



REVIEW OF HUNGARIAN PHOTOGRAPHY



Dear Reader,

I'm, proud to hand over the first issue of the Review of Hungarian Photography for your very eyes.

Our goal with this publication is to help deepen the international community into the background and the current trends and thoughts of the photographers working in Hungary. What type of projects are Hungarian photographers developing nowadays? How the experts analyse their works? Both questions could be relevant to those interested in this field. We are confident that this selection, compiled from the articles deemed to be the most interesting among the ones published in the Fotóművészet (Art of Photography) magazine in 2017 and 2018, is going to be useful for providing the Reader with a nuanced picture of the recent and ongoing developments in Hungarian photography.

The selection includes a wide variety of articles. We considered it essential that all these thoughts and findings characterising the photography and art history research and present the diversity of approaches to photography in today's Hungary are published in English as well.

As the editor-in-chief of the Fotóművészet magazine, I gladly recommend this publication, which was created as a result of cooperation between our editorial staff and the Capa Centre.

I wish for all our readers to find exciting artists, concepts, thoughts and surprising discoveries. Hopefully, you will find, our review is a compelling read about remarkable works and artists.

Mihály Surányi

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The Robert Capa Contemporary Photography Centre, which opened in Budapest in 2013, on the 100th anniversary of the birth of the world-famous Hungarian-born photo reporter, Robert Capa, is the leading photography institute in Hungary.

It is indisputable that the works of several Hungarian photographers constitute an essential part of the universal canon of the history of photography. Great individuals determining the course of photography on a global scale have emerged from our circles in Hungary, who played not only an important but essential and dominant role in the development and recognition of the formal language of photography. We can also word it this way: the Hungarian history of photography occupies a special place because, without it, the 20th-century chapter of the universal history of photography could not have been written. It was not only a single Hungarian artist here or there who proved to be exceptionally talented; it was Hungarians as a whole who determined the course of development of the visual perspective. Let me mention a few names: László Moholy-Nagy, Brassai, and among the photographers: Márton Munkácsi, Robert Capa, and André Kertész.

We thought that it would be an excellent idea to use this unique background and attention to present the current developments of Hungarian photography. Working with the reputable Fotóművészet magazine, which has been in print for more than 60 years, we gladly present the first volume of this collection of writings on contemporary Hungarian photography.

Orsolya Kőrösi



When selecting the articles, interviews, and studies to be included in the first issue of the Review of Hungarian Photography magazine, published under the auspices of the editorial team of the *Capa Központ* {Capa Centre} (Gabriella Csizsek, Balázs Gáspár, Judit Gellér, and Emese Mucci) and the head editor of the *Fotóművészet* {Art of Photography} magazine (Mihály Surányi), our goal was to allow a wider audience to familiarise themselves with the diversity and variety of photography in Hungary.

It was an important criterion to present newly discovered facts and stories about artists who already enjoy a certain degree of recognition on the international stage, such as the excerpts from the diary of André Kertész as well as the pursuits of the photography groups '*Pécsi Műhely*' {Workshop of Pécs} and '*Munka-kör*' {Work-Group}. Writings discussing the works of contemporary creators, Imre Benkő, Péter Korniss, Arion Gábor Kudász, Gábor Ősz, Dezső Szabó, and Balázs Telek, among others, as well as of aspiring young artists, interviews made with art collectors or the founder of the Fortepan online photography collection, criticisms of exhibitions, and reports on diploma thesis defences can all be found among these curated articles.

We trust that the excellent past and exciting present of Hungarian photography are accurately reflected in these studies and the readers not only acquire valuable knowledge but also enjoy reading this interesting material.

Judit Gellér

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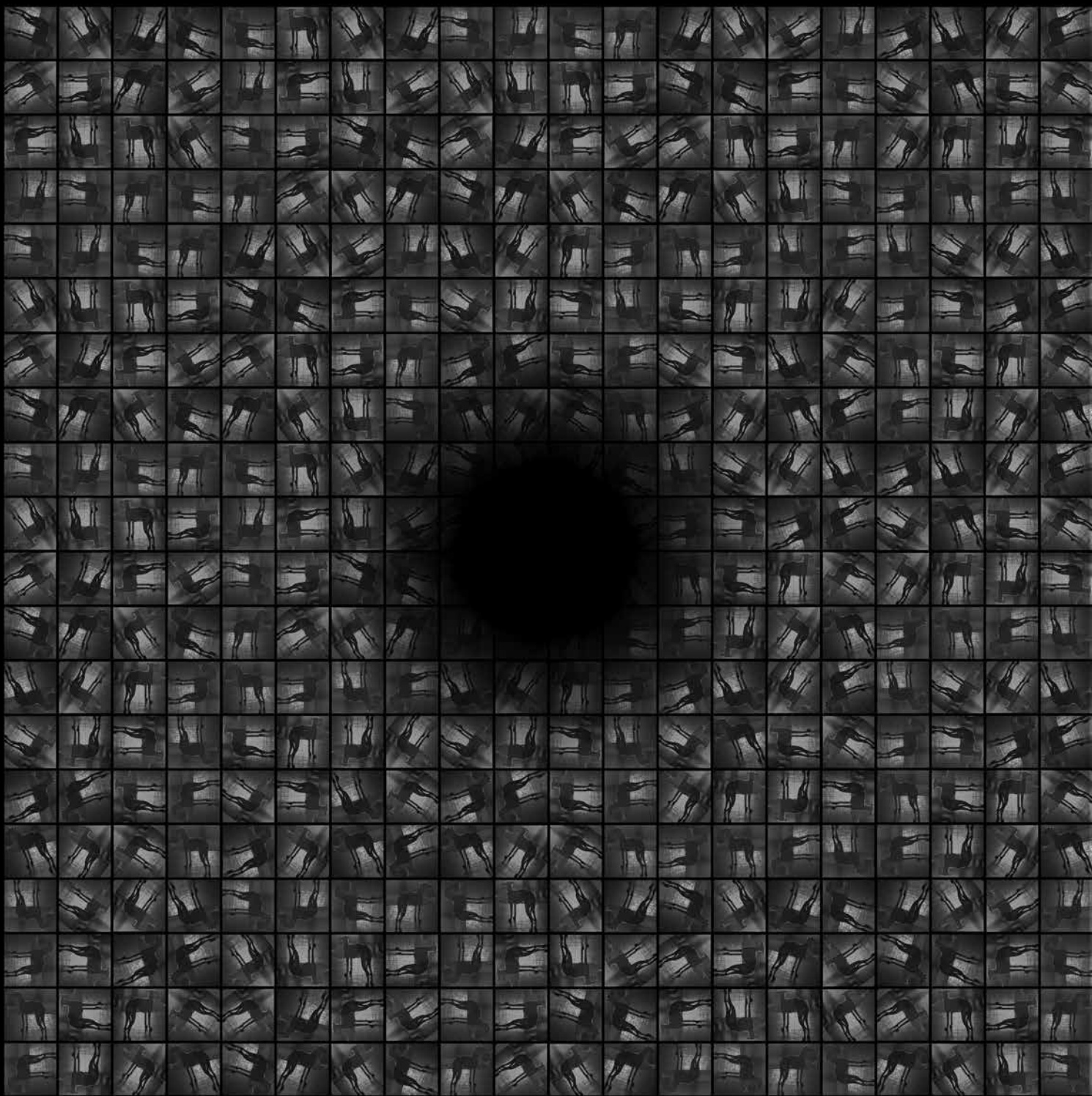
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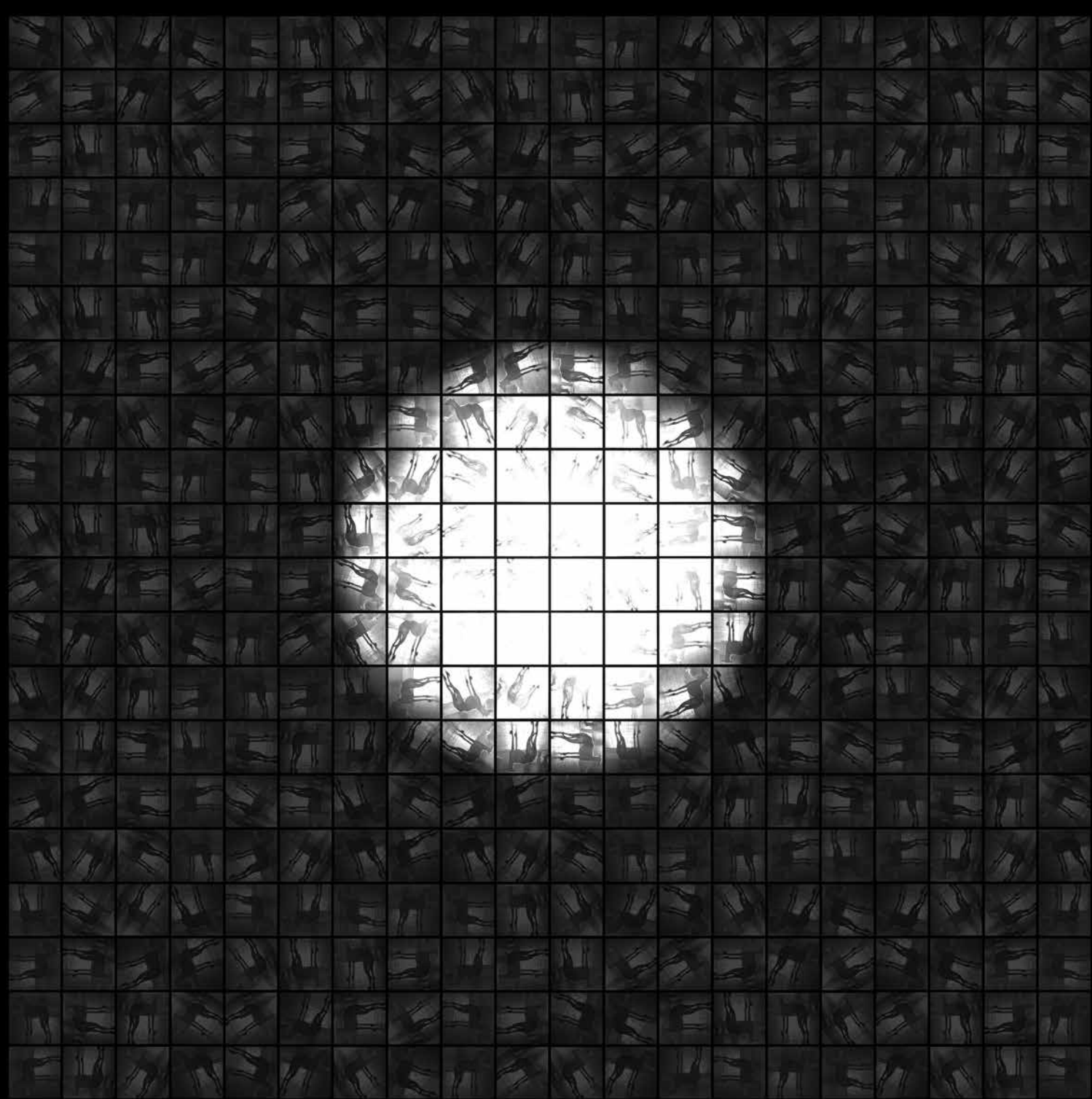
REVIEW OF HUNGARIAN
PHOTOGRAPHY



SÁNDOR BACSKAI

MY LIFE IS ONE HUNDRED PERCENT ABOUT PHOTOGRAPHY

INTERVIEW WITH PHOTOGRAPHER **IMRE DRÉGELY**



Imre DRÉGELY: *Dog 1-2*, 2007, *DIID* series, digital collage, giclée print, 120x240 cm © Imre Drégely

Sándor Bacskai: *When and where were you born? What did your parents do?*

Imre Drégely: I spent my childhood in the village of Mélykút, in Bács-Kiskun County. I come from an artisan family. I was born in the maternity hospital of neighbouring Bácsalmás, one day before Christmas. My father's family was a multigenerational dynasty of men's tailors. My mother was originally a hairdresser, but she worked only for a very short time: after my parents got married, she became a housewife. My father learned the tricks of the trade in my grandfather's tailor shop, but he had a gift for draughtsmanship, and his unfulfilled artistic ambitions added several detours to his life's path. In his youth, he participated in the Mélykút drama society, he directed plays, painted scenery, then after a cultural scandal ending in a show trial and eight months of remand (in Csillag Prison, Szeged), he was able to commute his further punishment by doing military service. As a decorator in the army, he had to paint — inter alia — Tito as a chained dog on the barrack's wall. (The family archive has safeguarded a photo from his years in the army: the picture of a dead parachutist at the airport of Pápa who had crash-landed. This is the first image from my childhood that burnt into my mind. It was a trauma — the story of the background story of my picture titled Soldier [Katona] from Sensor [Szenzor].) After military service, my newly-wed parents lived in Budapest for a couple of years as lodgers in a shop in Szív street. My father worked for the Jelmezkölcsönző, a costume rental company,

which made costumes for theatre performances and films. (In the meantime, he also meddled in some illegal package transmission: he smuggled packages of charcuterie from his hometown to his brother-in-law's butcher's shop.) However, when my father was offered a position as director of the community centre in Mélykút, my parents moved back home. This is how I was “almost” born in Budapest.

SB: *Would you tell us about your childhood?*

ID: In the crucial years of my childhood, till the age of 9-10, I spent a lot of time in my father's “empire”: I grew up in the community centre. Events, banquets, dance school, a circus troupe that set up camp there, a musty office, memories that are partly captured by photographs as well. There was also an amateur film club and a photography club — this is where I have my first photo lab memories from; the darkroom lamp, the smell of chemicals, the Opemus 4 enlarger's lamp cabinet with a Parliament-shaped dome (which I evoked in my work entitled *Archívum* [Archives], with a Polaroid transfer). I didn't really see what kinds of pictures were made there, but I still have some of my father's photograms. He didn't lead the lab himself, but he became an avid amateur photographer. There are plenty of documents, commemorative pictures, and a few 8 mm film rolls from that age. For instance, a funny picture features Mihály Mészáros, or Michu, the shortest person in the world (who later became famous in the U.S.), posing on a desk next to a table lamp.



Having inherited my father's drawing talent, I have been drawing a lot from early childhood — so much so that I already had to have glasses at a young age. This is how the ophthalmologist's cabinet in Baja, with its optical lenses and appliances, became a lasting and fundamental experience for me. It was my source of inspiration later on for the *The Eye Doctor's Cabinet* [Szemvizsgáló], the memory of blurry vision.

SB: From 1975 you studied at the Secondary Technical School of Fine and Applied Arts. What kind of memories do you have from this period?

ID: Since I was good at drawing in elementary school, my art teacher suggested me to apply to the Secondary Technical School of Fine and Applied Arts. I had to indicate three fields of study (specialisations) in order of importance. After graphic art and the graphic design of toys, my third choice was photo illustration. I was admitted to the latter at the first attempt. As far as I know, overapplication was about tenfold to this major. My alternative plan was the grammar school of Kiskunhalas, where I was also admitted to be a student of physics. However, my preference was Budapest and the art school.

I started photography from scratch; back then I knew very little about photography or photographers. I was familiar with a few names from magazines like *Magyar Ifjúság*, *Ifjúsági Magazin*, *Nők Lapja* and *Képes Újság*: I had heard of Korniss, Gadányi, Hemző. In those times, the subject was headed by Éva Barta (Lászlóné

Stross), who studied under József Pécsi, and in the last two school years, from 1977 till our school-leaving exam, it was lead by Albert Kresz (later on succeeded by Péter Tímár). Two young teachers accompanied us all through our school career: Klára Tőry and Katalin Keller, who had both theory and practice at their fingertips. Indirectly, I also considered our dorm teacher Zoltán Móser my photography instructor.

In the first years, we studied only technology and theory, with studio and lab practice, at first with negatives that were given to us. We received a thorough, classic type of training: we had classes in optics, photochemistry and the history of photography. We were assigned specific, general themes to shoot like children, the zoo, street reports, sports photography, photo etudes, social photography, portraits, object photography, reproduction, artefact, and towards the end of our studies, commercials, and illustration.

My first success and my first published picture was an awfully grainy photo of children enlarged from a detail. It won first prize at the national photo contest of secondary schools in Pécs. I was slightly nervous when I submitted it: I was worried that the granularity of the picture would be problematic. But Professor Móser encouraged me, saying that that was what made it special. At that point, I hadn't even seen the film *Blow-up*. **The Grey Dove** [A szürke galamb] (from my *Sensor* [Szenzor] series exhibited in 2016) pays a nostalgic tribute to the memory of those grainy black and white pictures and Antonioni.



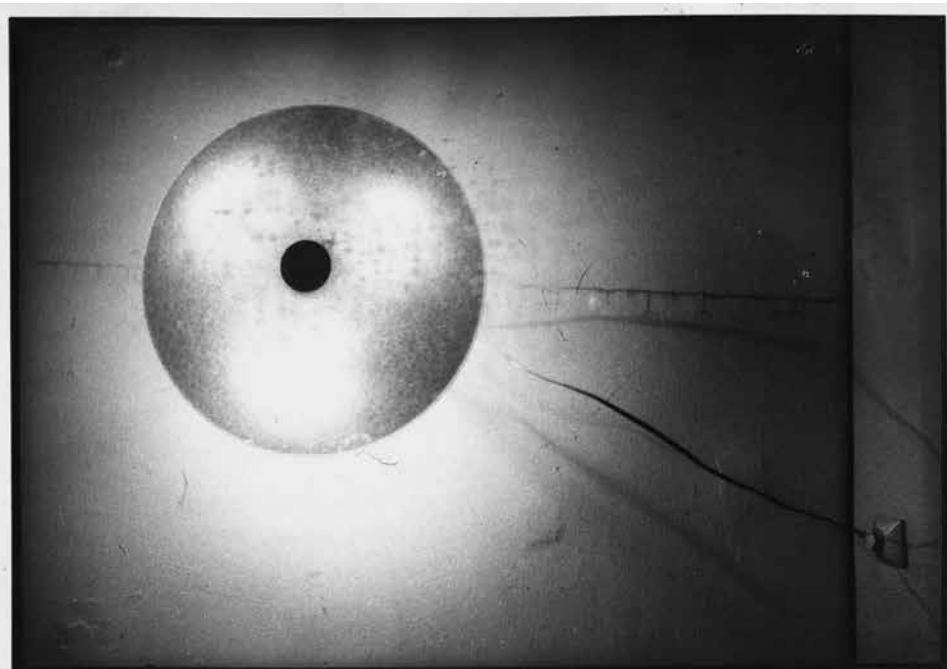
Imre DRÉGELY: *Sea*, 1978, school works, montage, silver gelatine print, 12x40 cm © Imre Drégely

My next submission at the Pécs contest was a more mature and more artistic picture: *Poet 78* [Poéta 78] also received an award, and it was even published in *Fotó* magazine. This was already the period of my own ideas and staged photos for me, in fourth grade. One of these works was a lab montage, *D.Z. '78*, which I blew up from a slide series in black and white. I dragged a plaster torso and a chrome plate to the engine scrapyard opposite the Kőbánya Brewery; I did bizarre set-ups at the scrapyard, using Agfachrome.

Jenő Sevcsik's books in the Industrial Library were my schoolbooks and "Bible" for me. Sevcsik's book entitled *About Photography* [Fényképezésről] was a standard reference book.

Besides *Fotó* magazine, *Fotóművészet*, *Filmkultúra* and *Filmvilág* were also available, and we read those to be well-informed. We attended university film clubs, and there were some memorable photo exhibitions as well, such as the Helikon Gallery or the Fényes Adolf Hall with exhibitions of Zoltán Szalai, János Eifert and Edit Molnár. Moreover, then there was the MADOME, too, with informative, professional courses by József Tóth "Füles", János Eifert and János Dozvald and the then-popular diaporama, which was somewhere on the half-way between a film etude and a photo etude.

All of the above constituted the reference material in Hungary, this was the overview of the official supply.

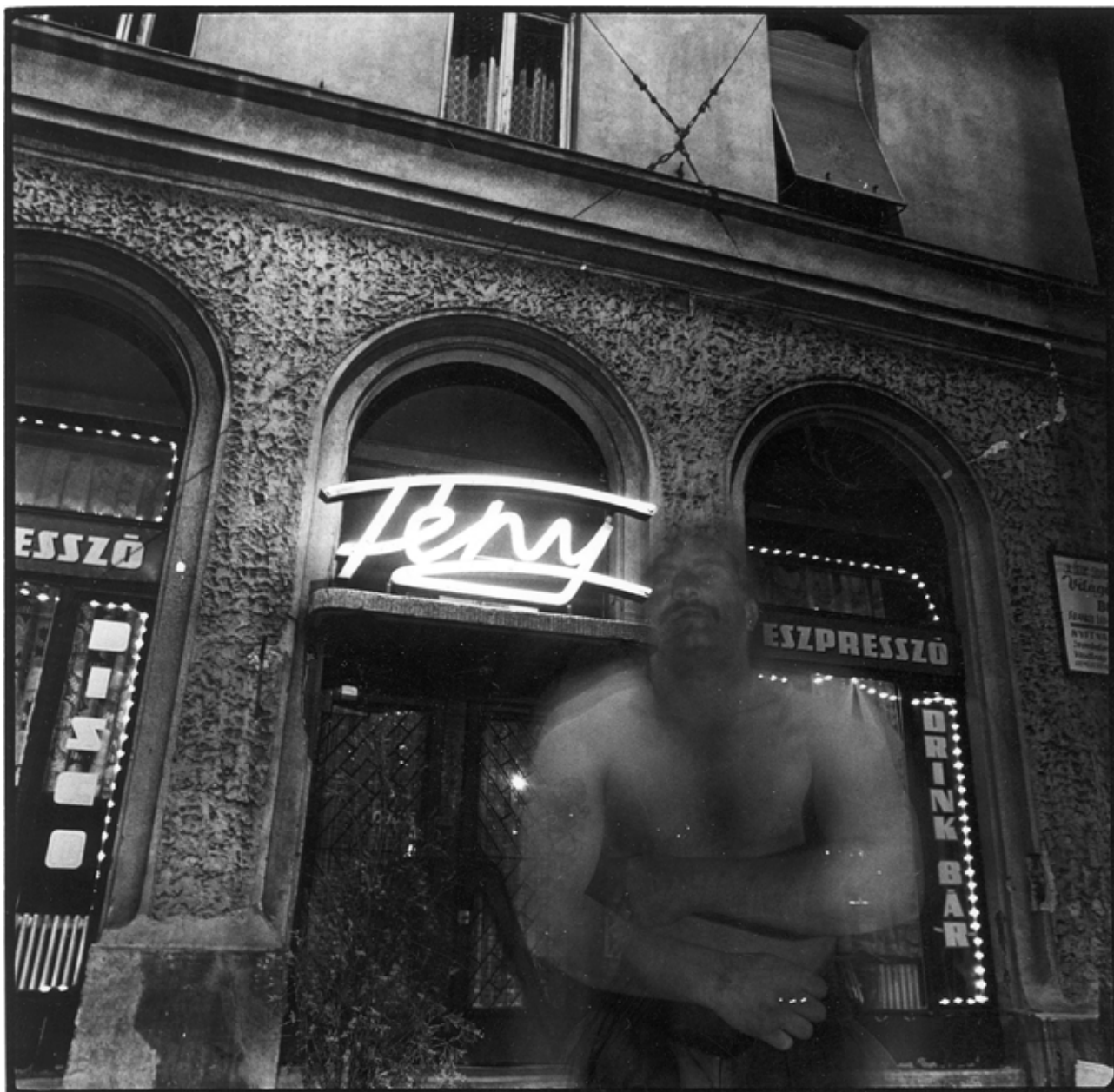


Imre DRÉGELY: *Block of flats 1-2*, 1990, Budapest by night series, diptych, silver gelatine print, 2x18x24 cm © Imre Drégely



In addition to learning about “extracurricular” ideas, we also attended free university lectures at TIT. At ELTE University, we attended Professor Klára Tőry’s lectures on the history of photography, and we went to Kossuth Club to listen to talks of László Beke about contemporary avant-garde issues: access, information about the world beyond the Iron Curtain in the 1970s, concept, happening, flux, the Documenta in Kassel and other “forbidden fruits” like these. The class below us at the university, including Tibor Miltényi and Lenke Szilágyi, was the most open to these ideas.

At that time, theoretical attention was focused on semiotics, structuralism, and ethnography, in sync with the prevalence of social photography and documentaries. Consequently, extracurricular literature was composed of the book series *Accelerating Time* [Gyorsuló Idő] and *Socio-historical Library* [Társadalomtudományi Kiskönyvtár], as well as the books published by the Kriterion Publishing House.



Imre DRÉGELY: *Fény/Light*, 1989, *Budapest by night* series, silver gelatine print, 30x30 cm © Imre Drégely

Imre DRÉGELY: *Thunder*, 1988, *Budapest by night* series, silver gelatine print, 30x30 cm © Imre Drégely



Imre DRÉGELY: *Eye doctor*, 1997, *Objects I* series, Polaroid 665 negative, silvergelatine print, 34x34 cm © Imre Drégely





Imre DRÉGELY: *Cancer 1-16*, 1992, *Zodiac* series, thesis project, 16 pcs Polaroid SX 70 collage, 36x33,5 cm © Imre Drégely



Imre DRÉGELY: *Pisces 1-16*, 1992, *Zodiac* series, thesis project, 16 pcs Polaroid SX 70 collage, 36x33,5 cm © Imre Drégely



Imre DRÉGELY: *Chalice 1-4*, 1994, *Still lifes* series, thesis project, silver gelatine print, 4 pcs 60x50 cm composition, 120x100 cm © Imre Drégely



Imre DRÉGELY: *Still life with fly 1-9*, 1994, 150x180 cm © Imre Drégely

As regards to semiotics, I even contacted Özséb Horányi in connection with an image-analysing survey published in *Fotóművészet* (Károly Hemző: *Triptichon*). Later on, Horányi became my professor at the College of Applied Arts. We had semiotics as a subject in the master's programme, so I came full circle.

My interest in ethnography encouraged me to hitchhike to Transylvania in the summer of 1977 with two school mates of mine from the faculty of painting. For me, it was a photography expedition; for them, it was about drawing. We even ended up in jail because of that. It was part of the mission that we brought certain items with us that were “hot” at the time: Amo soap, cigarettes and whetstones that we exchanged for Kriterion books. I took pictures with the school's Praktica and had plenty of film rolls with me. I even made a detour to visit the villages of the Casin Basin, Romania. Before the trip, knees trembling, I solicited Péter Korniss's advice about where to find rather intact villages.

Later on, Albert Kresz became the leader of the faculty. He conveyed a determining photographer's attitude and kind of introduced me into the practice of professional life. I can also remember a period when Kresz's prominent fellow photographers temporarily used the school's studio instead of the studio of the Hungarian News Agency (MTI). It was useful to be able to peek into that milieu and get to know these people. Kresz, in fact, also involved us in more or less real-life projects from his own domain. For instance, we were assigned to design an album cover photo for a “tender”. When we were in fourth grade, he gave us an agenda. With my classmate, Ibolya Kólya, we had the opportunity to take part in the ethnographic documentary photo shoots along the River Galga, which involved drawing up the inventory of the objects of the village museum as well as illustrative photography and report.

After the school-leaving exam, the two of us even tried to get into the ethnology programme at the Faculty of Humanities at ELTE so as to be researchers-photographers.

SB: *What topics and genres were you attracted to at that time?*

ID: Back then, I was intrigued by the “associative series of images” as a format. I still apply that method: Placing a documentary photo from the Galga region into a different context, I created the triptych entitled *Sea [Tenger]*, specifically due to the influence of Zoltán Huszárik's film *Respect for the Elderly Women [Tisztelet az öregasszonyoknak]*. I may have taken a picture of that older woman in Domony, Huszárik's native village.

I follow a similar methodology in my current projects as well: I construct something from emblematic historical documents with the intention of abstraction.

SB: *What happened to you after you graduated from secondary school?*

ID: The same as to my contemporaries. A standard life programme began: we started applying to the College of Fine Arts, to the College of Applied Arts, or ELTE, while preferably working as a freelance, or at some workplace that was somehow relevant to the profession. Some of my classmates have become reporters or concert photographers; another one has a printing-house, while yet another one works for a printing-house as a photographer, “almost in the profession”.

I submitted my application several times to the College of Fine Arts to the faculties of both graphic design and painting, solely for the sake of getting into higher education somehow, but in the end, I had to wait till the actual launching of the photography programme at the College of Applied Arts.

It was a unique situation. For lack of an adequate programme, the Studio was the token of continuity, where we could introduce ourselves as guests around the time of our school-leaving exams.

As life would have it, instead of the coveted job as a photographer, I was employed by the Hungarian Television where I have been working for years as an assistant cinematographer and cameraman. It was very important that, in addition to that, I also received a job opportunity at the Institute of Theatre and Film Science through my professor, Katalin Keller and her husband, Sándor Féjja. I took pictures, and developed, reproduced and enlarged them from filmstrips and the archived unit still photography negatives, for the photo gallery of the Film Archives, as well as for *Filmkultúra* and other publications. The film industry attracted me. Meanwhile, we were shooting super 8 mm films with my friends for fun, and we even presented it at the “Másvilág” experimental film festival (Eötvös Club). I also tried to get in the cameraman programme at the College of Theatre and Film Arts once, but then I slowly swung back to photography.

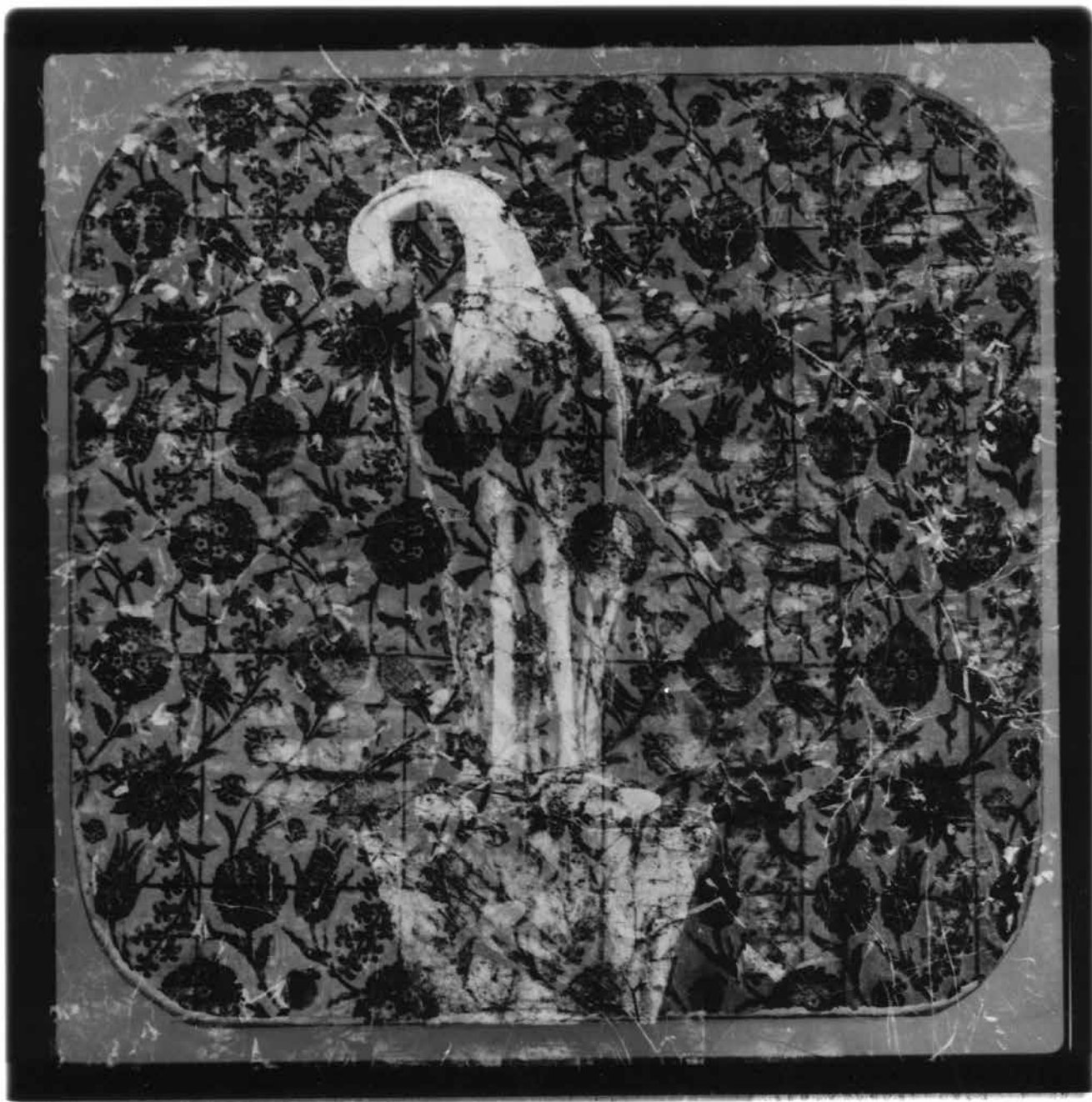
I quit my job at the television because even though I was also a unit still photographer on film sets, I drifted away from photography and photographic circles. I tried to “move closer” to the photographic circles, to the Studio, while undertaking more neutral jobs. In the meantime, around 1985-1986, I had my first exhibition in Bercsényi, together with a graphic designer friend of mine.

I made a living as a semi-skilled worker at Szikra press-house, working permanently in night shifts. Later on, during my years at college, I would go back there to take pictures — this was my selected essay topic in the report photo semester, under professor Imre Benkő's lead.

After working at the press for one or two years, I moved on to another job at the Budapest Kunsthalle. It was a creative type of work that I could do among friends, with art within arm's reach, as a member of the exhibition implementation team. I think back to that as a golden era — I was already working intensively on my photographic artwork. It was rather comforting to hang my own picture on the wall at the “Fotográfia '87” exhibition.



Imre DRÉGELY: *Torso I*, 1997, Salföld workshop, Polaroid image transfer, 10,5x8 cm © Drégely Imre



Imre DRÉGELY: *Stonebird*, 2003, *Objects II.* series, Polaroid 665 negative, silver gelatine paper, 50x50 cm © Imre Drégely

Meanwhile, I was already attending the Studio, reconnecting with the people there. This period of the Studio was marked by the direction of László Tasnádi, Zsolt Barta and Gábor Kerekes, with Beke and Miltényi. I was admitted with the first version of my *Budapest éjszaka* [Budapest by Night] series, which I then continued during my college years, expanding it into an exhibition.

SB: *In 1988, you were admitted to the College of Applied Arts. How did you like it?*

ID: I was working at the Kunsthalle when the photography programme was launched. So the opportunity to study photography came nine years after my graduation in secondary school. This was a busy and intensive programme. Since then, my life has been one hundred percent about photography. My college years brought a new community, new colleagues and co-creators — a new intellectual medium. The opportunity to have a workshop, a studio and a laboratory meant the world to me. There was a master-level creative workshop on the topic of large-size enlargement held by an American photographer. We got the raw material from the Forte Factory — it was fun working with one-meter-long test strips. Thanks to this course, we set things up for a metre-sized enlargement, which sparked a long-term artistic concept in me, leading to my second diploma.

In addition to this intellectual effervescence, the College also provided professional training in areas that I had not been familiar with: advertising, fashion, *editorial*, and the *designer*-like attitude.

The political transformation took place during our college years, and it brought forth a new sort of commercial and editorial photography, with freshly established creative studios, international advertising agencies, magazines, and the most diverse applied works.

The College guaranteed continuity in the domain of art as well — it basically coincided with my Studio years, my admission to the Association, and the Pécsi József Grant during the Master's Programme. Besides my tutor Gábor Kopek, the teaching staff also included Tibor Miltényi and Tibor Zátonyi, who were at the same time members of the Studio as well, and this overlapping was crucial for me.

SB: *What was your diploma project?*

ID: On Miltényi's suggestion, who was my thesis consultant, I graduated from the Designer's Programme with a Polaroid SX-70. As far as I know, he was the one who connected the Studio with the agency of Polaroid in Hungary. (And he also organised a large-scale exhibition from our Polaroid artworks created within the Studio in the Kunsthalle, entitled *Tatarozás* [Refurbishment], in which I was involved on behalf of the College in another room.) It was then that I got hooked on SX-70 and David Hockney's Polaroid collages. I was interested in this regard in spatial decomposition,

composites, panoramas, and matrixes. I was challenged by the idea of outdoing Hockney's achievements, adding something to them, or creating something different, something new.

In 1992, this is what inspired my diploma project, the *Zodiákus* [Zodiac] series. It involved the transcription of Renaissance woodcuts on Polaroid as the sheets of a fictive wall calendar, accompanied by a thesis paper on an astrological topic. The mosaic system was also extended to my conventional black and white works. I learned to shoot image compilations "by heart", and I graduated with large-size composite still lifes and space compositions in 1994 from the Master's Programme — at the same time that my pictures won the Pécsi József Grant. I came full circle once again: we asked Gábor Kerekes to be my master, whereas my opponent was László Tasnádi. Ours was the first class to attend a master's programme, hence the first to graduate with a master's degree. Kerekes officially became my master, so from then on, we would mutually call each other "Master".

SB: *You also taught at the school of the Fotográfus.hu Foundation for some time. What brought you there? What was your field, and what courses did you teach?*

ID: I guess I encountered the Fotográfus.hu on the occasion of the official organisation of the online gallery. I didn't hold courses at the school, but, from time to time, I was indeed asked to give lectures by Miklós Gulyás on the topic of technology and art. Using my own artworks as illustrations, I presented various creative techniques, procedures, and image forms used by me, and analysed the connections between them. Here — just like at the school of György Stalter and co. — my long-time love, the Polaroid was in focus.

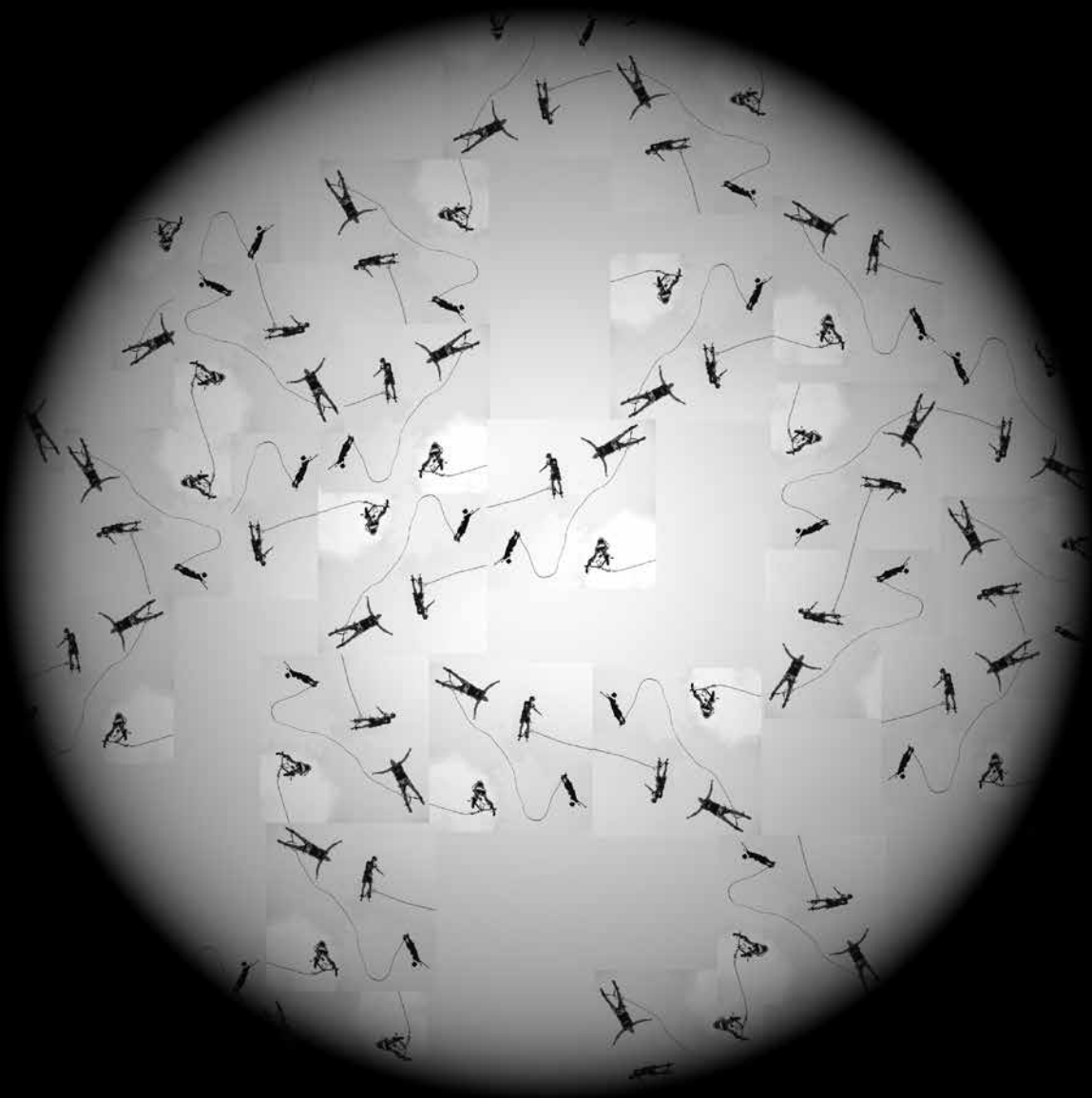
SB: *You also taught at the workshop of András Bozsó and co., if I remember correctly.*

ID: Yes, I presented SX-70 Polaroid collages at their nude photography workshop, prepared with the methodology applied by the Renaissance drawing machine, the Dürer-grid, as well as image transfer and similar techniques.

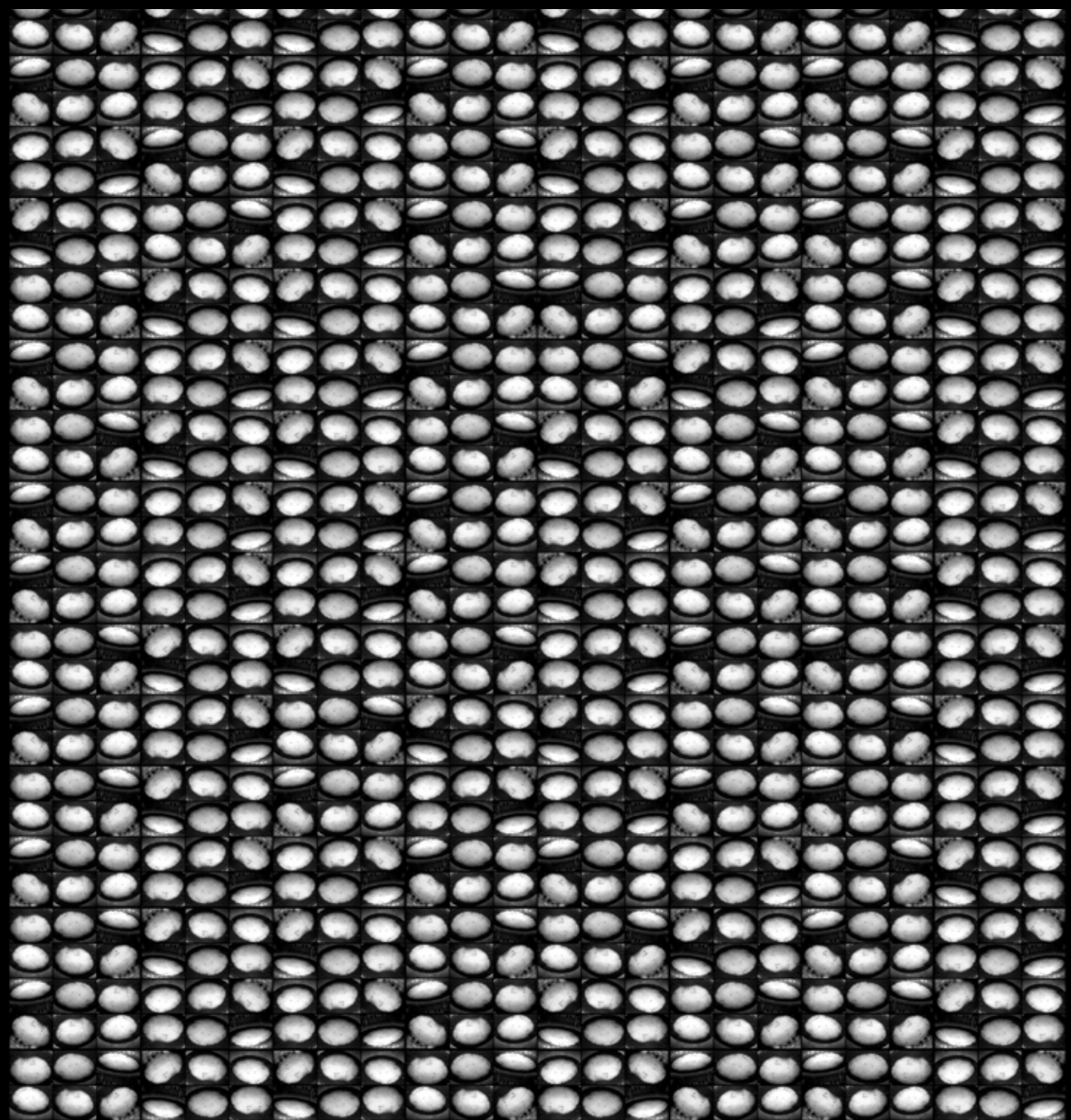
SB: *Have you ever felt intrigued by more conventional photography such as photo reports and documentary photos?*

ID: Oh yes, I have, I still am. At college, it was Imre Benkő who endeared me to the beauties of this genre, which meant a lot to me, I took delight in learning about that universe.

However, as life and my primary affinity would have it, this was not to become my professional profile. In each stage of my life, even when I worked in product advertising photography, I also worked on documentary pieces, out of personal interest, and sometimes as occasional assignments. I consider this an archived "secondary oeuvre" that has been quietly accumulating in the background, from which specific elements are adapted or transferred into my exhibition materials.



Imre DRÉGELY: *Periscope*, 2007, *DIID* series, digital collage, giclée print, 100x100 cm © Imre Drégely



Imre DRÉGELY: *Pool I*, 2006, *Monoscope* series, digital collage, giclée print, 100x100 cm © Imre Drégely

Such a picture is, among other things, the one entitled *Fény* [Light]. Initially, I created it for Ferenc Bodor's book, *Pesti presszók* [The Coffee-Bars of Pest] while documenting archaic neon-lit coffee-bars. This picture has its own story: its atmosphere records an era, including the chap who happens to be in the picture.

SB: *Do you experiment a lot before the creation of a specific image?*

ID: Instead of experimenting, I'd rather refer to it as collecting motifs in preparation for a given picture. I take photos of those things that may be interesting for the given project. I stumble upon objects, take pictures, scan, fix sights, take notes and make photo croquis. These will eventually come together and create a structure, an image raster, or one of them will emerge as the main motif. I have the background story of a given picture, and the visualisation of this story is the finished picture itself.

This is how a cigarette case — cherished for thirty years — found its place in my present-day suburban environment in the picture entitled *Munkás* [Worker], as part of a current series.

Right now, I have a rusty, cast-iron dachshund with me. It's a paperweight; I got it from an elderly gentleman — a new story, the plan of a new image in my head.

The system is deliberate — what I have to experiment with is its further development.

Ever since 2006, step by step, proceeding from exhibition to exhibition, I have been working on a particular type of composite picture that had begun with the Polaroid collages. Then it continued with the black and white photo constructions composed of a few images, and then I got as far as these large-size sequences consisting of several thousands of frames.

The first time that I displayed these was at an independent exhibition under the title of *Monoszkóp* [Monoscope], in 2006. In the pictures of the *Monoszkóp*, ornaments, linear patterns, mechanic fractals were formed, with industrial objects, robot figures and the like in the film frames. A next step whirled me toward the figurative. It is an intermediate position, a shift from the op-art-like non-figurative: the silhouette of an articulated figure, an optical illusion in the picture titled *Labirintus* [Labyrinth], for instance. For me, in this process, the labyrinth is the symbol of both losing the photo-like character and of finding the way back. The next shift took me closer to a more photo-like visual effect with more narrative pictures.

My recent artworks, *Sensor* [Szenzor] and *Monuments* [Emlékművek] are stories condensed into pictures. The images of the background raster constitute the texture of a particular image. They are transformed into text that talks about that specific picture.

SB: *Can you easily part with artworks, or do you cut and carve, amend and modify them until you feel that they are finished and complete?*

ID: I have worked quite a lot on my artworks created in recent years. This is a meticulous job: it involves a lot of fussing in front of the screen, zooming in, zooming out, harmonising granularity, resolution, and opacity. I use the computer for manuality to ensure that there is no inadvertent CGI (computer-generated images). This is also the reason I adjust and mix the details manually, touch by touch, according to my algorithm. The same thing happens when a painter rushes back and forth in front of a massive painting in the making, except that I zoom in and out with the mouse.

The installation, the spatial dimension is often part of the concept, too. Due to that, apart from image formation, scale and dimensioning also play a major role.

Earlier I had to experiment a lot with the exhibition print as well. My partner in that is Pigmenta APL. We have been working together on my pictures since my exhibition entitled *Monoscope* [Monoszkóp], and by now, we can practically read each other's minds.

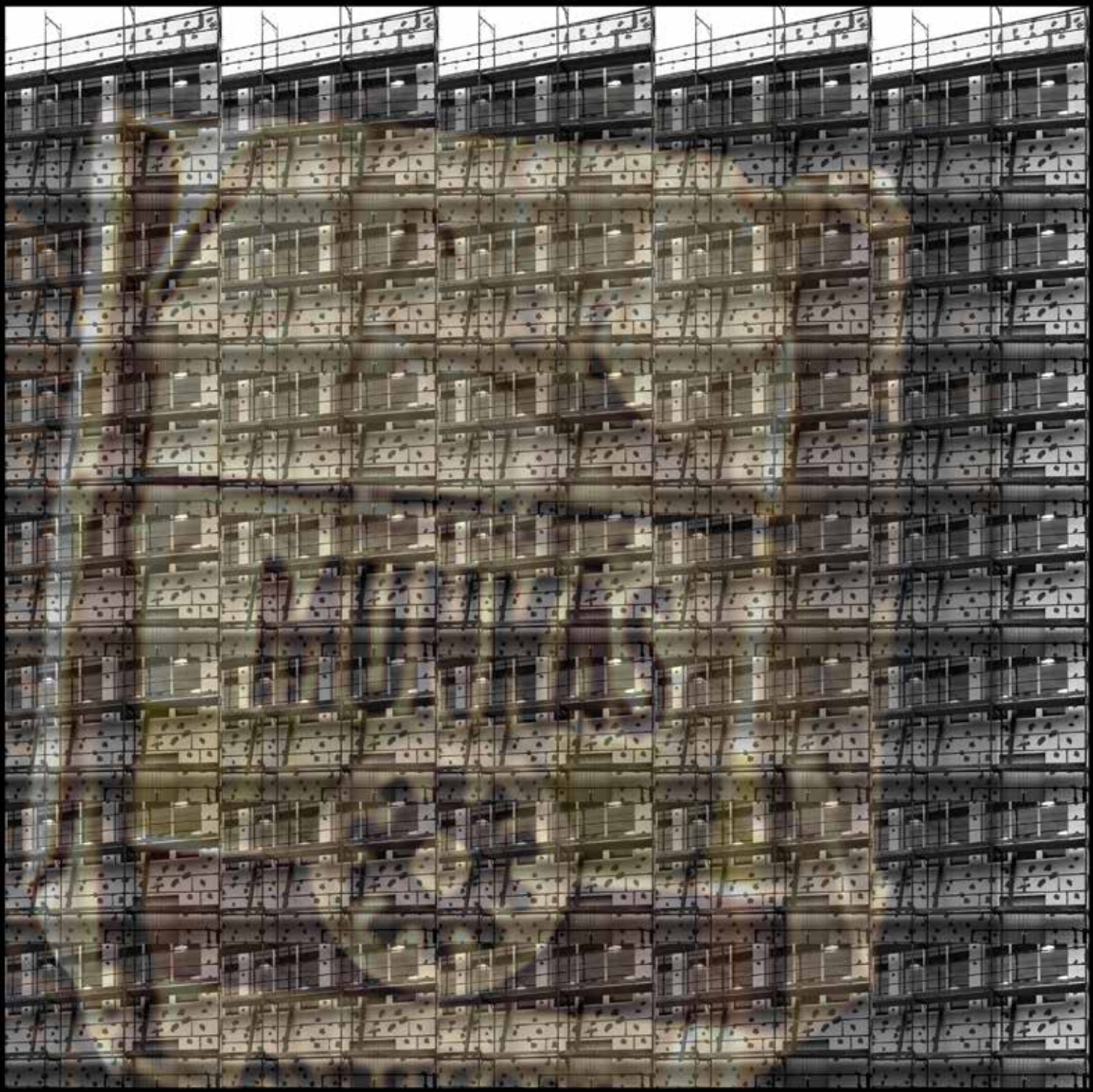
SB: *Is belonging to the photographers' community or being part of a group important to you?*

ID: Ever since my school years, I have drawn inspiration from various groups, and each of them meant a different sort of bond to me. Most importantly, they more or less spurred me on to stay active. Without a community, I have always found it hard to identify creative goals — I need assignments to channel me. This motivation has materialised in collectively organised, thematic exhibitions that serve as an agenda-setting challenge as well as inspiration.

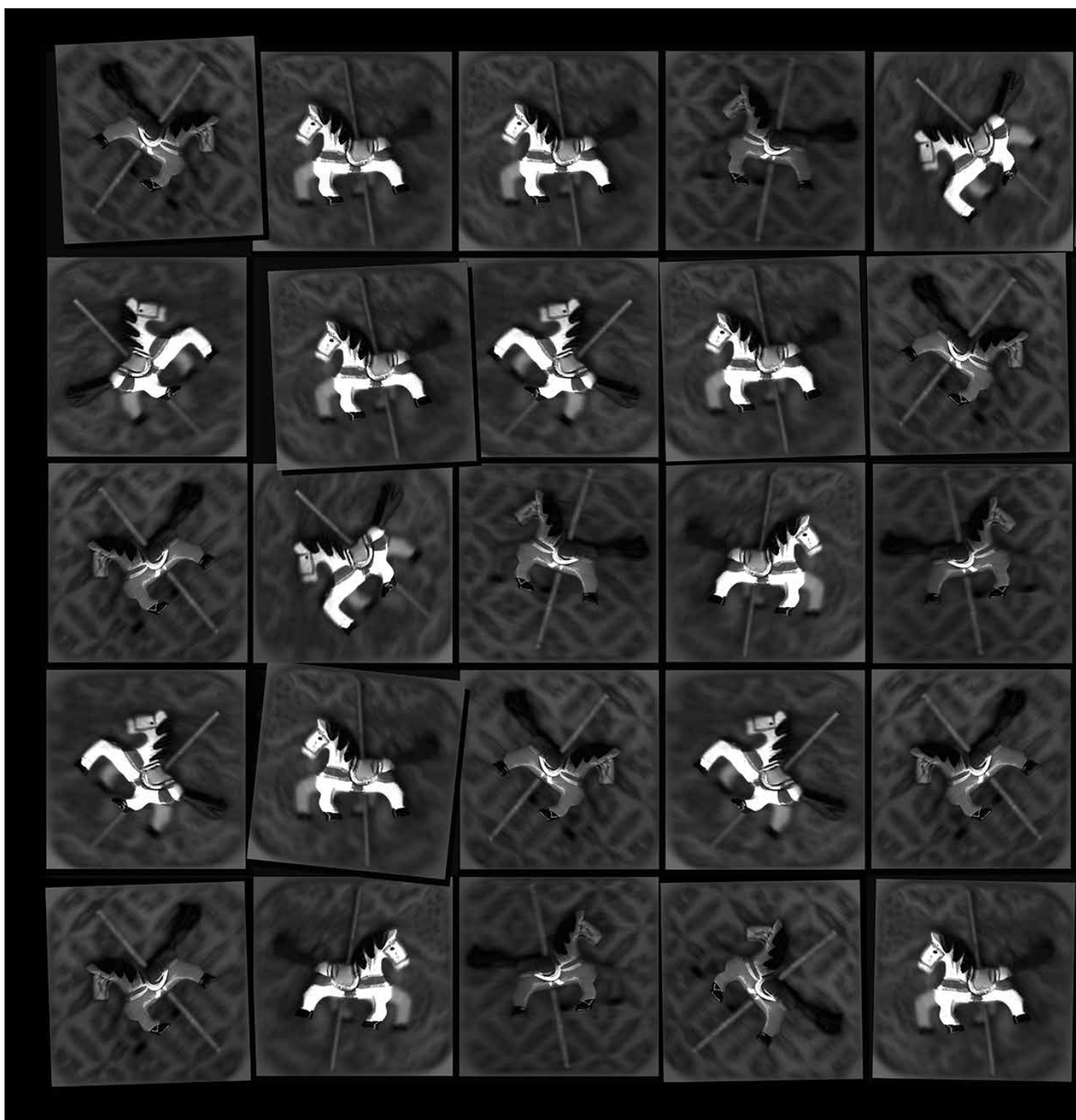
In addition to providing an agenda, the Studio also meant socialisation and self-definition for my generation, and it determined genre affiliations and amicable relations. This was the starting point of certain self-organised groups that later on mobilised approximately the same group of people. This is the community that means "the others" for me, even if in their dispersed and virtual form nowadays.

In the 1980s, the transformation of the Studio was succeeded by *United Pictures Association* [Egyesült Képek Egyesület], *First Creative Group* [Első Alkotócsoport] within the Association, "Bolt Galéria" [Shop Gallery] in the 1990s, and later on *+Workshop* [+Műhely], and the Nessim Gallery.

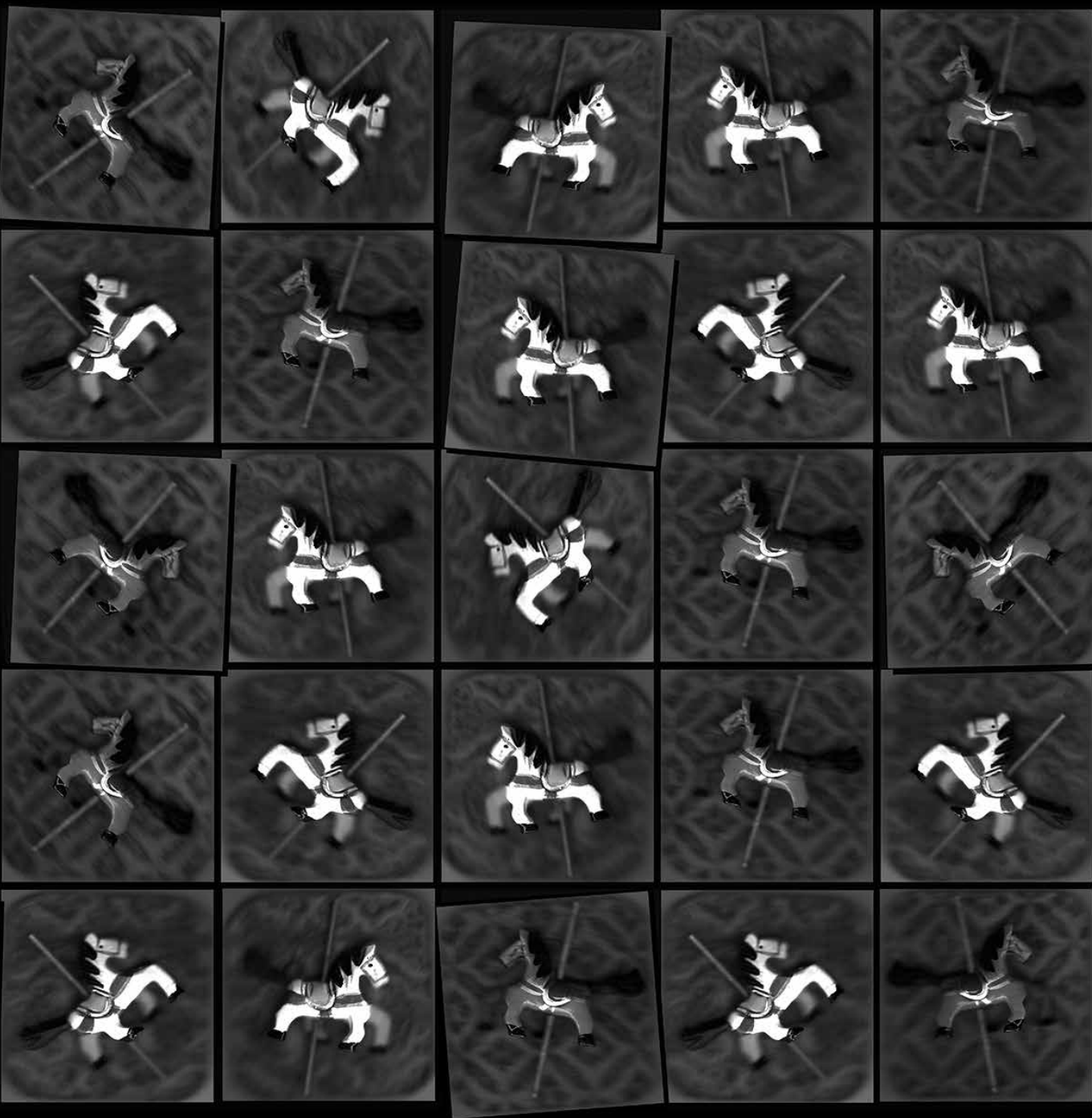
These groups and other groups emerging around them have had a crucial mobilising force to this day — even if they no longer exist. Much in the same way as the momentum of Gábor Kerekes will remain with us forever in this effervescence — even though he is no longer among us.



Imre DRÉGELY: *Worker*, 2016, *Monuments* series, digital collage, giclée print, 60x60 cm © Imre Drégely



Imre DRÉGELY: *Hypodrom*, 2008, *DIID* series, giclée print, 52x100 cm © Imre Drégely





SÁNDOR BACSKAI

Ádám László KISS: *Vörösmarty square from the Deák Ferenc street*, 1938 @ Fortepan

From 6x6 Negatives to Mobile Apps

Interview with Miklós Tamási, Editor of the Fortepan Online Photo Archives By Sándor Bacskai

The first thing that came to my mind concerning Fortepan was the Horus Archives of Sándor Kardos. His father worked as a photographer. Did you also have a photographer in the family?

No, I did not. Even though I was an amateur photographer as an adolescent for a little while. Even in grammar school, I was more interested in collecting and accidentally finding photos rather than taking photographs. I collected objects and all sorts of junk. I began to go to house clearances with my friend Ákos Szepessy in 1986, and we have kept up this habit ever since. However, our collecting passion was certainly fuelled

and motivated by the fact that we could enlarge pictures in the photo lab of our school, and we found the enlarging of found negatives immensely interesting. My cousin was a student at the photography department of the Secondary Technical School of Visual Arts, and he gave us some practical advice as to how many seconds were necessary to develop a picture, and so on.

What was your aim with these enlargements?

We were simply curious to know what was on the negatives. The fact that we would go to flea markets in the 1980s also involved that we were hoping to find some kind of a trace or memory

of Hungary between the two World Wars, because the atmosphere of that particular period had completely disappeared by then, and we had absolutely no visual information about it. The other era, which equally vanished into thin air, and which genuinely intrigued me, was 1956. My father took part in the events of 1956, and he talked about them quite often, though not every day. At the same time, we are all familiar with the perspective or approach that our textbooks and publications adopted in their treatment of the revolution of 1956. Moreover, the publications published on the topic had poor visual support; they were illustrated with the copy of a copy's copy. I am not sure whether it was due to a lack of pictures or something else, but looking back from the 1980s, the revolution of 1956 seemed very distant, almost like a myth, even though only thirty years had elapsed.

The silence of the Kádár era succeeded in the end, and by the end of the 1980s, the revolution had been successfully “undone”, as if it had never happened.

However, Radio Free Europe dealt with it quite extensively in 1986, if you listened to their programmes.

