media, as well as the figures of Brezhnev and Kádár, but memory itself and memory politics came into focus on the picture entitled *Congress* (2002). In a blurry painting reminiscent of a flickering TV screen, the characteristic wall patterns (painted with a roller) of the sixties and seventies also recreate the sleepy, worn-out mood of the era, and at the same time refers to the way in which mediated reality has transformed the tangible world of people's lives. In other words, the picture casts an eerie light on how János Kádár, the bloodthirsty retaliator of the 1956 revolution, became the protector of Hungarians, and who, according to some legends, even stood up to the Soviet Union when it came to the well-being and the living standard of the Hungarian people.

As old socialist interiors faded away and gave way to something else, and as Kádár's legend became the subject of cult history analysis, the concept of memory and remembrance has also been transformed by the beginning of the 21st century: thanks to the information technology and critical "revolutions", they have become the focus of scientific interest in fields ranging



Attila SZŰCS:
Living Room in the Kádár's Villa
2014, oil in canvas, 190x240cm

from historiography to psychology and neuroscience to the study of artificial intelligence. Post-communist nostalgia, now presented in this harsh way and new spirit, has appeared before on Szűcs's earlier paintings from the nineties. They featured a special *lieu de memoire*⁷, the socialist-era playground, which was not at all a prominent location in communist iconography, but the rotten red benches and rusty rocket- and globe-shaped climbers beautifully reflected the sad afterlife of communist utopias.

Szűcs became an artist in the intermediary, critical mentality of the nineties, thus experimenting with the self-reflexive and painterly critique of painting as a program, therein which he relied on the visibility of a blind spot that simultaneously produced formalist (abstract art) and abstract (epistemological) associations. So he painted blurry patches on his abstract and figurative paintings (depicting, for example, playgrounds or holiday resorts) that obscured part of the subject.

Later, the tangible blind spots have disappeared, but Szűcs also depicted Kádár's holiday home as a blind spot in a figurative (epistemological and memory political) sense (*Living Room in the Kádár Villa*, 2014). The house in question was, in fact, deliberately forgotten and neglected, although it could be one, if not the most important *lieu de memoire* of the Kádár era.

Socialized in the atmosphere right after the regime change, amid the ongoing canonization of neo-avant-garde and the expansion of new media art in Hungary, the artist group Little Warsaw (Kis Varsó) was founded in 1996 by András Gálik and Bálint Havas. The group borrowed its name from a legendary area populated by Jews in the Eighth District of Budapest, where the resistance successfully fought against the Nazis and the members of the Arrow Cross (the Hungarian National Socialist Party) during World War II. Already at its inception, the group intended to systematically process the socialist past in their various projects rooted in conceptualism.

⁶ See Derrida, Jacques: *Spectres de Marx*. Galiléé, Paris, 1993. Under Hungarian wild capitalism, suspicion erupted alongside nostalgia, which was partially due to the fact that in 1994 the former Socialists came to power. Although in 1998 they lost the elections, but in 2002 they were able to win again in coalition with the liberal wing of the former democratic opposition. Economic life was even more haunted by the past, as corporate and party leaders who acquired their wealth in the former state socialist system, became dominant players of the new capitalist economy during the privatization process of the 1990s.

⁷ See Nora, Pierre et al.: *Les Lieux de mémoire I-III*. Gallimard, Paris, 1984-1992.

INSTAURATIO!



LITTLE WARSAW AT STEDELIJK MONUMENT CONTRA CATHEDRAL

“what a Western viewer could do with the statue of a 19th-century Hungarian agrarian socialist revolutionary which, at first glance, appears to be just a stereotypical socialist realist peasant figure, while his undeniable power, monumentality and strange modernism also evokes the conflict not only between peasantry and the proletariat, but also between tradition and modernization”



Little Warsaw: INSTAURATIO! – Monument contra Cathedral, 2004, installation
Exhibition: “Who if not we.” / Time and Again.
Stedelijk Museum, 2004
Photo: Stedelijk Museum, ©Stedelijk Museum, Little Warsaw



One of the most renowned of these works was *Instauratio*⁸, where they erected the statue of *János Szántó Kovács* (1965) by József Somogyi (one of the most famous Hungarian socialist realist sculptors and, for a time, the rector of the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts) at the Stedelijk Museum’s exhibition *Time and Again* in Amsterdam in 2004.⁹ The title of the piece speaks for itself, as it is a hybrid of ‘installation’ and ‘restoration’, meaning that Little Warsaw (Kis Varsó) intended to represent themselves with the ideological-critical restoration of the statue of Somogyi at a post-communist exhibition in one of the most famous museums in Western Europe. Basically, they were asking, somewhat provocatively, what a Western viewer could do with the statue of a 19th-century Hungarian agrarian socialist revolutionary which, at first glance, appears to be just a stereotypical socialist realist peasant figure, while his undeniable power, monumentality and strange modernism also evokes the conflict not only between peasantry and the proletariat, but also between tradition and modernization.

Another of their works, *Crew Expendable* (2007) demonstrates a similarly fine microhistorical motivation that, in a global context, evokes the sci-fi classic *Alien* (1979) with the concept of a crew sacrificed for scientific discovery and profit, while actually thematizing the figure of a forgotten artist, János Major, and his so-called tombstone project from the sixties, when he found Jewish tombstones decorated with intertwining five-pointed and six-pointed stars. The strange symbol for Major, who was of Jewish descent, became of interest on both a personal and an existential level, because he was very interested in the issue of the suppressed, or even taboo topic of Hungarian anti-Semitism. Major could experience anti-semitism first-hand as a forgotten and, in some sense, disenchanting magical realist graphic artist of the Iparterv generation (the best known group of artists and art history formation of the Hungarian neo-avant-garde). Almost turning into objects,

his parodistically anti-Semitic (in fact, anti-anti-Semitic) graphics could not be sufficiently deciphered not only by the official, socialist realist spectacle, but also by the liberal and modernist ideology of the neo-avant-garde, since in both systems only the universal had a place and a meaning, while the personal dimension seemed pathetic and petty. One could also say that both sides were trying to suppress the selfish and practical *Eigen-Sinn*, which, according to German social history, became the everyday ideology of the people of fascist and communist dictatorships.¹⁰ As the *Szántó Kovács* statue could be the portrait of the grumpy and wayward yet successful Somogyi, who cooperated with the system but still adhered to his own (modernist) ideas, so becomes the satirical drawing *The Yid is Washing Himself* (1967) a self-portrait of the disenchanting Major, who is being put on the pedestal of Little Warsaw’s monument as an emblematic figure.

Unmemorial (2014) is also a non-memorial with a similar spirit, which is not a traditional memorial, that is, not a memorial to the depicted worker, but an allegorical portrait of its creator. The object of the artistic intervention is the statue *Reading Worker* (1951) by András Beck, which first appeared as a non-memorial at the exhibition of Little Warsaw, entitled *Naming You* (2012) at the Wiener Sezession. With a classically rooted figure – the pathos ranges from Dürer’s *Melancholy* to Rodin’s *Thinker* – Little Warsaw reintroduced the communist idea of the Cultural Revolution at an extremely complex exhibition into its original (no less complex) world of reality, which was covered by the intricate weave of desires, fears, ideologies, and compromises. András Beck was one of the typical figures of the communist world: a highly-cultivated sculptor with avant-garde ancestors, who, following the change of regime in 1949, also served the communist system due to his leftist commitment. He believed in the Cultural Revolution, which is aptly symbolized by the *Reading Worker*, and was disappointed by the communist dictatorship, degenerated

8 For more on interventions and for a memory-based analysis of Kis Varsó, see András, Edit: *Transgressing Boundaries (Even Those Marked by the Predecessors)*, New Genre Public Art, in: Alberro, Alexander (ed.): *After Conceptual Art*. MIT Press, Cambridge, 2006, pp. 162–177.

9 The statue was moved from its original location, Hódmezővásárhely to Amsterdam, meaning that Kis Varsó not only appropriated the work of Somogyi, but also re-enacted the erection of the statue.

10 See Lüdtker, Alf: *Eigen-Sinn. Fabrikalltag, Arbeitererfahrungen und Politik vom Kaiserreich bis in den Faschismus*. Ergebnisse Verlag, Hamburg, 1993.



Little Warsaw: The Battle of Inner Truth
2011, installation view, variable dimension
Exhibition: The Battle of Inner Truth. Trafó Gallery
Photo: Lenke Szilágyi, ©Little Warsaw

to a personal cult that systematically cut off its enemies not only from power but even from the public (i. e. imprisonments, deportations). Little Warsaw, moreover, juxtaposed Beck's career with another aspect of socialist culture, the scientific and technical revolution, in which modernization was, in part, truly in the interests of the people (as demonstrated by the Soviet potato harvesting machine appearing next to the compromising figure of Beck, a servant of the system), while violent collectivization destroyed the faith and commitment that socialism actually needed to succeed. This kind of critical perspective can be compared not only with the civilizational interpretation of revisionist Sovietology¹¹ and the contextual approach of social art history, but also with the activist criticism of esoteric conceptual art.¹²

A similar approach applies to the works of Tamás Kaszás, a graduate of Intermedia Studies and a follower of the social-critical, radical utopian thinkers (e. g. Tamás St. Auby, Miklós Erdély) of the Hungarian neo-avant-garde. Kaszás does not analyze art from a formal, neither a medial point of view, but explores its social potential, and was one of the first to turn to communist iconography with an entirely new approach, as exemplified by his piece entitled *Broadband Bulletin Board* (1998–2009).

The reinterpretation of the well-known elements of the labour movement's iconography (sickle, hammer, wheat, worker fist, worker heros), coupled with the latest ecology-driven critique of the late capitalist system, sheds new light on communist ideas, and frees the symbols of community culture from the captivity of negative connotations (violent, unreasonable,

and hypocritical collectivization). Kaszás puts the anti-capitalism of communist ideas into an ecological perspective with the aim of creating a new ideology and iconology for survival, or, at least, sustainable development, or creating a new kind of "folk science" along the lines of folk art and folk culture, which is able to function in a new, hypermodern world of broadband connections.

The memorial entitled *Burden or Resource?* (2017) by Randomroutines (the artistic cooperation of Tamás Kaszás and Krisztián Kristóf since 2003) in Třinec, Czechia, is a haunting reminder of the human towers of the famous Czechoslovakian mass sports events, the Spartakiada.

The title, on the other hand, is a quote from the human resources minister of the populist but anti-communist Orbán government: "Neither the Hungarian communities nor the government have decided whether the Hungarian-speaking Gypsies living across the border are a burden or a resource."¹³ The terms 'burden' and 'resource' thus refer to the human factor, the human resource, which played a prominent role in the construction of the socialist spectacle.¹⁴ At the top of the human tower stands a young girl with a wrench as if she was installing something, which, however, only looks like a large cracked mirror. Originally, a socialist monument depicting the conquest of the cosmos was designed to be erected on the monument's place resembling a grandstand. However, the heroic, iron-welded youth of Randomroutines, on their journey to the cosmos, do not rise to the stars because they collide with a cracked mirror, which, despite all their heroism and enthusiasm, cannot be repaired with the tools at their disposal.

Another post-communist iconologist, Csaba Nemes graduated from the Hungarian



Randomroutines:
Burden or Resources?
2017, public sculpture
Třinec, rebar, ca. 550x300x500 cm

Academy of Fine Arts as a painter during the change of regime. He later worked on neo-conceptual photo-based art projects, then painted storyboards and made animated films about political topics. The language of socialist or rather social realist painting returned to his work in this political context, as he first applied it in his pictures related to the series of Roma murders committed in 2008, which had caused a great uproar in Hungary, and politically supported everyday racism. However, in the series *Father's Name: Csaba Nemes* (2009–2013), through his own past and photographs of his father, he reflected on the conflict between cultural and communicative, that is, social and personal memory. Csaba Nemes the older, worked as a member of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP), far from the capital,

¹¹ Revisionist and post-Revisionist Sovietology did not interpret Soviet systems (solely) as a totalitarian dictatorship, but as a special civilization that had its own language and vibrant culture, which was activated when the subject was willing to learn the language and the value system. See Kotkin, Stephen: *Magnetic Mountain. Stalinism as a Civilisation*. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1995.

¹² According to post-Marxist criticism, both conceptual and neo-conceptual art used an abstract and formal language built on a medial foundation that made the criticism of art and society inaccessible to the average viewer. As an opposition, activist art initiates a clear dialogue with members of society. See Roberts, John: *The Intangibilities of Form. Skill and Deskilling in Art after the Readymade*. Verso, London, 2007.

¹³ Quote from Mélyi, József: *A kozmosz átírása [Re-writing the cosmos]*. Balkon online, 2018. 03. 22., URL: <http://balkon.art/home/a-kozmosz-atirasa/> (Last downloaded: 4 November 2019)

¹⁴ I use the term socialist spectacle in the sense that Evgeny Dobrenko does after Guy Debord, who understands Debord's spectacle as a version of Foucault's dispositif, that is, not merely an imaginary entity, but a complex system of institutions and discourses that limit the possible narratives of subjects about themselves and the world surrounding them. See Dobrenko, Evgeny: *Political Economy of Socialist Realism*. Yale University Press, New Haven, 2007.



Csaba NEMES: Kádár's resort
2009, oil on canvas, 110x150 cm



Csaba NEMES: Dialectical Theatre
2015, oil on canvas, 150x200 cm



Csaba NEMES:
Hearing
2010,
oil on canvas,
200x200 cm

in a small village, Tuzsér, where he put his heart and soul into managing the school and the cultural centre, and as a result, his photographs portray a truly human-faced socialism. His son Csaba Nemes, on the other hand, selected photos that offer a glimpse into the slips and bumps of everyday socialist iconography as well as of the failures of the system, as his painting *Hearing* (2010) does. Following one, or rather two, regime changes,¹⁵ the viewer recognizes that not only the pioneer boy is incapable of finding his place in the system, but those in power do not really know what to do with the situation and the power vested in them either.

The direct antecedent of Nemes's personal series, *Kádár's Resort 1-4* (2009) reflected on a special element in the iconography of the number one leader: the pictures of this series specifically portray purist, modernist holiday homes (owned by Kádár and other senior leaders) located next to the lake Balaton in a realistic style, which pointed to a neglected aspect of the socialist past, its modernism, and its ambivalent relationship to modernism in the Western sense. While in fine arts and in ideologically representative genres decomposition and abstraction were seen as decadent, in architecture, not only functionalism was promoted, but abstract ornamentation was also accepted. Recalling the drama theory and epic theater of Brecht and the spectacular ideology of all aspects of socialist life, *Dialectical Theatre* (2015) features another dimension of oblivion, an alternative sculpture park. The heroic socialist realist sculptures are standing on a deserted lot in downtown Budapest in the present, which is likely to be the site of a modernist, functionalist office building.

An elderly woman is walking down the street, ignoring the statues of superhuman communist heroes deported to the midst of crumbling houses. Perhaps she doesn't even see them anymore: on the one hand because she only cares about her own fate (*Eigen-Sinn*), and on the other hand because their symbolic and iconic power has long since vanished.

A fellow graduate of Nemes, János Kósa (similarly to Attila Szűcs) has already committed to painting in the neo-conceptual period of intermedia, photography and installations, and in the 1990s, he built his oeuvre on "digital" reinterpretations of classic and modern motifs in art history. In his case, however, 'digital' did not mean digitizing painting, but activating the pathos of the information society, that is, in



János KÓSA: Province
2007, oil on canvas,
130x200 cm
Photo: Miklós Sulyok

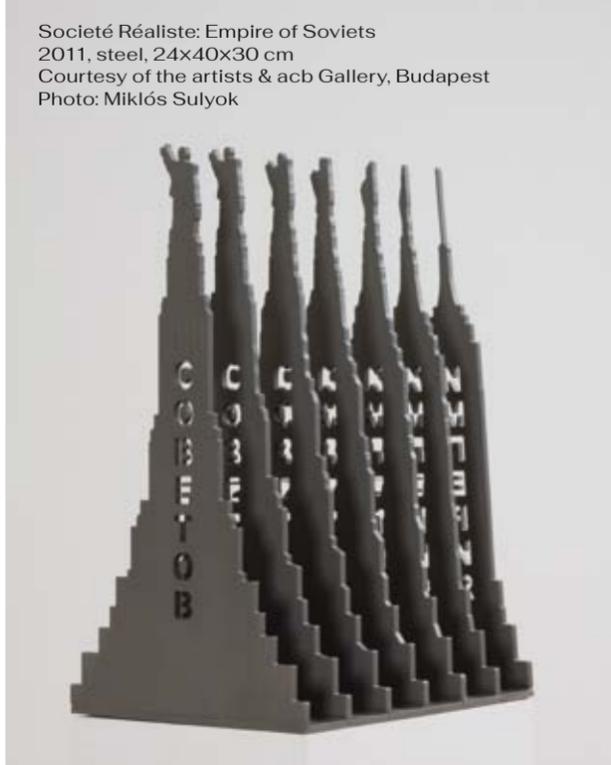
Kósa's paintings, hackers and painting robots took on the classic pathos formulas. During the international career of Neo Rauch and the New Leipzig School, Kósa incorporated both the official and unofficial, but popular icons of the socialist past into his works. For example, in *Province* (2007), dedicated to the subject of space exploration, not only do slender workers stretch out to the stars on a socialist modernist relief, but one can also recognize a legendary Hungarian cartoon character of the sixties among them, the rather simple than brilliant Köbükí, a distant (twelfth generation) future descendant of the Mézga family, who can be interpreted as a parody of the average Hungarian socialist family. A few years later, *Offering* (2010) went even further in the ironic treatment of the past, where an ancient topos of nationalist art provides the starting point: King Stephen, the first king of Hungary offers the crown, symbolizing the country, to the Virgin Mary to help protect Hungary. The topos of Regnum Marianum (literally meaning the Kingdom of Mary) became especially popular during Romanticism and Historicism, when it was revived as a symbol of the desire for an independent Hungarian statehood. Gyula Benczúr, the most celebrated Hungarian academic painter of the 19th century, also painted the scene, and Kósa incorporated the

angel representing the divine power of Mary to his own composition. In Kósa's painting, however, Saint Stephen offers the (toy) crown to Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, while surrounded by various icons of the socialist era: a heroic communist sailor, a clown of the "communist" Picasso, and, as a late descendant of the clowns, another well-known Hungarian fairy-tale hero, the well-meaning Manócska, who is caring for the ageing Saint Stephen. The painting can also be understood as a genealogical reading of the success story of today's Hungarian populism, as it shows the extent to which the people are addicted to the old topos and gestures, as well as their exceptional ability to accept the anachronistic survival of feudal power structures.

