



REVIEW OF HUNGARIAN PHOTOGRAPHY

ISSUE NO. 2



THE EDITORIAL TEAM



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Mihály Surányi



Balázs Gáspár



Gabriella Csizék



Emese Mucsi

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DEAR READER

We are excited to present the second issue of the *Review of Hungarian Photography*. The aim of our publication is to make the work of photographers and photojournalists working in Hungary known to a wider international audience.

Our priorities while compiling the article-selection for the *Review of Hungarian Photography* are to increase awareness of Hungarian photography's diversity and richness, to present newly discovered facts and stories about artists who are already well-known in the international scene, to showcase the work of contemporary as well as emerging young artists, and to include interviews and exhibition reviews.

In the second issue of the magazine, we adhere not only to the above approach but also strive to present an even broader spectrum of significant pieces from recent years. Thanks to the widespread recognition of photography, nowadays almost every cultural–artistic journal and type of media publishes studies and articles focusing on some aspect of the medium of photography. With this in mind, in addition to articles from the magazine *Fotóművészet*, which remains the leading professional journal of photography in Hungary, we also include selected pieces from other key publications in the Hungarian art scene, both printed and online. This allows us to present even more topics, aspects, approaches and issues in the four sections of various thematic focus—20th century, post-war, contemporary, interview. In addition, we have put more emphasis on the predecessors working in the 1970s and 1980s, as this is a very exceptional period in Hungarian photography still to be discovered. There are only a few sources available internationally about the pre-WWII period of the history of Hungarian photography, and we would like to remedy this by translating three studies we find worthy of attention. The contributions include works of photographic theory, personal interviews, studies of complete oeuvres, as well as analyses focusing on individual works. Brief biographies of the authors, editors, and artists have been added to provide a more comprehensive picture.

Nowadays, the distribution opportunities offered by online platforms have become of paramount importance. We hope that the *Review of Hungarian Photography* will not only promote the international visibility of Hungarian photographers and writers on photography, but it will also help readers to better understand the discourse of photography in general.

We wish all our readers an exciting adventure, full of discoveries.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editorial Introduction

Biographies – Editors

Biographies – Authors

András Váczy: 'I just had to do something.' – An Interview with Zsuzsi Ujj

Kata Balázs: Interview with Visual Artist Tibor Várnagy Part 1 (1968–1989)

Judit Geller: Photobook Discussions 3 – 'It is about the potentials of our vision, or our image viewing position.' Tibor Gyenis: *You Are Here*

Vera A Fehér: "... what if I just took photographs by feel?" – An Interview with Máté Bartha

Balázs Gáspár: Red Flags in Black-and-White – The Red May 1919 Album

Tímea Bata: Uncropped. On the Rural Studio Photography Collection of the Museum of Ethnography

Gabriella Vincze: André Kertész (1894–1985) and Hungarian Movement Art from Hungarian Life Reform Movements to the Szentpál School

György Cséka: How to Use the Photograph – on the Works of Péter Tímár

Ágnes Eperjesi: On the Photogram – As Seen Through Dóra Maurer's Series Entitled *Blind Touching*

György Cséka: Wild Landscape

Gábor Pfisztner: Recycling: Memories of Forgetting – Photo/Model 2

Zsófia Somogyi: The Unimportant and The Essential – On the Photographs of Ildi Hermann

Attila Horányi: About A Portrait – István Lábady: Portrait of Asztrik Várszegi, Archabbot of Pannonhalma

Flóra Barkóczi: The Present, Future and Past of a New City – Plan D, Dunaújváros

Biographies – Artists

Impressum

5

7

10

20

34

46

54

62

72

82

98

106

122

128

142

148

158

161

REVIEW OF HUNGARIAN
PHOTOGRAPHY



Judit Gellér (1983) curator, lecturer. She has been publishing art critiques and art reviews in various Hungarian journals since 2000. She has been a member of the Association of Hungarian Journalists since 2007 and of the AICA Section Hungary since 2017. She earned her BA and MA Degrees as a Design and Art Theory Expert at the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design. Between 2013 and 2015, she was a board member of the Studio of Young Photographers Hungary. She started her Ph.D. studies in 2013 in the Film, Media and Contemporary Culture program of Eötvös Loránd University. Since 2014, she has been a lecturer at the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design. Since 2015, she has been working as a curator at the Capa Center. She is the founder and editor of the Pécsi József Photography Grant digital archive. Since 2020, she has been on the editorial board of the *Review of Hungarian Photography*. Her research fields include private photos, the artistic use of archives and contemporary photography.

Mihály Surányi (1959) He obtained his degree at the Budapest University of Technology's Faculty of Chemical Engineering in 1982. From 2005 to 2008, he studied Art Management at the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design. He has become known on the Hungarian photography scene as the head of the Nessim Gallery. Since 2006, he has organized over forty exhibitions in Budapest and abroad. He has been editor-in-chief of the magazine *Fotóművészet* ["Art Photography"] since 2017. From 2020, he has been on the editorial board of the *Review of Hungarian Photography*.

Balázs Gáspár (1989) photo historian, editor. He studied literature and philosophy between 2007 and 2014 and acquired a degree at Eötvös Loránd University. From 2012 to 2013, he also attended courses on photography. He has been publishing articles on exhibitions, contemporary photography, and the history of photography on blogs, in online periodicals and in printed journals since 2014. He has been the editor of the blog of the Capa Center since 2018. From 2020, he has been on the editorial board of the *Review of Hungarian Photography*. In his articles, he focuses on the relationship between photography and politics/propaganda, as well as the connection between photography and cities. He lives and works in Budapest.

Gabriella Csizék (1966) After completing her studies in Art Theory and Cultural Anthropology, she worked at the Hungarian Museum of Photography, and later became a curator of the Hungarian House of Photography. Her main areas of interest are contemporary photography and related interdisciplinary fields. She is involved in the editing of exhibition material, as well as the compilation and editing of images for books. She has devised the concepts of the artistic project *Folyamatos Jelen* (*Present Continuous*) (exhibition and catalog series), the *Verzó Online Gallery* and the exhibition series *Pillanatnyi Forgatókönyv* (*Momentary Script*), also acting as editor and organizer for all three. She curated *When Will It Be Tomorrow/Mikor lesz holnap*, a comprehensive exhibition presenting the oeuvre of Sylvia Plachy. She has been the co- and organizing curator of numerous international exhibitions put on display in Budapest. One of the main driving forces behind her activities is to make Hungarian photography known in the international scene. She is currently working on *The Photojournalist Robert Capa*, a

permanent exhibition to be opened in Budapest. From 2020, she has been on the editorial board of the *Review of Hungarian Photography*.

Emese Mucsi (1985) curator and art writer. She graduated from the Faculty of Contemporary Art Theory and Curatorial Studies at the Hungarian University of Fine Arts in 2013, and from the Faculty of Hungarian Literature and Linguistics at the University of Szeged in 2017. She started publishing critiques, essays, and interviews in various art journals in 2011. From 2013, she ran projects as a freelance curator. From March 2014 to January 2018, she was the editor-in-chief of *Artmagazin Online* (artmagazin.hu). Between 2016 and 2019, she was a board member of the Hungarian section of AICA (International Association of Art Critics). She has been a curator of the Robert Capa Contemporary Photography Center, Budapest, since January 2018. She has been a Ph.D. student at Eötvös Loránd University's Film, Media, and Cultural Theory Doctoral Program since the fall of 2018. Since 2020, she has been on the editorial board of the *Review of Hungarian Photography*.

Vera A. Fehér (1983) photographer. She completed her Photography MA at the Rippl-Rónai Faculty of Arts at Kaposvár University in 2019. Her work has been acknowledged with the Award of Esztergom at the 21st Esztergom Photography Biennial, the Honorable Mention Award of the PH21 Gallery in 2018 and by the fellowship of the Association of Hungarian Photographers in 2018–2019. She is a founding member of the artist group called *Hibaizmus* (Errorism). She is also a member of the Studio of Young Photographers, the Műhely Művészeti Egyesület art association in Kecskemét, Hungary, the Photography section of MAOE (National Association of Hungarian Artists), as well as the Association of Hungarian Photographers. Her works have been regularly showcased at solo and group exhibitions since 2010.

Kata Balázs (1981) art historian living in Budapest. She completed her degree in Hungarian and Art History at Eötvös Loránd University, also obtaining the necessary qualification for teaching. She also studied in Poland and Italy. Since 2007, she has written several publications, mostly on 20th-century art, with her primary focus being the art of the eighties, performance art and photography. She has held courses as an external lecturer at the University of Theatre and Film Arts and the Visart Academy of Art and Design and has also taught at the Eszterházy Károly University in Eger as an assistant professor. She has worked at the Ludwig Museum, the Art History Research Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences through a grant for young researchers, as well as the Hungarian University of Fine Arts. She has been on the staff of the acb ResearchLab since 2020.

Flóra Barkóczi (1990) art historian. She works at the Artpool Art Research Center in Budapest, Hungary, while also pursuing her Ph.D. studies at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest. Her main research interests include the art of the East-Central European region during the socialist period and after the change of the regime; the evolvement of digital culture in the region starting from the 1990s; the interrelations between art and technology; the use of photography in neo avant-garde and contemporary art; and the changes in archival practices and methodologies caused by digital technologies. Formerly, she worked as a curator and program coordinator at the Robert Capa Contemporary Center and as a researcher at the acb ResearchLab in Budapest. She is currently working on her dissertation on the future potential of art archives in East-Central Europe after the digital turn.

Tímea Bata (1976) ethnographer, museologist. She graduated from Eötvös Loránd University with a major in History and Ethnography, then completed her Ph.D. at the University of Pécs. Since 2005, she has been working as a museologist at the Museum of Ethnography, dealing with the Photography Collection of the institute. Her publications are built on the photographs held by the museum, with her main interest lying in images from the pre-World War II era. In her works, Bata analyzes the estates of researchers and photographers (József Huszka, Gábor Szinte, Béla Gunda, Rilly Weissbach and her sibling), visual documentation concerning certain ethnographic regions and themes in the era (the Ormánság region, Békés county, the museum's photographs depicting Jewish people), and elements of the legacy of what is seen as the typical 'Hungarian' style in photography.

György Cséka (1972) aesthete, critic. He earned a degree in Hungarian Language and Literature and Aesthetics. From 2009 to 2010, he served as the secretary of the Studio of Young Photographers. From 2009 to 2012, he was the editor of the fine art photography journal *Fotopost.hu*. He also worked as a contributing author to the art blog of the Hungarian news portal *Origo* called *Kunsztriblog* from 2013 to 2014, and has been an author for the online magazine *Artportal* since 2015. From 2019 to 2020, he was the editor-in-chief of the online photography magazine *Punkt*. He has been working at the Artpool Art Research Center since 2020. He is a regular writer of articles on contemporary photography and fine art and is also active as a curator.

Ágnes Eperjesi (1964) artist. Her first solo exhibition took place in 1989. Since then, she has exhibited her works in solo and group exhibitions alike. She had solo shows in New York in 1999 and 200 and participated in the Houston PhotoFest with a solo exhibition in 2002. She has received numerous Hungarian and international acknowledgments, including an essay by Arthur C. Danto in 2005. Her works can be found in several public collections and museums. She is represented by acb Gallery in Budapest. A bilingual Hungarian-English volume dedicated to her early photographic works was published by acb ResearchLab in 2019, which also included her position statement in an essay. In 2017, she gave a lecture with the title "The photogram as a medium of art and education" at the "Impacts of the Hungarian Avant-Garde" conference at Indiana University Bloomington, USA. She has been a faculty member of the Intermedia Department at the Hungarian University of Fine Arts since 2010. She is presently a Senior Lecturer at the Hungarian University of Fine Arts.

Attila Horányi (1966) art historian, aesthete. He is the acting head of the Institute for Theoretical Studies at the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design. He has an MA in Art History and a Ph.D. in Aesthetics, both from Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. Dr. Horányi was a Fulbright scholar at the Cultural Anthropology Department of Northwestern University. He was a fellow and later board member of the Civic Education Project and received the Kállai Grant for three years. He is the recipient of the prestigious Németh Lajos Prize (given to art historians and art critics), and one of his book reviews was granted the Opus Mirabile Prize by the Art Historian Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He has been a member of numerous boards, the most notable of which was the Photography Board of the National Cultural Fund, which he also led for two years. He frequently organizes conferences in art history, the theory of photography and visual culture. His areas of research include modernist art and art theory, design theory and the philosophy and history of art history. He is also completing a monograph on the autonomy of art and a collection of published and unpublished essays.

Gábor Pfisztner (1967) photography writer, lecturer. He graduated from Eötvös Loránd University as a History and German major and spent two semesters as a guest student at the College of Applied Arts, studying Visual Communication. He completed his Ph.D. at Eötvös Loránd University in the Aesthetics program of the Philosophy Doctoral School. He regularly publishes theoretical essays and critiques on photography. He gives lectures on the history and theory of photography and contemporary photography. He is a faculty member of the Budapest Metropolitan University's Department of Visual Communication.

He is also an invited external lecturer of the Photography Department at the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, as well as Eötvös Loránd University's Institute for Art Theory and Media Research.

Zsófia Somogyi (1978) She earned a degree in Art History and Aesthetics at Eötvös Loránd University in 2003. From 2003 to 2007, she worked at the Dorottya Gallery. From 2007 to 2009, she was a recipient of the Kállai Scholarship, granted by the Ministry for Education and Culture. She has been working at the Jewish community center Bálint House since 2007. In 2007, she was awarded a fellowship by the Frac Lorraine Museum (Metz, France). She has been an external lecturer of the KREA design school since 2008. As curator and art critic, her focus is on private photographs and contemporary photography tackling human rights issues and social problems.

Gabriella Vincze Gabriella Vincze (1979), art historian. She wrote her MA thesis on the Hungarian sculpture of the 19th and 20th centuries and the relationship between text and photography. She earned her doctorate at ELTE Art History Doctoral School with a dissertation on the history of Hungarian movement art entitled *A magyar mozdulatművészet története és néhány motívumának nemzetközi párhuzama* [*The history of Hungarian movement art and the international parallels of some of its motifs*]. Her research areas include the history and survival of modern dance; the relationship between dance, visual art and photography in the 20th century; movement and dance photography and visual art adaptations in contemporary dance. She has researched all these topics as a research fellow at the Institute of Art History (Hungarian Academy of Science's Research Center

for the Humanities), and the University of Theatre and Film Arts, in addition to studying the material of numerous private collectors in the United States and France. She is a member of the Dance Studies Working Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Hungarian Fellowship for Dance Sciences. She has organized exhibitions on the art of movement: in 2012, at the Museum of Applied Arts, and in 2013, at the Hungarian Institute in Paris. She has edited four volumes on dance and 20th century visual and photographic art and has published dozens of articles in various volumes and journals. She is currently working on several interdisciplinary studies and a book of studies analysing and contextualising Hungarian movement art photography.

András Váczy Author of the interview with Zsuzsi Ujj at Artmagazin

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“I JUST HAD TO DO SOMETHING”

INTERVIEW WITH ZSUZSI UJJ



Zsuzsi Ujj, 1988, courtesy of the artist

András Váczy: *You were born in Veszprém, in 1959. What was your family background? And what was your childhood like?*

Zsuzsi Ujj: Both my mother and father came from a family of farmers. However, as a result of nationalization during the Rákosi era, they were stripped of all their possessions, including their animals and land, and were left with only their house. They also had to face forced collectivization. My mom first took

a job at a firearms factory (which later became a “Zhiguli” parts manufacturer - a Russian car) in the Cseri Woods and continued working there until she was pressured into entering the party, which drove her to hand in her notice. She got away with her resignation without incident. That was when she started working for Ofotért, an optics company, where she remained until retirement.

My dad's story was similar. He was knowledgeable about both agriculture and machinery, so he worked as a machine and lathe worker. He completed some kind of secondary education, became a foreman, and retired from the Agricultural Machinery Factory at the age of 60. The three of us are still living merrily—my parents are happy people. Mama is past 90, Papa will turn 93 in January. Since I was quite a sickly baby, I was taken to stay at my grandmother's place, which was really great. They had a cow, some hens, a pig, a dog, and a cat—really everything you could wish for as a child. My time at her place did me a world of good. I drank fresh milk straight from the cow, and that was where I learned to walk and say my first words. Then, suddenly, when I was deemed to be healthy, I was torn away from her. I believe that's why I'm a bit of an odd bird—I experienced my being taken away as a violent act.

But then I went to school, which I liked, mostly because of my classmates, given that the school itself was a stronghold of communist ideology, functioning almost like a party school. My homeroom teacher was a party member and attempted to persuade my parents to join the party, too. They were devout Catholics, going to church every Sunday, which the school very much disapproved of. I was an excellent athlete, also interested in literature, but could never get a five, the highest mark. I wasn't considered a good student, as I had behavioral issues. I had to face all sorts of punishments, including my pioneer tie being withdrawn and whatnot.

AV: *You mentioned you were interested in literature. Did that mean reading, or also writing?*

ZSU: I wrote some poems, but my homeroom teacher—indeed a cruel person—confiscated those, too, and never gave them back. I was very much fond of Petőfi and continue to like his poetry to date. I now view him quite differently than back when I used to read his revolutionary poems to socially sensitize myself. These days I prefer his pub poems and love poetry.

AV: *And how about love in your own life?*

ZSU: I always had innocent relationships. It was in eighth grade that I fell in love with Tibor Bakács (Settenkedő). He is also from Veszprém. We held each other's hands on the street, we went to the movies, and allegedly even kissed. He lived like a king compared to me. At the movie theater, I would usually buy a ticket in the first three rows, but with him we sat in the box seats. He put his hand on my shoulder, things like that... Then he fell in love with someone else, and I moved on to other innocent relationships. I somehow managed to finish elementary school without having to repeat a grade. However, I failed one of my classes at midterm in eighth grade, with the mid-term report card counting towards my application to secondary schools. Back in the seventies, you

stood no chance of getting into high school with a GPA of 2.4. You had to go to vocational school, as that was where the riff-raff was thought to belong.

AV: *So what did you do after elementary school?*

ZSU: For a year, I worked four-hour shifts at the József Szigeti Lumber Works, known today as the Balaton Furniture Factory. My task consisted of assigning quality certificates, meaning that if, for example, 1,500 garden chairs were manufactured, I would manually number the corresponding quality certificates from 1 to 1,500. The job wasn't particularly uplifting, but I



With Grandpa, 1963, courtesy of the artist

enjoyed being there. I then decided to follow in my mother's footsteps and become an optician, because Budapest was the only place where you could get the necessary training. I moved to Budapest to study at the vocational school for opticians and rented a bed for 300 forints a month in a Kapás Street studio apartment owned by a Ms. Lincsi. There were two beds; she slept on one of them, I slept on the other, and we shared the bathroom and the kitchen. Back then, at the age of 15, I didn't find it all that frightening. Fortunately, Ms. Lincsi typically worked afternoon and night shifts. She even allowed me to smoke in her kitchen, despite her having asthma. As a matter of fact, we didn't see much of each other.



My husband is an engineer, 1985, slide and blow-up, courtesy of the artist

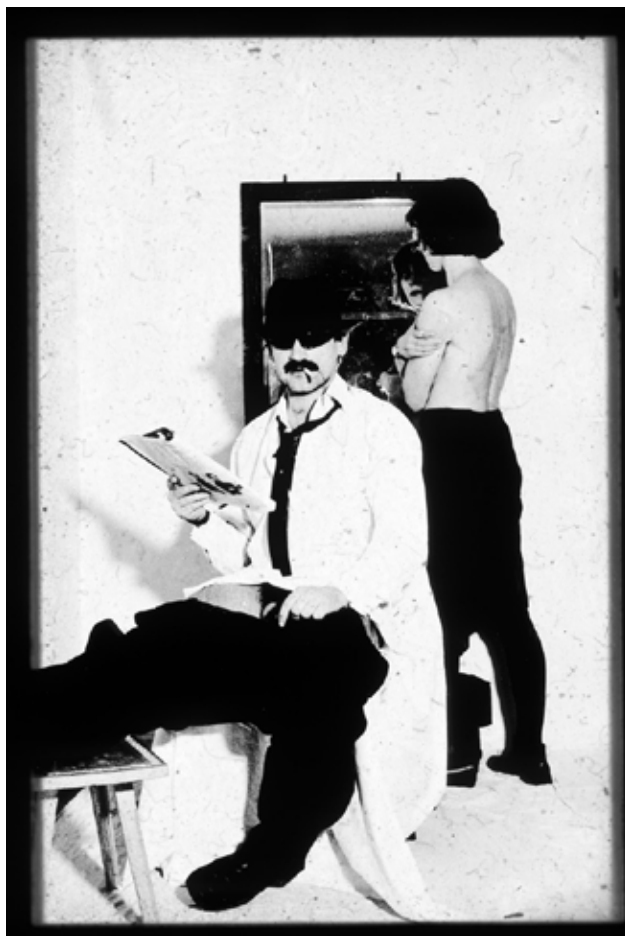
AV: *What was the optician vocational school like?*

ZSU: Like slavery or legal child labor, at least in those days. Eight hours of work, four days a week, plus two days of school. Back then, Saturday was still a working day, with Ofotért optical stores also staying open. In the first year, our practical education took place in a common training workshop, but starting with the second year, we were placed in stores where we had to work hard. We would wait on customers and then go back to the workshop to prepare the eyeglasses they ordered. We received a monthly stipend of about 300 forints for all that.

After my first year, I left Ms. Lincsi and moved in with Zsuzsa Dárdai in Ráckeve. She was a friend of mine who worked as a nursery school teacher in Halásztelek. In the afternoons, she would come to the city so we could watch a movie, go to the theater, or attend a concert. The commuter rail to Ráckeve operated late into the night, so we could travel home by train, and I didn't have to pay any rent apart from the occasional purchase of firewood. If we ran out of firewood, we would stay in our coats. I obviously wasn't very well socialized at the time,

so after a year's stay, it turned out that it would be better if I left. That's when I moved to Hungária Boulevard, once again into rented lodgings.

The places I rented were pretty awful. At the same time, I became familiar enough with the movie scene to know what I wanted to see, and there was no shortage of available films to choose from. Back in Kapás Street, I noticed the Buda Dance Club on the corner, next to what operates today as a gallery. The club used to host concerts by Béla Szakcsi Lakatos and other excellent jazz musicians. Interbrass also used to play in the neighborhood on Marczibányi Square, while the Builders' Club was home to György Szabados' concerts. But movies were my number one passion, and I was not yet interested at all in visual arts. Following a series of innocent loves, at the age of 18 or 19, I met the man whom I later married. I was 24 at the time of our marriage. A few years later we got divorced. He was called Sándor Mátyási, and he appears as the model in my picture entitled *With Öcsi* [Öcsis]. He helped me a lot and was the one who bought me a camera.



Tibor Várnagy, 1987, photo credit: István Halas © HUNGART 2018

AV: *How did you create *With Öcsi*?*

ZSU: I used the camera's self-timer to take the photos. I arranged Öcsi and myself into different poses. I had Öcsi [Sándor Mátyási, referred to in the diminutive] grow a mustache. The dropped pants were no accident, either. I took my cue from Hajas and Vető's photograph entitled *Lou Reed Total*. I wanted my piece to resemble the Hajas image. It took us not one, but two photo sessions to take all the pictures. I used a unique and most likely unrepeatable technique for *With Öcsi*. I was surely influenced by the cinema, as the piece consists of 14 frames. The whole work is a vertical picture, about two meters long. We exposed each frame separately onto the paper, always covering and rolling up the other parts. István Halas helped me do the lab work.

AV: *Where did you work as an optician?*

ZSU: I worked at the Ofofért store near the Opera, at 32 Népköztársaság Street (present-day Andrásy Avenue). I enjoyed working there, as I liked my colleagues and was happy to work with people. In the meantime, I somehow managed to pass my secondary school exams and moved back home to

Veszprém for around a year, year-and-a-half, with the intention of preparing for the university entrance examination. Of course I didn't end up preparing for it, so I returned to Budapest, where I undertook odd jobs. For instance, there was a printing house on Blaha Lujza Square offering occasional night jobs. Then there was the National Institute of Pedagogy, looking for pollsters. I chose to do polling in the countryside, both because it paid better and because I was keen on traveling. I spent a lot of time in Pécs at the housing estate, visiting several friends on those occasions and lodging with them. I also went to Győr-Sopron county to do survey research, whose results we then processed via computer. I worked as a pollster for two or three years in the early '80s.