Absolutely, and in fact, the thirtieth anniversary gave me a significant impetus. However, there were still no pictures. As far as I can recall, János Berecz and his staff had a televised mini-series, which showed some short footage about 1956 for the first time. It was staggering to see those archival images about 1956 actually happening, and I was overwhelmed by the possibility that I might stumble upon some thrown-out pictures somewhere. I had the impression that just one or two

hard copies would have tremendous value. Now I know that the real gap in Hungarian photo history is not 1956, because many people took pictures in those days, especially in Budapest, and many of those have survived, though naturally, many were destroyed after 4 November. But we don't have pictures of those inhabitants of Pest who spent the street fights in basements. We have absolutely no visual documents of 1956 in the countryside, we know nothing of those who fled to Moscow, no parliamentary materials have been recovered, there are barely any pictures documenting how Imre Nagy's government operated — and we have few shots of the subsequent trial as well. What have survived are mostly pictures by amateur photographers, whose aim was not to report — but rather, they took pictures as enthusiastic observers and onlookers as they were strolling the streets of Pest.

How and why did this early phase of photo collection turn increasingly serious in your case?

In 1999, I started working for CEU, and from 2000, I worked at Galeria Centralis, which was an integral part of the Open Society Archives (OSA). In connection with the exhibitions, we had to do research at least two or three times a year, in the Historical Photo Archives of the Hungarian National Museum, for instance, and I gradually discovered that this was the kind of activity that I was the most interested in of all. It also became clear to me that museology had major deficiencies in that respect, and that this would be worth looking into. I knew that our collection also contained some materials of the kind that can be found in museums. However, the latter had always been

Unknown: *Deák Ferenc square, in opposite the Deák Ferenc street, 1945* @ Fortepan





reluctant to provide such materials for publication and would do so only for money. It seemed logical that I should take the collecting activity even more seriously than before, for many people had taken pictures, many photos survived, and it was possible to come across valuable pieces even then. Moreover, I liked to think of it as a kind of snub to show that it was possible to create an alternative photo collection outside the mammoth network of state museums. We worked on it together with Ákos until the website was launched in 2010. Just one year before that, in 2009, we were struck by the idea that we should scan the negatives accumulated to make our stock more visible. The photo library of UVATERV played an important role in the history of *Fortepan*. After the political transition, I was still very interested in the photo history of 1956. I was eager to find authors, amateurs, photographers, or anyone else who had documented that period. In the mid-1990s, I set out to leaf through the press of 1956 and 1957, both national and regional papers, and I noted down what pictures had been published in which press outlet, and whether the authors of the pictures were named. This is how I stumbled upon a picture published in the spring of 1957, in *Esti Hírlap* with the caption: “The facades of the buildings of Nagykörút are being refurbished in shock-work. The engineers of UVATERV are standing on the scaffolds”. I looked up UVATERV in a phone directory and found some contact details for them. It turned out that they still had major projects going on — they were just then constructing Ferihegy 2 (the Budapest airport terminal) and could not care less about the past. How a search for archived documents turns out is usually up to the goodwill of warehouse attendants, and not of CEOs, for they are the key figures who know what is in

the basement. However, in the case of UVATERV, not even the warehouse attendant had the faintest idea whether they had any pictures from 1956, and to make matters worse, the photo lab of the company had just been closed, and the company outsourced the tasks related to the documentation of the construction works. The archives were huge as the engineering company had been set up in 1949 — UVATERV was the firm that began the construction of the underground. The warehouse attendant lady was kind enough to help. There were about 150,000 shots stowed away in boxes, and I was allowed to come in once a week and go through the negatives, which were, by the way, stored in a garage, under awful conditions. It was a unique and life-changing experience for me to be able to research the photo legacy of a giant company that included pictures from the 1940s as well as the Rákosi era. In reality, three days would have sufficed to determine whether there were any pictures documenting the events of 1956 or the subsequent reconstruction works, but I bargained so that I could go back for months. Each week I took some negatives with me, had contact sheets made of them in the MTI (*Hungarian Telegraphic Office, the Hungarian State News Agency*) laboratory, then I took them back the next week and brought home some new ones. Slowly I had about 3,000 brilliant pictures at home.

Didn't UVATERV have contacts or hard copies of these photos?

As it turned out later, they did have hard copies, but not in the garage, and their paper-based material was even less organised than the negatives and did not include any pre-1970s pictures. When the warehouse burnt down in 2015, we also tried to help, saving what we could, and that is how I met Pál Ritók, the

Gyula KRASZNAI: *Unsigned*, 1954 @ Fortépan

Gyula HÁMORI: *Szent István square*, the photo was taken in front of the Basilica. On the right side, that is the Hercegrímás (Wekerle Sándor) street. 1950 @ Fortépan

Antal KOTNYEK: *Jenő Barcsay*, painter, 1960 @ Fortépan



director of the Museum of Architecture. They have some of the contacts from the 1950s, about two to three thousand.

Did you have any idea about what to do with that pile of negatives?

I thought we could compile a book — that was still in a world without the Internet, everybody was thinking in terms of albums. I was spellbound by the material about Budapest from the 50s and 60s; it was a tremendous pleasure for me to be able to track the ways in which Budapest changed, even in its temporary and gap-toothed condition. UVATERV built all kinds of things, under and above the ground, bridges, detached houses — they even renovated church buildings, always documenting the conditions before, during and after the works. I peddled my book concept to various publishers, but no one thought that I was onto something. I was told that construction works were not interesting, “retro” with its coffee-bars and neon tubes was already the hype then. Compared to that, construction works gave a much more dire impression: the communist heavy industry and people in rubber boots, pickaxe in hand, trampling in the mud. And in the 90s it was not cool to propose that some nice buildings and liveable blocks of flats had been designed in the Rákosi era, too. By now, this has changed perhaps: the acceptable part of communist architecture may have gained some appreciation both in professional circles and in public opinion.

Did UVATERV agree to the making of a book from their photographs?

They just did not care. Basically, the deal was that I could do anything in the warehouse if I designed a wall calendar in exchange. I had to pick twelve pictures — and in the end, they

replaced even those twelve archival pictures with twelve brand new ones that included a recently inaugurated section of the M0 motorway, for instance, and aerial photos. They did not give a damn about anything. Actually, that raises a question: how many more collections of this kind might be lying around in the country? Not on a UVATERV scale, of course, but most counties had similar engineering companies (BARANYATERV, HAJDÚTERV, etc.), which also employed photographers. These could be collections that have gone missing, and as you can imagine, it would be quite a find if they were recuperated. Actually, there is a good catch that is no longer missing: the photo legacy of the *Budapest Town Planning Office* (BUVÁTI), created in 1952, which consisted of 30–40 thousand negative frames, was obtained by the Budapest History Museum about 20 years ago. We have been corresponding with the Kiscelli Museum about our intention to go through and process the material, and I just can’t fathom why we keep bouncing back: what could be the reason for the autonomous head of a public collection for not endorsing research on a photo legacy that has been in their possession for years? The year after the launching of *Fortépan*, we got a letter from the sister of Antal Kotnyek’s widow notifying us that she had around 1,500 negative frames that had been left with her because Kotnyek had asked her once if he could leave them in her basement, and they were somehow left there — would we be interested in buying them? Apart from these negatives, the widow had donated everything to the Museum of Hungarian Photography. So we met. She was very nice, and I offered to rake together HUF 200,000. I contacted the Museum Theatre Museum and Institute and told them that I would buy the negatives, process them, and then



Unknown: *Millennium subway is running from the Zoo to Heroes square.* 1954 @ Fortepan

I would give them the originals — absolutely befitting their scope of the collection — for the same price, as there were many pictures taken of actors in the set. The problem was that they set a tight deadline by which I could scan only part of the legacy, but I still transmitted the negatives to the Museum. This happened around 2011. Since then I have tried three times to obtain their permission to go to the Museum and scan those negatives that I had not been able to finish, because it is a nice and popular material, and many people would be interested. But it is out of the question.

When you started scanning your negatives that had piled up, in 2009, did you still have your job at CEU?

Yes, I had been working there for 16 years, and, for the past three years, I have been working exclusively with *Fortepan*. We bought a scanner. In accordance with my archivist concept, we were supposed to scan each frame, no matter how long it would take. However, after about one month, it became clear that this just would not work. There was no point in sitting in front of the computer night after night because, in fact, one could already see from the negative whether the picture had any interest to it or not. One has to point out that, on the small-film negatives, there were more dull pictures than interesting ones, and one month of permanent scanning was enough to deflate our spirit. Conventional public collection approach would have you digitise everything, that is why it takes so long...

They have a preservation concern as well.

Yes, but in my opinion, digital files are more vulnerable than objects stored in appropriate conditions. It also turned out during that month that some of the negatives concealed fascinating pictures. They got us going, and we decided to aim for a selection of a few thousand pictures. We said that the selected pictures should be interesting from a political history point of view because that would boost their worth and that they should represent a certain photographic quality. By the end of summer 2010, *Fortepan* was launched with 5,000 pictures. It was a big leap into the unknown, and I think that today we could not become so popular in such a short time. We started *Fortepan* at a moment when digitised collections were less omnipresent than today, Twitter and Facebook were not that widespread yet, and our anonymous viewers were astonished by the quantities of unknown photographs that suddenly became accessible — even though we were only talking about 5,000 pictures. A relatively small collection could make a big impression. Moreover, we needed popularity to be able to grow, to get offers. We could still go out today to council clean-ups and jumble sales to enrich the collection, but then we wouldn't have time for other things. The reason why I was fascinated with collecting was not that I wanted to physically own the picture and have the original analogue copy in a box — it is enough if someone lends it to me for a week until I can scan it.

Were you interested in whether similar online photo collections existed in other countries?

What we have always been interested in is whether there are open-access, high-resolution archives. In the United States, the Library of Congress and other public collections have been uploading more and more pictures in large-scale volumes. I have not come across any open-access private collections of our kind, which is not good because, in order to be able to apply for EU funds, we would need some partners. In the past couple of years, we have attempted to go in that direction several times, and we always failed for lack of someone to partner with. So far we have not won a penny on any tenders, neither here in Hungary, nor elsewhere.

Then how can you sustain Fortepan?

We have two sources of income. On the one hand, the *Fortepan* column of the index.hu portal publishes a photo selection every week, for which we receive HUF 125,000 a month. Usually, I get to pick a topic, and compile a generous pool of pictures for that, and then photo editor Szabolcs Barakonyi selects the thirteen pictures that they need. The other part of our income comes from four private sponsors. This covers my monthly salary as well as the cost of the equipment, the server, the scanners and the rental fee. It is essential to clarify who we are: we are neither an enterprise nor a foundation. *Fortepan* is basically a URL, the web address of a collection of pictures uploaded on the Internet. Three years ago, we came up with the idea that we should find some institutional background for the sake of the more significant tenders. This is how we found András Török, and his art sponsoring company, Summa Artium, undertook to look after our management. We are on excellent terms with him. András has invested a tremendous amount of energy into this work. It is not his fault if we are not more successful — this is a country that progresses rather slowly. The growth of the collection has been significantly boosted by the fact that we have obtained the complete works of some authors, or certain elements of them, for instance, those of Antal Kotnyek, Tamás Urbán, and, most recently, Zoltán Szalay. Currently, we are trying to explore the legacy of Demeter Balla. By the way, this puts us at rivalry with the Hungarian Museum of Photography. I think the collection of family and amateur pictures could be their duty as well, perhaps as a small-scale project, for example.

UVATERV: *Deák Ferenc square*, Anker house, 1950 @ Fortepan

Budapest City Archives / Budapest Police Headquarter, Technical Service of the Criminal Department: *Deák Ferenc square, the field of the metro construction*, 1959 @ Fortepan / Budapest City Archives, No.: HU.BFL.XV.19.c.10

MAGYAR RENDŐR: *Deák Ferenc square. sight from the corner of Király (Majakovszkij) street to Erzsébet (Engels) square*, 1965 @ Fortepan





How do you go about processing a legacy?

The fundamental question is what works by the given photographer can be found at home because, in the case of a reporter, for instance, most of the pictures would have stayed in the editorial office. In the case of Zoltán Szalay, it was his widow who tried to find the best solution. As far as I can see, many photographers in their seventies and eighties are concerned about the eventual fate of their oeuvres. In more fortunate countries, this would not be a major issue: museums of photography are the solution. What usually happens is that widows and family members contact us, or reach us through intermediaries. The widow of Zoltán Szalay, for example, was advised by Károly Kincses to contact us. *Fortepan* is a good alternative because nothing has to be conceded to us forever. We are a transitory stage: all I ask for is a couple of months while we can keep the material, only for as long as we do the selection and the digitisation. What we can offer in return is that many people will become familiar with these works, much more than if the pictures were locked up in a museum. Naturally, it is a crucial decision on the part of the relatives, as to whether they want to provide open access to the pictures. Some relatives hope to make some money from their inheritance, which is quite normal — after all, it is a lifetime's work. However, no matter how good those pictures are, you can't make any money from them unless they become visible. This is also true for the legacy of amateurs, for theirs may also contain tens of thousands of negatives: the heirs sometimes exclude *Fortepan*

because they think that we will make money from it — it is like the assumption that you can grow rich by selling books. Bit by bit, not always easy, most relatives can be convinced of our advantages. I have recently seen some WWII photo material. The author of the pictures served on a hospital train, travelling the distance between Budapest and the Don thirty-seven times in a Red Cross carriage, and he took pictures in this extreme milieu during these journeys, on a technologically appropriate level. His two daughters of retirement age invited me to take a look at the pictures, and I was flabbergasted because the war correspondents' pictures I had seen previously were nothing compared to these. But, for the life of me, I could not persuade the ladies: they hold the view that any picture uploaded on the Internet will be prone to fraud!

Well, they do have a point there.

Yes, but that is not a *Fortepan*-specific issue. You can't track the fate of anything: it can happen to any press photo that someone saves it with a single click, and then does something stupid to it, meddles with it, or writes a dumb comment to it. I tried to convince the ladies, but it turned out that in their opinion, each and every picture of their father had some specific interpretation, and they knew clearly what it was, and it would have to be written under the picture. They insisted that the picture and the explanatory text, the narrative could only appear together, and they did not understand that this would not be feasible in an Internet environment. When the site was launched, there were no captions whatsoever under

the pictures. Today there are: the place where the picture was taken is indicated in most cases — we usually owe these identifications to the efforts of our volunteers. These “fortepaners” are typically male intellectuals who endeavour to pinpoint a precise and accurate location for the pictures, as, for example, “Vasmű Street 2, Salgótarján.” However, providing further explanation or a description of the circumstances — even if it comes from the authors themselves — is far from our concept. Some people have a stunning memory, and they can remember each and every place and date, others belong to the note-taking type, while yet others are let down by their memory, and will give inaccurate data, and are sometimes out by decades. There are some who do not like our insistence on the facts that we have found and double-checked, while others welcome any kind of correction.

On your website, I saw the Jewish-related report photos by Sándor Bauer, who worked at the one-time Hungarian Photographic State Company. Where did you get those?

We were contacted by his widow and his daughter. The widow told us that Bauer was dismissed from the Hungarian State News Agency (MTI) due to his involvement in 1956, so he became unemployed by the end of 1957. He got smaller jobs for the magazine of the *Belkereskedelmi Vállalat* (Domestic Trade Company), and later on, he made artefact photos in the Jewish Museum. However, he had only a small film camera, so his pictures did not turn out really well. Yet somehow he managed to stay with the Jewish community as a reporter and event photographer, and he took pictures during general assemblies, funerals, and tombstone unveilings. His material is not overly exciting, yet the photos are important documents about the life of the Jewish community during the Kádár era. It is surprising

in itself that religious Jews are featured in pictures taken during the years of communism. Let me add that the Bauer material is incredibly voluminous. I could not tell you how many negatives it comprises, and there are three trunks full of rolls I have not even touched, partly because I am not particularly interested in pictures of the 80s.

Why not? Because you lived through the 80s and there is nothing to discover in them?

I do not really care for those “Pig-slaughtering in the backyard, with a Trabant in the background” or those “Going on holiday” kind of documents. However, I am interested in the timeless decadence and decay of the end of the Kádár era, reminiscent of the universe of Iván Mándy, and in the underground culture as well. And I would also be interested in photos from the Property Management Company (IKV), or pictures of the urban landscape. I think there were no such pictures taken at IKV. I searched for such photos high and low, but I did not succeed. Recently I have been trying to persuade Piroska Nagy to allow us to select some of her accurately organised material — composed of thousands of report photos — produced around the time of the political transition. Currently, we are scanning the pictures of unit still photographer János István who worked on the films of Károly Makk, Pál Sándor, and Péter Gothár, among others, but he also captured parties and “flying universities” on film.

How did your relationship start with Tamás Urbán?

I was still working at CEU around 2001, and I also contributed to the series *Hungarian Retro* [Magyar retró] of documentary filmmaker Gábor Zsigmond Papp: I selected the films and wrote the narrative texts. Gábor got a VHS cassette from someone and showed it to me — it was an educational video for the



Tamás URBÁN: *Teréz (Lenin) boulevard between the Podmaniczky (Rudas László) street and Szobi street*, 1972 @ Fortepan
 Gyula NAGY: *II. János Pál pápa (Köztársaság) square*, corpse covered by things brought from the central building of the Hungarian Communist Party, 1956 @ Fortepan



RÁDIÓ ÉS TELEVÍZIÓ ÚJSÁG / Zoltán SZALAY: *Ferenciek tere* (Felszabadulás tér), broadcast of the Hungarian Radio from the Modellház, 1987–1989 @ Fortepan

police. I became really curious about the reason the Ministry of Interior had had this video made, and I invested about eighteen months of my life into this project, especially in the part about state security, from which emerged our documentary *The Life of an Agent* [Az ügynök élete]. It was very complicated to get our hands on the original recordings, but finally, we found out that they were kept in the back warehouse of the dog-training centre of the Ministry of Interior located in Dunakeszi, and at the original site, in the film studio in Izabella Street. It was qualified material, but we managed to convince the Minister of Interior, Mónika Lamperth, to let us have it for processing. We were running short on time, which perhaps interfered with the quality of our work. There were no interviews about who the actors were, whom the staff was composed of, and so on, even though I really wanted to do that because it would have made this footage very strong, with live footage next to the archival pictures. The reason I am telling you about this is that this was the reason why I contacted the Police History Museum and asked them whether they had anything that could be of help. And that is how I met Tamás. At that time, he was sort of on the back burner, with his criminal reporter period, *Stern* magazine, the TV programme *Napkelte*, the press department of the Ministry of Interior, a jaw-dropping photographic oeuvre, all already behind him. We started talking, and we hit it off

instantly. He told me that when the archives of *Hungarian Police* [Magyar Rendőr] magazine were dumped in around 1992, he bundled them up, put them in his car, and drove them to the Hungarian Museum of Photography of Kecskemét. I nagged at him about this being an exciting material, and we should do something about it and should research it. So, we went to Kecskemét where the negatives had been sitting in the same cabinet for fifteen years and brought them to Pest, and at the OSA Archives, they were given their own site. When *Fortepan* was launched, Tamás gave us some of his own material, at first only a few pictures, then more and more, until we got to the point that we would go through his entire oeuvre together, so we have been meeting once a month ever since. He has amazing pictures; I think his series about “Pillangó” (a criminal with a butterfly-shaped tattoo on his forehead), accidents, and suicides are incredibly significant and thoroughly elaborated works. He has the ability to be present in these end-of-life situations, even while maintaining an invisible distance. Later on, I also selected 3,000 pictures from the magazine *Magyar Rendőr*, so that people could see them because there were some outstanding shots amongst them. Then we had another police chapter in our history. The Budapest City Archives inherited the archived negatives of the Budapest Police Headquarters and wondered if we would be interested

in working with them. It's terribly challenging to work with this kind of material because when the crime scene investigators went to take pictures of a suicidal scene, they shot, say, three pictures, then they went on to a burgled tobacconist's shop, and then on to a third crime scene, and after developing the negatives, they cut up the film according to reports, and if a report contained two frames, they glued some kind of adhesive ribbon on them, and wrote the case number on that.

Is there any text accompanying the pictures?

No, not a word because the Budapest Police Headquarters forgot to hand over the related documentation. Although there is a case number on the ribbon, the case number has no file to refer to, so you can't make out what happened, where and when. I went through the negatives from 1956 till 1961. It was a very stressful emotional experience because there are suicides on about thirty per cent of them. I also selected thirteen of these pictures with the intention of uploading them on to *Fortepan* because they are simply stupefying. One of the pictures was taken when a woman jumped out of a tenement building and fell on a mother and two children. My blood curdled at the absurdity of that incident. It was shot on big film, from various perspectives, from above, from the building opposite, as people stand around a family covered by a newspaper. The atmosphere of the picture is apocalyptic, but somehow, I felt that despite its horror it should be exposed, it should not stay hidden, that there must be some kind of publication or context where such a picture could be important. But then I was persuaded by others that *Fortepan* was not an appropriate forum for it.

Because of the protection of privacy rights?

No, you can't recognise the people. I selected only pictures in which the corpses are covered. The pictures showing suicide victims who jumped out of the window are the most horrifying. Blankets, newspapers, even tinfoil cover them; in one case a suitcase was put on the victim's head. The sight of the victims lying in the street is heart-wrenching. Even if no one's face is visible, the view of their hands, shoes, rolled-away hats is shocking.

What if some people recognise themselves or an acquaintance, and don't want that picture to be accessible on the Internet?

Over the nine years of our operation, there have been three cases when we had to take something off due to the author or to the picture itself. This is an extremely low number, and apart from that, we have been receiving only positive feedback. I can't remember any instance of someone recognising their relative and protesting against us having that picture. Typically, people are rather happy that these pictures are accessible. We get relatively few letters in which someone tells us that they have discovered a family member in the pictures. By the way, this is a problem because if we have 100,000 photos, you would think

that lots of individuals could be identified. As opposed to that, we only get a couple of such notifications a year. In my opinion, we usually recognise those faces or events in pictures that we have already seen before. In an unknown picture, identification must be much more difficult.

How do you see Fortepan in a few years from now? Will it be the same as today?

On the whole, yes. However, we always have new plans. We have just launched a new iPhone app, for instance, called ForteGo. When you walk around the city, it offers you the archival photos available for the area with GPS coordinates, going from the closest to the most distant to your position. It navigates you there with the help of a map, displays the archived photo, and proposes that you take a picture from the same perspective thirty or a hundred years later. The app then prepares a pair of images, and the trick is that the new picture will have the same proportions as the archived one: if the old one was made on 6x6 film, yours will be squared, too. This is the first such app in the world — partly serious, partly a game, a mixture of the two with a pun. This idea came to me when, once, while waiting for someone on Széll Kálmán Square, I wanted to look up, on the spot, the pictures available of the old Moszkva Square, and I did not know where to find them. If we know exactly where a picture was taken, and we can also identify your location with the help of the GPS, then, without any kind of search, you can quickly check out what that area used to look like in the past. We collect photos with Hungarian relevance. Apart from a Polish experiment — that did not work out in the end even though it was widely publicised — we do not know of any similar initiatives. The pictures that we work with are typically Budapest-focused, and we are under the impression that smaller communities remain invisible even though many people would be interested in them. Let's hope that thanks to ForteGo, a mayor will decide one day that he or she would like to have a similar system in his or her community, too, and they will start collecting old pictures.

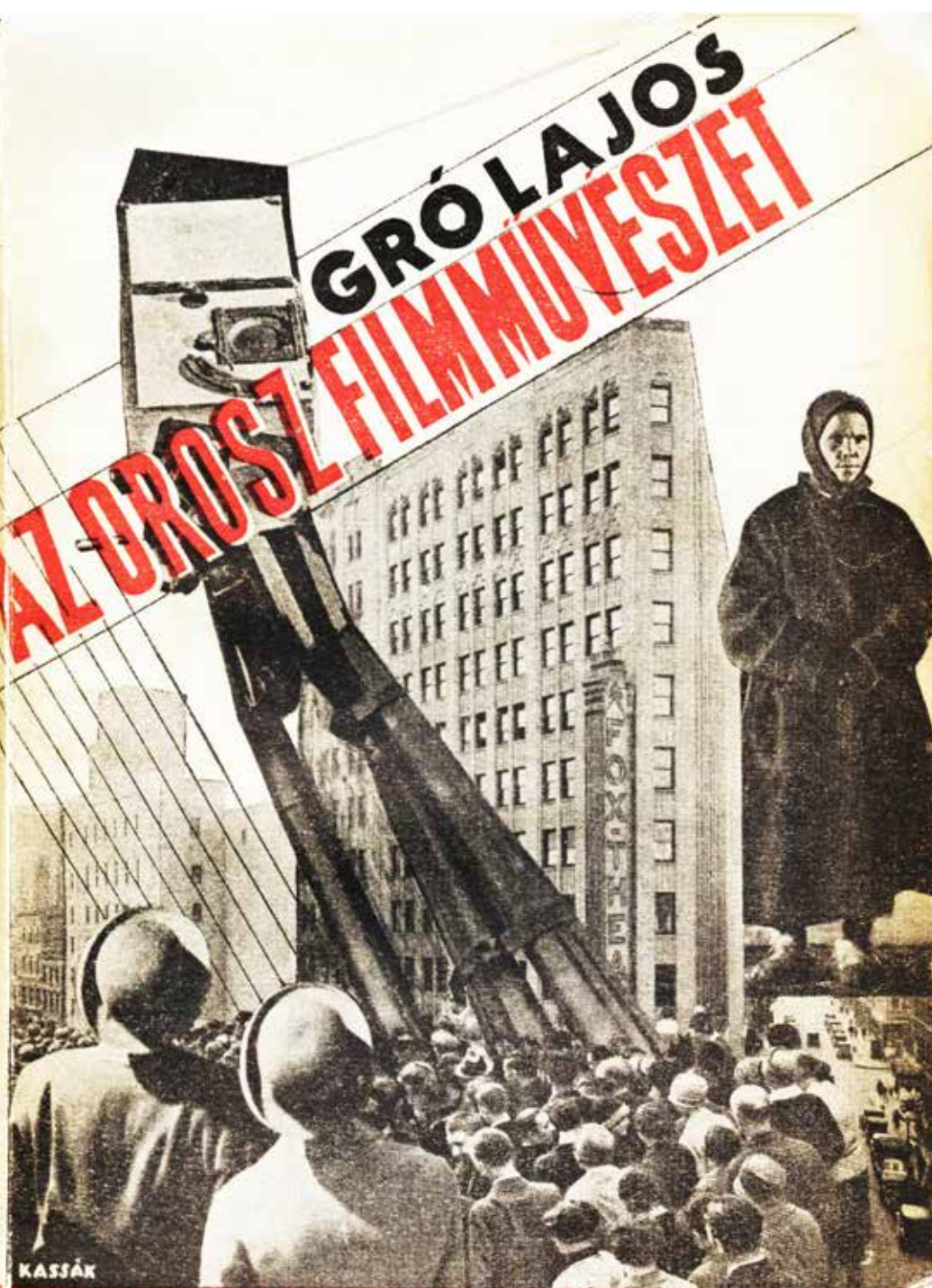
Tamás URBÁN: *Szent István boulevard*. A Fiat 500 car in front of the Vígsház, 1975 @ Fortepan



BÉLA ALBERTINI

THE PHOTOGRAPHY GROUP OF HUNGARY'S MUNKA-KÖR (1930–1932)

Picture 1



THE POMPIDOU CENTRE INVITED ME TO GIVE A SUMMARY ON THE ABOVE TOPIC AT AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON 3 MARCH 2017. (PRIOR TO THIS INVITATION, I HAD WRITTEN A TEXT ACCOMPANYING THE CATALOGUE OF AN EXHIBITION IN MADRID IN 2011 WITH THE TITLE *SOCIAL PHOTOGRAPHY: HUNGARIAN WORKER PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE 1930's.*) I DID DELIVER THIS SUMMARY IN PARIS, THE TEXT OF WHICH YOU CAN READ BELOW. ITS PUBLICATION WILL HOPEFULLY CONTRIBUTE TO THE INTERPRETATION OF THE HISTORICAL SITUATION, THE SOCIAL CONTEXT, AND OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES THAT HAD AN EFFECT ON VISUAL ARTS THAT LED TO THE CREATION OF THE GROUP FOR PHOTOGRAPHY AND THAT STIMULATED THE GROUP'S ACTIVITIES.

The activities of the photography group of *Munka-kör* [Work Circle], along with the career and oeuvre of its members, are internationally known as far as the major milestones are concerned. Beside the literature published outside of Hungary,² we have also seen foreign-language interpretations issued in Hungary, too.³ Due to particular historical circumstances, relevant adaptations have also been published in Hungarian beyond the country's current borders.⁴ The Hungarian literature is so rich in primary sources and historic adaptations that one can reasonably embark on reviewing only a selection of those works,⁵ and these reviews mostly restrict themselves to the chronology of events. The personality and works of Hungarian poet, novelist, literary translator, and avant-garde painter Lajos Kassák (1887–1967), the originator and *spiritus rector* of the *Munka-kör* spur us to explore the causes behind the events and examine the connections between them. Kassák needs no further introduction in Paris.⁶ We must, however, discuss in details the role Lajos Gró (1901–1943) played in the life of the group. Alongside his activities as a programme creator, publicist, and curator, he also did professional photography and carried out philosophical awareness-raising work as well.⁷ His oeuvre was also highly esteemed by Kassák.⁸ Gró, who implicitly took on the role of leader-in-practice in the photography group, was first and foremost an expert in film culture: his first book entitled *A film útja* [The Path of Film] (1927) served educational purposes.⁹ His second book, *Az orosz filmművészet* [Russian cinematography] (1931) was already a part and result of his involvement with the *Munka-kör*.¹⁰ The cover of the book was designed by Kassák; and the beginning and the end of the book are illustrated with the photo montages of one of *Munka-kör*'s photographers Lajos Lengyel. (Picture 1) The creation of the photography group of *Munka-kör* was the result of three trends coming together — but only upon closer inspection can the three be picked apart.

The first trend was the shift of emphasis in visual culture on the international stage. Photography enthusiasts tend to proudly list the significant technical achievements of the second half of the 1920s and the early 1930s. First in line was probably the *Malerei Fotografie Film* (1925).¹⁰ This fundamental work by László Moholy-Nagy also reflected the shift away from painting and towards photography and film, even in its title. This volume was republished in 1927.

For now,¹¹ I will only take a closer look at books and events that played substantial roles in the present story.

May 1929: Werner Gräff's little book *Es kommt der neue Fotograf*¹³ was published. Not long afterward, this was popularised by the Exhibition Catalogue of the Stuttgart Film und Foto (FIFO) in 1929. While he probably was not able to attend the exhibition in person, Lajos Gró wrote a short review about FIFO,¹⁴ underlining the first Western European première of Dziga Vertov's movie *Man with a Movie Camera*.¹⁵

FIFO was a pivotal event of 20th-century visual culture. Yet again, both the title and, of course, the contents of the event signal the technical trend in visibility.¹⁶ The catalogue of the event (18 May 18 – 7 July 1929) shows that the preparations in Stuttgart were managed by the representatives of progressive photography and cinematography around the world: Moholy-Nagy, Edward Steichen, Edward Weston, El Lissitzky, and Hans Richter. The exhibitors were listed in the catalogue's second edition¹⁷ released in 1979.

Another volume, *Deutschland, Deutschland über alles*, also published in 1929, contained photos and montages by John Heartfield, accompanied by Kurt Tucholsky's comments; and it was yet again Lajos Gró who reviewed this work in Hungary.¹⁸

In the Bauhaus movement, photography, which, as we all know, had been used since its very beginning and which was considered equal to other art forms, was taught from 1930 in the framework of formal education (*Fotoabteilung*, led by Walter Peterhans).

It is appropriate to mention that it was around this time that photographs gained ground in illustrated weekly papers, magazines, and periodicals, but we lack sufficient space for this here.¹⁹

This deluge of photography represented a shift of paradigm in the interpretation of photography and photographs. Nearly all initiatives were born as a reaction to pictorial photography prevalent at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Thus, the pride of photography enthusiasts is justified. It must be noted, however, that the spreading of photographs was not some kind of a spontaneous phenomenon, but a *consequence*. A consequence of the fact that in the second half of the 1920s, the avant-garde ran out of real momentum across Europe; or to put it more sharply and more appropriately: it became exhausted.²⁰ Lajos Kassák, whose receptiveness to international novelties is well-known, obviously sensed this.

The second trend that led to the creation of the photography group of *Munka-kör* and shaped its activities is formed by the life and career of Kassák after 1926, and by the way his relationship with visual culture evolved. All works about Kassák mention the events that occurred after his return from Vienna as an émigré in the autumn of 1926.²¹ However, he did not spend his first years at home in a vacuum; in order to better understand his attitude towards what was happening in Hungary, one must be familiar with the circumstances in the country at the time.

To wit, the period between the autumn of 1926 (Kassák's return) and the autumn of 1929 (the beginning of the Great Depression) in economic, political, and cultural terms may be called the most successful period of Hungary between the two world wars.²²

The waves of the scandal created by the franc counterfeiting conspiracy at the end of 1925,²³ the waves of which reached up to then Hungarian Prime Minister, Count István Bethlen, has been settled during 1926, mainly owing to the benevolence of England and Italy.

The economy, which plunged into a crisis following the First World War and the revolutions of 1918 and 1919, was restored at considerable sacrifice from the people and with the use of a loan from the League of Nations. January 1927 saw the appearance of a new stable Hungarian currency, the pengő.²⁴ As a result of all of the above, the living standards of the people also improved, and this did not apply exclusively to the middle and upper classes. Although the Hungarian economy was not balanced in terms of structure. With the economy heavily tilted towards the export of grains, a heavy price was to be paid a short time later. The positive economic change also led to political achievements. The results of the parliamentary elections at the end of 1926 reflected the strengthening of the governing right-wing party and the weakening of the left-wing.

The regime in place also achieved results in foreign policy. In the spring of 1927, an Italian-Hungarian treaty²⁵ signed during Bethlen's visit to Rome created strong support for Hungary. An act with the title *The military provisions of the Treaty of Trianon*, published on 27 April, provided certain reliefs as regards the previous prohibitions and limitations.²⁵ (It practically put an end to foreign military presence in Hungary.)

In 1928, amidst apologetic justifications, a law was passed to lift the anti-Semitic aspect of the so-called *Numerus Clausus* Act of 1920²⁷ (which had previously limited the number of Jewish students who could be admitted to institutions of higher education). This measure, given the traits of the Hungarian left-wing movement, was seen as a strong conciliatory gesture (and also sought to make the regime more "palatable" abroad).

While failing to provide comprehensive coverage of the social safety net, laws enacted in 1927 and 1928, respectively, on statutory sickness and accident insurance on the one hand, and statutory insurance for the elderly, and for widows and orphans on the other represented a major progress.²⁸

A law passed in 1927 on the establishment of Hungarian cultural institutions abroad and scholarships granted for education also signalled the improvement of the financial situation;²⁹ the *Collegiums Hungaricum* created at that time are still in operation. Minister of Culture Kuno Klebelsberg initiated plans³⁰ to build elementary schools in rural areas along with housing for teachers, which led to the massive spread of literacy across Hungary.

Shortly after his return, Kassák — in an effort to continue the legacy of his earlier avant-garde papers *A Tett* [The Deed] (1915–1916), and *Ma* [Today] (1916–1925) — started a new art periodical called *Dokumentum* [The Document] in December 1926. However, it received so little interest that the editor himself was forced to shut it down in the summer of 1927.³¹ It was also partly due to the international lull in avant-garde art outlined above. After 1926, Kassák gave up painting for roughly two decades, however, he maintained a vivid relationship with visual arts. For instance, he wrote an article for a periodical called *Magyar Grafika*

[Hungarian Graphics] with the title *On the road to elementary typography* [Útban az elementáris tipográfia felé] which was followed by advertising work for which he used photographs and photo montages.³² His theoretical essay on photo montages written in 1930³³ to this day has not been properly analysed from the standpoint of the history of photography. These works show a clear redirection of his interests. In 1927, at the initiative of Prime Minister Bethlen, a conservative monthly periodical of high intellectual standards called *Magyar Szemle* [Hungarian Review] was launched, with Bethlen himself heading the editorial board. The way Kassák acted during the years after 1926 becomes easily understandable in the light of the above.

As a result of the consolidation of Hungarian foreign and domestic policy and the economic and cultural upswing outlined above, a second international photography exhibition was organised in Budapest in the autumn of 1927.³⁴ Kassák wrote a formal critique of the exhibition,³⁵ however, his text was of theoretical significance, as it was also the key to understanding the subsequent internal functioning of the photography group of *Munka-kör*. He had already published photographs and photo montages in his previous periodicals, he discussed innovations in the area of photography,³⁶ but he did not give an itemized overview of photographs and photography. His reflections, which we quote here, have not been given enough weight by specialists.³⁷ What is novelty about this writing is not that Kassák acted as an opponent of pictorial photography. It is more important to devote attention to Kassák's opinion on the difference between painting and photography: "[...] painting is art, however, photography is first and foremost a technical product [...]. Painting is one of the highest degrees of achievement and individual expression of man's cultural evolution, photography is a creation of the new era, primarily a technical result, a procedure strictly bound to matter. [...] A painter paints what he sees, and a photographer captures what his machine sees," as Kassák pointed out.³⁸ "For today's man, the light and shade compositions of productive photography provide the exact clarity and aesthetic greatness of modern representation in a more definite manner than mastery of painting does," Kassák continued his train of thought in *Századunk* [Our Century].³⁹ In his theoretical reflections, he advocated the enforcement of the documentary function of photography.

The third trend was the Great Depression and the effects it had on international photography and Hungary's financial situation. The effects of the financial crisis induced by the stock market crash in New York in 1929 quickly spread in the entire world economy. In many countries, this logically led to the powerful evolution of social photography. Social democratic, socialist and communist parties and trade unions, recognising the potential for political mobilisation, supported the photographic documentation of the issues people faced who got into social peripheral situations and

were forced to live under miserable conditions, at the margin of both the economy and society. In terms of social photography, in the international communist movement, especially in Germany and the Netherlands, the Soviet inspiration had the strongest influence.⁴⁰ In Germany, *Der Arbeiter-Fotograf* (from 1926), controlled by the communists, and *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung* (A-I-Z), an illustrated newspaper published since 1921,⁴⁰ constituted the main platforms of social photography. *Das neue Bild*, a social democratic media outlet launched in 1930 published theoretical articles accompanying pictures about the goals of socialist photography.⁴² *De Tribune* and *De Soviet Vriend*, two Dutch papers with bias towards the communists also published social photographs in the early 1930s.⁴³ In Austria, *Der Kuckuck*, a social-democratic illustrated weekly newspaper was the main platform for social photography.⁴⁴ In France, *Amateur Photographes Ouvriers* (A. P. O.) started publishing regular social photography from October 1930 onwards. Social photography were also provided space in the columns of one of the most successful French illustrated newspapers, *Vu*.⁴⁵

Here, we must also mention the convergence of concepts that were present internationally then and are still around today. At that time, *workers' photography* referred to photos taken both by the workers and of the workers, displaying the way they lived. It must be emphasised that the designations *workers' photography* and *social photography* partially and logically overlap each other, however, not all pictures of workers are social photography, and vice-versa.⁴⁶

In Hungary, where the economy was primarily focused on the export of grains, the Great Depression resulted in the impoverishment of mainly agricultural workers (former markets abroad dwindled while production costs increased considerably). Unemployment reached critical levels in the industry (there was no permanent system of assistance in place for the unemployed). The crisis affected the lower middle class as well (a large number of people with university degrees became unemployed.)

As the cumulative consequences of the above three trends, after 1926, Kassák sensed so correctly that under the circumstances created by Bethlen's consolidation policy, the slogan "Forward for the Second Hungarian Soviet Republic" promoted by the Hungarian and international communist movement — that is, a recurrence of the 1919 dictatorship of the proletariat — were unrealistic. After his return to Hungary, he joined the Hungarian Social Democratic Party. At the same time, Kassák consistently criticised the political line of the party's leadership, which he considered lukewarm. In this setting, he emphasised the development of workers' education and ideological knowledge. Creating *Munka-kör* in the spring of 1928 served the way to put this into practice, which included the creation of artistic groups (recital group, theatre group, visual arts group) for young workers, students, university students, and administrative workers. The second step was launching a periodical. Rhyming with *Munka-kör's* name, the newspaper was published with the title *Munka* [Work] from September 1928 onward. (Picture 2)



Picture 2

In his lead-off article, Kassák was very clear: “We cluster around this paper not as *professional* politicians [original emphasis — B.A.], we are specialists in other areas of life, we want to work as artists, teachers, technicians and social critics. [...] The revolutions of 1917 to 1919 that arose in the aftermath of the World War did not turn out as expected across Europe, we acknowledge this objectively without these undeniable facts having turned us into plaintive old women or irresponsible demagogues.”⁴⁷ (This pointed remark had its own effect both on right-wing social democrats promoting total surrender and impatient communists expecting a revolution.) Kassák condemned factionalism that divided the workers’ movement — this referred to the international-scale opposition between the communists and the social democrats that was motivated from Moscow. “In order for workers to engage in socialist politics, they must first become acquainted with the diversity of life. [The *Munka-kör* placed an emphasis specifically on diverse personal and political development based on multifaceted art forms — B.A.] Political struggles are made up of a thousand factors, so it is only natural that those who know more of these, and have more of these components in possession, have greater class-consciousness and ideological education, thus have more decent opportunities in political struggles [...],” Kassák wrote, towards the end of his lead-off article published in his periodical.⁴⁸ Photography culture representing a new concept was present from the very beginning, providing a mash-up of an avant-garde introduction to photography⁴⁹ and documentary character, conveying the relationship between fine arts, film and photography. A popular article entitled *The culture of photography* [A fénykép kultúrája] penned by self-taught psychologist Endre Gergő, who so far has not received widespread recognition and analysis, discussed the new and current functions of photography with an approach that is consistent with Kassák’s interpretation.⁵⁰

It is against this background that the photography group was created as a new part of *Munka-kör* in the summer of 1930. Gró’s article *The worker-photographer* [A munkásfényképész], published in *Munka*, serving recruitment purposes, is not the only way to get insight into the genesis of the group⁵¹ — there is also a short and unsigned writing published in a monthly bulletin called *Munkássport* [Workers’ Sports], which, in May of 1930, announced the establishment of a photography group at the *Munkás Testedző Egyesület* (MTE) [Workers’ Physical Exercise Association], “[...] which will provide professional, socialist education to its members at regular, monthly meetups.”⁵² The idea of connecting sports and photography came from Germany. In Germany, this peculiar symbiosis already had its own periodical.⁵³ This is how MTE came to be the starting point of the photography group of *Munka-kör*. Another source of inspiration was *Munka-kör*’s recital choir and fine arts group (which included fine arts students enrolled in higher education) and the students

of the Hungarian Royal School of Applied Arts (a precursor to today’s Moholy-Nagy University of Art). A more detailed discussion of the complexity that was present in education, artistic work and political training is justified to take place at a later time; the versatile nature and the brotherhood of different art forms prevailed at *Munka-kör* due to Kassák’s conception and view of people. (Bauhaus’ influence, again, made its presence felt.) The photography group’s roll call was quite flexible; as time went on, not everyone participated in all of the group’s actions (organising exhibitions, writing articles); thus, we can rather speak of a core. Among the most prominent members, we find Tibor Bass, Teréz Bergman, Sándor Bodon, László Bruck, Sándor Fröhof (Gönci), Ferenc Haár, Lajos Lengyel, Anna Schmidt (Zsuzsa Kovács), Lajos Tabák, and writer-publicist (!) János Vajda. They were all born in the first decade of the 20th century, most of them between 1905 and 1910. Nobody has analysed in terms of social history, sociology and social psychology how many actual manual or blue-collar workers were there in this group.

The fact that social photography was at the centre of the photography group’s activities shows the concurrent impact of the “third trend” (the Great Depression) outlined above. The modernisation of the form of expression of photography is a result of the “first trend” (new photography gaining ground in visual culture at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s). The specificity that makes the activities of the photography group of *Munka-kör* peculiar or even unique on an international scale is that it had its roots in Kassák’s world view and views of photography outlined as part of the “second trend.”

What was the essence of this? A terse summary would say it went from the *human-as-a-whole* through social photography to the *new human-as-a-whole*. “We do make intentional efforts not to say: a human-of-a-class builds for a fellow human-of-a-class,” Kassák emphasised in his lead-off article quoted above.⁵⁴ He considered the whole of someone’s personality as a starting point, and, in his view, this was what was needed to be moulded to be a socialist. Therefore, to him, so-called misery photography was not at the centre of photography. In Kassák’s view, social photography is an element of the world documented by photography, which is part of building personality and educating someone to become a self-conscious socialist.

These principles came to life at certain stages of the photography group’s work. There is no catalogue of the pictures⁵⁵ displayed at the first exhibition which opened on 1 March 1931 in the Budapest great hall of the Tourist Association of Nature Lovers. A report about the exhibition tells us that as a way to somewhat “underline” the photography group’s launch and as a sign of its inspirations from fine arts, both Kassák and Ernő Schubert (1903–1960), a member of the fine arts group, exhibited montages with the titles *Hanged man* [Akasztott ember] and *Pilsudski with his family* [Pilsudski családi körben].⁵⁶ This article, penned by poet,

writer, publicist and deputy editor of *Munka*, József Nádas (1897–1975), provides some insider information: “If we want to educate real socialists — wrote Nádas —, we are speaking of total transformation of people, because while effective speeches may achieve momentary political results, these same results can be lost if in a given situation a more attractive speech has more impact.”⁵⁷ We hardly have to point out that this rhymes with the *human-as-a-whole* concept mentioned above. The report speaks of scenes on the streets, “the nooks of poverty” and the presentation of pictures of machines that do not include elements of “labour apotheosis kitsch” or of romanticising of machinery in vogue at the time. “New objectivity is what we have here: objects dominate these pictures [...],” the author said of the photographic form of expression that came to life at the exhibition. Ferenc Haár, another member of the group, wrote a clearly theoretical reflection on the interpretation of the exhibition, though, disguised as a response to readers’ letters. “A worker must endeavour to understand the world through photography. But this does not mean that a worker-photographer must limit him- or herself to photographing the scrawny, starving children of hovels. This could well be objective photography, but not yet socialist photography — it is at best one of its thematic elements.”⁵⁸ The very beginning of this sentence points out the social photographic concept of *Munka-kör*’s photographers. Haár, a practicing photographer, also took the time to explain the use of photo montages they were engaged in: a “socialist human” framing things in a context uses montages to “[...] turn various photographic materials and elements into an organic whole.”⁵⁹

Kassák, the master organiser of publication, has managed that even the very first photography exhibitions had proper verbal commentary, thereby contributing to the ideological and visual education of its recipients. (Cf. Going from the *human-as-a-whole* through social photography to the *new human-as-a-whole*). Also from the very beginning, another characteristic concomitant communication phenomenon was the role played by Árpád Szélpál by publishing articles on *Munka-kör*’s photography work. As a practising and highly effective social photographer, he was a patron of the cause, but, for personal reasons, he confronted Kassák.⁶⁰

A “second exhibition” was organized very shortly afterwards, on 19 April 1931, where the photographs of Tibor Bass, Ferenc Haár, and Lajos Lengyel were put on display. This took place in a dedicated professional fine arts exhibition room: the Kovács Salon. This time, there were printed invitation cards with an introduction written by Kassák. “One of the most significant culture-shaping devices is the photography machine.” (In this introductory sentence, we may recognise the changes outlined as part of the “first trend” and the attitude towards photography in Kassák’s critique of exhibitions cited as part of the “second trend.”) “With the invention of the photography machine, we move from the acoustic era to the optical era,” Kassák went on.⁶¹ He also pointed out the limitations of the “three young workers” working with primitive technological tools. What is important about this exhibition is that the invitation features Lajos Lengyel’s “fish” picture (Picture 3),⁶² which had already appeared in *Munka* in December 1930.

MUNKA FOLYÓIRAT MÁSODIK FOTÓKIÁLLÍTÁSÁHOZ

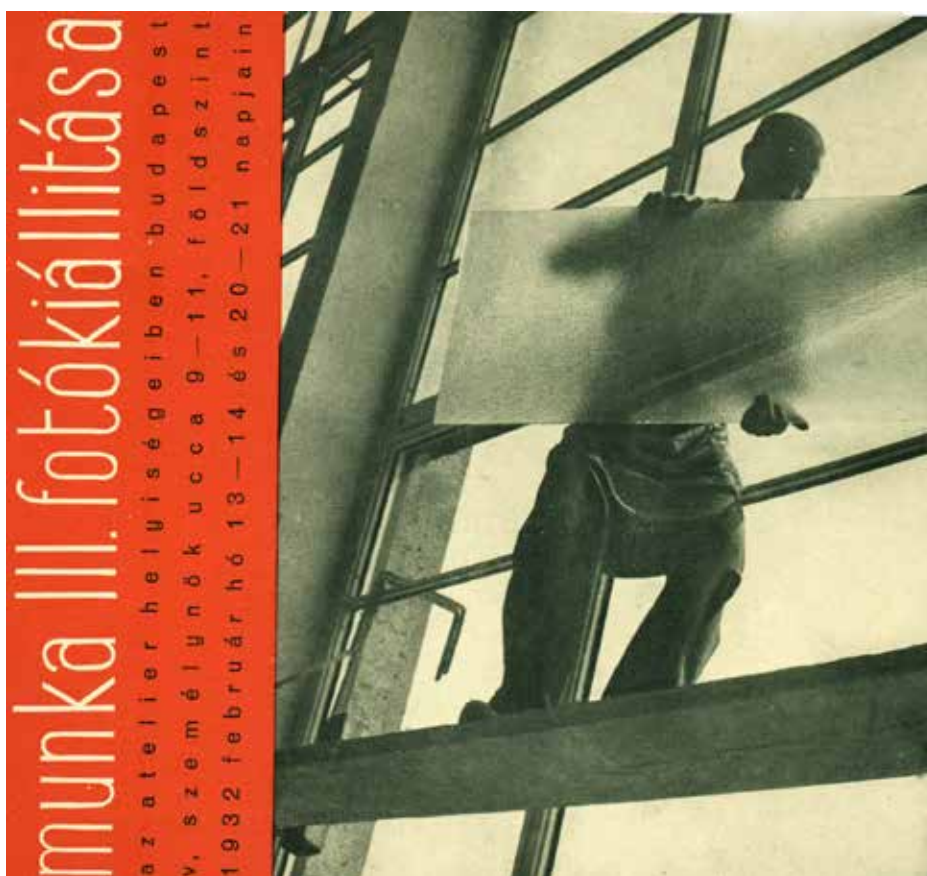
Korunk egyik legjelentősebb kulturális eszköze a fotografáló gép. A fotografáló gép feltalálásával az akusztikai korszakból átléptünk az optikai korszakba. A mai ember kíváncsisága a szemben összpontosul s tapasztalati úton a szemén át fogalmazza meg véleményét.

A fotografáló gép ma a szórakozó, utazó és dolgozó embernek egyaránt nélkülözhetetlen kataloza és harcostársa.

Bacsi Tibor, Haár Ferenc és Lengyel Lajos három fiatal munkás. Fotóik tehát nemcsak érdekes technikai és stílus kísérletek, hanem az új munkásgeneráció kultúrnívójának kritikai dokumentumai is. Három autodidakta, akik nem mesterségbeli rutinokkal, hanem látásuk kulturáliságával állítják meg képeik szemlélőit. Primitív technikai eszközökkel dolgoznak és mégis egyazon időben mernék kísérletezők s tudnak mérték-tartók lenni. Egyelőre az a legnagyobb erőnyük s ez különbözteti meg munkáikat a polgári amatőrök giccsétől, csaloggy, mint a professzionista mesterek konzervatív esztétizmusától. Nem nyomja ugyan őket a mult s vakon nem dobják félre az eddig elért eredményeket. Olyan tárgyilagosságuk önmaguk iránt, mint amilyen tisztaságra és tárgyilagosságra töreksenek fotóikban. Munkások és szocialisták a felvételükben a munkás gondosságát s a szocialista tárgyilagosságot dokumentálják, néha egészen



Picture 3

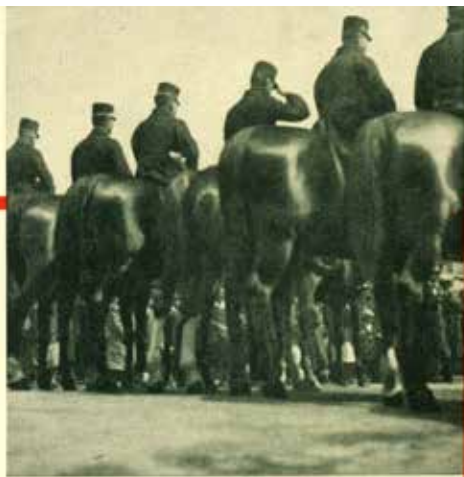


At that time, photographic representations of fish, as previously demonstrated by art history analyses, were in synch with the socially inspired paintings of the time, especially with the works of Gyula Derkovits (1894–1934),⁶³ thereby embodying a symbolic message, rising above everyday still lifes. Giving the picture such an emphasis was, again, undoubtedly a manifestation of Kassák's immensely refined visual and social sensitivity. The rank of the exhibition is demonstrated by the fact that an appreciation about it was published in the most prominent literary and artistic media outlet of the time, *Nyugat* [West]. According to the critique written by staff writer Zoltán Farkas, the exhibitors "Discard many of the superstitions of previous photography", and it appeared to Farkas that the exhibitors' works have not reached the performance level of contemporary professional photographers as regards "professional adroitness", however, were far more honest than the latter. "If we compare this exhibition of workers' photos to similar endeavours abroad, we certainly have reasons to be satisfied. In spite of our miserably restrained circumstances [this is an obvious reference to the consequences of the official arts policy of the time — B.A.], it sometimes reaches Western standards, because it provides a few truly sincere human documents," concludes the critique by the open-minded art writer.⁶⁴

The photography group probably ran out of creative momentum (which is quite understandable as they were basically amateur photographers), because the next, "third exhibition" would not take place until February 1932⁶⁵ at the Atelier Artistic Design and Workshop School.

The changes in internal politics — Bethlen's government was brought down by the economic crisis, with Count Gyula Károlyi becoming Prime Minister on 24 August 1931, whose political qualities were far more modest; in September, the Biatorbágy viaduct bombing⁶⁶ provided a pretext to attack the left, specifically communists, and martial law was proclaimed — brought social tensions that were already present to a breaking point.

In lack of exhibitions, Kassák used journalism to popularise the photography group's work. In the October 1931 issue of *Munka*, he published an account of the photographic work carried out at a location at the outskirts of Budapest (the Ferencváros forest plant) by social photographer Sándor Frűhof. "I am a worker-photographer. I know the potential of photography and I know that the photographs of the socialist man express socialist ideals," thus began his article.⁶⁷ Frűhof went on to give a realistic description of the preventive, defensive behaviour of the have-nots living in the huts when faced with a stranger trying to take photographs. Edited by Lajos Gró, the first issue of the periodical *A Munka Kulturstudiója*



a munka III. fotókiállításának résztvevői:
bass tiber (A), bergmann teréz (B),
bodon sándor (C), frűhof sándor (D),
haár ferenc (E), lengyel lajos (F), vajda jános (G)
a kiállítás nyitva február 13. és 20-án délután 2-től
8-ig, február 14. és 21-én délelőtt 10-től délután 4-ig.
.....
dolgozók esti tanfolyama az atelierben:
lakásművészet, grafika és tervezés, női divat,
szőnyegszövés és művészetelmélet kezdőknek.
tandíj (alkalmazottaknak) havi 8 pengő, 16 óráért.



Picture 5

[The Cultural Studio of Work] was published in 1931, featuring on its cover a photograph by Frűhof and publishing further photographs by the *Munka-kör*, but no further issues followed. Ferenc Haár, who was one of the most intelligent members with probably the highest institutional training among his photo group peers, wrote about socialist education in January of 1932⁶⁸ — this was a consequence of Munka-kör's activities, but a professional review of it still remains overdue.

The *third exhibition*, whose whole list of exhibited artworks is not fully known to us, was reported on by Lajos Gró in the columns of *Munka*. The invitation card featured a photo by Sándor Frűhof and Lajos Lengyel each (Pictures 4a, and 4b). The exhibitors were: Tibor Bass, Teréz Bergmann, Sándor Bodon, Sándor Frűhof, Ferenc Haár, Lajos Lengyel, and János Vajda. We only have fragmentary information on the subject of the photographs (loom — potentially a Frűhof cliché to be discussed later —, hammer, pitcher, etc.). “The objective of a workers’ photograph is to explore things and to increase the strength of the proletariat. This is what workers’ photography strives to achieve by using the technological achievements of bourgeois avant-garde [sic] and by applying socialist criteria,” said Gró,⁶⁹ which is a clear reference to the assertion within *Munka-kör* of the universal modernisation of the form of expression of

photography mentioned as part of the “first trend”.

The exhibition material was later displayed in Vienna at an exhibition organised by Naturfreunde, then for the period between 27 and 30 March, accepting the invitation by the Sickie Movement, it was exhibited in Bratislava,⁷⁰ then at the hall of the Artists’ Association, and after that they were delivered to Szolnok for the exhibition scheduled to open on 3 April — accompanied by the photographs of Lajos Tabák, who resided there — at the hall of the Szolnok Group of Private Clerks. The previous night, Kassák held a presentation with the title *Literary problems* [Irodalmi problémák] where representatives of the police were present. The following morning, the photographs of the exhibition were seized and confiscated by the authorities, charging that they were incendiary materials, furthermore, Kassák and Lajos Lengyel were taken into remand custody.⁷¹

In the light of these events, Kassák and his colleagues published a small volume containing 43 photographs taken in 1930 and 1931, entitled *From Our Lives* [A mi életünkől] in May 1932, which was the first photo book published by Munka. (Picture 5) There was no continuation to this, as there could be none. The group had no more exhibitions. Later on, as the result of the authorities officially monitoring the group, the operations of the photography group of *Munka-kör* ceased.



Picture 6a

Picture 6b

Picture 6c

The collection of photographs in *From Our Lives* [A mi életünkéből] — though, due to financial constraints, the publication's quality was very modest, i.e. 23x17 cm, the longer side of the photos, with one exception, did not exceed 15 cm — was a faithful representation of photographic work carried out in Munka-kör. In his introduction to the volume, Kassák yet again expressed his opinion on the difference between painting and photography, and noted: “There is a long way to go from photographing misery or street demonstrations as a sensation to photographs captured from a socialist perspective.”⁷² The assortment of photos published in *From Our Lives*, thematically, provides an experience reflecting the *human-as-a-whole* experience mentioned multiple times. The volume is also rich as far as genres are concerned: it features portraits (**Pictures 6a, b, c**) alongside genre art (**Pictures 7a, b**), and still lifes (**Pictures 8a, b**).



HAAR FERENC

Picture 7a



BASS TIBOR

Picture 7b



BRUCK LÁSZLÓ

Picture 8a



LENGYEL LAJOS

Picture 8b



Picture 9



Picture 10a



Picture 10b

From the perspective of *the form of expression of photography*, *Munka-kör's* photographs clearly kept up with international modernisation. It must be concluded that they discovered nothing new in this regard, but were consistently synchronised with the results of the montage techniques derived from Dadaism (**Picture 9**), the liberation of perspectives emphasised in Bauhaus (**Pictures 10a, b**), and new objectivity — including materiality and pronounced cropping (**11a, b, c, d**). An analysis from today's perspective of the contemporary *responses*⁷³ received from both Hungary and abroad will be an exciting assignment for professionals, which needs to be carried out in the near future.

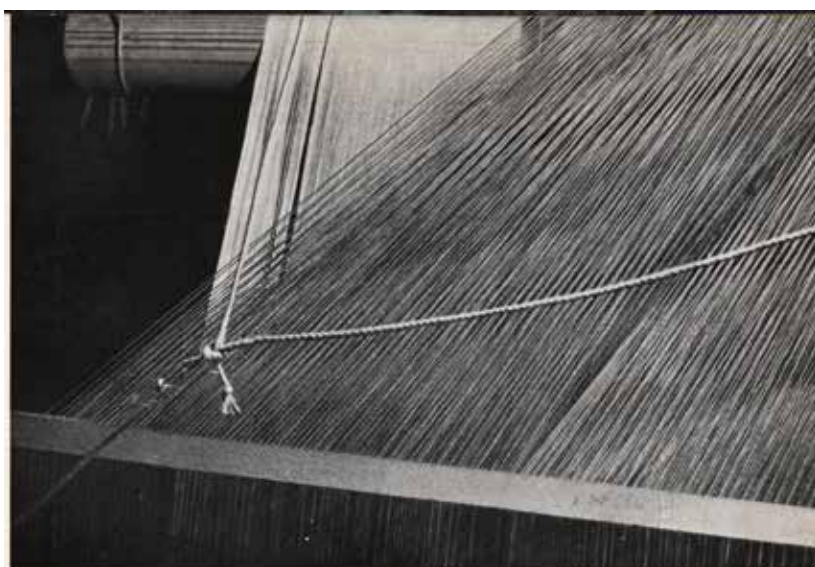
After they were no longer allowed to work for political reasons in Hungary, the photographers of *Munka-kör* were still able to publish their writings and pictures in the columns of the Viennese *Der Kuckuck*.⁷⁴ Besides the Czechoslovak responses already briefly touched upon, this can be considered a wider impact beyond our borders. In 1966, the Damjanich Museum in Szolnok featured a retrospective exhibition — with Kassák's participation — using the pictures they were able to find of the banned 1932 exhibition (**Pictures 12a, b**).



BERGMANN TERÉZ



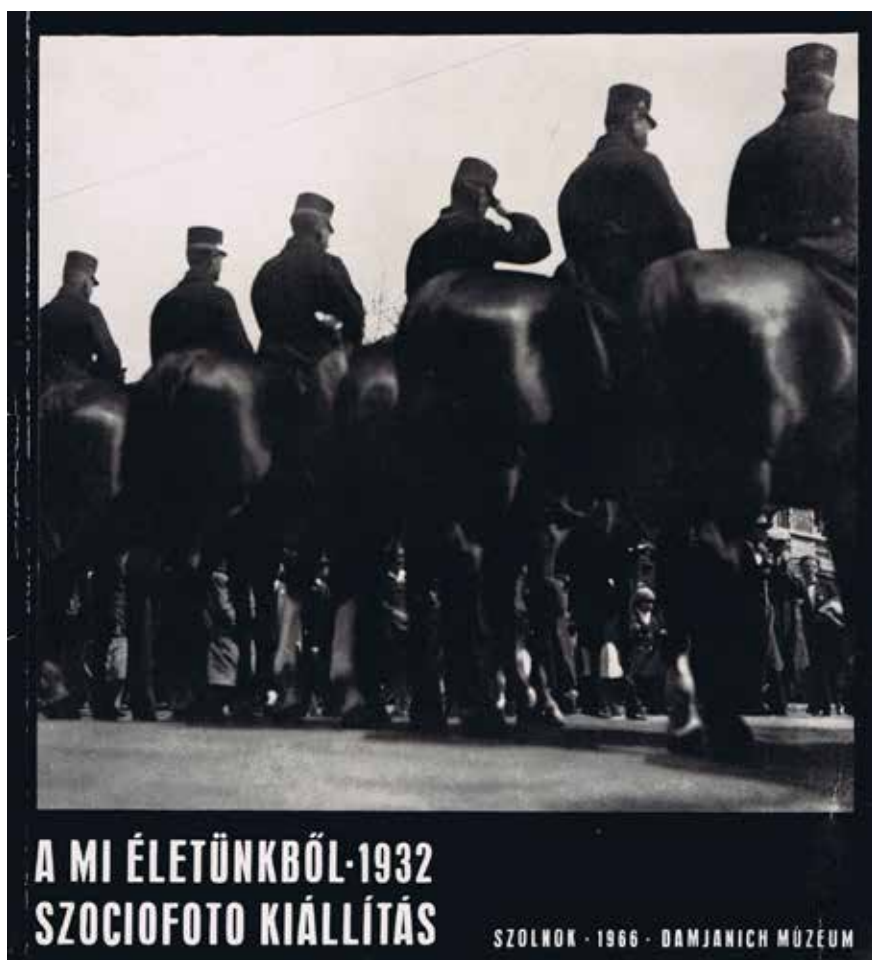
BASS TIBOR



FRÜHOF SÁNDOR



LENGYEL LAJOS



Pictures 12a and 12b

¹ Acknowledgments for the support with the writing of this review to Judit Csatlós (Kassák Museum), Metropolitan Szabó Ervin Library, János Lengyel, MOME Archives, National Széchényi Library, Balázs Zoltán Tóth (Hungarian Museum of Photography).