Another aspect of *Nachleben*¹⁶ the "purging" and activating of the critical potentials of communism, was the focus of the Société Réaliste group (Ferenc Gróf and Jean-Baptiste Naudy, 2004-2014), who also explored icons. Gróf and Naudy hosted their most significant solo exhibition *Empire, State, Building* at the Jeu de Paume in Paris, whose ironic, anthropological approach – juxtaposing the symbol systems of real and fictitious cultures – can be compared not only to that of the situationists but also to the revisionist Sovietologists. Also dealing with critical cartography, symbolic typography

¹⁵ The liberal, post-communist constitution of 1989 was replaced in 2011 by a new Fundamental Law with a conservative and illiberal tone.

Société Réaliste: Empire of Soviets
 2011, steel, 24x40x30 cm
 Courtesy of the artists & acb Gallery, Budapest
 Photo: Miklós Sulyok



and psychogeography, the duo has produced *1979* for a previous exhibition, *Over the Counter* (Múcsarnok, Budapest, 2010), which focused on post-communist economic life.

The work recalls the tortured figure of György Dózsa (sat on a hot iron throne), borrowed from the woodcut series *1514* by Gyula Derkovits (1928), the most famous Hungarian communist painter. Dózsa has become one of the symbolic figures of proletarian anti-capitalism, who, in fact, was a professional soldier hailing from an impoverished noble family. He became the leader of the peasant revolt of 1514, which, after a brief period of the Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919, became the number one historical precursor of the communist revolution in Hungary. The original, spiritually anti-capitalist, and even explicitly communist piece, was rewritten by Société Réaliste on the one hand, with the transcription of the allegorical commentary, that is, the ideological message (the text burnt onto the chest of Dózsa), on the other hand, by deconstructing the technique with which it was originally made. Dózsa's crown no longer reads the date 1514, which referred to the suppression of the peasant revolt, but 1979, which evokes the regime changes of

the 20th century, linking 1919, 1949 and 1989, when both communist and democratic changes were accompanied by constitutional changes. The other textual change is even more thoughtful, since Dózsa is no longer labelled "stinking peasant" (bűdös paraszt) but "stinking parallel" (bűdös paralel – sic!), indicating that the logic of revolutions with different ideologies is too similar. However, Gróf and Naudy also conducted an in-depth analysis of the original engraving, as the shape of Dózsa is drawn from words, crossed out in black and red as a deconstructive gesture, taken from the 1989 democratic constitution, which actually only amended the text of the communist constitution of 1949, based on a Soviet model. Société Réaliste thus points out the haunting continuity of communist and post-communist life and reality.

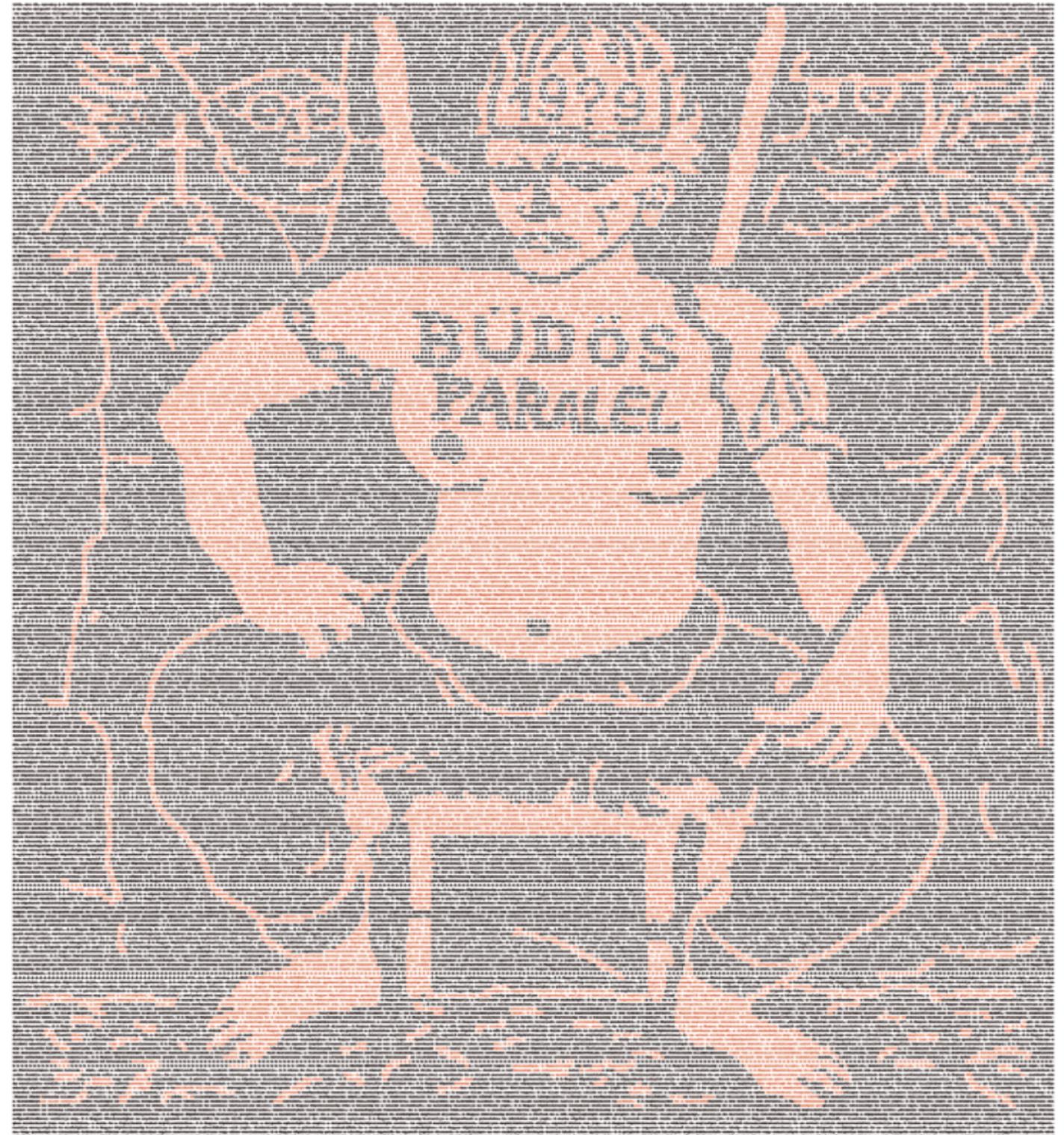
Another of their works deals with the geopolitical dimensions of continuity: the Empire State Building (1931) and the planned but ultimately unrealized Moscow Palace of the Soviets (1933) intertwine in *Empire of Soviets* (2011) using a distinctive medium of socialist realism, the not noble, but expressly ordinary, proletarian cut iron sculpture that evokes industry and the working class.

The easily interwoven realms and buildings that are not very different from each other thus provide a critique of the spectacle through the exploration of symbol systems that conquer and dominate the imaginary, the imagination, and desires.¹⁷ However, its current 21st-century context is clearly global capitalism, whose criticism fits in with the intellectual aspirations of the New Left. Representatives of the youngest generation follow similar paths of memory politics, but the focus and the pathos have shifted somewhat. Similarly to Csaba Nemes, Olívia Kovács, whose career started in the 2010s, painted her parents' family photos in the series *The Other's Past* (2013). However, they are no longer coloured by tragedy, existential and ethical conflict, but rather by nostalgia and exoticism.

A contemporary of Kovács, Kitti Gosztola, amid the present spell of national populism, does not thematize the communist past any more, but rather the national conservative

¹⁶ Nachleben, or afterlife is also an expression introduced by Aby Warburg, for defining the preservation and survival of the emotional and passionate energies captured in images.

¹⁷ See Buck-Morss, Susan: *Dreamworld and Catastrophe. The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*. MIT Press, Cambridge, 2000.



Société Réaliste: 1979
 2010, print, 100x100 cm, ICA-D.
 Courtesy of Ferenc Gróf



Olívia KOVÁCS: The Other's Past - Airplane
2013, oil on canvas, 30x40 cm



Olívia KOVÁCS: The Other's Past - Idyll '89
2013, oil on canvas, 30x40 cm

heritage. A cooperation with Oliver Horváth and Szilvi Németh, *Compass* (2017) no longer evokes revolutions but rather the Trianon treaty and national traumas, by presenting them in a new, ironic light as they used a marine biological metaphor to symbolize the breadth and irrationality of irredentist ideas.¹⁸ After Hungary lost its access to the sea, a Hungarian biologist was enraged about the lack of a fifth figure, symbolizing the lost seas, beside the allegorical figures of the ceded territories on the irredentist memorial on Szabadság tér (Liberty Square) in Budapest. Instead of the four Hungarian warriors caring for characteristic figures of the ceded territories, Gosztola and her companions created only a flower bed resembling a starfish as a kind of counter-memorial, replacing the allegorical figures of the original monument by a biological symbol capable of regrowing its limbs.

However, Gosztola's work was only on display at an exhibition in Rijeka, while a memorial was erected on Szabadság tér in Budapest to commemorate the heroic struggle against the German invasion of Hungary in

1944, conveniently neglecting the fact that the Hungarian army and part of the Hungarian population were actively involved in the Holocaust. The distorted image of history that the Szabadság tér memorial represents prompted many of the artists mentioned in this article to speak out, protest, and engage in activism.¹⁹ Moreover, it drew attention to the fact that, in line with the latest endeavours of official memory politics, there are pieces in the oeuvres of Hungarian post-communist iconologists that do not lift the socialist past out of history, but reintroduce it into a continuous historical stream of emotions and feelings, images and narratives. A typical example of this would be the aforementioned *Offering*, whose pathos spans from King St. Stephen and the Catholic Church's icons of Byzantine origin, through the socialist realism of Stalin and Rákosi to the pop culture of the sixties. But in this spirit, we can also discover the figure of the Pantokrator and the Hungarian holy kings in Dózsa, sitting on a fiery throne, as well as in the unfortunate androgynous clone of Société Réaliste. Perhaps the most perfect Hungarian allegory of the postmodern triumph

¹⁸ Translator's note: The Treaty of Trianon was the peace agreement of 1920 that formally ended World War I between most of the Allies of World War I and the Kingdom of Hungary, in which two thirds of the former Hungarian Kingdom's territory were divided up between the countries forming along the new border, that is, current Romania, the Ukraine, Serbia, Croatia, Slovakia and Austria. Between the two World Wars, official state rhetoric supported the irredentist aspirations of reclaiming these territories.

¹⁹ The Eleven Emlékmű Projekt (Living Monument Project) was launched in 2014 as a flashmob protest against a monument planned by the Hungarian government. As part of the Living Monument project, even after the official monument was set up quite hastily in 2014, there were talks and actions for years, and personal memorabilia were placed around the history-distorting state monument.

“in line with the latest endeavours of official memory politics, there are pieces in the oeuvres of Hungarian post-communist iconologists that do not lift the socialist past out of history, but to reintroduce it into a continuous historical stream of emotions and feelings, images and narratives.”

of iconology, however, might be an installation of Little Warsaw, *The Battle of Inner Truth* (2011), in which, in the world-wide archive of war-themed sculptures borrowed from Hungarian museums, under the auspices of the Babylonian ziggurat and some fluffy pillows, all the pathos formulas from Roman gladiators and conquering Hungarian warriors, through Dózsa and his warrior peasants, as well as the heroes of the labour movement, to a World War II aircraft smashing into a Gothic tower, are peacefully playing with each other.

The enigmatic title, however, not only presents the migration, afterlife, and reinterpretation of motifs as the most natural human and artistic activity, but also intensively plays on the psychic dimensions, from real pathos through artful artistic compromises, to the disenchanting, painful, schizophrenic re-creation of images. The registers of this psychic spectrum are the ones that make the post-communist iconology of communist iconography, which was perhaps the basis for one of the most exciting artistic trends in the Central European cultural region (that has been shaped in the spirit of classical visual culture), really enticing ■

Kitti GOSZTOLA - Oliver HORVÁTH - Szilvi NÉMETH: *Compass*
2017, cutted flowers, floral foam, styrofoam, grout
350x40x350 cm
SKC Gallery, Rijeka (Croatia)
Photo: Dominik Grdić





Zsolt ASZTALOS: My art XVI.
2019, C print, 120x80 cm
Courtesy of Ani Molnár Gallery



RÓZA TEKLA SZILÁGYI

LABOUR IS A TREAT IN ITSELF WHEN YOU ENJOY IT

THE PRECARIOUS CONDITIONS
OF ART JOBS IN HUNGARY

Although creative professions are often accompanied by a sense of vocation and a passion, sufficient working conditions are rarely guaranteed for those in these fields. This uncertainty raises the question of whether there is an overlap between the social class of the precariat¹ and the group of people engaged in creative work, including artists. Through the works of three artists, I examine the relationship between the effects of precarious conditions and immaterial and theoretical work, as it creates determining situations both in a professional and an existential sense in today's active art scene.

ARTIST-AS-LABOURER VS. ARTIST-AS-ENTREPRENEUR

Artistic activity and creative work often appear before us as manifestations of total freedom and boundlessness.² It is important to emphasize that while the mobility of artists and curators, resulting from certain projects, residency programs and institutional collaborations (as well as the pursuit of such opportunities) is common in the art world, this freedom of mobility also presents professional difficulties. As international mobility has grown, curatorial and artistic professions became synonymous with leading the life of a tramp – therefore, excursions for research purposes or pop-up projects generated in unknown areas may have contradictory effects.²

What does the “tramp” lifestyle provide? Breaking into the international art world existing in the network of digital society and prevailing in that market relies primarily on visibility and presence, that is, to get more people at more places to see the work of a given artist – these are the opportunities that the “tramp” lifestyle provides.

¹ In sociology and economics, the precariat is a social class formed by people suffering from precarity, which is a condition of existence without predictability or security, affecting material or psychological welfare. The term is a portmanteau obtained by merging precarious with proletariat. Unlike the proletariat class of industrial workers in the 20th century who lacked their own means of production and hence sold their labour to live, members of the precariat are only partially involved in labour and must undertake extensive “unremunerated activities that are essential if they are to retain access to jobs and to decent earnings”. Specifically, it is the condition of lack of job security, including intermittent employment or underemployment and the resultant precarious existence. Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Precariat>

² Dirk van Weelden: On mobility, in: On mobility (exh. cat.), De Appel Amsterdam, 2006, p. 94. (Hereafter: van Weelden, 2006)

³ The outsider's perspective and a new context acquired by the lucky globetrotters can produce unexpected results that challenge the status quo of previously known and existing economic systems or even the local artistic environment and bring about positive changes in the practices involved. At the same time, however, there is a risk that activities of this kind in unknown areas will often only reach the surface, while also having long-term consequences at the project site.

**“The offer of freelance labour,
on the other hand, can simply be refused
if any irregularity appears, either in the
product or the conditions of delivery”**

However, before a work of art reaches a state of being ready to be exhibited, before a performance becomes watchable, before the first printing press starts, and before the first 3D design is created, it is preceded by invisible, imperative and often difficult-to-calculate tasks. Purchasing the necessary equipment and the materials, the hours spent planning, securing a suitable location, setting up and briefing the team, obtaining and studying the necessary literature – we could go on and on. Whether the end result is an object, a document, a gesture or a performance, its birth is always the result of labour.⁴ This activity often expands to seven-day working weeks and a seemingly flexible schedule, which, more often than not, is only a cover for constant activity. Several initiatives provide behind the scenes insights: the increasingly popular studio visits (such as the Afternoon of Open Art Studios and the open days of Art Quarter Budapest as well as the events of Budapest Art Week), the public theater rehearsals, and the videos providing insight into the daily lives of art professionals serve, among other things, the very purpose of raising awareness to certain elements of these hidden activities in the minds of end users and consumers alike. The twist in the story is that, just as the work done in traditional Fordist factories is not visible to those outside the factory, so are the products of artistic institutions that are understood as factories rarely seen outside these locations. Institutions born to present products thus generate a paradoxical situation. With a little exaggeration, the artworks and the work done there is as visible as the workflow of any traditional factory.⁵

The question arises whether, in the context described above, the artist's character – instead of the genius figure of Romanticism, which is often referred to this day outside of the art world as the typical example – can be characterized as a worker or rather as an entrepreneur? Regarding creative professions, the first thing to mention when it comes to maintaining creativity and motivation is the state of precariousness. It is this precariousness that often indicates the difference between material labour resulting in a market-based, tangible product satisfying a specific need, and between immaterial labour (although this picture is becoming more and more subdued with the use of 0-hour contracts, which is also common among material labourers).