AV: *How did that all play out in your private life?*

ZSU: In the early days, I lived in Budapest, while Öcsi lived in Veszprém, and we would meet on weekends and on our days off. Then, when he said I should prepare for the entrance exam, he moved to Budapest, and I stayed in Veszprém. Even when we lived together, though, he was busy building his career,



With István Halas, 1985, photo credit: Tibor Várnagy © HUNGART 2018

while I had no clue about what I wanted or what life was all about. He obtained a university degree in systems engineering, then started a major in sociology and completed that as well, working together with people like Tibor Liska. He would leave in the morning and return in the evening, with more work or studying left to do at home. He completely withdrew into his own shell, which is how he is currently living, too.

So in the meantime, I started looking elsewhere. There were a few different men, but eventually I ended up with Halas. György Durst introduced us to each other in Balatonfüred, which we traveled to in '82 or '83 for a huge underground music festival organized in a hangar. From then on we started dating, and later moved in together, driving each other up the wall for some years. It was both a good and a terrible time. For instance, when he went to Paris, I had no idea if he would return. That's when I started doing photography.

AV: *What led to your involvement with photography? What were your main sources of inspiration?*

ZSU: Halas introduced me to Tibor Várnagy, the Liget Gallery, and the artists associated with that exhibition space. The Liget

often hosted photo exhibitions, with many photographers—such as Lugosi Lugo, Gábor Kerekes, Lenke Szilágyi, Tibor Zátanyi, Aliona Frankl, and others—frequenting the gallery. We used to get together occasionally, so I was familiar with their work. On one occasion, John P. Jacob, from America, visited the gallery in search of Eastern European photographers for a show he planned to put on in the US. This must have been around '85. It was with him that I had a chance to go over to György Széphelyi F.'s place, where the Hajas estate was kept. I had already taken photos before, but upon seeing the works of Tibor Hajas I was shaken. It dawned on me that the camera and photography could be used in a completely different manner from what I was used to seeing. This wasn't a conscious turn for me, I would rather say that something in his pictures moved me. My earlier photos already showed my own body, but those were more feminine and more respectable representations compared to the pieces I later put on display at the Liget Gallery in '87.

The Liget material consisted of brutal imagery. I believe that was the result of Tibor Hajas' influence. Not only did his images reveal to me the different technical possibilities within photography, but also the potential for expressing meaning



Dressed as Janis Joplin at the school carnival, 1973, courtesy of the artist

beyond the neighbor's roof or a cow in a meadow. Photos, I realized, could also provide a means of articulating one's inner world. I couldn't have put it so aptly back then, I just followed my instincts when taking the pictures. I didn't have my own photo gear; neither a camera, nor anything else, so I would borrow Zsuzsa Dárdai's Praktica.

I lived with Öcsi on Csepel at the time, in one of the housing estates in an apartment consisting of one room plus two smaller "half" rooms, and luckily not too much furniture. I could dedicate half of the living room totally to photography, creating an empty space where I would arrange whatever object I wanted to appear on, and then take photos using the camera's self-timer. These were composed pieces, with two creative flurries resulting in the material for the '87 exhibition at the Liget Gallery. I took note of what came to my mind, thoughts of what I wanted to see in the pictures. When I had collected enough ideas, I borrowed some lamps and a camera, waited until I was home alone and then created these series in two or three days. I didn't really have props, so I painted on my own body with black and white tempera and was also keen on using plastic bags and white bed sheets. On the photo *With*

a Throne [Trónusos kép], I "whitewashed" myself with white tempera, then used black tempera to imitate bones. I had a table covered with a bedsheet, on top of it a chair also covered with a bedsheet. I climbed on top quickly and took the picture with the self-timer.

AV: *What made your photos so grainy?*

ZSU: They came out so gritty and grainy because I wanted to see them and have them enlarged but blowing them up into one-meter prints would have been incredibly costly. So Halas obtained some print sheet film, onto which he copied my negatives, thus making them positives that could be projected onto the wall as slides. That's how I selected which photos I wanted blown up into one-meter prints. He then converted the slides back into negatives, which we used for enlarging the pictures. This procedure totally transformed the makeup of the photos. They became more forceful and cruder, conveying a sense of coarseness. Around that time the Liget Gallery happened to have a free exhibition slot because someone had canceled a show, so Tibor Várnagy offered me the opportunity. This happened in November of 1987. I owe a lot to Tibor.



Tibor Várnagy and István Halas mounting a poster for the Milan Knížíák exhibit, courtesy of the artist, photo credit: Zsuzsi Ujj

AV: *I recall something about the pictures coming off the wall.*

ZSU: I wanted the photos to seem like they were on canvas, so we mounted the Dokubrom paper onto plain canvas. As we didn't do a perfect job, during the two or three hours that we were giving a concert at the exhibition opening, the photos peeled off. It happened as if it were intentional. While the audience was listening to the music, nice and slow, inch by inch the pictures came off the wall.

AV: *That was when you made your debut as a singer. Did you ever learn to sing?*

ZSU: No, never. I can't even read music.

AV: *Where did the music for your lyrics come from?*

ZSU: It was my own music. I guess I would call the tunes blues progressions. I still play such tunes, both with my band *Csókolom* and with Kristóf Darvas.

AV: *Who played at the opening?*

ZSU: I invited János Vető, János Gasner, and Digó, a very talented boy from Veszprém with whom I actually wanted to

start a band in '81. However, he was a junkie, heavily addicted to poppy tea and heroin . . . so we had an alcoholic drummer and a heroin-addicted guitarist. With me not being either an alcoholic or addicted to anything else, we didn't get on very well. The songs emerged somehow, and there were a few of them. We compiled our first cassette with *Csókolom* in '93 from those songs. The exhibition with the concert in '87 was considered a notable event in town, and that's where I met Spenót. The show was on for two weeks, with its closing also marked by a concert of ours. Spenót played the drums, Digó the guitar, and Ildikó Szineg, bass guitarist and singer of the band *Kampec Dolores*, played the bass. This time we actually managed to achieve an enjoyable sound.

AV: *Where did you work in those days, how did you make your living?*

ZSU: At the time of the exhibition, I was working at the Korányi Institute of Pulmonology. Often confronted with vulnerability, illness and death during my job, the time spent there certainly influenced my thinking. So did the death of my grandfather, whom I photographed after he had passed



The *First Exhibition* at the Liget Gallery, János Gasner and István Nagy (Digó)

away. All those things came together to shape my mindset: the impact of Hajas, the Korányi, illness, and the death of my grandfather, with whom I was very close. I had been working at the Korányi for a year when we were invited to Frankfurt, and since I wasn't granted leave, I handed in my notice. That's how simple it was. Then I started going to the Béla Balázs Studio, first as an external member. Péter Forgács had already been working on the *Private Hungary* [*Privát Magyarország*] series at the time and had a wealth of material waiting to be processed. These films needed to be scripted, so that's what I did. Essentially, I had to go through them and take notes to facilitate their future usage. Later I became his assistant. Further on I was given other tasks as well. There was a lot to learn at the Béla Balázs Studio. And I enjoyed being there . . .

AV: Your pictures were exhibited again in '88. And then came your trip to the US.

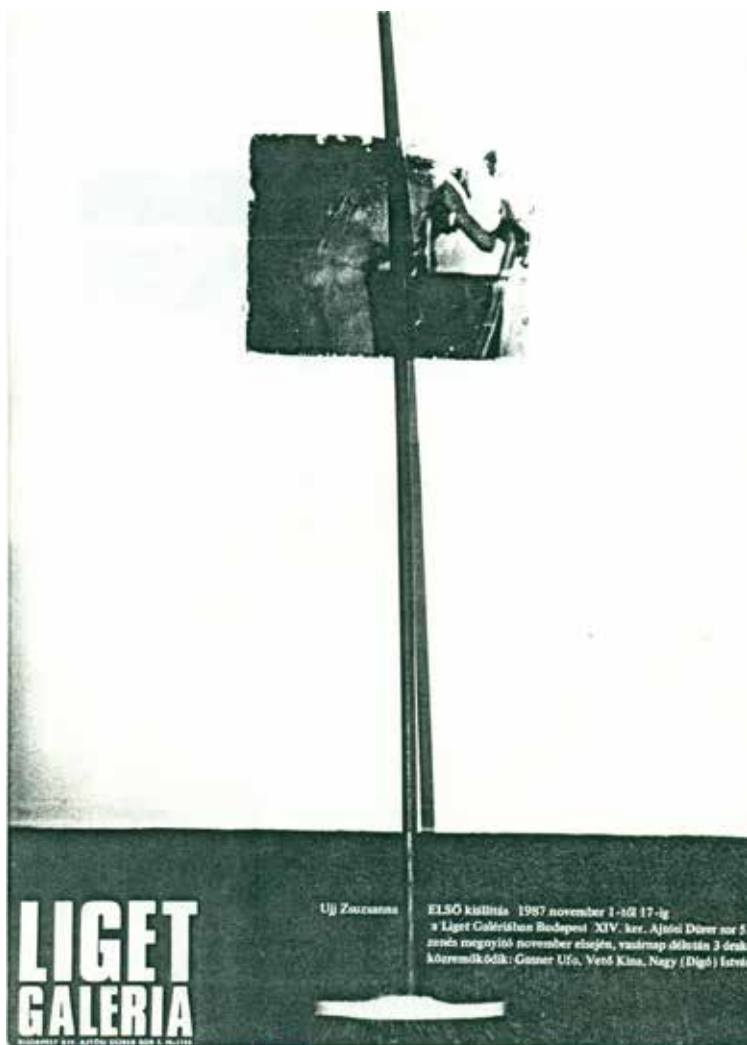
ZSU: That's right, through a scholarship from the New York office of the Soros foundation. We had several exhibitions in places like Austin, Houston, Oberlin in Ohio, and Boston.

AV: When did you take your last photos?

ZSU: In '91. They became known by the title *In Circle* [*Körbe*] and were my last works of photography. I then swapped my camera for the microphone.

AV: What happened to the pictures?

ZSU: Not much later, in '93, we formed our band *Csokolom* and started giving concerts. A friend of mine called Mátyás Selmeczi organized a concert for us in Miskolc, where I met Zsolt Kishonthy. I could tell that he was active in the cultural scene, but I didn't know he ran a gallery. Mátyás must have told Zsolt about my photos, because he started nagging me about them, expressing his interest in my work and talking about placing them on sale in a commercial gallery. I literally laughed at him to his face: put photos on sale in Hungary? Ha-ha-ha... But he wouldn't give up. He came to my apartment with László Jurecskó and had me dig out from behind the wardrobe a few large photos covered in dust. He liked them. Soon afterwards, Zsolt staged a lifetime achievement exhibition, showcasing my work created between '85 and '91 at the MissionArt Gallery in Falk Miksa Street. Tibor Várnagy



The brochure for the *First Exhibition*, Liget Gallery, 1987, courtesy of the artist

opened the show. It was a success, and I really loved seeing all my stuff together. Around the same time, the MUMOK in Vienna was putting on an exhibition focusing on East-Central European artists, with the Hungarian section being curated by Edit András. Some of my photos were featured there, as well as in a lengthy catalogue they published, which is how the Tate Modern selected *With a Throne* for their own exhibit. I didn't think anyone would be interested in my photography, but Kishonthy was right. He deserves credit for my photos being rediscovered.

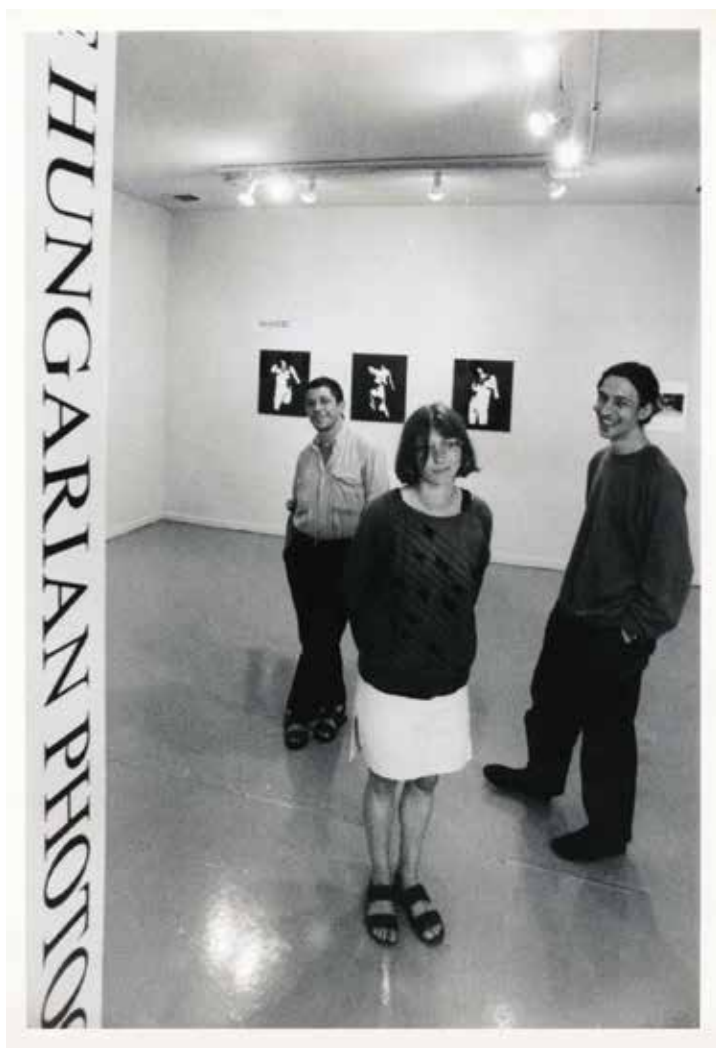
AV: Now, many years later, how do you see yourself and your artwork from that time?

ZSU: It was a very important period in my life, but I didn't develop an artistic identity. I identify much more as a songwriter

than a visual artist. At that time in my life, photography provided me with a means of self-expression. My viewpoint has changed completely since then, and it makes me smile to think how seriously I used to take my life. My pictures were born out of an elemental need, I could not have survived otherwise. I just had to do something.

INDEX OF PEOPLE MENTIONED

Dárdai, Zsuzsa: Visual artist and art coordinator. (Co-) founder of Árnyékkötők Alkotócsoport [Shadow Weavers Art Group], the periodical entitled *Árnyékkötők co-media* [Shadow Weavers Co-media], the Light and Shadow Art Foundation, the International Mobile MADI Museum Foundation and *MADI art periodical*. Digó: Musician. His civilian name is István Nagy but is also known as Narkós Pisti ["Dopehead Steve"].



At Houston Center for Photography, 1989, courtesy of the artist

Frankl, Aliona: Photographer since 1987, mentored by László Lugosi Lugo. Her artwork consists of black and white photos, and of photograms since 1996. Gasner, János: Musician. Played in different formations of the bands *Európa Kiadó* and *Sziámi*, as well as in *Art Deco*, *Orkesztra Luna* and *Új Nem*. Died in 2009. Halas, István: Started doing photography and visual art in the '70s. Regularly participated in the programs of the Liget Gallery in the '80s. John P. Jacob: American writer and curator. In his 1989 book entitled *The Metamorphic Medium: New Photography from Hungary*, he uses the concept of gender representation in the context of Zsuzsi Ujj's works. Selmeczi, Mátyás: Architect, worked as designing architect at the design department of ARÉV in Székesfehérvár between 1982 and 1992. Has been working as a freelance design architect since 1992. Spenót [Hungarian for "Spinach"]:

Musician. His real name is Zoltán Tóth. Played in the bands *Európa Kiadó* and *Ági és a Fiúk* in the '80s, later became a member of *Csókolom*, then *Puszi*. Széphelyi F., György: Art historian, specialized in art history methodology, baroque art, 17th to 19th-century Hungarian art and the oeuvre of his brother, Tibor Hajas. Died in 2014. Szineg, Ildikó: Musician, mentee of Csaba Hajnóczy. In 1983, became bass and second guitarist of *Kampec Dolores*, founded by Hajnóczy as one of the successor bands to *Kontroll Csoport*. Zátanyi, Tibor: Photographer, also worked as lecturer in the '80s and '90s (College of Applied Arts, *Szellemkép Szabadiskola* Art School). Várnagy, Tibor: Visual artist, manager of the Liget Gallery, contributor to *Artmagazin*, see: Várnagy, Tibor. "Ujj Zsuzsi: Képek, 1986–1991 [Zsuzsi Ujj: Photos, 1986–1991]." *Artmagazin*, no. 2., 2012, pp. 14–15.

Interview with Visual Artist Tibor Várnagy

Part 1 1968–1989

Kata Balázs: *How did you first get involved with art?*

Tibor Várnagy: I owe this to my parents, who were engineers and used to work on technical drawings in the evenings for some extra earnings. So from a very young age, they gave me a pencil, some paper, and plenty of praise. At primary school (ELTE Apáczai Csere János Practicing School), I was taught by Árpád Szabados from sixth to eighth grade (1968–1971). Later, during my years at Vörösmarty High School, I attended his art club at Gutenberg Square, albeit only for a short period of time. What made Árpád an important figure was that beyond familiarizing us with different procedures, such as graphic techniques or plaster casting, he also taught us art history, including the modern era: 20th-century art, the classical avant-garde, Chagall, Klee and Corbusier.

I started reading and collecting art books in my freshman year of high school. Lajos Vajda, Endre Bálint, Van Gogh, Bosch and Duchamp became strong influences early on, and later, in the Central Antiquarian Bookshop (right below our apartment), I managed to acquire a number of catalogues, exhibiting the works of artists such as Wolf Vostell¹ and Heinz Cibulka.²

In my third year of high school, I enrolled in a course on *Modern Hungarian Fine Arts*, offered by the Society for Dissemination of Scientific Knowledge. The scope of the course ranged from the Nagybánya Artists' Colony through the *Nyolcak* group ["The Eight"], the Szentendre Artists' Colony, the European School, up until the works of Lakner, Kondor, and Melocco. We would view slides for two hours every week, and each topic was presented by one of the three most established experts in the field.

I also read up on the artists who caught my attention, like Lajos Gulácsy, Lajos Kassák, Lajos Vajda, György Román, and later Bruegel, Rembrandt, etc. We saw originals from Margit Anna in Szentendre,³

as well as a performance by József Szajna—advertised as a happening—at the Ernst Museum in 1975.⁴

Béla Kondor also had a deep impact on me. Following my freshman year of high school, we were spending our summer holiday at Lake Balaton, when on a rainy Saturday my father stopped by a news kiosk to buy some newspapers for the family. He asked me what I wanted, and I chose *Élet és Irodalom* ["Life and Literature"] right away. I read the sociography piece on the last page, then spread out the pages in my room to decide which graphics I liked the best. From then on I became a regular reader of *Élet és Irodalom*, which led to my quickly growing interest in Kondor's works. I believe it was in the fall before he died that an entire issue was dedicated to his oeuvre, with an introduction to the drawings written by the artist himself. In the summer following his death, I traveled to Tihany to see the memorial exhibition that opened in his honor.⁵ I also managed to obtain a copy of his book entitled *Boldogságtöredék* ["(A) Fragment of Happiness"].⁶

KB: *How did your professional life develop after high school?*

TV: While earlier I was intent on continuing my studies at the College of Fine Arts, I changed my mind by my senior year. I was good at

painting and drawing, but I didn't do much of either, and I got bored with art classes, too. In those days, I was more attracted to the cinema, records/concerts, reading, and just wandering around, plus we also made regular excursions to Szentendre. I would rather have applied to study art history or film directing, but there were far more applicants than places, and my grade point average, as well as my knowledge, fell far short of the requirements. Having never been interested in what they taught at school, even though I had quite a thorough understanding of some subjects, I remained almost completely ignorant in others. At the same time, what I learned outside of school mostly proved to be useless for the entrance examinations. I applied twice to the Teacher Training College to study Hungarian and History but was not admitted on either occasion. On my third go, I applied to the Primary School Teacher Training College and was accepted easily.

I was actually satisfied with this change of plan, as by that time I had started to develop an interest in set theory and psychology. I chose to take my elective courses in Art and Popular Education and won a poster design contest in my first semester. Huba Bálványos started lecturing at the College at this time and launched his own elective art interpretation class. He used two slide projectors in parallel, so our discussions in class ventured into the realm of comparative analysis.

A few weeks later, Huba mentioned that Győző Somogyi had taken over the art club that he had been leading in Diana Street, and suggested that I check it out, if I was interested. Already familiar with Győző's screen prints from *Élet és Irodalom* and *Mozgó Világ* ["Moving World"], and having also seen his exhibition at the Studio Gallery,⁷ I decided to go. This happened in the fall of 1977. This art club was where I and the other members of the arts collective *Hejettes Szomlyazók* [Substitute Thirsters] first met each other. Péter Kardos, Attila Nagy, and Balázs Fekete were already part of the circle in those days, but Kada only joined after I left. Győző told us that he only considered himself the leader of the group as far as administrative matters were concerned and was otherwise just another member. And indeed, at times he drew with us.

What astonished me about this art club was that we didn't work on studies. Everyone created their own art, based on art models. Members shared an active social life, marked by excursions, visits to museums and the cinema, and discussions about what they were reading. I didn't participate in these activities at the time, but the following summer my girlfriend and I went to their "training camp" in Salgótarján, where we were also joined by Huba. We stayed in a school building, and every day we would be admitted to the enamel and glass factory to go and draw freely.

The camp was where one of the first actions of the pre-*Hejettes Szomlyazók* era took place in which I was also involved. Our inspiration came from the production line that we were shown at the glass factory on our first day, as part of the introductory tour. Women in headscarves sat along both sides of a long table, each with a single color in front of them. They were working on producing a flower motif, with each of them adding their own dots and lines in the right place of the goblet, then passing it on. One of the following evenings, a member of the art circle bought a cash register paper roll at a stationery shop. That's how we got the idea to also draw in a production line. Right eye, left eye, right eyebrow, left eyebrow, nose and mouth. We wrote those facial features on scraps of paper, and everyone drew to see what they would be working on. Balázs found one of those wooden rhythm tools

Tibor Várnagy: *Ass Stamp* (published in *Világnézettségi Magazin*, the magazine of *Hejettes Szomlyazók*, in 1984), stamp ink, A4 size.





Tibor Várnagy: *The Artist's Collected Nails 1986–2000*, color photo, A3 size.

used for teaching syllabication. He became the one to portion out the paper from the end of the table and determine how much time we had for drawing our part. Everyone began in a careful, fastidious manner, with great accuracy, then carried on in a schematic fashion, with Balázs leaving less and less time for details, while the drawers were also getting tired of the minutiae. When we pinned the paper roll to the wall, it reached around the entire room, and all this could be nicely followed: it started out with fine, detailed portraits, which turned into increasingly abstract and dispersed collections of points and lines. After I graduated from college, in the spring of 1980, I applied to the College of Fine Arts after all. I attended the entrance examination with Péter Kardos. Balázs Fekete had applied every year up until then and had grown tired of it by that year. We took the exam sitting next to each other, and although both of us got into the second round, I was not admitted in the end, and so let go of this ambition.

After college, I started working as a librarian; Andi (Andrea Hajagos) and I got married, and our oldest son was born in 1981. I started doing photography. I wouldn't say I restarted it, although I did shoot a few rolls towards the end of high school, but back then I didn't even know how to process film. Later on, I worked in folk education, which meant that—through my colleagues—I could arrange some exhibition opportunities for Balázs Fekete and others. These exhibitions took place in community centers, and the one by Balázs, in 1982, was at the Metro Club. With the art circle disbanded by then, we saw each other at New Wave concerts, sometimes at the Ikarus Community Center, sometimes at other venues.

KB: *How did you become manager of the Liget Gallery,⁸ and what happened in 1983–1984, your first two years there?*

TV: Kassák Club was looking for a manager. I applied for the position, and although the director liked my CV, there was another applicant she also found compelling. So she offered me something else: the manager's

position at the gallery she was about to open. She saw from my CV that I was attracted to art and had a little experience in organizing exhibitions. I immediately accepted her offer and was much more enthusiastic about that role than I would have been about managing Kassák Club.