² Ba[ss Tibor], *Verhaftung* [Fotografie], Der Arbeiter-Fotograf, 1931/10 (Oct.), 254; *Ungarn wie es ist*, Der Kuckuck, 1932/16 (Apr. 17.), 5.; Josef Nádass, *Einer von Millionen: Der Tag des Budapester Arbeitslosen Georg Rakos*, Der Kuckuck, 1932 (Nov. 20.) 8–9.; *Das gute Lichtbild*, Der Kuckuck, 1932. (Dec. 18.) 15.; F. R[osenberg], *Ein soziales Fotobuch*, Arbeiter-Zeitung (Wien), 1932/213 (Aug. 2.) 7.; *Ungarische Kinder*, Der Kuckuck, 1933/24. (Jun. 11.) [16.]; L'udovít Hlavac, *Sociálna fotografia na Slovensku: obsah, dejiny, súvislosti, prínosy*, Bratislava [Pozsony], 1974, 15; Béla ALBERTINI, *Historischer Abriß der ungarischen Soziofotografie: Symposium des Mediums Fotografie der 20er Jahre. Leipzig/Dessau 1980. Beiträge*, Berlin, Kulturbund der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik Zentrale Kommission Fotografie, 1980, 177–189.; Erich RINKA, *Fotografie im Klassenkampf: Ein Arbeiterfotograf erinnert sich*, Leipzig, VEB Fotokinoverlag, 1981, 131–132; Károly KINCSES, *Photographies made in Hungary*, Arles, Actes Sud; Milano, Federico Motta Editore S. p. A., 1998, 163, 165, 167–168, 253, 268–271; Annie-Laure WANAWERBECK, *Identité plurielle de la photographie hongroise 1919 et 1939: Photographies hongroises: Regards nouveaux* [Az Új Tekintet], Paris, Somogyi éditions d'art, Csaba Morocz Photographies, 2004, 11–14.; Francis Haar, *A Lifetime of Images*, Forew. James MICHENER, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2001, 1–[36.]; Matthew S. WITKOWSKY, *Foto: Modernity in Central Europe, 1918–1945*, London Thames, Hudson, 2007, 149–151; Béla ALBERTINI, *The History of Hungarian Photography 1900–1938: The History of European Photography 1900–1938*, 1. A–I, ed. Václav MACEK, Bratislava, Central European House of Photography, 2010, 316–337, XXV–XXVII.; XLVI–XLVII.; Béla ALBERTINI, *The Munka Circle and Hungarian Social Photography: The Worker Photography Movement 1926–1939: Essays and Documents*, ed. Jorge RIBALTA, Madrid, Museo Centro De Arte Reina Sofía, 2011, 295–298.

³ CSORBA, Csilla, *Le cercle «Travail» de Lajos Kassák et la socio-photo: Photographes hongroises 1900–1945*, Edition Encyclopédie, Budapest, 2001, 41.

⁴ JELEN, Mihály, *Munkásfényképezés* [the exhibition of Work Circle in Bratislava], A Reggel (Bratislava [Pozsony]), 1932. Apr. 3, 8; H. G., *A »munkagárda«* [the exhibition of Work Circle in Bratislava], Csehszlovákiai Népszava, Bratislava [Pozsony], 1932/14. (Apr. 3.) 3.; NÁ[DASS] József, *Mentik a kultúrát* [the cancellation of the exhibition], A Reggel (Bratislava [Pozsony]), 1932. Apr. 10. 8.; M. PÁSZTOR József, *A magyarországi szociotó csoport és 1932. évi pozsonyi kiállítása*, Irodalmi Szemle (Bratislava [Pozsony]), 1968/2. cover; Béla ALBERTINI, *A fotószakíró Brogyányi Kálmán*, Pozsony, AB-ART, 2003, 112.

⁵ These are all genres that form a heterogeneous material in terms of their abstraction levels. As a consequence of a history going back many decades, this material necessarily reflected the various historical and ideological/political relations, the approach followed by certain authors and the changes thereof that have occurred in the meantime. Today's analysts must take all of these facts into consideration when handling the writings and treatises serving as sources. G[ró] L[ajos], *Stuttgarter film- és fotókiállítás*, Munka, 1929/8. (Jun.) [246.] GRÓ Lajos, *Filmek – könyvek* [W. Gräff: Es kommt der neue Fotograf], Munka, 1930/13 (Apr.) 415.

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⁶ The Bibliothèque Nationale holds 62 (that's not a typo: sixty-two) items under Kassák's name: besides his works as a poet, an artist, an editor and a cultural manager, literature about him and his oeuvre is also available in both Hungarian and French. Lajos Kassák's fine arts works were exhibited several times in 1960's Paris as part of solo and group exhibitions alike (1960, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1967). The exhibition of the Kassák Museum in Budapest has the catalogue of his first solo exhibition: *Galerie Denise René Paris 1960* with foreword by Michel Seuphor. *Magyar Műhely* [Hungarian Workshop], edited in Paris, also talks about a Kassák exhibition called *Magyar Aktivizmus, L'Activisme Hongrois* organised in the second half of the 1970s in Noisy-le-Grand.

⁷ ALBERTINI Béla, *Beszélgetés Gönci Sándorral*, op. cit. 5; JENEI Gyula, *Retus nélkül: Tabák Lajos meséi*, Eső, 2004/1. 101.; SZARKA Klára, *Egy évszázados ember: Tabák Lajos fotográfus*, op.cit. 31.

⁸ KASSÁK Lajos, *Gró Lajos portréjához: Gró Lajos: Filmesztéikái tanulmányok*.

Magyar Filmtudományi Intézet és Filmarchívum, Budapest, 1967, 9–16.

⁹ Gró Lajos, *A film útja*. Általános Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1927. This volume, built on the author's in-depth knowledge of film — including international releases — popularised film as an art form making use of a peculiar, individual language. In addition to the aspects of the profession and of the form of expression, this volume already reflected the film critic's social engagement and basic ideological stance criticizing manifestations of capitalism at that time. Both film and photography professionals have yet to endeavour on a more thorough analysis of the interaction in Lajos Gró's views between the modernisation of the form of expression of photography at that time and the new way Russian/Soviet film directors and cinematographers looked at things. At this time, we primarily know only the consequences: the large part of the knowledge imparted on the photographers by Gró was based on the image culture of Russian/Soviet films, which were pioneers on a world scale at that time. Lajos Gró had read Pudovkin's *Filmregie und Filmanuskript*, also wrote a review of it (*Az orosz filmművészet* [Russian cinematography], Munka, Budapest, 1931), emphasizing the importance of montages in new Russian films. He wrote a detailed overview of Genghis Khan, a film directed by Pudovkin and screened also in Budapest: *Pudovkin filmkönyve* [Pudovkin's film book], Munka, 1929/6 (March), [190]. "This film presents the most beautiful achievements of Russian film techniques and the montage..." said Gró, bringing up specific images as examples (op. cit. 222).

¹⁰ Gró Lajos, *Az orosz filmművészet*. Munka, Budapest, 1931.

¹¹ MOHOLY-NAGY László, *Malerei Fotografie Film*, München, Albert Langen, 1925.

¹² ALBERT RENGER-PATZSCH, *Die Welt ist schön: Einhundert photographische Aufnahmen*. München, Wolff, 1928.; ALBERT RENGER-PATZSCH, *Photographie und Kunst*, Photographische Korrespondenz, 1927/3, 80–82. + two appendices; ALBERT RENGER-PATZSCH, *Die Halligen*, Geleitw. JOHANN JOHANNSEN, Berlin, Albertus-Verlag, 1927; GERMAINE KRULL, *Métal*, ed. A. CALAVAS, pref. Florent FELS, Paris, Librairie des Arts Décoratifs, 1928. For more on the photographer's oeuvre: MICHEL FRIZOT, *Germaine Krull*, Paris, Éditions Hazan, Je de Paume, 2015; KARL BLOSSFELD, *Urformen der Kunst*, einl. KARL NIERENDORF, Berlin, Ernst Wasmuth, 1928; JOSÉ ORTIZ ECHAGÜE, *Spanische Köpfe: Bilder aus Kastilien, Aragonien und Andalusien*, eing. FELIX URBAYEN, et. al., Berlin, Wien, Zürich, Verlag Ernst Wasmuth A. G., 1929.; AUGUST SANDER, *Antlitz der Zeit: Sechzig Aufnahmen deutscher Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Transmare Verlag, München, 1929. As a result of the FIFO exhibition, another publication came out, with the title *foto-auge: 76 fotos der zeit: oeil et photo 76 photographies de notre temps: photo-eye 76 photos of the period* (the original title, applying the Bauhaus movement's take on spelling, lacked initial capitals); MOHOLY-NAGY's authority, quoted above, was even published in Stalin's Soviet Union with the title *Painting or photography*. (Here, it must be noted that at that time, the Soviet art policy of social realism was not applied with all of its severity yet; at the FIFO exhibition, the Rodchenko whom the official art policy would, from 1932 on, permanently condemn on a charge of "formalism", was allowed, in a metaphorical sense, to carry banners of Soviet photographers.) LÉON-PAUL FARGUE, ROGER PARRY, *Banalité*, Paris, Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue Française, 1930; László MOHOLY-NAGY, *60 Fotos, 60 photos, 60 photographies*, einl. FRANZ ROH, Berlin, Klinkhart, Biermann, 1930; AENE BIERMANN, *60 Fotos, 60 photos, 60 photographies*, einl. FRANZ ROH, Berlin, Klinkhart, Biermann, 1930. (Fototek 1, 2); JOSEF PÉCSI, *Photo und Publizität: Photo and Advertising*, Berlin, Josef Singer, 1930; [Eugène] ATGET, *Lichtbilder*, eingl. CAMILLE RECHT, Paris, Leipzig, Verlag Henri Jonquieres, 1930; CAMILLE RECHT, *Die alte Photographie*, vorw. IWAN GOLL, Leipzig, Verlag Henri Jonquieres, 1931; LEWIS W. HINE, *Men at Work: Photographic Studies of Modern Men and Machines*. The

Macmillan Company, New York, 1932; BRASSA . *Paris de nuit*, Paris, Editions Arts et Métiers Graphiques, 1932; ERNA LENDVAI-DIRCKSEN, *Das deutsche Volksgesicht: mit 140 Kupferstifdrucktafeln*, Berlin, Kulturelle Verl.-Ges. [1932].

¹³ WERNER GRÄEFF, *Es kommt der neue Fotograf*, Berlin, Verlag Hermann Reckendorf, 1929.

¹⁴ GRÓ Lajos, *Filmek – könyvek*, op.cit. 415.

¹⁵ GRÓ Lajos, *Stuttgarti film- és fotókiállítás*, Munka, Budapest, 1929/8 (June.), [246.]

¹⁶ There was an exhibition put on about the change of direction in Budapest: *A fotóművészet születése: A piktorializmustól a modern fotográfiáig: 1889–1929/ The Birth of Art Photography: From Pictorialism to Modern Photography*, catalogue edited by BAKI Péter, Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, 2012.

¹⁷ *Internationale Ausstellung des Deutschen Werkbund Film und Foto Stuttgart 1929*, hg. KARL STEINORTH, VORW. MANFRED ROMMEL, Stuttgart, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt GmbH, 1979.

¹⁸ GRÓ Lajos, *Filmek – könyvek*, op.cit. 415.

¹⁹ Just a few examples, for indicative purposes only – Great Britain: The Illustrated London News; France: Vu; Germany: Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung, Münchner Illustrierte Presse, Uhu, etc.), but these would have space limitations. An illustrated appendix of Pesti Napló was published as of February 1925 in Budapest, only with photos accompanied by captions and short comments.

²⁰ KRISZTINA PASSUTH, *Magyar avantgarde – kelet-európai avantgarde: Tranzit: Tanulmányok a kelet-közép-európai avantgarde művészet témaköréből*. Új Művészet Kiadó, Budapest, 1996, 150.

²¹ The best work on the subject is in all likelihood a work published several decades ago — Péter GYÖRGY, *Az elsikkasztott forradalom: Kassák 1926 után – a hazatérés tanulságai*, Valóság, 1986/2, [66]–85. An excerpt from a small monograph also takes into account relevant opinions and judgments: György RÓNAY, *Kassák Lajos alkotásai és vallomásai tükrében*. Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1971 [203]–[220], see also: István PINTÉR, *Adalékok Kassák és Munka-köre munkásmozgalomhoz való kapcsolatáról, 1927–1939*, Múltunk, 2004/1, 270–283.

²² Provides an important summary on the path to consolidation: Jenő GERGELY, Pál RITZ, *A Bethlen-korszak, a nyugalom évtizede (1921–1931): A trianoni Magyarországon 1918–1945*, Vince Kiadó, Budapest, 1998, [53]–94.

²³ A few Hungarian politicians and military officers wanted to take vengeance for Trianon by bringing massive amounts of counterfeit French francs into circulation, but the plan failed at the outset because of the poor quality of the printed money.

²⁴ Legislative preparations for the transition began as early as 1925: 1925:XXXV. törvények a pengőérték megállapításáról és az ezzel összefüggő rendelkezésekről, Magyar Törvénytár 1925, annotated by Gyula TÉRFY, Franklin-Társulat, Budapest, 1926, 271– 275.

²⁵ 1927:XXVIII. t. c. az Olaszországgal 1927. évi április 5. napján Rómában kötött barátsági, békéltetői eljárási és választott bírósági szerződés beicikelyezéséről, Magyar Törvénytár 1927, annotated by Gyula TÉRFY, Franklin-Társulat, Budapest, 1928, 561–565.

²⁶ Magyar Törvénytár, *Op. it...*: 90–96.

²⁷ 1928:XIV. törvények a tudományegyetemekre, a műegyetemre, a budapesti egyetemi közgazdaságtudományi karra és a jogakadémiákra való beiratkozás szabályozásáról szóló 1920. évi XXV. törvények módosításáról [Act XIV of 1928 on the amendment of Act XXV of 1920 on the regulation of enrolment in science universities, in the technical university, in the university faculty of economics and in Academies of Law in Budapest]. Magyar törvénytár 1928, annotated by Gyula TÉRFY, Franklin-Társulat, Budapest, 1929, 330–332.

²⁸ 1927:XXI. törvények a betegségi és baleseti kötelező biztosításról [Act XXI of 1927 on compulsory sickness and accident insurance], Magyar törvénytár 1927, annotated by Gyula TÉRFY, Franklin-Társulat, Budapest, 1928, 384–531; 1928: XI. törvények a betegségi és baleseti kötelező biztosításról [Act XI on compulsory sickness and accident insurance], Magyar törvénytár 1928, annotated by Gyula TÉRFY. Franklin-Társulat, Budapest, 1929, 587–652. Their significance is demonstrated by the country's number one public dignity, governor Miklós Horthy, deeming it desirable to praise these in his subsequent memoirs. (HORTHY Miklós, *Emlékirataim*. Európa, História, Budapest, 1990, 185.)

²⁹ 1927:XIII. törvények a külföldi magyar intézetekről és a magyar műveltség célját szolgáló ösztöndíjakról [Act XIII of 1927 on the establishment of Hungarian foreign institutions and scholarships for the purpose of Hungarian culture], Magyar törvénytár 1927, annotated by Gyula TÉRFY, Franklin-Társulat, Budapest, 1928, 171–182.

³⁰ 1926:VII. törvények falusi népiskolák létesítéséről és fenntartásáról [Act VII of 1926 on the establishment and maintenance of rural public schools], Magyar törvénytár 1926, annotated by Gyula TÉRFY, Franklin-Társulat, Budapest, 1927, 61–71.

³¹ KASSÁK Lajos, *A Dokumentum: A magyar avantgard három folyóirata*. Helikon, 1964/2–3, 253–255.

³² KASSÁK Lajos, *Útban az elementáris tipográfia felé*. Magyar Grafika, 1928/5–6, 144–148.

³³ KASSÁK Lajos, *Fotomontázs*. Reklámélet, 1930/5 (May), 7–8.

³⁴ II. nemzetközi művészi fényképképző kiállítás Budapesten a Műcsarnok termeiben: 1927. szeptember 14–október 2. Athenaeum Irod. és Nyomdai Részvénytársulat ny., Budapest, 1927.

³⁵ KASSÁK Lajos, *A budapesti második nemzetközi fényképképző kiállítás*, Századunk, 1927/1–2, 256–258. – újraközölve: ALBERTINI BÉLA, *A magyar fotókritika története 1839–1945*, Műzsák Közművelődési Kiadó, Budapest, 1987, 196–199.

- ³⁵ Demonstrating his interest in the modernisation of photography is the fact that he reported on Man Ray's work creating photograms as early as 1924 in his Hungarian paper in Vienna — *Az amerikai Man Ray* [...], Ma (Wien), 1924, 6–7. (July 1st), [13.]
- ³⁷ An essay analysing the relationship between Kassák and photography, to this day at the highest quality of analysis, makes absolutely no reference to this critique — Lenke HAULISCH, *Kassák és a fotó* [Kassák and the photography], op. cit. 10–[27.] In his work quoted earlier, László Beke mentioned this critique twice, but has not addressed its specific nature as far as the relationship between Kassák and photography is concerned. — *Az avantgarde és a szociófotó*, op. cit. 538–539.
- ³⁸ KASSÁK Lajos, *A budapesti második nemzetközi fényképképzés kiállítása*. Op. cit. 526.
- ³⁹ KASSÁK Lajos, *A budapesti második nemzetközi fényképképzés kiállítása*. Op. cit. 527.
- ⁴⁰ Большой шаг вперед: к приезду немецких товарищей, Советское фото, [A big step forward: the arrival of the German comrades, soviet photo] 1930/23 (Dec.), 649–650.
- ⁴¹ Heinz WILLMANN, *Geschichte der Arbeiter-Illustrierten Zeitung 1921–1938*, Berlin, Dietz Verlag, 1974.
- ⁴² Hugo SIEKER, *Zielsetzung einer sozialistischen Lichtbildpflege*, Das neue Bild, 1930/1, 2–3.
- ⁴³ *Arbeidersfotografen, De: camera en crisis in de jaren '30*, sammenst. Flip BOOL, Jeroen de VRIES, tekst. Bert HOGENKAMP, et al., Amsterdam, Van Gennep, Pegasus, 1982.
- ⁴⁴ Stefan RIESENFELLNER, Josef SEITER, *Der Kuckuck: Die moderne Bild-Illustrierte des Roten Wien*, Beitr. Murray G. HALL, Wien, Verl. für Gesellschaftskritik, 1995.
- ⁴⁴ Michel FRIZOT, Cédric de VEIGY, *Vu*, Paris, Éditions de la Martinière, 2009.
- ⁴⁶ SIPOS Péter, *Egy lejáratos fogalom rehabilitálása: munkásfotó, szociófotó* [The rehabilitation of a discredited concept: worker photography, social photography, História, 1981/4, 24–25. — This article, rather than contributing to the clarification of the concept, focuses on the difference between the photographic reflection of misery and need, signalling the contemporary change in the atmosphere of domestic politics.
- ⁴⁷ KASSÁK Lajos, [untitled, the statement of the Munka magazine] Munka, 1928/1 (Sept.), [1.]
- ⁴⁸ KASSÁK Lajos, [untitled, op. cit. 3.]
- ⁴⁹ This was the place where Moholy-Nagy's outlook on photography — László MOHOLY-NAGY, *A fényképezés megújulása* [The renewal of photography], Munka, 1928/2, 42 — was for the first time summarised tersely in Hungarian, which was a seminal professional event even if a gross mistranslation made the understanding thereof more difficult — Béla ALBERTINI, “A tárgyencse körülszegése”: A korai Moholy-Nagy recepcióhoz, *Apertura*, July of 2015, (<http://www.mafot.hu/apertura.html>). The first issue even published a photograph by Moholy-Nagy — Munka, 1928/1, 19. There has been scant reaction to the fact that another — unsigned — picture by Moholy-Nagy was also to be found in the journal titled “Kliséi 10” [Clichéi 10] — Munka, 1928/1, 27.
- ⁵⁰ GERGŐ Endre, *A fénykép kultúrája*. Munka, 1929/6 (March), [182]–183. The author is by now a rather disregarded character, however, you can read more about him in the introduction to one of his publications: *Gergő Endre válogatott pszichológiai munkái*, intr. Antal GÖNYEI. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1973.
- ⁵¹ All specialised literature considers this the opening — Lajos GRÓ, *A munkásfényképész* [The worker-photographer], Munka, 1930/14, 245 — but it needs to be stated that it had antecedents.
- ⁵² *A fényképező munkás*, Munkásport, 1930/3 (May), 5.
- ⁵³ PHOTO-SPORT in Bild und Wort, Monatschrift, München, Müller, 1927.
- ⁵⁴ KASSÁK Lajos, [untitled, the statement of the Munka magazine], op. cit. [1.]
- ⁵⁵ SZ[ÉL]P[ÁL] Á[RPÁD], *Munkásfotókiállítás*, op. cit. 8.
- ⁵⁶ N[ÁDASS] J[ÓZSEF], *Munkásfotókiállítás*, op. cit. 131.
- ⁵⁷ N[ÁDASS] J[ÓZSEF], *Munkásfotókiállítás*, op. cit.
- ⁵⁸ HAÁR Ferenc, *A Munka fotókiállításához*, op. cit. 470.
- ⁵⁹ HAÁR Ferenc, *A Munka fotókiállításához*, *Idem*. — The subject of the photo montage was “in the air”. Alfréd Kemény — DURUS, *Fotomontage, Fotogramm*, Der Arbeiter-Fotograf, 1931/7, 166–168 —, an editor of Kolozsvár-based left-wing periodical Korunk [Our Time], who was living in Germany at that time and signed part of his writings as “Durus”, discussed its use for political purposes and popularised it in Hungarian using the initials of his pseudonym as a writer — Sz. A. [Gábor GAÁL], *A photomontage*, Korunk, 1931/12, 897–898. In order for us to be fully informed, there was a significant tension between Munka and Korunk at that time, due to the differences in their ideological and political views.
- ⁶⁰ *Az idők rianása: Szélpál Árpád emlékkönyv*, ed.; FEHÉR Imre, Törökszentmiklós, Városi Könyvtár, 1997, 16–17; ALBERTINI Béla, *Szélpál Árpád, a szociófotó*, [Kecske-mét], Hungarian Museum of Photography, 2005.
- ⁶¹ KASSÁK Lajos, *A Munka folyóirat második kiállításához*. Kovács Ákos szalonia, Budapest, 1931.
- ⁶² The invitation card, of which you can see two pages here, is the property of the Kassák Museum. KM-Any – 1648 b, c.
- ⁶³ KÖRNER Éva, *Derkovits Gyula*, Corvina, Budapest, 1968, 158–159, [206]–[207].
- ⁶⁴ FARKAS Zoltán, *Fényképzési kiállítások*, Nyugat, 1931/9, 633.
- ⁶⁵ Interestingly, the exhibition was only open four times: on 13 and 20 February (Saturdays) from 2PM to 8PM and on 14 and 21 (Sundays) from 10AM to 4PM. The source for this information is a contemporary invitation, for which we would like to thank János Lengyel, the son of Munka-kör's Lajos Lengyel.
- ⁶⁶ On the night of 13 September 1931, a muddle-headed assailant, Szilveszter Matuska, blew up the Biatorbágy viaduct located relatively close to the capital as the express train going from Budapest to Vienna was passing through it. The bombing, which killed 22 and wounded many, was a good pretext to start a manhunt on the members of the illegal communist party. Ample literature is available on this topic, ranging from historic adaptations to political essays.
- ⁶⁷ FRÜHOF [Sándor], *Munkásfotó*, op. cit. 519.
- ⁶⁸ HAÁR Ferenc, *A szocialista nevelés*, Munka, 1932/21 (Jan.), 585–586.
- ⁶⁹ GRÓ Lajos, *III-ik fotókiállításunk*, op. cit. 623.
- ⁷⁰ Mihály JELEN, *Munkásfényképészek* [Worker Photographers], A Reggel (Bratislava [Pozsony]), 3 April, 1932, 8. This publication tells us that Ferenc Haár's picture of the Saint Stephen Day procession and Lajos Lengyel's picture entitled *Kavicsos út* [Road with pebbles] were on display in Bratislava. H[?] G[?], *A »munkagárda«* [The Work Brigade], Csehszlovákiai Népszava, (Bratislava [Pozsony]), 3 April, 1932, 3. — this latter also refers to the exhibition of the Haár picture mentioned above; Rezső SZALATNAI, *Magyar munkások fotográfái* [Photographs of Hungarian Workers], Forum (Bratislava [Pozsony]), 1932, 319 — the latter allows us to identify the exhibition of Teréz Bergmann's new objectivist dynamo picture in Bratislava. Here, it must be mentioned that Kálmán Brogyányi, a Hungarian art writer living in Bratislava dedicated his 1933 book *A fény művészete* [The Art of Light], of which social photography was an important part, to Lajos Kassák on the book's flyleaf — Béla ALBERTINI, *A fotószakíró Bronyányi Kálmán* [Photography-specialist Writer Kálmán Bronyányi], Pozsony, AB-Art, 2003, 130–132. Brogyányi's book was praised by Lajos GRÓ in Munka (1933/29, 816).
- As a consequence of the exhibition of Hungarian social photographs in Bratislava, representatives of the Sick movement were present at the planned venue of the *Munka-kör* photographers' exhibition in Szolnok on the 3 April 1932.
- ⁷¹ A selection of contemporary documents: [Szolnoki rendőrségi munkatársak jelentése Kassák Lajos előadásáról és a fotókiállításról a helyi vezető rendőrfőtanácsosnak], Szolnok, 3 April, 1932. Typescript, Magyar Munkásmozgalmi Intézet Archívuma, 27535; [A Magyar kir. Rendőrség politikai rendészeti osztályának jelentése Kassák szolnoki előadásáról és a fotókiállításról a belügyminiszternek], Budapest, Apr. 6, 1932. Typescript, Magyar Munkásmozgalmi Intézet Archívuma, 27535; A Szolnokon őrizetbe vett Kassák Lajost ma újra kihallgatták, *Az Est*, April 6, 1932, 10; Kassák Lajost szabadonbocsátották Szolnokon, Magyarország, April 6, 1932, 11; Kassák előadása és a fotókiállítás, Szolnoki Újság, April 7, 1932, 2.; Sándor MÁRAI: A cenzuráról, Újság, May 22, 1932, 5–6; Amire nincs szüksége Szolnoknak, Szolnok és Vidéke, April 10, 1932, 3–4.; [Rendőrségi nyilvántartás a szolnoki 1932-es szociófotó kiállítás megnyitójára érkezett résztvevőkről] Szolnok, Feb. 21, 1934, Typescript, Magyar Munkásmozgalmi Intézet Archívuma, 27535 — this document enables us to know the list of the names of all the visitors who showed up for the opening of the exhibition, including the Bratislava members of the Sick movement.
- ⁷² KASSÁK Lajos, [Előszó] *A mi életünkben* Munka, Budapest, 1932.
- ⁷³ SZÉLPÁL Árpád, *Képeskönyv a munkáseletről*, Népszava, 1932/88, 22; FRÜHOF Sándor, HAÁR Ferenc, LENGYEL Lajos, *Tanulékonyág vagy élelmesség*, Munka, 1932/25, 707; MÁRAI Sándor, *Korszerű fényképek*, Újság, 8 June 1932, 4; G[ró] L[ajos], *A mi életünkben*, Magyar Fotografia, 1932/7, 13–14; ROSNER Károly, *A »Munka« fotói a munkáról*, Magyar Grafika, 1932/7–8, 93; F. R[osenberg], *Ein soziales Fotobuch*, op. cit.
- ⁷⁴ For detailed discussion of this topic, see: CSAPLÁR Ferenc, *Magyar szociófotók a Der Kuckuckban (1930–1933)*, op.cit.

FROM AMONGST ALL THE DOCUMENTS¹ THAT REMAIN OF THE RICH KERTÉSZ LEGACY, ONLY A VERY SMALL NUMBER OF DIARIES CAN BE FOUND; BESIDES CALENDARS, IN WHICH WE MAY ALSO FIND BRIEF NOTES AND COMMENTS ABOUT SOME IMPORTANT EVENTS, MEETINGS, READINGS OR THEATRICAL EXPERIENCES, ALTOGETHER ONLY TWO SUCH NOTEBOOKS WERE LEFT. THESE WERE SPECIFICALLY INTENDED TO BE KEPT AS DIARIES BY KERTÉSZ.

ORSOLYA ELEK

ANDRÉ KERTÉSZ

The 1912 Diary of André Kertész and the Beginnings of His Photographic Career

The first one covers the period between 6th September 1909 and 24th March 1910; the second (a more detailed and methodical diary) starts on 1st January 1912 and ends on 31st December of the same year.

It was in 2014 that the historian Béla Nóvé drew attention to the 1912 diary, a virtually unknown source in the history of photography in Hungary. Nóvé's article¹, published in the journal *Kritika*, reported that he had "stumbled upon" documents from Kertész's childhood and adolescence in the library of the Hungarian Foundation (AMA) in New Brunswick, the origin of which, he said, was unknown. "There is a high probability that the source of the collection may be lying dormant in some Kertész collection somewhere, with the artist's photographs, perhaps accompanied by more writings, including correspondence — for example, the ones from Paris — although it would require further investigation to ascertain their whereabouts, be they in New York, Paris, Buenos Aires, or Hungary." According to his report, the 18 files contain a 1200-page collection including photocopies of diaries, poems, letters, drawings, photographs and newspaper clippings.³ As part of my doctoral research,⁴ in May 2017 I had the opportunity to examine the New Brunswick collection and could ascertain, by comparing it with the Paris archive material, that the original documents from which these were copied are indeed in the Paris collection, which — as this case clearly shows — is still being processed to this very day. Still, the pre-war diary of André Kertész — at the time still Andor Kertész — has not emerged from total anonymity. The New Brunswick photocopies were systematically prepared and organised in 1985–1986. Among the material in the two portfolios kept by the AMA, we also find a letter from art historian Julia Ballerini to Dr. August Molnár, the erstwhile manager

of the Foundation, wherein Ballerini hints that Molnar's English-language comprehensive summary of Kertész's Hungarian letters could provide the means of sorting and separating personal and official documents. The letter, written in English and dated 30th April 1986, also bears evidence to the fact that the sorting and processing of the legacy were taking place at the artist's home, which had been vacant for seven months. Hence, vacating the apartment in a few days was not due to the "arrival of the next tenant", as Károly Kincses states in the introduction to his publication: *The Unknown Photographs of Andre Kertesz, Pictures and Objects from the Apartment at Washington Square* [André Kertész ismeretlen fotográfiái. Képek és tárgyak a Washington Square-i lakásból]. In my opinion, the problem with the sorting of the legacy was not due to a tight deadline but rather to the conflicting personal and cultural policy interests, which is also revealed by the fate of his scattered legacy. However, that is another subject.

Upon my query, Julia Ballerini told me that she had been asked to help organise and categorise the artist's official and personal correspondence. According to her, the task proved to be impossible, as Kertész's personal and professional relationships were inextricably intertwined. At the same time, Ballerini emphasised that the legacy arrangements were mainly taken care of by Robert Gurbo, and Sandra Phillips.

After the artist's death, Robert Gurbo, who had worked as an assistant to Kertész since 1978, established the André and Elisabeth Kertész Foundation, which he still manages, in order to handle the legal aspects of the legacy and the vintage copies. In 1985, Sandra Phillips had just received her doctorate at the Art Department of the City University of New York. Her dissertation was on the years that André Kertész had spent in Paris⁵.

The fruit of the joint labour of Robert Gurbo and Sarah Greenough and Sarah Kennel, two photography historians of the Washington National Gallery of Art, was the André Kertész Lifetime Achievement Exhibition in 2005. The exhibition catalogue, which to my knowledge mentions and uses the 1912 diary for the first time, was notably translated by Bulcsú Veress⁶. To the best of my knowledge, this source in the history of photography was neither to be found in French, nor Hungarian literature and this still seems to be the case. Among the more significant biographies published during the years following Kertész's death, I have so far not found any indication of the diary's existence apart from the studies appearing in the 2005 catalogue⁷.

BUT WHAT DO THESE DIARIES ACTUALLY CONTAIN?

The first entry (6th September 1909) bears witness to the 15-year old Andor Kertész starting his diary after a three-month

deliberation and without much enthusiasm, this day also being the first day of the new school year: "Today I started school, again," he writes. However, there is more to the seemingly ordinary start of the school year: from later entries in the diary, we learn that his father, Lipót Kertész passed away on 22nd February 1909⁸ and he skipped school for months, taking a job as a servant.

Thanks to one of his mother's unmarried brothers, Lipót Hoffmann (uncle Poldi), who had taken the three Kertész boys⁹ under his tutelage, Andor returned to school and graduated from commercial high school in the summer of 1912. Influenced by his guardian working at the Wheat Stock Exchange, his career path was clear. The artistically inclined Andor made the utmost effort to meet his family's expectations: as soon as he graduated, he took employment at the Exchange where, despite dissimilar abilities and disinterest in a financial career, he endeavoured to perform well. The 1912 diary is a testimony to these explorations, doubts, desires and, of course, the year's events defining the biographical profile (e.g. the making of his first photographs).

The story according to which the 6-year old Kertész turned his interest to photography after being impressed by illustrated magazines discovered in the attic of his uncle's house in Szigetbecse is well known. He fulfilled his childhood dream at the age of 18 when he purchased his first camera with his first salary. He used it to realise the concept pictures he had been imagining since he was a young child. This, however, the artist's recollections and the story transmitted by monographs,¹⁰ is not supported anywhere in the 1912 diary.

Primary sources show that the 17-18-year old Andor Kertész's main interests were his love stories, conflicts with friends, his studies and his disinterest in office work, as well as the inherent problems rising therefrom. In his daily diary entries, not once does he omit to mention his neighbour Jolán Balog, a girl of his age to whom he had been tenderly attached since 1905. Over the years, however, he only mentions photographs or taking pictures in twelve entries, seven of which refer to portrait photographs of family members or friends.

If we only take the remaining five entries into account, as in the 2005 catalogue by Sarah Greenough and Robert Gurbo, it seems that photography holds a prominent position in the life of the young Kertész. Yet, if we peruse the entries of the entire year, or even exclusively the entries where photography is mentioned, we see that precious little can be learnt about the early beginnings of Kertész's photographic career; and if there is something worth mentioning that emerges from the diary, it is the fact that photography played at the time only a marginal role in his life.

For example, in January he writes the following:

6TH JAN (SATURDAY)

A.M. I overslept a bit. By the time I went down, she had already peeked out [i.e. Jolán, with whom they exchange greetings fleetingly every morning through the kitchen window]. All the same, we still greeted each other this morning. I met her on the street when she went up to the apartment from the shop. She greeted me with an almost hurtful indifference.

P.M. I organised my letters. Around 4:30, just as I was looking for her picture, I saw that She was going to the Moh [...]’ from where, as I found out, She went to Teri’s place with Mariska. I figured that out and I would have liked to follow her, but I reconsidered.

I put Imre’s books and letters in order.

We saw each other again in the evening a few times. She did not even turn around as She was going upstairs.

Right now it is 12:45. I was with Józsi until 12:30, because his parents are not at home. We talked. Who else about but Her?

20TH JAN (SATURDAY)

When I went into the room after breakfast, at about 7:30, the curtain in their kitchen window was drawn open. Perhaps She wanted to show that She had looked out, or to signal that she would be looking out earlier? This is just a hypothesis. When I left for school, she was already in the shop. I will see if She looks out the day after tomorrow.

P.M. I was at Fekete’s; he was sketching all over the place. I read when I got home and in spite of myself, I took out a few of Jolán’s letters and kept reading them. The photograph came up, too. [...] Just as I was about to put them away, Jaksay came in, I went out with him. We wandered around here and there.

Now, this evening, She was in the shop. I looked in several times; she may have seen me at one point. Tomorrow I will be sleeping, she will not be looking anyway.

In February his brother Imre sent a picture of himself from Vienna, where he was doing his military service.

14TH FEB (WEDNESDAY)

She looked out already at 7:15. During breakfast, she purposely brought her coffee to the window and held it out to me as if asking if I wanted it? Of course, I signalled yes.

After that, I only saw Her after lunch but She didn’t see me.

P.M. Jenő sprained his hand at school. (...) Poor kid brother.

Imre sent his picture, giving mother indescribable joy. Too bad my kid brother’s incident counterbalanced it. Imre looks splendid. His face has filled out, thanks to the Emperor’s bread. Of the 7 Hungarian children, he is definitely the most handsome. As soon as I’m in the mood, I shall write, as I owe him a letter anyway.

At the end of February, without warning, he expressed the desire to take pictures up in the mountains. “I would like to go there again in the summer, but with a camera. Oh, what pictures I could take. Each one would be filled with poetry.” With this quote, Sarah Greenough opens her chapter titled “A Hungarian Diary 1894–1925” in the aforementioned catalogue of the Washington Exhibition: “I would like to go back there during the summer, but with a camera. What great pictures could I take. All filled with poetry.”¹² Due to the emphasis, Kertész’s words become *ars poetica* in Greenough’s essay: they suggest a spontaneous passion for photography, which in my view is not only anachronistic but also inaccurate since photography was obviously not playing any role whatsoever in his life at that time. The body of the text, as well as the events of the previous days, show that Kertész, in a sombre mood at the end of the winter, plunges into his memories, readings and poems, and concerns himself with questions of poetry, and not with the possibilities of photography.

8TH FEB (THURSDAY)

[...] P.M. I copied the poem from yesterday, as well as another short, older poem of mine into the notebook.

I did not study at all.

My head was filled with the murky chaos of a host of future poems. [...]

I saw Her in the morning and at noon, but not since then. I have been thinking too much about Her, and almost always talking about Her to Jaksay. I feel that I love her very much. Who knows for how long, if things continue this way? Time flies and it affects me, too.

9TH FEB (FRIDAY)

[...] P.M. After the lecture, I wanted to study but I didn't feel like it. I was thinking. My deceased father, She and all sorts of poem subjects were on my mind. I was in a daze. I went out, loafing around for a while, to clear my head. [...]

I went to the Sommer's with mum. Sanyi instilled a desire in me to spend a year in America¹³ after graduating. If he succeeds in going there, so can I, it's only up to me. We'll still have to see what happens.

12TH FEB (MONDAY)

[...] It was a wonderful spring day. The sun, the bright sunshine, did not appeal to me. I'm deeply depressed. I'm definitely anxious about Her.

16TH FEB (FRIDAY)

[...] At 9:30, I deliberately passed by in front of their house, I couldn't hold back any longer. That's when I first saw Her. She noticed me as I was coming back. That indifferent behaviour of Hers was too vexing. At the sight of me, She didn't even bat an eyelid, so to speak. This is definitely very hurtful. I shall lose her; a proof of it is that as of late, she has restarted not looking out in the morning.

25TH FEB (SUNDAY)

I slept like a log until 9:30. [...]

P.M. Due to late bedtimes for the past few days, I was already lethargic. I was thinking all afternoon. I found Strazsa, Szepesszombat, so lovely. Everything there is so atavistic, evocative. **I would like to go there again in the summer, but with a camera. Oh, what pictures I could take. They would all be filled with poetry.**

It occurred to me how I used to imagine Jolán. I thought she would start crying after the first kiss. How beautiful it would have been. But it didn't happen that way. Then I summoned up many other past emotional experiences. I brooded.

Afterwards, I don't know why I went to the cinema. I hadn't gone in 2 months, and I won't go for another 2 months. There was a nauseating mixed crowd there. Stench, rough faces. Not for me. [Bolded lines are mine]

Jolán's indifference makes him afraid that their secret love relationship may come to an end due to its secretiveness and because they so rarely met. Literary possibilities (writing poetry, reading novels and going to the theatre) as well as wandering around town, serve to express his sensibility; the thought of photography is forgotten until the beginning of summer.

In June, as an experiment, the family acquired a camera and paid for it in full on 20th June. „[...] I watched Jenő copying yesterday's test pictures. Today at noon, mum bought the camera recommended yesterday.”¹⁴

It would appear that the technically inclined Jenő (who would later become an engineer) was much more interested in the device itself than the artistically inclined Andor who, on June 1912, just happens to be graduating. His diary entries — besides Jolán — refer to his relationship to his studies:

10TH JUNE (MONDAY)

Hungarian language written exam. I wrote about the guild system and the free industrial-military pay. The exam ran rather smoothly. Cribbing was quite easy. My paper, I realised afterwards, was very one-sided. I wrote clearly, straight-to-the-point, in a lively tone, without the least inclination to do it.

[...] Now I am up here with Jenő. Before noon, I found out about the 3 subjects for tomorrow's German written exam. He is working on them since lunchtime. This kid is unparalleled. He is putting so much effort into it, as if it were God knows what. He must be able to feel the importance of my graduation more than I do. I'm totally indifferent to it. [...]

11TH JUNE (TUESDAY)

German language written exam. It was useless to work so hard yesterday because we got a subject completely different from what the boys apparently knew. The warehouses, translation from Hungarian to German. I couldn't write a single word; I copied left and right, roughly up to halfway through. [...]

I'm so scared that it didn't work out. It would be awful.

I was utterly exhausted when I got home. Not because of all the thinking, but because I had been sitting inside all morning. [...]

12TH JUNE (THURSDAY)

[...] Until now, cheating has always gone well. Especially today. [...]

17TH JUNE (MONDAY)

It was raining when I woke up. I wasn't in the mood to study anyway, but now I'm even less keen to do so.

I came upstairs and read the Easter edition of the *Pesti Hírlap* (Pest Newspaper).

20TH JUNE (THURSDAY)

[...] Today nothing came of studying either. I read the newspaper, watched Jenő making copies of yesterday's test pictures.

At noon, mum bought the camera recommended yesterday. (23.k.)

P.M. The old boy summoned me to the Upor on the telephone.¹⁵ He wanted to talk to me about a job. I could choose from amongst 4 different ones. The sugar factory in Szerencs, some steam mill, Görgl brothers (lumber trade), or the jute factory in Újpest.¹⁶ Of course, the old boy recommended the Görgl brothers, which means I would have to work at the sawmill in Galicia, Transylvania, or Romania for a few years. I didn't give him an answer because of Jolán, of course. I asked him to give me time until Saturday to consider.

[...] When I got home, I mentioned it to mum, but she was against it because of the travelling. She expressed herself similarly to the old man this evening and she will absolutely not let me go. In view of this, I declared that I wanted to go. Mum wouldn't let me anyway, so why not say it? I acted as if I didn't care about Jolán either. I don't have the slightest desire to go. I would though, if I didn't care or had nothing to do with anyone because then **either one or the other of my dreams would come true, I could see the world thanks to my job**. But as things are, I'd rather stay home; I love Her much more than that. [Emphasis added.]

We will revert later to Kertész's search for a job and where he found employment.

In the context of the first photographs, it seems obvious from Kertész's diary entries of June that it was his brother Jenő who was first and foremost interested in photography. Andor continues to invest his entire attention in his love, besides the mandatory schoolwork.

22ND JUNE (SATURDAY)

Jenő photographed me. This was his first shot that turned out well. I came upstairs intending to study. I started, but my resolutions vanished. I gazed lengthily at Bihari's *Honeymoon*¹⁷ painting, a card that I bought yesterday. From now on, I will buy some more, as I have wanted to do for a long time.

[...] I didn't study a thing today. I'm sure that I am going to fail and I have already mentioned it to Her, too. I will have to return in September. What is to become of me? I cannot study and I don't have the slightest inclination to do so, despite feeling that I should. [Emphasis added]

23RD JUNE (SUNDAY)

When I went downstairs, I wanted to photograph Jolán in their doorway, but she wouldn't let me. I got quite worked up over it. I went to the cemetery in a slightly disturbed mood, to study. I learnt a bit of history, but just a bit, and left. Shortly thereafter, we managed to get a shot of Jolán without her noticing. **Jenő processed it** in the afternoon, but it didn't turn out very well, as he didn't give it enough time to develop. And then, during the drying process, the photographic plate broke. [...] Around 6 o'clock, **Jenő photographed** Jolán, Ilus and Ella from the window, with their mother's knowledge. They stood by the kitchen door, with their mother watching them from the kitchen. Up to now, this is the most successful picture; **Jenő worked on it** this evening. I cannot describe how happy I am about it.

After taking the photo, I went to sit down in front of the shop with Jenő. [...]

I saw Jolán many times today. True, it was a nice feeling, but I mustn't show myself so often. I don't know when it was that she went upstairs, nor do I know if she looked out because **I went into the room to see the photo being processed**. I told Jenő to take the photo over to Mrs Balog tomorrow. I must start to be a bit friendly. [Emphasis added.]

24TH JUNE (MONDAY)

At school. The written exam went well; the director didn't even say that it was poor...

When I got home, a big disappointment awaited me. I had unintentionally ruined the photo I had taken of Them¹⁸. I had placed it on top of the sink in the morning to dry, but in a wrong way and it had run together almost entirely. The place where They stood remained clear.

P.M. **We made a copy** from the plate, and it worked. They came out splendidly. A small picture but sharp enough. **I can't stop looking at it and I'm so happy.** We gave them a picture, too. [...]

I will most probably end up in the Millers' and Bakers' Mill provided I succeed in graduating. The old man said that it would be rather inappropriate to get me into Gizella, as he has a commercial connection with them, and they would think that it was just because of the business. Therefore, I should speak to my uncle Móric and he will recommend me to them. What's more, the salary terms will also be favourable. I don't really know where I should go. By the time I'm 24,¹⁹ my salary would be low anywhere. I can't think of any suitable place. I'm doing the maths; my salary would be small either here or there. What will become of us? My God, may we succeed in all our plans. [Emphasis added]

25TH JUNE (TUESDAY)

[...] I accidentally managed to ruin the photo of the girls even more.

Jenő's department head does not want to take him back because he couldn't make him fail the exam. The bastard. He doesn't want to take him in revenge, he says because of his speech²⁰. He wanted to destroy my little brother's career, so I am going to flog him in the street. Filthy bastard.

P.M. Around 5, to uncle Móric for information. No favourable news. Small pay, no progress. Whatever's going on, it's rather slow. It was bad to hear. What will happen to me now? Can I obtain a proper position at the age of 24? I'm so scared of losing Jolán....

On one single occasion at the end of July, he mentions that he took a photograph without Jenő.

27TH JULY (SATURDAY)

A.M. Out to the People's Park with Fekete, where I took 3 photos. Not of "our" places²¹, because the weather for that was not favourable. [...]

Compared to his love story with Jolán, school and the question of employment, photography is quickly relegated to the background. On 27th June, he sits his final graduation exam and receives his diploma on 1st July and then, without any delay or enthusiasm, he hands in an application at the Magyar Cukoripar (Hungarian Sugar Industry):

1ST JULY (MONDAY)

I went to pick up my mark-sheets. Three 2nd grades, the rest were barely enough to graduate.

Before noon, I wrote out my application to the Hungarian Sugar Industry r.z.

2ND JULY (TUESDAY)

I went to the Sugar Industry to introduce myself. I'm already fed up with the whole thing; I really wasn't in the mood. [...] I spoke to Breuer, the director. He too thought my mark-sheet was bad. [...] We shook hands and I left. Now I'm waiting for a rejection letter. It is a loathsome office, I must say. I'm already disgusted by it. [...]

Today was my 18th birthday. There's no reason to celebrate. I was annoyed this morning because of that stupid office, and am still annoyed this afternoon.

After being rejected by the Hungarian Sugar Industry, Andor tries his luck at the Magyar Kőszénbánya [Hungarian Coal Mine Industry] (7th July), then the family consults Gíró és Pénztáregylet [Giro and Cash Association], the Magyar Bank [Hungarian Bank], and the KBT (public procurement consultancy) in his interest (15th July). On 18th July, he receives a positive reply from the Ulrich²² Department Store in response to an application he sent after seeing an ad in a newspaper. However, on Monday 22nd July, his first day of work, he is dismissed for his lack of knowledge in German, and that same afternoon he already has an interview at the Giro.

22ND JULY (MONDAY)

7:50. I come upstairs, and I see they are in the office already. [...]

8:17. I'm already back downstairs. A few moments ago, he comes over to me [i.e., one of the managers] and asks me "will you understand if we speak German to you?" "I only understand very little." He will ask the boss, who has just come back home, whether he would disregard my lack of knowledge of German. He will keep me informed. That was it. I close the lid on that one.

I'm off to report to uncle Poldi. (I made these notes on a piece of paper, on site)

[...] P.M. I did the test at 3:45 [i.e., at Giró]. I passed, they were satisfied with me. It was very easy. Dictation and the 4 fundamental operations. I just got home and told mum about it. Salary is 50 crowns for 6 months, and then I will be appointed permanently. Office hours, 9:30 to 1 pm, 3:30 to 5. I am very happy.

Finally, he starts work at Giró és Pénztáregylet²³ on 1st August.

1ST AUG (THURSDAY)

First day at the office. I arrived at 8:45. Four of us are newbies. They made us sign promissory notes and gave us the rules to read and then we sat down and waited to be sent home. I don't really like my colleagues. The older ones make you feel their superiority in the field. Before leaving, I dictated billing amounts to a colleague; that was all the work I had. At a quarter to 12, the boss let me go.

I heard that Saturday afternoon is off, except if there is a lot of work to do. At least I can meet with Jolán. [...]

This afternoon I did a little more work, and to my great surprise, I got my pay today. As soon as I got home about 15 minutes ago, I handed it over to mum. There was joy: „at last, I got to live to see it”. A big wish of hers has come true. [...]

From then on, the diary entries become less frequent. They deal primarily with conforming to life at the office and secret nightly meetings with Jolán. Beside the opportunities of entertainment the city offers (Rudas and Lukács baths²⁴, sports events²⁵, theatre,²⁶ where he can openly show up with Jolán), and excursions in the countryside (Nagymaros, Zebegény, etc.), photography is completely forgotten for the rest of the year.

6TH AUG (TUESDAY)

[...] This morning I did collection for the first time. I will be doing it regularly from now on. Wandering around. After all, it's better than sitting inside. I'm still in the expenditure department, but they say they're going to transfer me to the discounting department. I'm not learning that much there, however. [...] I must start learning German and stenography. We don't even have a typewriter. A separate table, a proper pen and ink set is an impossible concept. Maybe I will get them in the discounting department. (6 o'clock.)

We met at noon and were together until 2 p.m. Something happened which was different from usual. [...] The only thing left now is that I can freely touch her, and may God keep me from that for as long as possible because after that, there won't be anything left apart from complete boredom. [...]

22ND AUG (THURSDAY)

This evening, we were together again from 11:30 to 2:15. I figured I wouldn't try what she'd been letting me do for the last few days. I wouldn't touch her with total freedom but behave sensibly, like before. That was the plan. She again let me touch her in every way. But if she had refused, I wouldn't have done it. I planned to curb our excessive feelings of well-being because if we continue to spend our time together like this, it will soon cease to be so; also, her over-permissive behaviour affects my soul negatively and I may even start feeling momentarily disgusted.

[...] She mentioned this evening that she was looking at my photo, and how good I looked on it, and now it's the other way around. My face is quite sunken. And the photo was not taken that long ago. If I'm not mistaken, it was taken in May.

He mentions the photo again on two occasions until the end of the year, in a totally irrelevant manner compared to the later viewpoint of his career.

3RD NOV (SUNDAY)

P.M. Theatre. Amál was also with us. [...] Erős lánczok [Heavy Chains]. Vígszínház. Boriska was here when I got home, I found my business card and the photo of me that I had sent her in her purse. I took them.

4TH NOV (MONDAY)

I showed Jolán the card and the photo. She told me to steal them back.

According to Károly Kincses, Kertész, “at the end of his studies [...] worked in a discounting department as a correspondent”, and “spent his entire free time taking photographs. The first one, right in his mother’s coffee shop on Teleki square”²⁷. This is what Károly Kincses writes about the photo labelled *Sleeping Boy* (*Alvó fiú*) which, based on his research, was taken on 25th May. Kincses determined the time at which the photo was taken based on “the hand-written list of Kertész” (“Kertész egy kézírásos listája”²⁸) titled Homeland material [Hazai anyag], which came into his hands “one week prior to the submission of the handwritten material”, but its origin is unknown.²⁹ In the digitalised image file of the Paris Médiathèque de l’architecture et du patrimoine,³⁰ the exact same date appears. At the same time, the 2005 Washington and the 2010 Paris exhibition catalogues published the first photographs attributed to Kertész without any indication of the exact date.³¹

Based on the diary now brought to light, we see that the date of the photograph probably couldn’t have been 25th May since the camera had been bought by the family (and not by Andor) only at the end of June and because he only started working on 1st August. At the same time, the diary unequivocally reveals that on that certain day in May, Andor was occupied with friendship contention and lovesickness and had not made any reference to photography. There is no mention of the photo (which at that time had a startling topic) taken in his mother’s coffeehouse in the diary, not only on 25th May but also not at any other time for the remainder of that year.

Perhaps the notes made by Kertész in his later years are inaccurate or his early diary entries are incomplete. Perhaps the *Sleeping Boy* photo had been taken by Jenő and not by Andor. But what is clear is that we know little of the first photos attributed to Kertész and that the processed Kertész legacy and the published life interpretations are likely to give rise to many misunderstandings and misinterpretations.

Meanwhile, we can read in another one of Kertész’s reminiscences about the existence of a camera in the extended Kertész and Hoffmann family. A camera with which the children were allowed to play freely:

“I was still a young child, probably only 6 or 7 years old. We had

gone with my parents to visit one of my uncles who lived in a village near Budapest. I had happened to come upon some old magazines from the 1850s in the attic of his house. They were full of romantic stories with pictures, drawings and engravings. They appealed to me very much, and I dreamt that I would do similar ones one day, but I thought that I would do drawings.

We were a big family, with lots of kids, and some of us had cameras. We had taken a few pictures, and I immediately had the idea that I would tell stories with photographs.” [Emphasis added. Own translation]³²

The subsequent interpretation is quite relevant in this recollection and also suggests that the very first photograph was perhaps not taken in 1912 but much earlier, without any photographic awareness, while playing in the circle of family members. This hypothesis could explain why he may have written on 25th February with such determination and without any apparent precedents that he wanted to take photographs in Szepesség. Photography may not have been so unattainable to him before 1912, but at that time he had not shown any particular interest in it.

In my opinion, Kertész’s early photographic experiments were part of the cultural occupations with which he spent his free time. According to the diary, he was primarily interested in theatre and fine arts. He wrote poetry³³ and his theatre and reading experiences included modern and contemporary creators such as Károly Szász, Gyula Princz, Sándor Bródy, Árpád Abonyi, Ferenc Herczeg, Kálmán Porzolt, Géza Gárdonyi, Kálmán Mikszáth, Frigyes Hebbel, Pierre Weber, and Henri de Gorsse. He was also familiar with popular cultural and political newspapers such as *Új Idők* or the *Pesti Hírlap* and read them regularly, although in his entries he did not allude to any actual political events: neither the fight for universal voting rights, nor the first Balkan war and the civilian movements fighting against it; and Franz Joseph’s visit on 4th November didn’t even seem worth mentioning by the love-struck Kertész.

Although he refers fewer times to his fine art experiences,³⁴ he appears to be more comfortable with visual arts than with written forms of expression.

15TH APR (MONDAY)

I cannot write a review about a theatre piece yet but, to my greatest pleasure, lately, I can somehow do it about art pieces and other solid artwork, but only in broad outlines, as I am still unable to do it in depth. I have no words for it, even if I have it in me. [Highlight in the original.]

However, he highly underestimates the significance of his sensibility and critical approach:

28TH JAN (SUNDAY)

[...] I judge paintings very much according to my personality which, perhaps, I should not be doing because one's character is usually disregarded unless it is something extraordinary. I am unable to judge by the taste of the crowd. I look for the poetic dimension in everything. Art criticism requires immense knowledge and courage. I have neither. These were the thoughts going through my head while contemplating the images — in view of my helplessness — and thereafter.

He will come to deeply understand and fully live the significance and the possibilities of his sensibility and his individual vision in the 1920s, in the cosmopolitan environment of Paris.

"In every one of his statements André Kertész has said at least once that he was producing a photographic diary of his entire life. [...] Indeed. 'Photography has not influenced my life, my life has influenced my photography,' he said and he did not exaggerate." writes Károly Kincses, quoting the artist¹ in the introduction to his book. Robert Gurbo also highlights the artist's autobiographical inspiration: "The subject of his art, he often insisted, 'is me!'"³⁶ Although all creators draw inspiration first and foremost from their own impressions and perceptions, in the case of Kertész this autobiographical aspect fundamentally determined the form of expression of his pictures and the interpretation and perception of his career. Thus, the interpretation and the significance of his art are inseparable from the interpretation of his life's path. That is why it is crucial, even today, to rethink the Kertész narrative, which the latest results of social sciences and (visual) historiography give ample opportunity to do.

To this day, Kertész's early career, as well as numerous details concerning other events in his life, remains shrouded by a more or less impenetrable veil. Over time, gaps and contradictions have been obscured by the crystallised Kertészian narrative, as well as the writing of the history of photography which also puts homogeneous, linear, and uniform stories at the forefront. The way I see it, Kertész became a photographer little by little, due to his sensitivity to the historical and cultural context. As Gurbo also points out: "Almost as soon as he began to photograph he seems to have recognised, perhaps intuitively, that he could use his camera to question, explore, and ultimately understand his relationship to the people and things around him."³⁷ The vision of his predestination only developed later when influenced among other events by the needs of the

art photography market and historiography since the 1960s, stories took shape that are to this day decisive for the trade and the public at large.

Such a retrospective explanation of Kertész's predestined talent for photography can be found, for example, in Annie-Laure Wanaverbecq's text, in which she writes: "Already from his first photographs, it appears that the young Kertész searched for the harmony of light and the play of shadows, which proves that he already sensed the essence of photography at an early age, and at the same time it explains why he instinctively and definitively distanced himself from the dominant pictorial photographic aesthetics."³⁸ Andor Kertész, however, had not consciously taken photographs at all in the pre-war years.

Robert Gurbo's perception seems more appropriate and more constructive. According to him, Kertész's early pictures, free of the expectations and conventions of the age, tell most of his personal experience in finding himself out of place in the environment he was born into. His natural sensibility, which he could not express in his teenage years in other ways, found its proper format in an autodidactic way, in photography learned free of photographic standards.³⁹

My goal here of course, is not to question the scientific results of the cited and mentioned literary sources, since there is evidence of well-founded research, source material exploration and compiled cultural and historical context behind the hundreds of pages of work. Based on critical reading of related literature and the use of unexploited primary sources, I would like to show that considering the inconsistency of his non-homogeneous life path, Kertész's career and life's work can be redefined⁴⁰ and that the rules of biography writing may be reconsidered (and shall be reconsidered), and perhaps our knowledge, according to the challenges of the age⁴¹, can be expanded, too.⁴²

- ¹ The legacy was offered to the French State in 1984 by the artist himself. The archive placed in the collection of the French Ministry of Culture is handled by the Photo Gallery of the Médiathèque de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine, which comprises of hundreds of private and professional letters, diary entries, newspaper clips, exhibition catalogues and other personal documents in addition to approx. 100,000 negatives, 15,000 slides, and numerous contact prints. Certain documents can be found in photocopies in New York, in the collections of the American Hungarian Foundation and the André and Elisabeth Kertész Foundation. Some of his personal items went to Argentina, to his younger brother, Jenő's family, and the rest are in Hungary: nearly 200 photos and approx. 100 personal objects are owned by the Municipality of Szigetbecse, guarded by the Hungarian Museum of Photography in Kecskemét.
- ² NÓVÉ Béla: *A „nagy háború” – egy önkéntes optikáján át. André Kertész, 1914–1918* [“The Great War” — through the optics of a volunteer]. *André Kertész, 1914–1918*, *Kritika* 43. (2014/9–10), 13–16.
- ³ The photocopy of the 1912 diary can be found in the archives of the American Hungarian Foundation, in the dossier ARCH 192 Box 1 Folder 7. Its original is in the collection of the Archives des Monuments historiques & Patrimoine Photographique de l'État in France in box 2005/032/101–102–103.
- ⁴ The ELTE BTK doctoral programme “Atelier” is under joint guardianship — a cooperation between the European Department of Social Sciences and Historiography and the Aix-Marseille University Department of Comparative Literature (from 2015). Working title of the research: *The problem of (national) identity in the life path of André Kertész / Sentiments d'appartenance et parcours exilique chez André Kertész*.
- ⁵ PHILIPPS, Sandra (1985): *The Photographic Work of André Kertész in France, 1925–1936: A Critical Essay and Catalogue*, doctoral thesis, City University of New York.
- ⁶ Probably Dr. Bulcsu Veress, an American-Hungarian political scientist.
- ⁷ The Budapest Vintage Galéria, which collaborates closely with the New York Kertész Foundation, published a small booklet about André Kertész in 2007, in connection with the retrospective exhibition in Washington. The authors of the short biography are Robert Gurbo and Sarah Morthland who mention “Kertész's early diaries” without indicating sources and without proper processing. See *André Kertész. Budapest, Paris, New York*, Vintage Galéria, Budapest, 2007, 7.
- ⁸ Hungarian and French literature mention simply 1909, without precise dates. Only the Sarah Greenough – Robert Gurbo exhibition catalogue publishes, as a postscript (!), the legible date of 22nd February in the 1909 diary. See: GREENOUGH, Sarah, GURBO, Robert, KENNEL, Sarah: *André Kertész*, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., 2005, 246.
- ⁹ Imre (born in 1890), Andor (born in 1894) and Jenő (born in 1897)
- ¹⁰ See e.g., KRISZTINA Passuth I.o., quoting: KINCSES Károly – KOLTA Magdolna: *Homeland material, Photojournal, André Kertész and the Hungarians* [Hazai anyag, Fotónapló, André Kertész és a magyarok], Magyar Fotográfiai Múzeum, Kecskemét, 2005, 20.; BODNÁR János (edit.): *André Kertész Magyarországon* [André Kertész in Hungary], Főfoto, Budapest, 1984, 7.; FRIZOT, Michel – WANAVEBECQ, Annie-Laure: *Kertész* (catalogue), Jeu de Paume, Paris, 2010, 21.
- ¹¹ The handwriting here is hard to read.
- ¹² S. GREENOUGH – R. GURBO (2005), 2.
- ¹³ We can see, already in the pre-war years, the possibility and the desire of Andor to go abroad (“I could see the world in consequence of my profession,” see his 20th June diary entry which I quote in a more complete form below). Ignoring this, literature generally states that Kertész left Hungary due to constraints of historical and social circumstances in the 1920s. Kertész-research has also not addressed the question of why an artist, not speaking French at all, chose Paris in 1925 although he had relatives living in America.
- ¹⁴ I quote below the complete 20th June 1918 diary entry.
- ¹⁵ The handwriting here is hard to read.
- ¹⁶ The Újpest Jute Factory.
- ¹⁷ BIHARI Sándor: *Honeymoon* [Mézeshetek], 1905. Oil painting, Hungarian National Gallery.
- ¹⁸ The day before, he still writes that “Jenő, from his window, (took the photo) of Jolán, Ilus and Ella”. This also shows that he is not at all concerned with the question of authorship and the photographer's identity. As Greenough writes, Jenő and Andor “were taking photos together so much, that often Andor considered the photos that his kid brother had taken to be his own.” See: S. GREENOUGH – R. GURBO (2005), 5. Later, Kertész has this to say about the question of authorship: “The experience is mine and therefore every picture belongs to me, even if I made it through someone else”, quotes Béla Tarcai in the 1964 Kertész interview S. GREENOUGH – R. GURBO (2005), 270.
- ¹⁹ The age of majority is what he and Jolán have to wait for in order to marry

freely, without parental consent.

²⁰ Jenő would stutter until the end of his life. Andor, according to Robert Gurbo's recollections, lisped in his childhood.

²¹ With his beloved Jolán, they often go to the People's Park where they can keep a low profile.

²² B. J. (Baptist Johannes) Ulrich, Austrian manufacturer and wholesaler, is one of the founders of building engineering in Hungary. After having his depot in Budapest in 1884, he established his store on the Váci körút in 1912 (later Vilmos császár út, presently Bajcsy-Zsilinszky út) at No. 31. <http://legyor.hu/>

²³ The predecessor of today's GIRO Zrt. and KELLER Zrt., Budapest Giro and Pénztáregylet Rt. served the needs of financial institutions from the age of dualism until its nationalisation after the end of the Second World War. See FEBER Katalin – NAGY Krisztina: *A Budapesti Giro és Pénztáregylet Rt. 1893–1948*, GIRO, Budapest, 1990

²⁴ 18th February, 28th July, 20th August.

²⁵ On 10th April, for example, he goes to the first rugby match ever held in Hungary on which he gives his opinion in the diary. However, he neither mentions the first national automobile race started in Budapest on 5th June, nor the first national air race on 20th August.

²⁶ For example: 7th February, 4th April, 15th April, 3rd November, 24th November.