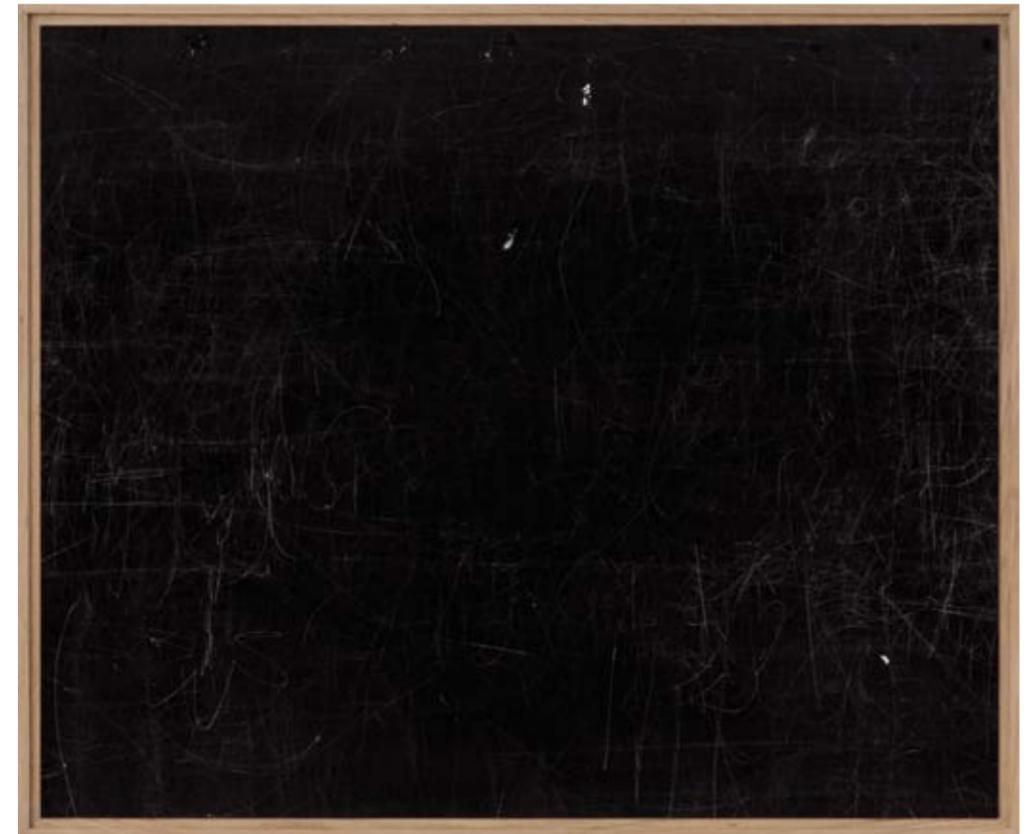
The most important points of the interpretation of the word 'precariat' in relation to this current topic were summarized by Sándor Hornyik: in Franco Bifo Berardi's interpretation, the precariat – as opposed to earlier interpretations less related to creative work – already appears as a class of creative freelancers with a flexible schedule, conducting immaterial labour.⁶ Sándor Hornyik goes on to say, “Brian Holmes, who is a bit more familiar with the art world than Bifo, sees the situation of artists much darker. In his essay, 'The Flexible Personality' (2001), he writes about the global information society's success in personality-shaping, which has slowly transformed the art industry similarly to the creative industry.”⁷ This means that as surveillance techniques have been evolving in a remarkable way, wage labour and freelance labour – whether done locally or remotely at telematically connected sites – has also become the subject of surveillance (i. e. email tracking applications, surveillance cameras, call control).

4 Sholette, Gregory: State of the Union, Artforum, 2008. Source: <http://www.gregorysholette.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/SholetteArtLaborArtforum1.pdf> (Last downloaded on 1 March 2018) (Hereafter: Sholette, 2008)

5 Steyerl, Hito: Is a Museum a Factory?, in: e-flux journal #7, June-August 2009, p. 5.

6 Hornyik, Sándor: Az immateriális munka hősei [The heroes of immaterial labour], exindex, 13 November 2015. Source: <http://exindex.hu/index.php?l=hu&page=3&id=973> (Last downloaded on 27 October 2019) (Hereafter: Hornyik, 2015)

7 Hornyik, 2015.



Viktória BALOGH:
Blackboards
2017, giclée print
83x100 cm



Zsolt ASZTALOS: Unknown artists
2019, mixed media, installation
ISBN books+gallery, Photo: Zsolt Asztalos
Courtesy of Aní Molnár Gallery

Brian Holmes further refines his explanation of freelancers' vulnerability: "The offer of freelance labour, on the other hand, can simply be refused if any irregularity appears, either in the product or the conditions of delivery. Internalized self-monitoring becomes a vital necessity for the freelancer. Cultural producers are hardly an exception, to the extent that they offer their inner selves for sale: at all but the highest levels of artistic expression, subtle forms of self-censorship become the rule, at least in relation to a primary market."⁸

Thus, the information society in which we live also shapes the creative and art industry in terms of its customs. But besides customs, capitalism also influences the constellation responsible for taste and values.⁹ As Richard Florida, an American urban studies theorist who focuses on social and economic theory, says, "creatives" are a conscious class whose behavior is difficult to predict and cannot be deflected.¹⁰ These qualities are most likely the result of uncertain conditions affecting creative professionals, since they demanded

awareness from the members of the precariat. Due to the very nature of the new creative economy, jobs and opportunities come and go, thus, security is the privilege of the few.

Artists living in Hungary are seeking connections with the international art world not only for the sake of wider visibility, rather for more seriously funded opportunities, essential for their livelihood, due to the small size and the small art scene of the country. However, building foreign relationships requires a broader artistic practice as well as an entrepreneurial mindset more typical of marketing professionals. The factor that makes it even more difficult to master the artist-as-entrepreneur mentality is that the active segment of the Hungarian art scene seems to exist as a parallel reality, with little connection to the everyday world – that is why the creative labour conducted in this parallel reality is more difficult to interpret for groups that actually have capital and are able to provide support to artists.

THE CONCEPT OF ART JOBS IN THE LIGHT OF IMMATERIAL LABOUR

Although fine art cannot be called literally intangible labour, since artistic activity produces tangible (sic!) objects, the social acceptance of the creative process and the reactions and scepticism of lay people who are less familiar with the relationships of immaterial labour are in many ways similar towards professionals carrying out immaterial and theoretical work.

According to Guy Standing, "The precariat has distinctive relations of production (...) Essentially, their labour is insecure and unstable, so that it is associated with casualisation, informalisation, agency labour, part-time labour, phoney self-employment (...). All of these forms of 'flexible' labour are growing around the world. Less noticed is that, in the process, the precariat must perform a growing and high ratio of work-for-labour to labour itself. It is exploited as much off the workplace and outside remunerated hours of labour as in it."¹¹ Italian sociologist and philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato, who coined the term immaterial labour in 1996, emphasizes that "It is worth noting that in this kind of working existence it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish leisure time from work time."¹² Conclusively, succeeding in art is a full-time job and requires an attitude similar to that of an entrepreneur leading their own business. Due to the varying intensity of working hours which are not easily trackable in a traditional spreadsheet, activities producing cultural content are usually harder to interpret as labour. As Lazzarato states, "All the characteristics of the postindustrial economy (both in industry and society as a whole) are highly present within the classic forms of 'immaterial' production: audiovisual production, advertising, fashion, the production of software, photography, cultural activities, and so forth.

The activities of this kind of immaterial labor force us to question the classic definitions of work and workforce, because they combine the results of various different types of work skill: intellectual (...), manual (...) and entrepreneurial skills."¹³ It is important to emphasize that immaterial labour mostly exists in the form of networks and it never operates at a specific location (i. e. the factory), but in society at large, and it is here that it acquires its legitimacy. The fragmented nature of creative labour requires small, productive "units" organized specifically for the tasks of an ad-hoc project. These groups may exist only for the duration of those particular jobs (think exhibitions, plays, or cultural festivals existing outside permanent institutions).

The global production of fine art is characterized by intermittent work, fragmented labour and wages in most places – this is especially true of the small Hungarian market, which is unfortunately lagging behind in many respects in terms of visual culture consumption. The situation of major museums closing in succession for various reasons (renovation, relocation), the questionable quality of public artworks, and the financing difficulties for emerging fine arts initiatives and groups all contribute to the inaccessibility of fine art for the broader public. Thus, it is not surprising that the actors of the Hungarian fine arts scene encounter significant systemic deficiencies during their work that seriously hinder their advancement, which they must remedy themselves with personal activities and engagement in order to alleviate precarious conditions. Along these lines, we can conclude that Hungarian artists trying to break into the international scene need to acquire the artist-as-entrepreneur attitude.

8 Holmes, Brian: The Flexible Personality: For a New Cultural Critique, in: transversal 1, 2002. Source: <http://16beavergroup.org/pdf/fp.pdf> (Last downloaded: 26 October 2019)

9 Hornyik, 2015.

10 Peck, Jamie: Struggling with the Creative Class In. International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, Vol. 29. (2005), p. 744.

11 Standing, Guy: The Precariat and Class Struggle, in: Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais. 103. (2014) p. 14.

12 Lazzarato, Maurizio: Immaterial Labor, 1996. <http://www.generation-online.org/c/cimmateriallabour3.htm> (Last downloaded: 20 March 2018) (Hereafter: Lazzarato, 1996) Originally published in Virno, Paolo; Hardt, Michael (eds.):

Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics. University of Minnesota Press, 1996, pp. 142–157.

13 Lazzarato, 1996.

“the communication economy aims to make every consumer a producer as well, of photographs, music, messages, public outpourings, performances, videos, opinions and stories”



Zsolt ASZTALOS: Unknown artists
2017, mixed media, installation
Bázis Gallery, Cluj-Napoca
Photo: Zsolt Asztalos
Courtesy of Ani Molnár Gallery

ZSOLT ASZTALOS – UNKNOWN ARTISTS AND CANONISATION

With respect to fine art – in the era of “a child could paint that” type of commentary especially typical in the case of abstract paintings and graphics –, the question rightly arises: “wherein lies the intellectual or cultural added value of such work?”¹⁴ As Dirk van Weelden states, it would seem that artists “carry out an alternative [...] form of research and journalism. Consciously and with critical intent, in order to provide a necessary supplement [...] for the information and images that circle around us.”¹⁵ He also adds that “Culture has been an industry for a long time, and therefore a market as well. Creativity is a commodity, inside and – above all – outside the art world.”¹⁶

But how did this all happen? There is always a demand for nice things and eye-catching decorations, however, their quality is a whole another question. The global flow of information has spawned a worldwide market based on an artistic practice consisting of (thoughtful, multi-component) creativity and years of institutional and extracurricular studies, as well as the ability to produce an aesthetic product available at IKEA’s decoration department. The world of art has its own “network with its own flow of funding, its own publicity, its own complex relationships with governments and financiers. Works of art are what is discussed and displayed in the spaces and publications belonging to the network. Artists are those who are active and show their work and receive reviews and invitations within that world.”¹⁷ Meanwhile, “the communication economy aims to make every consumer a producer as well, of photographs, music, messages, public outpourings, performances, videos, opinions and stories.”¹⁸

These more commercial manifestations are on the market in the same way as the products of the fine art scene – just think of the new group of artists, tattoo artists and graphic designers who are active only on Instagram.

As mentioned earlier, a successful fine arts career requires creating publicity and maintaining a presence. Several works of Zsolt Asztalos resonate with this idea and the question of non-artistic images created with the help of digital platforms and widespread imaging tools.

Winner of the Mihály Munkácsy Prize, Zsolt Asztalos (1974) graduated from the Hungarian University of Fine Arts in 1999 in the class of Dóra Maurer. Primarily a conceptual artist, his works have previously dealt with the situation of the everyday person within consumer society, but in recent years he has addressed various aspects of individual and collective memory. He mainly creates installations, videos and photo-based works. So far he has participated in nearly a hundred exhibitions both in Hungary and abroad. In 2013, he represented Hungary at the 55th Venice Art Biennale with his video installation, *Fired but not exploded*.

The rules of the art world, which operates in parallel with the capitalist market, but as a parallel public, and the evolution of the canon are all decisive factors in judging artistic labour. (It is in this context that a cultural financing system that provides more prominent financial support to artists echoing current pro-government ideas may seem really defective.) The various factors and issues determining the contemporary evaluation of works of fine art also appear in the oeuvre of Zsolt Asztalos. The central issue in his series *Unknown Artists*, the latest edition of which was shown in the ISBN Gallery run by Bea Istvánkó, is the significance of the artist persona and whether they can be separated from a particular work of art, as well as the extent to which the work is linked to the context created by the artist’s name. The exhibition features reproductions of works by unknown artists collected by Zsolt Asztalos; the arrangement, without the intention of visibility, evokes the moments before installation as well as moving house, the spaces of archives and warehouses, with pictures hidden halfway by packaging materials and bags.

^{14–15} van Weelden 2006, p. 96.

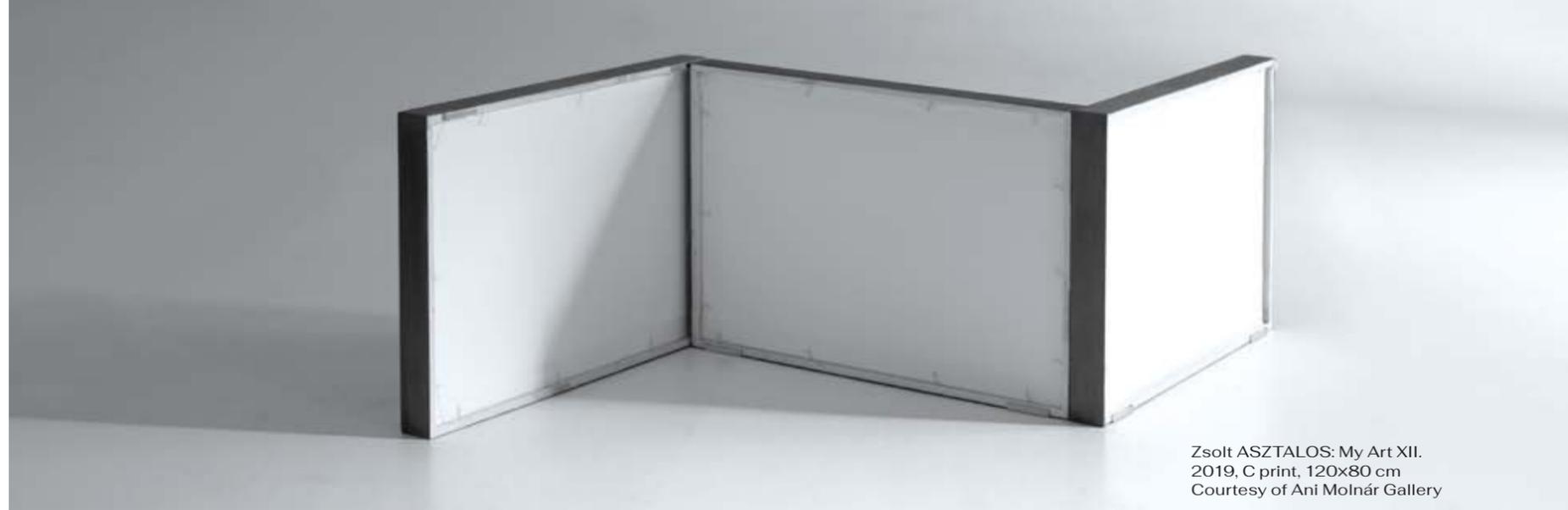
¹⁶ van Weelden 2006, p. 97.

¹⁷ van Weelden 2006, p. 95.

¹⁸ van Weelden 2006, p. 94.



Zsolt ASZTALOS: My Art XVII.
2019, C print, 120x80 cm
Courtesy of Ani Molnár Gallery



Zsolt ASZTALOS: My Art XII.
2019, C print, 120x80 cm
Courtesy of Ani Molnár Gallery



Zsolt ASZTALOS: My Art X.
2019, C print, 120x80 cm
Courtesy of Ani Molnár Gallery

“The series My Art consists of objects reminiscent of minimalist studio still lifes built of the artist’s earlier works”

A controversial topic in art theory for centuries, Zsolt Asztalos turns towards the unknown author as a contemporary of a culture that plays with the idea of artist superstars whose image is built on a similar marketing strategy used for products of a competitive market. In a world where we encounter a constant flow of images thanks to the digital society and the everyday use of digital devices, we can easily identify the source and author of images created using such tools via the Internet.

While in the case of works from bygone eras, the case of unknown authorship does not necessarily reflect the will of the artist, in contemporary art the same situation is the result of a conscious decision and a well-built marketing strategy. Alongside unknown contemporary masters who are only identifiable by their work, there are also those who, by concealing their own names, decide to join a group – so that their own identity blends into a larger creative process driven by multiple factors.