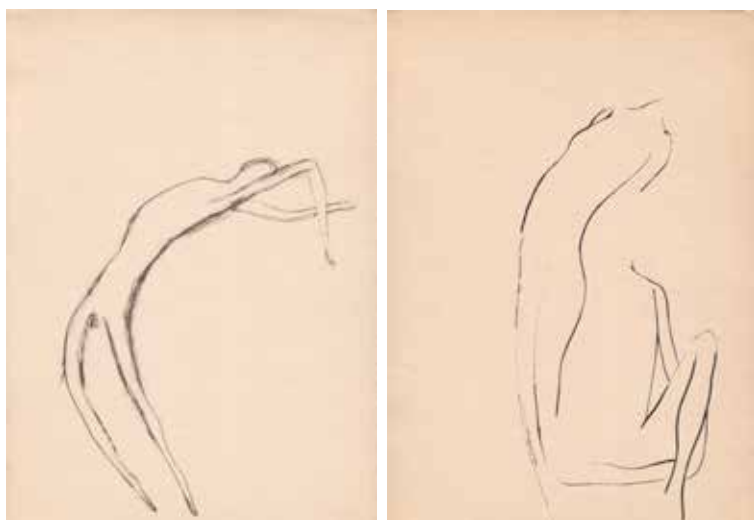
My first trial exhibition—presenting old First of May posters borrowed from the archives of MAHÍR, the Hungarian national advertising agency—opened on May 1, 1983.⁹ The room the gallery used had earlier served as a store and was said to have been a bakery prior to the war. Later it housed an art club and was then used as a working venue by the Zugló Amateur Film Studio. However, when the neighbors started reporting them to the police for being too noisy late into the night, our director (Ernesztin Reszler) moved them to a different location and decided to turn the space into a gallery. I called Árpád Szabados to ask his opinion about what I should focus on to do my job well. He asked me what profile the gallery was aiming for. “Figure out the profile, that's the most important part,” was his advice. But that's not how it worked in practice. Because, you know, without me being aware of it at the time, I had to assess what was realistic within the existing institutional system and given the means at our disposal. What could we do in our six square meters with the technical apparatus we had? Of course finding the answers to those questions was a slow process, and mostly an instinctive one.

Ernesztin Reszler, Liget Gallery founder, asked me whose works I would like to exhibit, but she compiled most of the program for the first year. By the second year (1984), half of our program was made up of her ideas (the János Schادل memorial exhibition, Péter Gyárfás's collection, Attila Csáji), while the other half came from me (Árpád Fákó, Bálint Flesch, István Halas, Győző Somogyi). The shows that meant the most to me in that period were Árpád Fákó's *Fish-Smile* [*Hal-Mosoly*], Bálint Flesch's *Cold Sticky Things* [*Hideg Ragacsos Dolgok*], István Halas's *Labyrinth* [*Labirintus*], and Róbert Swierkiewicz's collection *A gyakorlati művészet és a technológia közötti kép* [“The Picture between Practical Art and Technology”], which was opened by the Xertox group's action art piece entitled *Levél az ismeretlen cenzorhoz* [“Letter to the unknown censor”].

Balázs Fekete also had his first exhibition at the Liget in 1984. By then, he had applied to the Young Artists' Studio several times. That year I did so too for the first time. While he got accepted, I didn't (yet). We founded the group *Hejettes Szomlyazók* around May 1984. Of Ernesztin's artist friends, I struck up a friendship with György Galántai and Róbert Swierkiewicz early on. György was publishing the samizdat journal *Aktuális Levél* [Actual / Alternative / Artpool Letter] in those days. I had already been familiar with Róbert's graphics, but we had never met in person before.

From the point of view of the Liget and its future years, my meeting with István Halas was also a decisive moment. After our second exhibition, I contacted him about our next show, as we wanted to have the poster for the show printed for the first time. From then on, the Liget had most of its posters designed by István, up until 1990–1991. Posters weren't practical at all when it came to mailing them, since they had to be folded in half to fit into an envelope. In retrospect, I guess we chose this format because by 1983, the fourth year of the New Wave, every cultural event—including concerts, alternative (non-bricks-and-mortar) theater premieres, and exhibitions—was advertised with A3-size posters. We typically

Tibor Várnagy: *Fire Contacts*, 1987, black and white photo paper, 24 cm × 18 cm each, interior from the 2019 exhibition at the acb Attachment Gallery (photo: tbb).



Tibor Várnagy: From the "Tea Pictures" series, 1987, India ink, A4 size.

had 400–500 copies printed, out of which we mailed about 150–200, and mailed the same amount in the city, mostly in the downtown area, in selected spots in the busiest squares and streets. We couldn't use the poster columns owned by MAHÍR, nor did the rules at the time allow plastering them on the walls of houses, so we had to resort to using construction fences and other such "temporary" locations. We would prepare a small bucket of wallpaper paste, and set out into the city after 10 p.m.

The majority of our posters were designed by Halas, but occasionally the exhibiting artist would take on the task (Árpád Fákó, Róbert Swierkiewicz, László feLugossy, elek is, György Bp. Szabó, György Giorgio Soós, János Gasner, Gábor Tóth). The general practice, though, was for the artist to provide a picture and the title of the exhibition, after which István would design the typography, or, when he wasn't available, then I would. We organized a total of 127 exhibits between the summer of 1983 and the fall of 1991, with 95% of them being advertised via posters. We changed course with Ágnes Háy's exhibition entitled *Dance Macabre* [*Haláltánc*] in October of 1991,¹⁰ when we started using postcards instead. We continued with postcards until the end of 2010. We completely moved to digital invitations in 2011, which actually resulted from the austerity measures introduced in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis.

Coming back to our topic: In the early eighties, István (Halas) had his studio at 3 Kossuth Lajos Street, where I started going every three weeks for pre-press. My visits soon became more frequent, as he had plenty of things to teach me about photography, too. I'm not sure when István started dating Zsuzsi Ujj, but starting in the mid-1980s the three of us saw each other almost every day. We would go out at night to put up Liget posters together, and our conversations started influencing the way I thought about the Liget and its exhibitions. At the same time, of course, there was a good deal I could learn from all of the different artists we showed at the Liget - partly theory and



Tibor Várnagy: *King*, 1989, tempera and India ink, 58 cm × 74 cm.

partly practical matters. There was no other way to go about it, since back then there was no curator training available in Hungary, or in fact any school where one could learn how to operate a gallery (not even something like András Réz's "Training Course on Leading a Film Club," which I attended at the FMK ["Young Artists' Club"] back when I was still in folk education). In the meantime, I also started making art again. I did some photography and photo projects, some collages and some New Wave graphic art. I developed a new technique: I used tempera to paint the basis of my motifs in light or varied colors, then covered the whole sheet with black India ink, which I then washed off. As a result, patterns emerged in the India ink where I had previously used tempera, because the ink was cleared away by the water there, while it seeped into the untouched parts of the paper.

KB: *What role do you think the Liget played in spreading, or rather representing, the "New Wave"?*

TV: I would say the beginnings of the New Wave date back to the second half of 1980, which was about when bands such as *Trabant* and *Bizottság* ["Committee"] and the Vető-Zuzu duo started playing music. Gábor Bódy's film *Narcissus and Psyche* debuted in December of that year. So by the time the Liget opened in May of 1983, the New Wave was past its first years and the landmark events of its tempestuous *Sturm und Drang* period. And even 1983 was something of a trial year for us, both for the Liget as a gallery and for me as its manager.

In 1984, New Wave exhibitions at the Liget included the shows of Árpád Fákó, István Halas, Balázs Fekete and Bálint Flesch. From 1985, I can mention the exhibitions of János Szirtes, István Nyári, Tamás Soós and feLugossy. The years 1986–1987 also saw a number of New Wave

exhibitions, with the works of Lenke Szilágyi, György Giorgio Soós, Attila Pácz, El Kazovszkij, Gábor Palotai and Miklós Peternák, János Sugár, Krystyna Ziach, György Bp. Szabó, János Vető, Kirsten Dehlholm, etc. The Liget was not nearly as salient a venue of the New Wave as the FMK, the Bercsényi Club, the Lajos Vajda Studio in Szentendre or—at times—the Studio Gallery; but at the time it would not even have been possible to operate a gallery clearly and exclusively dedicated to the New Wave.

The New Wave started as a subcultural phenomenon, which managed to gain ground in a wide range of venues, from the most marginal locales to national institutions of the highest prestige. Of course, the latter would never stage the New Wave as a main theme, but still, occasional appearances were possible, for example in connection with the annual exhibitions of the Young Artists' Studio. Or to cite another example, in those days János Szirtes could not have had a solo exhibition at the Kunsthalle yet, but presenting a performance was alright.

From 1984 onwards, the New Wave emerged as a defining motif of Liget programs too, with a third or fourth of our shows at the time being somehow related to it. The New Wave as a

defining trend of the era also manifested itself in our openings, which mostly took the form of actions/performances or concerts, often even when the displayed works were not considered New Wave art *par excellence*. In retrospect, another interesting question would be to see how much of the contemporary Hungarian artwork we began exhibiting abroad starting in 1987 represented the Hungarian New Wave or Post-New Wave. Needless to say, the fact that the New Wave was a well-distinguishable—though not exclusive—theme driving our activities could have influenced the selection of those works, too.

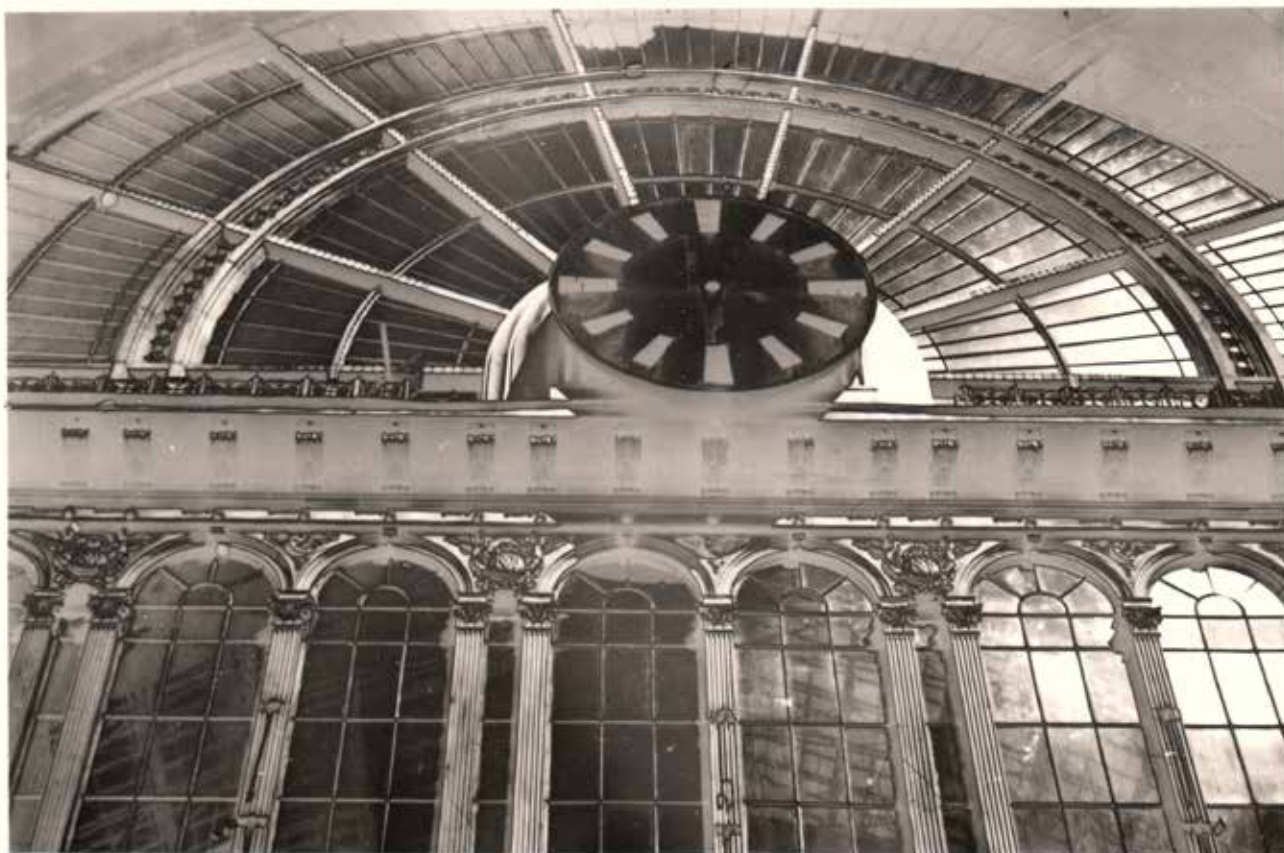
KB: *What did the years 1985–1986 bring in the life of Hejettes Szomlyazók and in your own career?*

TV: The *Hejettes Szomlyazók* group became increasingly well-known starting in late 1985. Our exhibition at the Bercsényi Club (*Második hullám* ["Second Wave"]) in early 1985 did not draw much attention, but that was when we met members of the *Csere* ["Exchange"] group,¹¹

who were very enthusiastic about our work. The first two issues of our *Világnézettségi Magazin* ["World Views Magazine"] were scarcely read by anyone other than our closest acquaintances. The breakthrough for the group came when, at the end of 1985, Tamás Soós invited us to open the part of the *Day Art* exhibition taking place on Almássy Square. The others started working on this project with Gábor Litván, but I didn't participate. On the one hand, I didn't have time to attend rehearsals. On the other hand, I was more interested in action art pieces and not so much in rehearsed performances using scenery and costumes. Without a doubt, though, *Camdok*—one of the first performances by the *Hejettes Szomlyazók*—turned out to be a successful and strong debut. It was on Almássy Square that the *Hejettes Szomlyazók* became known to the art scene.

In October of 1986, *Platón Barlangja* ["Plato's Cave"], run by the *Hejettes Szomlyazók* and the *Csere* group, opened its gates. The whole idea would never have been realized if it had not been for Talán Sebeő's enthusiasm, who pushed us to follow up on György Galántai's suggestion and rent the premises. The idea occurred to György because the basement shelter we used was next to his studio in Kavics Street. *Plato's Cave* started off with a "festival" entitled *Láthatatlan művészet/ Invisible Art*, which began in the early afternoon in the street with a series of actions (including the *Festményháború* ["War of Paintings"] in the trees and bushes of the neighboring hill), and continued in

Tibor Várnagy: *Eastern Railway Station*, black and white photo, from solarized negative, 14 cm × 18 cm.





Tibor Várnagy: *Poor is Not Illegal*, 1989, Houston, TX, black and white photo from solarized negative, 18 cm × 24 cm.

the basement. That was where I performed my first action. I cut the reproductions used in the *Festményháború* into small pieces, put them into a coffee pot, and made a “brew.” When in 1990 the *Hejtettes Szomlyázók* were invited to do a performance at the opening of the *Ressource Kunst* exhibition¹² at the Kunsthalle, I repeated this action as part of our act. This time I filled the coffee pot with some newspaper, which resulted in a black and white paper pellet. Once the water boiled through, I poured it into a chemist’s flask just like the one used by St.Auby for his 1965 object entitled *Cooling Water* [*Hűlő víz*]. The outcome looked exactly like St.Auby’s object, the only difference being that my brew was poisonous, as dailies were typeset using lead letters.

KB: *What inspired you to create TV Contacts [TV kontaktok]?*

TV: I made the first *TV Contacts* in 1985—these were put on display at the already mentioned *Day Art* exhibition. Back then, Hungary was far more isolated culturally than nowadays, but in Budapest we still had access to western art journals, albeit with a slight delay and somewhat haphazardly. The inspiration for *TV Contacts* came from a contemporary American artist’s works that I saw at the time in reproduction, most likely in *Artforum*. They were paintings—portraits, but in a way they were rather anti-portraits, since—in a photographic sense—they were blurry and out-of-focus. They were probably created using a spray paint gun. An equally important influence on the genesis of *TV Contacts* was something that Miklós Erdély told me in those days. He said that if, while lying in bed, an idea—some sort of pictorial notion—came to his mind whose outcome he could visualize, he would not leave his bed to realize the idea. I found that to be a very thought-provoking suggestion, as up until then we were conditioned through our studies to try and capture reality, even if at times in a distorted form, to achieve

a more powerful effect, or by montaging various segments of reality.

The *TV Contacts* series was one of my first works where I thought I could put into practice what Erdély was talking about. I had absolutely no idea what would come out of pressing photo paper to a television screen. The only thing I had to concentrate on at the moment was avoiding overexposure. How blurry the images would be was only revealed during lab work. Likewise, it could not be known in advance that some of the developed photos would be recognizable, and show, for example, a sitting newscaster wearing a tie. Other pictures—such as the one showing the small town square where one of the scenes took place in the film *Drama of the Lark* [*Pacsirta*—were too out-of-focus to be identifiable. The blurriness was a consequence of the thickness of the TV screen glass. From a visual point of view, television mostly operates with emblematic images that can be recognized even when the characteristic traits rendering the pictures unique are removed. You cannot tell from my contact prints how old the reporter is, but their hairstyle and the silhouette of their clothes are enough to see whether it is a man or a woman. There are some cases where even that can’t be decided, but you can still tell that what you see is a human face. It would not be possible to reduce and then recover in a similar manner a landscape or cityscape, or even some interiors and still lifes, as you would only arrive at some randomly shaped smudges. I wasn’t interested in that level of abstraction, though. What intrigued me was what the recoverable shapes showed us about the reality of television and about its visual palette.

Ultimately, *TV Contacts* proved to me that Miklós Erdély was completely right when considering what it was and what it wasn’t worth creating, because really, what was the point of taking pictures like the ones already taken by hundreds and thousands of people before us? Isn’t it much more exciting to seek patterns of reality neverseen before and never thought about? The punchline of the whole story was that TV contact prints had already been done by Erdély himself, namely on the third page of his series entitled *Man is Not Perfect* [*Az ember nem tökéletes*]. The series dates back to 1976, but I didn’t see it until the spring of

1986,¹³ while those following Erdély's oeuvre did not know until then how the photos were taken.

KB: *What happened at the Liget between 1987 and 1988? What foreign relationships did you manage to build?*

TV: In February of 1987, the Liget presented an exhibition of works by Milan Knížák. Milan and I became quite good friends while he was in Budapest. He lived in downtown Prague with his family and was prohibited at the time from exhibiting or publishing his works in Czechoslovakia. But at least the Czechoslovakian cultural leadership had the decorum to allow him to travel abroad. Therefore, he could exhibit and publish in the West as the sole Fluxus artist living in Eastern Europe. We organized a talk with Milan at Kassák Club the day after the opening. László Beke asked him what it was like to work in Prague prior to 1968, and what he was doing in the US in 1968, as that's where he happened to be at the time. Then suddenly someone from the office appeared beckoning to László or Milan—I can't recall which—to take a phone call from Switzerland. We waited for them to return and continue. A few minutes later they came back to tell us the news that "the greatest Czechoslovakian artist had died"—Andy Warhol. We got the call from Tamás Szentjóbby.

When we took Knížák's works back to Prague following his exhibition, he showed me his altered vinyl records. He told me how from the 1950s onwards he used to listen to countless records—mainly classics—and then once he grew tired of them, he started experimenting with breaking the records in half, then gluing two halves, belonging to different records, such as a Dvořák and a Beethoven, back together. He didn't glue the different pieces together for the sake of the visual effect, but rather out of curiosity: how would the vinyl sound when put on a record player? He then started scratching the records and putting bits of adhesive tape on them here and there. Let me emphasize once more that he was interested in the resulting sound, not the visual outcome. He gave us his tape *Broken Music*¹⁴ as a gift, which we listened to once we arrived back home. I found a sanding disc for a grinder (the same size as contemporary vinyl singles) on the street, which I sent to him as a kind of lighthearted reflection on his *Broken Music*. A few weeks later I received



Tibor VÁRNAGY: *Black Squares*, 1988, black and white photo from solarized negative, 40 cm × 30 cm each, installation shot from the 1989 exhibition at the Liget Gallery (photo: tbb).

an answer: one of his altered records, glued onto the back of the sanding disc I had sent.

In the late summer of 1987, Tamás Körösenyi, Zsigmond Károlyi, János Szirtes, and I traveled to West Germany. We had received an invitation to Bonn, which we used as a base to make several excursions to nearby cities to visit exhibitions. On one such trip, to Bochum, we stumbled upon a large show of Knížák's works at the local museum. What happened was that some West German artists, members of an artists' group in Bonn, saw the annual exhibition of the Young Artists' Studio in 1986.¹⁵ Intrigued by what they saw, they turned to the Fine Arts Department of the Hungarian Ministry, inviting Zsigmond Károlyi, Tamás Körösenyi, János Szirtes, Ádám Misch, Kristóf Ducki, and myself to the Kulturzentrum Hardtberg. We left Budapest for West Germany in Tamás's Wartburg station wagon. Szirtes and Ádám Misch traveled separately.

Our first stop was Vienna, where we stayed overnight at an acquaintance of Tamás's. Next, we stopped in Munich, where we were lodged by a girl of Hungarian origin. Szirtes, feLugossy, and efZámbó had already arrived there on their way to Denmark. That night we went to a Henry Rollins concert upon László feLugossy's suggestion. The following day we took leave of László and Öcsi [efZámbó]. János Szirtes came with us to Bonn, though, and continued his journey to Denmark from there. We were still in Bonn when the three of them arrived back, all together, I believe, for the farewell party marking the end of our stay.

I remember walking the streets of Bonn with László, talking and making lithographs together. I took to lithographing there, as we had sophisticated equipment and a workshop at our disposal. I had no previous experience with lithography, but there was a somewhat ostracized young boy who started teaching me. As I found out later, he escaped to the West from Dresden, where he had known A.R. Penck,



Tibor VÁRNAGY: Photo of the *Hejettes Szomlyazók's* action entitled *Beach*, 1989 (black and white photo from solarized negative, 18 cm × 24 cm).

and Penck even traveled to see him and make lithos after his escape. I owe it to him that I got to know the works of Louis Soutter, a big favorite of Penck's.

As I mentioned, we would sometimes get into Tamás's car and drive to see exhibitions in nearby cities such as Cologne, Bochum, Düsseldorf, or Bremen. We also had plans to visit *Documenta* but didn't manage to in the end. However, we did make it to the König bookshop in Cologne and to an exhibit in Düsseldorf with a phenomenal installation by Boltanski. We saw a collection of artists' books in Bremen, including *Tango*, the magazine of Łódź Kaliska. That was the only place I ever saw their work on display in the West. We visited Valéria Sass in Darmstadt, where we saw an excellent show of Beuys's works. Later, we viewed a copious selection of Beuys's drawings in Bonn (and we also saw a Beuys exhibition in Stuttgart on our way home). We visited Géza Perneczky in Cologne. The idea to go and visit András Medve in Düsseldorf must have come from me. I think Kada introduced me to András the previous summer in Kisörs, calling on me to meet his friend—a pal of Beuys—in the neighboring village. We didn't find András at home, so his wife, Krisztina Baksa-Soós, took us to his studio. This first trip to the West was a cultural shock for me, as I saw as much contemporary art in a short period of time, as would have taken me several years to see in Hungary.

Following the Knížák exhibition, we got the works of Heinz Cibulka from Vienna, which marked the start of our "Viennese cooperation." Hermann Nitsch came to Hungary in 1988, accompanied by Cibulka. At the time, Nitsch was starting to reconstruct his early actions, in which Heinz had originally acted as a model and assistant. Starting in the 1970s, he also became one of Nitsch's photographers and photo-documentarians. We presented a Hungarian exhibition at the Fotogalerie Wien in May/June of 1988. The space consisted of a larger and a smaller room, the latter being the size of the entire Liget. That was where we displayed

the works of Tibor Hajas and János Vető. The large room housed the pictures of András Baranyay, Fákó, Halas, Kerekes, Lenke Szilágyi, Zsuzsi Ujj, Attila Vécsy, Tibor Zátanyi, and myself. Nitsch and Cibulka came to see the exhibition the morning before the opening, and were very much intrigued by the works of Hajas and—to our surprise—Zsuzsi Ujj. Zsuzsi had her first solo exhibition the previous fall in 1987 at the Liget, but the Hungarian art scene had not yet taken her works seriously. Zsuzsi's works were mainly inspired by the visual aesthetic of the Hajas *catalogue raisonné* published by the periodical *Magyar Műhely* ["Hungarian Workshop"] in 1985 in Paris. In addition, starting in 1986, I would take visiting foreign colleagues who were interested in exploring Hungarian art in more depth to György Széphelyi's place to view Hajas's photos, and since Zsuzsi and István used to hang out with me all the time in those days, they joined us most times. György Széphelyi also showed us some video recordings, so we had a chance to gain quite a thorough insight into the Hajas oeuvre.