²⁷ KINCSES K. – KOLTA M. (2005) 24.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 7.

²⁹ The source of the pictures was the Hungarian Photography Museum, the André Kertész Memorial Museum of Szigetbecse, the Historical Photo Gallery of the Hungarian National Museum, the Petőfi Literary Museum, and the Hungarian Theatre Museum and Institute, and perhaps the related documents also turned up from one of the above.

³⁰ Accessible at http://www.culture.gouv.fr/public/mistral/memsmn_fr,

³¹ S. GREENOUGH – R. GURBO (2005), p. 22., FRIZOT – WANAVEBECQ (2010): 30–31

³² GAILLARD, Agathe: *André Kertész, «Les grands photographes»*, éditions Pierre Belford, Paris, 1980, 11–12. Quote translated by Orsolya ELEK.

³³ His poems, written in 1911–12, were left between the pages of a Hebrew prayer book.

³⁴ See, for example, 28th January 1912, Kunsthalle (Múcsarnok), 2nd February 1912: Iparművészeti Múzeum (Museum of Applied Arts), 30th March 1912. Home Art Exhibition (Lakásművészeti Kiállítás), Industrial Technology Museum (Technológiai Iparmúzeum) 15th December 1912: Miklós Vadász exhibition, Ernst Museum.

³⁵ KINCSES K. – KOLTA M. (2005) 7. quotes this without indicating sources. The statement first appeared in 1979 (in the 85th year of the artist) presumably in a nude photo album in the following format: “Photography has not influenced my life; my life has influenced my photography”. See: KELLY, Jain (ed.) *Nude: Theory, Lust, Lustrum*, New York, 1979. Quoted by S. Greenough – R. Gurbo (2005) 269.

³⁶ “The subject of his art, he often insisted, ‘is me!’” See “André Kertész to Robert Gurbo, conversations from 1978 to 1985”. In: S. GREENOUGH – R. GURBO (2005) XIV. Quote translated by Orsolya ELEK.

³⁷ “Almost as soon as he began to photograph, he seems to have recognized, perhaps intuitively, that he could use his camera to question, explore, and ultimately understand his relationship to the people and things around him.” S. GREENOUGH – R. GURBO (2005) XIV. Quote translated by Orsolya ELEK.

³⁸ «Cette recherche d'harmonie avec la lumière, cette maîtrise de l'ombre et de ses incidences, sa facilité à comprendre la nature même de la photographie, entraînent très tôt et définitivement Andor Kertész hors du champ de la photographie d'art et du pictorialisme dominants à l'époque.» Source: FRIZOT – WANAVEBECQ (2010) 22. Quote translated by Orsolya ELEK.

³⁹ S. GREENOUGH – R. GURBO (2005) XII–XIII

⁴⁰ As pointed out at the 2005 retrospective exhibition in Washington, „[...] the tension between the facts of his life and his perception of it is often at the root of his most compelling photographs.” Quote translated by Orsolya ELEK. See S. GREENOUGH – R. GURBO (2005), XIV

⁴¹ Expressions that try to capture our age, as for example postmodernism (Jean-François LYOTARD), presentism (François HARTOG), the fuzzy present (Gábor SONKOLY), or the off-modern (Svetlana BOYN), are all ideas that question the possibility of linear explanations and strive to describe complex, controversial processes.



Play the piano together

Balázs Telek: Anamorph

IT IS THE BEGINNING OF ENDRE ADY'S POEM "I LIVE IN THE HEART OF THE YOUNG AND ALWAYS PERSIST [...]"¹ THAT COMES TO MY MIND WHENEVER I THINK OF BALÁZS TELEK AND THE VOID HE LEFT IN MANY — NATURALLY NOT ONLY IN THE YOUNG BUT IN ALL THOSE WHO KNEW HIM — OF THE INCOMPLETE MOURNING PROCESS WHICH HAS BEEN GOING ON SINCE HIS TRAGIC DEATH TWO YEARS AGO. HOWEVER, PERSONAL EFFECT AND CHARM FADE, DISAPPEAR, TOGETHER WITH THOSE WHO KNEW HIM, WHO REMEMBER HIM. WHAT REMAINS IS HIS WORK.



Balázs Telek left behind countless exciting photographic artworks, but only one independent album summarizing his oeuvre was published in his lifetime, exactly 10 years ago, in 2007: the *Anamorph²*, which could be regarded as a robust selection of his works completed until then; with emphases added by Balázs Telek, as to what he considered essential to collect and show.





Balázs TELEK: *Apocalypse at the Keleti train station*, camera obscura, 2009 © Heir of Balázs Telek

Good artworks keep their freshness throughout the years and remain inspiring, they keep changing with their age and their reading. *Anamorph* is definitely worth rereading and reviewing. Also, because when it was published, perhaps due to the low number of copies or the already weak photographic reception, it didn't get enough attention, so only a few articles have been written about it. At that time, it may have seemed as the first sign, the summary of a promising career, there would be more to come, since the photographer who collected his artworks on 132 pages was only 33 years old! Looking from 2015, and especially from 2017, the book is more and more serious and unavoidable, as this is the only summary of Balázs Telek's work, namely, according to his own ideas and conceptions.

The book is still an exemplary, excitingly composed and executed object, which praises the joint work of Balázs Telek and his wife, Gabi Halász. It is typographically innovative and well thought-out, a work created with the utmost care, therefore it definitely stands out from similar products on the Hungarian scene. It is a grandiose and reader-friendly album, as, contrary to the usual Hungarian practice, all of its commentaries are translated into English, French and German languages. Furthermore, it provides information about the photos at the end of the series in a witty and ingenious way. Richly served information is vital, as the book presents a quite specific oeuvre. The style of presentation highlights an essential aspect of Balázs Telek's work, namely its pedagogical, educational dimension.

The entire book is permeated with the desire for the transfer of knowledge; it tries to raise the spectator's interactivity, to involve them in the creative process. As if the teaching activity of Balázs Telek was continuously communicating the following towards his listeners: "I prepared this in such and such a way, it is very simple, you can do it yourself, it's just a game!"

And what is all this that anyone can do? Splitting obvious, ready-made, usual vision and imaging, and then joining it again in a tricky, cunning way, so that we get a better understanding of the nature of vision and representation. Balázs Telek's oeuvre is like he would have reset photography. He did not remain content with the usual, highly developed and sophisticated technology, but he stepped out of it and went back in time to the most primitive, purest, and most crafty imaging methods. He went back to *camera obscura*, to the simple box with a hole in it, and through continuous experimentation, in an evolutionary way, to various anamorphic representation modes. All this by creating and experimenting with most of his imaging devices by himself.³ He did not remain content with the image created by the "simple" *camera obscura*, like many people do or did, he wanted more: to leave the two dimensions, to step out of two dimensions into three, and back. A particular feature of his photographs is endless transformation, the process of metamorphoses, from two dimensions to three, from one face to another. Later, his images have become more object- or statue-like in their shaping.



Balázs TELEK: *Opened Gothic*, developed anamorphosis, 2003. Ø 18 cm © Heir of Balázs Telek

Balázs TELEK: *Cistercians*, developed anamorphosis, 1998. Ø 40 cm © Heir of Balázs Telek



Balázs TELEK: *A couple*, developed anamorphosis, 2005. 30x30x25 cm © Heir of Balázs Telek

Balázs TELEK: *A couple*, anamorphosis from 6 views, 2005. Ø 25 cm © Heir of Balázs Telek



Balázs TELEK: *Yogi*, anamorphosis, 2004, Ø 25 cm © Heir of Balázs Telek

Anamorphosis that interested Balázs Telek the most means change-back in Greek. Whoever prepares anamorphosis, prepares a visual enigma, a mini labyrinth, which has only one entrance, one key, more precisely: only one viewpoint from where all the views become whole and understandable. Anamorphosis is splitting the world into pieces and putting the pieces back together again but in different ways. It is a game played with appearance and reality. Because looking at the pictures of Balázs Telek, they are like the reflection of a distorted mirror, an exploded view of the world, or a cubist photograph. As though someone had split what is visible into its component elements. It would also offer the right way of looking, but only in one particular way. It gives us a special key to what we think is the most natural, so we don't even realise it: the key to vision. *Anamorph* explains precisely how the images contained in it should be viewed, in order to see what the photographer wanted us to see; in order to do this, sometimes it is enough to hold the book at a specific angle, on other occasions it invites us to photocopy the picture and fold it, thus to enjoy the artwork

in a proactive way. It is like understanding Bach's piano playing by playing the piano with him. Many pianists say exactly this about Bach. The book requires us to *act*, but it is also possible to use it in the traditional way, by turning the pages on the flat. However, in this case, the disassembled reality doesn't change back; it remains static.

At the beginning, Balázs Telek was interested in architecture, later he turned towards a particular, specific genre of portrait. He indeed records his friends, family members, and himself right from the beginning, but later this kind of intimacy in his photography only increases. As he was basically interested in understanding the view and experimenting, his medium and his object could be almost anything, which is why he turned towards his environment, towards his loved ones in a natural way. The way of shaping is almost always abstract, more exactly, timeless. He photographs his subjects *nude* in many senses, which not only means literal nudity, but the nakedness of real, close faces, and the negligence of all features referring to the given age, whether it be clothes or jewels. The longer

Balázs TELEK: *Look*, developed anamorphosis, 2005. 11x24 cm © Heir of Balázs Telek





Balázs TELEK: *100 years*, developed anamorphosis, 2005. 11x24 cm © Heir of Balázs Telek

exposures require a completely different behaviour from the subjects, due to the unique photographing modes — thus the disappearance, vanishing of all behaviour and manners. He records many of his subjects with eyes closed, which also increases the experience of timelessness.

Looking at the pictures in the traditional way, without changing them back, due to the aforesaid and the features of anamorphosis, in many cases, there is something morbid and frightening. We see nude faces, limbs, absorbed in timelessness with eyes closed, with the expression of sleeping or death, with distorted features, dissected. Due to the particular mode of imaging, although we *know* that the images fit together only when they are looked at in a certain way, we cannot evade *feelings* that come when we are looking at the photos. It is like looking at faces, eyes appearing to be from another world or actually from the other world. This aspect is also enhanced by

low light and the dark, black background. There's something inexplicably dreadful in the images, in the faces, and this feeling doesn't really disappear even when we already know how to look at them.

Obviously, we will never be able to look at, to read Balázs Telek's images without thinking of his tragic death; in this way, the feelings inspired by his pictures are also about death. They somehow foresee, predict his death. As if Telek would have unconsciously *written* his own death into these faces, that other world where he passed onto, and the world where his loved ones remained without him.

As though, already in this excellent book, even if unknowingly, inadvertently, unconsciously would tremble the words that Gérard de Nerval wrote in his impressive verses: "[...] My only *star* is dead, and my constellated lute / Bears the black sun of the *Melancholy*."⁴

¹ ADY, Endre: "Ifjú szívekben élek", *Ady Endre összes versei*, Osiris Kiadó, Budapest, 1998, 754.

² TELEK, Balázs: *Anamorph*, KattArt Kereskedelmi és Szolgáltató Bt., Budapest, 2007.

³ "— How many cameras do you have?

— You'd rather ask how many types of cameras I have, because I have at least four panoramic cameras alone. I also have cone cameras, I tried to image spheres and I prepared cameras for this as well. Most recently, I created a cone-panoramic camera system which I didn't have an opportunity to try so far. With this camera, it is possible to create an anamorphic panoramic photo." TELEK Balázs: „Nincsenek véletlenek” [interview], *Fotóművészet*, 2002/1–2. VOLUME XLV. 1–2. http://www.fotomuveszet.net/korabbi_szamok/200212/telek_balazs?PHPSESSID=bc5e9293810bd6e400fb4aaee209f43b

⁴ GÉRARD DE NERVAL: *El Desdichado*, translation: Kálnoky László, <http://mek.oszk.hu/04300/04350/04350.htm#29>





Balázs TELEK: *Panorama of hands*, developed anamorphosis, 11x24 cm, 2005. © Heir of Balázs Telek



Imre BENKŐ and Péter KORNISS in editorial office of Nők Lapja. Budapest, 1987 © Imre Benkő
Fotóarchív

JÁNOS PALOTAI

Icons

“There were icons like Péter Korniss and Imre Benkő”, said Péter Rákosi, who had taken classes with Imre Benkő at the photography major of the School of Applied Arts in the 90s. His other disciple, Krisztián Kiszely, he says, was motivated spiritually by “his magical pictures, similar to those of Péter Korniss or Henri Cartier-Bresson.”¹



Imre BENKŐ: *Ballet student*. Hungarian State Opera House, Budapest, 1974
© Imre Benkő

Imre BENKŐ: *Silver wedding*. Boldog (Hungary), 2004 © Imre Benkő

IN THIS ESSAY, WE WILL LOOK AT THE HISTORICAL, EXISTENTIAL, LINGUISTIC, AND MORAL REASONS THAT MADE BENKŐ AND KORNISS OUTSTANDING FIGURES AND ICONS OF HUNGARIAN PHOTOGRAPHY. THE ANSWER TO WHY ANNA BÁLINT, WITH HER SON, OR MIKLÓS CSIRMÁZ MIGHT HAVE BECOME MAGICAL MAY BE FOUND IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUBJECT, IDEOLOGY, AND IMAGES ALONG WITH DISTINGUISHING CRITICAL ICONOLOGY. WHAT ALSO MAKES THIS SUBJECT TOPICAL IS AN EXHIBITION PUT ON RECENTLY PRESENTING THE 80-YEAR-OLD PÉTER KORNISS AND THE RELEASE OF IMRE BENKŐ'S NEW ALBUM.²

Péter Korniss is a member of the great post-war generation, along with people like Tamás Féner, Endre Friedmann, Éva Keleti or Edit Molnár. Imre Benkő is six years his junior and arrived with the second wave from a different sociocultural environment, with different childhood experiences. However, they do share common experiences as far as a few social and technical transformations are concerned, such as digitalisation, the iconic turn and the change of meaning. History — 1944, 1945, 1949, 1956 — had a substantial impact on both families, the latter completely rewrote Korniss' personal narrative...

They started devoting themselves to photography at the same ages, and it soon became their calling. Korniss would join *Nők Lapja* [Women's Magazine] as a photographer at the age of 24 in 1961 and would stay there for 30 years. Benkő started working for the national news and photo agency (MTI) at the age of 25 and continued this work from 1968 through 1986. Their parallel lives meet and not at infinity. Their early works relate to ballet — and miming in Benkő's case — and theatre. Korniss photographs the *Pécsi Balett*, *Déryné* [Déryné State Theatre] and *25. Színház* [25th Theatre]. Of this era, he says: "The first big influence on me was Cartier-Bresson: shape, light, the moving figure, and material. Even my theatre photos bear signs of this. Later, André Kertész came to be the closest to my heart, and this holds true to this day. André Kertész is a photographer whose poles ooze photography and here, [with Kertész], there are more emotions."³

The shapes, light, figure, and emotion featured in Korniss' recollection also play a significant role in Benkő's evolution. He works at *Körszínház*, *Domino Pantomim Együttes* and Iván Markó's young company, *Győri Balett*. These provide good "schooling" for him in terms of compressing moments into a frame and learning to compose fast.





Péter KORNISS: *Girls in the Dance House*, 1967 © Péter Korniss

Benkő gains international recognition with his ballet and dance pictures: he is awarded World Press Photo prizes (1975, 1978), where Korniss is already a member of the jury at this time (1977–1979), later becoming a consultant. He also holds the latter position with the W. Eugene Smith Fund. Korniss later goes on to become a member of the Sony World Photography Academy (2007). His affinity for dance and music remains to this day. After the theatre, he photographs authentic bands of the folklore genre back in Hungary and, at the same time, the International Dance Theatre in Amsterdam. In 1967, he made it to Sic in Transylvania with choreographer-collector Ferenc Novák, where dance is an integral part of life. What he sees there becomes a defining experience for him: “I thought I had returned to the past,”⁴ he writes.

With his camera, he goes on a journey of discovery and through the culture and mores of this archaic world, he reaches simple people. The exhibition of his “hushed up” topic, his photos from Transylvania, at the Kunsthalle creates much buzz. His pictures reflect ethical and ethnic norms: they give humaneness to humans and Hungarianness to Hungarians, which also appears in his later works. At this point, Korniss is noticed abroad. To quote his album’s title: He “set out to see the world.”⁵ Thanks to the ethnographic value of his books, he is invited to America, where he holds lectures at the anthropology departments of several universities, then

goes on to photograph Native Americans as a scholarship recipient *Land of Red Cloud* [Vörös felhő földjén]. The book was prefaced by Nebraska University professor Robert D. Miewald.⁶

According to Jean Baudrillard, the most beautiful photographs are taken of savages, because they face the lens the way they would face death.⁷ With his photos, Korniss surpasses manipulation and skin colour as a boundary, not viewing Native Americans as savages but rather expressing the “death” of their culture. He goes to Wounded Knee, a sacred place of the 19th-century Native American freedom fight, where equality movements rekindled in the 1970s. He takes pictures for *National Geographic*, *GEO Magazine*, *Fortune* and *Forbes*. He also makes it out to Yemen, the “Land of ancient caravan paths”. The contradictory relationship between the archaic and the modern world becomes an essential element of his works. “What is soon going to disappear should be immortalised. As a photographer, I could not have found a more beautiful mission for myself.”⁸ He photographs traditions that have been preserved not only in Transylvania but also in the Hungarian countryside: in 1970s Rimóc, a young man who died unwedded is escorted on his final journey by “brides” at his “funeral wedding”. (This is around the time that ancient craftsmanship finds its way into cities and folk dancing evolves into a movement.)



Péter KORNISS: *The two of them on Christmas Eve*, 1982 © Péter Korniss

A significant portion of both photographers' careers takes place in the socialist era. They pushed the ideological "boundaries" of photography by dealing with sensitive subjects that were usually kept under wraps. At this time, Benkő no longer limits himself to official photography, turning his attention to the everyday man and becoming interested in simple, "mundane" subjects. Korniss' and Benkő's human-centric works come from within, fed by humanism and a moral sense instead of the idea of "valuing humans above all" or the proclamations of a proletariat declared as "the ruler class". They documented and sought out real substance instead of empty slogans.

Tamás Féner is the one who starts pushing back against the artificial ideological structure of representation in the 1970s. He shows not working heroes but victims of labour in his photographs taken at the "red" Csepel industrial complex, viewed as taboo, in his series about the miners of Feketevölgy, in the pictures taken of the railroad workers bidding farewell to the last steam engine: *Archival Present 1, 3, 4 [Archív jelen]* (1972–75); a documentary entitled *Underground Shift [Sihátán]* (1974).⁹ He criticises not only the official representation of society but also the political leadership because they do not appreciate value-creating humans. His photos caused disturbance not only amongst the cultural bureaucracy — which, as a service to the prevalent ideology, preferred to have the canon of "Truth, Beauty, Excellence"

displayed — but also amongst some viewers.¹⁰

As a continuation of his work about the disappearing world of peasants, Péter Korniss dedicated himself to the fate of people forced into the industry from agriculture, commuting between the countryside and cities. In 1976, he started taking photos of a group located at the bottom of the social hierarchy of labour division. This is demonstrated by a photo taken in the "centre" of the country, in Clark Adam square: up above is the Buda Castle, the palace, while down below "navvies are digging the ground", in a ditch. The second half of this pair of pictures shows the same people standing near the Danube, looking at the Parliament Building on the other side, shrouded in mist. The documentary value and associative field are contrary to the official iconography and ideology of the time. It is only optically that Korniss looks at the group from "above", he pays them respect. He always strives to have people accept him, to sense the tact with which he photographs them. He follows Capa's advice, putting a slight spin on it: for a good picture, you need to be sufficiently close to people. He works with them, travels with them on the "black train", finds out what it is like to have your time split between two locations. At this time, hundreds of thousands of people commute between their residence and their place of work. The photos show that they keep the flavours of home in antiquated wooden boxes at their workers' lodgings, in the era of "fridge socialism".

Around this time, the guest workers performing menial tasks in Western countries were already afforded more humane circumstances. Korniss observes and studies a workplace community for years: András Skarbit's life until his years as a pensioner. Over the years, they grow close to one another; the "reluctant" man opens up to Korniss' camera. His fate shows us how a member of society is capable of becoming more than he is destined for. Someone who gets the missing appreciation in his village community of Tiszaeszlár: giving humaneness to humans. To paraphrase Heidegger: the warmth of the home is what means freedom for the "man with a dwelling", contrary to a homeless who are lacking it. The official ID pictures of the album are merely data. The fact that man is more than those images is backed up by Korniss' photos; his hero is working the land, partaking in the village's life, in the congregation, in bar conversations while in standing-only bars in the capital, people like this are only guests until they finish their pint of beer.

Péter KORNISS: *At home with Bread*, 1982 © Péter Korniss



Péter KORNISS: *In the Shower*, 1982 © Péter Korniss





The unification of social and private spheres was not achieved under socialism. His pictures tell this truth; that is what makes his album *Guest Worker* [Vendégmunkás] cathartic and iconic, containing Ágnes Losonczy's sociological study. Korniss does not desert the Skarbits after finishing the album. This is not a one-off, simple relationship between a photographer and his model, he returns to them and the subject as a friend. His album, like Imre Benkő's *Steel Town* [Acélváros] about Ózd, is a cultural critique of "people's democracy" and not apologetic: the way he shows workers is through ethically responsible representations. His series entitled *Guest Worker* [Vendégmunkás] is rewarded in the 1986 World Press Photo contest.



Imre BENKŐ: *PEKO Steel Industrial Works. Ózd, 1993* © Imre Benkő

Imre Benkő photographs the organised workers of the large-scale industry. His social sensibility and news-consciousness he keenly followed take him to Ózd in 1987. At this time, the Metallurgical Works already start laying people off, but industrial apprentices are still being trained. István Mizerák, an MTI photographer, is documenting the events in the factory paper. His pictures were put on display at the National Museum¹¹ and have a permanent exhibition in the Ózd Cultural Centre. He is the one who accompanies Benkő to various locations, who had already made a report about the plant as a contributor working for *Képes* 7 [Illustrated Week]: it shows people stumbling along in a dusty metallurgical colony as an overcast, dreary twilight descends on them — very Benkő-like. He imagined the smoking iron beast as something frightful and enigmatic. He was unsettled and bewildered by what he saw. He knew he would be back here. He does not photograph façades, like the Bechers in Düsseldorf and he does not take sterile workers' portraits, like Richard Avedon, but instead shows people in their own environment. He goes through all the different departments of the Metallurgical Works. He returns to Ózd year after year, at which visits he creates a report with the accuracy of a sociologist. In his report on the plant, he summarises the demise of an entire industry and regime, the contradictory post-socialist process, from a series of privatisations to the dismantling of furnaces. In his pictures, everything is grey: the plant, the city, life itself. Not because of the smoke, not because of the deposits and not only because of Benkő's handling of light but because of the nature

of the system. His photographs appear in exhibitions abroad and specialised magazines.¹² The W. Eugene Smith Fund awards him a scholarship. New York's Anthony Suau contacts him, asking him to go photograph Ózd with him. Concurrently with Benkő, Tamás Almási starts shooting a film series about the plant with the same persistence, for 20 years. The director referred to Benkő as a "silent documentarist". They both capture the regime change, making up for the shortcomings of the arts and social sciences of the time. Benkő spent his childhood amongst workers, and this is another factor that influenced his outlook on top of what he saw. In Ózd, he found humiliating professional and living circumstances, which resembled those of Korniss' "guest worker". Workers are victims, rather than heroes, of work and ideology. Benkő "documented the outdated Ózd Steel Works starting at the end of the 1980s in a style reminiscent of William Eugene Smith's reports on Pittsburgh. Benkő's indictment spoke of incompetence and flawed planning. In the 1960s, with his pictures, Benkő would have found himself amongst the ranks of the opposition, but they appeared a lot more widely accepted at the end of the 1980s."¹³ In his portraits, worn-out faces do not show the regime as having a "human face". The heroic saga becomes a modern passion story. Using his empathy, Benkő gains access everywhere, to Roma shantytowns, to self-taught painter Gábor Váradi, to the Csirmaz family, a family of skilled labourers, where — as a sign of solidarity — he takes a picture together with the ageing worker. Benkő is also highly critical of himself: he is aware of the haphazardness and brittleness of his language,



but his commitment to human equality is undiminished. At the time of the cataclysm of the political transformation, when traditional institutions and behavioural patterns collapsed, humaneness and solidarity are the things that can stand above history — this is the foundation of Benkő's humanism. "The way his peculiar face looks up towards the sky carries a message" — he said of his picture taken of Miklós Csirmaz, which he himself considers emblematic and legible, with a symbolic location and story.¹⁴ The cover of his Ózd album features the head of a worker, his body covered by and his life "encompassed in" the iron object. The other half of this symbolic pair of photographs is *The Burial of the 40-year-old Metallurgist* [A 40 éves kohász temetése]. In the preface to the volume, Colin Jacobson, the editor-in-chief of the *London Reportage Magazine*, writes: "Benkő has a mission. He knew what he was doing and why he was doing it. His work is a 'nod' to a group of people, which, while they were aware that they deserved more in life, strived to make the best of what they were given..."¹⁵ Miklós Gulyás compares *Steel Town* to *Guest Worker*, Péter Korniss' best work.¹⁶ This is based on the subject being identical: the lack of humaneness. This is what both Korniss and Benkő hold society to account for, which had proclaimed man to be of paramount value. Not just based on its ideology, but also based on their own moral obligations. They recognise that the language used in political and moral thinking contradicts practice; therefore, with their pictures, they "rewrite" the history of socialism under socialism. Rephrasing a reflection by American philosopher Richard Rorty, we might

write that as sensitive intellectuals they recognise the shared potential for humiliation as a social bond.¹⁷ (A short time later, Benkő would share the fate of the unemployed.) Film director Balázs Simonyi, albeit using different wording, reaches the same conclusion, writing the following about Benkő in his opening speech for the photographer's exhibition: "He is one of the last humanists in an anti-human era."¹⁸ Péter Korniss is the "other" humanist, who had been inspired by human solidarity based on the knowledge of shared danger to describe the humiliation of "others" — which (could also be) is "us" — so that we can avoid it being repeated.

Benkő does not abandon the topic even after *Steel Town* [Acélváros] after the first seven years; *Steel-Art* [Acél-Mű]¹⁹ is a summary of thirty years. If his previous book is a passion play, this one is a requiem. His album is streaked with contact pictures forming a black ribbon, designating the pictures that have made it into the album; the artist thereby gives us a peek behind the curtain and makes us privy to his thinking. We are shown the end game, the dismantling of the furnaces, the knocking over of the chimneys, the memorial plant, the "industrial park", the "culture plant". In his preface, Howard Bossen says that many photographers had covered the steel industry — including Jindrich Streit — but nowhere does it play as important a role as in Imre Benkő's oeuvre. In 2019, his pictures about Ózd are featured in an international exhibition about the steel industry put on in Greensburg, Pennsylvania, with the title *Molten Light: Photography, Steel and the Modern World*.





Imre BENKŐ: *Szabadság (Liberty) Road*. Ózd (Hungary), 1989 © Imre Benkő

Imre BENKŐ: *Miklós Csirmaz, electrician*. Ózd (Hungary), 1989 © Imre Benkő

Imre BENKŐ: *Maintenance workers*. Blast furnace gas plant. Ózd (Hungary), 1989 © Imre Benkő





Péter KORNISS: *At Miskolc Railway Station*, 1984 © Péter Korniss

The notion of equality also predominates in Benkő's and Korniss' work as university professors. They considered their students equal partners, and their disciples were aware of their professors' greatness. Some were influenced in their career choices by the works of the "icons". Benkő teaches at the School of Applied Arts, while Korniss teaches at the University of Theatre and Film Arts, and at the Budapest Metropolitan University.

Benkő's commitment to equality also appears in his other, "non-political" works, including another series that took him decades to finish called *Twins* [Ikrek]²⁰ (1982–2008). The choice of topic comes with its own inherent fraternity and freedom. The ideals of modern society are represented by Benkő at the level of everyday life, in the appearance and words of his models, applying a duality: the dichotomy of symmetry/asymmetry and identity/non-identity. With "reflections" and "copies", he incorporates psychological elements into his work. He photographs the Tajti brothers for nearly 40 years; the series is given a new meaning by representing the embeddedness of human existence in time. Concurrently with his intra-generational work, his intergenerational pieces show the changes. He has been photographing the *Sziget Festival on the Hajógyár Island* for 25 years: he has documented how a marginal sub-culture has become a product of the

entertainment industry; how the participating generations and their social fabric have changed: *Faces* [Arcok].²¹ He tracks the life and changes of the capital for 30 years: *Grey Lights* [Szürke fények],²² *BLUES Budapest*.²³ He is loyal to people, subjects, and spaces.

The time of human existence also plays a crucial dramaturgical role in Péter Korniss' work. His iconic photograph made in 1967 of young Anna Bálint and her baby, complemented by photos of the hanging cradle, became a series. In 2008, he photographed them again while they were holding the old picture in their hands. He takes separate pictures of the third generation, with Anna Bálint's niece in the clean room, wearing jeans and rollerblades, signalling that she wants to leave. The pictures represent not only time but also Korniss' relationship with the subjects, whom he usually photographs head-on. If he was taking pictures in profile, showing that "they are there", that would show distance. Front-facing pictures say "I am here", and brings the person closer, shows them and their posture better, whether they be rich, in a decorated room, in a stable or in a pauper's apartment with oil lamps, like that of uncle Pali Simon where Korniss was staying.

His other series also spans forty years and shows the entanglement of individual and social-historic time in the changing of the culture. In the photograph *Newlyweds*



BENKŐ Imre: *Furnace worker funeral*. Bükkmogyorósd, 1990 © Imre Benkő

[Lakodalmas pár] taken in 1971 in Sic, Transylvania, we see the rite of Mari Boldizsár and Márton Balogh getting married: the wedding march, the bride pouring a drink for her husband, a group photo of the two families next to a well-stocked table, which is a sign of abundance. The festivities are followed by everyday life, but the young woman is clad in her folkloric dress even when working in the kitchen or the land. Three years on, their daughter is born, whose godfather will be Korniss. They, too, deem the photographer, and not just the photographs, to be important. Later, in a three-generation family picture, Márton is wearing a suit and only the straw hat remains of his old clothing. In another picture, Mari and her husband are seated in traditional clothing outside their old house, and there is a satellite dish on the wall. In the continuation, we see Mari with her grown-up daughter in their new apartment in Gherla, amongst new furniture. A few years later, Korniss is taking photographs of Mari in Budapest amongst stylised “Christmas trees” near the Kunsthalle. Everything is about the old culture eroding after the dictatorship falls apart. In the pictures, all these indicate the changes in Eastern Europe, globalisation, the stream of information, material gain, freedom of movement and the necessity to move to find employment. Korniss shows what effect the changes had had on traditions and craftsmanship. Objects gain then lose value in a series of

copies and become mass merchandise. Transylvanian women sell these first and later move on to selling their manpower as nurses or cleaners. Korniss’ most recent series on them is a sort of follow-up on *Guest Worker*, a synthesis of this and his earlier photos from Transylvania.

His series created in the new millennium about the renewal of Nativity plays is special — it shows performers donning the old shepherds’ cloak as a costume. That is how stylised signs are endowed with meaning, which is underlined by Korniss taking these photographs in an urban setting. Compared to popular baroque, his Nativity picture shot in a field is surreal. Another contrast is that of Transylvanian women wearing their traditional garb in the capital, which do not appear in the picture as costumes. He makes both series with a digital camera in giclée print and painting-sized, printed out in colour, in keeping with the spirit of the time. Technical signs and social codes are equally relevant here. Both series are a sort of synthesis of the road travelled, where Korniss also photographed Romanians in Transylvania and also discovered the common traits after first focusing on the differences in the dances of the Transylvanian Plain. As a result, he made the same journey with dancing as Béla Bartók had with music in his work as a collector. When old women from Sic — the last generation wearing folkloric outfits, “living monuments” — are seen not in their “colourful” rooms

back home, but instead in apartments in Budapest or the street and underground passages where a young Transylvanian musician in the background holds their violin the Transylvanian way, all of this recalls the motif of movement IV of the *Concerto* of the composer who was forced to flee his home country: “Hungary, you are beautiful and splendid”, which is, at the same time, sentimental, humorous and grotesque, depending on the fate, past, present and imagined future of every person. Péter Korniss’ photos, on top of being instantaneous, are clear, tonal, well-composed, assisted by the shapes provided by culture, work, celebration, and “choreographies”. His figures often inherit in their postures the way their predecessors had been told to pose by the photographer, for which the pattern is provided by the archaic mother-child cult. Pictures inside pictures and visual culture have a special meaning. This also shows that pictures are obvious but open, their associative field is not closed.

Imre Benkő’s pictures, with their grey tones, are similar while also remaining “colourful”. This is not meant in an optical sense, because Benkő when it is up to him, continues to use an analogue camera on black and white film consistently and would not replace his old Horizon panorama machine with a newer one. However, he can work with both colour and digital cameras as well. In his photos, he keeps the black film frames, lending them more credence. His pictures are also fraught with emotion and doubt about what we are seeing. What they are “about” might be obvious, but they lead our thinking down various paths. His compositions, with their evocative effect, also elicit emotions. Benkő is more ironic and inquisitive. In his publication (1979), German photography theoretician Klaus Honnef divided photographers into two groups: some are like reporters, while others proceed more like naturalists. “Members of the first group devote themselves to representing everyday important or inconsequential events, and their goal is to thereby create typical pictures. Members of the other group use the camera’s lens to uncover the hidden connections of reality, as though they were shining a light on what is beneath the surface, traversing it, making the forces at work beneath visible, if only through allusions. They compare, analyse and confront the phenomena of reality, allowing, of course, the viewer to draw their conclusions. But if a photographer starts focusing on a single subject and untangles it systematically, if they show the phenomena of the world of sensation from all perspectives, including their appearance and back side without trying to conceal their point-like nature, their transience, their being bound to an era, if, moreover, they group a multitude of visible situations and individual events into a single meaningful and plausible structure, which contains history and the story of mankind and in which this is directly demonstrated — then we are certainly faced with someone who is more than a reporter,

more than a naturalist, possessing true revelatory abilities, and perhaps becoming a new kind of artist.”²⁴ The latter qualities hold true in the case of both Péter Korniss’ and Imre Benkő’s work. Korniss’ photographs are significant for ethnography and cultural anthropology, while Benkő’s pictures can also be appreciated based on their sociological and sociographical relevance.

Neither considers himself an artist, but rather a photographer. Their self-definition is based not on exclusion but on internal factors. Of this, Péter Korniss says: “As a documentarist photographer, I have always wanted to be objective, but deep inside, I knew this was not possible. I tried to keep faithful to reality, but I came to know too many of its faces. I would have liked to have overcome my biases, but they were too deeply rooted in me. I tried to approach my subjects with detachment, but I was never able to. I knew that my nature, knowledge, and experiences determine what I see, how I see it, and how I photograph. The message of the pictures had been decided before pressing the button on the camera.”²⁵ Korniss calls himself a photographer; his pictures are exhibited at the National Museum of Art in Bucharest, then in Prague, then in the autumn, at the Bratislava Month of Photography, and beyond this region also in Brussels. It must be noted here that Korniss was a member of the Czech Press Photo’s international jury for 20 years, and the organisation honoured him with a lifetime award for his work for Czech and Slovak photography. In addition to all of this, he did a lot for getting Hungarian photography more recognition abroad.

Imre Benkő, as a documentarist photographer, distinguishes himself from artists who wait for inspiration, and instead stages and makes the picture. “While you have life, which is a wonderful thing, which can hold everything that is unexpected and creative for the photographer, if he wants it to and looks at the world that way. A photograph has a space-time continuum that is decisive for the photographer, and when he is there and takes the picture is what matters. Photography is not just a autotelic gallop; it is meticulous work, a process that uses small extracted sections to render the essence of an era it sees and to show how it covers the zeitgeist. Through the figures, the surroundings, the connections via objects that are in the picture, one can call this coincidental, but it is not, because the photographer is aware of there being something and would be happy to find the figure that fits into the picture and that one does not always get. If you have an idea in your head of what you would like, you can only really be in luck if something presents itself to you when the time is right.”²⁶

Both photographers have these prefigurations in their heads, which bear similarities to Kant’s *a priori* category, that which precedes experience. Their high standards — as creators and professors — reminds us of Kant’s ethical caveat. According to

this, you should act such that the maxim of your will could hold at once as a principle in a universal legislature.²⁷ They abide by their Kantian moral obligation; their motivation is respect for humanness. This might be outdated now, but we can also refer to contemporary philosophers. Jacques Rancière²⁸ deems it important to evoke a moralism-based approach to works: pictures can be classified in an ethical system, which needs to answer two questions: their origins, or veracity, and their purpose: what they are used for, and what effect they generate. In our case, their origin is the moral, humanist motivation of solidarity we have already examined. Rejecting traditional ethnic and racial discrimination, both photographers seek out what is shared.²⁹ This is what elicits the viewer's moral judgment, which connects the communicative and aesthetic levels of the pictures. As creators and professors, they do not impose judgment on the viewer. They leave this up to the human dignity they respect and the freedom required by viewers. The judgment of the viewer can build a bridge between aesthetics and ethics.³⁰ Their series on the guest worker and Ózd can be exemplary, first seizing the viewer's attention morally, who then discovers their aesthetic values. The need for freedom also characterises the creators: a push for autonomy, having what they do be accepted because their works do not fit into either category: reports or art photos. With their "otherness", by "violating norms", they rewrite the earlier system of genres.

In my article on Imre Benkő, I mention the monograph I wrote, *LIFE-WORK*, at the invitation of the Hungarian Academy of Arts and which was published by its publishing house in May of 2018.

- ¹ PALOTAI, János: *Benkő Imre ÉLET-MŰ*, Budapest, Magyar Művészeti Akadémia, 2018, 275.
- ² KORNISS, Péter: *Folyamatos emlékezet* [Continuing Memories], Budapest, Magyar Nemzeti Galéria [Hungarian National Gallery], 29.09.2017 – 21.01.2018; BENKŐ Imre: *Acél-Mű*, book launch event, Capa Center, Budapest, 25.10.2017
- ³ Personal account.
- ⁴ KORNISS, Péter: *Kötődés. 1967–2008*, Budapest, Helikon, 2008, 36.
- ⁵ *Heaven's Bridegroom* [Elindultam világ útján] (1975) has been translated to four languages, while *Passing Times* [Múlt idő] (1979) and *The Land of Red Cloud* [Vörös felhő] has been translated to three, *Kötődés* (2008) was published by Fresco Fine Art with the title *Attachment*.
- ⁶ KORNISS, Péter: *Vörös felhők földjén*, Budapest, Corvina, 1982, 6.
- ⁷ BAUDRILLARD, Jean: „A radikális egzotizmus”, *A rossz transzparenciája*, Budapest, Balassi-BAE Tartóshullám-intermédia, 1997, 129.
- ⁸ KORNISS, Péter: *Kötődés, 1967–2008*, Budapest, Helikon, 2008, 6.
- ⁹ FÉNER, Tamás: *Fények által homályosan*, Budapest, Scriptor, 1993, 47–61., 80–95.
- ¹⁰ MITCHELL, William John Thomas: *The Politics of Interpretation, Hungarian Translation*. Zsófia Anna Tóth, Szeged, JATE Press 2008, 124.
- ¹¹ MIZERÁK, István: *Élet/Művészet*, Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, 2011.
- ¹² Korniss is amongst the first to write about this in Nr. 4/1987 of the Dutch *Professionale Fotografie*.
- ¹³ SIMON, Mihály: *Összehasonlító magyar fotótörténet* [Comparative History of Hungarian Photography], Kecskemét, Magyar Fotográfiai Múzeum, 2000, 252. A note relevant to the subject: the manuscript of Miklós HARASZTI's workers' sociology, *Paid by The Piece* [Darabbér], had been confiscated by the police and an action was brought against its author (1973). As regards the authors of the study [*Intellectuals on the Road to Power* [Az Értelmiség a hatalom útján], which criticized the system, Iván Széleynyi left the country and György Konrád was forced into internal exile.
- ¹⁴ VARGA, Attila: „Ózdot és a Szigetet is máshogy ismernénk nélküle”, *Magyar Nemzet*, 16.10.2016.; NEMÉNYI Márton: „A fotós, akinek egy képén sem süt a Nap”, *24.hu*, 08.01.2017.
- ¹⁵ BENKŐ, Imre: *Acélváros/Steeltown, Fotó esszé/Photoessay, ÓZD 1987–1995*, Budapest, Pelikán, 1996, 9.
- ¹⁶ Part of an interview with Miklós Gulyás that didn't make it into the Benkő monograph: PALOTAI, *op. cit.*
- ¹⁷ RORTY, Richard: *Contingency Irony and Solidarity*, Hungarian Translation. BOROS János, CSORDÁS Gábor, Pécs, *Jelenkor, diaioia* series, 1994 (200), 212–13.
- ¹⁸ BENKŐ, Imre: *Panoptikum, 1980–2016*, Budapest, Artphoto Galéria, 2017. Although it is unclear where film director Balázs Simonyi said this.
- ¹⁹ BENKŐ, Imre: *Steel-Art: photo essay* [Acél-Mű: fotóesszé] Ózd, 1986–2016, Budapest, Benkő Imre Fotóarchív, 2017.
- ²⁰ BENKŐ, Imre: *Ikrek [Twins]*, Kecskemét, Magyar Fotográfiai Múzeum, 2008.
- ²¹ BENKŐ, Imre: *Arcok: Sziget Festival: Hajógyári Sziget, Budapest, 1993–2002*, Budapest, Alapítvány a Magyar Fotográfiaért, 2003.
- ²² BENKŐ, Imre: *Szürke fények: Budapest, 1970–1999*, Budapest, 9s Műhely, 1999.
- ²³ BENKŐ, Imre: *Blues: Budapest, 2000–2003*, Budapest, Városháza, 2003.
- ²⁴ HONNEF, Klaus: „Photography between Profession and Abstraction”, *Fotóelméleti szöveggyűjtemény*, Hungarian Translation. Anna JÁVOR et al., Budapest, Enciklopédia Kiadó, 1997, 190.
- ²⁵ KORNISS, Péter: *Kötődés. 1967–2008*, Budapest, Helikon, 2008, 256.
- ²⁶ Personal account.
- ²⁷ KANT, Immanuel: *Critique of Pure Reason. Metaphysics of Morals*, Hungarian Translation: Gábor BERÉNYI, Budapest, Gondolat, 1991, 138.
- ²⁸ RANCIÈRE, Jacques: *The Politics of Aesthetics*. Hungarian Translation. Júlia JANCsó, Budapest, Műcsarnok (Elmegyakorlati Könyvek sor. 3. 2009, 16.
- ²⁹ KORNISS Péter, ZÁVADA Pál: *Egy sor cigány: huszonnégy mai magyar*, Budapest, Corvina, 2011.
- ³⁰ JAUSS, Hans-Robert: *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, Hungarian Translation. Csilla Bernáth et al., Budapest, Osiris, 1997, 450.



The Reality of the Phenomenon Péter Türk and Photography

Between 20 April and 24 June of 2018, the Ludwig Museum held a retrospective exhibition of Péter Türk's works, under the title *All is not visible* [Minden nem látszik].¹ One major consequence of this was that his oeuvre — that hitherto was only fragmentary accessible to the public — could be interpreted at one single venue, and as a whole, and in context. This also provides a chance to subsequently interpret Türk's earlier known works in a different context and from a new perspective. From our point of view, this is especially relevant for those photographs where the published material specifications give no more detailed information than "black and white photograph". A significant part of his well-known works were created predominantly in the 1970s, using one or more photographs. In a chapter of his book entitled *The Use of Photography in Fine Arts* [Képzőművészeti fotóhasználat],² Sándor Szilágyi draws attention to two of Türk's works: *Class Average* [Osztályátlag] and *The STREET* [Az UTCA], and in connection with these two photos, he discusses sequential action and, referring to Zsófia Beke, mentions the analysis of duality built on contrasts.

The phrase "use of photography in fine arts" was mentioned in Hungarian by László Beke, probably for the first time, in an article published in *Fotóművészet* [Photographic Art] in 1972, where he observed and analysed the international trends of the time, and later in connection with Hungarian artists as well.³ This "use of photography" is primarily mentioned in the contexts of *happenings*, *Project Art*, *Land Art*, and *Concept Art*. Together, these give the reader-viewer a kind of theoretical filter through which they can view Péter Türk's "photography-based" works. In this study, I do not wish to refute the legitimacy of such an approach or analysis. Instead, within the framework provided by the exhibition's curatorial concept,⁴ I'd rather propose a new perspective as to what to do with photography when it is used as a tool.

The exhibition at the Ludwig Museum summarises Türk's career in 10 "chapters". It begins with the mid-1960s when he worked with paint, charcoal, and pencil, and later created three-dimensional reliefs in cardboard (which he presented at the exhibition *Szürenon*, organised by Attila Csáji in 1969). The

Photo: József Rosta © Ludwig Museum – Museum of Contemporary Art, Repository and Digital Archive



last “chapter” presents his so-called brick works, the “system” of which has been intriguing Péter Türk for over a decade, from the mid-1990s onwards. It gained importance after the so-called turning point⁵ in 1989; although from the point of view of the works, this turning point did not represent a break. In the eight remaining chapters, i.e. from the very beginning of the 1970s until the second half of the 1990s, the technique of photography in one way or another is continuously present in his creative work. In some periods it played a central role, otherwise it is only a starting point (e.g. “projected image”), both an element and a tool of raising an issue.

This versatile “use of photography” can certainly be approached using traditional criteria as a basis. In his earlier mentioned highly significant study, László Beke identifies four functions that made photography suitable to play a predominant role in the art of the 1960s: The documentation, the potential of the magic associated with photographic visualisation, the reproduction (multiplication and disseminability), and the rhetorical possibilities that stem from the use of photography (metaphorical use).⁶ Accordingly, the documentation of the action obviously necessitated the use of this technology in the cases of *Experiments with Question-marks* [Kérdőjeles akciók] and *Obsolescence actions* [Elévülési akciók] presented at the Chapel Exhibitions organised by György Galántai in Balatonboglár. Regarding the photo entitled *The STREET*, created at the end of the 1970s, we can emphasize the “averages” that can be made visible by the photograph, while regarding the *The postman comes, or the prodigal son returns* [Jön a postás vagy

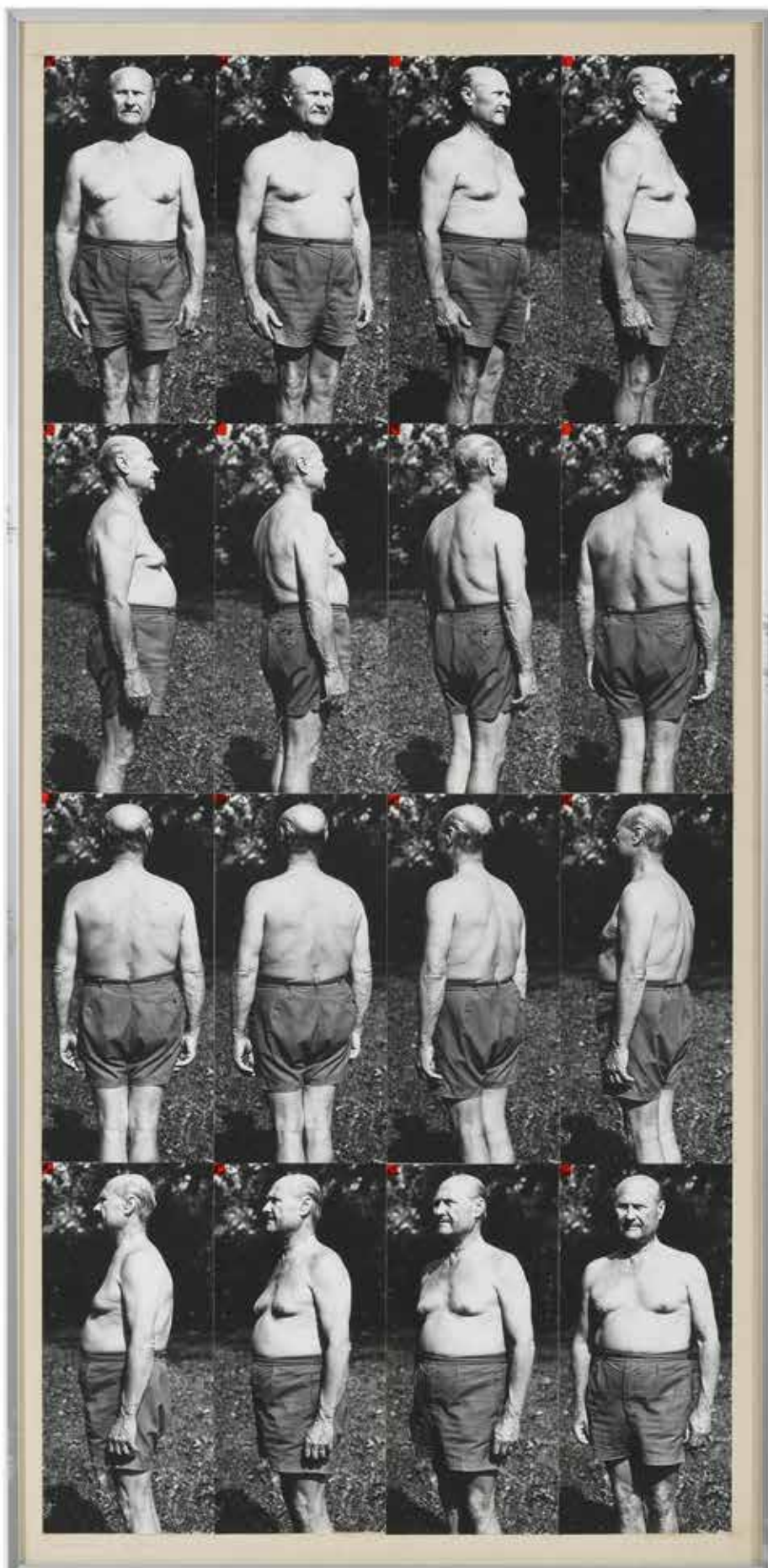
hazatér a tékozló fiú], *He's coming* (*The systematic unification of 16 phases of motion of an approaching figure*) [Jön (Egy közeledő alak 16 mozgásfázisának szisztematikus egyesítése)] and *Treadmill I-II* [Taposómalom I-II], created a few years later, we can underline the use of sequentiality to reflect movement in time and space as well as all of the multiplication and the inherent possibilities. It is probably the so-called metaphorical function that played the most important role in Türk's “use of photography”, inasmuch as the way a photo that is created with the help of the light can be interpreted as the imaging of the process of photo imaging. Photography and the creation of a picture are different from the process of recording a sight and thinking about photography. The process of use itself refers to something else; it is a transfer, the representation of something that cannot be spoken, but which can be visualised in another way.⁷

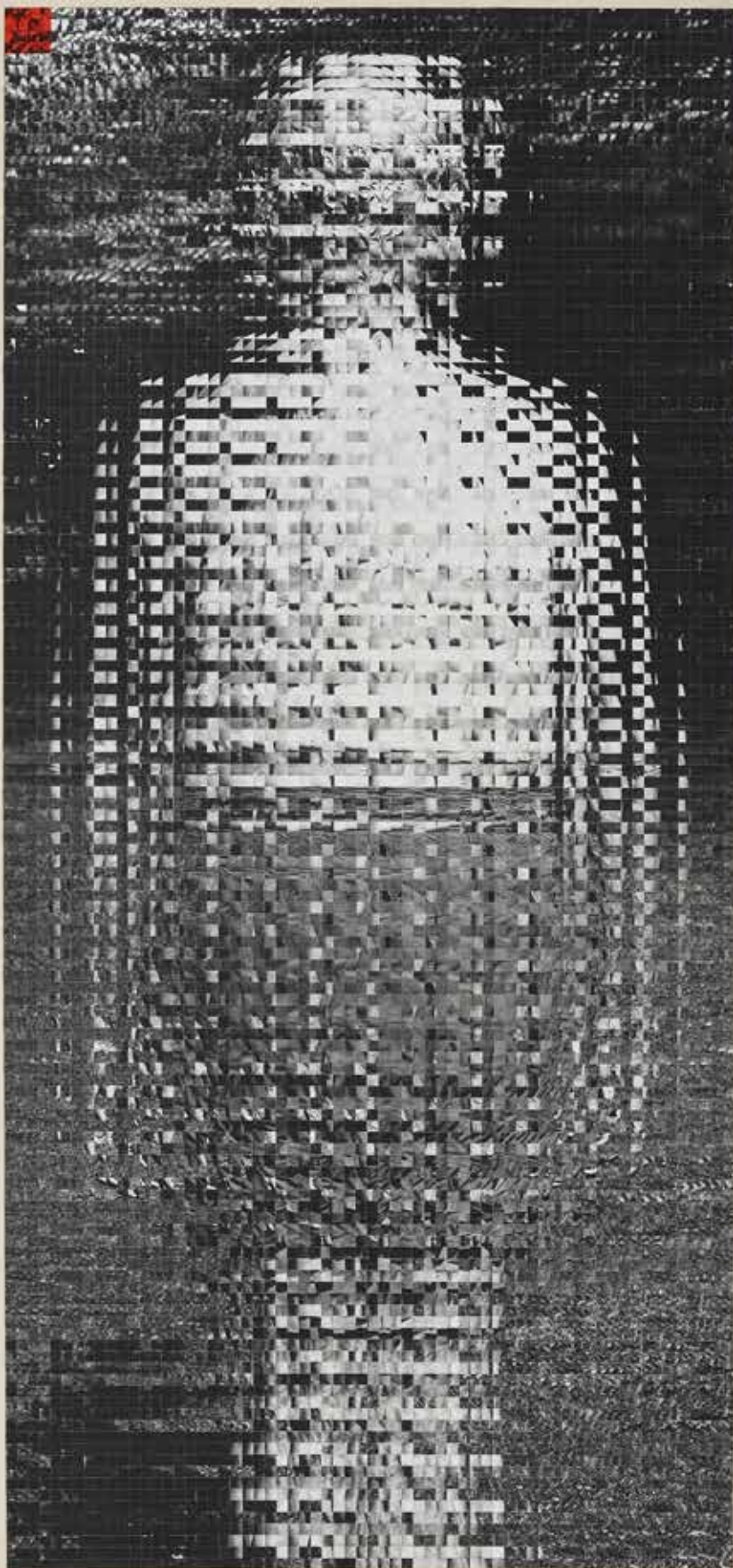
Therefore, this is (also) why these suggestions are important, but such labels can be misleading when it comes to understanding the “use of photography”.⁸ However, this has a completely different origin in Péter Türk's work, unlike in the cases of most of his contemporaries. In his images created using photographic (and other) techniques the emphasis is somewhere else: he does not examine the problems of photography, nor the inherent contradictions of photographic techniques in the context of the relationship between reality and image, and meaning, etc., nor does he analyse the potential or the problematic nature of “realism”. He examines something completely different and does it in a completely different way.

Photo: József Rosta © Ludwig Museum – Museum of Contemporary Art, Repository and Digital Archive



Péter Türk's relationship with the world and his way of thinking about art, both intrinsically intertwined, can be considered as concentric. However, the circle this implies is not vicious (contrary to other circles), and the movement in it is essential, albeit not necessarily inevitable. Right from the start, he is intrigued by "nature", in the broadest sense of the word. Nature, i.e. the world itself, can primarily in its entirety be experienced through our senses, and in case of Türk, in interpreting this world, art is given a primary role. "Nature", however, never reveals itself in its entirety, only in its phases or its elements. Türk combines these components into a specific system, which somehow models the complexity of the phenomena revealed to him. However, since phenomena always get through to us via mediation, the challenge is always to understand their nature and to endow them with meaning. The artist imagines the phenomenon mainly pictorially, therefore, it is important to them to know how these images are created, in which the phenomena become visible. In turn, with the help of these images, "nature", even if in a peculiar way, becomes visible; or rather the way Péter Türk relates to it and the way he defines his position within it.

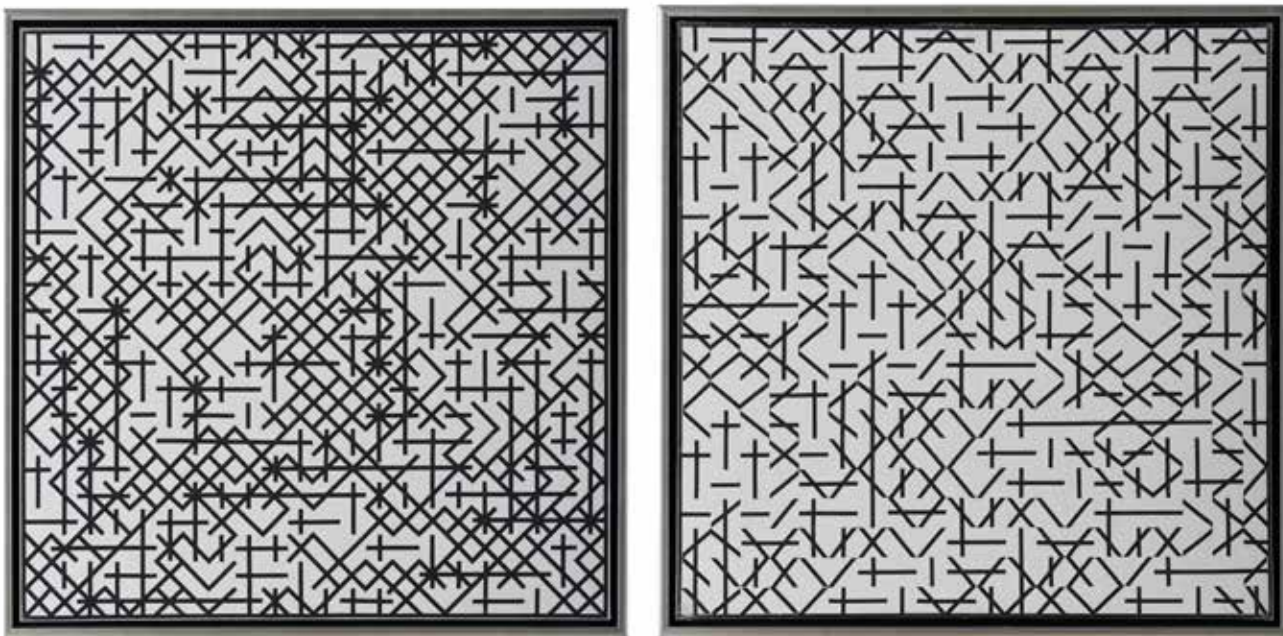




Therefore, “nature” can be the starting point. This nature, however, is not the “natura” that surrounds us less closely, which existence is increasingly limited to a hybrid form. This concept of nature⁹ is much broader, eventually coming to encompass all living things and the whole world that surrounds us and is linked inseparably to our very being. Türk is intrigued by understanding, interpreting, and giving meaning to this concept, as he strives to thereby grow nearer to the essence of everything. Art is the tool for him to achieve this goal, and also a program which “makes existence transparent” and from which his own life is inseparable. This is how the creative work of the artist becomes a very personal business for him.¹⁰ As a result, he does not relate to the world in a rational way but experiences it through his emotions. This is how art becomes a tool in the process of interpreting and giving meaning.

It seems reasonable to ask: what kind of “cognition” does art facilitate? How can “nature”, as something taken as a whole, and its existence be known and understood through art? It would be pointless to try and find a clear answer or to seek some kind of a definition to this in Türk’s work. However, we could go further and interpret his artistic strategies and his use of tools as an answer thereof.

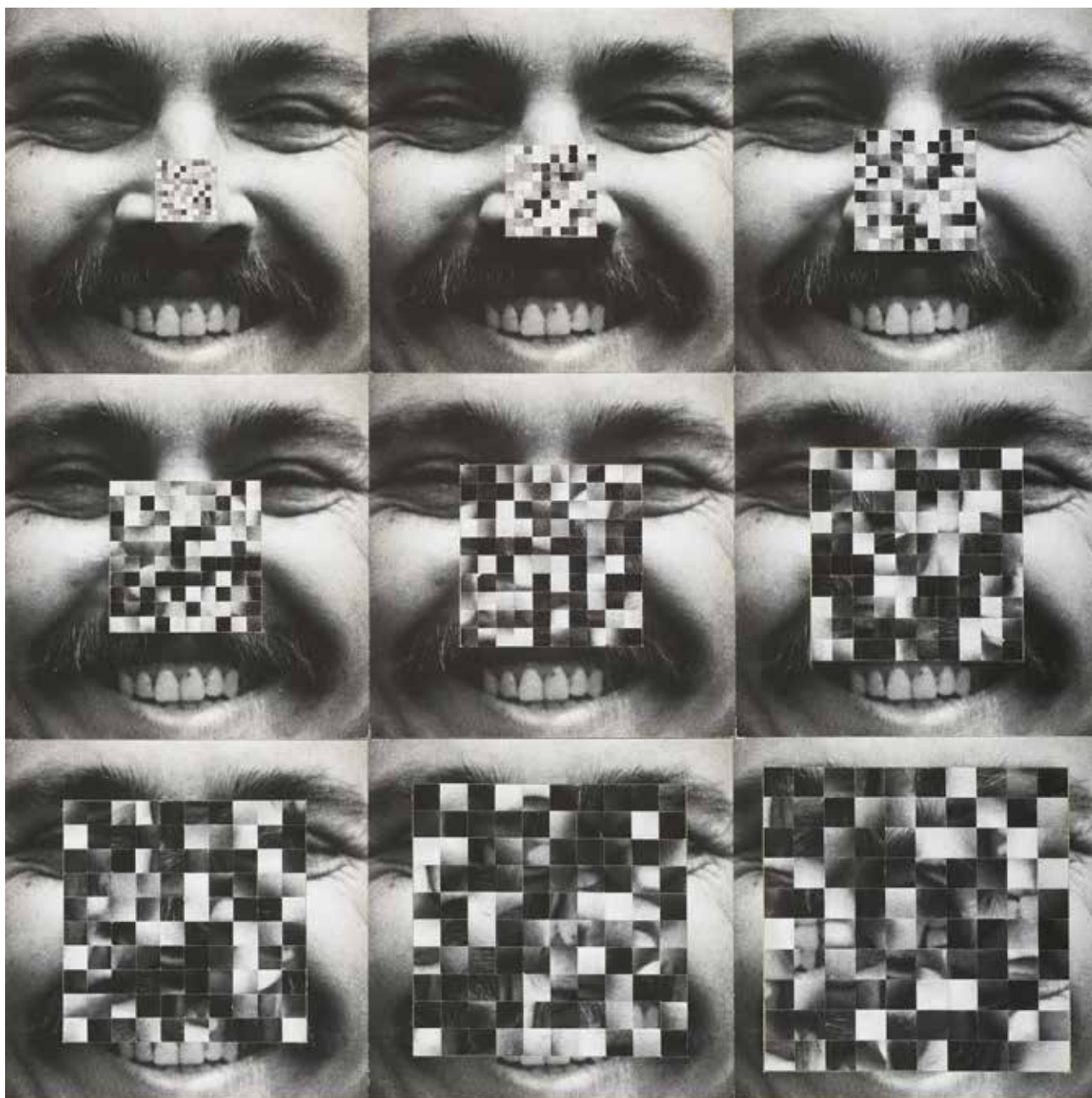
Péter TÜRK: *Treadmill I-II.*, 1975-1981, photo: silver bromide print, paper; 100,5x49,5 cm/pcs. © Ludwig Museum – Museum of Contemporary Art, photo: József Rosta



Péter TÜRÖK: *Composition with math-based rhythm I-II.*, 1970 canvas, acryl; 100x 00 cm © Private collection, photo: József Rosta

“Nature”, as we encounter it, is always fractured, only certain parts and elements of it are accessible to mankind, who exists within it and is therefore organically intertwined with it. These parts and fragments, which somehow are arranged into a whole, form an ensemble, a kind of system encompassing all living things. Türk’s works can be interpreted as an attempt to grasp these parts. He then processes these parts so that they point towards a larger degree of wholeness, in the meantime it becomes apparent how these parts and elements connect to each other, demonstrating how complexity can be created from simple elements that are visible and that expose themselves (a potential variant). These elements combined into a system is not only external, even if it happened in a purely logical manner. The “logical formula” not only provides a framework in order to contain all the individual elements. Rather, we must think of an internal, mutual regularity which the artist is actually seeking, and which manifests (can manifest) itself in the logical formula used to reveal determinations, and which then establishes the fabric of the “whole”. Here, it is worth recalling those of Türk’s works in which he effectively weaves together the elements from different photographs to achieve his desired result. While there is a demonstrable logical connection here, the final vision is much more strongly defined

by the mutual determinations and interactions between the elements, which manifest themselves most clearly as parts of a systemic whole, thus conferring meaning to them.¹¹ Türk’s “works of photography” can thereby inform us that it is not sufficient to simply apprehend photography as something that only records what is given and creates a hierarchical unit by framing what is outside of it. Instead, what is essential is to discover the connections, similarities and differences inherent to it, their connections to one another, how they are formed, what their essence is, how this vision — that can be recorded using the instrument with all of its limitations — can come together (for instance, the entirety of the blackening silver grains that “make up” the recorded picture). As such, Türk considers a picture taken with a camera insufficient in itself, for him it is only a document or a medium (carrying information). This is suggested by a pen drawing entitled *Untitled [More accurate than a machine 1-4.]* [Cím nélkül (Pontosabb a gépnél 1-4.)] completed in 1975–1976. Thus, it is important to note that Türk later abandons traditional camera-based photography in favour of “photograms”. Over time and more and more evidently, the pictures were taken using a camera become mere starting points, negatives; the raw material for a potential vision.