Zsolt Asztalos turns to those who have not even left their most basic mark of identification, that is, their names, on their creations. In the case of older works, the lack of signature may be caused by a number of technical reasons, such as the signature fading away or even being cut off, in addition to the artist’s decision. In the case of unsigned works, authorship can be revealed as a result of a number of parallel processes, if professionals have enough information about both the artist and their

oeuvre in which they intend to embed a certain piece. By comparing stylistic elements and conducting archival, database and scientific research, professionals can attribute the works with the help of traces (brush strokes, the paints they used) left by the author.¹⁹

The first version of the exhibition presented in the ISBN books+gallery had been displayed in the Bázis Gallery in Cluj-Napoca in autumn 2017: as part of that exhibition, which bore the same title, Zsolt Asztalos also debuted a documentary in which he explored the historical and contemporary theoretical aspects of the unknown author by interviewing several aesthetes, art historians and art experts. The works of the 2019 exhibition *Unknown Artists* raise not only the issues of historical research, but also important questions for shaping the contemporary canon: is the name of the artist an essential part of the truth of art? Is there a masterpiece in the absence of an oeuvre? Does a successful oeuvre create the context for a piece? And the question rightly arises: are the works of Zsolt Asztalos signed?

In an age where an increasing number of people are able to create aesthetically pleasing visual content with the help of digital tools, *Unknown Artists* thus reflects on the phenomenon that signatures, which can be interpreted as an important element of artistic self-management, are playing an increasingly important role.

The series My Art consists of objects reminiscent of minimalist studio still lifes built of the artist’s earlier works; however, the peculiarity of the series is that only the frame of the works or, in some cases, only their shape, wrapped in packaging foil, is visible. No trace of the artist’s hand can be seen on the works, they can only be recognized by the composition they are arranged into. Pictures put in identical frames and larger prints covered with bubble wrap are recycled by the gesture of arranging them into an installation – Zsolt Asztalos reflects on the fact that entering the canon is beyond the control of the artist. After all, his works take on a new context as part of the installations in the way that certain elements of an oeuvre are put in new contexts in exhibition situations that disregard the artist’s original intentions. On some of the series’ pictures, we can see packaged works, or compositions typical of the studios, reminiscent of the state of packing before the transportation of the pieces. These conditions may be indicative of the artist’s presence at international fairs as a success factor in the art scene, a sign that the artist has successfully created his own publicity and that his work is being presented to a wider international audience. In contrast, the very same gesture of packaging may indicate that the work are lying forgotten in a dusty warehouse hidden from the eyes of the public.

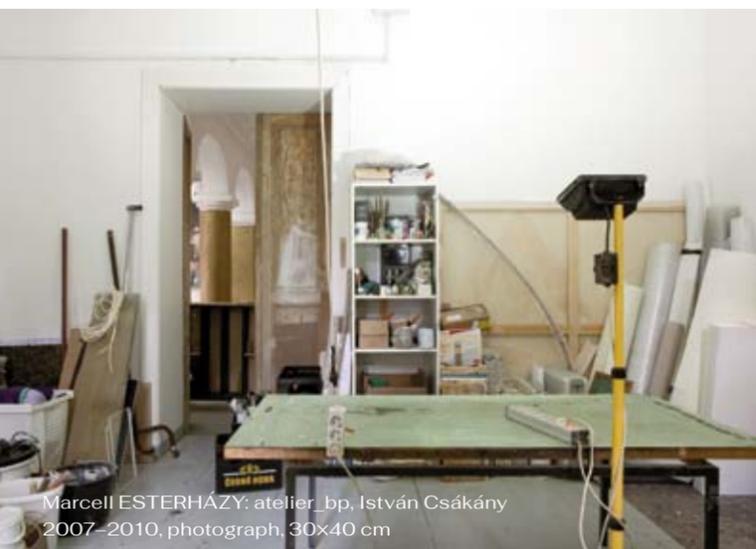
¹⁹ Szilágyi, Róza Tekla: Felszívódott emlékek, hiányzó információk. Asztalos Zsolt: Ismeretlen szerzők [Absorbed memories, missing information. Zsolt Asztalos: Unknown Artists], 2019. http://artmagazin.hu/artmagazin_hirek/felszivodott_emelekek_hianyzo_informaciok.4489.html (Last downloaded: 30 August 2019)



Marcell ESTERHÁZY: atelier_bp, Zsolt Asztalos
2007–2010, photograph, 30x40 cm



Marcell ESTERHÁZY: atelier_bp, Péter Puklus
2007–2010, photograph, 30x40 cm



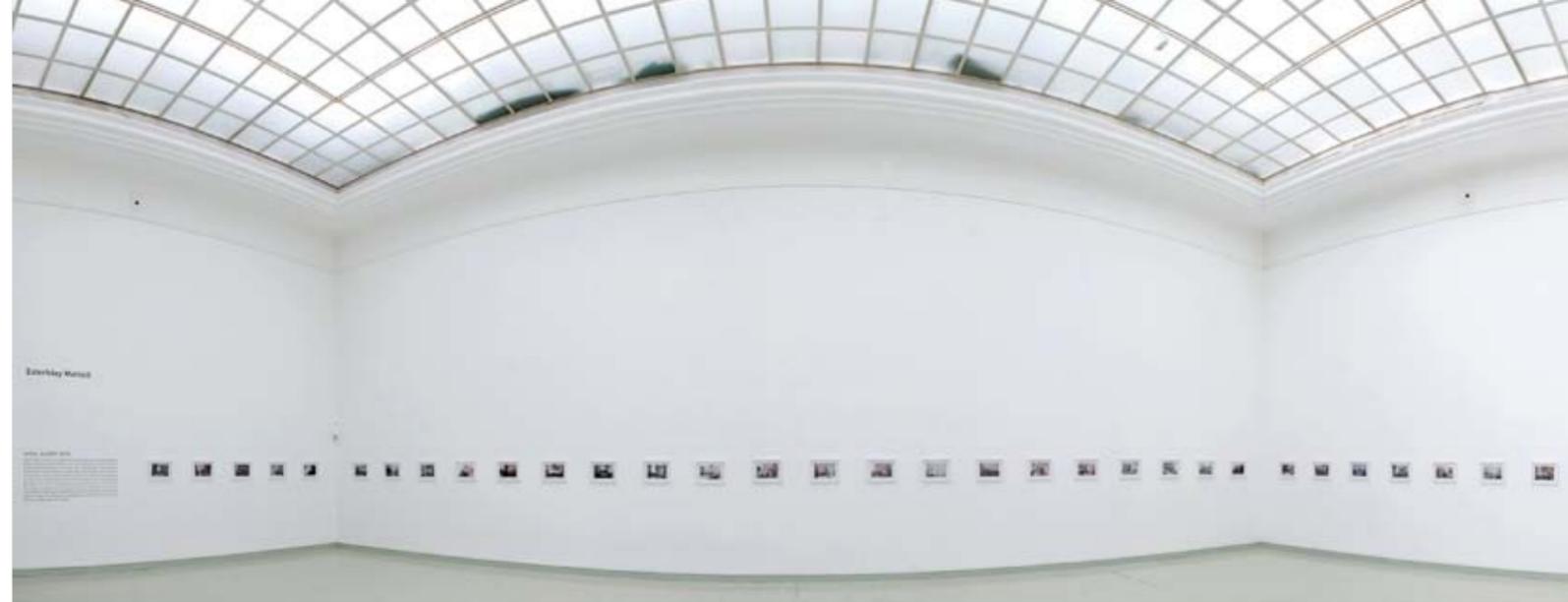
Marcell ESTERHÁZY: atelier_bp, István Csákány
2007–2010, photograph, 30x40 cm

MARCELL ESTERHÁZY – THE PLACE OF INVISIBLE WORK

As Gregory Sholette writes, “Even relatively successful artists must cope with constantly shifting employment, global transit [...], and tireless networking and self-promotion.”²⁰ Based on these qualities, Sholette calls artists “the prototype of the knowledge proletariat.”²¹ The precariousness of the very existence of those engaged in fine arts is mainly manifested in the inferior existential status of professionals and cultural workers active in this field. One of the most unique currencies in the fine art world, the opportunity, the hope of a future exhibition, or simply an opportunity that arises at a more distant point in time easily replaces an actual living wage. This means that those who are active in this field tend to take advantage of opportunities for their professional development, pushing real salary aside in the hope for long-term success – since the closed art world applauds these kind of choices the loudest.

At this point, a previously mentioned issue reappears. It is common for members of the precariat to have to work to get a job. The equivalent of this in the world of fine arts is the (often not professional) labour carried out for raising the rent of a studio. The situation is similar to that of the chicken and the egg: without a studio it is often difficult to work, but without work it is difficult to manage the financial constraints of renting a studio. And let’s not even mention the costs of art supplies, traveling for research, and buying the latest publications.

In his series entitled *atelier_bp* (atelier Budapest), Marcell Esterházy deals with the aforementioned subject. The series of photos, taken between 2007 and 2010, document the workplace of Hungarian artists, creative professionals and art theorists – but none of the photographs in the series actually shows the person using the studio, study or atelier.



Marcell ESTERHÁZY, atelier_bp, exhibition view, Műcsarnok
AVIVA Art Award, Budapest, 2010

“M. E. What a peculiar monogram – the last remarkable person who had these initials in Hungarian art was Miklós Erdély.”²² Currently living and working in Budapest, visual artist Marcell Esterházy was born in 1977. He graduated from the Intermedia Department of the Hungarian University of Fine Arts in 2003, and from 2014 to 2017 he was a student at the Doctoral School of the Hungarian University of Fine Arts. In 2004 he received the mention spéciale du jury of the Lucien Hervé and Rodolf Hervé Prize so he could study in Paris, as well as the Eötvös Scholarship which allowed him to take part in a post-graduate course at Le Collège Invisible, l’Ecole Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Marseille. His works can be found in the collection of the Ludwig Museum and the Hungarian National Museum as well as the Irokéz Collection in Hungary, while abroad at the Marseille Fonds Communal d’Art Contemporain (FCAC). The recurring issues of Esterházy’s works include the varieties of processing the past, collective and personal memory, the demagogic fabrication of historical memory as well as the decimation of personal memory – so he often works with and reinterprets family photos and found albums.

The dilemma of “working in order to get work” is also characteristic of the issue of acquiring a studio. After all, the studio, which provides suitable conditions for creative work, puts a financial burden on its tenant. If we approach

the art world from a strictly market-based point of view, then we can refer to the previously mentioned Fordist factories, where the work done in the factories is not visible to outsiders, as parallels of the atelier.

Marcell Esterházy gives an insight into the “factory” – that is, the world of the studio –, but does not provide any hints as to how the professional working in the studio earns the income necessary for maintaining the space. Is their fine art practice sufficient to secure the studio, and if not, what kind of “extra-curricular” activities are they doing to raise the rent? We do not know the schedules of the persons concerned – we only see that, for some, the place of art-related work is nothing more than a single desk in an average living space, while for others, we get an insight into the space specifically designated for such activity.

The viewer becomes a guessing voyeur – while Marcell Esterházy, as an artist, creates a photo series of studio visits that are increasingly popular in the art scene. The scene of the invisible intellectual labour becomes visible – what is more, the ateliers eventually find themselves presented as framed images in an exhibition space. Marcell Esterházy’s artistic role was to observe the phenomenon, select and document the locations, and then, finally, bring them to the exhibition space. This meta-translation and the lack of vocabulary associated with multiple translations are specific to Esterházy’s works.

20–21 Sholette, 2008.

22 Horányi, Attila: Kétlakosság. Esterházy Marcell munkáiról [Amphibious.

The works of Marcell Esterházy], in: Jelentés [Meaning, exh. cat.], Capa Center, Budapest, 2016, p. 16.



Viktória BALOGH: Exercise books
2017, 34 sheets of hand-made paper, 30x24 cm
Photo: Viktória Balogh
Hybridart Gallery, Budapest,
2018, *Knowlegdes exhibition*

Viktória BALOGH
Knowledges exhibition view
2018, Photo: Viktória Balogh
Hybridart Gallery,
Budapest, 2018

VIKTÓRIA BALOGH – THE TRACES OF INVISIBLE INTELLECTUAL LABOUR

In the works of Viktória Balogh, the often invisible intellectual work carried out in the atelier is materialized in pictorial form through the medium of photography.

Born in 1992, Viktória Balogh is primarily engaged in conceptual photography, but she has been working with fine art techniques in many of her works. In 2017, she graduated from the Photography Department of the Rippl-Rónai Faculty of Arts at the University of Kaposvár, then continued her MA studies there. Between 2016 and 2019 she was a recipient of the State Scholarship of the Republic of Hungary as well as a fellow of the New National Excellence Programme. In 2018 and 2019 she was a fellow of the Hungarian Association of Photographers. She currently lives and works in Budapest. She had solo exhibitions in Budapest at the Hybridart Space and the ISBN books+gallery.

In her work *Exercise Books*, Viktória Balogh uses notebooks whose original purpose was to record and make it easier to recall high school curriculum – she repurposes them into handmade paper sheets with a traditional method. The words of the original notes sometimes pop up on these thicker and somewhat more worn, but clean sheets –

fragments of the knowledge once recorded are thus recalled even after the notes have lost their function, referring to the phenomenon of “what you once learned, you do not forget completely”. The cycle of knowledge, the learning process that can be considered as intangible labour, and the accumulation of acquired knowledge are visualized in *Exercise Books*. These blank white pages can thus be interpreted as memorials of immaterial labour, of former teachers and of the hours spent studying.

While *Exercise Books* focus on acquiring knowledge, photos of wiped-down blackboards and top-view images of scratched theatre stages focus on knowledge transfer.

The pieces in the series *Knowledges*, whose images are displayed in larger sizes resembling blackboards, symbolize theoretical and practical knowledge. The immaterial labour carried out at both locations – in front of blackboards and on the stages – is invisible in the pictures, as the actors are not depicted. Viewers can see only the layered clues, the signs of labour, left behind by those conducting the activities. Viktória Balogh’s works explore the possibilities of the visual representation of knowledge, reflecting on what is considered

an unpaid, immaterial labour that we all carry out for our own development – and that, if they are fortunate enough, is present throughout the lives of both emerging and acclaimed artists so they are able to maintain their creativity.

The information society still believes in creativity and the economic benefits it can bring, and that almost a whole section of society can prosper solely through their creativity. Of course, creativity and the belief in it are constantly changing – nowadays, more and more creative professionals (both artists and art theorists) are trying to adopt the revenue models of the private sector. Thus, the artist-as-labourer has become an artist-as-entrepreneur²³, a free agent who, like other creative labourers, strives to adapt to the rules of the environment for greater financial security.

While international professional relations seem to be important topics for contemporary artists, the art world as an enterprise is still happy to take advantage of unregulated employment conditions. The precarious nature of international labour is not only a trait worthy of attention by artists, but also seems to be a structural necessity that allows the art world

²³ Sholette, 2008.

²⁴ Downey, Anthony: *Art and Politics Now*, Thames and Hudson, 2014, p. 61.

²⁵ Sholette, Gregory: *Delirium and Resistance*, Pluto Press, 2017, p. 25.

“Viewers can see only the layered clues, the signs of labour, left behind by those conducting the activities”

to continue to develop and expand. It is no coincidence that questions regarding the workings of the art world – its reliance on short-term contracts, the unpaid internship positions, the flexible working conditions and the lack of security for workers involved in the production of artworks – emerge all the time. Moreover, as Anthony Downey says, “Sustaining the culture of the art world is itself a business based on often inequitable terms of employment.”²⁴

The Hungarian art scene is also a dynamic system that adapts, but at the same time it breaks itself down to uncover contradictions within its own system. Institutions (museums, schools, galleries, exhibition spaces) “are rife with administrative malfunctions”, as Gregory Sholette puts it.²⁵ A significant part of the institutional system of art depends on the money of the rich, the investors – so this factor also determines the relative safety of the precariat. Especially because, as mentioned earlier, private organizations and investors are much more reliable in meeting social needs than the public sector (it’s worth remembering the concept of artist-as-entrepreneur).

The decision is not simple: do you participate in this economy or do you leave it behind completely? Often conducting immaterial labour and living under precarious conditions, freelancers who exit the system are constantly working to get close to the source of capital essential to their work and well-being. Thus, in the search process driven by survival, members of the precariat strive to carry out self-assigned tasks related to their true interests, while seeking their own path – and finding and completing those tasks requires genuine creativity ■



Andrea DUDÁS FAJGERNÉ:
Rest on my bosom!
2017, oil canvas, 90x120 cm

GERDA SZÉPLAKY

INDIVIDUAL MYTHOLOGIES

POST-FEMINISM
IN CONTEMPORARY
HUNGARIAN ART

“By the end of the 20th century, a feminist discourse has emerged in Hungary that focuses on the representation of femininity, while also representing a wide range of attitudes, not only regarding artistic expression (i. e. various media and techniques), but also the diverse forms of identity”

INTRODUCTION

The history of feminism dates back at least a century, provided that we consider the initial (if not the very first) period of emancipation and the fight for women’s rights. Alas, it is advisable to do so because with the establishment of the first women’s movements, women’s painting schools opened all over Europe, including Hungary: women as artists became part of the fine arts discourse from that time on. However, in the strict sense, we can only speak of feminist art from the second wave of feminism, stemming from the activities of the movements that followed after 1968. By this time, women are no longer interested in pursuing equality, they are not driven by a “desire for identification” with men, but on the contrary, they are motivated by differences. They attempt to define gender and social roles along a construct of feminine identity that is based on a specific world experience of women. Thus the focus is shifted to the issues of identity, a different kind of perception and understanding of reality, a unique way of exploring the meaning of signs, and the possibilities of the symbolic realizations of femininity.¹ It is during this period that radical feminism emerges, blaming heterosexual culture and gender stereotypes for women’s subjugation. The third wave of feminism, defined here as post-feminism, begins in the 1990s.²

The term post-feminism is linked to postmodern theories, first and foremost the theory of Julia Kristeva, a “student” of Lacan, according to which the essence of our being is no longer defined by gender differences, but by duality: feminine and masculine ways of experiencing the world are both parts of human identity. Judith Butler shifts this assertion somewhat toward a performative identity policy by denying the essential reasons behind female attributes, moreover, she deconstructs the “feminine” by referring to a diversity of experiences, not feminine and masculine. Butler, both in the case of femininity and masculinity, argues that gender identity is a performative accomplishment.³ Amy Allen sees the acceptance of a feminine identity neither as a biological issue, nor as identification with women with similar characteristics to us, but as a political fact.⁴ From this, Amalia Sa’ar derives an identification policy that considers femininity not as determinative or essentialist, but as a “free choice”.⁵ Post-feminism, in addition to seeing women’s emancipation struggles complete and finished, is based on this freedom. In this article, I present post-feminist artistic endeavours in Hungary.