Our collaboration with John P. Jacob started with the exhibition entitled *2nd International Portfolio*. The aim of this exhibit was to present the current works of the Eastern European underground—or "non-official"—artists. He arrived in Budapest in April of 1986 at my invitation, and on May 2nd we opened the show. The material then went on to be displayed in Boston at the MIT List Visual Arts Center in January of 1987, after which it toured the US for two years, displayed mostly at university galleries. Thanks to John, Hajas was included in the material at MIT, and in the fall of 1990, a huge retrospective exhibition of the Hajas oeuvre was opened in Richmond, Virginia (also co-curated by John),¹⁶ with a beautiful large-sized catalogue published for the occasion. Concurrently, we hosted 2–3 exhibitions showing Viennese works per year, which meant that in those days we made frequent trips to Vienna, and had Gerlinde Schrammel—an art historian and board member of the Fotogalerie Wien—and her Austrian colleagues as regular visitors.

Gerlinde and her husband, Pierre, lived in the district called Döbling, and would put us up most of the time when we were in Vienna. On one of our evenings with them, I asked Pierre if he knew the whereabouts of the Görgen

Sanatorium where [István] Széchenyi had spent his last years. The following day we found it, and although we only took photos of the exterior at that point, it was clear that the building had been emptied, and one of its wings was being demolished. During our next visit to Vienna, we climbed in, and upon returning with some members of the *Hejettes Szomlyazók*, we were specifically there to gather pieces for *Döbling*, an installation we planned to create from the discarded objects lying around. The material was put on view at the Fotogalerie Wien in 1988, after which it was taken to Salzburg at the end of the year. The Fotohof there had invited Péter Forgács to curate an exhibition presenting contemporary Hungarian art. I don't know what happened, but instead they just exhibited the material we compiled with Gerlinde for the Fotogalerie Wien, with only some minor changes.

That was also the year our story began with the Łódź Kaliska. Józef Robakowski spent some time in Budapest in the summer and fall of 1986. We were honored that he looked us up, most likely due to our *2nd International Portfolio* exhibition, which included both his and Knížák's works, along with pieces from several other representatives of the contemporary Eastern European art scene. Józef arrived in Budapest after the exhibition, probably at the invitation of the BBS [Béla Balázs Studio], given that he was also involved in making experimental films. I showed him our *Világnézettségi Magazin*, which immediately brought a smile to his face, spurring him to tell us about a similar Polish samizdat published by the Łódź Kaliska group under the title *Tango*.

He invited me to participate in the First International Video Clip Festival in Łódź, organized by him in January of 1987. I set off on a harsh winter day, arriving in Poland to find the country in a state of emergency, with a 10/11 pm curfew in place. Those were the days of the infamous Jaruzelski era. It was an adventurous trip, at times a bit frightening, but generally high-spirited, and peppered with house parties, giving me a chance to meet members of the Łódź Kaliska and many other Polish colleagues. We exchanged publications with the Łódź Kaliska. The difference between their *Tango* and our magazine was that while ours was primarily based on graphic reproduction techniques, theirs—

partly due to their involvement in film and photography—relied far more heavily on photographic means. Like us, they used a mimeograph for printing the text, and also made use of screen printing, stamp printing and sometimes lino printing as well. They had started publishing *Tango* a few years earlier than we launched *Világnézettségi Magazin*, but both periodicals had their last issues printed prior to 1987.

Another similarity between the activities of the two groups was that like us, they were also keen on making parodies, paraphrases and persiflage. Moreover, both groups were eager to involve colleagues in producing their publications, performances and actions. Artists from outside their group (Zbigniew Libera, Jacek Kryszkowski, Zygmunt Rytko) were featured in *Tango* and in their actions, just like in our *Világnézettségi Magazin* (István Halas, Tamás Soós, Endre Miklóssy) and performances (Talán Sebeő and the Csere group, Gábor Litván, Elvira Kukta, etc.).

I remember wondering, as I approached the border during my journey home, what would happen if I were caught with all those Polish samizdat art publications. Since I traveled home through Prague to pick up some material from Knížák for his exhibition at the Liget, it wasn't even the Hungarian, but the Czech border guards I had to fear. This made me slightly uneasy—whereas on familiar ground I would still stand a chance of talking myself out of the situation, how could I possibly win over the Czechs? The best part was that—quite characteristically of the era—as we neared the border, the entire train compartment became a bit jittery, because everyone else was also smuggling something, albeit not typically cultural artifacts. We quickly struck some deals, agreeing which of us would claim the surplus volumes of the various goods. In the end, it all turned out well, with none of us being found out. It's also worth mentioning that in 1987, Kovács and Kovalovszky organized an exhibition of artists' books in Székesfehérvár, entitled “...A surprise... for our readers” [„...Meglepetés...olvasóink részére”],¹⁷ showing, among others, the periodicals of the *Hejettes Szomlyazók* and the Łódź Kaliska.

Tibor VÁRNAGY: Zsuzsi Ujj at the *Hejettes Szomlyazók's* action entitled *The Last Supper* [*Az utolsó vacsora*], 1989, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, solarized negative.





A year later, in the spring of 1988, we opened an exhibition at the Liget presenting contemporary Polish experimental photography, which again brought Robakowski to Budapest, together with Adam Rzepecki, one of the members of the Łódź Kaliska. Though I had already invited them to exhibit at the Liget in early 1987, that spring was when Adam and I got close enough for the group to finally accept my invitation and come to Budapest in the spring of 1989.

KB: *What was the focus of your own works in this period?*

TV: In 1986, for the MIT exhibition, I took a series of portraits of the participating artists I knew personally and of artists from Budapest's art scene in general. The twist was that I asked all of them to look cross-eyed, since—as we know—the eyes are the window to the soul. I started my *Tearajzok* ["Tea Pictures"] series in 1987. What I learned from these pieces, drawn with a brush using India ink, was that my preoccupation with people wasn't limited to photography, but also stayed with me when I started drawing. Of course it took a different form, and emerged from my fantasies due to the nature of the medium. In fact, right at the beginning, I had a series of dreams that got me thinking about what I could capture of them in drawings. Ultimately, this resulted in male and female figures, sometimes

together, sometimes separately, but with the focus always being on their motions. Like on the drawings of Greek vases. I came to realize that the things worthy of drawing were those that existed only in my imagination. In that sense these were metaphysical pictures. Not being created with the purpose of capturing nature or any visual impression, these scenes arose from fantasies, and as such would start drawing themselves, bringing out things from me that perhaps hadn't even materialized in my mind.

The connection with tea was that I had just started drinking tea without sugar and lemon, and that brought with it the discovery of how important temperature was in influencing the whole sensation. Then there was another connection: these pictures weren't born of work done at the table—I would draw sitting cross-legged on the floor. And even the time of day carried significance, since it was the silence



Tibor VÁRNAGY: Zsuzsi Ujj at the *Hejettes Szomlyazók's* action entitled *The Last Supper* [*Az utolsó vacsora*], 1989, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, solarized negative.

arising in the evening after dark that provided the inspiration for the process.

My first solo exhibition, entitled *The Vase* [*A váza*], took place in the spring of 1988 at the Lágymányosi Community Center. The only problem was that after I had agreed to do the show, I realized that it would be impossible to create a meditative atmosphere there with my A4 sheets, given that the exhibition space had no door, and its entrance directly faced the snack bar. I am not a fussy person, but it was pretty clear that such vibrant background noise would not be conducive to a good reception, so I quickly transformed the project. The tea drawings were made available in print in an artists' book-like brochure entitled *The Vase*, which was to be taken and browsed through at home, whereas for the exhibition I created an installation. I put on the wall three sheets of packing paper with my drawings. Each of them showed a vase, drawn with charcoal using both of my hands.

On the floor, I set up two teepees of wood, both consisting of three scorched logs, 120–130 cm tall, piled against each other, with an old, plate-shaped lamp hung above one of the teepees.

I made my *Black Squares* [*Fekete négyzetek*] series in 1988, which was a sequel to my earlier cameraless photo series *TV Contacts* [*TV kontaktok*] (1985) and *Firecontacts* [*Tűzkontaktok*] (1987). By 1987, I was already a member of the Young Photographers' Studio, so when Heinz Cibulka was here visiting, we invited him to screen his films at the Studio's Garay Street premises. Gábor Kerekes was the artistic leader of the Studio, a person with whom I found cooperation to be smooth and efficient. Whenever the Liget was presenting the photos of a foreign artist, we would invite the artist and/or the curator of the exhibition for a talk at the Studio. Starting in 1986, Endre Mányoki, known from the old periodical *Mozgó Világ*, became editor-in-chief of *Fotó* ["Photo"], and started publishing an increasing volume of compelling articles on contemporary shows. László Lugo Lugosi wrote about our Krystyna Ziach exhibition, Juszuf Antal about an Ákos Birkás show also presented at the Liget; I published accounts of our exhibits of Milan Knížák and Michaela Moscouw, while Tibor Zátanyi translated pieces from Cibulka. That was when I started writing reviews—never before had I published critical texts.

KB: *How were the Firecontacts born?*

TV: Milan Knížák's *Fireprints* series, exhibited at the Liget in February of 1987, provided direct inspiration for the *Firecontacts*. Milan was an electrifying, yet wise "older" master to me, just like Miklós Erdély. I was fascinated by the Fluxus and took pleasure in the naturalness of their response to the New Wave. To me, the two men's openness to the New Wave did not appear to be contradictory or cast doubt on their artistic integrity in any way. They were absolutely able to synthesize it into their own way of thinking and became more liberated as a result. Milan's series was a terrific gesture: let's put the photos of our social life on fire and see what remains of them.

It got me thinking, though, that perhaps I could do something different. Milan's fire prints involved an element of chance (see John Cage's chance procedures), with the flames recomposing the photos, drawing attention to certain parts, while wiping out others. The idea I had was to try and use the light of the fire burning the photo paper for the exposure as well. What if I lit my material, which would thus capture the light of its own destruction? Would it be possible to develop such photos? To my surprise, I didn't even have to experiment in the darkroom for very long to expose the photo paper to the right amount of light (let it burn for the right amount of time) for something to start showing on the paper. It was like a game, having to figure out where to light the paper, how to orient it and when to drop it into water for the exposure to result in sections that could still be developed. I realized what I had already felt—though not so clearly—in the case of the *TV Contacts*: I was not interested in the abstract pictures, but the gesture itself. I was also taken by the idea that this was a wider interpretation of photography as a medium.

KB: *What did this period bring in the life of the Hejettes Szomlyazók?*

TV: The years 1987–1988 were busy for the *Hejettes Szomlyazók* as well. I'm trying to recall whether the ministry's Fine Arts Department asked me in because I was invited to Bonn—not with the *Hejettes Szomlyazók* sculptural ensemble entitled *The Condemned Cell* [*Síralomház*], but with a work I presented individually at the same annual exhibition of the Young Artists' Studio¹⁸—, or whether Hédi Szepesi summoned me after the success of *The Condemned Cell* (1986) to request the *Hejettes Szomlyazók* to create a similar production for an East Berlin exhibition presenting contemporary Hungarian art. In any case, the latter invitation led to the creation of the *Isenheim Altarpiece* [*Isenheimeri oltár*], which we welded in the basement and the garden of Miklós Erdély's place, since the necessary machine and industrial voltage was available there. Miklós had already passed away by that time. We completed the piece, it was taken to East Berlin, and then upon its return to Budapest it was exhibited at the Ernst Museum in 1988.

Prior to our trip to Germany, we traveled to the village of Apostag in the summer of 1987, as Balázs Fekete had recently bought a farmhouse there. Our *365-page Calendar with Nudes* [*365 lapos aktnaptár*] was born there. We quickly agreed on the concept for the *Isenheim Altarpiece* and the calendar by an overwhelming majority, as well as the concept

for *The Condemned Cell*. As I remember it, the 365 drawings took us a single afternoon session to complete. The others recall it differently; they claim we spent days with the drawings. But I think the following day all that was left to do was to give titles to the pages—we chose a woman's name for each. We sat on a blanket in the garden, surrounded by pencils, paints, brushes and A4 sheets, and each of us started working on a sheet. We drew until we got stuck, then passed the sheet on to our neighbor. That's how simple it was.

The 1987 annual exhibition of the Young Artists' Studio took place at the Ernst Museum. The *Hejettes Szomlyazók* as a group was already recognized enough to be given the entire ground floor, which—though not part of the "real" exhibition space—was a much larger area than what we would have had upstairs. We covered both walls of the entrance hall, starting from the marble benches up until the staircase, with the 365 A4-size pages of the *Nude Calendar* filling the walls to a height of two meters. The pages were arranged under glass sheets sized 100 cm × 70 cm (with nine pages under each glass), and then placed closely next to each other. We made something like a garden gate out of dry branches and covered two of the four neon fixtures on the ceiling with semi-transparent red paper—used at the time for the packaging of photo paper—so that we could display the following sign: THE HEJETTES SZOMLYAZÓK WELCOME VISITORS OF THE EXHIBITION. The text was intended to evoke the 1st of May parades to contemporary viewers.

Géza Boros was quick to highlight our production in the program recommendations of the weekly journal *Tükör* ["Mirror"], writing that the exhibition of the Young Artists' Studio was just as usual, but our work made it worth seeing. Our installation *Döbling* was another great success, displayed at the annual exhibition of the Young Artists' Studio in late 1988,¹⁹ although it was somewhat of a disappointment to me. Part of the reason for my disappointment was that we had a suggestion for that year's annual Studio exhibition. One of the late summer Studio circulars ran our call to action—worded by Kada—to follow a thematic focus, so the show wouldn't be the salon-like jumble it used to be

in previous years. With *Döbling* in mind, we put forward the theme of the mental institute. That was extended—or “hacked”—by Zoltán Szultán Bogdándy to include the hospital as well. Those ended up being the two themes, but with most members disregarding both, not much changed compared to the previous years. At the same time, we had to incorporate into our *Döbling* installation all works dedicated to the mental institute motif. Despite the circumstances, though, this Studio exhibition turned out to be the third in a row where our work was among the strongest presented.

KB: *How did your activities continue in 1989?*

TV: 1989 was a very intense year for us. It started with our action entitled *Beach* [*Strand*] at the Fiatal Művészek Klubja or FMK [“Young Artists’ Club”] and continued with *Factions* [*Frakciók*], an exhibition at the Studio Gallery. In the meantime, the Łódź Kaliska arrived in Budapest to exhibit at the Liget, after which we set off to West Berlin for our show at the Bethanien. Shortly after we arrived back, we had Sibylle Hofer’s opening at the Liget. We had met with her in Łódź in January of 1987. Next came the *Blue Steel* [*Kék Acél*] exhibition at the Budapest Gallery (for which the *Hejtettes Szomlyazók* created its *Manage it Wisely* [*Monopoly*] [*Gazdálkodj okosan!*] installation), and then Zsuzsi Ujj, István Halas and I flew to the US to cover the Austin – Houston – Oberlin – NYC – Boston – NYC itinerary. At the end of the year, we traveled to Łódź with the *Hejtettes Szomlyazók* to present a concert performance at the Galeria Wschodnia. In the meanwhile, we arranged an exhibition entitled *Photo-Model* [*Fotomodel*] in Szombathely, and I participated in two exhibitions: *Different View* [*Más-kép*] at the Ernst Museum and *Symmetry* [*Szimmetria*] at the Hungarian National Gallery. 1990 started for me with my action entitled *Photo Cocktail* [*Fotókoktél*], presented at the Bercsényi Club as part of an exhibition series organized by the Young Photographers’ Studio. The *Hejtettes Szomlyazók* had a show at the King Stephen Museum in Székesfehérvár in the spring of 1990, and that was also when the group’s action, where they painted on the east side of the Berlin Wall, was born. From Berlin we traveled to Hanover, and on our way

home, I presented in Vienna an English version of *Photo Cocktail* at the opening of the exhibition entitled *Schnelle Bilder*. I appeared after no one other than the Austrian cultural minister herself, who delivered the opening speech, as the show was on experimental photography in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, and Austria.

Just a few days later I flew to New York to set up the material for the *Hidden Story* exhibition. That 1990 trip was my second journey to the US, as a year earlier I had already been there with Zsuzsi Ujj and István Halas for three exhibitions curated by John P. Jacob. The first was a show presenting the works of the three of us at the Houston Center for Photography. The second, a larger exhibit on contemporary Hungarian art, opened in Oberlin, a small university town near Cleveland, at the Allan Memorial Art Museum. Finally, the third was a solo exhibition of mine in Boston at the Photographic Resource Center. On our way to the different venues, we participated in slide show presentations in Austin, Houston, and I am not even sure where else; but I know that John arranged for the program to cover all of our travel expenses, with even a little extra money left over for us to spend. I thought to myself then that with the change of regime, our professional lives would remain like this for good: we would travel freely and organize exhibitions in Hungary—in Budapest and the countryside—as well as abroad, at more and more prestigious venues wherever we went.

¹ Wolf Vostell. Kestner-Gesellschaft e. V, 1977.

² Heinz Cibulka. Wieland Schmied, daadgalerie, 1986.

³ Exhibition of Painter Margit Anna. May–June 1977, Artists’ Colony Gallery, Szentendre.

⁴ Exhibition of Polish Artist József Szajna. October 6–26, 1975, Ernst Museum, Budapest. Organized by the Institute for Cultural Relations; exhibition venue: Kunsthalle [Műcsarnok], in cooperation with the Warsaw Studio Theater Gallery.

⁵ Béla Kondor Memorial Exhibition. June–October 1973, Tihany Museum, Tihany, Hungarian National Gallery.

⁶ Kondor, Béla. *Boldogságtörődék*. Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1971.

⁷ Exhibition of Graphic Artist Győző Somogyi. September 17 – October 14, 1975, Studio Gallery, Budapest.

⁸ <http://www.ligetgaleria.c3.hu/>.

⁹ For exhibitions at the Liget Gallery from 1983 to 1990, see: <http://www.ligetgaleria.c3.hu/dupla8390.htm>.

¹⁰ For exhibitions at the Liget Gallery from 1990 to 1995, see: <http://www.ligetgaleria.c3.hu/dupla9095.htm>.

¹¹ Cseresorozat Nemzetközi Filozófikussági Művészetiőreiskola [Exchange Series International Philosophical Art Advancement Movement], see: <http://www.c3.hu/~titanic/html/csero/csero.html>.

¹² Ressource Kunst. *Die Elemente neu gesehen*. [Resources. Reinterpreted Elements in Art]. May 10 – June 17, 1990, Kunsthalle, Budapest. Concept: Georg Jappe.

¹³ Exhibition of Miklós Erdély. April 11 – May 5, 1986, Óbuda Gallery, Zichy Mansion, Budapest. Organized by Márta K. Kovalovszky, Eszter Bartholy and Tamás Török.

¹⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=88ONydyRX7c>, last accessed: November 1, 2018.

¹⁵ Studio ’86. April 3 – May 3, 1986, Miskolc Gallery, Miskolc.

¹⁶ *Nightmare Works: Tibor Hajas*. August 30 – October 14, 1990, Anderson Gallery, School of the Arts Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond.

¹⁷ „...Meglepetés...olvasóink részére...”. *International Exhibition of Artists’ Books*. October 18 – December 7, 1987, King Stephen Museum, Székesfehérvár. Organized by Éva Askericz, Márta Kovalovszky and József Ladányi.

¹⁸ Studio ’87. December 1, 1987 – January 17, 1988, Ernst Museum, Budapest.

¹⁹ Studio ’88. December 1, 1988 – January 15, 1989, Ernst Museum, Budapest.



JUDIT GELLÉR

P H O T O B O O K D I S C U S S I O N S 3

“It is about the potentials of our vision, or our image viewing position”

Tibor Gyenis: *You are here*¹

Judit Gellér: *Your photobook titled *You are here* will be published in 100 copies by the Hungarian Museum of Photography. You did not have the title translated into Hungarian. Should we understand it like the caption on the maps in public spaces, denoting your position?*

Tibor Gyenis: I thought I wouldn't give it a Hungarian title, because this phrase is already so ingrained into our common knowledge, that it does not need to be spelled out separately; moreover, when the viewers open the book, they will see the image with the same title, including the symbol that usually marks that “you are here.” Perhaps the fact that it is not translated provides some further compactness, or impetus, because, after all, it is still the image that dominates the whole, and the texts are there only in reference to the image.

The introduction to the book is not a text of art history or career analysis but a text composed by a writer specifically for this purpose upon my request. I was very pleased that László Garaczi accepted this task, and he basically unravels this title, this mark, this situation, and this experience. As this is a thick book, I believe that when you take it in your hands and investigate it, you will cease to have any sense of missing something, of not finding yourself, or your position in relation to the book. The images and the text assist in this, surrounding the dot, the mark, this situation. But of course, this can also point further away what exactly this denotation of a point in space is and where we are precisely.

J. G.: Yet, this is not the picture on the cover of the book. Why?

T. Gy.: We did not want to establish the same concept with the words and the image, and make the cover represent an illustrative situation. At the same time, this photograph captures a very peculiar moment of “being here” at the denoted point with the tap by the road in the landscape. It is in an unusual place; moreover, this tap is open, and some opaque fluid is flowing out of it, which makes it a little more specific. It does not depict a general, natural environment but a more specific, Eastern European situation.

J. G.: Does this marking of a point mean a symbolic marking of a location for you too? I mean, could we say that in your oeuvre, in your work, you have reached a certain point, and this book was compiled in relation to that?

T. Gy.: I don't think so. Although it could seem like that, because I have never had such an excellent, thick book before, providing an overview of so much of my work in such large size and high quality. But I do not think that this is the case, because while until now I have preferred certain types of photographs or certain ways of creating pictures, I have also started a new way of building images, which is still in progress, at least I hope that it will continue. This is also evident in the chronological and editorial arrangement of the book as well. So



perhaps it is more that we have this perpetual need for interpretation: where are we, what is happening around us, what role can images, or the position from which we view them, play in all this? Is it about the potentials of our vision or our image viewing position? Perhaps about our awareness of our place in space and the resulting consequences? That is, this is more of a philosophical question. But, on the other hand, ‘you are here’ means that ‘you’ are here, not me, so this position and the search for this position are related to the viewer.

J. G.: How was your work with László Garaczi? Did you know each other before? Did you talk about the series and their background?

T. Gy.: No, we did not know each other before. I had read his books, and we were Facebook friends. I saw his Facebook posts, and his style of posting was very close to my interests and visual logic. He shared pictures that I also found very engaging, and then I thought his was a good point of intersection; if he enjoys these types of images, he might enjoy looking at my pictures too, and my request would not be strained.



Gyenis Tibor: *8 óra II. / 8 Hours II*, 2005-2007,
lambda print on wood, 70 x 100 cm

Gyenis Tibor: *Eszköz / Tool*, 2005,
lambda print on wood, 70 x 100 cm



Gyenis Tibor: *Fenntartható fejlődés I. / Sustainable Development I*, 2018, lambda print on wood, 70 x 100 cm



Gyenis Tibor: *Magyar tenger / Hungarian Sea*, 2018, lambda print on wood, 70 x 100 cm



Gyenis Tibor: *Részletek a víz felesleges gesztusból / Details from The Ten Superfluous Gestures*, 1999, lambda print on wood, 50 x 60 cm

J. G.: *In the book, the individual series do not have separate introductory texts. This gave me the slight feeling that you left many things to the viewers in terms of interpretation. Do I perceive this intention correctly?*

T. Gy.: I think this is not my competence, but Péter Baki, the editor of this book series, includes my volume. We compiled the book chapters under his direction, which was, of course, a dialog, but it was his external perspective, well, external from the author's point of view, which was the basis of their arrangement. After all, the whole series is structured in the same way for all the other artists, perhaps on the basis that the book series is for authors at a stage in their career where there have already been analytical studies on their works, or one can access the interpretations, or descriptions, which can help place them on the map. I wasn't opposed to this, partly because I think that as the book encompasses several decades, the consecutive images and series also assist the viewer in the interpretation.

Gyenis Tibor: *Weekend I. / Vacationers I*, 2017, carved lambda print on wood, 100 x 100 cm



J. G.: *The series selected for the book encompass works from the past twenty years. For example, how do you look back on the first series in the book, Details from the Ten Superfluous Gestures [Részletek a tíz felesleges gesztusból]? How do you feel about its relevance today, and how has your way of thinking changed since, not necessarily in terms of the technical details of the creative method, but rather regarding your theoretical approach?*

T. Gy.: This is quite a difficult question from several aspects. I would like to start by continuing the previous topic, elaborating a little further on why the selection of the book is based on the past twenty years. It consists of certain types of images; for example, the ones where I worked with people were not included in the book.