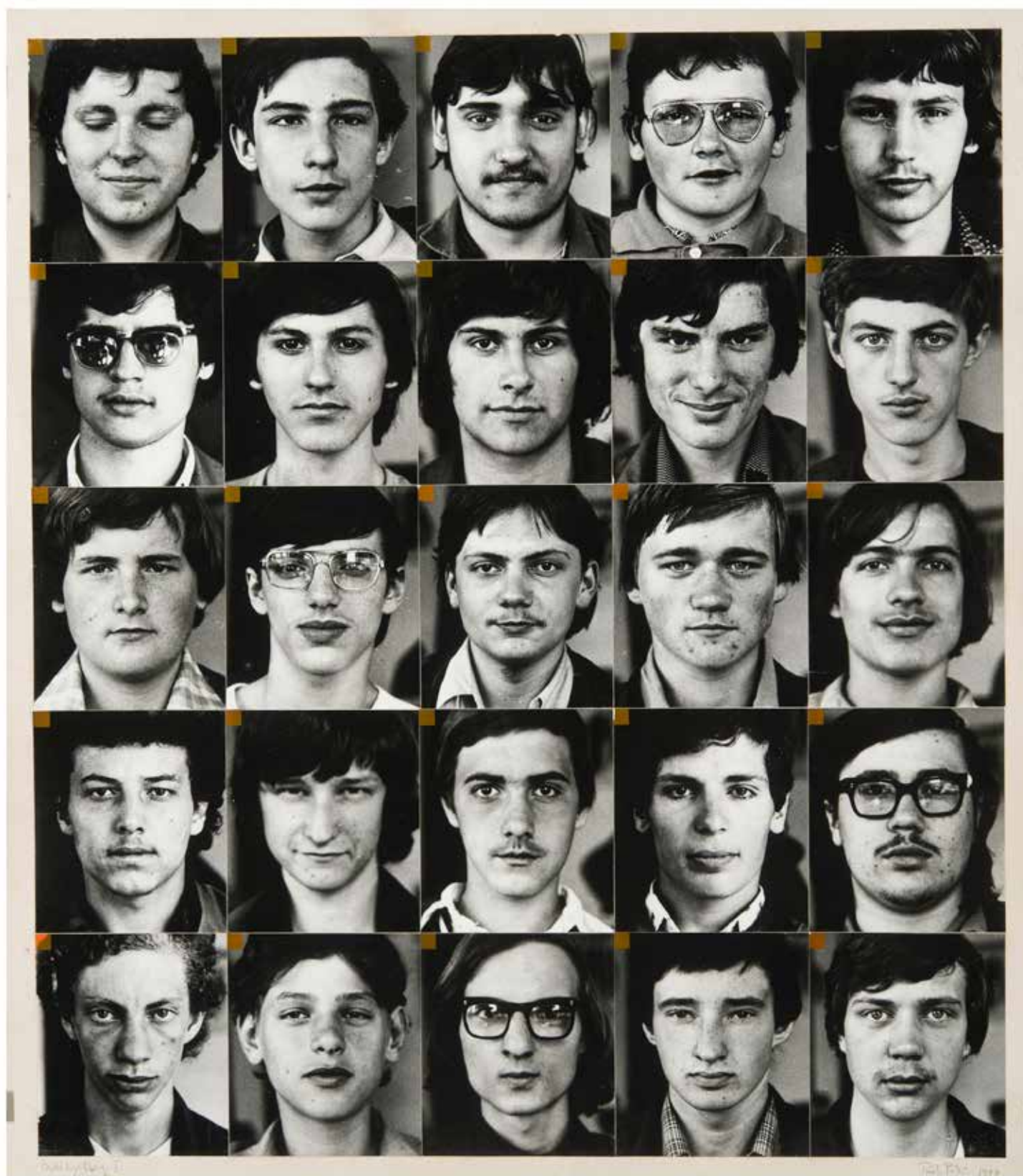


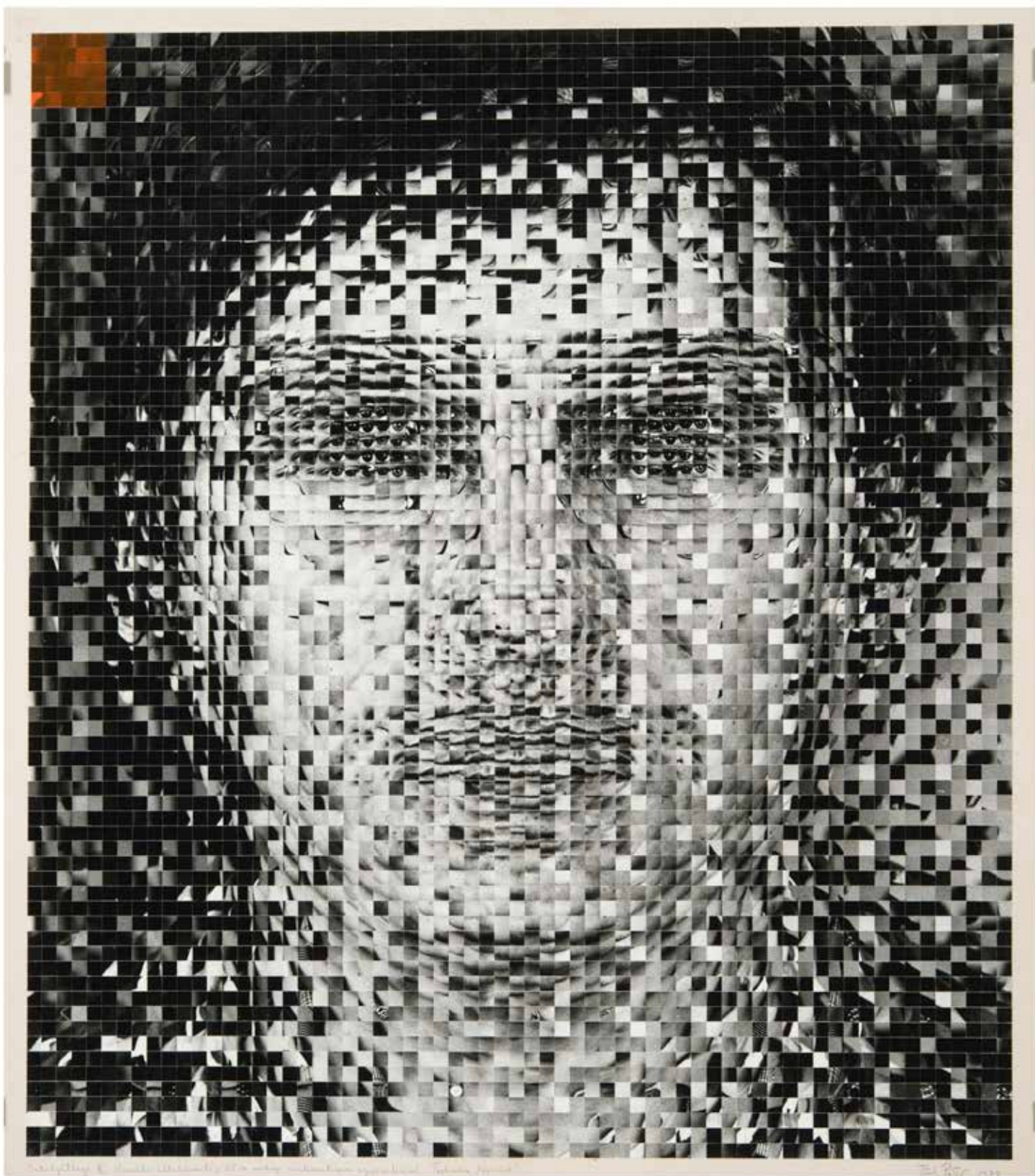
Péter TÜRK: *100 random elements in a face*, c1970, black and white photo, silver bromide print, cartoon; 40x40 cm
© Estate of the artist, photo: József Rosta

The world as a system of living things can be grasped at the level of phenomena which phenomena we have to make use of in order to understand the world on their basis. In Türk's case, these phenomena are always images or image-like. Phenomena, as they typically manifest themselves in the constructive process of sight, or revealed as memories, or, in some cases, appear as visual phenomena.

The primary purpose of Türk's art is, therefore, the understanding of these phenomena apparently lacking all meaning, and it is in this sense that he explained it to Miklós Peternák.¹² This is the main motivation behind all of his artwork. In this process he has the opportunity to understand, which aims at the world and existence, as they are, in which he exists.

He creates pictures using a particular technique, in which he is the initiator of the picture, but the spectacle that appears later is not planned and cannot be anticipated. Another rather similar technique he uses is to follow the line of sight, thus creating a concentrate of how the human eye processes information, in which the information is condensed into a particular "image".





Péter TÜRK: *Average of a class I-II.*, 1979, photo: silver bromide print, paper, 79,5x69,5 cm / pcs. © Hungarian National Gallery, photo: Tibor Mester



In this sense, he is interested in knowing how sight works, how an image is created through sight and which, accordingly, can be called a psychogram, a mnemogram, or a phenomenon, which are revealed, come about, manifest themselves, and which *after all* we already apprehend as pictures (obviously as a result of their position and context).

As regards works bearing the same title, we are confronted with the fact that although these pictures are photographs in the strict sense of the word, they have nothing to do with traditional photography, since they do not record anything external which then they have to represent somehow. The use of photographic procedure serves to model and “image” certain processes and make these visible. Referring to his work in the mid-1980s, in an interview with Gábor Andrási, Türk said that what he was very much intrigued by was the thought of “non-visibility from which things appear [...], the starting position of the picture-making man, as he creates something visible out of the invisible”.¹³

Almost ten years earlier, Türk told Miklós Peternák that he wanted to find pictures in nature.¹⁴ These pictures should appear as “phenomena born in nature,” that is why the pictures created using a specific technique after the 1970s bore the name: phenomena. It is essential to note that Türk did not

consider these phenomena entities endowed with meaning, but things that induce the process of giving meaning and force the inner being of the viewer (or artist) to bring forth some sort of meaning themselves.¹⁵

In this context, it is worth recalling that Hans Belting, in his “draft for An anthropology of images”, stresses that there are no images in the world, that it is we who project them and place them into the world. We see images through media that “host” them even though this is only a symbolic act.¹⁶ Thus — to continue Belting’s train of thought — through this projection, we impose some kind of an order upon the world. However, Türk is not interested in “imaging” or representing what is in the world, but in knowing what can be revealed of it as an image, which would somehow offer for interpretation the embarrassing richness of “nature” seen as a collectivity of all living things. Türk wants to observe these in their complexity as long as they can offer a possibility for understanding.

While, from a technical standpoint, phenomena, psychograms and mnemograms may seem sharply separated from the earlier “photo-based” works, however, the way Türk starts working on them and then progressively abandons them when their use becomes unjustified and because he feels that they no longer have any potential, cannot be considered an abrupt change.



Péter TÜRK: *Visual generalisation interweaving 9 identical image I-II*, 1977, photo: silver bromide print, paper; 78,5x70 cm / pc © Estate of the artist, photo: József Rosta

The early reliefs may already be interesting, too, since, from a certain point of view, they are a creation of complex unity and the conjunction of light and shadow; thus what prevails is not their plasticity, but rather the way they play out as images in the viewer's eye. Another reason for putting photography on the back burner — besides the fact that Türk had seemingly run out of ways to exploit the potential that photography held for him — is that in the 1980s, physical, sensible light loses ground to internal (divine) light.¹⁷ In this period, Türk is interested in complex spectacles born out of systems of lines created by images projected on top of each other (that is, not exposed on top of each other and developed afterwards and not woven together from fragmented “snippets”), with underlying images that are reproductions of well-known masterpieces from art history.

All of this also demonstrates that the world, nature and all living things manifest in Péter Türk's artwork as an image taken in a particular sense. For him, image is not a representation of the world nor the representation of a concept, but an entity with intelligence in a peculiar way. Not necessarily a surface since Türk does not insist on using the traditional “panel picture” format, however, he does not refuse it directly. The world, the parts of which become an image as a result of his work, means

something else to him than it does in Heidegger's critique, where the world was only accessible as a representation, always indirectly, i.e. through a medium, thus the thing itself always remains hidden. In Türk's case, the image (which corresponds to Heidegger's work of art, although for Türk the image is not necessarily identical to the work of art)¹⁸ is what makes the existing visible and opens the way for intelligence so that through the effort of understanding the essence of what the image “conveys” is revealed. This way, the image provides the possibility of a “system” through which, revealed as a part of nature, meaning can be infused into the relationship between nature as a whole and the person who creates and perceives it through the pictures as phenomena, to the entirety of the world and to all living things. That is how we get back to nature as a whole, something which we do not and cannot experience and can only postulate based on the foregoing.

Finally, there is one other important argument in favour of breaking away from the traditional approaches to Péter Türk's “photo-based” works. It is not only that Beke's system for the artistic use of photography is not really plausible, but it is Türk himself who rejects a “medium-centric” examination (whichever of the many possible opinions this may represent).



Péter TÜRK: *Place of numbers II*, 1971, oil, canvas; 80x90 cm © Estate of the artist, photo: József Rosta

Türk himself states that he is not interested in the issue of the “medium”¹⁹ neither as a material nor as an instrument or intermediary (a transmission instrument or channel). László Százados has a similar view on this matter who also stresses that “in Türk’s art, associations putting the ‘objectiveness’ of the usual world-describing routines into perspective and demolishing generic and thematic limits are operating on an ongoing basis.”²⁰ Contrary to this, when it comes to the use of various materials and tools, what Türk considers the essence is how they “mobilise his internal imaging tools.”²¹ In a different context, he says that the technique never appears “in its apparent and absolute form,” for this is not what its significance derives from. It is always complemented by something that cannot be separated from its aesthetic determination and subproblems related to other works, which come into action within it.²²

In conclusion, we can state that photography is only one in a range of tools with which we can create images whose creation intrigues and awes the artist, and which provide the artist with a sort of explanation for the world through the finished work of art. Each tool, technique, or “medium” is only an opportunity for the artist, albeit different opportunity which enable him to seek out answers to different questions and to observe different phenomena.

From a certain point of view, his turning point in 1989 is not really a turn, because the reference point would be different to which he compares everything, that is, the basis for the “system” suspected in nature. Up to this point, the possibilities of human cognition and its principles have been embodied in scientific knowledge along with the disclosure of nature in itself which this scientific knowledge may aim to discover. However, after the turn, a transcendental element, the ghost of creation (God) becomes the basis of the world (*φύσις*) and of a man experiencing, sensing, receiving and striving to understand it.

¹ The exhibition’s title is a reference to one of Türk’s works from 1976 which he mentions in the interview with Gábor András. These four sentences appeared on small rectangular objects while a slideshow of photos was shown: “all is not visible”, “more than one is visible at the same time”, “a bird passed in front of me”, and “the leaves have moved”. ANDRÁSI Gábor: *A fény titkai. Beszélgetés Türk Péterrel, Új művészet*, 1996/9, 23–33.

² SZILÁGYI Sándor: *Neoavantgárd tendenciák a magyar fotóművészetben 1965–1984* [Neo-avant-garde tendencies in Hungarian photography 1965–1984]. Budapest, Fotókultúra, Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó, 2007, 340.

³ BEKE László: *Miért használ fotókat az A.P.L.C.? [Why does APLC use photos?]*, *Fotóművészet*, 1972/2, and: BEKE László: *Fotó-látás az új magyar művészetben* [Photo vision in the new Hungarian art], *Fotóművészet*, 1972/3. Both appeared in the following publication: László BEKE: *Médium/Elmélet: Tanulmányok 1972–1992*, Balassi Kiadó - BAE Tartóshullám – Intermédia, Budapest, 1997/7, 17 and further. Digital versions: <http://www.c3.hu/collection/koncept/images/beke.html>, and: <http://www.c3.hu/collection/koncept/images/beke1.html>. The article referenced by László Beke can be accessed at the following link: <http://towery.lehman.edu/NEWreadings/Artist%20and%20Photographs.pdf>. Further reading on Lawrence Alloway: Stephen Moonie, *Mapping the Field: Lawrence Alloway’s Art Criticism-as-Information*, *Tate Papers*, No. 16, Autumn 2011, <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/16/mapping-the-field-lawrence-alloway-art-criticism-as-information> (last visit 15 August 2018).

⁴ Acknowledgments to the László Százados, curator of the exhibition, and Szilvia Nárai, assistant curator, who deserve the credit for making this kind of approach, this different and new interpretation possible.

⁵ Cf. SZÁZADOS László: *Minden nem látszik* [All is not visible]. Péter TÜRK (1943–2015) retrospective exhibition, Budapest, Ludwig Múzeum, 2018.

⁶ Cf. László BEKE: *op. cit.* (1972/2).

⁷ A good example of this is *Film Stage. Associative Series* [A Filmszínpad. Asszociációs sorok] (1972), which, using photo montages, creates visuals that become visible on the screen as a reality, thus referring to its own “methodology” and “technique”. But if we go beyond this interpretation, the artwork is essentially the gesture of a reality coming to life, an act of creation, where the created artwork unfolds its entirety only to the viewer during the screening.

⁸ Gábor András, in his discussion with Péter Türk, makes it evident that this kind of labelling is not favourable when it comes to Türk’s art — more specifically, he considers the use of the term “conceptual art” too textbook-like. ANDRÁSI Gábor: *A fény titkai. Beszélgetés Türk Péterrel, Új művészet*, 1996/9, 23–33.

⁹ I feel no calling to summarize, even in the broadest terms, the “cultural history” of the concept of “nature”. However, it is important to note that nature, at least in Aristotle’s works (on the basis of, amongst others, Heidegger [Vom Wesen und Begriff der φύσις. Aristoteles, Physik B, 1 (1939) 239. In: *Wegmarken. Gesamtausgabe*, Bd 9., Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Hermann. Frankfurt a. M. Vittorio Klostermann 1975.]) was more or less synonymous with being. The entirety of what exists is what he calls *φύσις* (nature), but *φύσις* is also the essence of being. This is why Hans Blumenberg may write that being and nature mean the same thing. (Cf. HANS BLUMENBERG: *Das Verhältnis von Natur und Technik als philosophisches Problem*. In BLUMENBERG: *Ästhetische und metaphorologische Schriften*, Ed. Anselm Haverkamp. Frankfurt a. M. Suhrkamp 2001, 255). In case of Türk, all of this is of great importance, since to him, understanding nature and its phenomena are the starting point from where he would like to get to understand his “having been thrown into existence” through his investigations.

¹⁰ Péter Türk’s sentences are quoted by László Százados in *op.cit.*

¹¹ Heidegger writes something similar about a possible way of comprehending systems when he interprets Schelling’s “philosophy of freedom”. He talks about *Gefüge*, an adjustment based on an interaction, where the relationship between the components and their position in the whole system stems from the possibility of these adjustments and where the system as *Gefüge* is not simply a container in which things are juxtaposed in a completely random and interchangeable manner. Cf. Martin HEIDEGGER: *Schelling: Vom Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit* (1809). Gesamtausgabe Bd. 42., ed. Ingrid Schüßler. Frankfurt a. M. Vittorio Klostermann, 1988, 44 and infra.

¹² Giving meaning to phenomena. Miklós Peterák’s discussion with Péter Türk (1986). The interview, unpublished until now, will appear in the artist’s exhibition catalogue. Special thanks to Miklós Peterák and to the Ludwig Museum for giving me a chance to read the text and to use it when writing this article.

¹³ ANDRÁSI Gábor: *op.cit.*

¹⁴ This is underpinned by his work entitled *Seventeen meters worth of image amongst trees and foliage* [Tizenhét méter kép fák és lombok között] exhibited at Óbudai Társaskör in 2013, where, instead of applying the photographic method, he used paint to record the sight that the foliage of the trees would have formed on the paper and which was specifically made visible by the use of paint.

¹⁵ PETERÁK Miklós: *op.cit.*

¹⁶ HANS BELTING: *Kép-antropológia. Képtudományi vázlatok*. Translation: Pál Kelemen. Kijárát Kiadó, Budapest. 2003.

¹⁷ ANDRÁSI Gábor: *op.cit.*

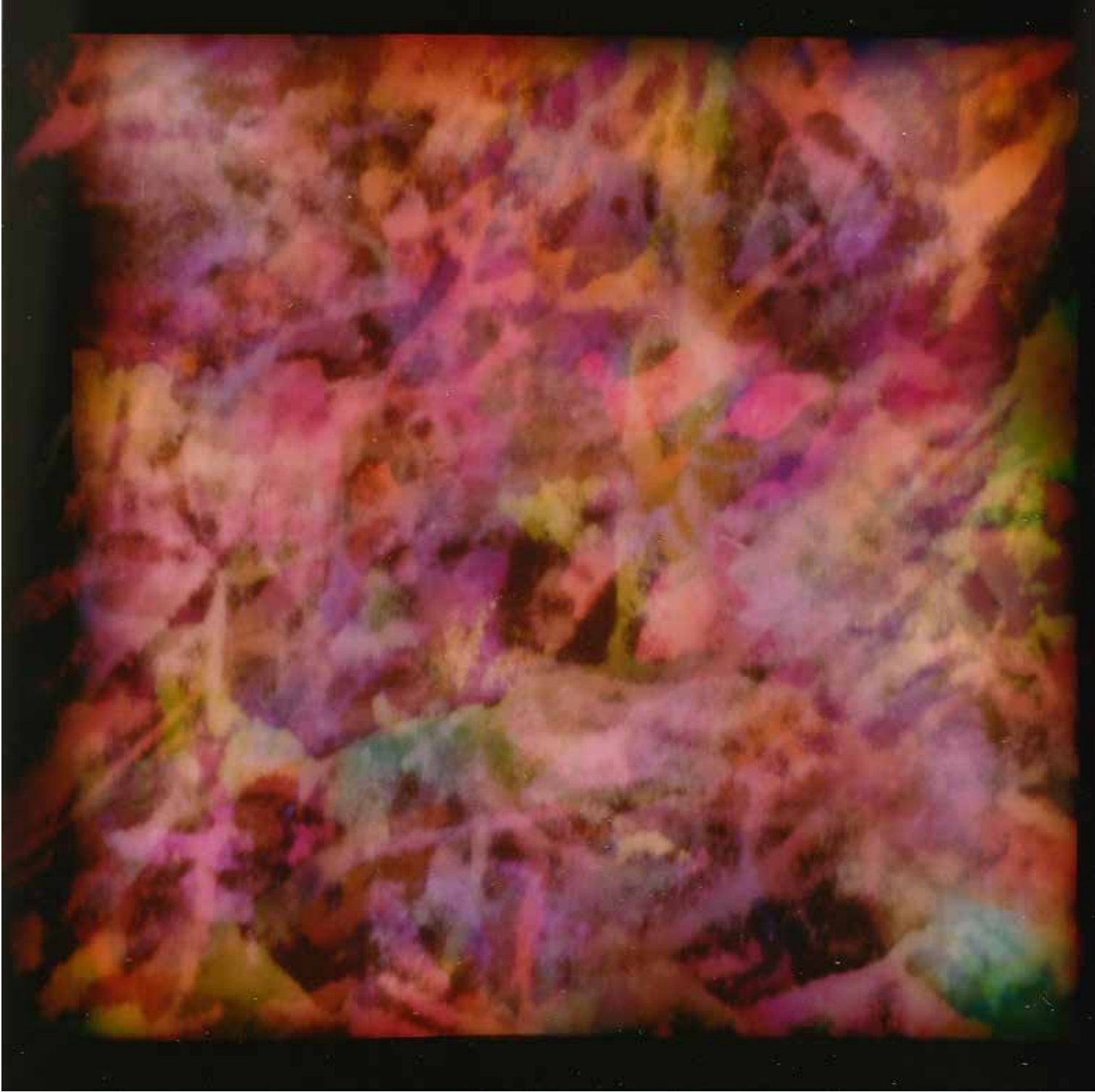
¹⁸ Cf. Martin HEIDEGGER: *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes, Die Zeit des Weltbildes*. In: HEIDEGGER: *Holzwege*, Frankfurt a. M. Vittorio Klostermann, 1980. In Hungarian: Martin HEIDEGGER: *Rejtektutak*, ed. Pongrácz Tibor. Translation by Bacsó Béla, Zsolt Pálfalusi, Osiris Kiadó, Budapest, 2006.

¹⁹ ANDRÁSI Gábor: *op.cit.*

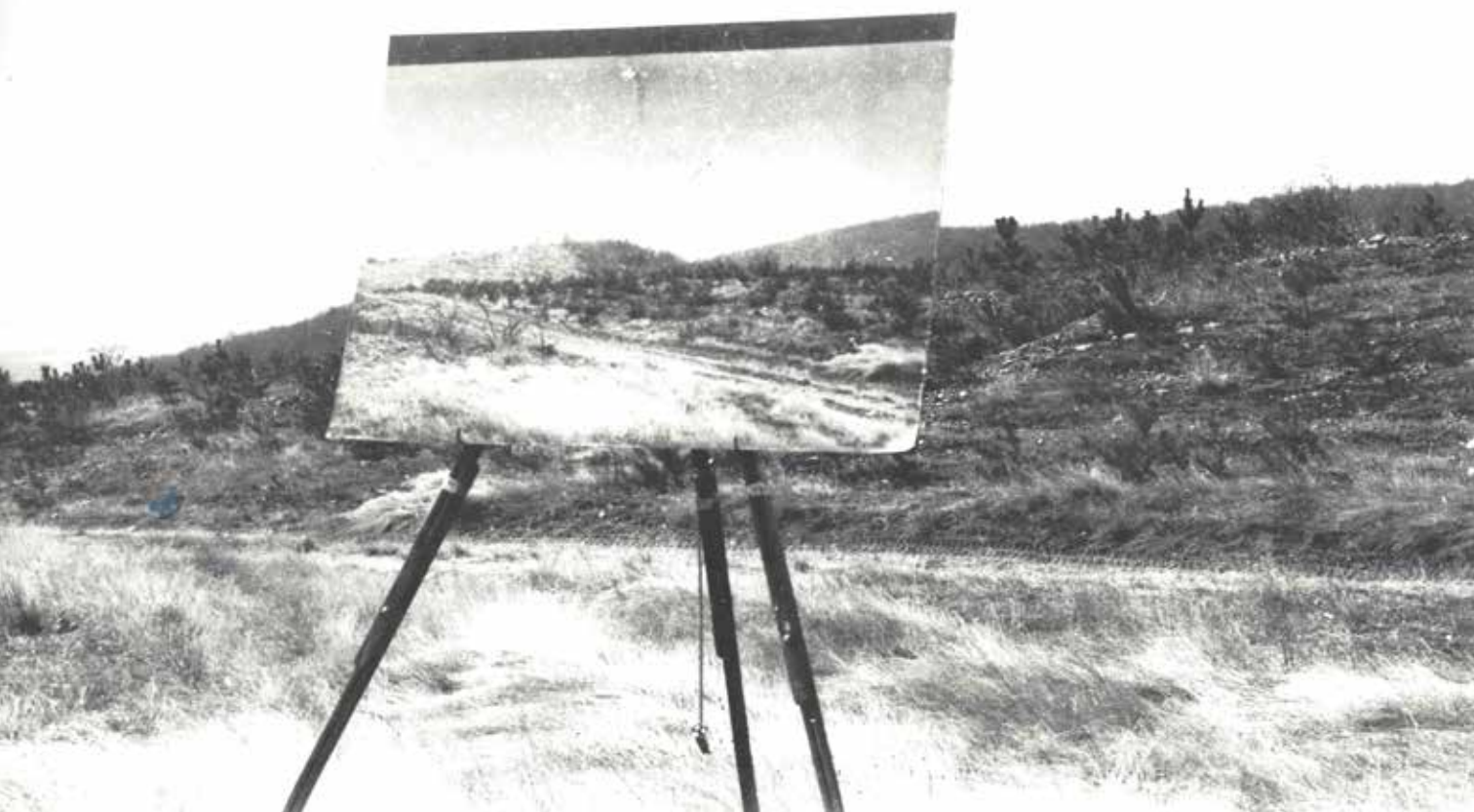
²⁰ László SZÁZADOS: *op.cit.*

²¹ ANDRÁSI Gábor: *op.cit.*

²² *Ibid.*



Péter TÜRK: *Psychograms*, Eye movement studies in an empty square, rather plane, c1980, paper, colour photo, 20x 2,5 cm © Estate of the artist, photo: József Rosta



OUTDOOR GEOMETRY AND SERIALITY IN THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF PÉCSI MŰHELY (1970–1974)

The start of the photographic work of *Pécsi Műhely* (1969–1980) is clearly linked to the group's land art projects. Between 1969 and 1972, every summer, under the supervision of their teacher and mentor, Ferenc Lantos¹, the young artists did their creative work in the enamel factory of Bonyhád, where they came up with the idea of installing and observing geometric elements from their enamel works in a natural environment. It was photographer Katalin Nádor² who steered the artists, whose education had been limited to graphic design and painting till then, towards photography, and introduced the members of *Pécsi Műhely* to the science of photography and blow-up. As they grew increasingly attracted to new technical and visual options and broke free of Lantos' strict classical geometric world, the young artists began to perform experiments in the landscape. The first project was carried out by Károly Kismányoky and Kálmán Szijártó in one of the forests near Pécs in September of 1970, then other members of the group — Sándor Pinczehelyi, Ferenc Ficzek, sometimes Károly Halász — also joined the experiments. They were looking for sites shaped by industrial activities, such as deforested areas, sand mines, and quarries, and subsequently searched for suburban environments like paved streets, stone steps or house walls, in order to temporarily place simple geometric figures on them, to observe their interaction with the landscape and the visual effect the new view, the new landscape had.³

Ferenc FICZEK: *Untitled*, Photo documentation of the land art series 1, 1972, silver gelatine print, 20,8x29,5 cm © Courtesy by the acb Gallery

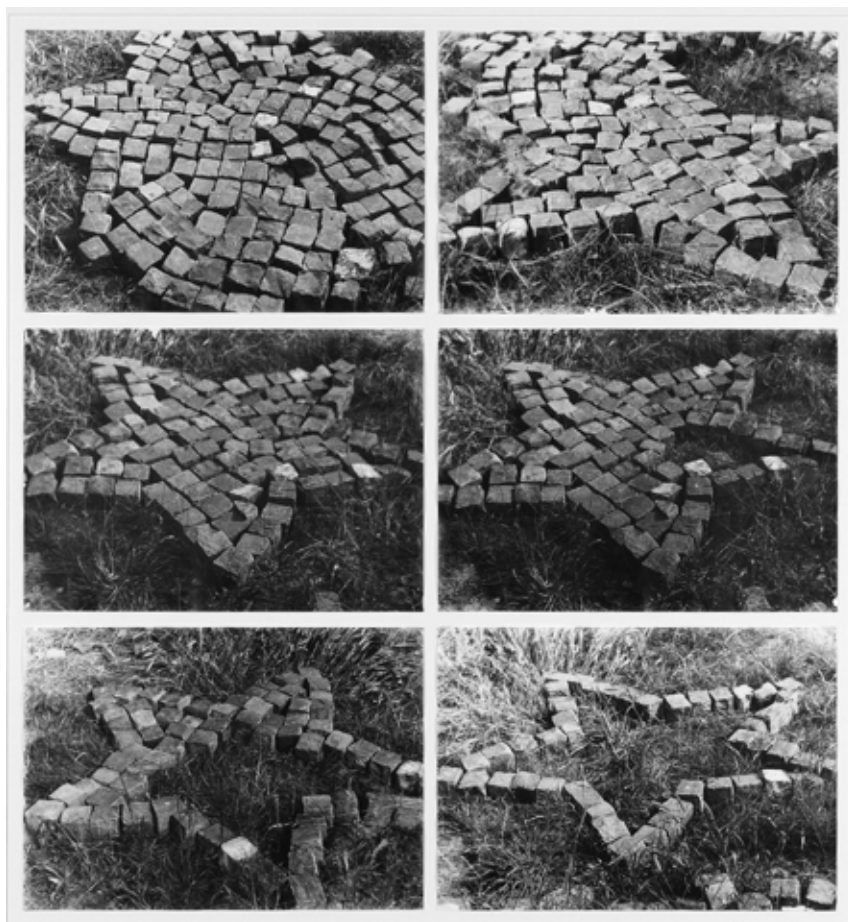
First, the purpose of photography was documenting and analysing the effect that different stages of the outdoor interferences had had. Its use reflected Károly Kismányoky's and Kálmán Szijártó's interest in processes, time and movement as opposed to the result, a static work of art.⁴ Later, all the surroundings made an appearance in the photographs — the artists and nature, art and life, essential processes, spatial perceptions, and unquestionable sensuality — thanks to which the outdoor projects donned a phenomenological dimension. Károly Kismányoky pointed out the essence of the group's experiments at an exhibition in 1971: "The photographs displayed here track our inquisitive activity. Can we ask questions of nature? This activity, carried out in a set period of time, is a characteristic manifestation of our growing and changing knowledge. We applied our experiments as the only workable and achievable form of observation of the present

period where the main, defining principle is to gain knowledge. Our intention is not to imitate or to copy, but to understand."⁵ At this time, photography constituted an instrument that enables *Pécsi Műhely* to gain new visual experience. With regards to land art projects, the use of seriality does not seem intentional yet, nor is the artistic quality of the photographs taken during the interventions discussed. This is clearly expressed by Károly Kismányoky in 1971: "We are interested in the finished photo as an attitude, characteristic and irreproducible, part of an eternally unique process and the recording of its momentary state — and not for the purposes of reproduction."⁶ Land art photographs are not used as parts of a series until four years later, when, in 1975, photos taken of a project called *Rolling Yellow Band* [Guruló sárga csík] and organised in 1971 are made into a colour stencil, on which the phase pictures, aligned horizontally, are repeated in different colours.⁷

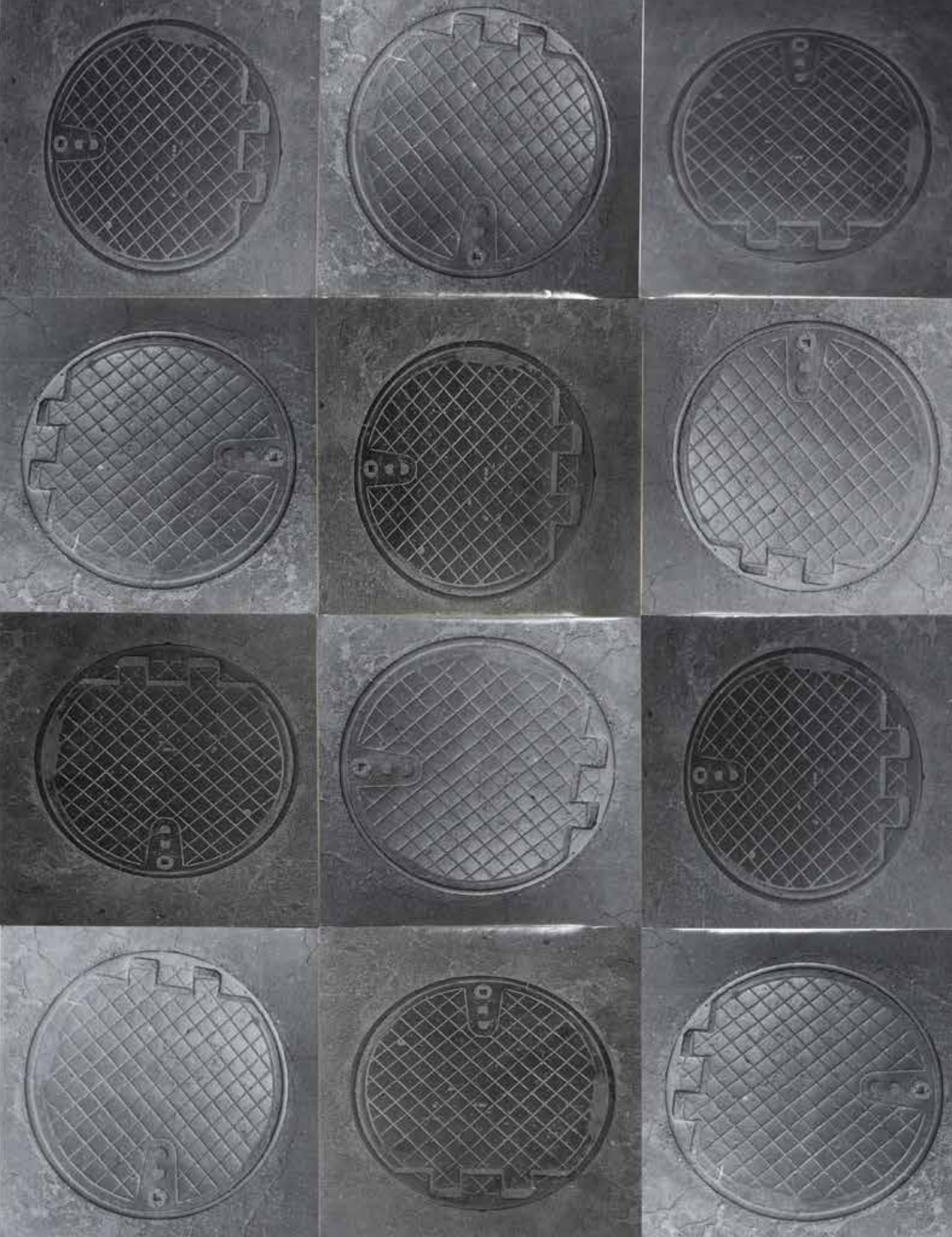
Ferenc FICZEK: *Untitled*, Photo documentation of the land art series 3, 1972, silver gelatine print, 20,8x29,5 cm © Courtesy by the acb Gallery



After the period of experimental projects staged in nature (1970–1971), Károly Kismányoky, Sándor Pinczehelyi, and Kálmán Sziujártó turn their attention to urban environment and its everyday and playful geometries, while Ferenc Ficzek, and Károly Halász discover the geometric possibilities and ontological dimensions of manipulated space with the help of simple household objects, a chair, a door, a wheelbarrow, a TV screen, or an empty TV box. However, the examination of urban geometry is often accompanied by an intervention. In his series entitled *Sign tests* [Jelpróbák] (1974), Károly Kismányoky observes the continued visual effect that elements placed in nature have in an urban environment. He places “+” and “=” signs at different points in the city — between posts, on cobblestones, on a stone wall, in a ditch, in a park, on sand, on a discarded food can — in order to observe how space changes, how sometimes expands and how latent geometric effects are intensified due to the presence of the visual elements left there. In his series entitled *Covering (up)* [El(le)fedés] (1974–1975), he takes pictures of road signs covered with black foil, thus questioning and abolishing their original geometry, and meaning — both their form, and the traffic signs —, and giving them a new one. Refusing artwork status, i.e. the idea of a “static, finished work”, he creates one of his most elaborate series of photographs about a manhole cover (Timár street, 1972), whose round shape fills the frame almost entirely and whose repetition makes this element, indiscernible and insignificant at first, take on a new substance, and become almost transcendent.



Sándor PINCZEHELYI: *Star* (cobble), 1972, silver gelatine print, 6 pcs, each 20,8x29,5 cm © Courtesy by the acb Gallery



Like other members of the group, Sándor Pinczehelyi, who carries on the momentum of land art experiments, dissects, highlights, or displaces the static geometry of façades. In his photo series entitled *Junction I. and II.* [Összekötés I. és II.] (1972), a white line runs horizontally then vertically between the windows of the characteristic buildings of Pécs, disrupting the geometric balance of the massive façade. This same façade is the subject of a four-part series entitled *In Memory of Copernicus* [Kopernikusz emlékére] (1973), in which the projections of the geometric shadow of the church, adjacent to the building, redraw the composition, the frame, and the forms. The steps, and the shadow projected onto and diffracted by the steps become one of the inevitable subjects of his geometric, playful, and vertiginous observations (*Stairs* [Lépcső], 1973; *Stairs, shadow* [Lépcső, árnyék], 1974). The most emblematic of the visual elements is the cobblestone, its individual and group potential, as well as its indispensable connotations. The photographs of a project entitled *Star (cobblestone)* [Csillag (utcakő)] in 1972 were taken of a pile of cobblestones, left unattended at a roadwork site, rearranged in the shape of a five-pointed star. This piece, beyond its political dimension, combines in itself the artist's geometric, spatial and serial way of thinking.⁸

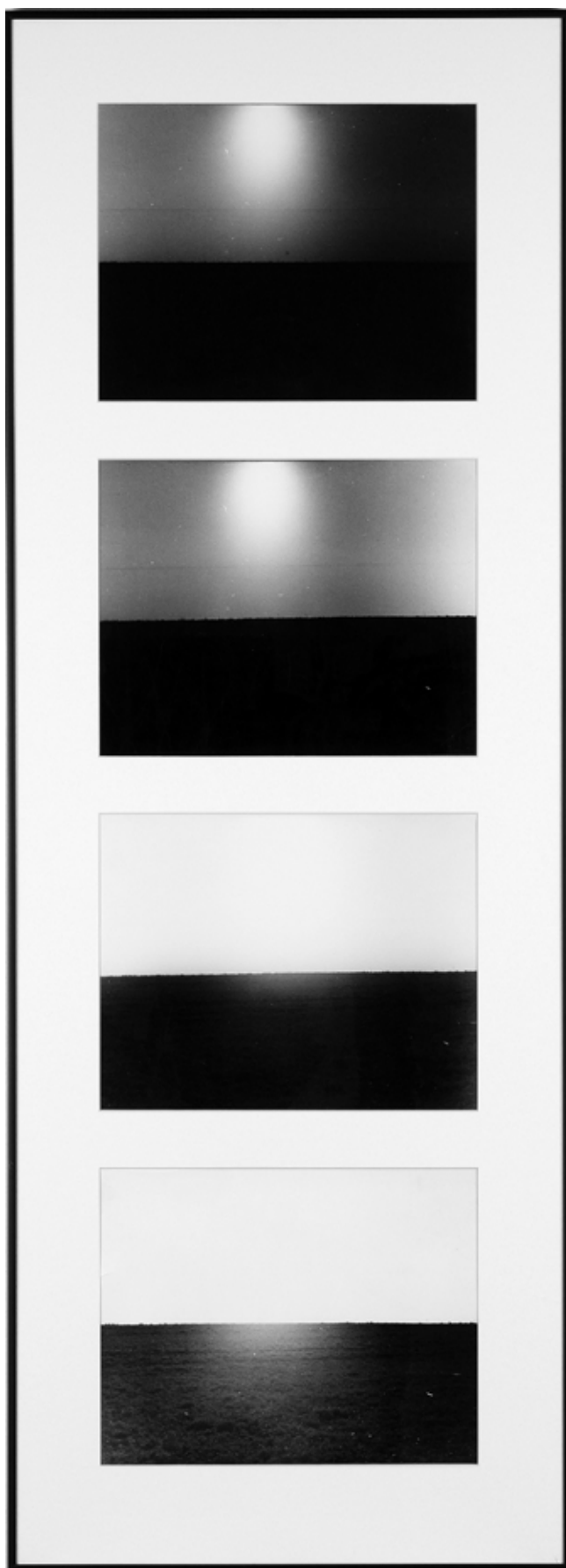


Sándor PINCZEHÉLYI: *Bonding I*, 1972, silver gelatine print, 54x24,2 cm © Courtesy by the acb Gallery

Sándor PINCZEHÉLYI: *Bonding II*, 1972, silver gelatine print, 71,5x17,2 cm © Courtesy by the acb Gallery

The city and its geometric elements have a very slight role in Kálmán Szijártó's works. One of his most poetic and, taking its technical background into account, most playful geometric-serial works — besides the stencilled serial remake of the *Rolling Yellow Band* mentioned above — was not even made in an urban environment. In a series entitled *The Way of the Sun* [Napjárás] (1975), a strictly horizontal landscape appears, where the horizon is positioned exactly in the middle of the picture. In the first three-phase pictures, it is as if Szijártó were setting out all the positions of the celestial body in the sky, however, in the final one, the light of the setting sun erases the rigidly geometric dividing line. All Szijártó did was develop the same picture four separate times with four different levels of exposure. Using this trick, the artist breaks this basic geometric component, a horizontal line, and thereby denies strict geometry.

Kálmán SZIJÁRTÓ: *Sunpath*, 1975, silver gelatine print 4 pcs, each 24x30 cm © Courtesy by Balázs Sziluka

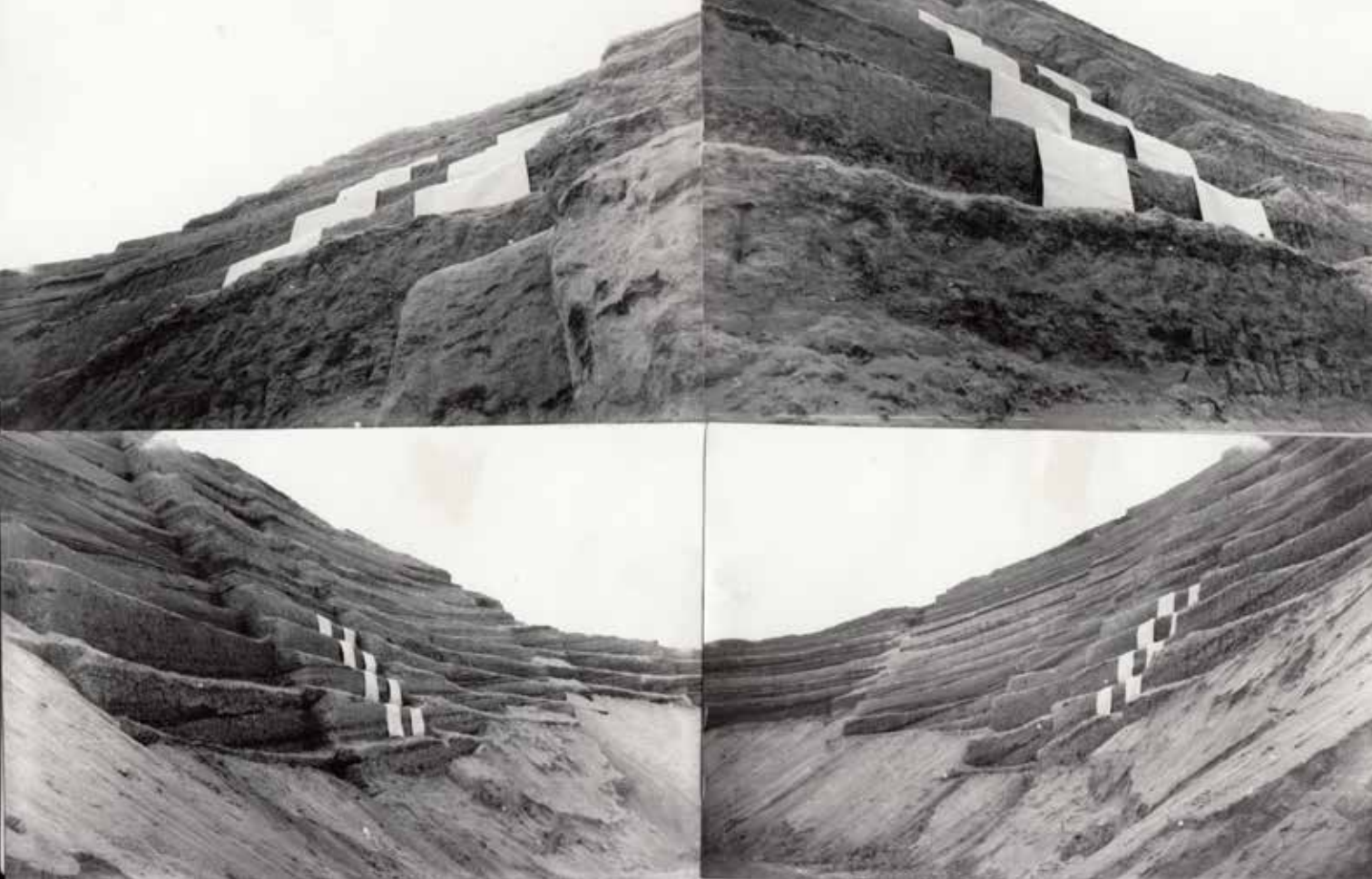


While Ferenc Ficzek had a preference for classical studio photography, two of his works are worth mentioning as part of this category. Through a 1972 photo project called *Untitled* [Cím nélkül], we follow Ficzek's path as he gets on a bus in the city with a white, rectangular package and a stand, and wanders out into nature. There, he sets up the stand, unwraps a photo that looks like a landscape and puts it on the stand. This is when it becomes evident that the photograph represents the landscape where the artist is. The stand, the outline of the landscape photo, first wrapped then unwrapped, as well as the perspective of the landscape are all part of a geometry created and transformed by an artistic gesture. Ficzek's way of thinking is strongly linked to the group's experimental and playful

mentality, and gives evidence of a complex spatiality. This is well-illustrated by a three-part series entitled *Manipulated space connections* [Manipulált térkapcsolatok] (1973). Starting with a photograph showing a frame-like white structure placed in a field, he successfully manipulates space by combining the exterior and the interior, that is, he merges the geometric object placed in nature and the geometry created in the studio. At different angles, he places sticks at different angles, on the edges and the corners of the white structure seen in the photograph, whose shadow, due to the intense lateral lighting, also interferes with the structure and redraws the original plane geometry into spatial geometry.

Károly KISMÁNYOKY – Kálmán SZIJÁRTÓ: *Documentation of the Rolling yellow strip action 1*, 1971 © Courtesy by Pécsi Műhely archive





Károly KISMÁNYOKY – Kálmán SZIJÁRTÓ: *Landtransformation*, 1970, silver gelatine print, 4 pcs, each 7,5x11 cm © Courtesy by the acb Gallery



Károly KISMÁNYOKY – Kálmán SZIJÁRTÓ: *Pécs*, quarry behind Tettye 1-5 detail, 1970, silver gelatine print on Dokubrom paper 5 pcs, each 29,3x41,8 cm © Courtesy by the acb Gallery

Károly Halász familiarised himself early on with photography on his own, a fact his works entitled *Photographic experiments inspired by László Moholy-Nagy's writings* [Fotókísérletek Moholy-Nagy László írásai alapján] (1971) or *Private screening I.* [Privát adás I.] (1971) attest to. Although geometric thinking interlaces all of his works, a photographic project entitled *Lenin Street* [Lenin utca], created in 1974, may be the only one of his works in which urban geometry appears — even if only secondarily. The artist wants to shed light on how the buildings and their entrances reflect the life philosophy of those who live in them.⁹ In other words, how urban geometry — gates, doors, windows, stands, bars, pylons, sewers, the system of diagonal, vertical and horizontal lines and arches formed by

façade adornments — connect to everyday life, and how these two domains affect one another. In this series, Halász handles the question of urban geometry with an ontological approach that speaks in a unique voice amongst the photographs of *Pécsi Műhely*.

Past the period where they observed outdoor geometry, the toolkit and thematic affinity of the members of *Pécsi Műhely* start to differentiate as their individual voices grow ever stronger. Although they did not continue down this path, the shots that were taken during this period clearly anticipate the group's photographic experiments to come and the phase-like and serial nature of the photographs taken of their individual performances¹⁰ created at the end of the 1970s.

¹ Ferenc LANTOS (1929–2014) painter, graphic designer, art educator. He founded the fine arts class at the Secondary Art School of Pécs in 1959, where members of *Pécsi Műhely* met.

² Katalin NÁDOR (1938) photographer. She worked as a museum photographer in Pécs and also had a career as an independent photographer. She taught the technical aspects of photography to members of *Pécsi Műhely* and let them use her laboratory to blow up their photographs. Nádor regularly documented the group's experimental land art projects, including those entitled "*Forest*" [Erdő], *Large white strip along a horizontal line* [Széles fehér sáv, vízszintes lénia mentén] (1970), *Falling roll, running-hill* [Zuhanó tekercs, futás-domb] (1971) and *Running (2)* [Futás 2.] (1971). She made the emblematic portrait of Sándor Pinczehelyi entitled *Sickle and hammer* [Sarló és kalapács] (1973). See: *A Pécsi Műhely Nagy Képekgyűjteménye*, edited by Sándor PINCZEHÉLYI, Alexandra kiadó, Budapest, 2004.

³ Károly KISMÁNYOKY and Kálmán SZIJÁRTÓ wrote short descriptions and analyses of nearly each of their land art projects, in which they described the visual effects of views. *Ibid.*, 296–315.

⁴ Regional parallelisms are worth mentioning as regards the visual language inserted into a natural environment, alongside sensitivity to movement, impermanence and the dematerialized body, and recording them via photography. On the same note, the projects of Czechoslovak Jan STEKLÍK and Jiří VALOCH in a forest (*White Strip in the Forest, Forest Demarcation*, 1970), of Polish Konrad JARODZKI in a quarry (*A Record of Space*, 1971) or of the Slovenian OHO group in a wheat field (*Wheat and Rope*, 1969) are worth mentioning, too.

⁵ Károly KISMÁNYOKY: Manuscript, archive of Károly Kismányoky, 1971.

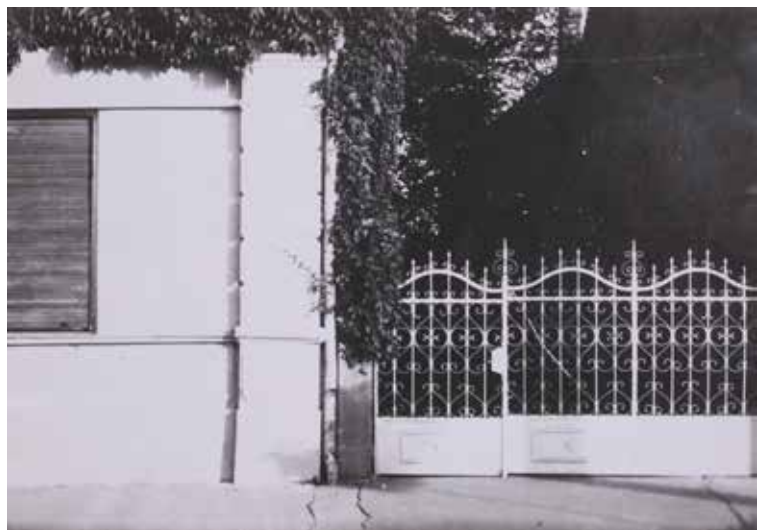
⁶ Károly KISMÁNYOKY: *Time/motion/image* [Idő/mozgás/kép], manuscript, archive of Károly Kismányoky, 1971.

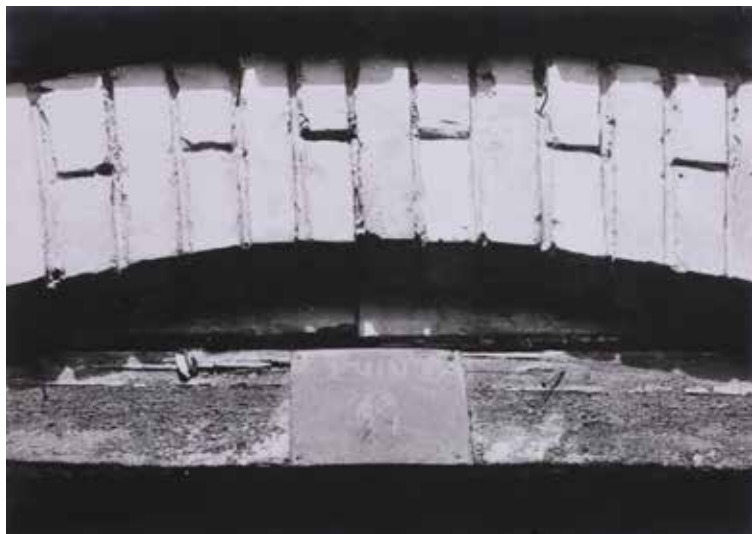
⁷ István ROLLING STRIP [Guruló csik], 1975, paper, stencil, plywood, 320x160 cm, in the collection of King St. Stephen Museum, Székesfehérvár. See: *Ibid.*, 293.

⁸ One of Sándor Pinczehelyi's most sensual series of cobblestone photographs is *Cobblestone* [Utcakő] (1974), in which the cobblestoned road meets an untouched soil surface like a horizontal, diagonal and vertical lace. See: *Ibid.*, 206.

⁹ Japanese director Akira KUROSAWA's *Dodesukaden* (1970) inspired Károly Halász to create this series of photographs. The film deals with scenes from the life of a slum in Tokyo. See: Károly HALÁSZ: *Lenin út/Lenin Street*, 1974, joint publication of Miskolc Gallery and Vintage Gallery, Budapest, 2013.

¹⁰ The performances of Ferenc FICZEK (*Change of shadows* [Árnyékváltás] with Sándor Pinczehelyi, 1977), Károly KISMÁNYOKY (*Losing track* [Nyomvesztés], 1977), Sándor PINCZEHÉLYI (*Linking* [Összekötés]), Károly HALÁSZ (*Private screening* [Privát adás], 1977) and Kálmán SZIJÁRTÓ: (*Metamorphoses* [Átváltozások], 1979–1980) and the summary nature of the preparatory photographic studies merit their own, separate study.





Károly HOPP – HALÁSZ: *Lenin street* (detail) 1973–74, silver gelatine print 18x24 cm © Courtesy by Vintage Gallery

Gábor Arion KUDÁSZ: I.
Electricității monument, with Prometheus catching the lightning, is standing over the Vidraru dam. At the time of its construction, it was the ninth highest building in Europe. In an average hydrological year, it can generate 400 GW/year © Courtesy by the artist

P O S T



Posthumanism in The Brick Factory On Gábor Arion Kudász's Human series

H U M A N I S M

Although brick doesn't yet play an essential role in posthumanist philosophy and the latest spectacular offshoots of cyberpunk (*Westworld*, *Altered carbon*), Gábor Arion Kudász's project *Human* (2014–2016) serves as proof that the automated world of brick production — from the extraction of clay, which changes landscapes, through standardised processing to its comprehensive use — can be an excellent subject for a photographic series observing the present and future meaning of humanism and humanity.¹

The existence of brick coincides more or less with the era that geologists call the Holocene, which doesn't mean that the construction material, which has revolutionised human culture, disappeared at the end of the Holocene and at the beginning of the Anthropocene, i.e. in the second half of the 20th century, only that other types of techniques (concrete, reinforced concrete, glass) have replaced it in large-scale constructions and that brick itself has turned into cinder block. The Holocene geological epoch started after

the last ice age, around 11,700 years ago, and the first clay bricks are estimated by scientists to have been made 10,500 years ago at the very beginning of the Holocene, meaning that they have been around for as long as human civilisation, which had already shaped the surface of the Earth significantly back in the Holocene. We now live in the Anthropocene, at least according to geologists, who followed biologists, ecologists and climate researchers when deciding in 2016 to insert a “human era” amongst the geological epochs which, according to the

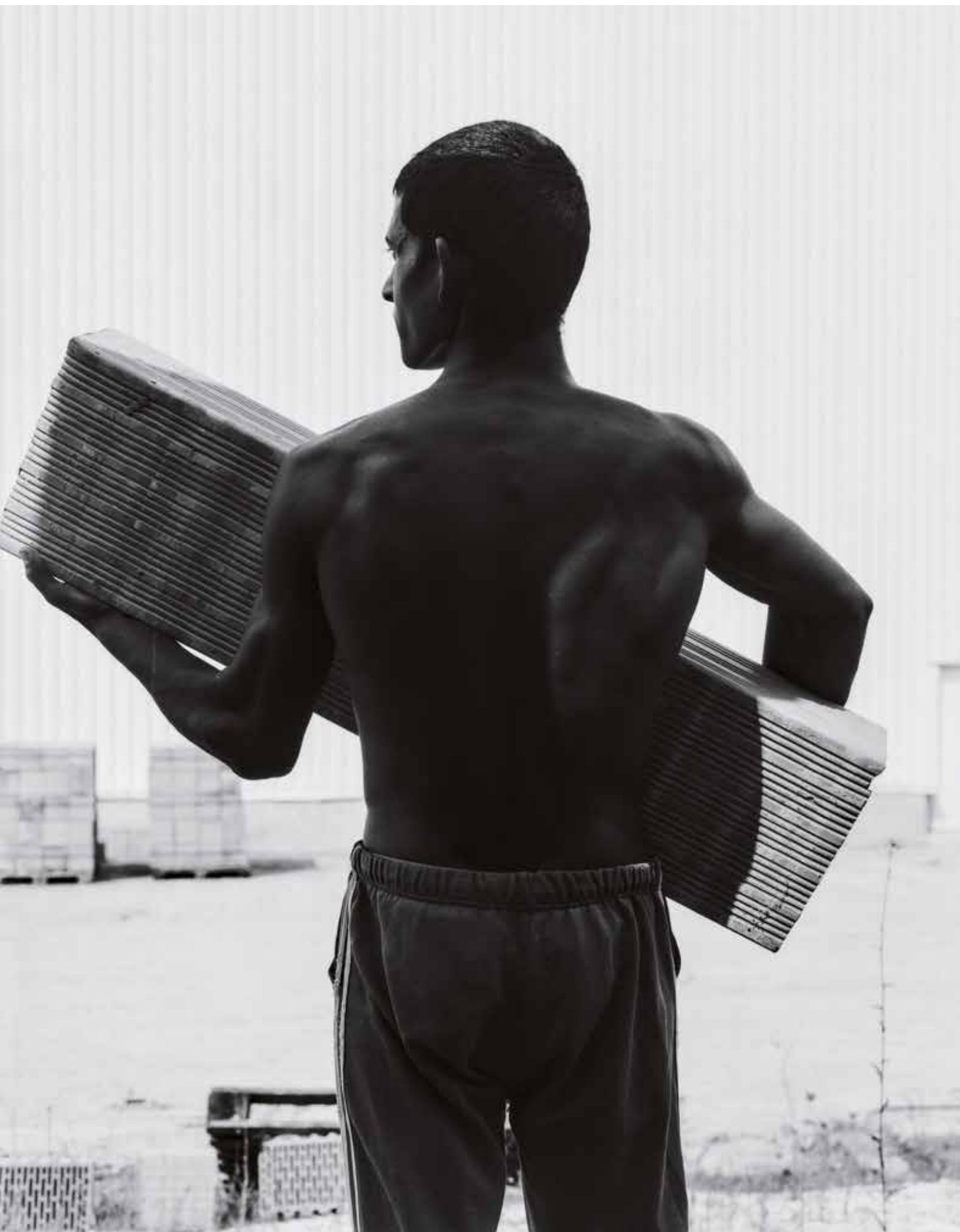
acting chair of the Subcommittee on Quaternary Stratigraphy, Jan Zalasiewicz, began around 1950.² From a stratigraphic point of view, the amount of fissile materials rising sharply after 1945 is a perfect marker of the Anthropocene, however, the most characteristic fossils of rocks created in this epoch will have been plastic and chicken bones.