1 Luce Irigaray is the most influential representative of identity theory built on diversity. In her works, she emphasizes the necessity of constructing a female self opposite the Freudian phallogocentric (male) identity with its oppressive logic and centralized identity. See Irigaray, Luce: *Speculum de l’autre femme*. Minuit, Paris, 1990.
2 About the periodization, see Kristeva, Julia: *Women’s Time*, transl. Alice Jardine and Harry Blake, in: *Signs*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Autumn, 1981), pp. 13–35.
3 See Butler, Judith: *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*, in: *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Dec., 1988), pp. 519–531.
4 Allen derives her position from Hannah Arendt’s concept of solidarity in *The Human Condition* (first published in 1958). See Allen, Amy: *Solidarity After Identity Politics: Hannah Arendt and the Power of Feminist Theory*, in: *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (1999), pp. 97–118.
5 See Sa’ar, Amalia: *Postcolonial Feminism, the Politics of Identification, and the Liberal Bargain*, in: *Gender and Society*, Vol. 19, No. 5 (Oct., 2005), pp. 680–700.

THE POST-SOCIALIST DISCOURSE

During the time of socialism in Hungary (similarly to other Eastern European countries) feminism was based on the logic of sameness, which has promoted gender equality through equal participation in labour, and has put in place countless measures in favour of working women. Top-down feminism, however, did not simply proclaim the elimination of sex differences, rather it made impossible the true representation of femininity. Women could become “equal people”, but they were neither allowed to criticize the dominating patriarchal system of values, nor to act radically. As a result, post-feminist art took on a unique form: it was a culmination of both the missing second wave of feminism and the third wave that had already transcended the critical attitude towards patriarchal culture. In post-socialist discourse, a distinctive “mixed” post-feminism emerged, in which both the critical voice and the liberation stemming from the diversity of identity were present.

The feminism that emerged in Hungary after the change of regime can be called “shy feminism”.⁶ Hungarian women now considered feminist achievements (such as the right to study, to work, to have control over their own bodies) to be natural, yet they were afraid to proclaim themselves to be feminists.⁷ All this resulted in “weak feminism”, though this can only be seen in the reception of feminist art. However, the artworks themselves were characterized by a frivolous and ironic tone rather than shyness or weakness, while at the same time displaying the ease and naturalness of the choice of identity.

Before 1989, there was virtually no “women’s art” in Hungary. Following the change of regime, there was a proliferation of works expressing an intent to define gender identity, albeit initially in a veiled, “disguised” manner, which can be explained by the lack of feminist philosophical background at that time. It was a great change from the male-dominated art canon of the 1980s, when women artists were finally given opportunities to appear in state representation:

one of the best examples is the 1997 Venice Biennale, where Hungary was represented by Róza El-Hassan, Judit Herskó and Éva Köves. More and more historical and thematic women’s art exhibitions were opened, which now focused on the issues of gender roles and the characteristics of language use, as well as the gender-specific ways of experience and expression.

In 1995, the first series of exhibitions entitled *Water Ordeal* was launched at the Óbudai Társaskör Gallery (curated by Gábor András), which specifically featured women artists, including Ilona Lovas, Mariann Imre, Ágnes Deli and Mária Chilf. At the turn of the millennium, the exhibition entitled *The Second Sex* opened at the Ernst Museum (curated by Katalin Keserü). Using both historical and thematic grouping, divided by genres and media, its aim was to provide an overview of Hungarian women’s art from 1960 to 2000. It was especially revelatory that women artists whose works were known already but had never been analyzed with a feminist approach before, such as Margit Anna, Dóra Maurer and Ilona Keserü, were also included in the discourse. In this new light, it became evident that works that were previously interpreted as part of the reigning patriarchal canon, were actually taking a stand against it, such as the knitted *Sentry Box* (1976) by Zsuzsa Szenes, or *Preserve* (1976) by Gizella Solti. However, some of the defining personalities of Hungarian feminism have been omitted from the exhibition.

By the end of the 20th century, a feminist discourse has emerged in Hungary that focuses on the representation of femininity, while also representing a wide range of attitudes, not only regarding artistic expression (i. e. various media and techniques), but also the diverse forms of identity. Since 2016, the contemporary women’s art scene also has its “own” platform of representation called FERi, a non-profit, feminist gallery owned and run by art historian Kata Olta.

Orsolya Drozdik (Orshi) influenced Hungarian post-feminist discourse not only with her

works, but also with her collection of feminist essays, entitled *Walking Brains* (1999), which played a huge role in shaping the theoretical background. For a long time, Drozdik was the only one in the Hungarian scene who, returning home after a long stay in New York, represented a post-feminist attitude: she no longer intended to determine a woman’s place along the lines of a critical attitude, that is, in relation to masculine forms of identity, rather she was solely concerned with her own self-representation. From the outset, Drozdik’s art revolved around understanding, creating and presenting the self. She started her career in Budapest, then moved to Amsterdam in 1978 and then to New York in 1980. In the period before 1978, as an artist living beyond the Iron Curtain, it is understandable that her feminism has shifted towards radicalism. After all, it was the unequal gender roles, the application of double standards, and the discourse defined by patriarchal values that prompted the development of a form of identity in which being a woman and being an artist were equally important. The neo-avant-garde forms of expression emerging at that time proved to be a suitable tool for formulating radical (not frivolous, but subversive) questions about the traditional artistic canon and women’s empowerment.

In her series of performances and photographs entitled *Individual Mythology* (1975–77) and *Free Dance* (1975–76), she reflected on the issues of identity models available to women artists by taking on the role of dancers.

Being a dancer involves experiencing the liberating act of physical existence. During the performances, Drozdik projected photos of dancers on her body while dancing, thus transforming herself into the experience of a free state of the body. She started collecting nineteenth-century photographs of nude figures and models for her series *Nude Model* (1975–77). She developed her own system and terminology for collection and reuse, called the *Image*



Orshi DROZDIK:
Individual Mythology, Free Dance
1976, silver gelatin, 39x29.5 cm



Orshi DROZDIK:
Individual Mythology, Free Dance
1976, silver gelatin, 29x21 cm

⁶ See Fábrián, Katalin: Cacophony of Voices: Interpretations of Feminism and its Consequences for Political Action among Hungarian Women’s Groups, in: *European Journal of Women’s Studies* Vol. 9 No. 3 (2002), pp. 269–290.

⁷ See Fábrián, op. cit. Also see Sleicher, Nóra: Feminizmus(ok) és demokráciá(k) [Feminism(s) and democracy(ies)], source: <http://tntefjournal.hu/vol2/iss3/schleicher.pdf> (Last downloaded: 27 October 2019)



Orshi DROZDIK: Manufacturing the Self: The Body Self (1984–1993) iron, rubber, nickel silver, black-and-white photographs Ludwig Museum Collection

(*Imago*) Bank theory (1977), based on which she started using a combination of different techniques as her work method. It was important for her in the intermedial works she created in this period for the idea and the concept behind the work to be emphasized, and not the medium or the way of execution. Conceptual art as a work method helped her to “subvert” traditional art and create a place for the individual mythology of the woman, which she could only do within the criticism of the dominant discourse (and not outside of it).

In order to create a new mythology that positions the woman artist against the “disciplining and coercive” powers of art historical canon, she had to construct a new (feminine) concept of self. Drozdik had to create the “replayed self” in the artistic discourse of the socialist culture of the seventies, in which figurative representation with an academic-humanist perspective coincided with the censored Marxist-Leninist way of portrayal. For the construction of the aforementioned self, she was offered two patterns at the same time: one of them was women represented by art history, that is,

the objectified female body depicted as a nude, while the other was the woman who identifies as an artist, with a conscious sense of self. All this resulted in dual self-portraits and self-nudes: when she portrayed the body as an artist’s, she looked at it with the cold gaze of the viewer, but when she offered her body as a model’s, she simultaneously experienced – from within – her own objectification, vulnerability, and desire.

In the nineties, now in New York, as feminist theories made her more conscious of her femininity and gender roles, the creation of the Self became an even more determined program in her art. The parts of her series *Manufacturing the Self* (e. g. *Body Self*, 1983–94; *Medical Erotic*, 1993; *Nineteenth Century Self*, 1993; *The None-Self*, 1993; *The Hairy Virgin*, 1994, etc.) all deal with different aspects of identity acquisition. At the centre of her endeavours stands the body model offered by the Medical Venus, created after Clemente Susini’s 18th-century *Medical Venus*, in relation to which she can assume a feminine identity. Becoming widespread around the world over the centuries, she first photographed a rubber copy of the sculpture

Orshi DROZDIK: Manufacturing the Self: The Body Self (1984–1993) (detail: The Self Love Letter) iron, rubber, nickel silver, black-and-white photographs Ludwig Museum Collection



at the Museum of the Semmelweis Medical University in 1977. In the 1980s, she also took a series of photographs of Medical Venus statues in medical museums around Europe and America. Medical exhibitions made her realize that tradition has always forced women in all of the patriarchal discourses to assume a dual attitude and experience, and only through reflecting to that can a feminine identity be created. Women are simultaneously motivated by scientific narratives to have an objectifying, analyzing gaze as well as erotic feelings: the female rubber sculpture arouses desire through eroticization. Her installations were accompanied by “love letters” in which she expressed her erotic feelings.

In the installation *Body-Self*, the life-size rubber casting of the artist’s naked body lies on a metal table in the centre. Next to it are the “love letters” engraved on twelve silver plates, and on the wall are a series of twelve black and white photographs of the Medical Venus which were taken between 1984 to 1993. Texts of different structure and content shed light on the erotic and power relations of medicine. The photos are documents of a historical-scientific narrative: the plastic object is the

embodiment of a vulnerable woman, represented only by its anatomy, while the texts placed on cold metal objects (in the place of organs) express the desires of a real-life woman. The three contexts and sets of objects create the erotic-tuned discourse in which patriarchal (not just medical) culture is deconstructed. Even if it appears more tamed later, this gesture of deconstruction is present in every single one of Drozdik’s work, even those in which the artist is no longer concerned with the social status, the historical or scientific context of the woman, but the experience and representation of the female body from within.

Drozdik thus brought this consistent art program and the freshness of international post-feminist art when she returned to the post-socialist art scene. Her works had (and still have) a crucial influence, and without her, perhaps another kind of artistic discourse, a truly “shy” post-socialist feminism would have taken place. After the change of regime, Hungarian women artists began to develop a program of search for identity, as part of which they sought new expressions: new mediums, new techniques, even new types of artworks and new genres.



Emese BENCZÚR:
My work from another view,
where everything depends on a threads
1999, Bartók '32 Galéria, Budapest
Photo: Miklós Sulyok

Ágnes Eszter SZABÓ: Ágnes Eszter Szabó
and Péter Hecker exchange jam for picture
2004, drawing, embroidery, 90x70cm



Ágnes NÉMETH: Body Pipe
2014, installation, 40x45x280 cm

POST-FEMINIST ASPIRATIONS

In Hungarian fine art, embroidered images represented a new genre that features the most common use of materials and a form of activity considered to be traditionally feminine, while expanding the closed circle of traditional art forms. Emese Benczúr's conceptualist works consistently formulate a verbal message that questions the rationality-based techniques of patriarchal culture as well as the practices of traditionally masculine activities that are thought of as superior. Examples of such "silly messages of women" include *Today I Didn't Go To The Beach Either* (1994) or *I Fulfill My Duty* (1995), in which the meanings of expectations towards women as well their subordinate and hierarchical status are encoded. In Benczúr's installations, instead of the serious materiality of earlier sculptural approaches, the emphasis shifts to the frailness of the thread, to which she even reflects in one of her embroideries: "(W)here it all hangs by a thread."

Eszter Ágnes Szabó also does embroidery: her wall hangings ironically evoke Hungarian peasant culture. The embroidered sentences paraphrase folk wisdom while exposing decoded gender stereotypes. An installation including actual jam and marmalade, the embroidered wall hanging in Szabó's *Traffic Jam* (1999) features a visual-verbal narrative of how a woman attempts to incorporate her everyday activities, which are mostly considered futile, as valuable into a masculine culture. The image

“visual-verbal
narrative of how
a woman attempts
to incorporate
her everyday
activities,
which are mostly
considered
futile, as valuable
into a masculine
culture”



Ágnes NÉMETH: Self-bridling
2006, photo manipulation series, 50x70 cm
Photo: Szabolcs Králl

tells the story of the woman (a housewife) who initiates a trade with the man (an artist): for the drawings of Gábor Roskó, Eszter Ágnes Szabó gives jam in return. The result of feminine work thus becomes equal with art.

Embroidery is a basic form of artistic expression for Mariann Imre as well. Completing the ethos of Kristeva, her embroidered pieces made of concrete combine masculine material with the subtlety of feminine perception: light threads penetrate cold, hard, grey stones. In her installation of concrete hearts, the red threads that emerge from the inside of the concrete pieces remind us of tiny blood vessels, thus referring to the reality of bloody tissues and organs, the human (not just the female but also the male) body exposed to transience.

Ágnes Németh took a somewhat separate road from the discourse above, as she describes gender identity as a revelation of direct female experience and existence. She also uses rural materials of the "feminine" character, such as cane, bamboo, horsehair, wire braid, or mud; for her, turning to these natural materials means entering into the physical-organic world. Her attitude evokes the art of Ana Mendieta, who, as a feminist representative of nature art, also questions the connections between femininity, physicality and nature. One of Németh's most important works is *Self-bridling* (2005), an installation presented at the Bartók Gallery in Budapest. Straw bales,

which were carried into the gallery and placed in columns next to the walls, transformed it into a sacred space, the temple of nature. At the same time, the good-smelling straw structure made of a "living" material evoked the cozy, warm spaces of femininity. In the performance related to the installation, the artist presented herself as "self-bridled": she curbed her own savagery, thus articulating that a woman exposed to her physicality could only obey the demands of the patriarchal society if she suppressed her instincts ("Put the bridle in your mouth and discipline yourself!"). In the "stall temple" the horse is symbolically present: as a strong-willed woman seeking dominance, who must be broken as a wild mare; more specifically, if she wants to become part of culture, she must break herself.

In *Body Pipe* (2014), Németh evokes the image of birth. The piece consists of a so-called varsa, a traditional fish-trap made of willow branches that the artist, in this case, covered in different coloured patches of soil into which she mixed seeds and peat, and glued figures of bronze soldiers in firing position onto random spots on the outer surface of the statue. The whole construction carries a strong formal resemblance to the womb, and this is made even more evident by the installation inside: a holed-out rectangular shape made of dirty medical gloves can be recognized at the bottom of the varsa, directly on the ground. In this



Ilona NÉMETH:
Private Clinic I-III.
1997, Installation, metal construction, velvet,
rabbit skins, moss, 72x112x112 cm
Photo: Marián Ravasz

way, the work presents the womb as a hollow, oppressive space that does not accommodate life and birth, but excision, autopsy, and death. *The Body Pipe* can also be interpreted as a spatial-visual parable of abortion, that also provides a philosophical reading of the work, which is that patriarchal culture, through its nature-oppressing (medical-scientific) practices, extracts from the woman her sensuality, thereby eradicating her true power, her fertility.

This medical-scientific context also provides the background for Ilona Németh's installation *Private Clinic* (the work implicitly refers to Orsolya Drozdik's *Medical Venus* pieces). The installation, which focuses on the expropriation and medicalization of the female body by men, presents us with the objective means of exercising medical power. At the

“how women, who have empathy as their defining character trait, wish to participate in the great narrative of history”

same time, the items of the equipment carry the characteristics of subjective femininity. In the “clinic” we see three gynecological examination chairs with unique covers, whose soft fabrics refer to the circumstances of making love. But despite the erotic connotations, the spread-out foot holders testify to the coldness of medicine, its alienation from the real, living body, and the woman's vulnerability.