It mostly presents images that work with or manipulate landscapes and leaves out the photographs of persons or groups, where photography was used as a group-organizing tool. Looking back, or applying a retrospective interpretation, these landscape images are interestingly arranged around a kind of geometric concept, which I was not so much aware of at the time of taking the pictures. I realized this in retrospect, together with how my work relates to the works of other artists in this way: for example, to ones who worked close to me in the Pécsi Műhely [Pécs Workshop]. The workshop members brought my attention to this, and they also asked me to open a jubilee exhibition of theirs, which was really an honor. Interestingly, there is indeed a peculiar way geometry appears in these images and also in the nature of the manipulation.

Actually, this geometric nature is still waiting for elaboration or interpretation, which is not necessarily only my task, as I can't really see beyond my work well enough, and I do not possess such conceptual approaches to view my own work from the outside. Nevertheless, this amorphous, or degraded, or ambivalent geometric image construction can be detected throughout many of the photographs. In a way, it provided a structuring principle for the book. While preparing the book, some technical questions related to the past also arose. For example, the first series were created via analogue techniques, in accordance with the contemporary enlargement standard: they are less saturated, with less contrast and color saturation, just as the digital surfaces of the time, the contemporary enlargements, and perhaps even our objects were somehow paler. This has undergone major changes over a short period. For this reason, the book had to be somehow unified; we had to see how the old, scanned files related to the spectacles we are used to today, to our sense of saturation and balance. And this already raises the question of whether it is a forgery to pour a sauce like that on the old pictures? And I think this raises even more questions, and I don't even know if there is a correct logic, along the lines of which we could handle these old photo enlargements and the unified view appearing in the book.

And all this is linked to a further important question: namely, what we think now about the characteristics of reality, realistic depiction, and the digital image. When I created these transformations suggesting or imitating digital manipulation around the 2000s, and then I documented these with the help of photography, these questions were much more relevant. At that time, we were more on a borderland, and now the borderlines have somehow been moved to the inside; the issues arise in a different way. But I cannot tell what these changes are exactly or how we view this borderline between digital and analogue at present. *The Ten Superfluous Gestures* is basically my first mature work. A program definition. The joy, and perhaps I can now say: self-confidence of a creative method.



Gyenis Tibor: *Touristic*, 2019, carved lambda print on wood, 70 x 100 cm

J. G.: *In connection with the question of forgery and creating illusions, do you happen to remember how your series from 2000, Hobby Genetic Engineering of Examples [Hobbigénebézési példatár] was received back then? Putting it in a more profane way: did these illusory manipulations and images deceive the viewers, or rather, make them think?*

T. Gy.: I showcased these images in the Vintage Gallery at an exhibition, which was opened by András Falus, an academic of genetics and immunology, that is, an expert, who lived in the contemporary world of genetics, and he basically captured the humorous side of this thing. There were many others approaching it from this aspect: that we are participants in a game, and this is a funny approach. Yet, a review appeared in *Magyar Narancs*, which clearly put it in the digital manipulation category, and as such, deemed the series to be risk-free.



Gyenis Tibor: *Monszántó / The Field of Monszántó*, 2018, lambda print, 70 x 100 cm

Gyenis Tibor: *WEB. 2*, 2014, carved lambda print on wood, 50 x 60 x 2,5 cm



I do not mind either interpretation, as they reflect our position of uncertainty; namely, that unless we are immunologists or biogenetics experts, we have no idea what exactly this is all about. Just to raise a current question: is the COVID-19 virus artificial or not artificial? The approach that art can capture is perhaps the one presenting or elaborating on that we can raise countless questions as non-professionals. It shows what perspectives we may have regarding a question, so it is not at all a problem for me if there are several or various interpretations for this too.

J. G.: *For some of the images in your series Eight Hours [Nyolc óra], it is clearly visible that you put lots of work into them. Were you preaching the redundancy of work at that time?*

T. Gy.: This is an interesting question because since then, its context has been expanded to include the issue of basic income, but the discourse around the increasing number of so-to-speak redundant jobs, or jobs that are difficult to make sense of, has also intensified. But, if I recall correctly, at that time, this did not play a part for me, even though it is visible that these works have no direct, meaningful outcomes, except for the unfolding of some kind of curiosity, peculiarity, and an inexplicable system.

This situation resembles how some people legitimate and attribute meaning to a certain type of work for themselves and get it done, which I'm trying to underline, asking whether, after all, it makes sense to spend eight hours a day arranging muddy, wet rugs in a grid. And how does this order relate to other orders, or to our concepts of order, to an operational system connected with the organization of our lives?

J. G.: *If we proceed in the book in a chronological order, we find the image titled "You Are Here" mentioned above at about the middle of the book, in the Carved Images [Faragott képek] series. What is the history behind these photographs?*

T. Gy.: I started working on the Carved Images series in 2014. It is rather interesting where we are standing and what the reality of the image is. As for the photographs that I took previously and were materialized, I strove to be as thorough as I could: making the enlargement really nice, putting it on an enduring medium, making sure that the glass cover separating the viewer from the image is not disturbing, that one can check out the details, go up close to the photograph, etc. In a way, I started to fetishize this visual interface because of all this.

As a result of the technology, the images are rather vulnerable, and one minor flaw can ruin its window-function for me. As an author, I can only see the flaw from then on. It is like putting on glasses, and suddenly there is this small dot on it, which we notice, and not only does it become very disturbing, but it will also create a different focus. So my starting point was, okay, let's break this window function intentionally then, and let us hack the cooperation between the viewer and the photographer. Here we are looking outside, and beyond the frame, we can see a landscape or a rippling sea, but there is a disturbing element. And this is enhanced by an extra layer, which I had not suspected previously, that this kind of ambivalence is very difficult to present via reproductions.

Our approach to looking at photographs is so routine-like that we don't even think about taking a closer look at the surface of the photograph. Namely, the photograph is very specific; we identify the objects in the image, and we could cite Barthes here, for this we are not looking at the surface itself. This is partly the reason for the smaller supplementary images and the shadowing, which try to showcase that the ambivalence, that is, the ambivalence of image creation, lies here in the existence of the photographic objects. So, on the one hand, the photography itself, and, on the other hand, the coexisting and "speaking" mounting material are damaged or complemented, thus shifting into three-dimensional space.

J. G.: *The last few series of the book were created in the past two or three years, and I don't know much about this, but the dominance of the geometric forms was striking for me. I'm thinking of, for example, the images "Can" [Konzerv] and "Silver" [Ezüst]. Would*

you say a few words about these works?

T. Gy.: When I became aware of what we have already talked about, about how dominant the geometric nature of the manipulation can become, or how it can create a kind of gravitating situation, I actually started consciously looking for these situations. When Lake Balaton froze up in 2017, I went there with the intention of visiting the frozen lake because large, empty, homogeneous spaces are relatively rare in Hungary. There are trees, bushes, hills everywhere, and there are no large-scale empty landscapes. I hoped to see a large plane and a great sky there, and when I got there, it turned out that there is no homogeneity at all, yet this startling, broken and refrozen lake with its sugar cube-like formations was perfect for my concepts.

Another component is that when I started carving the images, a question started to arise more and more prominently, which I should define now but I won't be able to – what the difference is between photography using photographs and visual arts using photographs. Perhaps I could make it more specific by saying that in terms of the compositional considerations of the image, the carved images are more related to a kind of visual arts tradition. Thus, the editorial principles we see with visual arts people are enhanced, and this results in photographic images resembling paintings, providing the geometrical works with more prominence. But, at the same time, these are not geometrical matters, strictly speaking. When you look closer, you can see that they are somehow eroded, arbitrary or not fully following a logic, a bit amorphously geometrical situations.

J. G.: *The images of Sustainable Development [Fenntartható fejlődés], on the other hand, are very much like ordinary landscapes...*

T. Gy.: Yes, and I had to put a little effort into having this series included in the book because it is still in progress, and there is only very minimalist, hardly discernible manipulation, a little reclusive in terms of the interpretation of the image. I think that when more elements of this series will be completed, this attribute will provide an immediate connection between them. They look like plain landscapes, but it is revealed that I removed parts of the foliage for the sake of the composition. This is not so obvious at first sight, but when we bring attention to it, then the person looking closely enough will immediately see it. This is a radical manipulation, because until now I have only applied manipulations that would interfere with vegetation like this only to a minimal extent.

Nevertheless, the pictures were taken in early fall, and I have checked all of the trees since, well, except for one, which is in Italy at a high altitude, but I checked the other two this year, and they were thriving and blooming beautifully. So, the lives of these trees were not really disturbed by this arbitrary thinning of their leaves for the sake of composition.



Gyenis Tibor: *Tyukok / Hens*, 2019, carved lambda print on wood, 70 x 100 cm

detail



J. G.: *I apologize in advance for the downright question: actually, it is true for each of your works that you apply a physical manipulation, you make a gesture, and then you take a picture of this scene, object, or composition. Why don't you use Photoshop?*

T. Gy.: For one part, they would probably be very different images, because Photoshop transforms images in a very different way.

In certain cases, it would be obviously much easier to create an image of this type, but the physical manipulation transforms the two-dimensional spectacle within the three-dimensional space, and this is different from a plane transformed by an algorithm. For me, our surrounding environment and our relationship to it are essential. So is the relationship with the image, of course, and therefore I think using Photoshop to

transform the images would be more about the dialog with computer-based thinking and not about tackling my existence in real space. When creating Sustainable Development, for example, I once climbed up and down on a ladder in the rain, or in the case of another tree, the slope was so steep that I had to fasten myself because of one wrong step, and I would have just simply rolled down the hill and would have had to start the whole thing again. I had to climb up and down many times to create the expo, to check if I had taken down the leaves at the right places because, of course, the spectacle must work from the perspective of the lens. If we move half a meter away, it becomes obscured. This spatial situation, moving in real space, is somehow more exciting for me. And this immediately places me among the things outdated and oblivious. [Laughs.]

J. G.: Well, I think you are far from that! I would like to ask about your picture “The State” [Az állam], which appears in two places. First in the *Eight Hours* series, but then you returned to it in the *Carved Images* series as well. Is this typical for you, reaching back to earlier works and transforming them?

T. Gy.: Well, this remains to be seen because I haven’t done this since then.

What happened there was that accidentally I still had a nice and big, 170x140 cm enlargement of this image, which, based on the feedback, turned out to be rather powerful, and based on the sales data, we could say it was rather successful.

And it was very appealing for me to see whether I could develop it any further.

This is why this has a carved version as well, but so far, I wouldn’t say this is typical because when I work on the carved images, I take the related photographs differently.

Earlier I was looking for a stage-like impression, but with *Carved Images*, I am trying to find pictures, which can bear another layer afterwards, which can get into a dialog situation.

Gyenis Tibor: *You Are Here*, 2014, carved lambda print on wood, 80 x 100 x 2.5 cm



detail



J. G.: *What is your overall view about the publishing of this photobook?*

T. Gy.: This is an overview situation, which is rather festive and allows me to dwell in it a little more. The reproductions are large enough, it is nice to look at them, and there are many of them – so this is an invitation for looking around in a hopefully exciting environment.

Another interesting question is that I have never used the same compilation of images twice in any situation of presentation that I have participated in so far. Thus, for example, when architects invited me, I would bring a compilation completely different from what I brought to this Mezőszemere workshop the last time, for which I created a whole new material.

These changes in perspective are fascinating because they show how the emphasis can be shifted even within the same material. There is a borderline, of which I do not always know where it lies, but if we move beyond it via another context, the given material will shove it off itself. For me as an author, this borderline lies somewhere else and looks differently than from a theoretical point of view.



Gyenis Tibor: *Konzerv / Can*, 2018, lambda print on wood, 70 x 100 cm

J. G.: *The physical appearance of the book is actually a book object; we could call it a box-book. You used an external cover, which the book itself can be slid into. What was the purpose and function of this cover type?*

T. Gy.: The graphic design and the appearance of the book is the work of Gábor Gerhes. He is the one who brought up this concept, and I am pleased with it. When reading a book, the time spent with the book creates a distinct attention, which I think might be rather important today, or it should be emphasized. Today, there are many things that enforce multitasking, quick panning, filtering perception, and interpretation. It is increasingly rare that we have time to sit down and immerse ourselves in something.

And since here we talk about photographs, which are seemingly easy to scroll through and take in, this box-like design can be helpful, where you must make the gesture of opening it up, and you have to take an extra step, which helps creating a distinct attention, separate from the attention that characterizes everyday life.

J. G.: *The publication of the book was scheduled for spring, but its launch was delayed for fall. What happened to you in the meantime?*

T. Gy.: Yes, the book was ready earlier. In the meantime, I had a solo exhibition at the Janus Pannonius Museum Gallery of Modern Hungarian Art with the title *Extended Illusions* [*Elhagyott illúziók*], and there will be a group exhibition at the Capa Center in November, which I will participate in. So, I think that the timing of the launch was also good.

¹ Gyenis, Tibor. *You are here*. Hungarian Museum of Photography, 2019. Text by László Garaczi. Edited by Péter Baki. Trans. by Andrew Gane. Cover and book design by Gábor Gerhes. 146 pages, 21.5x26 cm.

Gyenis Tibor: *A hibrid eróziója / Erosion of The Hybrid*, 2020,
lambda print on wood, 70 x 100 cm



Gyenis Tibor: *Antiproton*, 2020,
lambda print on wood, 70 x 100 cm

“... what if I just took photographs by feel?”

An Interview with Máté Bartha

„...because being a sensitive and meticulous photographer doesn't automatically mean you have the skills of a filmmaker in terms of cinematic thinking, editing or production principles.”

Vera A Fehér: We asked the national and international award-winning author about the afterlife of his work *Kontakt*, his recent Documentary Film Director degree, his first film, and his latest work.

You won the Rencontres d'Arles with your series *Kontakt*. What is the story behind *Kontakt*? How was the idea born, how did it materialize, and how did it make it to the top? Is something still happening with it?

Máté Bartha: That year, I was looking for a topic for my thesis film for the Documentary Film Director MA I had started at the University of Theatre and Film Arts (SZFE). Patriotic education, including military training and placing shooting ranges at schools, was part of the public discourse at the time. This is what I wanted to make a film about; I was looking for subjects, and I even started shooting some of my ideas. I stopped when I found the Home Defense School, which is the one presented in my series *Kontakt*. It all began with a conversation between myself and Kata Oltai, who was planning the *Golden Boundaries* exhibition at the Capa Center and invited me to participate with this military theme. Then, as the material grew and became more substantial, I finally decided to elaborate on it, and enter it for the Capa Grand Prize Hungary.

V.A.F: If you hadn't won a grant, would you have fallen between the cracks?

M.B.: Yes, but at that point I pretty much thought I was going to win. I had already spent the summer photographing the Home Defense school; I had about 50 really good photographs, so I was feeling pretty confident. I was also certain of one thing: if I won, I would be in a new competitive position, guaranteeing me another year to work on this subject, which would be a lot better for me as well as for the material.

V.A.F: And you did win a grant, and then you won the Capa Grand Prize as well. What did the Grand Prize do for you?

M.B.: First of all, it was good feedback that what I had been doing with photography for the previous 10-plus years could be loved and appreciated. Also, I was obviously happy about the money, because it was very funny that through winning the grand prize, basically my MA in Photography from MOME helped me to cover the costs of the Documentary Film Director MA. And then there is the TOBE Gallery – the curator Flóra Mészáros introduced me to Bea Puskás and Tamás Opitz after winning the grand prize. I didn't really plan on looking for a gallery. I wasn't really into selling images or thinking in terms of art objects before, although now that I've got a bit more insight into it, I'm discovering interesting and exciting aspects of this. When talking with them, the idea of applying for the Arles Prize quickly came up. I thought, “why not? If they help me get through it, let's do it- we have nothing to lose!” We submitted the application, and my material actually won the grand prize – then it became clear that this was something momentous. Because winning the Capa Grand Prize is a great recognition, but to win the same prize in Arles... I felt that I would be a fool not to try to ride the waves that *Kontakt* had made. And this didn't mean



Máté Bartha: *Kontakt* (series), 2018



Máté Bartha: *Where Is A Place for Hope?*, new series

that from then on I was going to strain myself, start shooting feverishly, producing new projects. Rather, I changed my attitude: I decided to approach the doors that opened up, to go where life presented the fewest obstacles. I don't consider myself a dedicated photographer, but I don't consider myself a filmmaker either – I just expect to get as much out of each of them as I put in.

V.A.F: *What do you consider yourself then?*

M.B.: A visual creative artist. If I look back on the last 10-plus years, everything I have done has been creative work related to the visual. I was either doing photography or cinematography or directing or editing. I did a lot of work for the online news sites VS.hu and origo.hu, for the press, in commercial photography, and on documentaries. The ratio of creative to professional work was constantly shifting. One week I would make a professional editorial documentary, and the next week a mind-blowing experimental video clip for my brother, who is a musician. What I do is basically “lens-based” – this is what ties it all together. If I'm at a documentary film festival, I say I'm a filmmaker; if I'm at Arles or Paris Photo, I say I'm a photographer. Whatever makes sense. But I don't want to take any of these labels too seriously, because if something is compulsory, it becomes cramped.

Besides being lens-based, all of my work is also documentary-based. In both film and photography, I use very little staging; I prefer working with found objects. Finding my topics is inspired by actual work. In 2018, RTL Klub ran a series on sustainability issues; for that, I worked as a cameraman, doing practical things - getting in a car, going for interviews, shooting B-roll; but while that was happening, we were in some really interesting places, and came across some really good subjects. I found a lot of new locations there for my latest series. Inspiration happens in other places too: I found the protagonist of my thesis film for SZFE [University of Theatre and Film Arts] while working on my series *Kontakt*.

V.A.F: *What else did Kontakt do for you after Arles?*

M.B.: It's actually a prize that you can put on your CV; the award is a hallmark of the material. Eventually, *Kontakt* was selected one more time and taken to China, to the sister festival of *Rencontres d'Arles* called Jimei x Arles, which meant that a lot of people got to see it.



Máté Bartha: *Kontakt* (series), 2018



V.A.F: *Does this success have implications for your film career?*

M.B.: No. This type of crossover is more of an exotic aspect. It matters, because it's exciting to have achieved something within another art form, but it's more like a reassurance to the client that I'm generally able to bring things to the table. It is not really a direct passage because people in these industries don't really know each other. Someone who is familiar with the documentary world – all the series, channels, and platforms - might have no idea what Paris Photo or Arles is.

V.A.F: *But photography has a lot to do with documentaries.*

M.B.: You bet. Of course it has a lot to do with them, it's just not obvious, only to those who do both, but not to the outside world. No one would be asked to direct a documentary simply because of a series of images. And this is fine, because being sensitive and meticulous in photography doesn't mean you're up to the job in terms of cinematic thinking, editing or production principles.

V.A.F: *What is the crucial difference?*

M.B.: Mostly the nature of the storytelling, the structure, and the audience.

V.A.F: *That's important.*

M.B.: Yes, the audience is very different. A film tells a linear story. I must mention that today's television watching habits and Netflix are disrupting this very linearity: You can watch a film at home, you can stop it at any time, you can re-watch it, and this interferes with linearity, and that's why programs are starting to have a different structure. In principle, the film is a linear narrative, which you are forced to watch, for example, in the cinema. Even TV shows are different nowadays, because the concept is that if you turn it on in the middle, it should still be exciting. In a cinema, you have to take the viewers by the hand, walk them through something frame by frame, scene by scene. For a series of photographs, even if presented in a book, you can just flip through them, proceed from the end towards the beginning, and you can spend either a lot or just a little time on them. If they are exhibited, even then there are various ways to view them. Photographs must be able to stand on their own.



Máté Bartha: *Kontakt* (series), 2018

Documentary films are much more didactic than photography, in the best sense of the word. This is one of the reasons why I got into documentary filmmaking, because you can tell a story in a clearer and more concrete way. Photographs, on the other hand, tell a story more through symbols and emotions. Even if a story is connected to a specific location (as in this case, the camps of the Home Defense School) the material is not about what the camps look like or how many children attend them. Photographs convey much more timeless images. Of course, a documentary is not just about the story being told, but it is much more closely related to it. This is why the audience is different.

V.A.F: *Why are you drawn to this kind of well-understood didactic storytelling?*

M.B.: It's a question of life philosophy. It's more about what to do with your life (laughs). I think you have to contemplate and enjoy it in an intellectual way, to ponder the diversity of things, the variety of forms. Beyond that, if someone has the ability, energy, and most of all the opportunity – and of course a story that others can learn from – then go for it. Obviously, it's a matter of faith whether we can make the world a better place (to put it overly romantically) by conveying things that are instructive, or at least thought-provoking, for others. Sensitizing people. I think it is compulsory for those who can do it. Those who have the talent and the existential situation. In any case, this is my solution to the nagging question of what to do with my time and how to alleviate a little of the sense of injustice, the sense of remorse, that arises in the more fortunate half of the world – where I count myself and where probably the readers of this article belong, too.

There are photographs that change people's perceptions of the world, such as the iconic image from the Vietnam War of the naked girl (Nick Ut – Napalm Girl, June 8, 1972), or those narrative photo series that address a specific problem, explore a subject in a more scientific way, juxtapose multiple viewpoints; but all of these successful images make up a very small percentage of photography in general. Or there's press photography, where it's difficult to distinguish between how self-contained the image is and to what extent it is an illustration.

At the same time, fine art photography or art photography tends to work with subtle thoughts, feelings, and symbolism. It's all very exciting intellectually and it's good to play with it, good to create in this context, to live in this world, to be charged up by and to think about it. But it can only reach such a narrow audience, that for a person whose aim is to sensitize, these platforms are actually useless. This could be either because they reinforce familiar stereotypes, or because they are too complicated and high-brow to appeal to a wider audience. In addition, often they don't even strive to talk about a specific problem. This is debatable, an issue for which I welcome counter-opinions.

For example, I saw an exhibition in Arles where otherwise very serious global problems – which we could actually try to understand or confront – are transformed into clichés, into a springboard for a piece of art, into design products, right before our very eyes. It would be nice if someone could convince me otherwise.

By contrast, a documentary film festival or screening always attracts more socially sensitive people and stakeholders. Somehow films work in a different way: the makers are there, the actors express their thoughts, there's a conversation; people relate to films in a different way – for me it's a more direct relationship. The downside is that the creative process is much more restricted in the case of film, and you have less artistic freedom.

V.A.F: *Is it possibly less self-contained?*

M.B.: No, that's not true. There are many different kinds of documentaries in which the director is massively involved - whether it's in front of the camera, or through his voice, or even, as in the case of a personal photography series, the creator is actually depicted. There are several approaches: experimental, lyrical, observational documentary – these are less well known to the general public, and again, this presupposes a slightly more professional audience. Yet, its format makes it more well-suited to reach more people. But you're right, if you look at the big picture, the film is really less self-contained, if for no other reason than because you are probably working in a team. You also need a lot more money than it costs to make a series of photographs, and once you have found money and a producer, there will be voices that will have a say and shape the outcome. That's just the price you have to pay.

Obviously, it's a matter of faith, whether we can make the world a better place (to put it overly romantically) by conveying things that are instructive or at least thought-provoking for others. Sensitizing people. I think it is compulsory for those who can do it. Those who have the talent and the existential situation.

V.A.F: *You graduated from SZFE in 2019, majoring in documentary film. What was your thesis film?*

M.B.: The title is *Downstream* [*Szél viszí*]. It's about a girl who attended the Home Defense School depicted in my *Kontakt* series. She grew up in very poor surroundings, was separated from her mother as a child, raised in various foster homes, and all the while attended the Home Defense School. The film covers the period starting when she turns 18, is released from guardianship, and decides to put her life in order. She wants to see her mother again, get a job, and find a relationship.

Coming back to documentaries in general: Here too, the general is observed through the particular. A specific character in a specific story, with whom it is easy to identify, speaks of more universal things than just her own story. The central question of the film is the question of whether inherited patterns of life can be overcome by force of will. The beauty both in documentaries and photography is that there's something that continues working inside of you; you have to dig a little bit further down, which keeps you, as the viewer, engaged.

For example, I saw an exhibition in Arles too, where otherwise very serious global problems – which we could actually try to understand or confront – are transformed into clichés, into a springboard for a piece of art, into design products, right before our very eyes. It would be nice if someone could convince me otherwise.