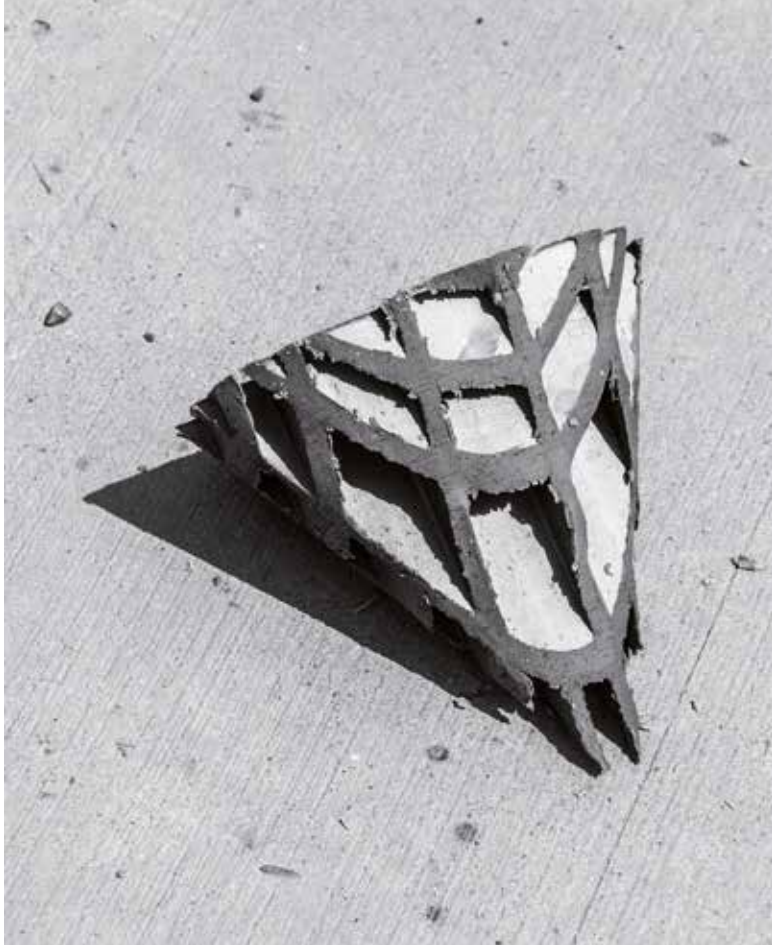
In the past, Gábor Arion Kudász created photography series geared specifically towards ecology from *Green Area* (2005–2006) to *Waste Union* (2007–2010). While *Green Area* presented how modern man populates and reuses green patches of ghettoised nature in the inner city, *Waste Union* examined how human culture demolishes its direct natural environment and transforms the biosphere surrounding its living space into a depository of waste and unnecessary things.

The next step in the artist's career was *Memorabilia* (2010–2014), which had a more personal focus but had also been inspired by research on memory and anthropology. Finally, *Human* seems in a sense to deliver a synthesis of ecology and anthropology, because, while its focus is on industrial production, what the series actually examines is what kind of interface takes shape between nature and technology with the dividing line being brick, and what kind of impact this interface has on the representation that the artist and clay factory workers have of humans and humanity. On the far horizon and through the complex

visual culture of some of the pictures, the narrative of globalisation and ecological disaster looms, the best-known representatives of which are possibly photographers Edward Burtynsky and Sebastião Salgado. Burtynsky gained recognition by his use of special locations, big dimensions and epic compositions, which visualise the dramatic transformation of the surface of the planet, nuanced with some melancholy, but in an extremely spectacular way. Salgado also made himself a career with a sensationalist combination of photojournalism, sublime pictorialism and the critique of capitalism, while he presented the still undiscovered peoples and places of the Earth in his beautiful, uplifting and very sharp black and white photographs (*Genesis*, 2004–2011).

The world of *Human* is black and white, but its visual culture transcends Burtynsky's or Salgado's *spectaculum*: it evokes, on the one hand, the social photography of the interwar period, the *Neue Sachlichkeit* and the *Neues Sehen* (or the *New Vision*), while, on the other hand, it also contains rather mysterious images, which hew closer to the photographic tradition spanning from surrealism to conceptualism. An example of this is the worker impersonating Icarus, standing proudly on a forklift; the clay factory worker posing on the pediment; or the old man who — as a distant relative of the peoples of nature — runs the palm of his hand over a pallet of bricks.





Gábor Arion KUDÁSZ: *XLIX*.
Conic section of a Wienerberger block (Alsódetrehem, România) © Courtesy by the artist

In the context of Kudász's typically Eastern European people and clay factory landscapes, what percolates is not so much the anthropological tradition of American photography, from Walker Evans to Sebastião Salgado, but the memory of Karl Blossfeldt, Albert Renger-Patzsch, László Moholy-Nagy and György Kepes. Not only the unusual viewpoints and the humanist and positive representation of technology recall the Bauhaus movement and Moholy-Nagy's and Kepes' representation of the world, but concretely a recognisable human hand, given only a short title: *Hand covered in coal dust* (Sibiu, Romania). Its place in the series is shown by a Roman numeral: XXXII. In the series, containing 80 numbered pieces denoted by Roman numerals, there are portraits of bricks which recall Blossfeldt's phantom-like plants, plates of cinder blocks and broken bricks reminiscent of rocky landscapes — typically accompanied by an entirely objective, descriptive title and the mandatory Roman numeral: *Conic section of a Wienerberger block* (Tritenii de Jos, Romania) (XLIX). Also, many of his larger-scale photographs depicting parts of a factory recall the essentially optimistic technical monumentality of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* and especially that of Renger-Patzsch: *Recycling the waste heat of the brick kiln* (XVIII). In some of

his other photographs, the viewer cannot quite discern what is happening, and it is exactly the ghostly, staged nature of these pictures that makes them unique. An example of this is the hopscotch made from crushed, malleable cinder blocks. Though the picture bears a telltale title, referring to the fact that Kudász did not stop at the photographic traditions of social photography and industrial landscape photography, instead of insinuating something ultramodern into the classical, essayistic tone of his project: *Repeated agility, resistance and balance test* (Lukovit, Bulgaria) (XX). This ultramodern thing is none other than an intensive and collaborative involvement of the people appearing in the photographs in the project, which leads us to the socially sensitive world of participatory art, which denies the autonomy of art.³ Indeed, the brick factory workers do not simply pose or show off their dexterity at the request of the “anthropologist” who came from afar but tell him of their lives and dreams. At this point, the question that remains is how the nomad “eco-photographer”, who had wandered amongst different landscapes and cities, found himself anchored in brick manufacturing and why exactly brick came to be the protagonist of his project brooding on modern humanism.



Gábor Arion *KUDÁSZ: XX.*
Repeated test of skill, balance and fitness (Lukovit, Bulgaria) © Courtesy by the artist

INDEPENDENT AND/OR CORPORATE REPRESENTATION

Corporate art or “art incorporated” is a term coined by Julian Stallabrass, who uses it with a double meaning depending not only on the intentions of the customer or the patron but also on the intentions of the creator and the intention to succeed.⁴ According to him, the seemingly independent modern and late modern (postmodern according to others) art is doubly — in a material and an intellectual sense — linked to the art market, which is an integral part of the capitalist economy, what’s more, some — like YBA artists, seen as paradigmatic by Stallabrass, spearheaded by Damien Hirst — build their art on this relationship, not only materially, but also conceptually. Kudász is not one of them, he does not follow this paradigm and only accepted Wienerberger’s offer of collaboration because he got full aesthetic and political autonomy. In 2014, the company invited him, Charles Fréger and Frederike von Rauch to create a photographic series which is connected to the activities of Wienerberger in some form.⁵ As a consequence of this invitation, Kudász not only delved into the cultural history and current manufacturing technology of bricks but also familiarised himself with the main products of Hungarian industrial photography and artistic corporate representations. This is how he encountered the moving humanism of Swiss Maroc Grob’s *Industrious* series (2012), who presented the workers of the Holcim plant, located in Miskolc, from the labourers to the CEO with the same heroism and sincere immediacy in anthracite grey — in accordance with the latest portrait trends of Hollywood.

Kudász’s purpose — in distinct contrast with this humanism estheticised into empty images — was not to create mere icons but to express the complex relationship between man and technology, nature and culture through the subject of brick manufacturing. Therefore, the series says much more about the artist himself than about Wienerberger, and — in conformity with the Kudász “brand” — does not only reflect on industrial production and late modern industrial society, but, in a broader sense, also examines human existence, modern technology and even the questions of modern imaging. For this, Kudász doesn’t simply relate to his subject as an “objective” photographer, but also shapes and comments on it and he does this not only by setting up and occasionally

even staging the photographs but also by modifying reality, as he sometimes complements the captured reality and its photographic representation with drawings and figures. These textual and visual comments concern both the psychology and technology of representation as they show what is beyond the world of brick factories and their people: the cultural horizon that defines the “anthropologist’s” mindset.

Kudász visited some of Wienerberger’s Central-Eastern and South-East European factories in Solymár, Balatonszentgyörgy, Békéscsaba in Hungary, Trittenii de Jos, Sibiu and Gura Ocnitei in Romania and Lukovit in Bulgaria, and for this, he traversed the Transfagarasan highway, which inspired one of the opening photos of the series. The other opening picture features, on top of the dam of one of Romania’s biggest hydroelectric plants, a futuristic robot or cyborg-like enormous metal statue representing Prometheus holding a bolt of lightning. After having shown a glimpse of the reference system of nature and culture, the third image reflects Kudász’s own peculiar horizon insofar as it shows a three-quarter portrait of a worker holding a cinder block, and later we get to know the workers’ names and the ideas of Florina and Florin from Gura Ocnitei pertaining to their ideal and actual homes. Thus, brick is merged with the concept of home, and this concept is further reflected in several photos of the series, which show housing estate flats and family houses, soon-to-be-demolished socialist high rise buildings, social housing apartments and family houses assembled from construction waste. Photograph number IX entitled *Deserted shelter and the schematics of an average American living room* (Transfăgărășan highway, Romania) emblematically represents the confrontation between original ideas, desires, and reality. In *Human* Kudász even comments on the nature of the relationship between imagination and tangible reality as he inserts the construction of the Ames room’s optical illusion at several points, which symbolises the limits and conventionality of human perception, as well as how easy it is to deceive the human eye and also the fact that sight, beyond optics, is about thinking and remembering, and in this sense, it is intrinsically dependent on acquired human culture. All of this refers in an auto-reflexive way to how Kudász’s own culture, the horizon of art history, ecology and anthropology shapes and forms his perspective on the brick factory and its people, technology, and humanism.



Gábor Arion KUDÁSZ: IX.
Deserted shelter and the schematics of an average American living room (Transfăgărășan Highway, Romania) © Courtesy by the artist

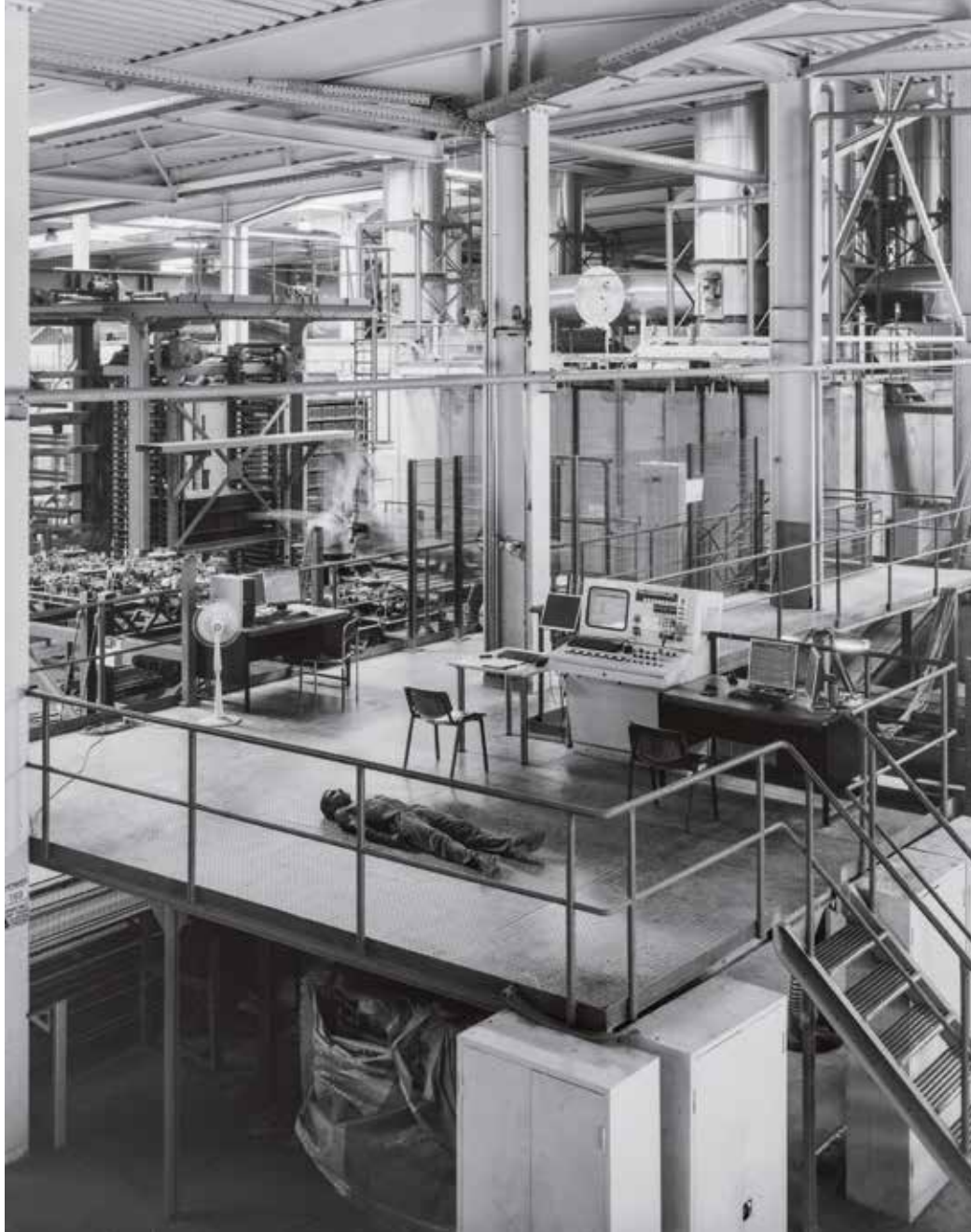
TECHNOLOGY AND HUMANISM

In the photographs of *Human*, not only the workers, but Kudász himself is also drawing, most often human scales and proportions, which define representations of brick, modern manufacturing technology and technology as a whole. At the start, the project — in a rather telling manner — was called *Human Scale* instead of *Human*. The drawings in the photographs referring to human scale are an apt reference to this heritage. A classical humanist representation of man is featured in some of the photographs from Vitruvian architectural proportions through Leonardo da Vinci's encircled Vitruvian man to Bauhaus's Ernst Neufert's modern version. Neufert's version of the Vitruvian man — a Neufertian derivative of the most famous allegory of classical humanism — decorates the brick wall of a deserted complex of small apartments in the form of a chalk drawing. The figure, however, is too big compared to the apartments; old humanism does not fit into them anymore. Kudász's commentary is very terse at this point: *Unfinished social housing apartments* (Targoviste, Romania) (VII). The architectural paradox comes to life in the Anthropocene context of the brick factory as the incongruous figure looks like the actualised version of an ancient Sumerian mural. Actualisation, the revival of the memory of humanism, also appears more concretely and vitally in the project, when a brick factory worker, at Kudász's request, poses like Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian man.



Gábor Arion KUDÁSZ: VII.
Unfinished social housing apartments (Targoviste, Romania) © Courtesy by the artist

Gábor Arion KUDÁSZ: XII.
Worker and automated production lines (Lukovít, Bulgaria) © Courtesy by the artist



However, the modern man is visibly not comfortable in classical poses; he feels much more at home while working or performing his tasks in the world that is alien to him. The human figure laying in front of the control panel of an automated factory is the perfect allegory for this alienness, the incommensurability of man and technology — which harkens back to the 1920s and 1930s, and especially to Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. The photograph of a man lost in the mechanical and electronic jungle of technology is the central photograph of *Human (Worker and automated production lines, XII)*, which is also stressed in the context of an exhibition by the print's large dimensions. The situation of human perception and human understanding in the post-Fordist era is yet again reflected by

an outside observer, however, this time not by the figure of an optical physiologist, i.e. Adalbert Ames, but rather by the figure of an occupational psychologist, Lilian Gilbreth, hidden in the title of the photographs. Gilbreth's studies on work efficiency and her flow diagrams drawn with light inspired Kudász to create his light painting photographs about the motions of the brick factories' robots. All of this leads us from the conveyor belt and human efficiency to automation and robotics, which redefine humanity, and which not only define the volume and the scale of production but also how the workers, who do not create nor produce, only accomplish servicing and monitoring tasks, perceive themselves.

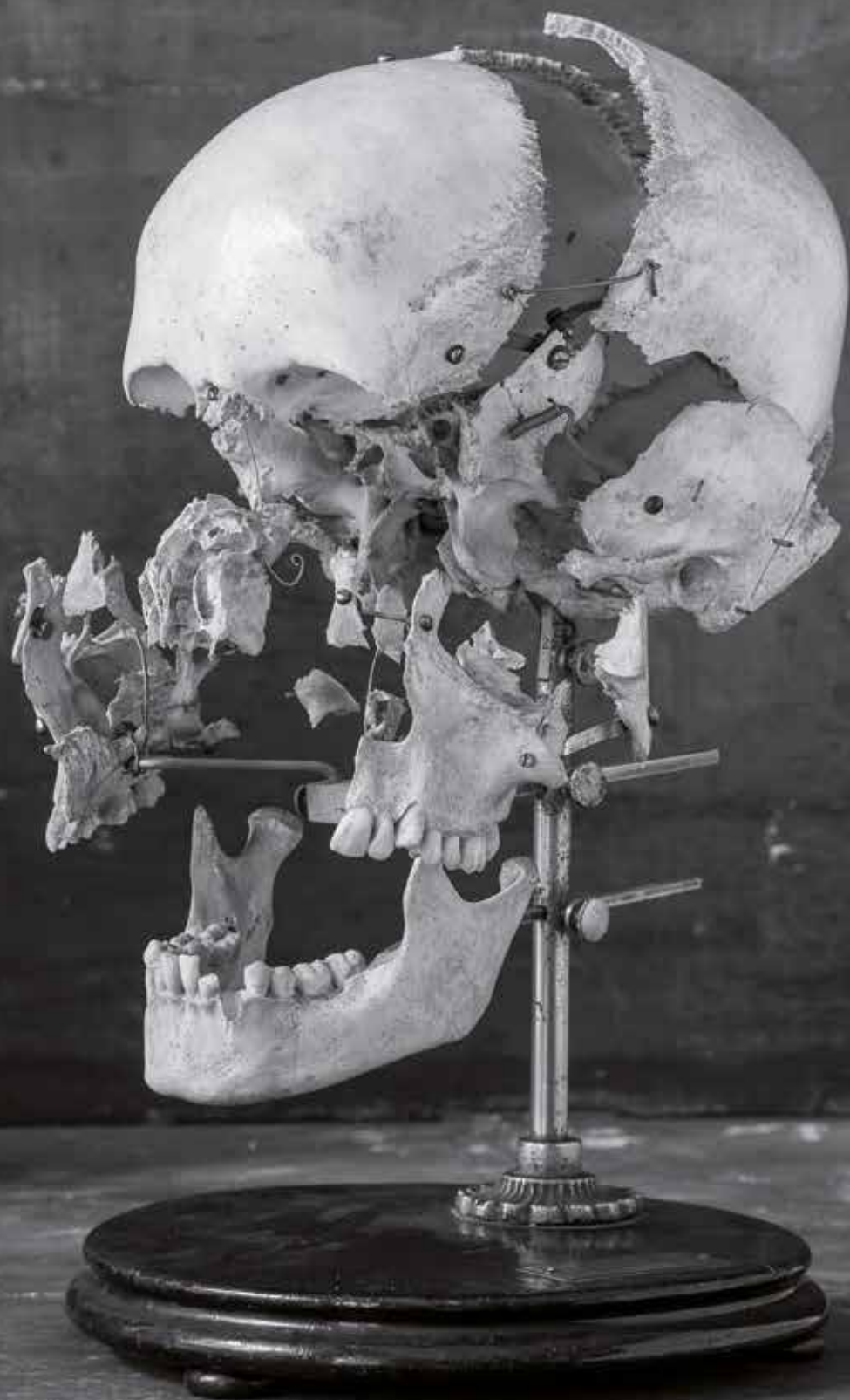


Gábor Arion KUDÁSZ: XXXII.
Hand, covered with coal dust (Széchenyi, Romania) © Courtesy by the artist

Kudász, in the photographs of *Human*, puts this mechanical vision of the world in contrast with the human scale — which is still applicable when it comes to the cinder block — also shown by the hand holding the cinder block (XLVII), reminiscent of Moholy-Nagy's "hand". The hand, which these days mostly pushes buttons as part of the manufacturing process, used to shape bricks as well as the constructed environment to its own scale. A constructed environment, the creation of which — according to modern stories of our culture — had a major role in the rise of mankind and in the process that eventually led to the Anthropocene.⁶ However, if we link the Anthropocene, not to the third, but the second industrial revolution, we arrive at the same visual culture, the visuals of Bauhaus and *Neue Sachlichkeit*, which were among Kudász's biggest inspirations.⁷ At the same time, Bauhaus and *Neue Sachlichkeit* indicate a certain tension, a tension which is demonstrated by the modern-day expansion of the scientific perspective and also by those marvellous and puzzling thought experiments that still place man at the centre of the physical horizon, ranging from quantum physics to relativistic cosmology.

Gábor Arion KUDÁSZ: LVII.

In his work on architecture, Vitruvius, a Roman architect describes the proportions of an "ideal" man as follows: four fingers equal one palm, four palms equal one foot, six palms equal one cubit, four cubits equal a man's height, four cubits equal one pace, and 24 palms equal one man. If you open your legs so much as to decrease your height $\frac{1}{14}$ and spread and raise your arms till your middle finger touch the level of the top of your head, you must know that the centre of the outspread limbs will be the navel, and the space between the legs will be an equilateral triangle. The length of the outspread arms is equal to the height of a man; from the hairline to the bottom of the chin it is one-tenth of the height of a man; from the bottom of the chin to the top of the head it is one-eighth of the height of a man; from the top of the chest to the top of the head it is one-sixth of the height of a man; from the top of the chest to the hairline it is one-seventh of the height of a man. The maximum width of the shoulders is a quarter of the height of a man; from the breasts to the top of the head is a quarter of the height of a man; the distance from the elbow to the tip of the hand is a quarter of the height of a man; the distance from the elbow to the armpit is one-eighth of the height of a man; the length of the hand is one-tenth of the height of a man; the root of the penis is at half the height of a man; the foot is one-seventh of the height of a man; from below the foot to below the knee is a quarter of the height of a man; from below the knee to the root of the penis is a quarter of the height of a man; the distances from below the chin to the nose and the eyebrows and the hairline are equal to the ears and to one-third of the face.



TECHNOCENE OR CAPITALOCENE?

Some say, even outside sci-fi circles, that the Anthropocene should actually be called Technocene.⁸ According to the apostles of the Technocene, rather than humans, it is in fact technology, enforcing its own abstract logic in an almost autopoietic way, that is changing the environment, which, from the beginning of the 20th century, became more and more autonomous due to the development of information technology and robotics. All of this affects the person and classical humanism, as it is not only our constructed environment that takes over an increasingly big part of the planet's biosphere but the biosphere itself is fundamentally modified through various hybrids. As Donna J. Haraway prophetically proclaimed in her *Cyborg Manifesto*, a human/robot hybrid age dawned as early as the second part of the 20th century if we think of artificial organs, genetically modified organisms or the extension and shaping of our senses via electronic means.⁹

Human shows this new humanism not only with the portrait of man modified by a coordinate system, but the anatomical illustration of the “exploded skull” also points us in this direction if we put it in the context of robotic images. In this new coordinate system of the 21st century, where sci-fi becomes reality, the new coordinates are set not by Moholy-Nagy or Jacob Bronowski, but by thinkers like Ray Kurzweil, who predicts the advent of technological singularity and real artificial

intelligence before the 2030s. The development of computers infuses new energy into another, more ancient utopia, the idea of eternal life. Indeed, as a transhumanist, Hans Moravec is a bearer of good tidings, promising a downloadable conscience, which would mean the transfer of our mind into the hardware of a computer. However, this utopia is more of a dystopia to many, which would not only cause an ecological disaster and a potential failure of mankind but, more than that, also its lasting decline. Thus, today, transhumanism and global capitalism collide with the forces of critical posthumanism, which stresses the importance of life and human thought.

According to Katherine Hayles and Rosi Braidotti, Michel Foucault was the first to raise the question of what it means to be human and how this meaning depends on a specific era's way of thinking from the standpoint of science and the history of ideas.¹⁰ Foucault's biopolitics has become necropolitics today, and the metaphor of governmentality (gouvernementalité) has yielded to the nightmare of a global capitalist concentration camp.¹¹ For this reason, some speak not of an Anthropocene or a Technocene, but of a Capitalocene, and of the fact that it is capitalism that is shaping the face of the Earth drastically, driven by profit.¹² Interestingly, this tradition goes back to vitalism and the early 20th-century critique of capitalism, when Moholy-Nagy wrote about slice-man working in factories.¹³

¹ *Human* won the Robert Capa Grand Prize in 2015, was exhibited at Zsöfi Faur Gallery in 2018 and published as a book the same year. Kudász defended his DLA dissertation entitled *Human Scale — from brick to the horizon of the technological era* in 2016, whose text was an important source for me in interpreting his project.

² ZALASIEWICZ, Jan et al.: “Anthropocene: Its Stratigraphic Basis”, *Nature*, 2017/1.

³ BISHOP, Claire: *Artificial Hells. Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, Verso, London, 2012.

⁴ STALLABRASS, Julian: *Art Incorporated. The Story of Contemporary Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004.

⁵ Since 2013, these invitations have formed the basis of Wienerberger's contemporary photography collection, which has been published in book format: LOUDON, Valery et al.: *Insights. Wienerberger Contemporary Photography Collection*, Kehrer, Berlin, 2017.

⁶ BRONOWSKI, Jacob: *The Ascent of Man*, BBC, London, 1973.

⁷ GYÖRGY KEPES: *A világ új képe a művészetben és a tudományban* (1956), Corvina, Budapest, 1979.

⁸ CERA, Agostino: “The Technocene, or Technology as (Neo)environment”, *Techné*, 2017. https://www.pdcnet.org/pdc/bvdb.nsf/purchase?openform&fp=techné&id=techné_2017_0999_10_4_72

⁹ HARAWAY, Donna J.: *Kiborg kiáltvány [Cyborg Manifesto]*. *Tudomány, technika és szocialista feminizmus a nyolcvanas években* (1984), <https://hironok.files.wordpress.com/2009/06/haraway.pdf>

¹⁰ HAYLES, N. Katherine: *How We Became Posthuman*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1999. and BRAIDOTTI, Rosi: *The Posthuman*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2013. At the end of Michel Foucault's 1996 book, *Les mots et les choses* — which marks to both authors the beginning of critical posthumanism — Michel Foucault states his idea, which since then has become legendary, that the notion of man may not last longer than “a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea”.

¹¹ AGAMBEN, Giorgio: *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1998.

¹² KUNKEL, Benjamin: “The Capitalocene”, *London Review of Books*, 2017/5. <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v39/n05/benjamin-kunkel/the-capitalocene>

¹³ MOHOLY-NAGY László: “A szeletembertől az egész emberig” [From the Slice-Man to the Entire Human], *Korunk*, 1930/2. <http://www.korunk.org/?q=node/8&ev=1930&honap=2>

Gábor Arion KUDÁSZ: XXXVI.
The main things for Florina: *Copil* (the child), *Familie* (family), *Casa* (house) and *Fabrica* (factory) uniquely presented by edgy square notwithstanding as the foregoing (Gura Ocniței, Romania) © Courtesy by the artist



It is this slice-man that appears in Kudász's work, set in the brick factory. The skilled labourer does not know a thing about transhumanism or posthumanism, still, Kudász shows us how he views his own position in the world and why he sees it the way he does. Straddling participatory art and staged photography, the seemingly emotionless artist wants his models to play an active role. The starting point for this intellectual collaboration must have been that labourer who oversees the manufacturing of ten thousand bricks per shift, yet has never pondered what he would do with them if the opportunity arose. In spite of all, Kudász's artistic activism took its final form in the shape of an album that contrasts the artist's anthropological sensitivities and the broadness of his intellectual horizon with the perspective of the slice-man and that of global technocapitalism. However, if we revive the educational optimism of Bauhaus from a hundred years ago, it is not inconceivable that after *Human*, even Florin and Florina might have looked at their lives, works and roles in the human ecosystem differently.

RITA SOMOSI

WITHOUT A CAMERA LENS

**Medium theory experiments
in Viktória Balogh's and
Máté Dobokay's photo series**



SLOWLY, IT WILL BE ONLY NATURAL THAT THE MEMBERS OF THE YOUNG PHOTOGRAPHER GENERATION BECOME ACTIVE MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ART SCENE BEFORE GRADUATION OR AT THE VERY BEGINNING OF THEIR CAREER. PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION, PORTFOLIO REVIEWS, RESIDENCY PROGRAMMES AND PHOTOGRAPHY FESTIVALS SUPPORT THEIR EARLY CANONISATION, WHEREAS INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP EXHIBITIONS HELP THEM TO BECOME KNOWN IN PROFESSIONAL CIRCLES AND BY A BROADER AUDIENCE. HERE FOLLOW THE PORTRAITS OF TWO YOUNG EXPERIMENTAL PHOTOGRAPHERS VIKTÓRIA BALOGH AND MÁTÉ DOBOKAY, WHOM BOTH OBTAINED THEIR BA IN PHOTOGRAPHY AT THE KAPOSVÁR UNIVERSITY.

Viktória BALOGH: *Complete*, 2016, mixed technic (giclée print, colour enlargement, needlework, wooden frame), 38x32 cm



Viktória BALOGH: *Complete*, 2016, mixed technic (giclée print, colour enlargement, needlework, wooden frame), 32x38 cm

In the spring of 2018, **Viktória Balogh** (1992) presented her work at two solo exhibitions: one in Hybrid Art Gallery as part of the Budapest Photo Festival, and the other at ISBN Gallery within the Kűszűb Fesztivál programme. Currently¹, she is studying in Kaposvár and will obtain her MA in Photography next year. During high school, she was attracted by a career in the performing arts, but she shifted her focus on photography after a photography course in Pécs. She was working with visual effects as an applied photographer and assistant at a theatre; her series sometimes still echo this background in her choice of locations or the theatrics of her compositions. One of her early pieces is called *Aspect* (2016), which is centred around the physical border between the performer and the audience: the safety curtain. It's diverse, mostly homogenous, black surface, full of signs, unfolds in the form of frontal pictures from the centre of the auditorium and the centre of the stage. One side is functional and known only to the insiders, the other side blends in with the festive visuals of the theatre or is part of creating an illusion. It serves as a border between two worlds, reality and fiction, which can only be crossed by only one party. The changing perspectives of the project's video installation work, however, plays precisely with blurring this boundary, thus confusing the viewers.

The worn-out surfaces, reminiscing the visuals of the safety curtains in theatres, are present once again in the pictures of *Knowledges [Tudások]* (2017) series; they, however, take the form of school blackboards and theatre floors. They also carry signs, "knowledge footprints", compressing an immense amount of information and time layers. The signs were put on both black surfaces on purpose, but whereas on one side the intention was to wipe them off, on the other side they served as visual references. The board is the tool of display, teaching and intermediation, a symbol of lexical knowledge, where the information provided is unquestionable. In Viktóra Balogh's pictures, blackboards that lost their function and the empty desks are presented with the indelible traces of knowledge: time layers one atop another, messy whirling lines rotating above and under each other, a turmoil of signs and surfaces wiped with smooth gestures alternate. We see the stages from above, small signs on them indicate order, they serve as supporting grips in space, such as the place of furniture; yet, together with the boards, they seem to appear more likely to be abstract pictures with dim gestures, which may contain traces of knowledge. A video piece also complements Balogh's series (*Untitled process*, 2017), in which the artist paints back the layers which stood the test of time and many board-wipes, in a

meditative video: she turns the signs into letters, numbers and scraps of words. What makes something disappear and what is it that overwrites the intention to delete?

The series called *Masterpieces of World Literature* [*A világirodalom remekei*] (2018) deals with knowledge in a materialised form. Instead of topics, the books are arranged by the colour of the canvas binding as a memento of a long-forgotten world, literacy or activity. Due to a change in the acquisition of knowledge, books — which by now made were reduced to visual elements and colour fields — have become tangible objects, carrying only aesthetic value; they are but installation elements, where their colour matrix of the different units dominates instead of their content.

A more personal viewpoint can be observed in her series *Complete* (2016): she appropriates family pictures or photos made of her in her childhood. Her starting point was photos from her mother's family archive that were found in boxes — she got fascinated by the decomposition and natural lightness of the images. The series was created using these photographs: in the studio, she completed them by placing herself in every picture, sometimes very in a very accented, sometimes only in an indicative way but always keeping herself incognito.

Viktória Balogh appropriates, connects, overwrites in a playful composition and resumes a once started narrative. Her series called *Highlight* (2016) can be drawn as a parallel with her gestures. In this series, she used her pictures and photos from others and separated those in which a defect due to light infiltration was strong. She took advantage of the weaknesses of analogue photography by turning the details into reverse. The burnt-out parts became perfect for exposure; thus, she overwrote the original pictures again and recovered the errors. The *Immersing cross section* [*Elmélyülési keresztmetszet*] (2017) was created as an analogy for love and photography. The artist defines love as a cross-section of a process, showing us the intensity of emotions and intimacy from the romantic feeling of walking on clouds to the depths burnt in us. Love deepens by getting to know each other, the colour of the paper deepens by light, and the process materialises in a lyrical photogram. Her series *Untitled* (2017) was formed while experimenting with black and white photographic paper, that is raw material. The artist was interested in how the photographic paper reacts to light, the picture that changes continuously until it is finished, that does not capture permanency or the moment but rather the constant change.



Viktória BALOGH: *Master pieces from the world literature*, Palette, 2017, giclée print, 254,5x30 cm

Viktória BALOGH: *Garden*, 2018, print, 85x105 cm



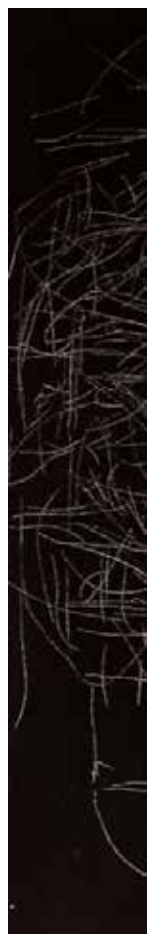
The *Garden* (2018) [*Kert*] series is about the manifestations of intergenerational yet practical forms of knowledge. Stepping out of a technicised world and turning to nature is depicted in the pictures taken on the land of her parents in Dunaszekcső and her grandparents in Dunafalva. She has photographed the work in the countryside and the seasonal change for a year and arranged the photos in a photobook. In the pictures, she captured the synthesis of the theoretical and practical intergenerational knowledge of her parents: value creation out of nothing, the garden, which is both a location and a way of life. Viktória Balogh does not idealise, but rather documents the daily (weekend) routine and tasks, yet, the signs of

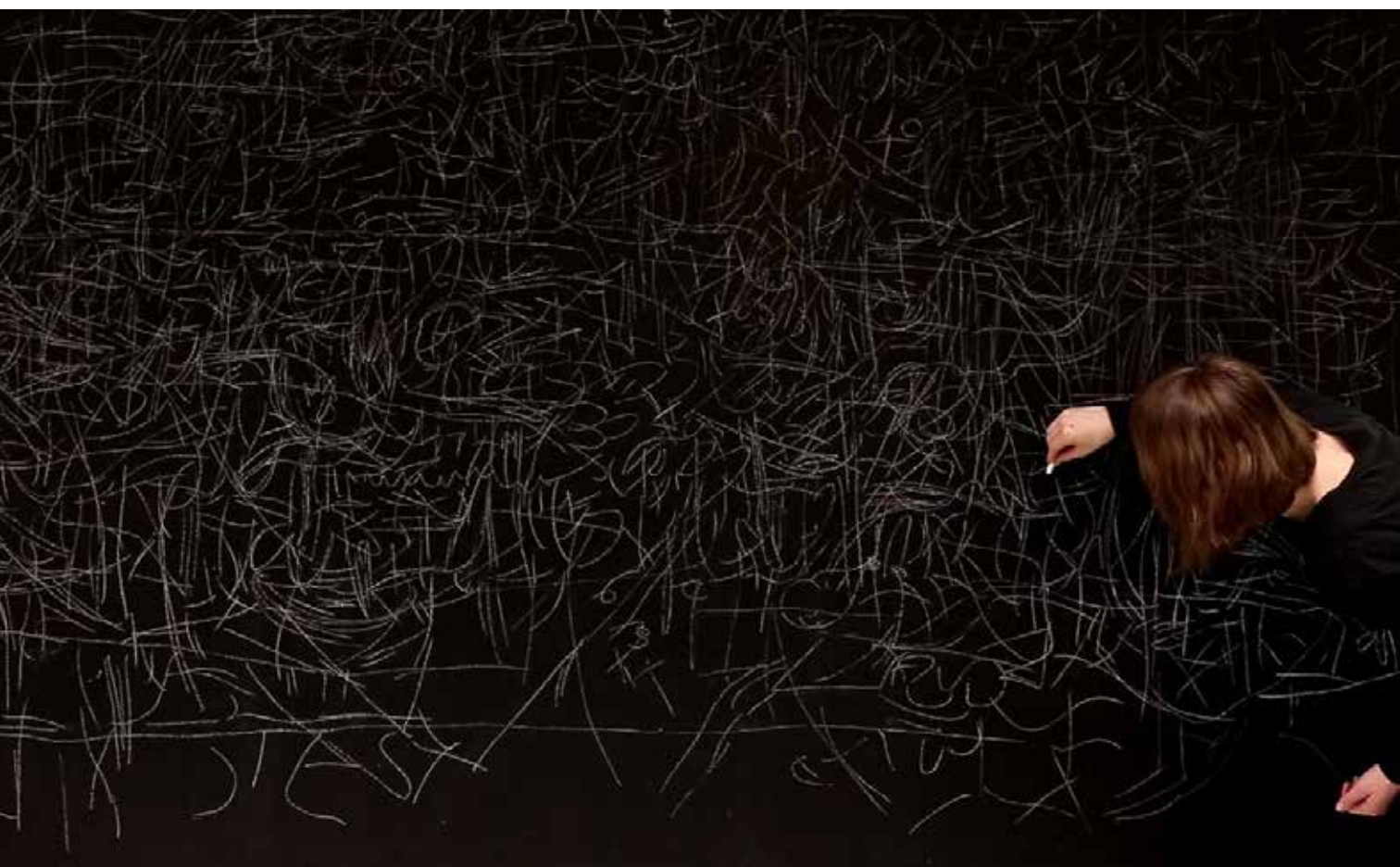
her approach and Rousseau's concept of nature are also undeniable. Temporality and the order of nature are leading the viewer, yet the monotony of the work is still accentuated. Balogh has arranged the pictures in a diary-like book, yet she is distancing herself in a certain way: she herself does not appear in the photos, and her parents are only present in a few pictures. The seasons and the periodically changing seasonal works are reminiscent of the Book of Hours from the Middle Ages. In her series, Viktória Balogh examines the possible links and layers of how to connect the reality of everyday life and that of artistic reality, by appropriating and taking pictures of lost and found objects and surfaces.



Viktória BALOGH: *Aspect*, 2016, installation (2x3x7 m)

Viktória BALOGH: *Untitled process*, 2017, performance, video, 27 minutes





Viktória BALOGH: *Knowledges*, Scenes, 2017, giclée print, mounted, 72X105 cm



Máté DOBOKAY: *hommage à Andreas Gursky*, 2014, mounted piece of duct tape, 18x18cm

Máté Dobokay (1988) does not describe himself as a photographer but rather as a visual artist who is working with the medium of photography. He is well-known in the Hungarian art scene: he has had several solo and group exhibitions, was one of the finalists of the Leopold Bloom Award, and in the year of 2018 he won the main prize of the portfolio review of the Budapest Photo Festival. He was also selected as a young talent for the EU photography platform, Futures; served as a board member of the Association of Hungarian Photographers between 2014 and 2017, got nominated for the Lucien and Rodolf Hervé Award and the Esterházy Art Award. He is mainly interested in the geometric abstract style of the second half of

the 20th century, *colour field painting*, monochrome painting, and the methods of transition of medium theory experiments into photography. Dobokay drifted away from classical imaging at an early stage: he does not reproduce reality, he creates it. He is not trying to capture a sight or a moment; rather, he is interested in the possibilities of working with the raw materials of photography. Among the photographers, Gursky had the most significant influence on him. In his work, *hommage à Andreas Gursky* (2014) which is on the verge of being a gag to the iconic artwork called *Rhein II* by Gursky, referenced by using a piece of mounted insulating tape, however, beyond this, he was inspired by the genre of painting, too.

While there were ongoing attempts to redefine abstract art in contemporary visual arts over the past decades, it were not his contemporaries but [painter] Simon Hantai who had the most considerable influence on the young photographer. His direct treatment of the material left an especially significant impact, evidently, the practice is also a crucial part of Dobokay's creative process. Image creating has to be understood literally when talking about Máté Dobokay: he is working in a lab with chemicals, and material experiments are an unavoidable part of both his mindset and creative process. He distances himself from nature, from the representational character of photography, and creates, irrespective of space and time. He is studying phenomena; he is changing processes and is thinking inside them. He was particularly intrigued by the pliage technique in the works of Hantai, and, in his series *hommage à Hantai Simon* (2013), the same use of material and folding technique become the elements of imaging. "When looking at Hantai's method, the artist isn't that much of a creator but rather a manual worker, who is only supporting the process of painting, who subjects his work to the material and adapts to it."²



Máté DOBOKAY: *hommage à Hantai Simon III/2*, 2017, chemigram, 100x90 cm, photo: Biró Dávid

Máté DOBOKAY: *hommage à Hantai Simon III/4*, 2017, chemigram, 60x50 cm, photo: Biró Dávid



The same approach prevails with Dobokay. In the case of his contrasting black and white chemigrams, the photo can be viewed as its own print. Manuality and being without a camera is not a depiction of reality, but rather it is a transposition of a medium theory experiment into a photograph, whereas the foldings create abstract patterns, reminiscent of either the micro and macro cosmos of Gunter Rambow or biomorphic abstract prefigurations.



Máté DOBOKAY: *Spots_20*, 2014, chemigram, instant film, 9,5x7,3 cm

With his series called *Spots* (2014), he exceeds the Hantai influence, and the polaroid becomes his chosen medium. He renounces the realistic perpetuation of nature to a degree as we see non-existent landscapes in his pictures, which were created due to the characteristics of raw materials and the intervention of the artist. Máté Dobokay interrupts the polaroid development process and starts to create landscape-like pictures by folding. There is no exposition, only the connection of both papers, proving that we not only can capture existing things, but imaging is also possible without involving reality. The artist builds on the viewer's familiarity with painting traditions during the process of receiving: he develops the work based on elements and forms representing and reflecting classic prefigures. The created landscapes are born by controlling the development process and by unified lighting. Thus the connection between the raw material and the artist is highlighted.

Máté Dobokay's bachelor's diploma work, *Gray* (2015–2016), is a series of 13 chemigrams, enlarged to the same grey tone. Instead of referring to these as a photo series, the term “a series of photo-material images” is a more precise description. The pictures represent only themselves; colour is present on the pictures as an imaging element. Dobokay examines to what extent it is possible to transpose the monochrome painting tradition to the field of photography.

The blurring of the boundaries of photography and painting occurs by bringing materials and objects into the foreground. The artist concedes a significant momentum to the paper: the polaroid and baryta papers dried by themselves, and thus gained their shape, summoning the prefiguration related to the *shaped canvas*. The final presentation form of the photos was then created independently of the artist.

In his work, *R255G204B204.doc* (2017), Máté Dobokay has also passed classic imaging: in this case, he worked with texts. He converted a simple document into an image by choosing the same colour for the text and the background. The piece called *Field of Colours* (2017) pushes ahead with the lyrical monochrome direction, reflecting on the traditions of *colour field painting*. He worked with the Instax technique and used colour filters when developing the pictures, thus changing the colour scale of the photos. The luminograms do not represent a precise object; thus the objects own medial nature comes to the fore again. As a reflection on the relation between the picture and the object, the colourful filters are part of the installation, while at the same time, these objects help in interpreting the photos.

Máté DOBOKAY: *Spots_01*, 2014, chemigram, instant film, 7,3x9,5 cm



His series *TAIE* (2014) is directed at depicting nature as it is, with a lyrical tone, even though it may be reductive. Máté Dobokay takes pictures without a lens and disregards the actual, real view. The light beaming through the hole forms the pictures: their composition is defined by the seemingly endless line of the horizon and light effects. In the pictures, the environment loses its nature of being a landscape, and thus, the images are defined by motifs of painterly gestures. The meditative endlessness of the photos highlights the foggy, mystic atmosphere of the landscape. Dobokay creates endlessly abstract landscapes because he is interested in how real landscapes can be reproduced in their purest forms. Almost like a paintings, the series *Waves* (2017), dealing with the relationship between moving and still images, goes even further: he created contact sheets from videos of wave movements recorded with a cell phone. In the monochrome series, the relation between the motion picture and still image, digital and analogue imaging, are confronted.

Máté DOBOKAY: *TAIE No. 4*, 2014, giclée print, 120x150 cm

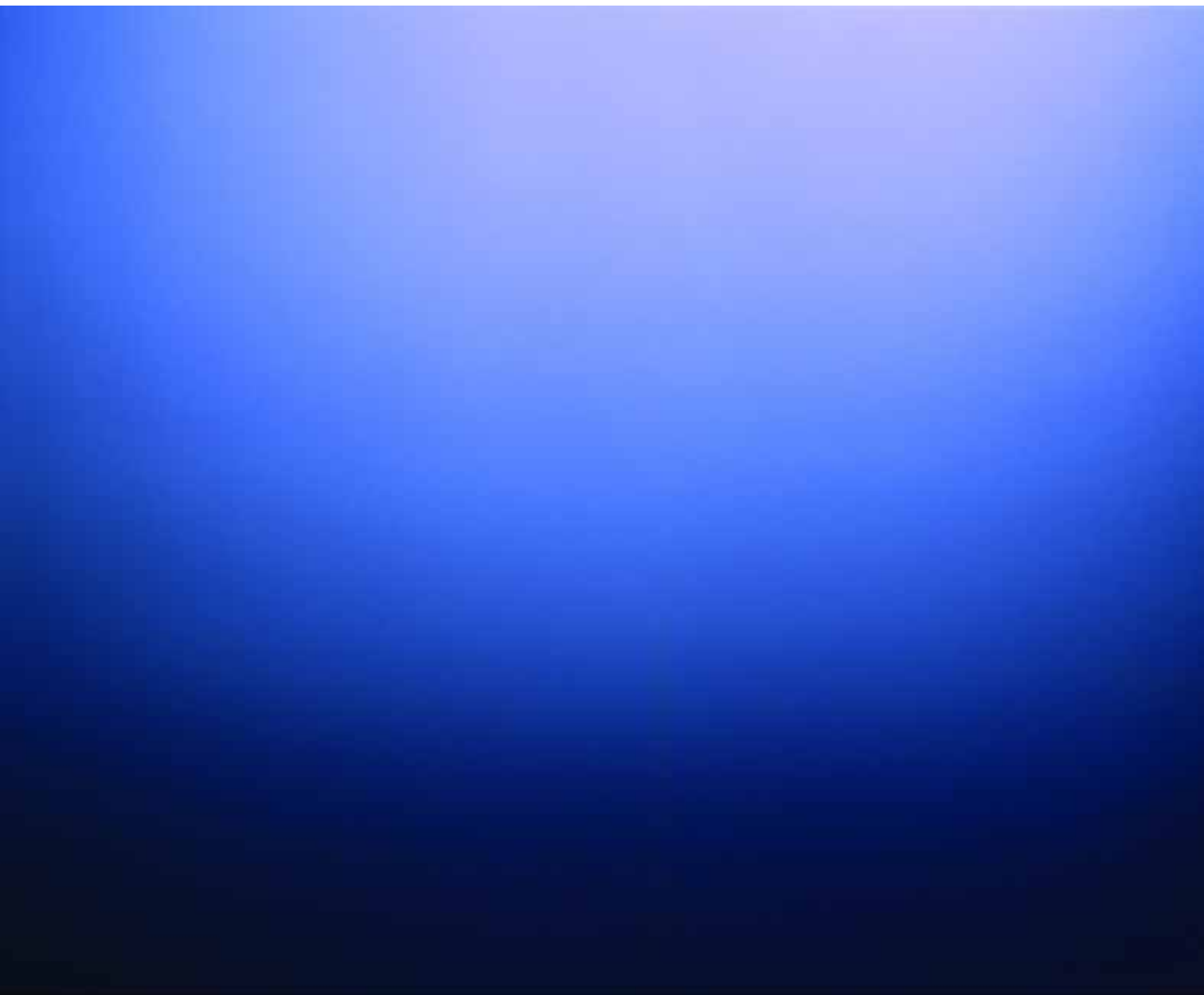


The experimentation of photography as a medium can be observed in every one of Máté Dobokay's series. Almost all of his series is a work in progress, and he always works on several assignments at the same time. He enriches the notion and understanding of photographic pictures with his minimalistic toolset and reductive approach.

¹ The original article was published in 2018 in the Fotóművészet magazine.

² Ágnes BEREZ: „Érintők Hantaihoz,” *Artmagazin*, 2008/4.

Máté DOBOKAY: *TAIE No. 9*, 2014, giclée print, 120x150 cm



RITA SOMOSI

IT
MAY
CONTAIN
H U M A N
IN
TRACES,
AS
WELL

REAL ABSTRACTIONS

AND ABSTRACTED

REALITIES IN

B A L Á Z S

D E I M ' S

PHOTO SERIES



Balázs DEIM: *Minimal 15*, 75x50 cm, giclée print, 2015



He started to take photographs at the age of 10, when his father, who also was a photographer, gave him a small-film Chinon camera. At the time, he mainly photographed his surroundings in Szentendre, but his love and interest in the city come through to this very day in some of his works. His constructive approach can partly be linked to the city's classical art traditions, and perhaps a little bit more to his visual artist grandfather, Pál Deim. Balázs Deim thinks in pure compositions and he does not like distracting details. His visual purity is due to long exposures and a lot of hard work: "parallels do not come by themselves," says the

artist. He is an experimenter who is interested in alternative imaging processes. Most of his pictures go through many types of media until they reach their final form, but he also enjoys visual games: he creates photographic mosaics and experiments with polaroid transfer. Novus Art School Budapest changed a lot in how he perceives art, but he became a fully-fledged artist at Kaposvár University, studying photography. His diploma thesis, called *Surveillance System* [Térfigyelő rendszer], has been featured in numerous exhibitions in recent years, including at the European Month of Photography in Vienna and Luxembourg.



Balázs DEIM: *Minimal 4*, 75x50 cm, giclée print, 2015



Balázs DEIM: *Minimal 10*, 75x50 cm, giclée print, 2015

One of his earliest series, *Ghost town* (2008), is also related to Szentendre. Instead of the city's typical sites or motifs, he was more interested in the deserted suburbs and industrial areas. The visual fabrics of the series reminiscent of a film still leaning towards the mystique: time stops in the black and white pictures, nothing happens, even the sky frames the black horizon in the streets of no man's land suburbia, placing the fragmentation and the texture of the buildings in the foreground. The phenomenon of depletion also appears in his series of skyscrapers called *Construct* (2014-2016): however, here, instead of examining one specific city, the artist chose to take a look at several living spaces and cityscapes and studied the changes induced by the acceleration of urbanisation along with the socio-cultural implications thereof. Instead of individuality, the grey and standardised environment dominate, and human presence is only detectable in the form of flashing lights.

Balázs DEIM: *Panel 10*, 52x35 cm, giclée print, 2016





Balázs DEIM: *Panel 16*, 52x35 cm, giclée print, 2016

Balázs Deim's *Panel* series (2016) focuses on the socialist model and the milieu of the uniformed dwellings of grey housing estates. These are the pictures before the wave of modernisation, where the structure and atmosphere of monumental buildings are reminiscent of a forgotten era. Lamps shine on the dark horizon, colourful lights light up the grey blocks as a symbol of human existence, and the artist attempts to save something from the ambience of the old estates to the present before they would be repainted. The *Windows* (2010) series confronts us with a former military launch base perishing in the Pilis Mountains. He took photos of the rooms of the abandoned secret complex reserved for air defence purposes with the help of some light through the windows as if time had stopped for a second, there are objects thrown on the ground, debris and graffiti on the crumbling walls. At first, nature appearing in the window frame makes the impression of a two-dimensional landscape, only the tendrils and branches crawling in indicate the unstoppable power of nature. The gesture of the human footprint appears through the relationship between nature and the built environment, in an inverse manner with lush nature forcing its way in through the windows.

While human presence is notable in Deim's series, the representation of portrayals appears only in his *Photo me* (2012) series. Made during his studies at Kaposvár University, this is a series of ID pictures — took in photobooths by his models — enlarged to huge sizes. The pictures are straightforward yet disturbing at the same time. Everyone who takes her/his ID picture in their hands is confronted with a very raw imprint of reality. Deim realised this identity analysis through an impersonal (automatic) medium, while he placed himself in the role of the observer, in a most objective position.

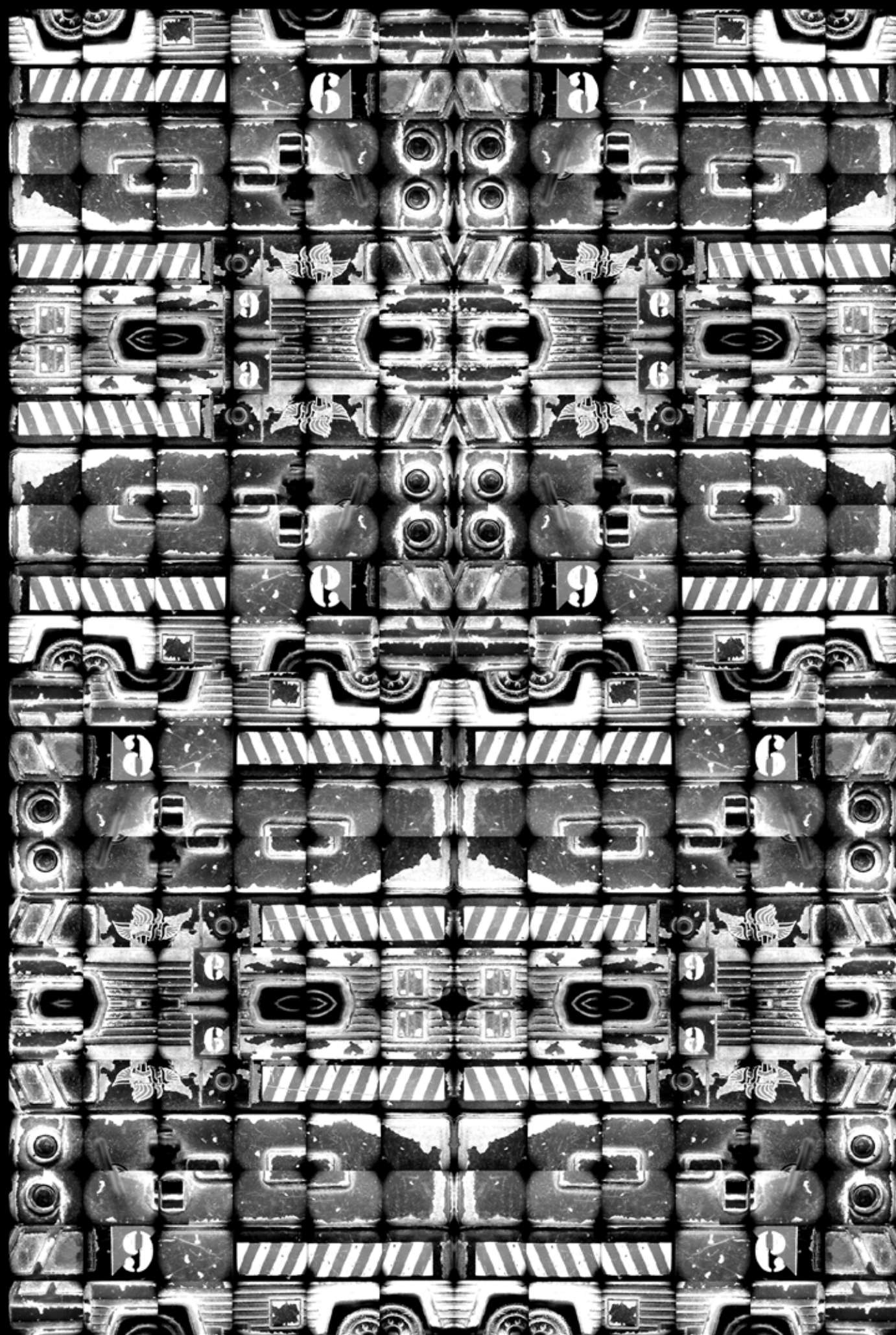


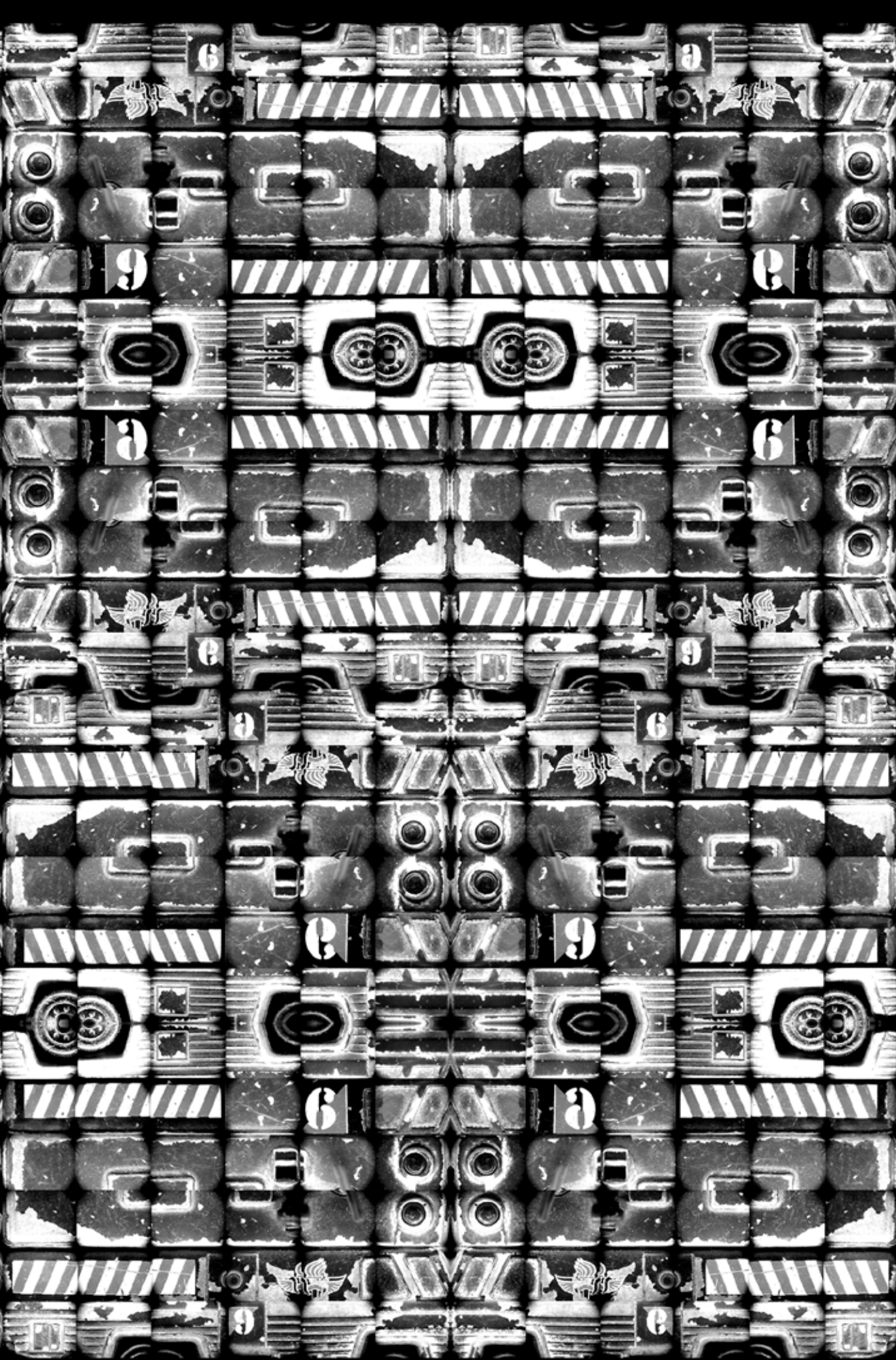
Balázs Deim became known for many people thanks to his *Surveillance System* (2013) series, which he made as a closing project of his years in Kaposvár. He observed at Budapest's lively squares and intersections, such as Széll Kálmán tér, Blaha Lujza tér or Nyugati pályaudvar with camera obscura equipments made from beer cans. He placed several cameras on each square, high up on telephone poles or street lamps. The intention of the artist was the creation of an inverse surveillance system, which he then connected with the technique of solarography. The photographic papers, placed in the cameras, were left for three months on the busy squares, where due to long exposition the tiny movements vanished, and only objects and buildings remained on the recordings and the trace of the motion of the Sun, creating a drawing-like rainbow-coloured figures. So the final images encompasses the visual signs of the passing days and the weather at the same time. The observed places are in motion, yet there is a certain kind of static picturesqueness to them. The pictures, which took months to make, are dense imprints of everyday life and time, where every strip represents a day. The gesture and tools of observation, the surveillance cameras have become natural in both public and private areas, both inside and outside. Balázs Deim's series *CCTV* (2015) is a portrait series of cameras, which were formerly known as a creative tool, but today they became the symbol of observation, power and everyday control. However, there is a twist, too: instead of their invisible role they now become the objects of observation.

Balázs DEIM: *Surveillance system 6*, 80x80 cm, solargraphy, 2013

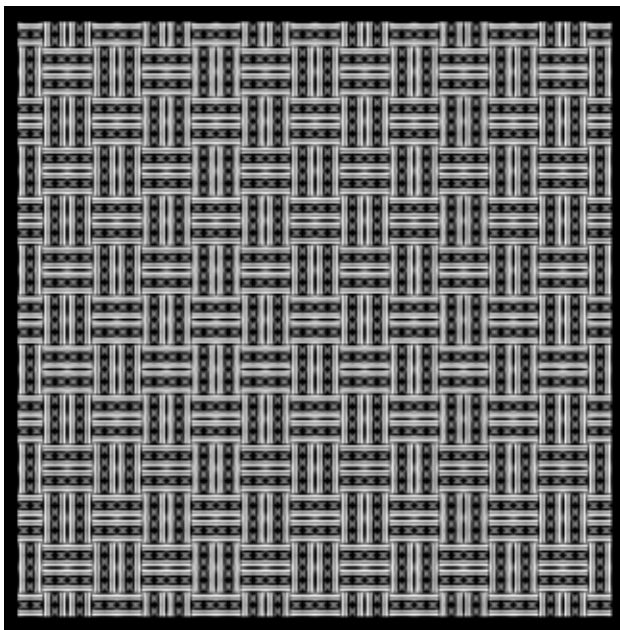


Balázs DEIM: *Surveillance system 1*, 80x80 cm, solargraphy, 2013



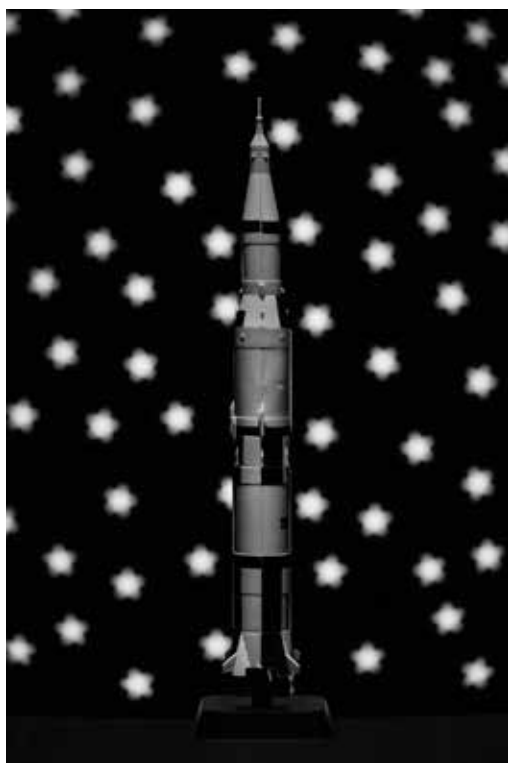
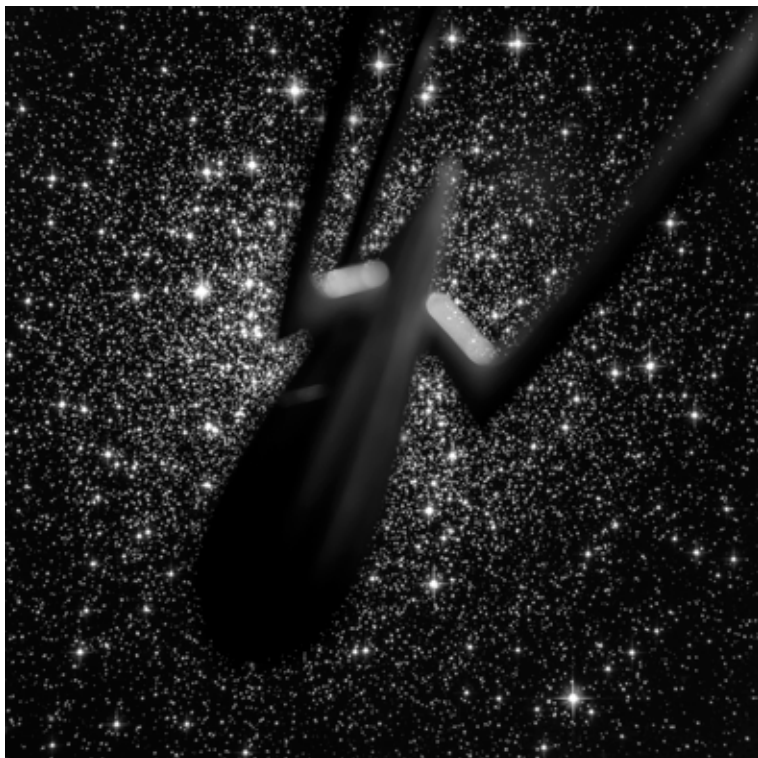


Imre Drégely's approach had a significant impact on Deim: his series called *Mosaic* [Mozaik] (2009) grew out of a task Drégely had given to him. The viewer loses orientation pretty quickly in his pictures as the pulsating view and sequential units of the compositions sometimes use more concrete, sometimes more abstract, visual elements. Kaleidoscope-like textures are revealed as macro mosaics of various objects or of a watercourse compressed in carpet-like compositions. He plays with sharpness, details, or the viewer's perception as well as the objects of the picture: thus, even the sewer cover becomes square-like. The process of abstraction becomes the focus in the series called *Minimal* (2014–2015), where Deim reduced parts of the urban environment to constructive compositions. Tending towards monochrome, the series *Memories from space* (2012), made with polaroid transfer technique, depicts barely recognisable object (for example, a red washbasin turned upside down), which become abstract compositions when transmitted to paper.