Róza El-Hassan's emblematic action on blood donation also touches on issues of body politics, but it has a stronger social dimension. El-Hassan premiered her action *R's Dreaming About Overpopulation* in Belgrade in 2001 on the occasion of the reopening of the Museum of Contemporary Art, which had been closed for three years due to the war.⁸ Beyond the layers of political meaning and moral stance, the work draws attention to the role of women in particular, that is, how women, who have empathy as their defining character trait, wish to participate in the great narrative of history. The artist presented the act of blood donation as a woman in bed, thus, through its iconography, it could be interpreted not only as a collective social act but also as a metaphor carrying symbolic meanings: it referred at the same time to the sacred connotations associated with blood donation (the blood of Christ shed for man) and feminine physical experiences (cyclically occurring bleeding and childbirth).

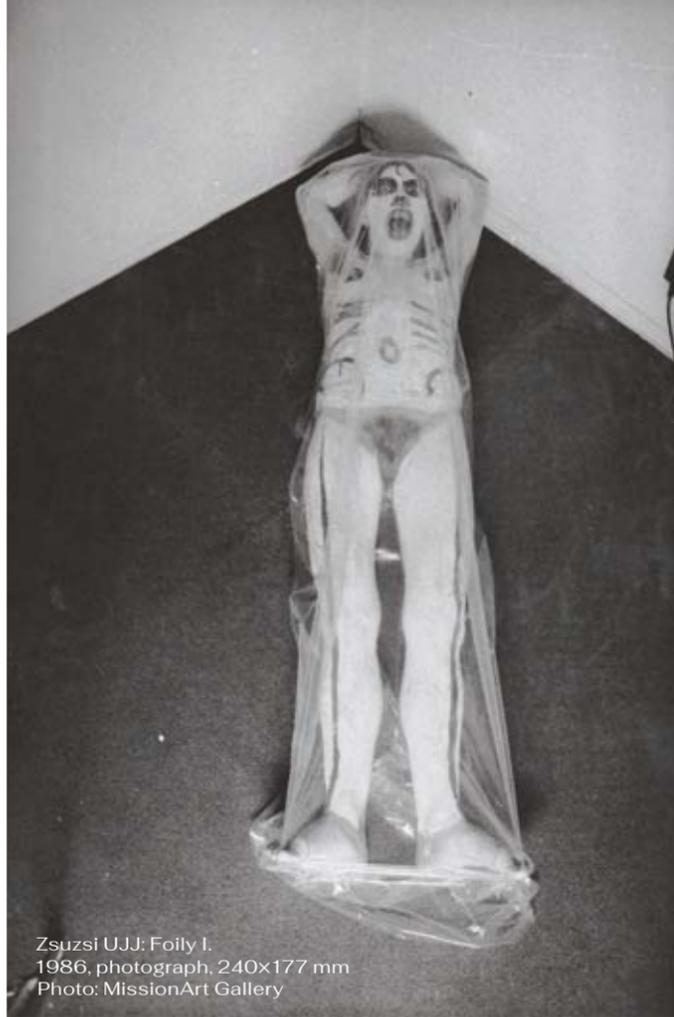
New media, however, seem to have become less apt to articulate feminist issues, which can be mainly explained by the fact that creative activities based on the use of technical tools, due to their objectivity and their alienating effect, are less able to represent bodily experiences and subjective perception and reception. Exceptions include the sensitive videos of Hajnal Németh and Éva Magyarósi, as well as the computer work and prints of Kriszta Nagy (Tereskova x-T). In the works of Kriszta Nagy, in which she transforms photographs, the body appears simultaneously as a fetish, a sexual object, a commodity, and as a living, transient matter. Although

she is the model for her own pictures, the advertising communication of consumer culture necessitates that she always appears in a disguise: her true self is obscured by her attire, her makeup, her pose, the lighting, and even her body, toned by modern training.

Ultimately, her body is always disguised by a mask, so it cannot express the subjective, inner world; what is articulated is the “social body” that plays the expected roles in a given context. In 1998, she put up a billboard on Lövölde Square in Budapest: standing in a pose that evokes lingerie advertisements, it portrays her as the ideal woman with an ideal body. In this work, which can also be categorized as street art, she is “advertising” herself as a woman artist: the ironic caption on the poster (“I am a contemporary painter”) evokes a critique of consumer culture. Kriszta Nagy's subversive artistic language is based on the rhetoric of frivolity: it's loud and cheeky, even when she is not criticizing the culture of communication, or the order of the signs that make up the world of pretences, rather conducting a ruthless analysis of herself. An example of that is *Me and My Handsome Tom-Cat* (1998), which explores the topic of ageing and change. In her latest site-specific installation, *Sleeping Beauty is Dead* (2019), in which, in addition to the issues of ageing and passing away, the failure of choosing a lifelong partner is put parallel to what it means for a woman to be the object of desire. Moreover, it is about how sexual and gender-based identification is related to the passage of time and the transformation in the psyche.

It may sound contradictory, but among the artists who use the medium of photography, the ones who most effectively articulate gender issues are those who are able to reflect on gender roles by exploring the meanings behind reality with the help of essentially realistic images. A notable representative of the underground scene, Zsuzsi Ujj was one of the first in Hungary (1985-1991) to use this medium as a tool for feminist self-expression: she only photographed herself with the help of

⁸ She repeated the action in Budapest in 2002.



Zsuzsi UJJ: Foily I.
1986, photograph, 240x177 mm
Photo: MissionArt Gallery

a self-timer, or sometimes instructed people to take photos of her. By this time, the self-portraits of Cindy Sherman were already well-known: the artist took on a variety of roles by putting on a costume (and using the embodying power of the mask), paraphrasing both well-known female models from art history as well as her own contemporaries. Zsuzsi Ujj applied white tempera on her own body on which she painted black lines and dots: one time she “magnified” her genitals, making transparent the characteristics of her femininity; another time she drew a skeleton or a skull on herself, opening the field of interpretation toward the phenomenon of death. This series of masked-body photos portrayed feminine existence as being a ghost, a rethinking of the ‘death and the maiden’ theme from a feminist perspective.

Ágnes Éva Molnár’s photo series, entitled *A Hundred Times* (2015), does not show full body self-portraits, only fragments (faces, hands, legs), which, with the cursive text written on them with pen as well as the symbols placed around them (e. g. jewellery that represents the attributes on the depictions of Venus, or a skull that evokes transience), presents the issues of the appropriability of feminine identity and whether it can be allowed to be constructed by others. The fragmented body is a central theme in feminist art, especially in painting: it is through partiality that an internally experienced, heterogeneous body that is falling apart and is intertwined with sensitivity can express itself in an authentic way. In representing her own body, the woman artist is confronted with a traditional viewpoint that reflects the male gaze. The male gaze captures the female body as one visual unit, an appropriable object obedient to the ideal of beauty.

As an opposition to this approach came the so-called ‘critical particularity’, which is exemplified in Kata Könyv’s *Partially Whole* (2017) series. Looking at it, our disturbance does not only stem from the horrific feeling evoked by the cut-outs, the wrong framing, or the dismemberment of the body, but also from the fact that the details, the close-ups of the skin we are presented with do not refer to a beautiful and healthy body, but to the undisguised reality of physical existence.



Agnes Eva MOLNAR: Hundred Times #5 –
I Stop Being Attractive
2015, giclée print, aluminium dibond,
40x40 cm



Kata KÖNYV:
Partially Whole series/ Soft Images V.
2016, installation, 60x20 cm

Andrea Fajerné Dudás is the one who confronts the image of a female body removed from Greek beauty and various humanistic ideals the most radically: in her paintings and performances, she strives to make an ideal image out of her own ‘fat body’. The basis for this is a complete identification with her own body. Fajerné does not formulate critical reflections on men’s culture, nor is she ironic, but asserts herself as woman in a naturally naive way, even if she blows up the system of expectations. Her works are all based on identification and acceptance without resignation, which can be considered a true post-feminist attitude. She accepted her husband’s name: the suffix ‘-né’, which originally expressed being in the possession of a man (i. e. the Hungarian version of Mrs.), does not mean subjugation for her, but the acceptance of them belonging together. In her performance, *Hi’m Venus and Hi’m Grace* she uses a body mask that emphasizes those physical characteristics (the flesh, the layers of fat) that are repulsive according to the beauty ideal of patriarchal culture. Dressed in a meat costume, she processes animal fat on a meat grinder, which she incorporates into a dough and bakes an

edible, life-sized female body from it. Traditional feminine activities are important for her: at her eat art performances, she cooks or bakes, sometimes mixing her own bodily fluids into the food. In her self-portraits, she portrays herself naked and expresses not only her commitment to her body, but also to her social and gender roles. In her series of paintings, *Married Life*, both she and her husband are depicted naked, usually doing some kind of housework, in the name of equality. On the painting *Rest on My Bosom* (2014), the richness of the figurative motifs corresponds to the richness of the thick layer of paint – the floral pattern of the wallpaper and the floor refers to the Song of Songs. The pictorial narrative reveals the identity of the woman artist, which is not based on unity, but on the contrary, on divergence and heterogeneity. The painting paraphrases the image of the nursing Mary, well-known from medieval and renaissance art: we see the naked Virgin, whose breasts do not appear here as objects of sexual desire, but as a means of nourishment. In Fajerné’s narrative, the mother is also a scientist who sits on top of a set of books in the midst of her daily activities to bring knowledge to her head through her womb and body.

“the creation of a feminine identity, the expression of the characteristics of women’s lifestyle, and the creation of the signs of a feminine language were one of the most important programs in Hungarian fine arts.”



Andrea DUDÁS FAJGERNÉ: Annunciation
2014, oil on canvas, 120x150 cm

In the meantime, she can only become an artist if she uses two additional hands: a fourth to paint with, and a fifth to stir lunch with as a good wife does. So, while Fajgerné is fully able to identify with traditional gender roles, she cannot (and does not want to) portray society’s expectations without a critical voice.

The most important aspect when presenting the various roles is always the experience of the body. Maternity becomes representable by physical experiences: in the series *Annunciation* (2014) we do not see the narrative of the Christian art tradition centred around the soul, but rather the processes that seemed inconceivable before the spread of feminism, and which only Frida Kahlo (one of Fajgerné’s major inspirations) could at first articulate through pictures.

In Hungarian fine art, Ágnes Eperjesi was the first to study the gender roles directly related to motherhood, child-rearing and housework, from which she compiled exciting art narratives. In her graphic works, she uses various techniques to depict everyday utensils or food items as found objects, while she represents scenes that evoke everyday

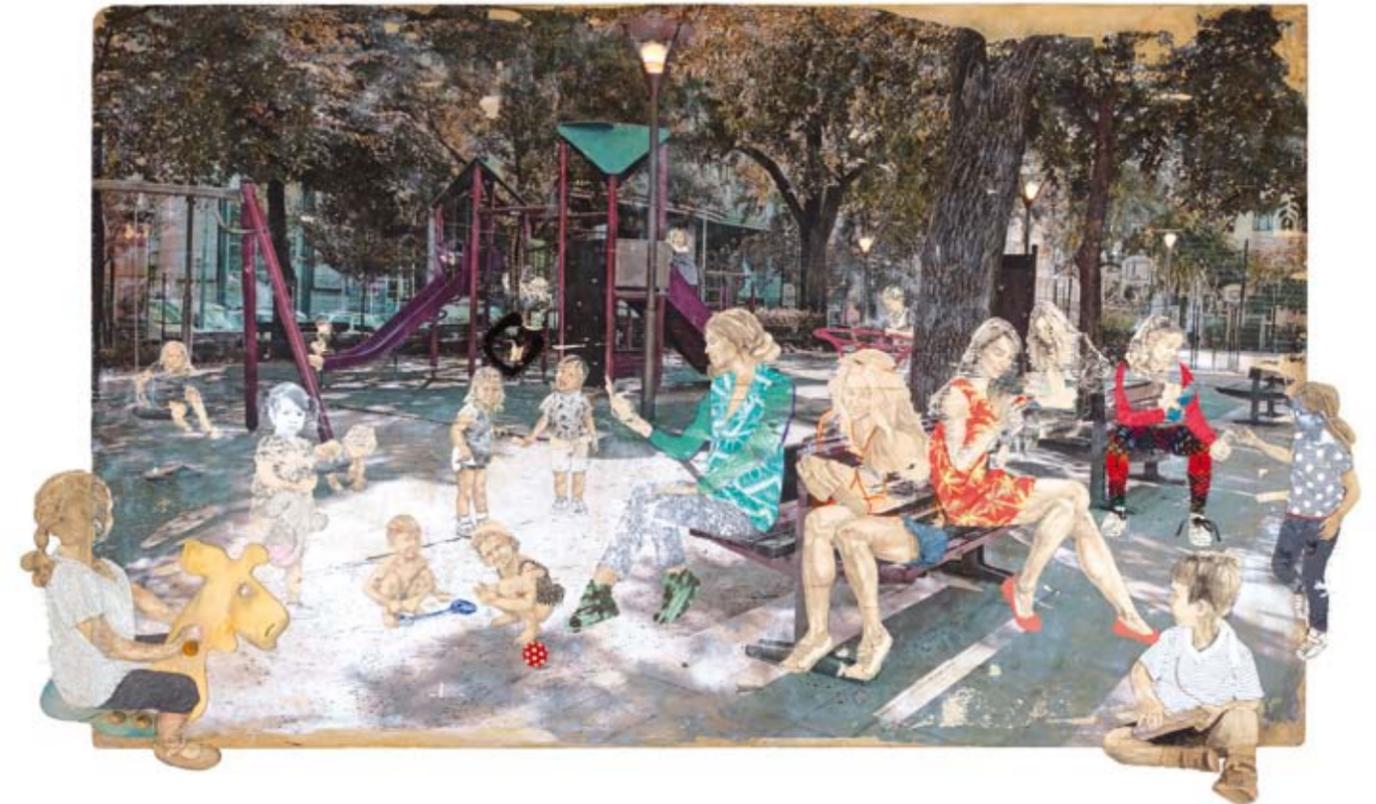


Ágnes EPERJESI: Selfportrait-slices
2004, lambda print, text on aluminium plate, 130x121 cm

activities with pictograms or comic strips. Her topics are mostly related to women’s activities (*Weekly Menu*, 2000; *Cooking Tips*, 2002; *A Sentence on Housework*; 2010), focusing on feminine experiences of reality. But in addition to the issue of gender roles, she also makes statements about the meaning of everyday life in a more general way, with philosophical consistency. For example, the series *Busy Hands* (2000), its 12 plexiglass pieces resembling tiles, contain scenes of both men and women doing regular chores that go unnoticed, thereby pointing out the insignificance of everyday life, and how the “unreal” world around us lost its values.

Child-rearing and women’s activities are also at the centre of Kata Gaál’s works from 2019 that are also not only about the issues of gender identity, but rather the way in which gender roles have been rewritten by changing gender stereotypes. Using old and worn drawing boards, her works, which thematize the behaviour patterns of women and children, are ready-mades and montages, sculptural objects and graphics all at the same time. The artist applied photographs, reminiscent

Kata GAÁL: Insta Control
2019, wood, textil, pin, wax, acril, graphite, led, 103x185 cm



of the faded illustrations of old magazines, onto the boards, but she also manipulated them: she inserted the facades of shops into a street scene, creating an agglomeration of references to consumer culture. Then she drew onto the redesigned cityscape and etched into the wood, and by scratching back motifs, she also created visual imprints of absence, thus bringing us to a world dominated by total oblivion of existence. These graphic narratives (*We Ain’t Gonna Find Any Better*; *Insta Control*) depict girls and women taking selfies or scrolling on their phones while shopping or looking after their children on the playground. In her other socially critical works, Gaál presents the virtual role models offered by pop culture: icons associated with gender identity that overwhelm the imagination of adults and children through various media, leaving no room for the free and conscious choice of self.

We can conclude that post-feminist artistic discourse has come a long way in the past two decades, producing countless revelatory works of art. Perhaps we can even say that during this period, the creation of a feminine identity, the expression of the characteristics of women’s

lifestyle, and the creation of the signs of a feminine language were one of the most important programs in Hungarian fine arts. And the narrative that can be defined by certain highlights of artistic oeuvres also sheds light on how great this road was in its impact on philosophy and society, leading from patriarchal culture to the free acceptance and representation of femininity, or even towards a free reception of the various forms of identity. But we can also say that the path has led from the confrontational, critical practice of identity construction to the freedom of individual mythologies. Feminist women today have to fight for something else, if the struggle for self-representation can still be called a fight. In its more than 100-year history, feminism has achieved its legal and political goals, which have resulted in women being moved to a different social status – as they say, women “have achieved what they could achieve”. And this is remarkable as it has changed the world! Along with socio-political changes, our private lives have changed, as well as the forms and scope of our possibilities: in the age of individual mythologies, the self that becomes individual can now choose freely and create itself ■



Zsófia KERESZTES:
Facing Enemies,
Melting Opposites
exhibition view
2018, Karlín Studios, Prague
Photo: Tomáš Souček

ATTILA SIRBIK

THE BODY as a certainty

„I can go to the other end of the world;
I can hide in the morning under the covers, make myself
as small as possible. I can even let myself melt under
the sun at the beach – it will always be there. Where I am.
It is here, irreparably: it is never elsewhere. My body,
it's the opposite of a utopia: that which is never under
different skies. It is the absolute place, the little fragment
of space where I am, literally, embodied (faire corps).”
(Michel Foucault: *Le corps utopique*)¹

“faith is the guarantee of the things we hope for, the
proof of things that cannot be seen, as well as the fear
beyond matter, where there is no freedom, only an
impassable border; that is where the body develops”

It would be best if the meaning and interpretation of the works in question, born in a corroded post-civilization space in which former localities are eliminated/intertwined, and may be replaced by an unprecedented heterogeneous proliferation, were as fluid and organically proliferating as the forms their creators use.