V.A.F: *Can we see this film anywhere?*

M.B.: Now this is a problem. Documentaries don't have a really good platform; a few Hungarian documentaries have been screened in cinemas lately, so there are some that manage to break through the barriers, because a certain cinema network feels that they would pay off. But short documentaries like mine are typically confined to festivals. This film was also presented at the 16th Verzió Film Festival, where it actually received the Best Student and First Film awards. It is currently being selected for other festivals too; there is no fixed date, but I hope that it will be screened again in Hungary and abroad. In a few years, when the festival opportunities are over, I will make it available online.

V.A.F: *What are you doing now in photography after the huge success of Kontakt and graduating from SZFE?*

M.B.: I won't be photographing *Kontakt* anymore, that's for sure. It might be turned into a book; I'm negotiating with a publisher, but nothing is certain. I've started working on some new material, but I don't have a title yet. One notable thing is that I have a major film project coming up for the next 10 months, but I can't give away any of the details yet. One thing I'm sure about is that I would not want or be able to do something as heavy as *Kontakt* straight away. At the moment I would like to return to a different, more relaxed creative approach to photography, which last happened to me after graduating from MOME. Then, for a couple of years, I only took photographs as a pastime on weekends on the street, and I had no intention with the images, I was just collecting them on my blog titled *nonrelevant*; but later on, that material was turned into a book.

I feel like I can just sit back a little bit again and photograph in a way that just feels good and focus on what moves me emotionally as a human being. What drives me are uncertainty and anxiety, and the ecological crisis, which is becoming more and more evident and part of the public discourse. Humanity's global ambivalence over how we have been living is right.

This is a psychologically interesting situation because it affects me and everyone else. I keep thinking, "what if I just took photographs by feel?" Earlier, I didn't have the confidence to believe that it was enough to work in this way, that I, as a person, could hold it all together. But if I accept that I won't be able to suddenly re-produce really heavyweight material, then I'm in for a nice creative process. It's also a kind of self-experiment: what if I shoot from a slightly more permissive position? I am sure that when I have enough good photographs, through a good editing process I will notice patterns that can be used to narrow down the new series to a very specific subject. I already have some potential framework ideas, but I don't want to rush myself at all. The key to creating really good material is not to try to live up to expectations.



NOTES

More on Máté Bartha's Arles award can be found on Punkt.hu. We have presented his latest photography series in Punkt.hu Gallery section.

<https://barthamate.com/>

<https://nonrelevant.tumblr.com/>

Máté Bartha: *Where Is A Place for Hope?*, new series

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Red Flags in Black-and-White — *The Red May 1919 Album*



Manó Vajda: *Parade at the end of Fűrdő Street*, Budapest, May 1, 1919 © Historical Photo Department of the Hungarian National Museum, inventory number: 90.371

Crowds parading along Budapest's streets: long, endless lines of men and women flowing along the roads alone, in pairs, or in groups, flying flags and banners of various sizes, with multi-story buildings of Pest in the background. A sight familiar for everyone, seen on many occasions. This May 1 photograph of Manó Vajda also showcases such a scene. The historical framework is provided by the non-provocative but noticeable details of the image. In the background, on the right, there is the iconic man with the hammer from Mihály Biró, behind it, at the end of Fűrdő (today Attila József) Street, we can see the portrait bust of Karl Liebknecht and Friedrich Engels, together with a huge gate with an indecipherable inscription; to the left, there is also an advertising column, with only the word "tanács" (council) with a clock on top. Based on the hour hands, it is about 11 o'clock, there are flags on both sides, and in the foreground, we can see a blurred hammer and sickle symbol.

The most well-known photographs of the Hungarian Soviet Republic were taken at the May Day celebrations in 1919. Until now, these photographs have been only examined as illustrations to historical works, or from the aspect of fine arts works – sculptures, paintings, installations: the creative process behind the works was reconstructed, the authors identified, and the cityscape of May 1 was interpreted using contemporary sources.¹ In this context, the photographs were only considered as valuable documents – however, some of the photographs taken on the day of the celebrations were not (only) taken with the purpose of documentation and/or they were not (only) used as documents.

The photo album *The Red May 1919* [1919. A vörös május] is the only photo album published during the Hungarian Soviet Republic by the Photographic Propaganda Department – several images included in this volume have been showcased in historical and art historical studies. The album is mentioned by several works in the field of the history of photography, but they don't provide specific information about the authors of the photographs.² Exactly for this reason, it makes sense to explore the elements significant from the perspective of the history of photography, and to examine the photographs included in the album *The Red May 1919* not from a historical or art historical point of view – as opposed to the approaches used until now; not looking at them as documentary but as propaganda photographs.

On May 1, 1919, the journalists – two people per newspaper – and the professional photographers had to wear an armband at the parade, which they could receive upon showing their IDs.³ The daily *Népszava* report also mentions the photographers: “The transformed, magnificent red arch of the millennium monument welcomes the parading workers. Tasteful artistic hands covered the old sculpture group with red shutters. [...] At the foot of the sculpture, we can see the main organizers with their armbands, distributing the crowd into various parts of the City Park. A whole legion of photographers and cameramen are standing in the middle of the great square to capture the gigantic parade, which shall proceed for hours.”⁴ There is no available information on whether the compilation of the propaganda booklet had been planned before May 1. However, the armbands handed out to members of the press indicate that they were preparing to photograph the celebrations. Still, the publication at the end of June could infer that they only started working on the album after May 1st (although it could have been a matter of paper shortage as well).

On June 25, *Népszava* announced that it was now possible to purchase “the tasteful booklet capturing the May celebrations in photographs. The cover of the booklet showcases the huge red figure of Mihály Biró. On the inside, the most outstanding photographs feature the fascinating phases of the great May festivity.”⁵ The publication informs us that “the photographs were realized with the cooperation of several photojournalist comrades, and the booklet was compiled by: Manó Vajda, the head of the Photographic Propaganda Department of the Public Education Commissariat.”⁶ (sic!)

It is worth briefly mentioning the editor and his career: although there are some works in the history of photography that mention Manó Vajda (1874–1945, originally Mór Weisz, from 1920 Pál M. Vajda) in connection with the Hungarian Soviet Republic⁷, they do not point to the importance of the positions he fulfilled and his work as a photographer during this period. Vajda's career in politics and photography had been running in parallel already before 1919. From 1900 for a long time, he worked for various associations and organizations.⁸ We do not know when and how he started photography and whether he studied the trade – yet, his biographical data imply that he was self-educated.⁹ His name starts appearing more frequently under images published in newspapers from the second half of the 1910s; in 1917 and 1918, his pictures were published in *Az Érdekes újság*, *Tolnai Világlapja*, and *Vasárnapi újság* as well. In the meantime, he was associated with left-wing circles, which is well illustrated by his series from 1917 created for the article “Hungarian Socialist Leaders Among Their Families” [A magyar szocialisták vezetői családi körben].¹⁰ In 1917 and 1918, he held educational readings accompanied by the screening of photographs in various trade and workers' associations.¹¹ In May 1917, “comrade” Vajda held a lecture with the title “A Basic Lecture of Photography” [A fényképezés alapvető tanításai] at the first meeting of the newly formed photography department of the Sports Association of Private Employees.¹² He remained active in both scenes during the time of the Hungarian Soviet Republic as well. Upon the election of the workers' and soldiers' councils on April 7, he was a member of the election committee of the 7th district,¹³ and he was also elected to the Central Council as a representative of this district.¹⁴ During the months of the Hungarian Soviet Republic he had a greater influence on matters involving photographers and the photography scene than any other photographer. He was commissioned by the Public Education Commissariat to head the photography department established at the beginning of May, and to be the production manager of a newly socialized plant, the *Uránia Szemléltető Eszközök Gyára* [Urania Plant of Visual Aids].¹⁵



Manó Vajda: *The Red Soldier at the entrance of the tunnel*, Budapest, May 1, 1919 © Historical Photo Department of the Hungarian National Museum, inventory number: 57.280

Manó Vajda: *The House of Labor in front of the Parliament*, Budapest, May 1, 1919 © Historical Photo Department of the Hungarian National Museum, inventory number: 90.372

At the end of May, Vajda became a member of the Photography Directorate¹⁶, and he compiled the album *The Red May 1919* already as the head of the Photographic Propaganda Department of the Public Education Commissariat.¹⁷ The newspapers published his portraits of Revolutionary Governing Council members. Most of the photographs published during the Hungarian Soviet Republic in *Az Érdemes Ujság*, for which he worked as a photographer all through this period, were by him; he captured all the relevant events. All this indicates that Manó Vajda was committed to the left; his connections to this political circle and his experience helped him to important positions even though he was not one of the best photographers of the time.

The 34-pages album *The Red May 1919* edited by Vajda¹⁸ included a foreword by Jakab Weltner¹⁹ and 32 photographs taken in the capital on May 1st. The captions below the images can be read in four languages: in Hungarian, German, French, and English, which suggests that the editors considered the internationalist ideals as well, besides the domestic audience – they wished to extend their reach beyond our borders as well. Moreover, 18 of the 32 images in the album have been identified with the help of other sources: 12 are by Manó Vajda, four by Révész and Biró, one by Károly Pobuda and one by Gyula Harsányi.²⁰ Three photographs – based on other pictures – can be safely assumed to have been taken by Vajda. Based on the known proportions, we can presume that as head of the Photographic Propaganda Department and the album's curator, Vajda mostly used his photographs.

In the context of the booklet published by the Photographic Propaganda Department, the images in the album are not (only) significant from a documentary aspect, but also in terms of their propaganda potential. The individual photos themselves testify of conscious creation: emphasizing the monumental nature of sculptures and installations via the human figures standing next to them and photographing from below; the croppings, including decorations, captions, and conveying the size of the crowd from above. At the same time, the 32 images can be split into four groups. The first one consisting of seven images focuses on the public statues set up for the May 1st celebrations – beyond the presentation of the artworks, these showcase the roots of the labor movement, the forefathers (Marx, Ervin Szabó), and represent the power of the workers (*The Statue of Labor* [Munka szobra], *The House of Labor* [Munka háza]).²¹ The very first photograph was taken at the Castle Tunnel: those exiting the tunnel from Buda or entering it from Pest were welcomed by two statues.²² On top of the tunnel, there is a red star with a hammer and a plow in it.

The coat of arms of Hungary and the lion's head are covered by a drapery, with an upright hammer placed on it and two important dates of the period, as well as one of its main catchphrases: "March 21 / Dictatorship of the Proletariat / May 1" [Március 21. / Proletárdiktatúra / Május 1.] This photograph sets out the theme of the whole album, and it symbolizes a new beginning via the spatial boundary (the entrance/exit of the Tunnel, the passage from darkness into light).²³ Although there are people in the first section's photographs, the focus on the actual crowd is more characteristic of the second section with its 19 images. The civilian participants of the parade are well-dressed: men's and women's suits, ties, hats; the monumental decorations across the city and the banner texts ("Workers of the world, unite!", "No Peace Without Victory!") show where and when the photographs were taken. Besides that, we can see processions of workers, domestic servants, Turkish, Czechoslovakian, and German workers, choirs, conventions, and the distribution of leaflets.²⁴ All this is intended to illustrate the considerable mass behind the proletarian dictatorship. All propaganda-relevant groups have been included in the album: from the working class, there are the sailors, the moving picture and meat industry workers, as well as the procession of the laborers from Csepel; women, their equal rights, the acknowledgment of their significant number and work is represented by a separate group of housewives; the international ideals and the foreign support is reflected in the sections of the Socialist-Communist Federation of Hungarian Internationalists representing foreign countries.²⁵ The third unit consists merely of two images, which showcase a running race.²⁶ The images of the runners do not only highlight the central role of exercise and sports in the Hungarian Soviet Republic.²⁷ The first photograph depicts the masses of runners on Andrásy Street, in front of the Opera House, and the second the moment before crossing the finish line. For the latter, the title reads: "Winners in front of the Finish Line," with two pairs on the left and a group of four holding hands on the right crossing the line: this gesture symbolizes equality and brotherhood, or their coming and arrival. The main theme of the fourth, last part is the child. The first image shows the entrance of Margaret Island – the "children's island" as it was called back then, with the writing "Children / Yours Is / the Future" [Gyerekek / tietek a / jövő] behind the statue of the "proletarian mother." This is followed by three photographs depicting children.²⁸ The last picture shows "little proletarians" standing in front of carnies, with dozens of children looking or waving and smiling in the direction of the camera, one of them holding a – presumably – red flag. This photograph, as the last piece of the album, is a kind of farewell; beyond that, however, it also represents



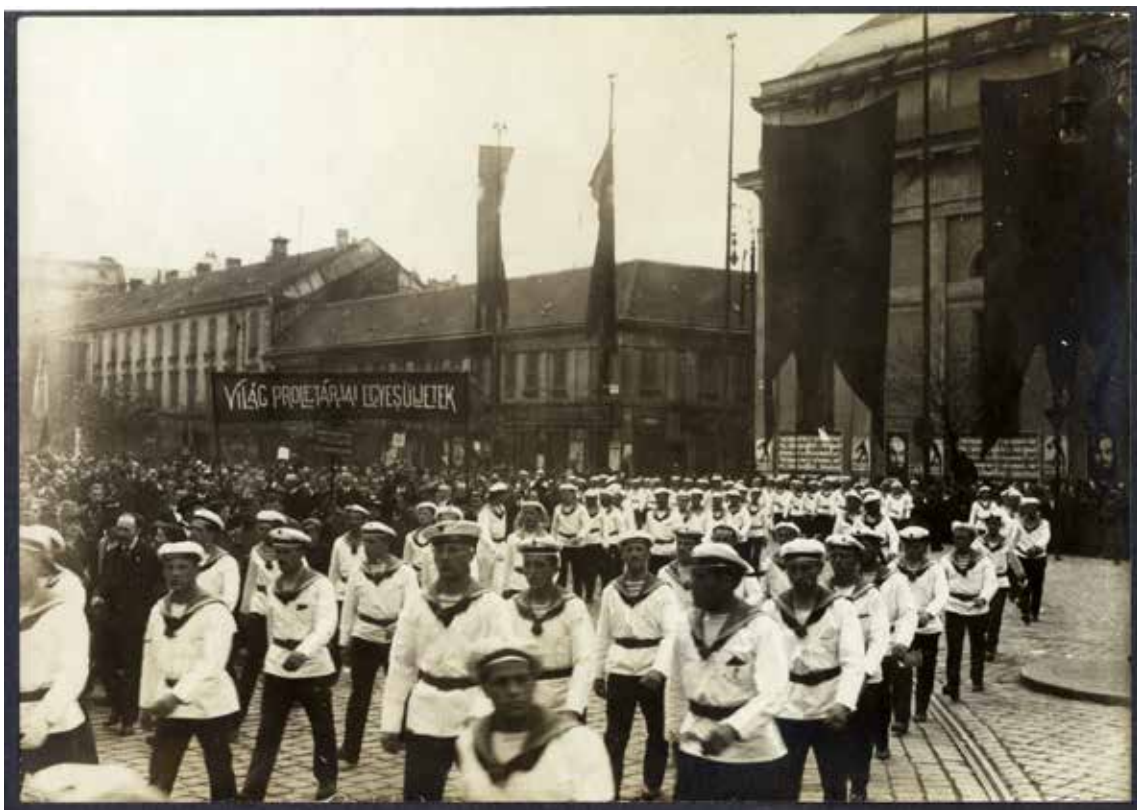
Unknown (probably Manó Vajda): **Red people with hammers on Berlini Square**, Budapest, May 1, 1919 © Historical Photo Department of the Hungarian National Museum, inventory number: 66.2080

Unknown: **Marx-allegory in the Stead of the Millennium Memorial Column**, Budapest, May 1, 1919 © Historical Photo Department of the Hungarian National Museum, inventory number: 66.1990



Manó Vajda: *Young proletarians enjoying the carny show*, Budapest, May 1, 1919 © Historical Photo Department of the Hungarian National Museum, inventory number: 90.370

In light of all this, it is likely that the individual sections and photographs are not in random order. Namely, the order of the images produces a peculiar arch, a narrative, which moves from the past towards the future via the representation of statutes, masses, runners and, finally, children. In addition, this interpretation of the album images points to that the authorities were aware of the importance of visual propaganda (also) during the Hungarian Soviet Republic period, which was not restricted to posters and works of art but to photographs as well. Therefore, the album did not only capture the images of the May 1 celebrations of 1919, thus making them observable and a part of our collective memory, but also (wished to) put them to use in propaganda and education. At the same time, the visual material of the album *The Red May 1919* is not particularly outstanding. It could have incorporated several photographs only published in newspapers – there were better photographs printed of the Berli Square statues or the Csepel proletarians as well – and famous photographers like János Müllner or Gyula Jelfy were not even included.²⁹ This could have been partly due to the rush (less than two months passed between the event and the publication), but also could have been due to top-down instructions, or simply because the editor was not making the best selection.



Manó Vajda: *Procession of the sailors*, Budapest, May 1, 1919 © Historical Photo Department of the Hungarian National Museum, inventory number: 57.323

Harsányi Gyula: *Czech and Slovak proletarians*, Budapest, May 1, 1919 © Historical Photo Department of the Hungarian National Museum, inventory number: 63.569

Manó Vajda's photograph taken at the parade shows a cloudy sky: by the time the arms of the clock in the picture took a full circle, a massive storm struck down, damaging and ruining most of the installations and decorations set up across the city. And soon enough, the storm of history cleared out the red draperies from the city squares. By October 1919, the album *The Red May 1919* was considered one of the "Communist, Bolshevik and anarchist copies to be confiscated and eliminated."³⁰ After all, the album was a successful propaganda product.

This study is a revised, extended version of one chapter of *From the Photography Propaganda Department of the Hungarian Soviet Republic to the Opera House – The Life and Work of Manó Vajda, a.k.a. Pál M. Vajda* [A Tanácsköztársaság Fotópropaganda Osztályától az Operaházig - Vajda Manó, azaz Vajda M. Pál élete és munkássága], the preparation of which was supported by the Photography Board of the National Cultural Fund of Hungary.



Unknown: *Rally in front of the Industry Hall*, Budapest, May 1, 1919 © Historical Photo Department of the Hungarian National Museum, inventory number: 57.246/b

¹ For example: Révész, Emese. "A múltat eltörölni végképp - Helyett, legalább gyorsan elfelejteni. A Tanácsköztársaság május elseji ünnepségének dekorációi." *Artmagazin*, 2013/2. pp. 8–11.; Markója, Csilla: "'Vörös posztó' - Városinstalláció 1919. május 1-én a források tükrében." *Enigma*, 2018/94. pp. 147–215.

² "Afterwards, the Photography Propaganda Department compiled a dedicated booklet on the celebrations, openly with a propaganda purpose." In: Stemlerné Balog, Ilona. *Történelem és fotográfia*. Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 2009. p. 129; "Eventually, we identified the publication »A Vörös május 1919« [sic!] as a public, promotional pamphlet of artistic nature, as it was basically a photographic and written documentation of the greatest mass event organized during the Hungarian Soviet Republic, the May 1st celebrations in Budapest. [...] The publication primarily aimed at showcasing the architectural and artistic works created specifically for the May 1st celebrations, but it naturally included mass displays and parades as well." In: Szabó, Viktor. *A magyarországi Tanácsköztársaság propagandája*. Eger, Eszterházy Károly Főiskola, 2016. p. 197.

³ *Népszava*, 29 April 1919, p. 8.

⁴ *Népszava*, 3 May 1919, p. 4.

⁵ The booklet cost two koronas and could be purchased at newsstands. *Népszava*, 25 June 1919, p. 10.

⁶ 1919. A vörös május. Budapest, Közkutatásügyi Népbiztosság, 1919. p. 33.

⁷ Szakács, Margit. "A magyar Tanácsköztársaság a riportfotók tükrében." *Fotó*, 1959/2. pp. 70–73.; Gábor, Imréné. "A forradalom és a szocialista fotóművészet." *Helikon*, 1969/2. pp. 301–303.; Demeter, Zsuzsanna, and Stemlerné Balog, Ilona: Müllner János. *A háborús Budapest fotóriportere*. Budapest, BTM Kiscelli Múzeum, 2006. p. 8.; Stemlerné Balog, Ilona: *Történelem és fotográfia*. Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 2009. p. 129.

⁸ He worked as accountant, auditor, and secretary as well at the Budapest District Patient Aid Fund until the second half of the 1910s; he was member of the audit board at the National Association for the Protection of the Blind, and he also served as member of the electoral and management board of

the National Association of Private Officials and Commercial Employees.

See: Budapesti Cím- és Lakásjegyzék, 1901–1902. p. 345.; Budapesti Cím- és Lakásjegyzék, 1902–1903. p. 351.; Budapesti Cím- és Lakásjegyzék, 1912. p. 497.; Budapesti Cím- és Lakásjegyzék, 1916. p. 535.; *Budapesti Hírlap*, 17 May 1912, p. 16.; *Népszava*, 26 February 1913, p. 15.; *Népszava*, 18 March 1913, p. 14.; *Budapesti Hírlap*, 15 April 1914, p. 19.

⁹ A 1913 photograph from him was published with the caption "amateur photograph." *Új Idők*, 9 February 1913, p. 176.

¹⁰ *Az Érdekes Újság*, 12 August 1917, pp. 13–16.

¹¹ The title of the lectures: "Travelling Through Switzerland" [Utazás Svájcban keresztül] and "Conquering the Arctic" [Az északi sark meghódítása]. We have no information on whether Vajda had ever visited Switzerland or the Arctic. However, he presented Switzerland's economic, natural, and cultural environment on several occasions and in several places in March and April of 1917, as well as February and March of 1918. Including: *Népszava*, 19 March 1917, p. 7.; *Népszava*, 3 April, 1917, p. 11.; *Népszava*, 20 February 1918, p. 6.; He held lectures of the Arctic in February, 1918: *Népszava*, 21 February 1918, p. 8.; *Népszava*, 28 February 1918, p. 8.

¹² *Népszava*, 5 May 1917, p. 8.

¹³ *Népszava*, 5 April 1919, front page

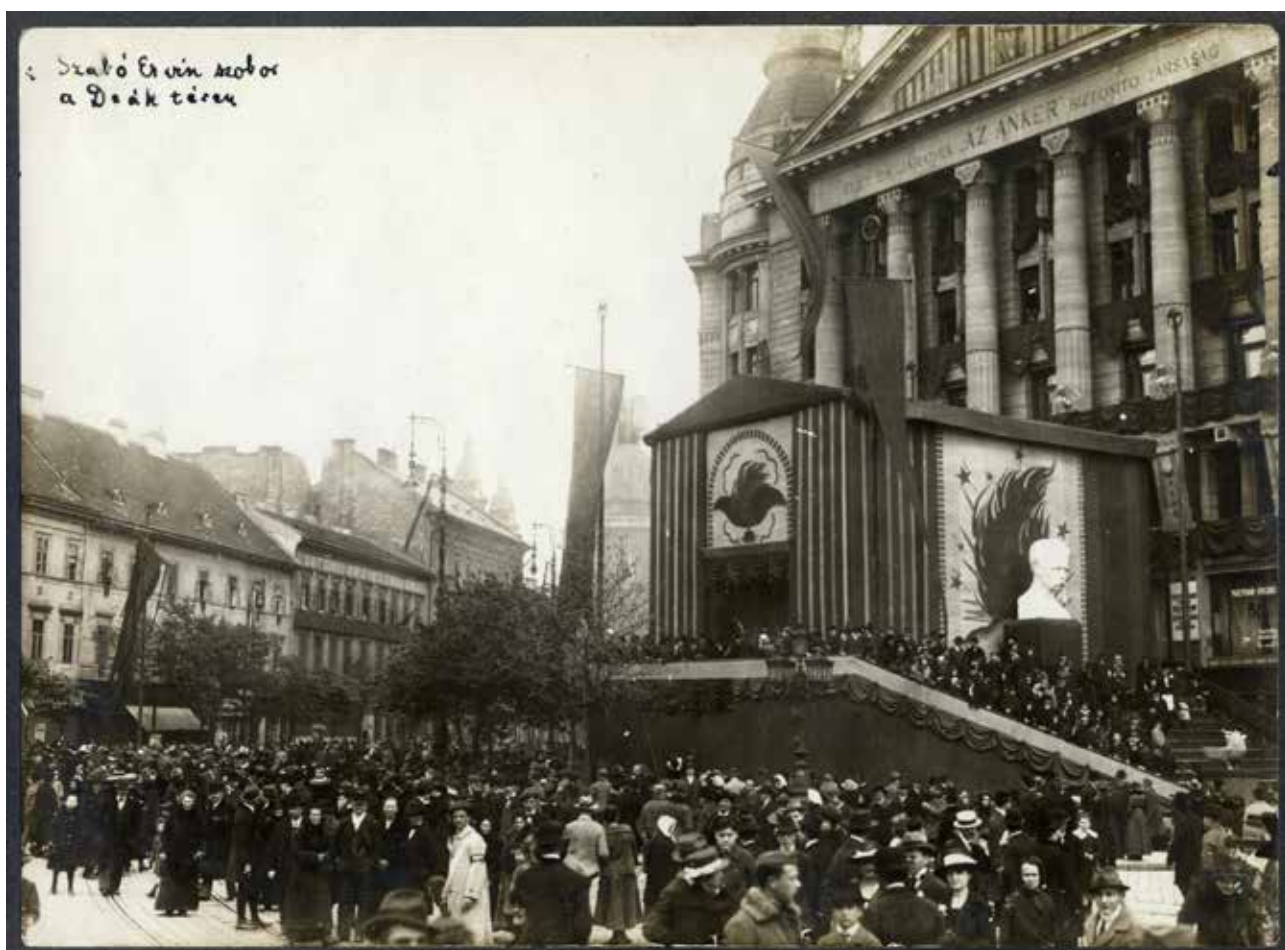
¹⁴ *Pesti Napló*, 12 April 1919, p. 4.