In his latest photo series, *Space* (2017), well-known everyday objects are figured: toys, lamps, a lemon squeezer, pancakes, or a memorial to astronauts who died heroic deaths. Compositions give a new context to the banal objects and are becoming the documentation of a fictional space journey. Deim plays with the perception of the receiver by turning a pancake into the full moon and golf balls to celestial bodies; at the same time, however, he also abstracts, while maintaining the substantive link. The artist wanted to depict wanderlust and the nostalgia for the Cold War through the metaphorical interpretation of space travel. Balázs Deim is interested in the city as a structure, texture or a term of expression: he uses the built environment to present humans.

Balázs DEIM: *Mosaic Water Mosaic*, 50x50 cm, giclée print, 2009



Balázs DEIM: *Flying object*, 40x40 cm, giclée print, 2017
 Balázs DEIM: *Monument*, 53x80 cm, giclée print, 2017
 Balázs DEIM: *Globe*, 60x60 cm, giclée print, 2017
 Balázs DEIM: *Rocket 1*, 40x60 cm, giclée print, 2017



Dezső Szabó: *Limits of Light*
5 September – 22 September 2017
Vintage Gallery

GYÖRGY CSÉKA

Basic Instinct.

DEZSŐ SZABÓ: LIMITS OF LIGHT



THERE IS A BEHIND-THE-SCENES PHOTO AT THE BEGINNING OF DEZSŐ SZABÓ'S ALBUM *KÉPEK/PHOTOGRAPHS* 1998–2006¹, WHERE THE PHOTOGRAPHER LOOKS THROUGH A HOLE SIMILAR TO AN AEROPLANE WINDOW: TO BE MORE PRECISE, WITH HIS WORK-TOOL, THE CAMERA, ON A TRIPOD NEXT TO HIM, HE OBSERVES WITH GREAT ATTENTION. DUE TO THE NARROW DYNAMIC RANGE OF THE PHOTOGRAPHIC RAW MATERIAL, SHADY PARTS ARE DISCERNIBLE, BUT THE WORLD BUILT UP BY THE PHOTOGRAPHER FOR THE SAKE OF THE PHOTOGRAPHIC CREATION IS INDISTINCT. IT IS ONLY MILKY-WHITE MIST, THE NOTHING ITSELF.

Dezső Szabó's entire oeuvre, created not only by photographic means, in a sense, can be interpreted as research into the foundations of art, representation and imaging, as an almost continuous and consistent reduction, in order to reach the limits of representation (thus *zero degree*), through new, different methods.

A basis of his research is the non-mimetic notion of photography, which he describes as follows: "An essential characteristic of photographic imaging is that — similarly to the human eye — it creates an image through the laws of physics, usually on a flat surface. This is why the photographic image looks like an objective copy of the world: due to the similarities of imaging and the objective elements of the process. However, this is only myth and illusion. The image is not identical to the world. A picture of any origin is reduced information; thus it is an abstraction."²

Another idea of his, determining (inter alia) the technical conditions of his work — thus the fact that he does not deal with purely digital imaging — is similar to that of Flusser: "The information generated electronically hides its essence, we do not comprehend its operation, it requires a high level of scientific and technical knowledge to understand it. Other features of an analogue photographic image, thus a real photographic image, are better able to point out substantial phenomena (concepts)."³

Turning from (monochrome) painting towards photographic imaging, Szabó's deeply image theoretical work can be defined as a kind of simulationism up until 2013, as he never turned toward the sight of *real*, whatever that meant, readymade or found, but he constructed it for himself and for the lens. He built up an illusion in order to take photographs of it, or rather, in order to analyse the imaging process, breaking it down

into parts and basic elements, down to the smallest grain of the image. Perfect simulation has never been his object. He never sought to create an aestheticist, self-serving *trompe-l'œil* type of photography. On the one hand, he deliberately and consistently created *imperfect*, faulty compositions; on the other hand, he always revealed and unveiled the creation itself, its stages and process, presenting the pictures not only as simple behind-the-scenes photos, and not only as secondary and ancillary to the works of art. Another characteristic of his constructions was his infinite mediatedness and reflexivity, as his compositions and models were also constructed compositions, spectacles, simulations produced by the media apparatus, images replacing and completely excluding the *real*. As he himself quoted Flusser (and Warhol) in an interview in 1998: "All images are good...,"⁴ as all of them are perfectly empty. His constructions, following the most important types of media images, simulated, decomposed and analysed extreme, eccentric, unconventional, but considering the media-occurrence, still common natural, human or social phenomena. In a certain sense, however, they conveyed *basic* experiences. Storm, volcanic eruption, lightning, accidents, decay and destruction, the conquest of the unknown, etc. During his simulation experiments, he got to an almost self-extinguishing endpoint in his series *High Voltage* (2012), where he did not replace the presented natural phenomenon with something else and did not create it by deceiving the eye, but he created the lightning by himself, with a homemade Tesla transformer. This way he has also passed imaging to a self-endangering stage, similarly to Hiroshi Sugimoto, who used a 400 thousand volts Van De Graaff generator to prepare his series *Lightning Fields* (2006–2014), and during which work he was struck by the electric current several times.

Dezső Szabó's last three exhibitions and series can be regarded as a change in his imaging method, but not in his image theoretical thinking.

All three series are characterized by the elimination of simulation, constructed composition, radical medium intervention, and the image's image-object, and they actually examine the photographic image's essential elements, such as the object and its image, more exactly imprint, negative and positive, the image carrier, its basic chemical elements, the light-sensitive surface and the light, in this way reaching the limit of photographic imaging and beyond, to the luminogram through photogram and chemical painting.

Each photo of the series suggest that Dezső Szabó somehow, but in different ways, goes back to the theory of monochrome painting, as some of the series, mainly the chemical paintings of *Exposed* (2016), include monochrome paintings.

¹ SZABÓ, Dezső: *képek/ photographs*, 1998–2006, Vintage Galéria, Budapest, 2007.

² SZABÓ, Dezső: „Exposed”, *Balkon*, 2016/9., 28.

³ SZABÓ, Dezső: „Black & White”, *Balkon*, 2016/9., 28.

⁴ “For me, it is the method of Andy Warhol that demonstrate the best the essence of the thing, as he randomly exposed with a Polaroid camera attached to his hand by adhesive tape. All images are good, says Flusser, and Warhol's mechanical-ideal, the complete randomness expresses the essence of a photograph and shows its emptiness.” *Terepgyakorlat*, Livia Páldi's interview with Dezső Szabó and András Gálik, *Balkon*, 1998/7–8., 23.

⁵ SZABÓ, Dezső: „Exposed”, *Balkon*, 2016/9., 28.

The three series so far form a triptych, presenting different aspects of Szabó's image theoretical questions. The creator consistently reflects on these aspects, as all his series are accompanied by a precise, strict and theoretically sophisticated text, which contains his ideas and theoretical presuppositions, facilitating the interpretation, but, at the same time, rendering it more difficult.

In his series *Black & White* (2015), Szabó, contrary to his earlier creation method, reaches back to one of the most basic, most fundamental methods of photographic imaging: imaging without a camera, thus creating images not in accordance with the law of optics: the photogram, which is not considered to be photography by many people, because it is located on the verge of a photo. The image capture is reduced to light, a light-sensitive surface, with the object leaving an imprint on it, thus creating the experience of a sort of radical directness, as it cannot be said that there is anything simulated or constructed on the image. Everything is what it is meant to be: the imprint of an object on a chemical element. The image's object is literally *inscribed*, engraved in the emulsion by physical contact, and an apparently obvious relationship is formed. The objects of photograms are reflections of the previous series, as they put on paper the objects, object-combinations, and models of simulations. Here, too, the relationship switches between a work of art and the accessories necessary for its creation, which are, in theory, secondary and to be discarded and destroyed. What was an accessory of a simulation, an element of a complex reference system before, an image of light, now almost directly and realistically enters into the space of the image, thus into an entirely different and new context through its physical imprint.

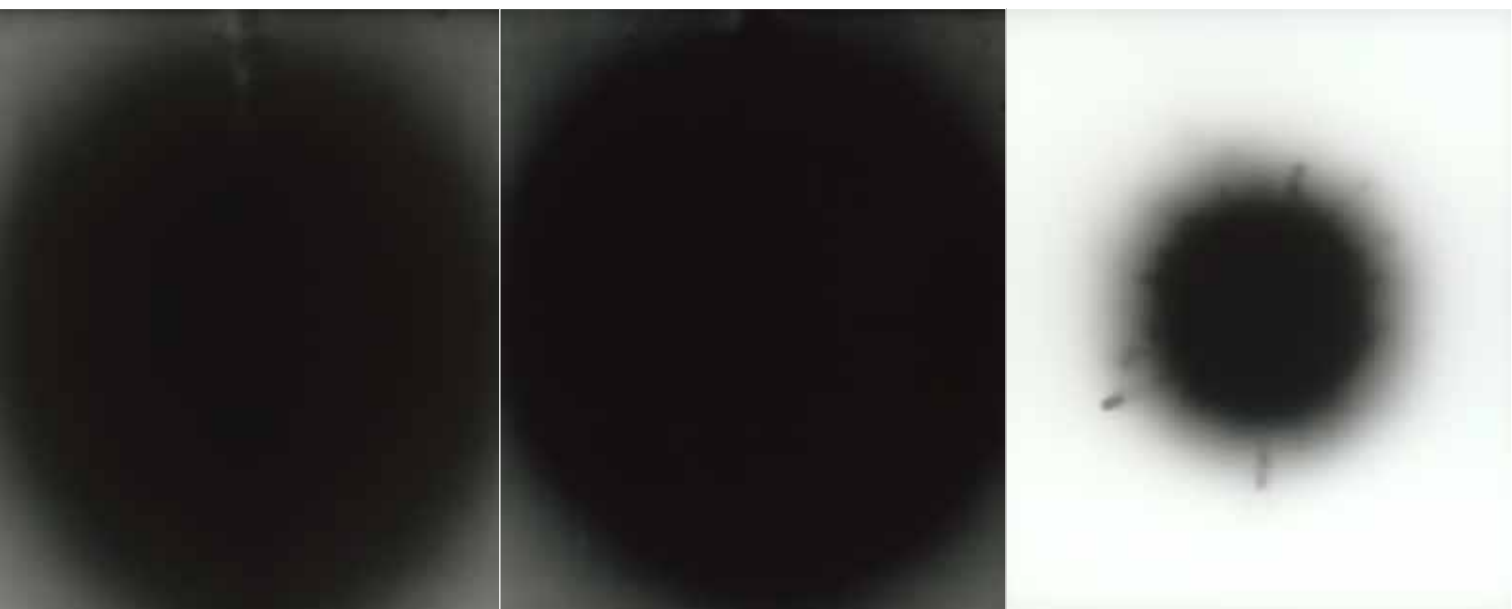
In the series (or rather stage) *Exposed* (2016), Dezső Szabó further reduces the composition, the imaging destination, withdrawing from the contact not only the mediation of the photographic apparatus, but the image object as well, as for Szabó, instead of the object being the concept, the direction of questioning is (was) what is important. In this series, he breaks up with the terrain of photography in a more radical way, more precisely, he eliminates the border between photography and painting, and creates a both visually and theoretically exciting hybrid: chemical painting. Light, photographic paper and chemicals are the only imaging elements of this series. Szabó's asceticism and conceptual rigour do not allow the aestheticist to play with chemicals, the elaboration of surfaces known from abstract expressionist painting, unique imprints, etc. Images are *created* only by drips of chemicals, by gravity, but, paradoxically, the image *takes place*, not on the surface, but in the surface: "Unlike painting (e.g. action painting) the »image« is not created on the surface, but in the surface itself, in the photographic emulsion (silver-gelatin print), in a physicochemical way."⁵

We do not see *something* on the pictures, there is nothing to distract or to disregard, to lead outside, to talk about something else; everything is about the picture itself, which is *here* and *this way*, closing the look in its emulsion. There is no other point than this filled-in emptiness, which flows from the chemistry, from these drips.

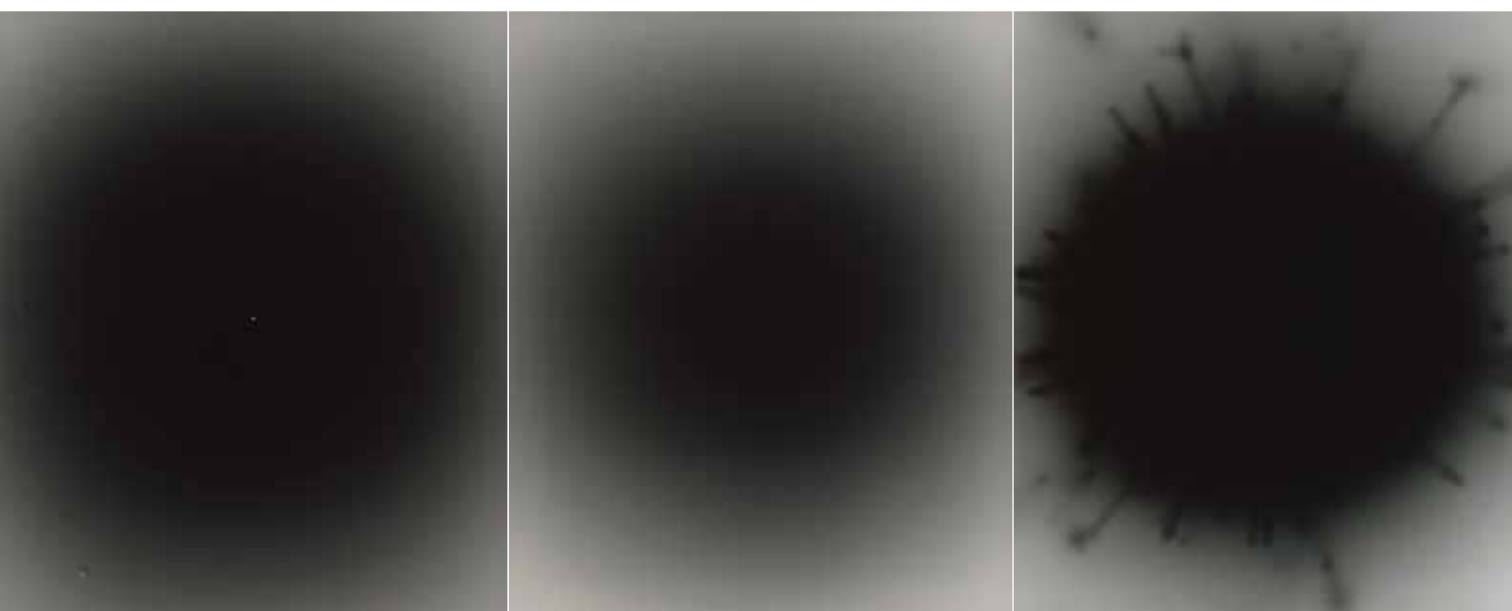
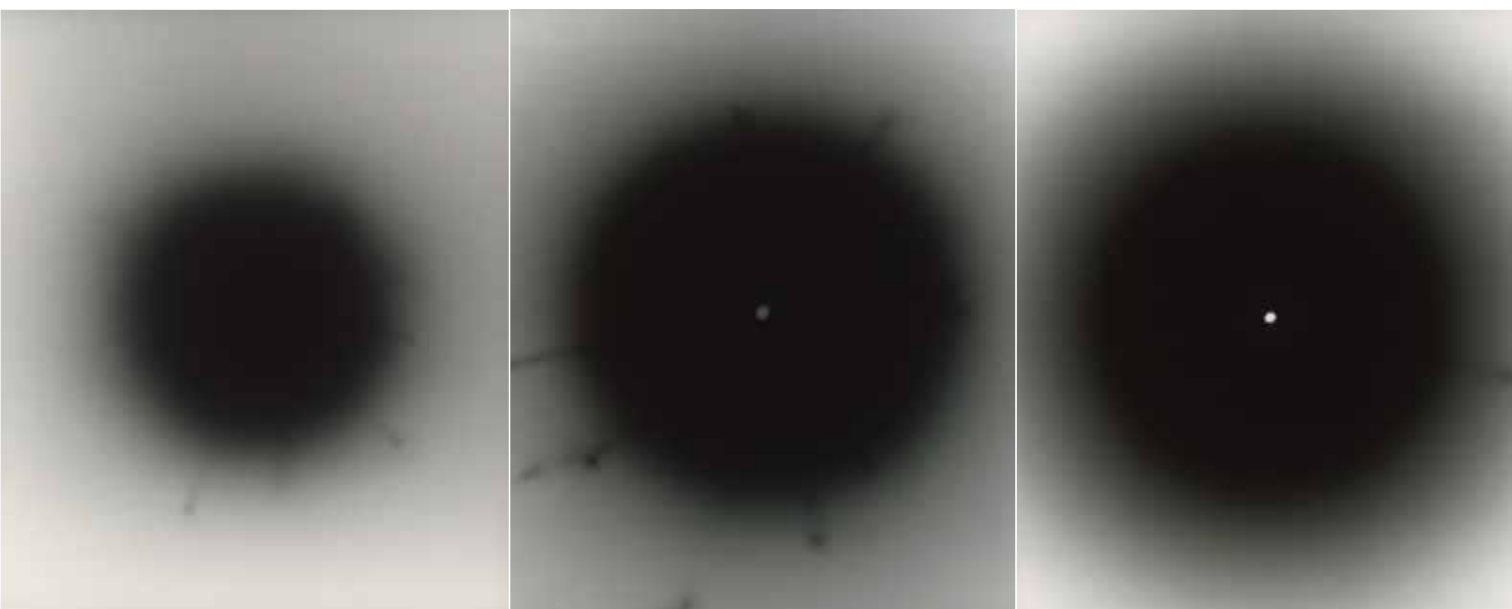
In the images of the *Limits of Light* series (2017), Szabó focuses on the two aspects of imaging: light and light-sensitive surface. In a sense, he steps back from the reduction on the surface of *Exposed* (2016) and visualises the image's object again; however, in this case, the image's object is the light itself, the imprint of light. The artwork recalls the scientific, experimental, processual context of the earlier series, as light, the mark of which is *suffered by* the images, comes from pyrotechnic tools, thus we see the burn marks on the images, and the imprint of temporal processes as well. The artwork can be regarded as a supplement to the series *High Voltage* (2012), the radicalisation and the extension thereof to other territories; similarly to that case, in this case, the image is formed by and during the demonstration of a somewhat self-endangering physical experiment.

Looking at the images of combustion, we reach the limits of light in several ways; we actually see the scope of each combustion experiment's light on the paper, as the images are uncannily like those afterimages which we see when we look into the Sun or to any other powerful, blinding light source. We see the image, the spots of blindness, not-seeing on the pictures, or perhaps the eyeball itself, as if our gaze, instead of looking at the outside world, was looking into our own *eyeball*.

Dezső Szabó's radical experiments shed light on imaging, leading vision back into itself, into its basic conditions.



Dezső SZABÓ: *Limits of Light*, 2017, luminogram, silver print, 58x48 cm © Courtesy by Vintage Gallery



THE ORDER OF ILLUSION

GYÖRGY CSÉKA

ABOUT THE ART OF GÁBOR ŐSZ

“A work of art speaks about the things of the world in such a way that the things of the world disappear. A work of art speaks about the things of the world in such a way that the talk of the things of the world disappears.”¹

Miklós Erdély

“There is no image — whether drawn, mechanical, photographic or digital — that would be merely a passive projection; rather it always carries a constructive element in it which is derived from the sphere of the image and which is the result of the history of the sphere. The reason for this is that images never react to the object to be visualised alone, but always include the history of their creation.”²

Horst Bredekamp – Franziska Brons

Gábor Ősz's oeuvre opens up and goes around the issues of image, photographic image and representation with amazing consistency and at an artistic level. He is not interested primarily in the creation and further multiplication of pictures; mere aestheticisation or autotelism are the furthest from his artworks. He rather tries to examine and present the creation and the essence of the image. More precisely, he tries to pose questions, as a good question contains the answer in itself should there be a *singular* comforting answer to any question.

Ősz creates photographs, films or installations by going back before the representation, to its preconditions. His reflexion, his analysis recurring to the medium and its mode of being, however paradoxically, materializes most cases in high aesthetic quality, rich and sensually enjoyable artworks, and does not remain at the level of a more ascetic, didactic theoretical reflection, which basically regards the artwork only as a tool or an illustration. At the same time, this is one of the traps that he successfully avoids, this is why his artwork





Gábor Ősz: Installation view at Gallery Vintage, Budapest 2018, with work *SPOMEN A/1*. (Cube), Camera-obscura, colour negative, Archival print, Over-all-size: 292x219 cm, Each: 73x73 cm, 2016-17, Camera (Cube), 2017, Plywood, plastic sheets, clamp clip, Aluminium folie; 23x23x23 cm, Vintage Gallery, Budapest, 2018 Courtesy, Vintage Galéria, Budapest. © Gábor Ősz

can be one of the most important — and by most standards outstanding — performance of contemporary art.

When we look at his series, i.e. the issues raised by him, perhaps the first thing we notice is the consistency with which he grasps and opens up issues within each series, but also in the context of more series as well. His range of ideas and the context of his art could be considered constant. He uses his material, and elaborates and develops his ideas in a very economical way, and reverts to them even after

years, thus creating a connection between the groups of works.

For this reason, his oeuvre can be interpreted and arranged from various directions and along various narratives, either following the conventional, biographical chronology, from the very beginning up to this day, or in a reverse order, moving backwards from his most recent work, or along the lines of new issues. I am trying to take a closer look at the most essential focal points of Gábor Ősz's career in the latter way.

His most recent work, *Spomen's*³ topics, or rather objects, are Yugoslavian World War monuments, which were erected by former Yugoslavian president Tito at the venues of partisan resistance fights. The unique feature of the monuments (*Spomenik*) is that, by contrast to the didactic, almost always figurative “socialist realist”, and therefore almost interchangeable works, not having any unique characteristic, which spread through the former socialist countries, these were unique, abstract, expressive, minimalist, thus, from many points of view, modern. In part, they are still considered to be modern today, thanks to the rise and popularity of brutalist architecture^{4, 5}. Surprisingly, they were built not immediately after the war, but a bit later, between 1960 and 1990. Their unique character and high standard are probably due to the fact that Yugoslavia went its separate way within the socialist camp; therefore, it enjoyed relative freedom. According to an excellent database⁶ launched in 2016, 96 of these monuments were preserved.

The issue which intrigued Gábor Ősz, as he explains in the text for his exhibition in the Vintage Galéria, was the following: “The question is: What can be the link between abstract forms and complex concepts, and transforming them into a kind of visual meaning, by means of dimensional transformation, if you like, how can the meaning of abstract concepts and forms be modified.”⁷

In his artwork, he prepared photography of three⁸ monuments; the shape of these monuments can be traced back to three primary forms: triangle, cube, and cylinder. He took photographs of each geometric body with a pinhole camera, specially prepared to the given form, shaped similarly to the form, in such a way so as to present an image along all sides of the given camera, thus capturing 360 degrees simultaneously. The series exhibited in the Vintage Galéria consists of images and their documentation, preliminary plans, drafts, and three cameras on tripods.

Gábor Ősz: *Installation view with SPOMEN C/1*. (Tetraeder), Camera obscura, colour negative, Archival print, Over-all-size: 228x198 cm; 2017 and Camera (Tetraeder), 2017, PVC, gaffe tape, Aluminium folie, tape, binder clip; 26x21x25 cm, Gallery Loevenbruck, Paris, 2018, Private Collection, France, Courtesy Galerie Loevenbruck, Paris. © Gábor Ősz

Gábor Ősz: *Installation view with SPOMEN B/3*. (Cylinder), Camera-obscura, colour negative, Archival print, Over-all-size: 248x196 cm; 2017, Camera (Cylinder), 2017, PVC, stainless steel, gaffe tape, Aluminium folie, tape, binder clip; 27x23x26 cm, Gallery Loevenbruck, Paris, 2018 Courtesy Galerie Loevenbruck, Paris. © Gábor Ősz





Thus the photographs of the three monuments were not taken in the usual way, as were, according to the creator, the photographs of Jan Kempenaers' album *Spomenik*⁹, used only as a starting point. That is to say, the photographer tries to record different views of a statue from an appropriate distance, in a faithful, undistorted, "objective" manner, since he is not able to present the full 3D view in 2D. Gábor Ósz's method is a kind of deconstructive analysis. He tries to interpret the statue's physical form and its message, which is by default difficult to link to the statue itself, in a way that further expands this gap and difference, breaking down the statues into further elements by preparing their 360 degrees "total" imaging entering with his camera into the statues' body instead of viewing them from the outside, which is then presented not in the form of a box (3D), but spread out on a two-dimensional plane. More precisely, he presents the large-scale prints of coloured negatives spread out on a plane.

The spread images are able to present countless projections of a statue on one plane; however, we have to give up coherent image, representation. Although in some sense they give the most exact representation of the statues, Ósz's images do not show the object itself, only a kind of "exploded view", a splintered, deconstructed image thereof, i.e. the object abstracted further, similarly to the statues, but in different way. Even if looking at the original statues, it is difficult to imagine what they mean, how they "mean" heroism, courage, and patriotism, the crumbs of meaning on Ósz's images are further spread, divided and moving away from each other. Ósz's analysis does not create a context for understanding, but he rather explodes this context. Like time does the same with the statues, since their today's perception has almost nothing to do with Yugoslavian partisan fights during the World War. Moving away in time, historical context falls off the abstract body of the statues, and they accept the meanings attributed to them by the recipients as if they were empty signs.



Gábor Ósz: *No. 8 Fécamp, 31.5.2000* (exposure time: 6h55min), Cibachrome, Camera Obscura, 126x235,5 cm, Private collection, Paris, Courtesy, Galerie Loevenbruck, Paris. © Gábor Ósz

Ósz's work, similarly to his earlier series, especially to his "epistemological" trilogy (*Ontology, Tautology, Fenomenology*), performs further meaning deprivation of the monuments, by multiplying and spreading their surface's, view's image in another medium. This way, the title of the work is paradoxical and ironic, thinking of the original context and meaning of the statues, which is extinguished by Ósz's *Spomen*, however, applying the "memory" on the existence of photography and the act of the artwork's preparation, it could be accurate. In a sense, photography is a memory, a trace, or rather the trace of a trace without origin. This way *Spomen* "recurses", not only upon the statue but upon itself as well: it reflects itself.

Ósz's method could be interpreted as a recontextualization, and his meaning-spreading deconstruction could be read as dark irony, since looking at the statues from today's horizon it is not enough to go back to World War II, but the years that have passed since the statues' completion should also be taken into account, including the other bloody, brutal, meaningless war, the Yugoslav war, which took place almost at the same time as the last statues were unveiled. This way the "original" meaning of statues gets an odd, desolate connotation, or entirely disappears, just like the state which originally gave them a home, which had built them.

Spomen can be connected to more contexts and issues within Ósz's oeuvre, but perhaps it is the closest to his *Camera*

Architectura projects, in this case, however, not in the context of architecture, but rather that of sculpture and in a not insignificant historical context. With the additional difference that, in this case, the statue, the building, appears as an image, and the camera, despite penetrating into it, is standing outside the building, separately, independent of it. In the case of the *Camera Architectura* projects, the construction, the building itself serves in one way or another as a camera, the building itself is the eye, the frame and the recipient of the view.

The first part of the trilogy mentioned earlier is *Liquid Horizon* (1999–2002). He prepared the photographs for this series by using bunkers transformed into pinhole cameras. Bunkers are part of the Atlantic Wall, the enormous defence system built by the German in World War II. Germany built the wall between 1942 and 1944 from Finland and Norway through Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, and the Channel Islands, to France and Spain. The Wall is about 5000 km long, however it does not mean an actually uninterrupted wall, but a series of fortifications, bunkers designed for a variety of purposes, which were built in order to foil the eventual landing by the allies, especially the United Kingdom. 15,000 bunkers were planned, but only 6,000 were built, and, as it turned out at the landings, mostly pointless, as they did not constitute a barrier to the troops.

The unique, ageless buildings were deeply recessed into the soil so as to provide as small a target as possible; the mostly concrete, to a lesser extent metal and wood, helmet-like, massive, minimalist constructions were designed for various functions. Paul Virilio, an author strongly impacting the art and the thinking of Ősz, has already typologized them in 1975 in his book *Bunker Archeology*,¹⁰ and photographed them too since the rich imagery of the volume was prepared by the author himself between 1958 and 1963. Bunkers could be simple observation posts or machine gun emplacements, they could serve as nests of anti-aircraft or anti-tank cannons, but could also contain radio stations, kitchens, various warehouses or crew quarters.

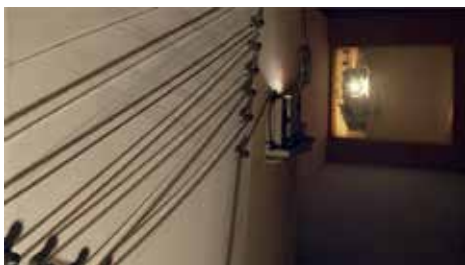
Ősz transformed some of the bunkers into *camera obscura*, i.e. into a camera. The use of this tool is paradigmatic considering his whole oeuvre. His image theoretical research, going back to the *before* of representation, brought with itself, on the one hand, the surrendering of merely self-serving imaging, and, on the other hand, related to this, the imaging itself. He thus denuded photography and traced it back to its basic elements. As when the objective is not aestheticisation, the most precise documentation and recording of the view, the faithful reflection of colours, clearness, richness of detail, etc., then the basic element of imaging is a box, and the hole in the box (and of

course photosensitive materials for recording images, paper, film, etc.). Which was naturally constructed by analogy with human vision, head, eye and skull.¹¹ Ősz reduces imaging to its primary conditions and tries to intervene in the management of the “apparatus”¹² as little as possible. He presents the functioning of the apparatus in its most essential and purest form. We see the same straightforwardness and ingeniousness in the fact that, in case of *Spomen*, he looked for statues which recalled the basic geometrical shapes.

Ősz appropriated bunkers in order to create, to record the view that the bunkers looked out on, or that which the soldiers, who stood guard in the bunker, for whom the bunker was built, (would) have seen. He creates the photos and modifies the view with minimal interference, which is typical of his subsequent works, too. He only places the apparatus in the (appropriate) position, so it can create the image almost by itself, revealing, exposing its operation this way. The creator’s genre “transgressivity” can already be observed in this project, and so his series cannot be called, or are not worth calling photographic, film, or installable projects, as he does not call himself a photographer or photographic artist since: “[...] I don’t want to create photographs, I only want to define phenomena. The created film or photograph is only the presence of an idea.”¹³

Gábor Ősz: **No. 5 Mers les Bains**, 19.9.1999 (exposure time: 5h15min), Cibachrome, Camera Obscura, 126x230,6 cm, Privat collection, Paris, Courtesy, Galerie Loevenbruck, Paris.
© Gábor Ősz





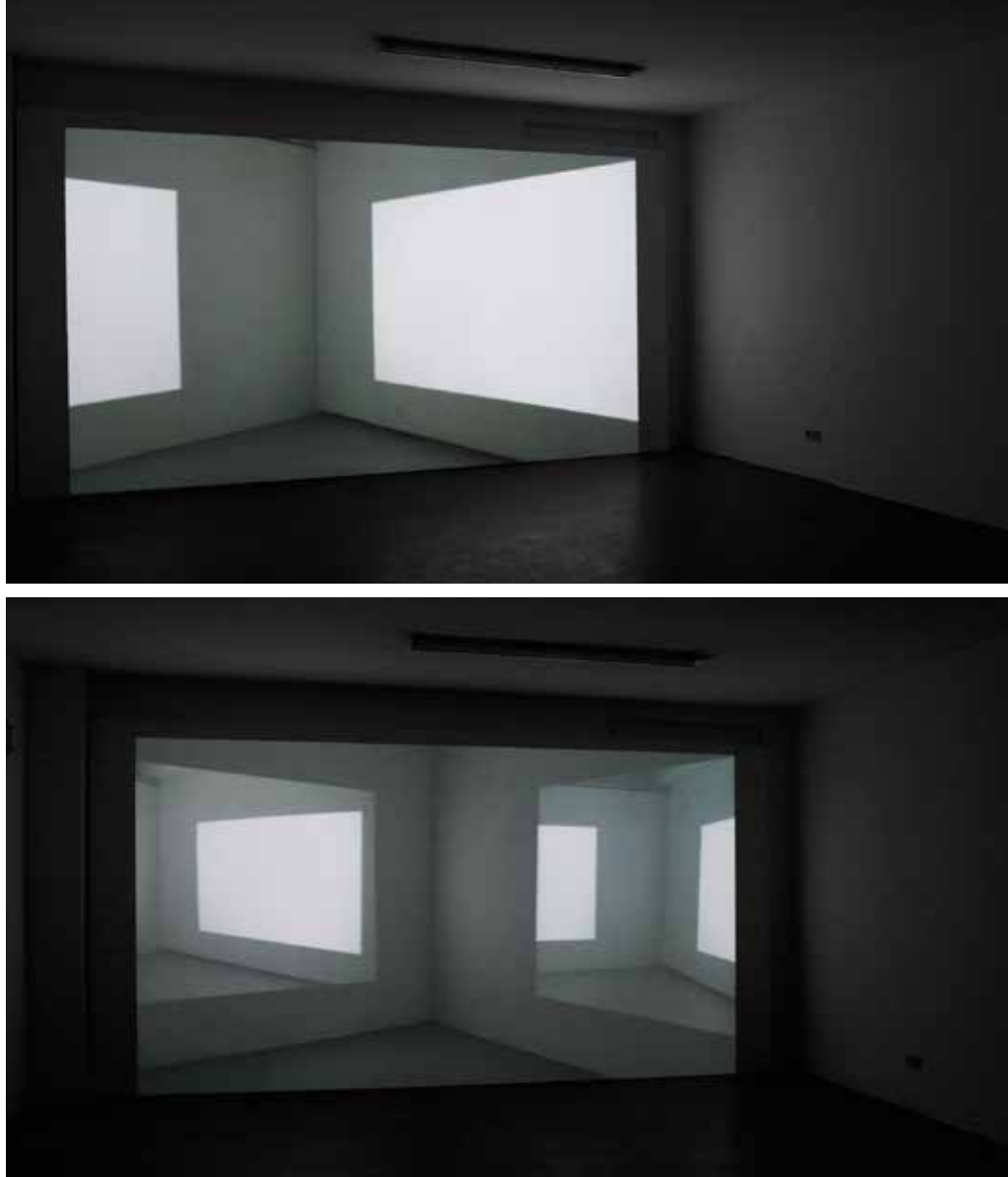
Gábor Ósz: *Ontology*, (2011) looped color single channel HD projection, 1080x1980, sound, 6'56", Collection Louis Vuitton, Paris, Courtesy, Van Der Grinten Galerie, Cologne. © Gábor Ósz

Gábor Ósz: *Installation view of Ontology at LUMO*, Budapest, 2013.
© Gábor Ósz

Here genre transgressivity is only latently perceptible, as, in spite of creating still images, due to the apparatus' characteristics, these still images are prepared over a long time (5-8 hours) condensing in themselves this way time, continuity and a kind of narrative, whereby each image implicitly contains a film. The title of the series is a reflection of this; the horizon is liquid, not only because of the sea but also due to the passing of time.

Photography by default records the momentary image of a view using light. Something that does not exist that way, that is already dead a moment later, as almost all theorists, not only Barthes, noted. Hans Belting writes: "The aura of unrecoverable hours of time remaining on the unrepeatable photo, however, results in "animation" suggestive of affective sympathy in the eyes of the spectator. The difference between the image and reality, which includes the mystery of absence that has been made visible, due to the distance in time, returns to the photograph, in which it appears before our eyes *post factum*."¹⁴

Gábor Ósz: *Installation view of Tautology*, (2012), looped colour single channel HD projection (1080x1980 cm), sound, 6'52", at Van Der Grinten Gallery, Cologne, 2012, Courtesy, Van Der Grinten Galerie, Cologne. © Gábor Ósz



However, Gábor Ósz's images record something disturbing, as they do not record one moment, not even a sequence of moments, like a film, but a collision, an accident, a collision of photography and film, a motion picture recorded in a still image, thus — a paradox. What we see is many times literally nothing, since everything is disappearing, moving, and motion and speed can only be recorded with an appropriate velocity apparatus, i.e. a video camera. However, in this case, the slowest possible apparatus records the speed of life and observation for hours in a single image.

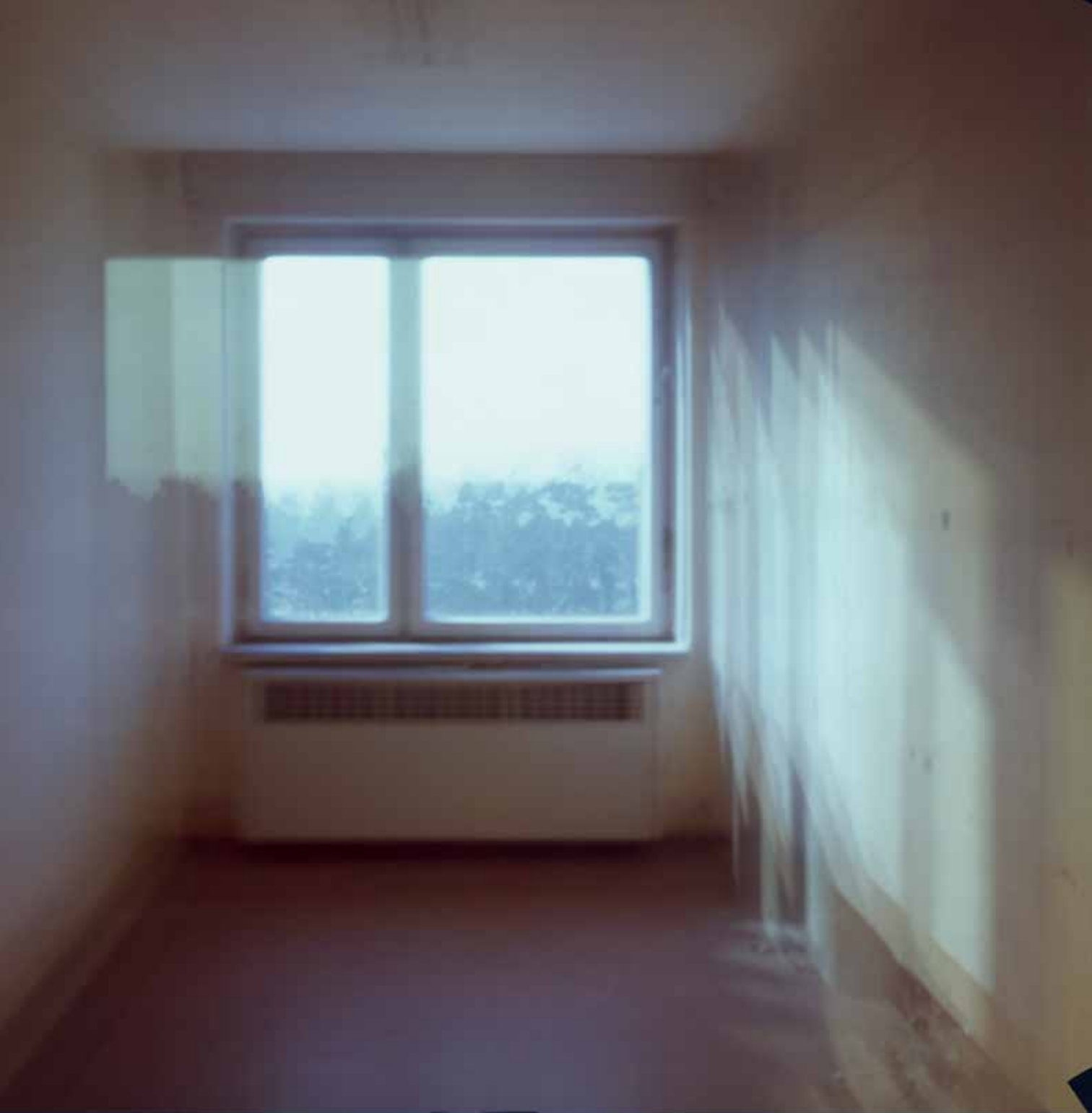
Ósz's images record a soldier's and the prevailing observer's glance and its frame, in other words, its system. Basically, as in his many other projects, we do not see *something* on the images, but we see the representation itself. In this sense, almost all of his works are self-reflecting and medium-centred, as we see the view, its image and the apparatus of its creation at the same time. In his subsequent works, the apparatus sees, films, and records its own functioning (*Ontology*, *Tautology*, *Fenomenology*). The series creates a link between the war industry and observation, pointing out the war roots of monitoring that we consider innocent and rooted in scientific objectivity, and indicating the deep military industry use of the apparatuses of photography and film, and the origins of their technological development.



Gábor Ósz: **No.8. Prora Project, 20 rooms(12.7.2002)**, exp.time: 3h 15min, camera obscura, ciba chrome paper, 140,5x126,5 cm, Collection Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Courtesy, Galerie Loevenbruck, Paris © Gábor Ósz

Gábor Ósz: **No.17. Prora project, 20 rooms (27.9.2002.)**, exp.time:3h , camera obscura, ciba chrome paper, 126,5x155,8 cm, Private Collection, Courtesy, Galerie Loevenbruck, Paris. © Gábor Ósz

The series *The Prora Project* (2002–2004) is the second part of the trilogy linked to the architecture and the history of Nazi Germany, where the artist, once again, built his *camera obscura* in an enormous, unfinished building complex, in order to create a particular view, a specific look. The propaganda organisation called Deutsche Arbeitsfront (DAF [German Labour Front]) initiated the construction of the greatest beach resort



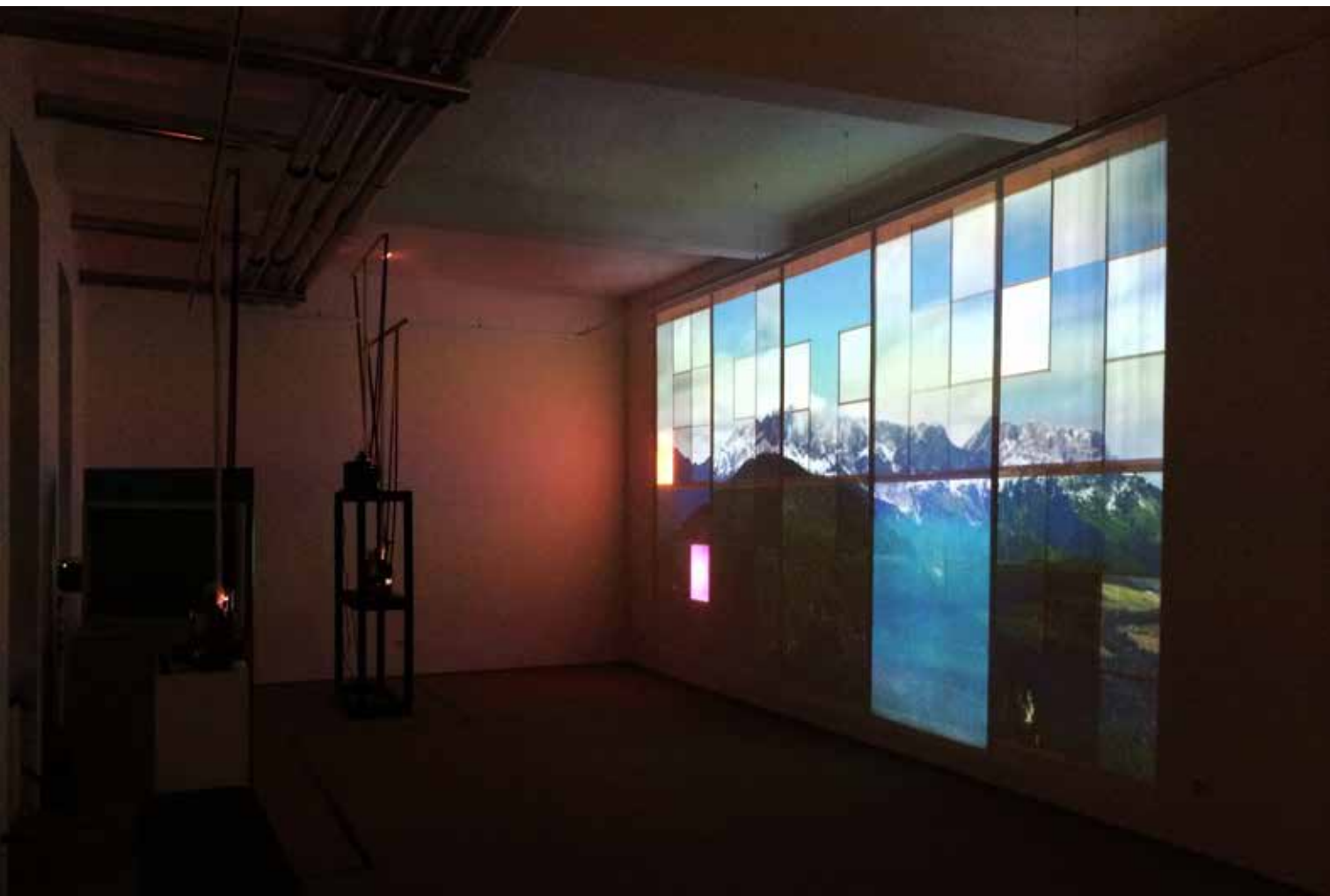
of that time for the Kraft durch Freude (KdF [Strength through Joy]) community of workers, which it had established. The enormous, 4.5 km long building complex intended to be able to accommodate 20,000 people was to be built on the island of Rügen, parallel to the seashore. It was built from 1936 to 1939, and it was supposed to be opened by 1941, but the outbreak of the war stopped the construction. The complex was named after the nearby fishing town called Prora. One of the most important

features of the six-story building containing 11,000 rooms is that all the 5 m long and 2.5 m wide rooms have a sea view. The building complex, similarly to the bunker network, was never able to fulfil the intended purpose. The common characteristic of the two projects is that, due to their size, their use has not been resolved to this very day. They weigh down upon the landscape as enormous and unmanageable mementoes, and even their demolition would be too costly.

The purpose of the building would therefore have been to control and direct German workers' free time within a set framework, thus providing the highest number of workers with the same collective experience and uniting them, something which was also visually expressed by the windows facing the same view: the sea. In his work, Gábor Ósz reconstructed this never realised, never formed, collective glance. In this present case, the frame for each of his pictures was a room, but rather a multitude of rooms, as he took his photographs with his enormous moving pinhole camera, filling the given room's door frame without leaving any gaps, recording the view of about 18-20 rooms on each photograph. More precisely, the view seen by the window and perceived by virtual sight. The "identical same". The images, similarly to that of *Liquid Horizon*, do not formulate the object; in fact, in this case, it is even difficult to specify what constitutes the object (?), but rather the image itself, the image's frame. We can see even less of the panorama visible from the rooms than in the case of the bunker, as the focus and the apparatus move further back and record almost

all of the room. This way, the window directly opposite the door forms the further border of the room, while the nearer border is formed by the pinhole camera in the door, intruding through the door. We are inside a camera again. However, there is another reason for "non-visibility"; contrary to the case of the bunkers, where we could not see the panorama exactly because time, the long exposure, blurred the view, here, sight was eliminated by collective vision, by recording more rooms on one photo. It is like looking through twenty sights at the same time. Everything shifts, blurs slightly, and finally disappears due to accumulation. The images, the sights cancel each other out. As in case of the statues of *Spomen*, Ósz demonstrates the problem of the link between the building and its propagandistic meaning and purpose. Because why would the workers be better followers of Nazi ideology, patriots, community-spirited and obedient citizens, if all of them look at the same actuality of an empty horizon, the almost unchanging image of the sea? How can an ideology be expressed by a uniform view of nothing?

Gábor Ósz: *Installation view with work Das Fenster*, multi-layered installation with looped color single channel HD projection & analogue 16mm film loops, at Van Der Grinten Gallery, Cologne, 2014. Courtesy, Van Der Grinten Galerie, Cologne ©Gábor Ósz





Gábor Ósz: *Installation view with work Das Fenster* multi-layered installation with looped, color single channel HD projection & analogue 16mm film loops, at MUDAM Luxembourg, 2015. Courtesy, Van Der Grinten Galerie, Cologne ©Gábor Ósz

The third part of the trilogy, *Das Fenster* [The Window] (2012–2013) is the reconstruction of one window, one frame and one view; that of Hitler. Ósz creates the window of the Berghof, Hitler's holiday home in the Bavarian Alps, which was bombed at the end of the war, burnt, but still served as a place of pilgrimage and a tourist attraction until 1952, when the Americans blew it up. As in the first two series of the trilogy, something non-existent is presented in this case as well, and, once again, a systematically arranged view, glance, picture frame is shown: "At the planning stage of the building, I came across the same concept as in the case of Prora or *The Liquid Horizon*: the drafting of the building's exact visualization was the result of a reasoned strategy. Hitler prepared a draft of the window and consulted on it with an architect. As he once noted himself: the house was built around the window. Perhaps it was not a coincidence that in the second part of the war, when things were getting worse, Hitler spent more and more time at the Berghof. He hoped that the force conveyed by the mountain might help to reverse the outcome of the war."¹⁵

Ósz reconstructs the window, and the view from it, which had impressed Hitler so much, based on remaining photos. The window's form was similar to a cinema widescreen, and it was graduated into 6 smaller windows within 10 greater divisions; however, the proportions of the windows fit the single frame ratio of analogue film, thus the vision recalls the medium of a movie and a photograph at the same time. The artwork is an 8x4 m projection, equal to the size of the window, where we see a film of the mountains recorded from the calculated position of the former holiday house. It is a loop projection, the window

brightens and then darkens, the small details and divisions gradually disappear, followed by the big divisions, ironically referring to the construction nature of the image. The projection takes place in a complex process because the digital film is mixed with the two analogue projector's image turned into a vertical position utilising a mirror. The dense square window recalls the drawing square, the drawing apparatus of Dürer, as he depicted it on one of his famous engravings *Unterweysung der messung mit dem zirckel un richtscheyt in Linien ebenen unnd gantzen corporen*:¹⁶ on the right side of the engraving the artist is gazing at his almost entirely naked model, lying on the left side, through the square in the centre of the image, while he is drawing his model at the same time on a squared paper in front of him.

The window and the square indicate the accuracy and the proportionality of the observation, and obviously its scientific correctness and objectivity, and the spectator's dominion over the sight as well, since, with the help of the square frame or bunker hole, the viewer subordinates the otherwise amorphous, boundless and unstructured view, the landscape, the nature, to his own system and systemizes and dominates it. It gives and attributes meaning to the view. As Nietzsche writes in one of his later fragments: "The entire apparatus of knowledge is an apparatus for abstraction and simplification directed not at knowledge but at taking possession of things: "end" and "means" are as remote from its essential nature as are "concepts." With "end" and "means" one takes possession of the process (one *invents* a process that can be grasped); with "concepts," however, of the "things" that constitute the process."¹⁷

Hitler basically has his own movie and his own photo album constructed with his holiday home's window. He reads out his own visions, his own meaning from the image displayed by the window. He puts the reconstruction's, the artwork's, thus any photographic or film imaging's objectivity into a quite ironic context, showing their nullity. Because, as we could have seen in his previous projects, no observation, vision or imaging is innocent and free of intervention and falsification but is mere construction. We create what we want to see, and we observe it in the view as a substance, an "objectivity" independent of us, as Nietzsche described it: "Ultimately, man finds in things nothing but what he himself has imported into them: the finding is called science, the importing—art, religion, love, pride."¹⁸

Although Hitler's reconstructed window and glance is apparently full of image and view in this case, as the passing of time doesn't have to be observed in a single still image, or 20 images within one image, because here we see a motion picture with recognizable elements; nevertheless we perceive the same nothingness as in the images of the trilogy's two other parts. Because the most crucial element of the view is missing: the glance giving meaning and sense. In vain does the film and the photographic apparatus of the window frame systemize and dominate the view, we will never see what Hitler saw, thus: we see nothing.

In the other *Camera Architectura* project, the series *Travelling Landscapes* (2002, 2005), the camera is the sleeping compartment of a train; the pictures of the landscape rushing by were taken during a single specific journey. At first sight, it is like looking at the pictures of the blurred, passing landscapes of *Liquid Horizon*. However, now there is another reason for the disappearance of sight. And this reason is speed. It seems that Ősz reverses the equation, as he does not record a view blurred and accumulated during the slow shutter speed from a fixed point, but the camera starts to move at high speed and records while moving. Instead of recording the happenings of hours, a process, the image records a view torn apart by speed. This project is also created at the intersection of picture and motion picture, besides the images recorded by the *camera obscura*, a film is recorded by the camera, which is later presented in a loop, creating a further level of reflection in the work. We simultaneously see and do not see what was recorded. Things directly recorded through the pinhole are destroyed by speed, while things recorded indirectly, through the pinhole and another apparatus, stay away from us due to the multiple mediation. Ősz models the travelling eye, although in reality we see much more details during high-speed motion, actually we are not able to process what we see, as the speed of information is too high. This way, our perception is illusory, we do not see that actually we do not see anything.

The connection between the contexts of speed and image and speed and perception inevitably fits within the context of Virilio's ideas: "Speed treats vision like its basic element; with acceleration, to travel is like filming, not so much producing image as new mnemonic traces, unlikely, supernatural."¹⁹



Gábor Ősz: **No 6. Permanent Daylight** (12–16.jan. 2004.), exposure time: 4 nights (5 pm – 8 am), caravan as camera obscura, ciba chrome paper, 148x156 cm, mounted on plexy glass, Collection Achmea, Netherlands, Courtesy, Galerie Loevenbruck, Paris ©Gábor Ősz



Gábor Ósz: **No 1. Permanent Daylight** (5–8 dec 2001), exposition time: 3 nights (6 pm – 8 am), caravan as camera obscura, ciba chrome paper, 91,5x162 cm mounted on plexy-glass, Private Collection, Monaco, Courtesy, Galerie Loevenbruck, Paris. © Gábor Ósz

In his series, *Permanent Daylight* (2003–2004), Ósz transforms a caravan into a pinhole camera and takes night photographs of the greenhouses, the lights of greenhouses, on the outskirts of the Hague and Amsterdam. In order to keep plants growing, make them sellable and profitable, these greenhouses are continuously lit by synthetic sunlight, the sun never sets in them. The artist records the light of the synthetic sun, and with the help of its light, the world outside his caravan, the otherwise dark landscape. This series is also perplexing, considering what is recorded by the camera — what is the object of the image? Ósz's observer and recorder standpoints, however, are also related to the speed of technology, as the image of light is captured by a vehicle that is, in theory, capable of movement. Two different, but basically the same accelerations, smash into each other and rush by each other. A further dimension of speed is when the flowers grown by the synthetic sun are transported to the great flower markets of the world by lorries and aeroplanes, thus at the maximum speed possible, to preserve their freshness on the way, and become sellable. Speed eliminates space and coordinates: a Japanese man can buy a flower for his girlfriend which was in an eternally illuminated greenhouse thousands of kilometres away only a few hours ago.

The artificial light *nourished* the photographs of the pinhole camera similarly to the flowers, as the images were not created with one long exposure, but an extended exposure time of 3–4 nights was necessary accumulated enough light *to bring the view to life*.



Gábor Ősz: **Blow-up** (2010), color and black and white single channel HD projection, duration: 8' 3", Installation view at LUMO, Budapest 2013, Courtesy, Vintage galéria, Budapest © Gábor Ősz

In his series, *Constructed View* (2004), compared to his earlier projects, Ősz almost reduces his intervention to zero during the creation of view. Earlier, he had chosen the apparatus adjusted to a frame, to a view, and decided on the type of recording, thus the size of the *camera obscura*'s hole, the perspective, and the elaboration of the hole, which also has an impact on the focus of the image, etc. on the basis of the aforementioned factors; now he does not interfere with these anymore, he takes the most essential part of the camera, the imaging device, thus the objective (in this case, the hole), for granted. His camera, in a certain sense, is a found item. Due to the building technology of a multistory concrete building, after solidification, the small metal bars, which were necessary to hold the resulting mould, are removed from the concrete blocks, leaving behind small holes in regular rows. Later on, following the completion of the building, these holes disappear, they become invisible. The artist used these holes in this provisional, transition phase, between their appearance and disappearance, building a camera around them. This way, camera and image in a certain sense have to do with speed and technology, as the creator imposes himself in one of the building phases of a building emerging out of nothing, and growing according to a specified schedule and deadline, and he records the image of views seen by the building, which were never perceived and won't ever be perceived by human vision, because the imaging device is already hidden and disappearing. The imaging potential of the holes is entirely determined by the quality of the concrete and the thickness of the wall, and since the walls are thick, the holes will be more tube-like, unlike the imaging device of a

traditional *camera obscura*. On the photographs, the images of more holes were recorded, for long exposures, several times. The image thus created is similar to a multiple stereoscopic image, which we see from several perspectives, barely shifted from each other, it is a bit like looking through a telescope. The view multiplies, disperses and decomposes. Which is the "real" image? How can we put together the multitude of images into one single image?

Space Monochrome (2006) presents the problems that are of most interest to Ősz, from another point of view. We see the images of flat interiors vacated and put up for sale in panel size, monochrome. However, disturbances occur during the perception of the images, as their texture is different from the traditional texture of photography. The pictures were taken with a digital device, however, the artist planned pictures in larger format than the camera's resolution, thus the emptiness and void between the pixels had to be eliminated somehow, therefore the picture's existing pixels had to be "cloned" with the help of a software. As the creator highlighted, and what characterises his whole work, the software, i.e. the apparatus performed the operation entirely automatically, without any modification or intervention. The final image, in which the "not real", cloned pixels outnumber the original ones, was prepared by a machine in more senses and phases. Paradoxically, the resulting texture, oddly enough, starts to resemble pictures prepared using traditional techniques, not by a machine. The apparatus tries to cover its tracks on the picture. It pretends to be something it is not, creates a vivid appearance, which



Gábor Ósz: **Blow-up** (2010), color and black and white single channel HD projection, duration: 8' 3", Installation view at LUMO, Budapest 2013, Courtesy, Galerie Loevenbruck, Paris © Gábor Ósz

apparently bears the mark of human hands, although it is only the result of a machine's cloning program. Looking at the pictures, it is impossible to decide what is *real*. What is an image of an object, where does emptiness, vacancy and its covering, start and end? Does real information exist yet? How much information does a software need to generate an enjoyable, even deceptive image resembling something else?

The image displays as an object, and carries, in its substance as its technical prerequisite, emptiness; that is to say, the traces of emptiness covered by cloning. The empty space, the lack of things, consumes the picture inside and out, but at the same time gives the recipient the opportunity to fill it with meaning. Giving a meaning shall have a starting point, an origin which cannot be other than the image itself. Therefore, the recipient, by interpreting the picture, "does" the same as the software's automatism, i.e. cloning.

The works, *The Colours of Black & White* (2008), and *Blow-Up* (2009) are the results of an examination of black-and-white photography, its "reality content", its relation to reality. The creator outlined his ideas as follows: "I was always embarrassed by black-and-white negative images. During my experiments, I always looped back to this problem and the expansion of the borders of black-and-white. I was very interested in creating images which are black-and-white at the moment of recording, on black-and-white paper, but result in a positive picture. I realised that this will only be possible if I transform reality to negative, and then the final image will be positive."²⁰ It could be considered strange that photography achieved and

preserved its "good reputation" reflecting, documenting reality with an almost scientific objectivity, that, looking at the black-and-white photographs, we perceive a totally spectacular, in no way hidden, almost rough abstraction. How was it possible, and how is it possible today, to perceive and evaluate a black-and-white photo which comes into existence as the result of a transformation, as a mirror of reality? How is it possible to talk about the authenticity of a medium, argue about this for decades, when it is clearly different from that which is visible and is essentially and profoundly false? Because, saying that black-and-white photo is "true", as abstracting the appearance of reality shows its essence, means that we foreknow, we have decided what we consider substance and accident. What we deem essential and what we deem non-essential. Thus, we, a priori and openly, give up any kind of and otherwise basically impossible objectivity, because we know what we want to see, and that is what we see! Although vision seems an obvious, objective and merely physiological capacity, it is a priori, performed, and determined by the conscience, the interpretation. Therefore, humanity had already decided before the invention of photography that this apparatus will be true and objective, and thus the pictures' colour, quality, way of preparation, etc. have not shaken this conviction, this paradigm for a long time, as it was not the result of experiential reality. Ósz presents the non-mimetic phenomenon of (black-and-white) photography through a radical translocation and inversion: he distorts reality and shows it in a way that on a (fake, not real) black-and-white negative it still looks positive, thus true. His works which consist of self-revealing picture

pairs and (also self-revealing) films relating thereto, confuse our vision and perception quite successfully, and thereby our certainty relating to reality, its sight and its image. In his film, *Blow-Up*, the camera moves continuously, in an uninterrupted manner, showing the “real”/falsified sight, arriving to the “true”/a priori fake sight. Not only are real and unreal, sight and representation, day and night mixed, but it is not possible to decide what was mixed with what. Ősz’s work challenges the basics of perception and imaging, thus using a mixed metaphor which, in a certain sense, is analogous with the work: he pulls the whole scheme down around our eyes. The film, otherwise, unusually in case of Ősz, recalls the context of another work, Antonioni’s film *Blow-Up* (1966) in its title and approach. Perhaps also because this is the most important, most quoted work of photo-culture, there is no photographer who, during their lifetime, would not have been under its influence in some sense, and furthermore, because its topic is the cognizability of reality and photography’s role in this.

His three film works, *Ontology* (2011), *Tautology* (2012), *Fenomenology* (2013) are closely linked to each other, presenting the topics of reflection, self-reflection, and self-referentiality. In different ways, all the works are infinite, self-reflecting, loop formations. In these works, maybe more radically than in any of his former creations, Ősz covers even the faintest trace of the objects; he exclusively shows the pure operation of representation. In these motion pictures only the picture’s, the representation’s or only the mere image format’s frame is left, as all the projections start with an empty film, with the projection itself. Objectlessness deconstructs its medium, its carrier, the film, as narrative ceases in the empty frames, the emptiness cancels time and space, what is left is empty continuance and light, the image of light, which illuminates not only itself but the space in which it is projected as well. An early forerunner of these ideas is *The Picture of Light* (1995), where Ősz projected the image of a light bulb on a tracing paper hung in the space, which performed the same function as its “original”, the light bulb, in other words, it lit up the space.