Filled with the desire to evolve, clones and mutants seem to be in terrible, continuous labour; while they cannot be born in this never-ending state, they have trust in decay because they know that all achievements and all competencies are a scam.² This is the vitality that comes from decay; foreign cells that reproduce themselves. Though in the cases of Zsófia Keresztes, László Gyórfy, Ágnes Verebics, Róbert Lak or István Máriás a.k.a. Horror Pista, it is not possible to decide whether the depicted, painted creatures, ceramic heads, or bodies embedded in latex are writhing at the moment of their birth or at the time of their passing; but it is also possible that the two are the same in terms of creation. A well-rounded team of geneticists and doctors lean over the pulsating paradox and stick their heads together; they are far from going unnoticed, and they are not even aware of the consequences. But faith is the guarantee of the things we hope for, the proof of things that cannot be seen, as well as the fear beyond matter, where there is no freedom, only an impassable border; that is where the body develops. More important

than this border-experience, however, is the openness that comes from the re-created sacredness and the waves of doubt, which cause the surface of the flesh to dry, crack and then split open as the conventional categories of intellect begin to collapse. The lingering disintegration, which is the very nature of the body, is swallowed up by the aura of miasmic vapour that leaks through the skin of Bataille and then vibrates in the air. And it is now a radical and irreversible decision to utilize dysfunction and chaos in the representation of the hybrid aesthetics of decomposition. The starting point is hybridization, and deterioration is fresh blood for the vampirism of understanding. On the other hand, the border is just what is needed, since it can be crossed over and over again: these border violations are a symbolic game in the space designated by art which lacks the naive idealism of changing the world. An electrifying gesture, the ecstasy of instinct, the evoked horror, the deconstruction composed of rusted metal and scrap wood, the monad-like closing of the Western mind, the detonation of a subject trapped in the dialectic language.

By distorting our realistic image of the body and shifting it toward a magically fictitious false reality, these artists (as well as their creatures) also suggest to us that mocking a humanistic body image that can be described as “realistic” generates a dangerous, subversive laugh in them.

¹ Foucault, Michel: *Le corps utopique* (Utopian Body), transl. Lucia Allais, with Caroline A. Jones and Arnold Davidson, in: Arning, Bill et al.: *Sensorium. Embodied Experience, Technology, and Contemporary Art*, ed. Caroline A. Jones, MIT Press, Massachusetts, 2006, pp. 229–234.

² “There is an interesting contradiction here as it seems that different (world) end-narratives work to restore and/or preserve the Great Narrative: if progression does not provide a unitary framework for humanity, then perhaps disappearance or extinction will, paradoxically, bring us together. This eschatological heritage seems to haunt even certain activist forms of anthropocene discourse, as the horizon of the ‘end’ politicizes the species by re-centralizing the human structure as a unit with planetary responsibility. For me, this concept is still too anthropocentric, and so I would emphasize here the unstabilizing marker of post-ness that opens up a zone of uncertainty in which the relation to the end becomes unmanageable. This may be true in a temporal sense as well, as we may have long missed the glorious end, the celebratory moment of responsibility, and we only traverse the Earth as a ghost of ourselves, practicing necropolitics and necroaesthetics. And, let’s add quickly, these necropraxis are always local at the same time. For me, the postapocalyptic sensibility, that is, the experience of the human world as a ruin, a fragment, an inorganic remnant, is also a generational experience, a kind of post-socialist perception of history” – Márió Z. Nemes (Sirbik, Attila: *A berekeszthetetlen bevégződés médiuma. Beszélgetés Nemes Z. Márióval, Kis Róka Csabával és Gyórfy Lászlóval* [The medium of the unbreakable ending. Interview with Márió Z. Nemes, Csaba Kis Róka and László Gyórfy], in: *Balkon*, 2018/4.



László GYÓRFFY: Facefuck VII
2015, ceramics, oil, 24,5x21x21,2 cm
Photo: Krisztián Zana

László GYÓRFFY: Lame Drama
2015, oil on canvas, 90x90 cm

“he always found the human body to be wrecked and distorted rather than ideal”

HYBRID AESTHETICS, BIOMORPH PARADISE

Gyórfy is terrified of the dimension beyond materiality. Although language itself has an immaterial dimension, it is brought to life by a non-eternal nervous system: our metaphors for describing the world beyond matter are beautiful, but do not help with the fact that everyone dies. His works basically reflect the experience of being embodied (i. e. being deposited in a body), without the traditional idealism of art, which was well established in Bataille’s base materialism by abolishing the hierarchy of above and below: bronze as a medium inherently has no greater aesthetic value than, say, snot.

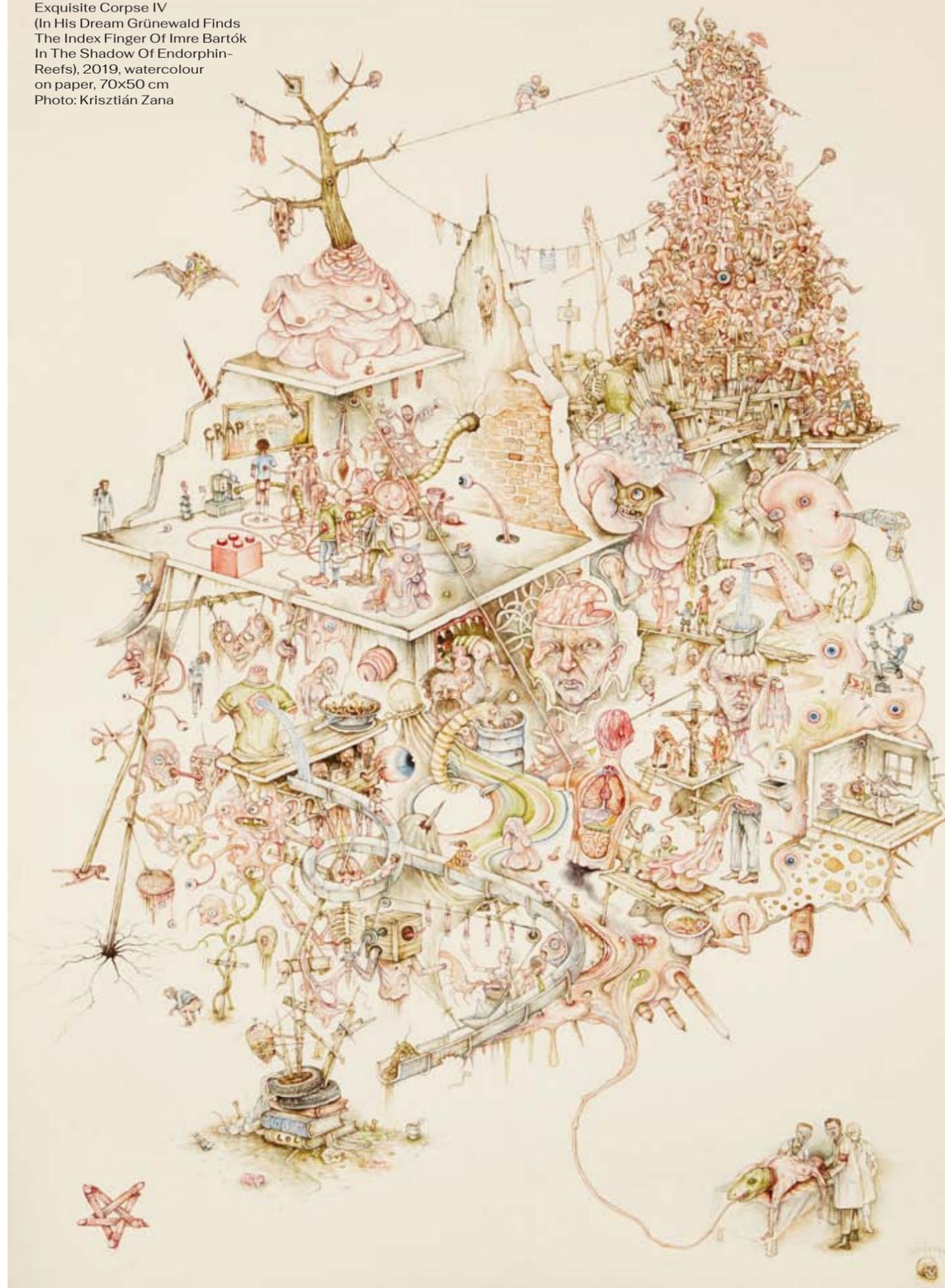
According to Gyórfy himself, he always found the human body to be wrecked and distorted rather than ideal; he became interested in the artistic methods of deforming the human body very early on, well before college or even in high school. For him, this kind of destruction is not some sort of degradation process, rather an escape route from an exclusionary beauty ideal that allows the proliferation of different, hybrid bodies.

The formlessness that often wobbles between representation and abstraction is part of a kind of hybrid aesthetic. Crossing the boundaries between dichotomies also belongs to the essence of hybridity. For example, the episodes of the creation story depicted on Gyórfy’s apocalyptic etchings, or the pieces of his painting series *The Black Rainbow/Inauguration of the Worm* (2015) are actually interchangeable, since in one of the images 9/11 happened millions of years ago: they show a transhistorical dramaturgy that is not centred around humans. In this sense, these beings, or rather, mutant organisms only resemble the human face or shape in awkward traces, making their position purely parodistic. Gyórfy’s *Miasma Project*, on the other hand, is a slightly different approach than hybridity. Here, his figures are no longer hybrid beings. In their case, one thing becomes irreversible: not the realization of rearrangement, but the fact of decay, where the artist deals with the vitality that comes from decomposition along his typical post-apocalyptic anthropology, based on horror traditions. According to Bataille, “Blindfolded, we refuse to see that only death guarantees the fresh upsurging without which life would be blind. We refuse to see that life is the trap set for the balanced order, that life is nothing but instability and disequilibrium.”³ In his sour revelation, Gyórfy is interested in rewriting childhood visual experiences as well as the study of dead or zombified genres of fine art – his works blend private images and official representation through a variety of media.

Gyórfy has always considered bare fiction more important than stripped down reality, which is even more exciting if there is a little clothing left on it, even if is in shreds; this torn-up costume is an accurate representation of the position and role of “experiencing reality” in his works. For him, the self in itself is a conceptual construct; together with appropriated quotes and references, quasi-personal fragments are embedded in the fabric of a rhizomatically organized reference network from which it is impossible to unravel the origin of motifs. Gyórfy’s latest work, *Exquisite Corpse IV (In his dream Grünewald finds the index finger of Imre Bartók in the shadow of*

³ Bataille, Georges: *Erotism, Death & Sensuality*, transl. Mary Dalwood, City Lights Books, San Francisco, 1986, p. 59.

László GYÓRFFY:
Exquisite Corpse IV
(In His Dream Grünewald Finds
The Index Finger Of Imre Bartók
In The Shadow Of Endorphin-
Reefs), 2019, watercolour
on paper, 70x50 cm
Photo: Krisztián Zana



“wild creatures beyond any kind of morality, alien to the pain of existence, ready to challenge the logic of perception and cut Deleuze’s throat”



Róbert LAK: Apollion
2018, mixed media on
canvas, 100x120 cm

endorphin-reefs, 2019) not only recalls the title and the motifs of Imre Bartók’s prose⁴, especially the universe of *Jericho Under Construction*, but its whole structure by creating a new hybrid tissue through demolition. Regarding the anatomy of cognition, Gyórfy is happy to share the box metaphor with Bartók: “If writing itself is like boxing, then a book is nothing more than a magic box with matryoshka-like structure, which contains more and more boxes; however, the ultimate secret, the metaphysical core, similarly to an excavation, is unattainable, since each box only contains another box ad infinitum.”⁵

The world of **Lak**, which is a kind of biomorphic paradise, the paradise of (walking through) hell, is also somewhat in tune with the universe of Gyórfy. There is a distressing continuity in the way Lak constantly returns to the same place and starts over; many of his pictures seem to be the same, a kind of mantra-like repetition as a conscious form of self-emptying. It is like a local, accelerated attempt of an incarnation of a single soul in the same body, so that it changes, stretches, spreads, or shrinks just slightly, as if something had just sucked the life out of it; continuous dying and resurrection. It is not an intermediate state, neither the desire for inhibiting the life trapped between the nothing/something before and after life, but a continuous copy-making, a visual condensation of the philosophical categories of ‘same’ and ‘nothing’. The painted creatures of Lak carry dimensions beyond matter. Dysfunctionality is supposedly unsettling because it is unacceptable for a person not to represent something truly valuable.



Róbert LAK:
Triptychon
2018, mixed media
on plywood,
72,4x172,5x5 cm

The useless is worthless. I think there is no real hybridity in Lak’s works. Of course, it is always worthwhile to make assumptions, and Lak’s pieces would like to suggest that there is a chance that something may re-form, but the realization of that formation is something that is constantly lacking. Religious coexistence, sado-masochism, the hiding Elephant Man, who is emerging from Lynch’s armpit as an embalmed bovine embryo, who then suddenly gets excited to book a trip and becomes the eighth passenger on the space shuttle of Giger, the opiate-addicted Swiss painter, to break out of Kane’s chest at lunchtime and wink at Bobby Peru, who will surely fuck Lula one day, but not today, because he has to hurry. Those that walk through, spend time, pop up, get copied into each other in these spaces are not morally weak, but rather wild creatures beyond any kind of morality, alien to the pain of existence, ready to challenge the logic of perception and cut Deleuze’s throat, and who would love to direct the blood splashing from the great philosopher’s artery directly to Bacon’s face. Do the figures in the paintings wear masks, or are they the inspirations for well-executed masks? Is this a clothed or a naked “reality”? Does this matter at all, or are there continuous distortions, and as soon as you ask a question, it cancels itself out immediately?

So, is it Kane, who has no facial expressions due to the mask built onto his face, or is it the pitiful figure of Merrick that emerges from Lynch’s armpit? What is more important is to look behind the distorted exterior. While ever-changing creatures cleverly avoid clichés, pathos, and kitsch, violence appears as a clinically pure abstraction on canvases depicting these softened figures; or, if not on a canvas, then an aluminium tray or the heavy door of a socialist cabinet made of chipboard. Lak’s works primarily depict enclosed spaces with biomorphic, always human-like figures sitting, standing or lying in twisted poses. These figures usually have a naturally coloured flesh, but are often bloody, have a smell of

decay, and they can take on all colours of the spectrum. It is as if there is some kind of coincidence- or error-provoking awareness in the spaces around these distorted figures, which always pushes the creative process in a completely different direction from the way it started. Although all of them are obviously painted with a brush or a spray gun, it is characteristic of Lak’s portraits and human figures to bear errors typical of analogue photographs and traditional films, such as the oval distortions appearing after developing the film, or scratches and other disruptions. For a painting, this means that its texture is enriched by adding a new spatial layer with each new layer of paint. The original, relatively realistic figure is often covered with so many additional layers that it is almost or completely unrecognizable. So there is no hesitation and correction and transparency, but a highly expressive form of expression. Then, as if they were suddenly put in Poe’s inquisition chamber. The victory of the soul over the flesh. This flesh does not want to please, but latch onto your heart as an octopus and feed on it. This may be our only chance if we become like these post-apocalyptic creatures, and wait for a definitive, inevitable, and irreversible end in a completely emptied, windowless room; where the end is a perpetual repetition of a game that is always the same. The figures of Lak in this eternal repetition are perhaps the last human beings to evoke centuries-old traditions of individuality with their torso, whereas their identities are merely indicated by truncated and unstoppably decaying and fraying bodies. The people in Bresson’s (and sometimes Fassbinder’s) spaces can suffer like this. Lak reverses the constructivist El Lissitzky’s statement, “We reject space as the painted coffin for our living bodies.” For Lak, even the landscape, the green of the meadow, is merely a pathetic illusion of freedom trapped within the coordinates of perspective.

⁴ “Imre Bartók set off on different, sometimes parallel and sometimes perpendicular paths of literature, with a unique map and several destinations. Literary theory, life philosophy, world novel, monster drama. Embodied minds and mindless bodies. Antroposophy and TV series. Pain and grace. Behind the problem and question of a humanity is man himself; the seed of man.” (János Szegő’s laudation for Imre Bartók upon him receiving the Attila Hazai Literary Prize.)

“Imre Bartók was born in Budapest in 1985 and has been living there with minor interruptions ever since. He graduated from the ELTE Miklós Radnóti High School. From 2003 to 2008 he studied philosophy at Eötvös Loránd University, then he was a PhD student in aesthetics. After his first novel, *Fém* (Metal), released in 2011, the parts of his trilogy (*A patkány éve*, *A nyúl éve*, *A kecske éve* – Year of the Rat, Year of the Rabbit, Year of the Goat) have been published annually since 2013.” (Source: <https://litera.hu/irodalom/publicisztika/frankenstein-es-robber.html>, last downloaded: 10 October 2019)

⁵ Urbán, Bálint: *Az ezer fennsík és a dobozok* [The thousand plateaus and the boxes], *Műút online*, 1 February 2019. (<https://www.muut.hu/archivum/30594>, last downloaded: 27 October 2019)



Zsófia KERESZTES:
Facing Enemies,
Melting Opposites exhibition view
2018, Karlin Studios, Prague
Photo: Tomáš Souček

“The false obsession with perfection can be called mutation in this dimension, which is no longer aimed at perfection, but at survival by adaptation. Borders are blurred between opposing parties, who are enemies and allies at the same time”

The objects of **Keresztes** are subjects without identity in a post-apocalyptic dimension; beings who cyclically devour and recreate themselves, but in their case perfection is not an issue or a goal; that is not how they operate. Rather, they exist in a kind of self-inducing process within a monotonous cycle, in which something is added to a creature in a certain moment, and some sort of “cell proliferation” begins; or in the other instant the thing turns back into itself, taking away from what it has already incorporated, and is thus forming. These effects are neither positive nor negative, they just happen and that’s it. Some of Keresztes’s creatures resign to their lonely fate, while some divide and create a company for themselves, thus, the absence is mutated to completeness.