¹⁵ *Népszava*, 10 May 1919, p. 9.

¹⁶ Additional members: "on behalf of the photographic workers Jakab Szentiványi, Gyula Zsámboki and Sándor Nádor, on behalf of the national council for intellectual products Vilmos Stemmler, and finally, Aladár Székely." *Népszava*, 27 May 1919, p. 10.

¹⁷ *Népszava*, June 25 1919, p. 10.

¹⁸ It remains a question whether the concept of the album described below was Manó Vajda's concept, or he had some kind of instructions regarding the compilation process.



Manó Vajda: *Ervin Szabó's statue on Deák Square*, Budapest, May 1, 1919 © Historical Photo Department of the Hungarian National Museum, inventory number: 90.373

¹⁹ Jakab Weltner (1873–1936) was a social democrat politician, representative, journalist, leading figure of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, and editor of *Népszava*. Vajda also photographed him with his wife and daughter in the above-mentioned series “Leaders of Hungarian Socialists Among Their Families.” See: *Az Érdekes újság*, 12 August 1917, p. 16. The photographer compiled another album specifically dedicated to Weltner, as a gift – in this, he presented this period of the country via 50 of his own photographs from the proclamation of the republic on November 16, 1918, until May 1, 1919. The album is available in the Historical Photo Department of the Hungarian National Museum. In the album, Manó Vajda took photographs 1, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 18, 23, 25, 28, 31, and 32, Révész and Bíró did 15, 16, 17, and 29, Károly Pobuda took the 19th, while Gyula Harsányi took the 21st picture. Images 3, 14 and 27 were probably taken by Manó Vajda. For the identification of the images, we used issues of *Az Érdekes újság* and *Tolnai Világlapja* published during the Hungarian Soviet Republic era, and photographs taken during the Hungarian Soviet Republic kept in the Historical Photo Department of the Hungarian National Museum. Révész and Bíró, that is, Imre Révész (1895–1975) and Irma Bíró (active in 20th century) were “mainly known by their photojournalist and advertisement photographs.” See: Kincses, Károly. *Magyar fotográfusok külföldön – Kislexikon*. http://www.fotomuveszet.net/korabbi_szamok/201102/magyar_fotografusok_kulfoldon_%E2%80%93_kislexikon. Accessed 29 March 2021.; Károly Pobuda (?–?) was primarily known as the photographer of *Tolnai Világlapja*, and mostly photographed sports events. Gyula Harsányi worked for the same newspaper, and in 1910, *Tolnai Világlapja* called him “the matador of snapshots.” See *Tolnai Világlapja*, 25 December 1910, p. 2980. The statues are as follows: 1. The Red Soldier at the entrance of the Tunnel; 2. The Statue of Work on Országház Square; 3. Red people with hammers on Berlini Square; 4. Marx's Statue on Ferenc József Square; 5. Marx-allegory in the Stead of the Millennium Memorial Column; 6. The House of Labor in front of

the Parliament; 7. Ervin Szabó's statue on Deák Square. See: 1919. *A vörös május*. Budapest, Közkultúrálisügyi Népbiztosság, 1919. pp. 1–7.

²⁰ Zsigmond Kisfaludi Stróbl's *Soldier of the Aster Revolution* [Őszirózsás katona] and Mihály Bíró's man with the hammer. Kisfaludi's statue is mentioned as the “red soldier” in the album, and Bíró's statue is included on the cover as well in graphic art format.

²¹ “Covering the national coat of arms and «overwriting» it was supposed to represent the superiority of the internationalist ideology propagating the brotherhood of the proletariat as opposed to the nationalist ideology embodying «national egotism»” writes Viktor Szabó. See: Szabó, Viktor. *A magyarországi tanácsköztársaság propagandája*. Eger, Eszterházy Károly Főiskola, 2016. p. 298.

²² In the first image of this section, we can see people gathering on the Vörösmarty, while the last one depicts people heading home to Buda at the Buda end of the Elisabeth Bridge. In between there are mostly scenes from Fűdő Street, Andrássy Street, Oktogon, the Körönd, Stefánia Street and the City Park depicted in the photographs. See: 1919. *A vörös május*. Budapest, Közkultúrálisügyi Népbiztosság, 1919. pp. 8–26.

²³ Szabó, Viktor. *A magyarországi tanácsköztársaság propagandája*. Eger, Eszterházy Károly Főiskola, 2016. p. 304.

²⁴ 1919. *A vörös május*. Budapest, Közkultúrálisügyi Népbiztosság, 1919. pp. 27–28.

²⁵ “Just as the Hungarian Soviet Republic placed theater, music and all treasures of culture in the public domain, so did we have to make all institutions of physical education public as well.” Cited from, and for more about the Directorate of Physical Education Matters see: *Népszava*, 25 April 1919, p. 12.

²⁶ The first one is [Pole climbing at the festivities in Margaret Island] and the other is [Amusement of proletarian children in the People's Park]. See: 1919. *A vörös május*. Budapest, Közkultúrálisügyi Népbiztosság, 1919. pp. 29–32.

²⁷ Although it is true that they could be authors of some identified photographs.

²⁸ *Belügyi Közlöny*, 5 October 1919, p. 1314.

Uncropped.

On the rural studio photography collection of the Museum of Ethnography

IN 1921-1922, NEARLY 25,000 GLASS NEGATIVES WERE ACQUIRED FROM THE COUNTRY'S RURAL ARTISTS AND PHOTOGRAPHERS FOR THE PHOTOGRAPHY COLLECTION OF THE MUSEUM OF ETHNOGRAPHY. THIS ARTICLE BRIEFLY DESCRIBES THE PURPOSE AND RESULTS OF, AS WELL AS THE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED BY THE NATIONAL COLLECTION.

The establishment and composition of the rural photo-graphy studios collection

In spring 1921, the Museum of Ethnography applied for government funding for the collection of ethnographic artifacts:¹ „The twelfth hour is already upon us after the all-destroying stormy years of the war. We must salvage, urgently salvage, what can still be salvaged. For the time being, unfortunately, all we can do is to collect photographs and photographic plates depicting old and already destroyed folk costumes which, according to our experience and our knowledge, can still be obtained in large numbers from the various regions, before they are permanently destroyed or otherwise lost.”² The First World War made the procurement of photographs important for two reasons. On the one hand, the post-war situation and the Treaty of Trianon made the fieldwork in areas previously of high priority for ethnography and long-term ethnographic collection in general, temporarily impossible. On the other hand, the turnover of photography studios increased during the war, and photographers were unable to store the suddenly accumulated number of plates: “Indeed, our field experience confirmed that we really only started the rescue in the last hour, and in many places, we were too late already.

There were cases when the photographers sold 10 to 50 thousand of their plates at a bargain price to glass dealers, mirror polishers, or greenhouse gardeners, or had carriage



1. Ferenc Stagl or R. Rupprecht (?): *Enlisted young men from around Nagymarton*. The scarcity of studio space is well illustrated. Sopron, second half of the 1910s, 12x16.5 cm, glass negative @ Museum of Ethnography, F. 34927

loads of these taken to the end of town, or, to save on the fare, buried them in their gardens, or carried them to the attic, the cellar, etc., because the taking of photographs, which had become almost epidemic during the war, had led to the accumulation of so many plates in their warehouses that they had to get rid of the old ones at any cost.”³ The selection of sites was determined as follows: „With our photograph and plate collection finally revised and sorted, we had a clear picture of which regions were underrepresented in our department and could base our collection program on that. Then, with the easing of times, we set out and traveled to a great number of places, having confirmed in the course of a few trial collection journeys that it was possible to collect old materials covering a larger area from a single photographer [...].”⁴ The main subjects are as follows: “relatively cheap photographic plates of great value from an ethnographic perspective, which can be obtained almost at glass price, depicting folk costumes, folk festivals, old time occupations, and facial features [...].”⁵ Among the ethnographic researchers of the museum, István Györfy, György Kemény, Gyula László Snr., László Madarassy, and Károly Viski were responsible for the field selection and the subsequent museum administration.⁶

The extent and intensity of the collection is well illustrated by the fact that within two years, the photography collection of the Museum of Ethnography⁸ was doubled by this purchase

of negatives.⁷ The photographs were cataloged within a short period of time, and the work was carried out in parallel by several museum employees, who were paid for the extra afternoon working hours.⁹ However, the records for the glass negatives are rather incidental: only a smaller proportion of the settlements have the name of a local photographer indicated. The museum records (the Museum of Ethnography’s Archive, genealogical records, inventory books), which allowed for subsequent clarification, do not fill in all the gaps either. Due to the nature of the collection, we cannot count on the advantage of the positive images, or the studio ornaments, for identification. The date of the photographs was not properly recorded at the time of entry; most of them were taken in the period between 1914 and 1921.

Almost one hundred years after their entry, as a result of intensive research based on the currently available documents (registry data, reports¹⁰), photographer registers, and comparative examination of the backgrounds, seventy-four photographers from sixty-two settlements could be identified from the complete collection.¹¹ Additionally, the selection was drawn from materials of two studios each in eight locations, and four ateliers in Szeged. Photographers from nine settlements are yet to be identified. A significant portion (42%) of the studios is missing from Margit Szakács’s national register¹² (marked with *italics*).

2. Piroška Papszt: *Wedding group in folk costumes. The work stool is visible on the side.* Szolnok, 1910s, 12x16.5 cm, glass negative @ Museum of Ethnography, F 36923



THE LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHERS
BY COUNTY AND MUNICIPALITY

BÁCS-BODROG:	Bácsalmás (?), Baja ¹³ – R. Goldstein, Bernát Nesselroth, Jánoshalma (?);
BARANYA:	Mohács – Photographers Miss Völker and Miss Tolnai Sellye – Imre Szemán, Siklós – Károly Szentgyörgyvári;
BÉKÉS: ¹⁴	Békés – Viktor Horváth, Békéscsaba – Kálmán Vörös, Endrőd – Imre Szabó, Gyoma – András Kocziha, Gyula ¹⁵ – Gyula Békés, Szeghalom – Gyula Szeghalmy;
BIHAR:	Sarkad – Róza Maár;
BORSOD:	Mezőkövesd – Rilly Weissbach and her sister, ¹⁶ Miskolc – Imre Barkó, Hugó Barna;
CSONGRÁD:	Szeged ¹⁷ – Emil Keglovich, Brenner Siblings, Ferenc Lintner, Rutkay and Vitnay, Szentcsanak – Successor of Vilmos Hegedűs;
ESZTERGOM:	Esztergom ¹⁸ – Nándor Klomann, Dániel Koch;
FEJÉR:	Bicske – (Mrs.) Kirschweng Lajos, József Wokaun, Sárbogárd – István Diamant, István Kozma Jr.;
GYŐR:	Győr ¹⁹ – József Glück;
HAJDÚ:	Hajdúszoboszló – Zsigmond Szeremley;
HEVES:	Eger ²⁰ – József Kiss, Hatvan – László Dora (?), Pásztó – Ödön Sztanok;
HONT:	Nagyvaros – József Zeidler
JÁSZ-NAGYKUN-SZOLNOK:	Jászapati – Antal Lakatos, Jászárokszállás – Jenő Beck, Jászberény – Fülöp Pollák, Kunmadaras – Mrs. Juliska Juhász Szűcs, Mezőtúr – Kristóf Kerpitz, Kálmán Varga, Szolnok ²¹ – Piroska Papszt, Túrkeve – Félix Markóczy;
KOMÁROM: ²²	Tata – Frigyes Fürst, Tatatóváros – Olivér Dimény;
MOSON:	Magyaróvár – Antal Kumpf;
NÓGRÁD:	Balassagyarmat – Aladár Vámos; Sálgótarján – ?;
PEST-PILIS-SOLT-KISKUN:	Aszód – Kálmán Solti, Cegléd ²³ – (Aladár) Mózer and (Imre) Rudda, Gödöllő – Ernő Hirling, Kalocsa – Endre Csincás, Kecskemét – Fanto Photography Studio, ²⁴ Kiskőrös – ?, Kiskunfélegyháza – Hugó Wesel, Kiskunhalas – Benő Zseli, Kunszentmiklós – Erzsébet Holzmann, Nagykőrös – Miklós Szmracsányi, Ráckeve – Mariska Szabó (delivered by?), Rákospalota – Béla Borsy, Szabadszállás – ?, Vác – Sándor Vasas;
SOMOGY:	Kaposvár – Sons of (Mór) Langsfeld;
SOPRON:	Kapuvár – Károly Karinger, Sopron ²⁵ – R. Rupprecht, ²⁶ Ferenc Stagl;
SZABOLCS:	Kisvárd – János Prohászka;
TOLNA: ²⁷	Bátaszék – Pál Rovács (Récsei), ²⁸ Dombóvár – ?, Dunaföldvár – I. Milnder, Wurczinger Photography Salon, Paks – Mihály Tumpek, Szekszárd – Ede Borgula, Tolna – Ferenc Schrantz (previously János Roth);
VAS:	Cellsdömölk – ?, Körmend – Károly Steindl (?), Sárvár – Géza Szente;
VESZPRÉM:	Devecser – Sándor Németh (?), Pápa ²⁹ – Béla Sörenstein, Veszprém ³⁰ – ?;
ZALA:	Nagykanizsa – Károly Mathea, Sümeg – ?, Zalaegerszeg ³¹ – Dóri Vajda; ³²
ZEMPLÉN:	Sátoraljaújhely – Bartizek Brothers (László).



3. Ede Borgula: *Bride from Sárköz*. Next to her is the plate indicating the sequence number of the photograph. Szekszárd (?), 1910s, 13x18 cm, glass negative @ Museum of Ethnography, F 36256

The following brief statistics emerge from the photographs acquired by the museum (regarding the number of municipalities and photographers): The collection resulted photographs from the largest number of settlements in the counties of Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun (14), Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok (8), Tolna (6), and Békés (5).

The number of glass negatives received from the photography studios varies (between 8 and 1342 pieces), with Rilly Weissbach's studio in Mezőkövesd (941 pieces) and Sándor Vasas's studio in Vác (1342 pieces) providing the most glass negatives. In addition, there were 18 more studios, where the number of items handed over was between 500 and 900.



4. Ödön Sztanok: *Wedding group photograph*. The “background” hanging on the wall of the building disappears behind the crowd. Pásztó, 1910s, 13x18 cm glass negative @ Museum of Ethnography, F 48592

What opportunities lie in two tons of glass negatives?

The 25,000 pieces of gelatin dry plates weigh about 1,800 kg. Due to the purposes and circumstances of collection (photographs taken mostly between 1914 and 1921, documented incompletely, selected based on an ethnographic perspective), the corpus, taken out of its context of production and use, provides a narrow, but all the denser and more layered cross-section of the history of photography in Hungary, and can therefore be a source of multifaceted research. The most powerful interpretation is that of the ethnographic, folkloristic reading, since – in accordance with the purpose of the collection and the methods of the selection – it provides a national overview of the spread, or even dominance, of the folk costumes, townspeople’s pieces of clothing and materials worn at the turn of the century in specific regions. Each urban or small-town studio³³ covered dozens of settlements, making the collection an invaluable resource of festive and everyday garments from hundreds of villages.

The photographic material clearly shows the prevalence of photography among the peasantry and the rural bourgeoisie in the period and the main occasions for studio visits.

Some of them are related to a specific event: first communion, enlistment (picture 1), wedding (pictures 2–4), funeral; others are for ID cards (pictures 5–6), memories, family pictures (pictures 7–12). These are mostly characterized by the use (display, capturing) of festive costumes and garments. The entire material is dominated by the family having its photograph taken in a time of war (which was also the reason for the collection of these images), and by photographs taken for remembrance with a family member present (or included via retouching) in military uniform preparing to go to the front (image 13), and photographs capturing women and children without the men, who are already in the front, and to whom the pictures were to be sent (images 14–17). These photographs were not taken for a festive occasion, and they are very much characterized by ordinary clothing. Due to the ethnographic nature of the collection, mostly created from a perspective of the history of clothing, there are hardly any photographs depicting the settlements or the cultural, social or school life of the given locality, and only a few occupations are displayed in this material.



5. Béla Borsy: *The making of a portrait*. Rákospalota, 1910s, 9x12 cm, glass negative @ Museum of Ethnography, F 32909



6. Béla Borsy: *The making of a portrait*. Rákospalota, 1910s, 9x12 cm, glass negative @ Museum of Ethnography, F 32861



7. Kálmán Solti: *Women from around Aszód in folk costumes*. They are photographed from an unusual angle, from the side and not from the front. Aszód, 1910s, 12x16.5 cm glass negative @ Museum of Ethnography, F 38716



8. Unknown: *Young couple and an old woman with a sack on her back in the background, waiting (?)*. Salgótarján, 1910s, 9x12 cm, glass negative @ Museum of Ethnography, F 41580



9. Antal Kumpf: *Girl from Püspök in folk costume*. With the damage to the painted backdrop in the background. Magyaróvár (?), 1910s, 13x18 cm, glass negative @ Museum of Ethnography, F 48530



10. Ödön Sztanok: *Siblings, with a man (the father?) lurking in the background*. Pásztó, 1910s, 10x15 cm, glass negative @ Museum of Ethnography, F 48753



11. Brothers Bartizek: *A family from Kovácsvágás*. Sátoraljaújhely, 1910s, 12x16.5 cm, glass negative @ Museum of Ethnography, F 25412



12. Ernő Hirling: *A Gödöllő photographer on a call-out, taking a shot of an elderly couple in front of a coffin warehouse, with a traveling screen in the background.* Valkó, 1910s, 12x16.5 cm, glass negative @ Museum of Ethnography, F 31269



13. Béla Sörenstein: *Girl from around Pápa in folk costume.* She is surrounded by two soldiers, and the shades are well discernible. Pápa, 1910s, 12x16.5 cm, glass negative @ Museum of Ethnography, F 37415



14. János Prohászka: *Family.* There is a camera in the foreground and backdrops stacked against each other in the background. Kisvárd, between 1914–1919, 12x16.5 cm glass negative @ Museum of Ethnography, F 28575



15. Aladár Vámos: *A family from Cserhátvarsány*. The father is probably on the front; the window of the studio can be seen in the background. Balassagyarmat, between 1914–1919, 12x16.5 cm, glass negative @ Museum of Ethnography, F 28939



16. (Mrs.) Kirschweng Lajos: *Family photo*. We can also see the person holding the painted backdrop. Bicske, between 1914–1919, 13x18 cm, glass negative @ Museum of Ethnography, F 30154



17. Ferenc Schrantz: *Family in folk costume*. Positive images are scattered on the stool in the studio. Tolna, between 1914–1919, 13x18 cm, glass negative @ Museum of Ethnography, F 46894

From a history of photography perspective, the collection has preserved negatives of several studios (in some cases hundreds of shots), where the positives never made it into another public collection, or only a few of them, mostly ones used in some specific way. Moreover, the type and equipment of the photography studios are rather varied (see image 18, or images 4, 6, and 15): from the nationally renowned studios with the most advanced equipment of the time (for example, the studios of Gyula Békés, the Fanto family or Károly Mathea) to the studios serving mainly the poorer social strata (but with their own versos, picture 2), and to photographers working on the veranda, porch or courtyard of a house, besides their other main occupation.

The enlargements supplied to the client are, of course, photographs corrected by the photographer. However, the negatives can also show the environment, the real milieu in which the image was taken, the details of the studio that later become invisible, and thus represent an unedited material compared to the positive images. Studying the glass negatives, one can see that the painted backgrounds, props, and settings aimed to imitate the bourgeois environment in the studios and photography salons operating with various technical equipment and backgrounds.

In most cases, this was not in line with the homes of the peasants, rural bourgeoisie, maids, etc., who came to be photographed. Instead, the subjects were generally dressed in carefully composed (festive) folk costumes that could be interpreted within the context of the local symbol system.³⁴ Ernő Kunt, writing on the anthropology of the peasantry's use of photography, observed that „the studios of professional photographers [...] were in fact workshops of transformation, special lock chambers in between the private and public spheres.”³⁵ The photographs selected for this study showcase a wide range of geographical units or types of folk costumes and photography studios from this briefly presented photographic material. The unedited negatives evoke this “lock chamber,” the environment and milieu of the photography studios. The pictures also demonstrate the contrast between the members of the peasantry, or the rural bourgeois, and the bourgeois backgrounds and props. At the same time, they also illustrate the casual nature of the occasions when the photographer is struggling with the lack of a real studio setting and suitable photographic equipment in a small space, courtyard, or porch (e.g., images 1, 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16).

18. Károly Steindl (?): *The street front of Károly Steindl's photography studio with a billboard and store window.* With the photographer himself standing in the door (?). Körömend's surroundings, 1910s, 9x12 cm, glass negative @ Museum of Ethnography, F41657



¹ Fogarasi, Klára. "Fényképgyűjtemény." *A Néprajzi Múzeum gyűjteményei*, edited by Zoltán Fejős, Budapest, Museum of Ethnography, 2000, pp 729–776. (Specifically: pp 740, 741)

² *Levél a miniszterhez 25.000 korona gyűjtési pénz tárgyában.* [A Letter to the Secretary regarding the collection budget of 25,000 Hungarian korona.] (*Néprajzi Múzeum Irattára* – hereinafter referred to as NMI, 34/1921).

³ *Jelentés a Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum Néprajzi Osztályának tisztviselői által az 1921 év első felében végzett gyűjtőútjairól* [Report on the collection field trips carried out by officers of the Ethnography Department of the Hungarian National Museum in the first half of 1921] (NMI, 55/1921).

⁴ *Jelentés Fejérpataki László főigazgatójának a Néprajzi Osztály tisztviselői által 1921. év első felében végzett gyűjtőutakról* [Report to Director László Fejérpataki on the collection field trips carried out by officers of the Ethnography Department in the first half of 1921] (NMI, 55/1921).

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Specifically, István Györfy visited 23, Gyula László, Snr. 21, and László Madarassy László 19 settlements. For example: Gyula László: "Szabadszállás – Jánoshalma – Bácsalmás – Dunaföldvár collection field trip; cost of plates: 440+300+240 Hungarian korona; personal expenses (1 day in Szabadszállás, 3 days in Jánoshalma-Bácsalmás, 2 days in Dunaföldvár, that is, a total of 6 days) for carriers, for fares, for receipts stamps, cloakroom charge at Keleti Railway Station and other miscellaneous expenditure 3614." (*Gyűjtőutakról elszámolások* [Accounts of collection field trips], NMI, 73/1922).

⁷ In some cases, the photographer handed over the material to the museum in person; in these cases, it was mostly entered as a gift, and not as a purchase (for example: József Glück, Imre Szemán, Géza Szente, Károly Szentgyörgyvár, Völker and Tolnai).

⁸ The photography collection received its own inventory book in 1894.

⁹ *Az 1921. évi negyedéves jelentések* [Quarterly reports of the year 1921] (NMI, 32/1921) and 1922. év negyedéves jelentései [Quarterly reports of the year 1922] (NMI, 31/1932).