The works deal with emptiness and recordings related only to themselves, but, in many cases, in a quite sophisticated way. Initially there is empty film, i.e. nothing happening, then the image’s light becomes more and more distant due to the successive reflections, and finally almost disappears. Ősz records the movie going empty, then in the following phase films this film and so on. By filming the filming, intricate spaces twisting into each other and shell structures are created. In the case of *Tautology*, the camera passes over the image of the projection of three empty, luminous pictures each time, and then “reloads” the film on the screen and films it again.

At the beginning the recipient stands in an almost blinding, luminous room, which gets darker and darker as the serial reflexion makes the picture’s light disappear. While the camera is sweeping around, it faces itself, whereby it rises and looks into the source of light: the projector’s light. The movement of the emerging camera and the sensation it causes is like a prisoner raising his head and looking up at his captor. Hypnotic music is played during the projection, getting the recipient into a kind of meditative mood; although the recipient is watching a film, he/she watches the nothing twisting in on itself, the empty content, which extinguishes the perception of time and space.

The endless spiral of *Ontology* is a bit more of a complex structure; here the camera passes not only over the screen, the image of an empty analogue movie, but also over the projector, and the film tape which runs out of the projector in a spectacular shape to return into the projector again. The image of the filmed projection is reloaded onto the projector, and filmed again, and it is repeated over and over. Ősz plays with repetition in his tautological and self-reflecting movies, as all spirals of the sight are caused by repeated recording, however, repetition is not exact repetition, as in all cases more things are recorded, but it is rather a repetition, a replica, a clone of itself. Repetition is repetition and difference at the same time.

We see the same on the projected picture and in the space, that is to say, the way of the empty film, the projection twisting in on itself. The installation is not accompanied by music, it is only possible to hear the screeching sound caused by the rollers on which the tapes recording themselves are running. The monotonous cracking recalls the operation of an old, poorly functioning, outdated machinery, the humming sound sort of compensates, in an almost ironic and funny way, for the actuality of the demanding sight of it twisting into a more and more complex spiral.

Gábor Ősz creates his works a bit similarly to Alberti: “First of all, about where I have to paint, I inscribe a quadrangle of right angles, as large as I wish, which is consider to be an open window through which I see what I want to paint.”²¹ However, unlike Alberti, he remains to contemplate *what* the image means and how that works. He does not “paint” anything there, only the painting itself, colour to colour. He observes what happens prior to and during representation, and what all this means in respect of reality.

The questions raised by Ősz, his works which are artworks and interpretations at the same time, undermine our perception and understanding of reality and images. He steps further and further back from the apparatus with exemplary asceticism and leaves it to reveal itself on its own and open up the illusory, constantly collapsing system which is called representation.

- ¹ ERDÉLY Miklós: "Marly Theses", In Idem: *Művészeti íráások, Képzőművészeti Kiadó*, Budapest, 1991, 128.
- ² BREDEKAMP, Horst – BRONS, Franziska: A fotográfia mint tudományos médium" [Photography as a scientific medium], In *A kép a médiaművészet korában*, Ed. Nagy Edina, Trans. KÉKESI Zoltán, L'Harmattan, 2006, 162.
- ³ "Spomen" means memory in the Serbo-Croatian language.
- ⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brutalist_architecture 30.08.2018.
- ⁵ Currently, the large-scale exhibition "Toward a Concrete Utopia: Architecture in Yugoslavia, 1948–1980", is at MoMa. <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/3931> 30.08.2018.
- ⁶ <http://www.spomenikdatabase.org/> 30.08.2018.
- ⁷ GÁBOR Ősz: *Spomen*, Balkon, 2018. <http://balkon.art/home/online-2018/osz-gabor-spomen/> 30.08.2018.
- ⁸ Here we have to mention the numerical coincidences appearing in Gábor Ősz's works, the importance of the number three, as his last major exhibition in Ludwig Museum (LUMÚ) took place with the title *Three by three* (26 July – 3 November 2013), where he presented some of his works in three groups, with three series in each group. The number of projects under the name Camera Architectura is currently three by three, as the other three members of the series *Liquid Horizon* (1999–2002), *The Prora Project* (2002–2004) and *Das Fenster* (2012–2013) presented at the exhibition of LUMÚ are the following: *Travelling Landscapes* (2002, 2005), *Permanent Daylight* (2003–2004) and *Constructed View* (2004). Within this group of artworks the trio exhibited in LUMÚ, presenting the image of the Soldier, the Worker and the Leader in connection with the history of Nazi Germany, forms a trilogy. Although the big window of *Das Fenster* is a faithful reproduction of Hitler's holiday home's original window, inside the 10 greater divisions, frames of the 8×4 m window, there are exactly 3×3 smaller windows/frames in each, which can be regarded as a self-reflective figure in many respects, but especially at the *Three by three* exhibition.
- ⁹ KEMPENAEERS, Jan: *Spomenik*, Roma Publications, 2010.
- ¹⁰ VIRILIO, Paul: *Bunker Archéologie. Étude sur l'espace militaire européen de la Seconde Guerre mondiale*, éd. CCI, 1975. In English: *Bunker Archaeology*, New York: Princeton University Press, 1994. English translation on the web: <https://archive.org/details/PaulVirilioBunkerArchaeology> 30.08.2018.
- ¹¹ Virilio also writes about this analogy: "Another photographer has written that his first camera obscura was his room when he was a child and his first lens was the luminous crack of his closed shutter. But the remarkable thing with the little Lartigue is that he's assimilated his own body to the camera, the camera of his eye to a technical tool, the time of exposure to turning himself around three times." Paul VIRILIO: *Az eltűnés esztétikája*, Trans. KLIMÓ Ágnes, Balassi Kiadó – BAE Tartóshullám, Budapest, 1992, 7.
- ¹² See VILÉM FLUSSER: "Technical images are produced by apparatuses. In saying this, one presumes that the typical characteristics of apparatuses as such — in a simplified, embryonic form — are also contained within the camera and can be derived from it. [...] The Latin word *apparatus* is derived from the word *apparare* meaning 'to prepare'. Alongside this, there exists in Latin the verb *praeparare*, likewise meaning 'to prepare'. To illustrate in English the difference between the prefixes 'ad' and 'prae', one could perhaps translate *apparare* with 'pro-pare', using 'pro' in the sense of 'for'. Accordingly, an 'apparatus' would be a thing that lies in wait or in readiness for something, and a 'preparatus' would be a thing that waits patiently for something. The photographic apparatus lies in wait for photography; it sharpens its teeth in readiness. This readiness to spring into action on the part of apparatuses, their similarity to predators, is something to grasp hold of in the attempt to define the term etymologically." See VILÉM FLUSSER: *A fotográfia filozófiája*, Trans. VERESS, Panka and SEBESI, István, Belvedere: ELTE, Budapest, 1990, 19.
- ¹³ „Nem fotókat akarok létrehozni” – interjú Ősz Gáborral II., Artportal, 30.10.2013. <https://artportal.hu/magazin/nem-fotokat-akarok-lelrehozni-interju-osz-gaborral-ii/> 30.08.2018.
- ¹⁴ BELTING, Hans: *Kép-antropológia*, Trans. KELEMEN Pál, Kijarat Kiadó, Budapest, 2003, 252.
- ¹⁵ „Szemtanúk vagyunk vagy nézők? Ősz Gáborral beszélget Kerekes Anna”, *Balkon*, 2011/11–12, 11. http://epa.oszk.hu/03000/03057/00040/pdf/EPA03057_balkon_2011_11_12_06-15.pdf 30.08.2018.
- ¹⁶ DÜRER, Albrecht: *Uderweysung der messung mit dem zirckel un richtscheit in Linien ebenen unnd gantzen corporen*, Nürnberg, 1538. <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/77620/> 30.08.2018.
- ¹⁷ NIETZSCHE, Friedrich: *Az értékek ártértékelése*, Trans. Romhányi Török Gábor, Holnap Kiadó, Budapest, 1998, 67–68.
- ¹⁸ *Op.cit.*, 89.
- ¹⁹ VIRILIO, Paul: *Az eltűnés esztétikája*, Trans. KLIMÓ Ágnes, Balassi Kiadó – BAE Tartóshullám, Budapest, 1992, 42.
- ²⁰ „»A valóságot fordítom át negatívba« – Ősz Gábor képzőművész”, *Magyar Narancs*, 2010/50 (16 December). http://magyarnarancs.hu/film2/a_valosagot_forditom_at_negativba_-_osz_gabor_kepzomuvesz-75200 30.08.2018.
- ²¹ ALBERTI, Leon Battista: *A festészetről*, Trans. Hajnóczy Gábor, Balassi Kiadó, Budapest, 1997, 75.

RITA SOMOSI

Side-notes for a NEW GENERATION

PHOTOGRAPHY MAJOR GRADUATE
STUDENTS AT THE MOHOLY-NAGY
UNIVERSITY OF ART AND
DESIGN BUDAPEST – 2017

Sára Erzsébet TÍMÁR: from the *Culture House* series, 2017, photobook



11 STUDENTS, 11 DIPLOMA THESES.

EVERYONE IS CURIOUS, EVERYONE HAS HIGH HOPES, AND EVERYONE IS EXCITED TO SEE WHAT SOCIALLY AND VISUALLY INTERESTING TOPICS, INNOVATIVE MEDIUM USAGE AND NEW PERSPECTIVES THE GRADUATE PHOTOGRAPHERS COME UP WITH. COLLECTIVE AND PERSONAL PAST, THE AMBIVALENT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MANKIND AND THE ENVIRONMENT, INSTALLATIVE SERIES CONTEMPLATING ON THE MATERIAL WORLD AND THE CONSUMER SOCIETY. IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO FIND COMMON GROUND, OR TO LINK THE WORKS OF GRADUATE STUDENTS TO A DEFINING TREND — THE WORD 'DIVERSITY' WOULD MUCH RATHER DESCRIBE THEIR INITIATIVES AND APPROACHES.



The pictures of the series called *Culture House* [Kultúrház] by **Sára Erzsébet Timár** look as if time had stopped: a table with a maroon tablecloth, with an artificial flower in a pot, artificial wood panelling covering the walls, mediocre, happy portraits of historical figures, and perhaps the dusty head of Ferenc Liszt on top of the cupboard. The typical furniture of cultural houses of Hungary go almost unnoticed at the first glance, their unique atmosphere enchants the spectators. The former bastions of socialist public education, the interiors of cultural houses on the verge of losing their functionality as community spaces and institutions, with time layers accumulated on each other, are presented as the objectified form of the memory

of an era and a community. The similarity between places is confusing and extremely natural at the same time — the scenes with bright colours, absurd constellations, the socialist realist furniture occurring again and again are mementos of a vanishing era. The past lives on in the present, the present overpaints the past; usage overwrites design — these frontal interior pictures are memorials to this slow change. The cut-outs can be interpreted as strong *statements* in themselves, and the ironic overtone refers equally to a vanished era and the way we connect to it. (The final form of the series is a photography book so that the pictures and the related information could be published as well).





Sára Erzsébet TÍMÁR: from the *Culture House* series, 2017, photobook

Attila Kozó's *Plaza* [Pláza] series is about today's defining community and cultural places, the shopping malls, referred to as cathedrals to consumer society, with their sociological and aesthetic connections. In his previous works, the accentuated sphere of thought was shopping and shopping culture (*Certain Paradise*), and his diploma work was centred around the visual world of the malls in Budapest. The artist presents interiors of buildings implemented with similar architectural solutions to possess a similar atmosphere, where, in order to stimulate

consumption, the malls' inviting visual appearance tries to add to the *feel-good* feeling. The photographer attempts to accentuate the visual elements of emptiness and superfluity by highlighting the location of simulated urbanity. The display of consumer rituals and the socio-critical attitude is not dominant, it lacks tension, even the grotesque poignancy of the compositions, the chosen moments reflect the contradictions of the phenomena less strongly, and the over-the-top post-production here and there softens the overall impression.





Made in China by **Krisztina Szalay** is about the Chinese market at Kőbányai street, which is often referred to as a synonym for the place where you can buy cheap mass-produced and perhaps fake products. The central community location of the Chinese community living in Budapest, with its chaotic and exotic turmoil, is depicted in street photographs, arranged into an object-centred medium, a 120-page photobook. The pictures show us the daily life of the market: they outline the industrial location and the social and societal network of the people working at the former GANZ factory. The artist wanted to capture the atmosphere, the place, the chaos, the crowds

and the temporariness represented even by the boxes, with an Eastern European flavour, which is embodied by the place itself. Work and human activities stole the spotlight from interpersonal relations: the loading, the myriad of colourful products and the rituals of the micro-community working there which are supplemented by the photos of the location and of goods confiscated by the National Tax and Customs Administration of Hungary. As if the market was a separate city within Budapest; the artist wanted to show the true face of the place and the stereotypes related to it in everyday life, all at once.





The series *Furnishing the Sacred* [Egészen más] by **Boglárka Zellei** provides an insight into the immersion rituals and, at the same time, the visual culture of small Christian congregations. The more than several-thousand-year-old tradition is depicted on Zellei's pictures with contemporary visuality and flavour. Sophisticated, yet theatrical moments and places are displayed, but the artist did not document events, he was more interested in the visuals and the intimacy of the topic and of the phenomena. The baptismal font with the shepherd placed in the middle, with an interior of stage-like shaping perfectly depicts

the habit of certain congregation communities. Zellei examined how the styles that are mixed, the demands, the solutions and the environments affect our image of the ritual, and to what extent the different designs of the locations, ranging from the representative *white cube* space to the inflatable rubber pool, makes us change our mind on the matter. In the centre, there is always the same moment and highlight, which is accompanied by reoccurring elements, although it is not the botched-up interior that makes the picture absurd but rather the spaces and the emptiness of the surroundings of the ceremony.



Boglárka Éva ZELLEI: from the *Furnishing the Sacred* series, 2017, 100x71 cm, pigment print, mounted on MDF board



Boys [Fiúk], the diploma work of **Panna Donka** is a large-sized, classic 3/4 portrait series. The artist was interested in the visual appearance of masculinity deviating from social expectations, the classic gender stereotypes and the hegemonic image of a man. She, therefore, examines gender representation and how we perceive gender roles. On her photos, we can see boys or young men, who, although with some hesitant look in their eyes, are brave enough to admit their insecurities, the tension between them and their own manliness. The artist is making heroes out of her models and is highlighting their sensuality, and she does not stop

at accentuating their characters, she pushes it further with women's clothing. She was inspired by the androgynous look, the gender bipolarity that is already accepted in the world of fashion, to highlight the content. She distanced her models from the present and their environment by the sterility of the circumstances in the studio, in the meantime ensuring them timelessness and intimacy. Donka brought the faces close to the viewers, pointing with lights to where the viewer should focus on. However, the femininity of her models would have been explicit enough without the lace bra or the mesh top.

Panna DONKA: **DÉNES**, 2017, 100x150 cm, digital print, mounted on dibond
Panna DONKA: **DAVID**, 2017, 100x150 cm, digital print, mounted on dibond
Panna DONKA: **BALÁZS**, 2017, 100x150 cm, digital print, mounted on dibond







Réka HEGYHÁTI: *Untitled*, Promises series, 2017, 40x60 cm, digital print

As the continuation of her former topic/research, Réka Hegyháti's Master's Degree work (for which she received the Rector's Award), *Promises* [Ígéretek] is about the most important point of bonding between the children of a children's home and the outside world and adult society: mentor-mentee relationship. Her work focuses on the dramatically toned, several times larger-than-life-size portraits of children in the transition to adulthood, and the more lyrical portraits of their volunteer mentors. While for the portraits of children the artist chose a more staged, yet objective viewpoint, highlighting their characters with hard light, whereas with the mentors the artist focused on the children's sphere of thought of inaccessibility and uncertainty and subordinated it to visual representation, in the meantime the mentors' promising attitude that support the development of social competences — which, in addition to providing formulas for vision, care, and help, can be viewed as the basis of their relationship with the children — remains unreflected. The mentors' ID-like photos do not exceed a general definition, the orientation of their looks is different, their characters are blurry. In her diploma work, Réka Hegyháti dramatises deliberately: by means of scale changes and cuts, she tries

to highlight the details which she considers important. With her choice of perspective, the artist distorts and makes heroes of her models at the same time. Due to the lack of light shedding, the focus is on the eyes and the look in those eyes, whereas the face and the whole head seem to be full of dark spots; and the hard-light fluorescent lamp is reflected in their eyes in the shape of a light stripe. The crops on the children's portraits changes, the faces popping out of the black, unilluminated background are forced in between sometimes broader, sometimes narrower bounds, which become mask-like, and blend into the background due to the shallow depth of field. The photographs of children with difficult past and present are taken in front of a dark background, and of the mentors who are more like guardian angels are taken in front of a white background — the latter's ethereal visuality form a sharp contrast with the powerful, dark-tone portraits of the children. The two rows of portraits in the series are exhibited next or opposite to one another, that of the mentorees in larger, and of the mentors in a smaller size, which is intended as the artist's reflection on distance and insecurity. However, the chosen installation form does not create more points of bonding, neither with the audience, nor between the photos.



Barnabás Neogrády-Kiss's diploma work bears the title – ...__... –, the Morse code for calling for help, and also focuses on children under state care: he aimed at documenting the world of a children's village in a subjective way. Instead of using bonding patterns with peers or adults, he examined the spiritual projection of children: how they feel in their everyday life in the environment that is artificially designed for them, in a transitional phase, far away from their parents, in a place where every house looks the same. Children hide in his pictures: they are running away or are talking alongside the road near

an empty street, wall or fence, that is, in the environment that was meant to represent home to them. Barnabás Neogrády-Kiss attempted to find signs that refer to the children being there, that are about them and their mentality, and to highlight the details that turn into symbols. In his series, the children were not playing an active part in the pictures, and the viewer automatically takes the quiet observer role of the photographer. The artist deals with the present, with the children that are turning away and running, who recall loneliness and melancholy in us, instead of our carefree childhood.





Balázs Túrós's work *Parallel Realities* [Párhuzamos valóságok] is a series on the situation at the peripheral areas of Hungary, the poverty of those living in the lagging regions, and their lack of perspectives. Though he tries to avoid socio-photography, there is a mix of social portraits and social genres in his work, and he searches for symbolic places in everyday life of the countryside. In his photographs, however, poverty has been positioned in a much too safe distance: the communal workers sitting on the orange bucket watching the burning brushwood or the close-up of a young Roma couple kissing, or maybe the photo of men merrily drinking *pálinka* after a pig slaughtering much rather depict cozy country life than the dramatic moments of hopeless everyday life. These depict typical situations rather than being reflections of surroundings at the level of surfaces.

Balázs TÚRÓS: from the *Parallel Realities* series, 2017, 75x52 cm





Marcell Piti's series *Inner Landscapes* [Belső tájak] examines the mechanism of remembering, linking the issue with one's attachment to a place: Why are we attached to places and how do these affect our identities? The artist was interested in the layers of the relationship between the material world and remembering, the transactions that are realised between men and their environment: what are those past events and landscapes that we remember and what do they symbolise? For the entire time, the context of objects remains the central motif — removed from its original consistency, yet kept in the same location, the series simultaneously discusses subjective and collective remembering, the lack of places, objects and important people. Irony is blended with nostalgia in the object groups represented in the pictures, while the objects come back to life. They stand out or disappear, such as the mouldy slide comes back to life due to demise, the furniture that has lost its identity will also be transformed because of the highlights. Due to the installation, these pictures are presented in an association network, forming a diary-like memorial.

Marcell PITI: *Untitled No. 11*, *Inner Landscapes* series, 2017, 60x60 cm, digital print in wooden frame
 Marcell PITI: *Untitled No. 13*, *Inner Landscapes* series, 2017, 60x60 cm, digital print in wooden frame



Marcell PITI: *Untitled No. 7*, *Inner Landscapes* series, 2017, 60x60 cm, digital print in wooden frame



András Töröcsi' series called *Minacious Nature* [Fenyegető természet] is about the contrast between urban surroundings and nature. It does not suggest any narrative but tries to grasp the emotional attitudes: it bases itself on moods and impressions. Töröcsi manipulates, plays with light, and distorts reality, which is represented in his pictures almost as a coulisse, and the displayed image, referring to alien planets or symbolic landscapes, with its mysteriousness and dreariness has an alienating effect. He lines up photos that are selected mainly with aesthetic considerations in mind, he tries to map the relationship between nature and mankind. He works with oppositions, reminiscent of the atmosphere of horror movies, of a world where no human would have the desire to go.



András TÖRÖCSI: from the *Minacious Nature* series, 2017, inkjet print, mounted on dibond



The diploma work of **Benedek Regős** called *Structure* [Szerkezet] focuses on the structural nature of photography as well as the illusion and the construction that maintains this illusion. He places the scenery of a movie studio in the focus and shows the viewers the backside of the surface imitating reality. He displays the structure that has a functional purpose, in order to depict reality and to create an illusion: thus, the material and its artificialness become visible. His pictures are arranged a regular raster net, where the relationship between

the photos defines the context. There is no narrative but rather a diverse net of pictures, changing in size, which was shaped by subjective decisions. Due to its design, it reminds us of the visuality of a map, and the connection between the photos automatically triggers the mapping of the relationships between the pictures. His works reflect the thinking on the nature of the photographic picture, the world being describable and mappable, where even the globe-holding Atlas, who lost his functionality, assists this material structure as a staffage.

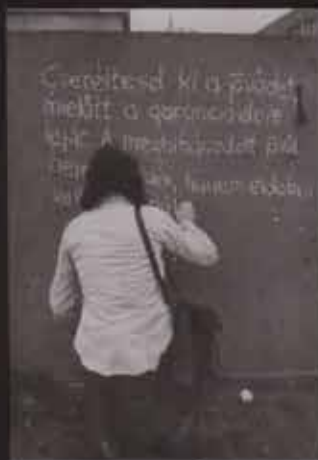
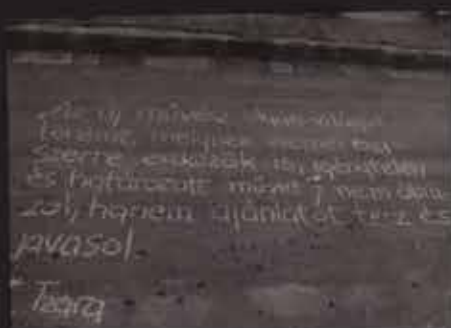




Benedek REGŐS: from the *Structure* series, 2016, 22x33 cm, inkjet print on pinewood
 Benedek REGŐS: from the *Structure* series, 2016, 11x9,5 cm, inkjet print on pinewood
 Benedek REGŐS: from the *Structure* series, 2016, 85x68 cm, inkjet print on pinewood

(UTCÁRA A MONDANIVALÓDDAL I.)

LEVÉL BARÁTOMNAK PÁRIZSBAN



(FOTÓ: VERES JÚLIA)

HAJAS TIBOR

“The works that were left as heritage – ... – some of them are artwork.”¹

– a report on Tibor Hajas’ (international) representation

With regard to the upcoming report on Tibor Hajas, I asked my former university professor József Mélyi whether Hajas has sold any of his artwork during his lifetime or not, and he answered: “Ever since he spent all of his first salary on a box of cigars, we don’t know what he did for a living.”² “Cigars?”, I asked. “Why cigars? Did he smoke?”

I confronted the abundance of such and similar questions during my research which aimed at investigating into the international representation of the works of Tibor Hajas, but mostly the market position thereof. After his death in 1980, many exciting questions were raised as regards the afterlife of the artist’s prosperous oeuvre, beyond the most unique cigar brands available in the Soviet Union, among others, the anomaly of the quote from László Beke, that can be read in the title: whether his surviving works are works of art or not. Beke wrote “some of them are artworks.” But which are these “some of them”? Where is the defining line between being regarded as a work of art and not being considered as such? This is a legitimate question to ask.

In order to discuss this issue, I invited for a background discussion Katalin Schultz, art historian László Beke, my co-author János Vető, and Attila Pőcze, owner of the Vintage Gallery, who also represents the works of Tibor Hajas in cooperation with the heirs on the market.³ Summarising the ideas of the discussions and the literature available on the subject, the following text — a non-exhaustive list — sums up Hajas’ significant Hungarian and international exhibitions and purchases of Hajas’ works, while it will also lift the veil from certain acute issues that this text does not attempt to answer. However, it sheds light on the fact that there is a need for an art history consensus.

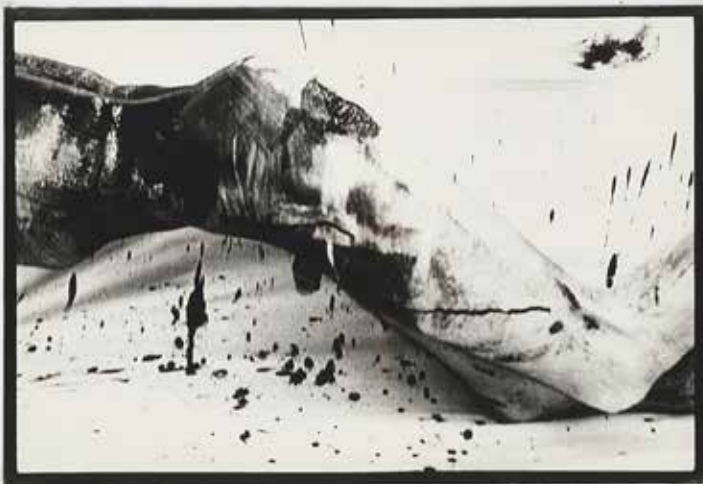
Nonetheless, if at first, I’d like to talk not about his oeuvre or the afterlife thereof, but, in connection with Tibor Hajas, rather about existence, we would immediately bump against strong dogmas. The whole art of Hajas mused about the boundaries of existence and non-existence, life, and passing. Born in 1946, the artist started his career at the Faculty of Humanities of the Eötvös Loránd University. That is when he became interested in poetry. In 1965 he was arrested for a street “non-action”,⁴ and was released on December 1966. In prison, not only did he become a bookbinder, but he also changed his name after his release. That was the moment when he was born for the

second time as Tibor Frankl — and it was the first time he was born as Tibor Hajas.⁵

He started to publish his first poems and essays in 1967. Two years later, besides poetry, he became interested in visual arts, too: in the forms of actions and conceptual works. After pen and paper, Hajas chose another medium capable of recording his artistic thoughts: photography. He considered photography as a tool, that enabled him to change the personality and offered a free passage between the possible versions of existence.⁶

In his street actions, such as *To the streets with what you have to say (A letter to my friend in Paris)* [*Utcára a mondanivalóddal l. (Levél barátomnak Párizsba)*] (1975), he wrote his poems on walls of buildings in Budapest, with chalk, and documented his actions with the help of his photographer colleagues. This way, in his early visual artworks, photography is used only as a tool to record his actions. This tool character gradually transformed from being the primary medium into being a subsidiary medium. After all, since 1978, Hajas positioned his own body in the centre. He “forces his body to become a piece of art in order to separate, create, and show the perfect moment”.⁷ In his performances, he raised the question of existence, although here in particular, he is leaning towards death and towards getting to know it. In his performances, transcendental energies take over space which burst his own body and mind.

In order to capture his ritualistic actions, he chooses the medium of photography. When he recorded these performances as photo series, his co-author and often one-man audience was János Vető. The two of them began working together in 1974. This is true with others, e.g. Gábor Dobos and Júlia Veres, who recorded Hajas’ early street performances, for example, *Everything is its own copy* [*Minden a saját másolata*] (1974) and the aforementioned *A Letter To My Friend in Paris* [*Levél Barátomnak Párizsba*] (1975) as well. This became a sort of practice to him: he worked together to a greater or lesser extent with photographers, who captured his street actions, films, and performances, and who supported him not only by recording these actions but helped him in developing, enlarging, and sorting photographs. Hajas himself was not very skilled in camera usage, thus he was not the one who controlled the entire mechanism.⁸



That is why, in the cases of his performances between 1978 and 1979, such as *Flesh Painting* [*Húsfestmény*], *Emergency landing* [*Kényszerleszállás*], *Tumo, Chöd*, it was János Vető who photographed, developed, and enlarged the pictures. Together, they sorted out the photos and arranged them into series and tableaux. Only sixteen tableaux were created from his works from that period. These have become the artworks themselves, but there have always been some individual enlargements of the elements of these fourteen different series created in this period.⁹

Hajas died in 1980, at the age of 34, in a car accident. The oeuvre of the productive artist, who was still at the beginning of his career, has thereby ended, but the legacy of his works keeps Hajas' impulsive character and art "alive".

"An informal international network was in operation"¹⁰

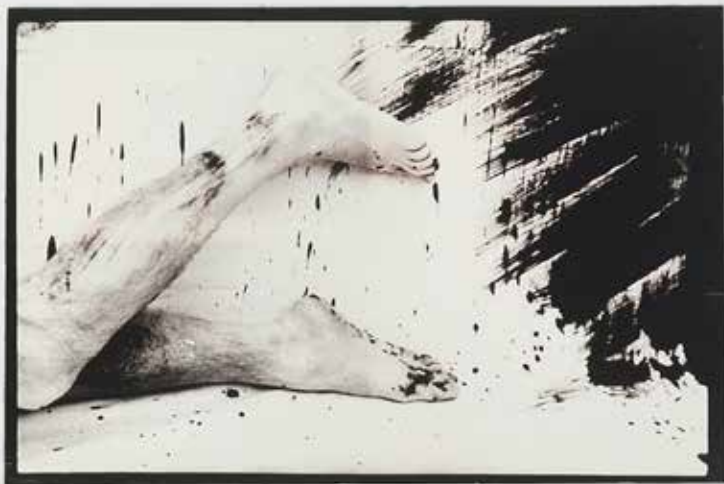
Since over the past decade, Hajas' art captured many sanctuaries of the international visual art, it is exciting to examine how Hajas was and is received, how many works he created, where have they gotten to and where else they could get to. After all, since 1973, he only had three individual exhibitions in his lifetime. Two of those exhibitions were organised in the Gallery of the Bercsényi Collegium, a.k.a. the Bercsényi Club, in 1978 and 1979. This was followed closely by his first individual exhibition abroad in May 1980, in the Galeria Permafo in Wrocław, Poland. His works were featured at international exhibitions as of the last couple of years of his life. The Club of Young Artists in Hungary has certainly played an essential role regarding international networking. Also, understanding very well the world of international biennales and triennales, and due to his

contacts and through the beneficial activities of the Hungarian Post (Magyar Posta), such key figures as László Beke, helped many Hungarian artists to get their artworks to the distant points of the world, such as Sydney, at the biennale in 1979. Or this led to the invitation by curator tycoon Jan Hoet that resulted in the performance that is today known as *Untitled No. 9* [*Cím nélkül No. 9*] on March 28, 1980, in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Ghent. Hajas received a passport and held his performance; moreover, he participated in the group exhibition called *Prospect 80/1 — 6 Hongaarse Kunstenaars* that was opened at the same time.

When I asked Kati Schulcz — the wife of György Széphelyi F., Biki's brother — about these times, who had lived together with Hajas for a longer period in the same flat, thus, had an insight into how many people came around visiting him, she just waved her hand and added that "we had people over every week who knew that ours was the place they had to come to".¹¹

THE AFTERLIFE OF THE OEUVRE

In the years following his death, Tibor Hajas' works have appeared in Hungarian and international institutional exhibitions alike, but the retrospective exhibition dedicated to Hajas was organised only in 1987, which was later moved to the King St. Stephen Museum in Székesfehérvár, the latter museum even purchased Hajas' artworks for the exhibition. This was quickly followed by the first international individual exhibition in 1990 in Richmond, at the Anderson Gallery of Virginia Commonwealth University. Chronologically, the next was another individual display and another catalogue, both at



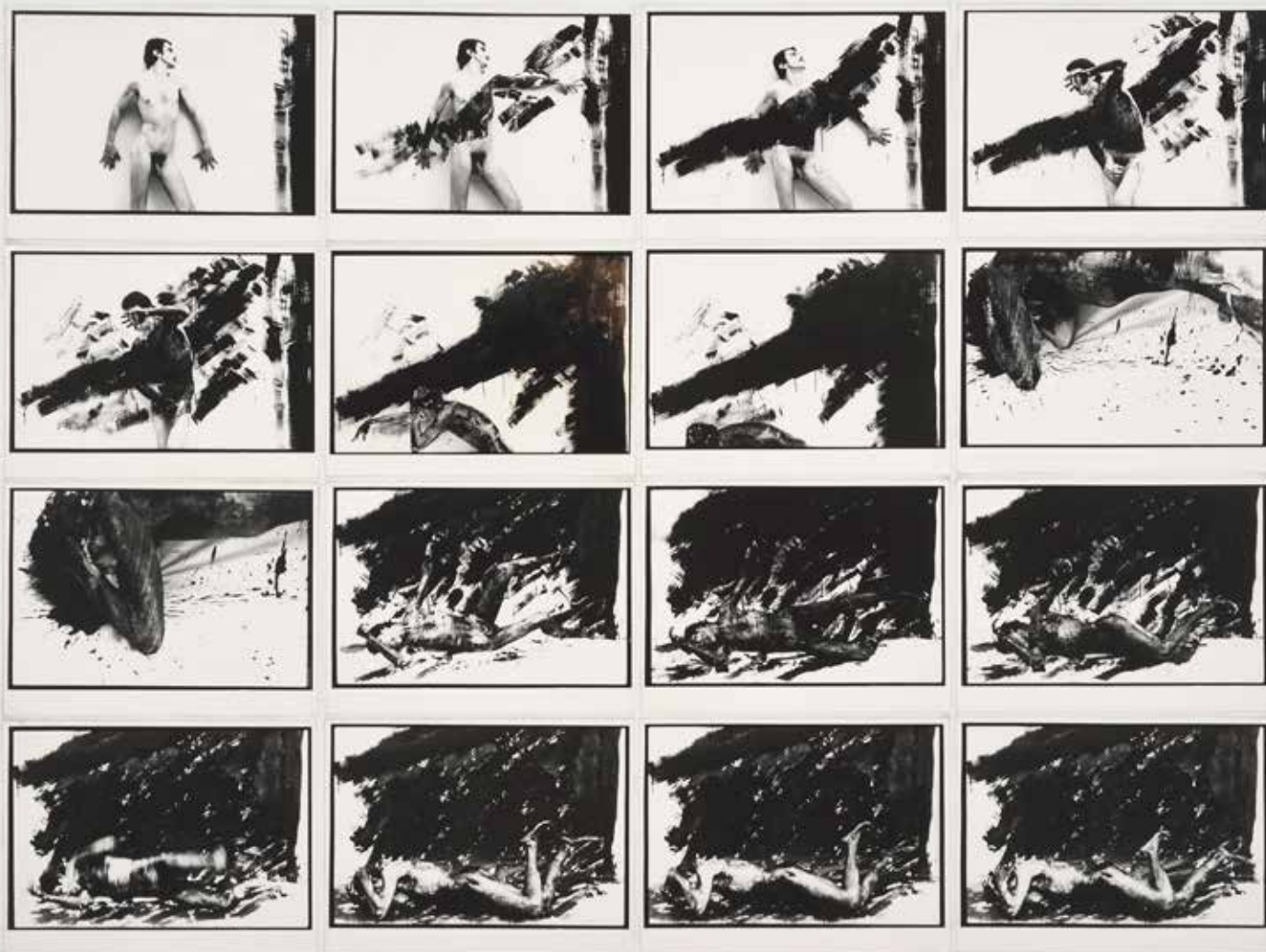
Tibor HAJAS: *Flesh painting 2*, photo: János Vető
© HUNGART 2020 © LUDWIG MUSEUM

the Ernst Museum in Hungary. In 1999, some of his works were returned to the USA to be exhibited at the *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s* exhibition, where László Beke was the curator of the Eastern European section. As the title of the exhibition declares, the aim of the exhibition was to organise a comprehensive presentation of conceptual thoughts “outside” of the Western world of art, which intended to recontextualise the world’s conceptual art with loyalty to the spirit of globalisation. The exhibition was displayed at the Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis, and later in the state-of-the-art Queens Museum of Art, New York.

In 2005, the stop-gap Hajas retrospective exhibition and a new publication by Ludwig Museum have been implemented, with Vera Baksa Soós as a curator. That was when international collection and museum purchases started. It is important to note the purchases by the Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana, and the Erste Bank Kontakt collection, because both collections play a significant role in the international representation of Eastern European art and in raising public awareness thereof. This can often be done by the travelling exhibitions of the collection.¹² In parallel, from the middle of the 2000s, the number of thematising group exhibitions has exploded that arranged the artistic works of the region created in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, into contextualising exhibitions under the auspices of the Eastern European topos. Artworks were exhibited that were and could be seen neither by the West nor by the East, or only by a very small audience because of the (prevalent) political resistance or

disagreement of the artists. After one and a half decades following the fall of the Berlin Wall, during the last years of euphoria over the vision of a united Europe, exhibitions, some way or another, thematising the region took turns in the museums and galleries of the cities of the old continent. Hajas’ works also appeared in great numbers at these presentations, along with his neo-avant-garde colleagues, including Miklós Erdély, Dóra Maurer, György Jovánovics, or Katalin Ladik.

Without being exhaustive, and only to illustrate the dimensions, such an exhibition was the *Fluxus East* exhibition that toured Berlin, Vilnius, Kraków, Tallin, and Budapest between 2007 and 2010, or the *Gender Check — Rollenbilder in der Kunst in Osteuropas (Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe)* exhibition organized by mumok (Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien), thematising gender questions, which has become a reference point for the region’s art, and which had its debut in 2009 and in the following year could be seen in Warsaw. After many Eastern European locations, one, or to be exact, two large-scale events came along in 2010, since the *Les Promesses du Passé (The Promises of the Past)* exhibition and its catalogue, which reinterpreted the art connections of the “divided” Europe, was on at the same time at two sites: at the Musée National d’Art Moderne and at the Centre Pompidou. The chief curator was the same: Christine Macel who had selected nine of Hajas’ works for the exhibition centre called *Viva Arte Viva* at the 57th Venice Biennale in 2017 and who inspired the topic for this article.



Tibor HAJAS: *Flesh painting 1*, photo: János Vető © HUNGART 2020 © LUDWIG MUSEUM

THE APPEARANCE OF THE MARKET

During the seven years between the two exhibitions, Hajas' works have appeared at a not insignificant number and quality of exhibitions, which focused on non-profit galleries of the major cities of Northern and Eastern European countries. The trade-related emergence of his works can be estimated as of the second half of the 2000s. That was the time when Hajas' works first appeared in Hungarian auction markets, and around the same time, the Vintage Gallery started to systematically position Hajas' works on the market in cooperation with his heirs. The gallery, owned by Attila Pőcze, highlighting the representative role of the great Hungarian photographers, and representing the works of Hervé, Kertész, Munkácsi, and also artists who use photography as their medium, at Hungarian and international art markets. That was how he noticed Hajas. In the past decade, the gallery has dedicated three individual exhibitions to Hajas' works. The first exhibition, in 2007, was followed by another in 2010, where the enlargements of *A Letter To My Friend* [*Levél barátomnak*] and *Self fashion show* [*Öndívatbemutató*] were presented, and in spring of 2017 contact copies and texts were exhibited, with the title *Person Reproduction* [*Személysozrosítás*]. Hajas' first individual international trade exhibition was organised by the Austin / Desmond

Fine Art Gallery, London, in cooperation with the Vintage Gallery. Emily Austin had already presented one of the pieces of the series *Levél egy barátomnak* in 2015, at the *Last Year's Snow* exhibition, which was the first representative group exhibition of Hungarian neo-avant-garde in London. The artworks that were selected for the *Action Works* exhibition were related only to Hajas' performances in 1978–79, thus enabling the gallery to link it to the formerly organised exhibition on Viennese actionists and thus reach the audience thereof, too. Besides the solo prints, the frames from the series *Húsfestmények*, *Surface Torture* [*Felületkínzás*], *Képkorbácsolás* and *Tumó*, well-known from the tableaux as well, were arranged into group blocks.

The audience in London could see the very same frames in connection with the tableaux, of which one part was at the same time hanging at the central pavilion of the Giardini at the Venice Biennale, due to the fact that the Ludwig Museum, the Municipal Picture Gallery — Kiscelli Museum, and the Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs, had loaned them, as these museums, including the King St. Stephen Museum in Székesfehérvár, and the Modern Hungarian Picture Gallery had bought fifteen out of the sixteen tableaux for their collection.¹³

From the point of view of the market, it is an unusual situation that the product of one of Hajas' defining eras — and a substantial part of his oeuvre that is incomplete because of his early death — is the property of museums. From his performances, only individual photos of the series related to the tableaux are available. What had happened is that not all of the photos of the series made for the tableaux had become the part of those tableaux. János Vető recounted that for each series they usually used a whole roll of film. This limited the potential “number of frames” in the series. Vető enlarged the frames after the roll had been developed, then sorted out these enlargements with Hajas and put the frames of the tableau in order. However, the pieces that did not become part of the tableaux and the copies of those that did, has not decayed. Hajas did not sign all of the photos, but he did it quite frequently. These pictures “travelled” to international exhibitions and became auxiliary materials for the publications of many art historians and critics (at that time, the only way to get published was to send a copy of the artist's photos to the journals).

In most cases, only one or two frames were involved, not the whole series; nevertheless, today, they live on as individual artworks. Taking into account the gesture of signatures, this could have been Hajas' line of thought about the individual pieces that he frequently signed. János Vető, the photographer of the series, separates the artistic relevance of the individual pieces and that of the tableaux.¹⁴

In my opinion, the artistic value of the singular pieces is not lower than that of the series arranged into tableaux. However, their visual effects are not always on the same level as that of the tableaux, because the intuitive elements, which, in the cases of the tableaux are part of the artwork, are missing from them. However, the market treasures these works, too. Enlargements of single photos or series of photos made by Hajas can be found in private and public collections, e.g. the MOCA in Los Angeles has the enlargements of three frames from the tableau *Flesh painting II (Landscape)* [*Húsfestmény II.*] (*Tájkép*) (1978) exhibited by the Hungarian Ludwig Museum. In addition, besides other individual pieces, the draft *Flesh painting I draft* [*Húsfestmény I. vázlat*] (1978) from the series *Picture lashing I-III* [*Képkorbácsolás I-III.*] and *Makeup drafts I-II* [*Sminkvázlatok I-II.*] can also be found in the collection of Róbert Alföldi, a private collector focusing on photographs, which is the preliminary study of the sixteen silver gelatine photographs known from the tableaux in the Ludwig Museum.¹⁵ Similarly, singular pieces were also presented at the *Bookmarks* exhibition, which was significant for trade reasons. The first exhibition concurrently with the Western European collection organisations was implemented in 2013 at the B55 Gallery, in Budapest. Moreover, the new Russian and Eastern European collection organisation committee of the Tate Gallery has also visited the exhibition. The delegation of museum experts and collectors were greeted by three trade galleries — acb, Kisterem, and Vintage — who also organised the exhibition. The cooperation by the galleries continued in the reception hall of the Art Cologne where they organised a joint presentation in 2015. In spring 2017, a fourth gallery got involved, albeit in a slightly different way. The Elizabeth Dee Gallery in New York, with András Szántó as a curator, has selected some neo-avant-garde artworks in cooperation with the three galleries. Hajas' works were presented at every exhibition.

However, interestingly, neither his strong presence at galleries from the middle of the 2000s on, nor their commercial galvanising power thereof have generated any significant procurement by public collections where Hajas would have been featured, except the quite noteworthy purchase by the Art Institute of Chicago, which became familiar with Hajas' work at the *Light Years: Conceptual Art and the Photograph, 1964–1977* exhibition. Hajas was not part of the aforementioned exhibition, but seven of those photographs of the street action in 1975 *Levél barátomnak Párizsba* became part of the purchased collection in 2011. In addition, the Ludwig Museum extended its already huge Hajas collection. Given the very nature of the market, I have not found any public information on private collection purchases; however, Attila Pócze shared with me the fact that,

by the character of Hajas' oeuvre, it is mostly institutions that are interested in the artist's work.¹⁶

WHAT COMES NEXT?

We can all agree that in Hajas' case, it is not about (re)inventions. Though it is indisputable that the exhibition of the nine works by Tibor Hajas at the centre pavilion of the Venice Biennale 2017 is to be considered as a milestone regarding the positioning of his oeuvre in both Hungarian and international contexts. However, the profession have not just discovered Hajas' art today. He was and still is in the international mainstream. At the same time, it is a fact that his presence there becomes more and more unavoidable. Regarding these mechanisms, Macel, the curator of the exhibition mentioned above, speaks about a breakthrough for fields that were not present in the Western discourse, and mentions that "art history serves exactly the purpose to be able to reshuffle the deck".¹⁷ This is what is happening right now.

In this period full of changes and possibilities, it would be useful to create our own stylistic form of expression and consensus. I believe that there are issues that would be important to clarify in order to maintain the artistic essence of art. One of them is the issue of authorship, which this report has not covered in details, although, in Hajas' case, who worked together with photographers, moreover, for particular series with several co-authors, it can be an essential point to make the issue of authorship clear, precisely because of the afterlife of the oeuvre. After the death of Hajas, the negatives of the photos of the performances remained with his photographer, János Vető, from whom the Ludwig Museum purchased them later on. Earlier, Vető had digitalised and archived the negatives. During our conversation, he told me that he did not want the many "good works", that had not made it to the tableaux, to be lost. Thus, he is planning an exhibition about the digital reinterpretation of the unknown pieces of the series *Tumo* and *Chöd*, in the Ferenc Hopp Museum of Asiatic Arts.¹⁸

It is hard to tell how the reinterpreted presentation with the reinterpreted series will affect the market for Hajas' works. Nevertheless, it could launch interesting processes, similarly to

his presence that got stronger last year. I think the fact that these tableaux "live on" in the unique artworks that can be regarded as parts of these series is the consequence of how the art world and the art market develop. Without these offsets, artworks would often become isolated, and it would be harder to get them to international museum presentations, which, however, are essential in order to position an oeuvre in its well-deserved place. I do not agree with the artwork status of "some" of the artworks. The artwork statuses of all the preserved pieces are not issues for me, but it is up to the art historians to decide how the profession should classify them. Also, the issue of how and where to price these pictures will be interfered by the voice of the market as well.

¹ László BEKE: „Hajas Tibor”, *Művészlexikon – Artportal.hu*, online: <https://artportal.hu/lexikon-muvesz/hajas-tibor-98/>

² Personal conversation with József MÉLYI, Budapest, November 15, 2017.

³ After the passing away of Hajas' wife, János Gát became the manager of the heritage.

⁴ Personal conversation with László BEKE, Budapest, November 22, 2017.

⁵ Illustration: *Curriculum vitae [Önéletrajz]* – property of the Institute for Art History, Research Centre for the Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Tibor HAJAS: *Szövegek*, Enciklopédia Kiadó, Budapest, 2005, 100.

⁶ Tibor Hajas: *A fotó mint képzőművészeti médium [Photo as a medium of fine arts]*, Tibor Hajas 1946–1980. Catalogue of the retrospective exhibition, King St. Stephen Museum, Székesfehérvár, 1987.

⁷ Vera BAKSA SOÓS: *Emergency landing [Kényszerleszállás]*, exhibition catalogue, Ludwig Múzeum, 2005, 16.

⁸ Personal conversation with János Vető, Budapest, December 1, 2017.

⁹ *Picture lashing [Képkorbácsolás]. Tibor Hajas' (1946–1980) photo works with János Vető [Hajas Tibor (1946–1980) Vető Jánossal készített fotómunkái]*, edited by László BEKE and János Vető, Institute of Art History, Research Centre for the Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, 2004.

¹⁰ Personal conversation with Katalin SCHULCZ, Budapest, November 23, 2017.

¹¹ See *ibid.*

¹² *Kontakt – ... aus der Sammlung der Erste Bank-Gruppe*, Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig — mumok, March 17, 2006 – May 21, 2006; *Kontakt... Works from the Art Collection of Erste Bank Group*, Institute of Contemporary Art – Dunaújváros, May 7, 2008 – June 13, 2008

¹³ *Picture lashing [Képkorbácsolás]. Tibor Hajas' (1946–1980) photo works with János Vető [Hajas Tibor (1946–1980) Vető Jánossal készített fotómunkái]*, edited by László BEKE and János Vető, Institute of Art History, Research Centre for the Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, 2004. Six tableaux are owned by the Ludwig Museum, Budapest, three by the Hungarian National Gallery, three in the Municipal Picture Gallery — Kiscelli Museum, two is in Székesfehérvár, and one is owned by the Modern Hungarian Gallery in Pécs.

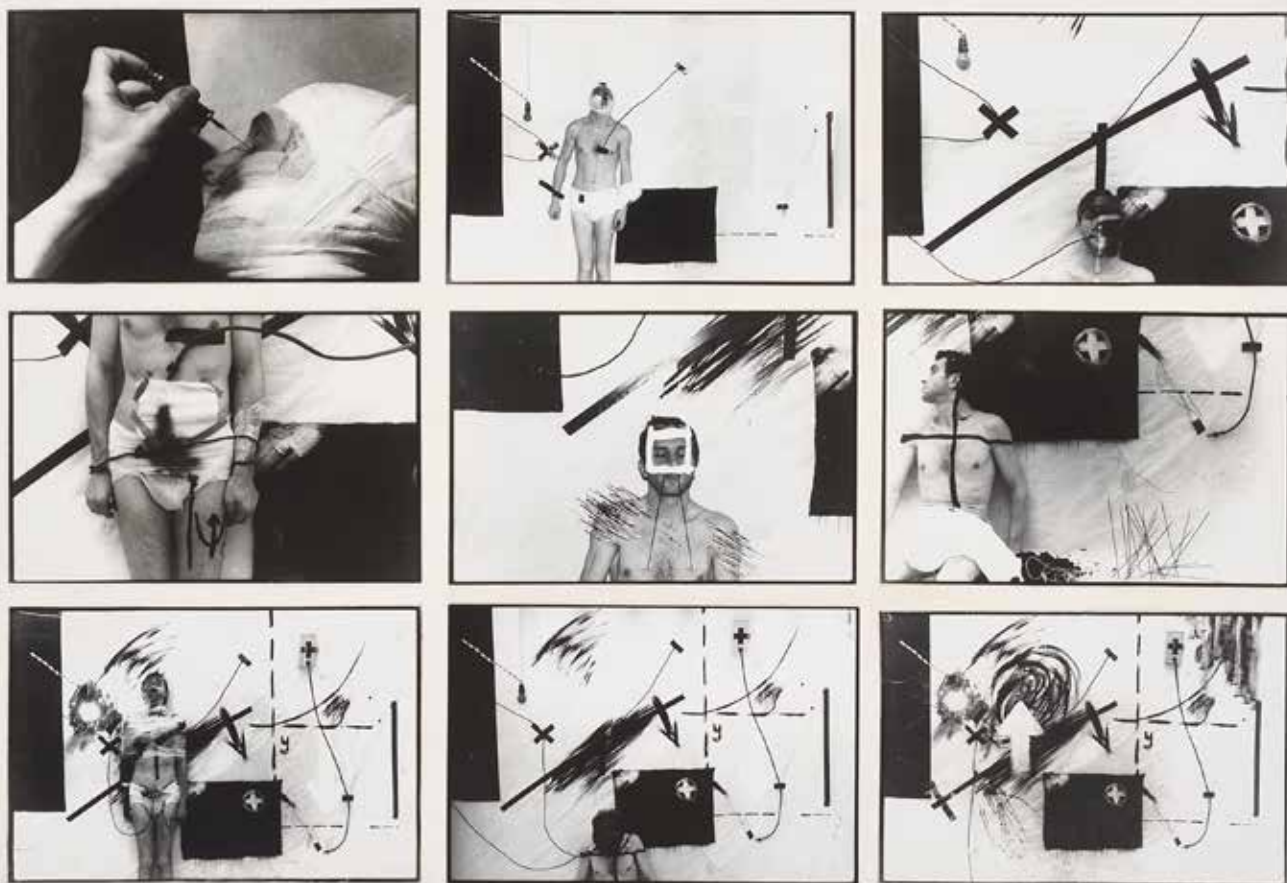
¹⁴ Personal conversation with János Vető, Budapest, December 1, 2017.

¹⁵ Exhibited: *The Freedom of the Past [A múlt szabadsága]. Compilation from the photo collection of Róbert Alföldi, Neoavantgard photography in Hungary from the 1960s to date [Neoavantgárd fotóművészet Magyarországon az 1960-as évektől napjainkig]*, Hungarian House of Photography – Mai Manó House, January 16, 2016 – April 10, 2016

¹⁶ Personal conversation with Attila PÖCZE, Budapest, January 31, 2018

¹⁷ Borbála KÁLMÁN: *Hajas Tibor A Velencei Biennálén [Tibor Hajas at The Venice Biennale]* — a quick interview with chief curator Christine Macel, *Ludwig Museum Blog*, http://ludwigmuseum.blog.hu/2017/11/21/hajas_tibor_a_velencei_biennalen_villaminterju_christine_macel_fokurattal

¹⁸ Personal conversation with János Vető, Budapest, December 1, 2017.



Fotó: VETŐ

TUMO 1.

Hajas '79

Tibor HAJAS: **TUMO 2**, photo: János Vető © HUNGART 2020 © LUDWIG MUSEUM

Béla ALBERTINI (1940)

Photo historian, PhD of the photo aesthetics (1979), C.Sc. of the art history (1984), professor emeritus at the Kaposvár University. He won several awards, Apáczai Csere János Award (2009), Németh Lajos Award (2010), Life Time Award of the Association of Hungarian Photographers and he holds the Argentum Award of the Hungarian Society for the History of Photography.

Sándor BACSKAI (1961)

Writer, journalist, contributor of the *Fotóművészet* magazine. In the 90s he recorded and edited more than hundred life-time interview for the archive of the Hungarian Museum of Photography.

György CSÉKA (1972)

Aesthete, critic. He studied Hungarian language and literature (1989-1994), later aesthetics (1994-1999). Secretary of the Studio of the Young Photographers from 2009, contributor of the *Kunztblog* (Origo). From 2015 he is working for *Artportal*. Fields of interest: contemporary photography, visual arts.

Orsolya ELEK

Orsolya Elek is a photographer, PhD candidate. She carries her studies in France at the Université Aix-Marseille and the faculty of Human science at the Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest parallelly. She takes part regularly Hungarian and international conferences concerning her research. She is a member of History and visibility – photography and film in the context of the XX. Century research group. After working as the editor of the online site of the Paris Photo, she is the editor and project manager of the international, online magazine, *The Eye of Photography*.

Sándor HORNYIK (1972)

He is an art historian, a senior research fellow at the Institute of Art History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The topic of his PhD was the artistic reception of the modern scientific worldview. It was published as a book as well. (*Anavtgárd tudomány*, 2011) His active interest was taken not only the avant-garde and neo-avant-garde art but the theory of the art history and the science of the visual culture. He collected the related texts in a book as well. He was the chief curator in the MODEM and has organised several exhibitions but not only in Debrecen but in Riga, Maribor and Paris as well. His monograph about Attila Szűcz was published by the Hetje Cantz publishing house along with the retrospective exhibition of the artist in the Ludwig Museum. He is working on a book about the archaeology of the surrealistism.

Róma KOPECZKY (1983)

Róna Kopeckzy is a curator, art historian, lives in Budapest. She was the curator of international art at the Ludwig Museum in Budapest between 2006 and 2015. She worked here on the space and situational practice of young and middle generation artists of the Central European region. She is the art manager of the acb Gallery from 2015. She joined to the organisational team of the first OFF Biennale Budapest in the same year. Co-founder of the Easttopics platform, which represents the contemporary Eastern-European art scene. Róna Kopeckzy is a Serb citizen with Hungarian origin with a background of French education. In the focus of her interest stands the political and cultural dichotomies moreover they impact on the visual art, which defines West- and East-North- and South-Europe. She got her PhD graduation at the Sorbonne in Paris.

János PALOTAI (1939)

He studied History and Philosophy at the Eötvös Loránd University and got his PhD graduation from aesthetics. He taught art philosophy on the Budapest University of Technology, visual communication on the University of Applied Arts, and media science on the Eötvös Loránd University. His teaching material for the teaching of moving picture culture, published with Erika Pasztor, can be found on the internet. He is a regular writer of the *Balkon* magazine, the *Filmkultúra* magazine, the *Filmvilág* magazine and the *Új Művészet* magazine.

Gábor PFISZTNER (1967)

He finished his studies on History-German language faculty on the Eötvös Loránd University, and he was a student on the Colleg of Applied Arts. He teaches in a high school and the lecturer at the Media Institut of the Budapest Metropolitan University.

Zsófi RECHNITZER (1988)

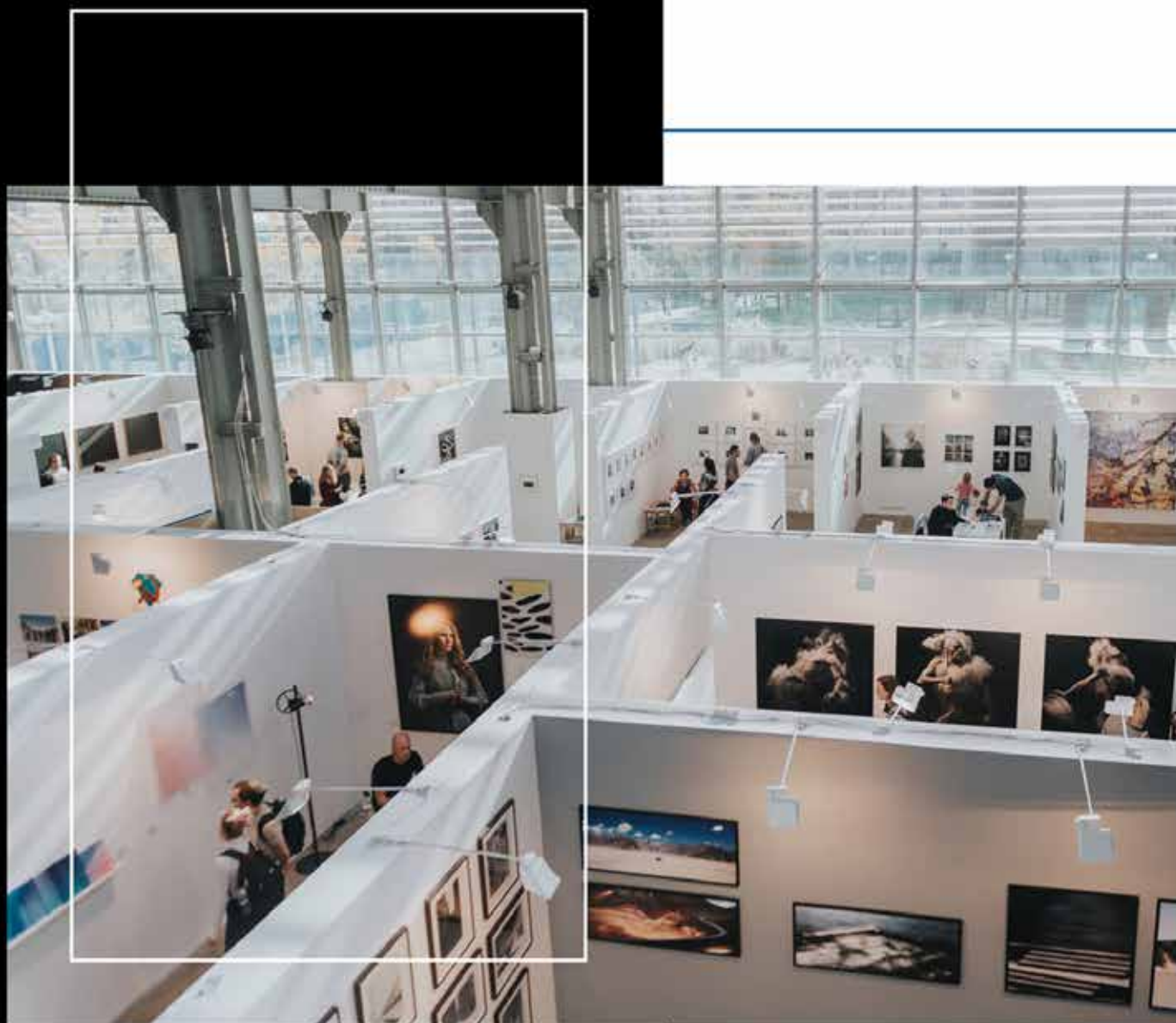
Freelance curator, art advisor, the founder of The Bazin-Project. She wrote her PhD about the growth of the Eastern-European art markets at the Széchenyi István University. Lived in London in recent years working on the international positioning of the Hungarian neo-avant-garde.

Rita SOMOSI (1980)

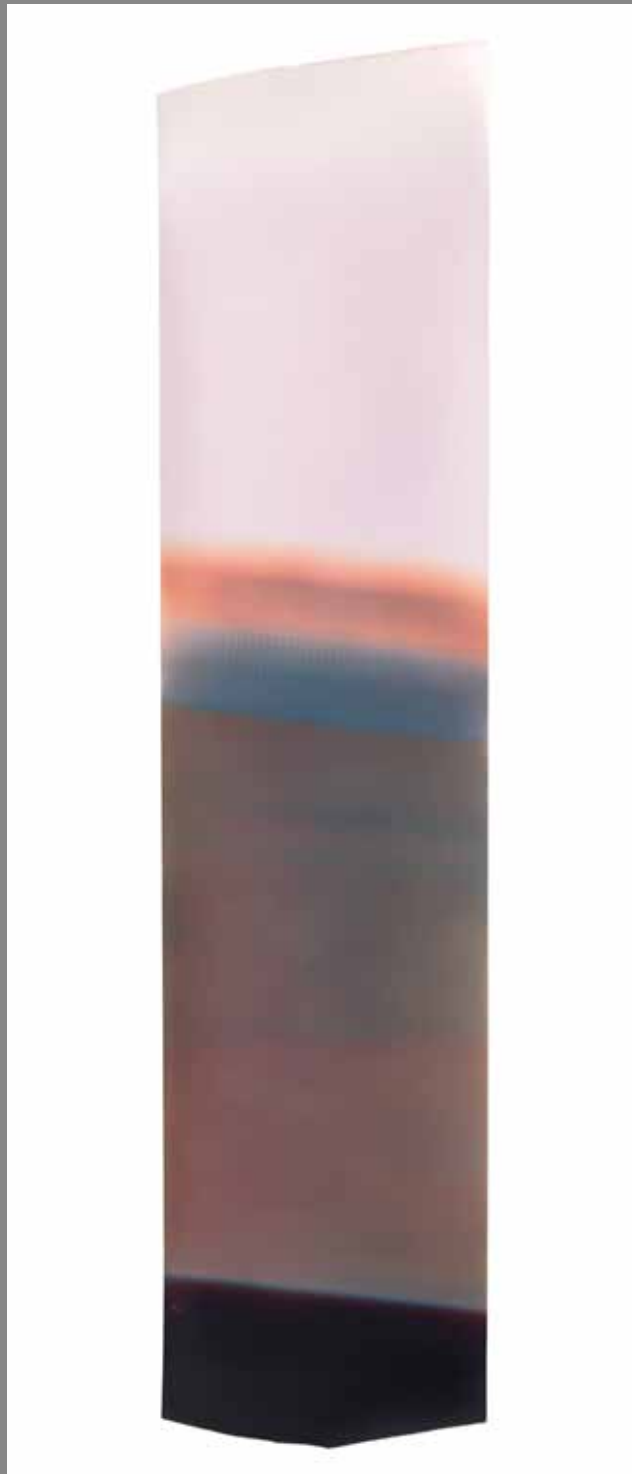
Rita Somosi studied art history and cultural management. She is a curator of the Budapest Photo Festival and regularly publishes about contemporary art, focusing on photography. As a gallery manager, she works for the Viltin Gallery.

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Viktória BALOGH: Immersion, 2017, colour fotogram, 91x28 cm (copyright: jel) space Viktória Balogh

Publisher:

Robert Capa Contemporary
Photography Center Nonprofit Ltd.

Partner:

Kortárs Művészetért Alapítvány |
Foundation for Contemporary Art

Editor: Mihály Surányi

Editorial board: Gabriella Csizsek,

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Design: Gabi Halász

Translation: A Lex Expert Ltd.

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