The false obsession with perfection can be called mutation in this dimension, which is no longer aimed at perfection, but at survival by adaptation. Borders are blurred between opposing parties, who are enemies and allies at the same time.

Their caring touches leave their mark on the other as well as their destructive attacks. They adapt, and strive for equalization. They “snack” on one another, take on the other’s experience, then knead it, shape it, and offer it to their partner, or to themselves. This kind of “self-cannibalism” is reflected in the fact that, for example, one shape is repeated several times on one body. For example, on *My Dearest Enemy* or *The Totem of Hidden Profiles*, repetitive shapes refer to paired organs or body parts, as if they were the embodiment of Siamese twins or avatars. Keresztes’s objects are generally associated with the fluidity of the net in the sense that liquids, unlike solids, cannot retain their shape; neither the space is fixed, nor the time is bound. This may seem contradictory because of the use of materials, and of course, when we look at these objects, we see solid, statue-like figures. Even so, their shapes resemble some kind of flowing bodies, which give the illusion that they can take on different shapes at any time, and that they have many forms hidden in them.



Zsófia KERESZTES: The Judge
2018, styrofoam, glass mosaic,
grout, copper, glue, fibreglass
220x130x90 cm



HORROR Pista: Rocket Base
2013, mixed media on paper, 70x100 cm

DOMESTIFIED HORROR AND THE TEMPTATION OF REALITY – ART CAPSULES AGAINST SOCIOPOLITICAL AMNESIA

In the dimensions of horror, there is always a kind of unbridled freedom, an imaginative outgrowth of instinctive curiosity, and the liberating power of fiction. Where the fictional reality of a fictional object is placed next to the reality of a real object, the function of the imagination is enhanced. In the case of **István Móriás a.k.a. Horror Pista**, the use of this space is conscious in some cases; however, in some of his works, especially in the meticulous, carefully crafted space of mini-installations, it seems that he repeatedly goes beyond intentionality, giving a chance to instinctive expression to present itself. In such cases, he crosses the border within which we still have actual grips to politics and public life, where the socio-horror is born. In the case of these border-crossing works, however, the viewer's intellect can roam much more freely: these works no longer trigger only intellectual but also emotional reactions.

Some of Horror Pista's works are playing with the temptation of a realistic state of being,

so these pieces are less fictional, but they are really exciting because their life dimensions start and return to reality: they create a kind of realistic horror, domesticate the dimensions of horror and make it familiar to us by not creating, but rather showcasing our little home-made everyday horrors. But let's take a look at exactly what and which emotions are played off by Horror's aesthetic range. First and foremost, there is the group of well-known fairy tale topoi that have fossilized into the deep layers of the unconscious, and into which Horror discreetly lowers, sinks, submerges his drill head, while also stirring up experiences based on prejudices, which regard some of our senses (smell, taste, touch) as inferior or base. But let's consider another central motif of his: frustration. What can you do with the anthropological magic tricks of the cult of the body that emerges from the mirror-smooth waters of the advertising world, which is deeply embedded in capitalism, if we associate the body with frustration, mutation, ugliness,

HORROR Pista: Purgatory
The Liquidation of the Squeal
2012, mixed media on paper, 100x150 cm



“The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.”

HORROR Pista: Bureaucrat Gas
2009, mixed media on paper, 21x28 cm



insanity? In the light of history, reality often carries the most absurd situations. Through his own filter, Horror passes on actual past experiences, be they personal or collective, to sublimate them into works of art in his workshop, his creative space.

In these works, he also expresses social criticism, often imbued with thick irony and, occasionally, a hefty dose of cynicism. He makes visual medicine: art capsules against sociopolitical amnesia. In many of his works, not only fiction but rather the temptation of the realistic state of existence can be discovered, which creates the magical, suggestive power of his visual language. In the details of some of Horror's works, as well as in these details' context, the disgusting and the sublime meet with a sense of balance; there are also cases when the balance is tilted for some reason, but only rarely. Thus, by injecting the sublime and the disgusting into each other (I would by no means say 'squashing them together', because in most of his works there is no sign of aggression, rather careful deliberation is what dominates), it creates in us a kind of

visceral, sensual and at the same time reflective attitude. “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.”⁶ Why this quote? It is right here, in this act of absence by the artist, precisely in the gesture of prudence, that we are shown the paralysis embedded in the terror of action, the power of inactivity born from sophisticated forms of fear-mongering. These dimensions are illustrated, for example, in those of Horror's works that embed the relationship between society and the individual. In this world of Horror Pista, this system of relations is immensely complicated and complex, for it infiltrates the world of apocalypse and science fiction beyond duplicity, perversion and hypocrisy. In case everyday horrors were not enough for you, or if you were to get rid of it, if you were ready to make peace with the fact that anyone's head could fall off at any time, or that whoever is embracing you is just a skeleton, you cannot escape either because you are hunted down by a strange creature or punished by your dreaded teacher. But these are all just projections. Which are nothing but the shadow of our most hidden inner fears. A grossly light egotrip. Or something completely different.

⁶ This quote, “which [John F.] Kennedy attributed to Edmund Burke and which recently was judged the most popular quotation of modern times (in a poll conducted by editors of The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations). Even though it is clear by now that Burke is unlikely to have made this observation, no one has ever been able to determine who did.” Keyes, Ralph: The Quote Verifier, St Martin's Griffin, New York, 2006, p. 59, 109, and 286.



Ágnes VEREBICS: Breathlessness
2014, oil, canvas 130x130 cm,



Ágnes VEREBICS: Breathlessness II
2014, oil, canvas 60x60 cm

“the shapes that are obscured under or rather behind these waterfalls of hair, develop into a sort of as if-identity in the gap between the deeply personal and the impersonal”

Verebics, though of varying intensity, has always been interested in the human body as a depicted object, as a motif with content and layers of meaning. The body sometimes appears uncovered and sometimes in symbolic clothing, often pushing the limit of extremity. She is attracted to portrayals of peculiar, often deformed, strange-looking people as well as animals, or extreme figures produced by distorted Western (or even Eastern) cultures, and those affected by genetic disorders. She sees the Self as polycentric, multi-layered, unstable and historically situational, a product of continuous differentiations and multiple identifications. Therefore, she does not perceive verbal or cultural exchange taking place between bound individuals, rather between malleable, transformable subjects. In the constant struggle with hegemony and resistance, every form of cultural intervention changes both participants.

The works of Verebics suggest that the body is the only certainty in general uncertainty. What are we seeing? Body manipulation, visual-metaphorical distortions of an actual image of the body, the illicit body, gesture essences, i. e. the visually amplified body-signal as a compression of the symbolic space. Verebics creates a world that refers to more than just reality: to the conceivable thought which is forced, or, in a better case, which is besieging the surface of subjectivity.

When viewing Verebics's images of bodies, it is not at all certain that we see what we are looking at. Her vaguely false representations of animals tend to refer to human behaviours that are considered deviant in some respects, as well as extreme and subcultural fashions. For example, when looking at a goose wearing a latex dress or a rooster decked out in leather, our mind almost immediately jumps to sadism and masochism, or the aggressiveness often mistakenly associated with punk (sub)culture. The artist uses a rather peculiar and interesting approach and creative representation, with which she seems to want to create a presence for the “other world” in our world, which (however strange it may sound) is the essential presence of absence in the foreseeable, perceptible and perceived presence. Ultimately, there is no hiding, no hidden meaning here, everything is unpacked; we just don't see what we are looking at, that's all. Among other things, this is the genius of Verebics. We are getting even closer to her subjects, the human bodies, by the fact that they are not even present this time.



Ágnes VEREBICS: Hairy Gang
2015, print, 100x40 cm

Using various techniques, the overlapping of dimensions for displaying the body or physicality is what Verebics's pieces are mostly born from. While some of her works carry the marks of horror aesthetics, incorporating its ugly, scary, provocative characteristics, other projects, such as *Hairy Gang*, at first glance, reveal a sort of over-aestheticized world. This series of female nudes depicted with incredibly lush hair that also takes us into the world of fashion, has an amazingly powerful atmosphere. It's as if we were looking at trendy women on the catwalk in the latest collection of hairy outfits. However, despite the fact that we are “facing” shapely, fit female bodies with rich hair hanging almost to the ground, many possible interpretations and, at the same time, misinterpretations can occur. Who are these women? Are they prehistoric women waiting for a marrowbone at the entrance of the cave? Are they androgynous beings, well-made wax dolls, sorceresses, taxidermied women who have been mummified for years until their hair reaches their ankles, dominatrices blessed with power in their hair, or are they the cursed results of atavistic genetics? Perhaps a sort of essential presence of all this is condensed into these creations, or rather, creatures, beautiful hair monsters created from human beings. Though not as vigorously and clearly as in Verebics's many other works, the beautifully dreadful presence of horror is there lurking and fluorescing in them. It is an attractive and repulsive, freezing duality. Indirect, subtly hidden, suggestive horror. Verebics incorporates into the *Hairy Gang* series a moment of intense detachment from reality by resurrecting indolence in her models, by which they cease to be models, and become bearers of concepts hidden in indolence; faceless beings who carry within themselves the duality of existence and appearance. But this duality does not exist between the body and an assumed role (this time conferred on the models by the artist), but rather within the body itself. After all, our image of a human as a model ceases to exist; the artist eliminates the desire in her models to represent themselves.

In Verebics's works, representation moves in the direction of the representation of the objectified body, and a specific segment of it, which in a sense takes over the role of everything, eventually replacing the body carrying it and referring to a distant, flawed, genetically defective body. For Verebics, it is inevitably important to grasp and show the essence of “beingness” through the depicted figures. It is no coincidence that we are talking about figures, since it is crucial for the artist to show the absent body that she perceives in her models, the desire for creation making her grasp it. In this case we are dealing with a special situation, since instead of paintings we are talking about photos depicting figures of flesh and blood (how many times do we have to forget this while looking at them?).

These behavior-less women (whose physical endowments are almost entirely obscured by “hair power”), elevated into works of art, blur those boundaries and mould those positions of the viewer, legitimized by society and mass culture, that would instantly transport us to the sensual dimension of sexuality. Instead, the shapes that are obscured under or rather behind these waterfalls of hair, develop into a sort of as if-identity in the gap between the deeply personal and the impersonal, not necessarily losing, but transcending their feminine identity. A strange mixture of homeliness and alienation, mysteriousness, and a kind of eeriness is present in this work all at the same time. *Hairy Gang* is a kind of mixture that blurs the boundaries, the demarcation line between bodily existence and computer manipulation. At the same time, the irony of this gesture cannot be ignored, since Verebics does not use the clone stamp tool to adhere to the unrealistic standards of fashion photography by endlessly chiseling the images, but only for manipulation and to enhance the mound of hair. In this way, the atmosphere of fashion mixes with ancient spiritual features and a kind of degeneration, creating the feeling of “I desire it, but I would not let it into my home”. ■

BIOGRAPHIES

Linda BÉRCZI – publisher, editor

Linda Bérczi is the president of the Together for Art Association as well as the director of L Art Management. After graduating as a cultural manager, she started her career at the G13 Contemporary and Modern Art Gallery in 2007. During the four years she spent working there, she acquainted herself with the Hungarian contemporary art scene. She has created and organized various cultural programs since 2012, including the Afternoon of Open Studios and Budapest Art Week, which has hosted numerous exhibitions and related programs (guided tours, lectures, performances, workshops) at more than 60 venues (leading museums, galleries and other exhibition spaces) in Budapest. She had been the founder and leader of the LAOS Studio House while it operated. She is one of the mentors of the Fine Arts Manager course at the WERK Academy. She is the founder and leader of the Budapest Art Mentor program, and the editor of 'MŰVÉSZLÉT – Kortárs kézikönyv képzőművészeknek' ('BEING AN ARTIST – Contemporary Handbook for Artists').

Zsófia DANKA – author

Zsófia Danka (1990) was born in Budapest. She graduated in art history from the Pázmány Péter Catholic University in 2013. In the same year, she started her MA course at the Manchester Metropolitan University in Contemporary Curating. After graduation, she started to work in Kunsthalle Budapest as an assistant curator. She was also a gallery manager of Art+Text Budapest and she was part of collaborations with different artists and curators from all over the world, working both abroad and in Budapest. Danka was invited to work as a deputy editor-in-chief at Artlocator Magazine in 2017. From 2018 she started to work in the National Archives of Hungary as an event manager and became the leading curator of the Négyszoba Gallery in Budapest. Zsófia Danka regularly publishes articles and organizes exhibitions and art events. Her main interest is working with emerging artists on socio-cultural events from the creation of the concept through the visualization to the follow-up activity.

Sándor HORNYIK – author

Art historian and curator Sándor Hornyik (1972) is currently working for the Institute of Art History of the Research Centre for the Humanities at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences as a senior research fellow. He has a PhD in art history (ELTE, Budapest, 2005). His research concerns the history and theory of avant-garde and neo-avant-garde art as well as the theoretical issues of contemporary art and visual culture studies. He published books on the neo-avant-garde reception of modern natural sciences (*Avant-Garde Science*, Budapest, Akadémiai, 2008) and on the intersections of visual studies and contemporary art (*Aliens in a Sin City*, Budapest, L'Harmattan, 2011). Between 2012 and 2014 he was the chief curator of MODEM (Museum of Modern Art Debrecen) where he curated several exhibitions dealing with socialist and post-socialist visual cultures. He also curated exhibitions in Maribor (*Foreign Matter: Surrealism in the Attraction of Reality*, National Liberation Museum, 2012), in Riga ("*Other*" *Revolutionary Traditions*, Riga Arts Space, 2011), and in Paris (*Cosmologie quotidienne*, Institut Hongrois, 2012). Recently, he edited (with Edit Sasvári and Hedvig Turai) an English volume on the Hungarian art of the 1960s and 70s (*Doublespeak and Beyond*, London, Thames and Hudson, 2018).

Róza Tekla SZILÁGYI – author

Róza Tekla Szilágyi graduated in art history and aesthetics from ELTE, and then worked for six months at the PiArtworks Contemporary Gallery in Istanbul. She continued her studies at the University of Fine Arts Budapest with a Masters degree in Contemporary Art Theory and Curatorial Studies. She has been publishing in national and international art magazines and publications since 2012. She was the founder of the Omnivore Gallery and senior curator of the Hybridart Space Contemporary Art Gallery in Budapest (2017–2018). Currently she is a senior associate at Artmagazin Online.

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Gerda Széplaky, PhD is an associate professor at the Visual Arts Institute of the Eszterházy Károly University. She has worked as the editor of journals such as Vulgo, Flash Art and Performa as well as several essay collections on philosophy and aesthetics. She regularly publishes essays about philosophy and aesthetics in arts journals and other professional periodicals, and in books. She is a regular participant of scientific conferences as well as a member of various research teams. As a curator, she has organised exhibitions in Rome, Venice, Cluj-Napoca, Budapest and Eger. Published books: *The Body of Man. Philosophical Essays* (Kalligram, Bratislava, 2011); *Diverse Architecture. The Architecture of Dezső Ekler from an Aesthetic Perspective* (L'Harmattan, Budapest, 2016); *The Hair on the Back of Kant's Neck. Essays on Aesthetics* (L'Harmattan, Budapest, 2017); *Wounding the Color Black. On Zsolt Berszán's art* (Asociatia Bazis, Cluj-Napoca, 2018); *Dark and Silent. Philosophical Essays About Literature, Film and Art* (L'Harmattan, Budapest, 2019).

Attila SIRBIK – author

Brought up in Rovinj, Attila Sirbik was born in Yugoslavia in 1978. He has lived in several cities in Central and Eastern Europe. He was a soldier in Požarevac. He is the chief editor of the arts journal Symposium, as well as a contributor to the fine arts magazine Új Művészet and Balkon. He is also a writer. His first novel was published at the prestigious Hungarian publishing house, Magvető.

Délia VÉKONY – editor-in-chief

Délia Vékony completed her art history and philosophy BA (Hons) and art history MA degree at the University of South Africa. She received her PhD in art history at Leiden University, The Netherlands. She has been working for the International Business School, Budapest since 2006 where she is currently a senior lecturer, responsible for the arts management specialization. Aside from curating exhibitions, she writes for various art periodicals. Her book *Lost in art. Searching for inherent quality in contemporary art* (Budapest, Underground, 2011) has been used as a textbook by students. Délia Vékony holds lectures at various local forums and international institutions, such as the Contemporary Collectors Academy (Budapest), Maastricht University (The Netherlands), IESA (Paris) and the University of Oxford. She works as a mentor for artists in the Budapest Art Mentor program. She is interested in the operation and mechanisms of the contemporary art world, as well as concepts such as presence, absence and rupture in art, and the responsibility of art and the artist in the 21st century.

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