¹⁰ NMI, 55/1921 (see endnote 3) and *Kimutatás Fejérpataki László főigazgatójának a 25000 korona elköltéséről* [Statement prepared for Director László Fejérpataki on spending the 25,000 Hungarian korona] (NMI, 67/1921), which includes the names of

the sellers, without identifying the related settlement. The following are completely missing from the documentation: Brenner Siblings, László Dora, Fanto, R. Goldstein, Viktor Horváth, Sons of (Mór) Langsfeld, Ferenc Lintner, Róza Maár, Károly Mathea, Bernát Nesselroth, Pál Rovácsék (Récsei), Rutkay and Vitnay, Károly Steindl, Mihály Tumpek, Dóri Vajda, Aladár Vámos, Wurzinger Photography Salon.

¹¹ Péter Cserevá, Zoltán Fejér, Péter Illés, Kelemen Kothencz, Zsuzsanna Kunics, Anna Megyeri, Irén Mészáros, Zsolt Odler, Magdolna Szabó, Mrs. Ilona Körösi Székely, Petronella Szojka were of great help in identifying the individual photography studios.

¹² Szakács, Margit. *Fényképészek és fényképszemlétermek Magyarországon 1840–1945.* Adatok a Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum Fényképtárának gyűjteményéből. Budapest, Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, 1997.

¹³ Albert, Iván. "Amiről a fénykép mesél. A bajai fényképezés rövid története 1945-ig." *Bácsorszá, 2005/3*, pp 40–42.

¹⁴ Bata, Tímea. *Műtermi fotózás Békés megyében (1872–1921). Válogatás a Néprajzi Múzeum vidéki fényképszemlétermek gyűjteményéből.* Budapest, Néprajzi Múzeum, 2018.

¹⁵ Durkó, Károly and Bernadett Durkó Illés and Tibor Balla. *Gyula régen és ma XI. Gyulai fényképészek (1896–2014).* Gyula, Gyulai Évszázadok Alapítvány, 2014.

¹⁶ Bata, Tímea. "A »német kisasszonyok« fotói a Néprajzi Múzeumban: a Weissbach nővérek és a matyó viselet." *Fotográfusok. A Magyar Fotótörténeti Társaság 2017. évi konferenciájának kötete*, edited by Éva Fisli, Magyar Fotótörténeti Társaság. (www.mafot.hu) – forthcoming.

¹⁷ T. Knotik, Márta. *Fénylőrök és fénylőrdák Szegeden (1859–1913).* Szeged, Móra Ferenc Múzeum, 2009.

¹⁸ Kaposi, Endre. *Fotográfusok Esztergomban a XIX. és a XX. században. Komárom megye fotótörténete.* Tatabánya, 1987.

¹⁹ Nagy, István. *A győri fotográfia 150 éve.* Győr, 1994.

²⁰ Demeter, Pál. *Egri fénylőrök és fénylőrdák. Az egri fényképezés kezdetei 1854–1914.* Eger, published by Pál Demeter, 2017.

²¹ Berta, Ferenc. *A fényképezés 150 éve Szolnokon 1852–2002.* Szolnok, 2002.

²² Mácsa, Mihály, and Ágota Pusztai, and Mrs. Anikó Molnár Fűrész. *Fotográfusok Komáromban, Tatán, Tatabányán. Komárom megye fotótörténete.* Tatabánya, 1988.

²³ Reznák, Erzsébet. "Fényképészek és műtermek Cegléden." *Gazdaság- és társadalomtörténeti*

tanulmányok, Studia Comitatus 25, edited by Sándor Soós. Szentendre, Pest Megyei Múzeumok Igazgatósága, 1995, pp. 265–306.

²⁴ Székelyné, Ilona Körösi. *A Fanto fotó Kecskeméten. Egy fényképész dinasztia emlékére.* Kecskemét, Private publication, 2014.

²⁵ Hárs, József. *A fényképezés története Sopron városában 1840–1857.* Manuscript, published on the author's website https://harsjosef.hu/sites/default/files/irasok/palyazatok/1984_A_fenykepezes_tortenete_Sopron_varosaban.pdf. Accessed 3 July 2021.

²⁶ The daughter of Mihály Rupprecht (?).

²⁷ V. Kápolnás, Mária. "Az első fényképészek és műtermek Tolna megyében 1870–1914." *A Wosinszky Mór Múzeum Évkönyve 24.* Szekszárd, Wosinszky Mór Megyei Múzeum, 2002, pp. 385–442.; V. Kápolnás, Mária. "Fényképészek és műtermek Tolna megye Központi járásában." *A Wosinszky Mór Múzeum Évkönyve 36.* Szekszárd, Wosinszky Mór Megyei Múzeum, 2014, pp. 507–546.

²⁸ V. Kápolnás, Mária. "Bátaszék első fényképésze Rovácsék (Récsei) Pál 1842–1926." *MAFOTApertura no. 30.* 2014/September. http://mafot.hu/apertura_bataszek-elso-fenykepesez-ecsei-rovacscek-pal-1842-1926.html. Accessed 3 July 2021.

²⁹ Ürmös, Lóránt. *Régi pápai fényképészek. A vizit és kabinetképek korszaka 1864–1935.* Pápa, Jókai Mór Városi Könyvtár, 2014.

³⁰ V. Fodor Zsuzsa: "»Isten áldja a tisztelt ipart.« Iparosélet Veszprémben a két világháború között." *Veszprémi múzeumi értesítő.* Veszprém, Veszprém Megyei Múzeumi Igazgatóság, 1989.

³¹ Megyeri, Anna. "Fénylőrdák, fényképészek, amatőr fotográfusok Zalaegerszegen, a dualizmus idején." *Zalai Múzeum no. 22.* 2015, 147–200.

³² Megyeri, Anna. "Vajda Dóri (1880–1944) fényképész és családja emlékezete." *Pannon Tükör 2015/3*, pp. 6–11.

³³ People from at least 17 settlements visited the photography studio of Rilly Weissbach and her sister, Róza (Bata, Tímea. "A »német kisasszonyok« fotói a Néprajzi Múzeumban: a Weissbach nővérek és a matyó viselet." *Ibid.*)

³⁴ More information on the use of photography studios and photography as such by the peasantry, see: Kunt, Ernő. *Fotóantropológia.* Budapest-Miskolc, Kunt Ernő örökösei, 1995.

³⁵ Kunt, Ernő. *Ibid.* p. 39.

GABRIELLA VINCZE

ANDRÉ KERTÉSZ (1894—1985) and Hungarian “Movement Art”

FROM HUNGARIAN LIFE REFORM MOVEMENT TO THE SZENTPÁL SCHOOL



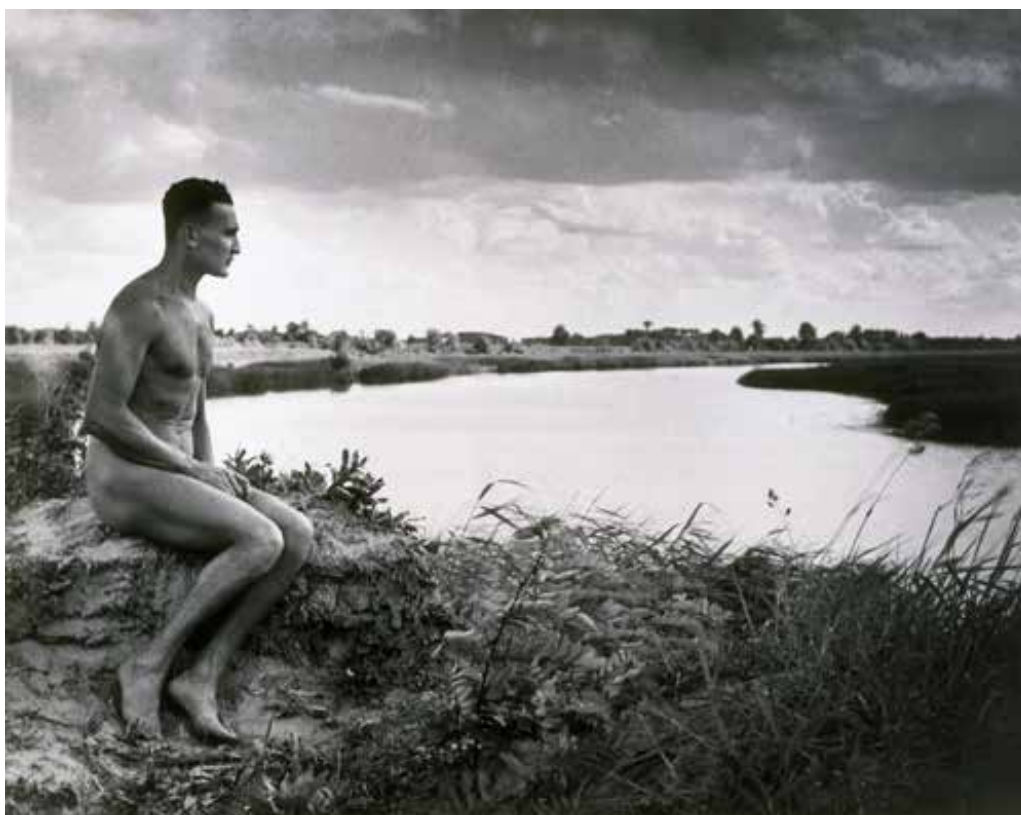
NUDE FIGURES PRANCING ON A MEADOW OR BENDING OVER NATURAL WATERS: MOTION STUDIES BY THE YOUNG ANDOR KERTÉSZ CAPTURED THE BEGINNINGS OF THE NATURISM MOVEMENT AS IT GAINED GROUND IN HUNGARY, AS WELL AS THE PECULIAR MOVES, FROM THE FISH JUMP TO *MOUVEMENT HUMORESQUES*, THAT HALLMARKED THE VARIOUS FREE DANCE AND MOVEMENT ART SCHOOLS A FEW YEARS LATER.

A luminary of 20th-century subjective photography, André Kertész was born in 1894 into a middle-class Jewish family in Budapest. It is less known that some of his early photographs, taken between 1912 and 1924, bear witness to the Freikörperkultur (FKK) movement—an influential trend in contemporary Hungarian society—along with the sports clubs and tourist societies associated with it. Upon entering adulthood, in 1912, not only did Kertész (at the time still Andor) discover photography (prior to his high school final exams, he and his brother Jenő were given a camera as a shared gift), but also committed himself to the theater and to physical education. He frequented soccer, boxing and rugby matches, and on February 19, 1912, he joined the Postás Sports Club, founded in 1899. According to an early diary of his (also dating back to 1912), theater was his other passion, with his entries including specific mentions of plays by Lajos Hatvany, Lajos Bíró, Dezső Szomory, and George Bernard Shaw, among others. His experiences with the theater made Kertész realize that his main interest lay in finding poetry in art, which indeed remained the defining quality of his photography throughout his life, and the goal he would strive to achieve with each shot.

One of the central themes of Kertész's Hungarian photographs taken after World War I was motion. Some of his early works already hint at a familiarity with the budding Hungarian free dance and gymnastics movements. After 1925, while living in France and occasionally visiting Hungary, Kertész already had a close relationship with the theater world. His two Parisian series, one rendering the Arc-en-Ciel Puppet Theater and the other Magda Förstner, a former member of the School of Orchestics, as well as his sequence of the Szentpál School in Hungary, date back to this period. A number of his nude and sport photos depicting his brother and other siblings bear a likeness to the FKK photography of the era, while others resemble images documenting the Szentpál and Madzsar Schools in the 1920s.

With origins in Germany, the “free body culture,” or naturist, movement set out to establish a healthy lifestyle: Its followers stripped the body of heavy clothing, spent time in the open air unclothed, and advocated for nutritional reforms (vegetarianism, teetotalism). Professing the unity of body and soul, they promoted—in line with other reform movements of the era—a return to the erstwhile golden age: to nature and to the natural. Its primary intention being the liberation of the body, FKK was not born as a system of movement, but later it became associated with various forms of physical activity, including gymnastics, running, and swimming. The Hungarian intelligentsia and art scene swiftly adopted the principles of naturism. At Laura Polányi and Alice Madzsar's school prior to 1930, exercises were often done bare-skinned, given that the credo of movement art (free dance) also called for the unity of body and soul, and espoused individual self-redemption.

With naturist philosophy propelling artists to picture man in his natural condition, the male nude had been present as a theme in photography since the end of the 19th century. Best-known representatives of the genre include Gerhard Riebicke, Thomas Cowperthwait Eakins and Rudolf Koppitz. In his early period, Kertész also took several naturist pictures of his brother, e.g., *Jenő a csónakot húzza meztelenül* [Jenő pulling the boat naked"] (1919) and *Kertész Jenő* [„Jenő Kertész”] (1919). While most of these images are considered sports photography, some can also be viewed as dance photos. Shots belonging to this latter group include *Jenő öcsém, Dunaharaszti* [„My Brother Jenő, Dunaharaszti] (May 30, 1920) and *Cím nélkül* [„Untitled”], both depicting male nudes sitting on a rock, with the former showing a man sitting on the shore, gazing at the water. The composition of *My Brother Jenő, Dunaharaszti* invokes paintings of the romantic era and symbolism, relying on the topos of nature as earthly paradise; the photograph could even pass as a remake of Gustave Moreau's *Prometheus* from 1868.



André Kertész: *My Brother Jenő, Dunaharaszti, May 30, 1920*. Courtesy of André Kertész Memorial Museum, Szigetbecse. Embracing Rousseau's call for returning "back to nature," André Kertész treated nature as a symbol of the Garden of Eden, in which his statuesque nudes represented mankind in its primordial state, as yet unspoiled. This theme appears in a number of variations in Kertész's works, showing a direct parallel to Rudolf Koppitz's photographs of nudes arranged against natural scenery, but most likely also reflecting a strong influence of the neoclassicist paintings of the *Arkádia-kör* [Arcadia Circle], a group centered around Kertész's painter-friends Vilmos Aba-Novák and István Szőnyi. The idyllic landscape, as well as the sculptural quality of the figures, the theatricality of gestures, and the sense of timelessness characterizing the group's paintings, are also defining traits of Kertész's series.

My Brother Jenő, due to similarities in composition, can also be considered a parallel to Rudolf Koppitz's 1923 photograph entitled *Self-portrait, In the Bosom of Nature*. The same underlying life philosophy—namely naturism—and similar motifs (rock, water) can be observed in the case of Koppitz's *Nude Study* (1927) and a series taken of the Madzsar School for illustrative purposes around 1925, showing Ágnes Kövesházi as she performs Mensendieck exercises (pelvic tilt, trunk side-bending, etc.). Although there is a strong temptation to trace the composition of *My Brother Jenő, Dunaharaszti*, back to contemporary postcards, of which Kertész was an avid collector in the 1910s, in reality, the nude—with its statuesque posture set

against a landscape background—was presumably instead grounded in the classical style that had emerged in dance and the fine arts in the 1910s. Accordingly, the photograph merits comparison with the paintings of the Szőnyi Circle, which was made up of close friends of Kertész's (Vilmos Aba-Novák, Erzsébet Korb, István Szőnyi, Károly Patkó). Members of the Szőnyi Circle are mostly known for their nude compositions that capture mythological or Biblical scenes portraying multiple figures in a manner evocative of sculptures against a backdrop of nature, with the natural state signifying the Garden of Eden. Of the group's members, Kertész was particularly close friends with Vilmos Aba-Novák.



André Kertész: *Vili Aba-Novák and Kató, in Aba-Novák's Studio*, 1923.
Courtesy of André Kertész Memorial Museum, Szigetbecse, Hungary

Kertész was well acquainted with Aba-Novák's works, as testified by his 1923 photographs showing the artist with his paintings in the background. Although Kertész did not have the opportunity to take composed, symbolic photographs with multiple nude figures posing in nature, his two above-mentioned works are nevertheless related to the art of the Szőnyi Circle, insofar as they are rooted in similar experiences and a common worldview. The closest parallels to the compositions of the two Kertész images can be found among the early paintings of circle members, showing single nudes set against a landscape background, such as Vilmos Aba-Novák's *Rest in the nature (in Buda Hills)* [*Pihenő a szabadban (Budai hegyekben)*] (1922) and Károly Patkó's *Nude from the*

Back [*Hátakt*] (1920). According to Kertész's memoir, he and his siblings were very athletic: They used to run, swim and go on regular hikes in the mountains. This is evidenced by another group of motion and nude photographs, including *Self-Portrait, Running with my Brother* (1919), *Kertész Imre és Jenő* [„Imre and Jenő Kertész”] (1919) and Jenő Kertész's shot entitled *André Kertész jumping over the drinking trough* (1923). The stretching exercise pictured in *Imre and Jenő Kertész* (1919) was a move also practiced by the Madzsar School, which makes one wonder what kind of connection Kertész had with Hungarian movement art schools prior to 1925, and whether the movement systems of any of those schools can be discovered in his photographs.

André Kertész: *The Dancing Faun*, June 1919. Courtesy of André Kertész Memorial Museum, Szigetbecse. *The Dancing Faun* is part of Kertész's mythological trilogy (*Jenő Kertész 1919–1924, The Dancing Faun* [Szigetbecse], *Dunaharaszti, 1919*). Presenting variations on a motion and theme, Kertész conjures up fauns, the part human and part animal forest creatures of Greek mythology, as well as their deity Pan, sometimes only through specific movements, while in other cases relying on props (flute).



André Kertész: *My Brother Jenő as Ikarus*, 1919. Courtesy of André Kertész Memorial Museum, Szigetbecse. Despite his unprofessional leg position, Jenő Kertész's nicely arched figure, pictured before landing in sand, evokes the fish jump of the Szentpál School.

Erzsébet Salamon, sweetheart and later partner of Kertész's, learned to draw from Álmos Jaschik, and also took dance classes. A close friend of Kertész's named Erzsébet Korb presumably also pursued movement art studies, while her sister Flóra Korb certainly did so. As discussed in a previous issue (*Artmagazin*, Dec 2013), Flóra Korb was a student of Clarisse Bierbauer and Olga Szentpál, and started having her own solo performances in the second half of the 1920s. Therefore, Kertész could have gained detailed insight into movement art systems either through Erzsébet Salamon or the Korb sisters. The different motions captured in *The Dancing Faun* (1919), *Jenő Kertész* (1919–24) and *My Brother Jenő as Ikarus* (1919) call to mind the illustrations in Angelo's 1928 book entitled *Dance*.

Dance. The Book of Art of Motion [Tánc. A mozgásművészet könyve] depicts figures—bare-skinned or wearing loosely

fitting gymnast outfits—performing the moves and jumps of the Szentpál School. If we look at the best-known Hungarian movement art schools at the end of the 1910s, when Kertész took these photographs, we find that the Madzsar School did not yet do jumps. Therefore, the sources providing inspiration for the pictures must have been the School of Orchestics, led by Mária Mirkovszky, and the Szentpál School—two schools that occasionally collaborated at that time. This assumption is further underpinned by Kertész's sweetheart Erzsébet Salamon having studied under Álmos Jaschik, as well as Angelo. Being an instructor for the vocational training course for women at the School of Applied Drawing prior to the formation of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, Jaschik worked as a colleague of Valéria Dienes, after which he became a costume designer for Olga Szentpál, beginning in the early 1920s. Angelo, on the other hand, was a popular director of

the era, with *Az óra* [„The Hour”], his antique-style *tableau vivant* making its debut in 1920. Working as a theater artist, he collaborated with Mária Mirkovszky’s husband in 1924. Although Angelo’s style of photography is quite different from that of Kertész’s, the above-mentioned three Kertész images and Angelo’s shots presenting the Szentpál School make one wonder if Kertész’s early photographs perhaps had a liberating effect on Angelo—mentor and close friend to Kertész at the time—upon his later commission. *My Brother Jenő* as *Ikarus* evokes the fish jump of the Szentpál School, even though the position of Jenő Kertész’s legs reveals he was not a professional gymnast.

The photo trilogy consisting of *Jenő Kertész 1919–24*, *Dunaharaszti, 1919* and *The Dancing Faun* can be viewed as depicting variations on a theme and a movement. *The Dancing Faun* captures the musical form *scherzo* through motion, for which Kertész could have gained inspiration from his musician friends or from a group following the Dalcroze method. The Szentpál School was one such group, with some early choreographies performed by Olga Szentpál (*Medvetánc* [„Bear dance”], *Fúriatánc* [„Dance of the Fury”]) containing grotesque hand positions similar to that of Jenő Kertész’s.

Kertész’s photos and their associated parallels served different purposes, however: In contrast with movements and choreography elements that were composed with an artistic intention, Kertész’s images—in the spirit of the pictorialist tradition—were meant to evoke figures of Greek mythology. Despite Kertész’s renouncement of pictorialist photography techniques, his early shots often reflected the influence of the genres and mythological nudes, characteristic of pictorialist aesthetics, while also showing the impact—as already discussed—of contemporary life reform movements. Kertész found his unique style in Paris, with the photography of his Paris era no longer reflecting an interest in creating naturalistic or picturesque imagery. Instead, he sought to explore composition and forms, together with the governing principles and essence thereof in his portrayal of both human subjects and nature.

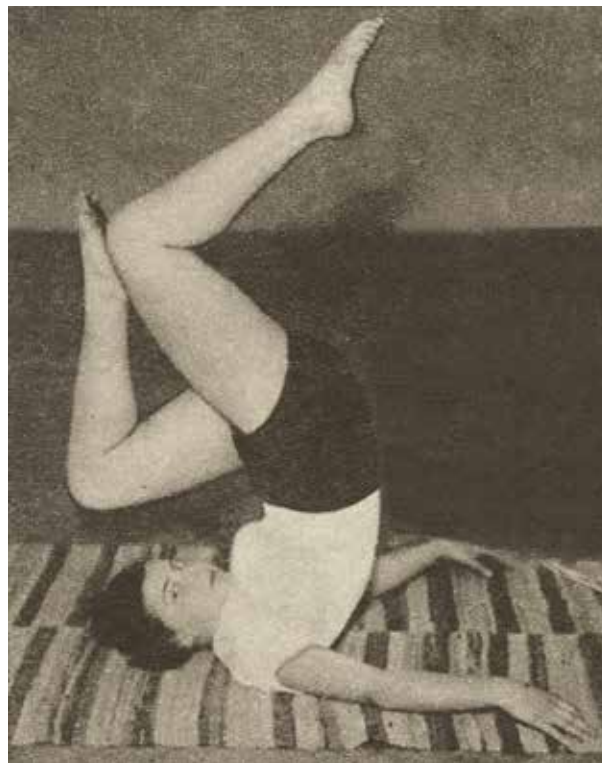
During his first years in Paris, he photographed a series of Magda Förstner and a series of the Arc-en-Ciel Puppet Theater. Magda Förstner learned music at the Fodor Ernő Music School, while also taking movement art classes at the School of Orchestics. It was through her movement art studies that she met Géza Blattner and Szilárd Detre, who would later become members of the Arc-en-Ciel Puppet Theater and introduce her to Kertész in Paris. Already a movement artist, Förstner arrived in Paris in 1927, where she performed character dances and *mouvement humoresques* (*Kínai császár* [The Chinese emperor”], *Pletyka*

[„Gossip”]) at the Sorbonne. Her typical genre is also reflected in the title of Kertész’s well-known photograph *Satiric Dancer*. Indeed, facial expressions and the mime-like, caricaturist portrayal of human types played a significant role in the dances of Magda Förstner. One of Kertész’s photos owned by the Getty Museum, depicting Magda Förstner as she is yawning, could easily be a snapshot from one of the dancer’s character pieces. Much more interesting, though, is the pair of photos showing Förstner in Étienne Beöthy’s studio, with Beöthy’s sculpture visible in the top left corner, and the dancer sitting and lying, respectively. In addition to those two images, a number of photographs were taken showing scenes in the studio (picturing Magda Förstner together with Beöthy). Kertész would emphasize in interviews that the two photos were born out of the dancer’s idea, with her improvisation leading to the pair of images that capture “the metamorphosis of the dancer’s body.”

Such a transformation of the human figure was already observable in the case of *Underwater Swimmer*, Esztergom (1917), and can be considered a precursor to the series of nudes entitled *Distortions* (1933). Given that Kertész would often shape his comments to support a preconceived image of himself, and in light of the geometric composition of the dancer’s arms and legs, which—alluding to Beöthy’s sculpture—appear to contradict the accidental, improvisational nature of the pieces, the two pictures are more likely to be viewed as arranged studio photographs. After moving to Paris in 1925, Kertész returned to Hungary on multiple occasions, including a visit before his 1935 trip to the United States. According to documents found in the Kertész estate, held at the Médiatheque de l’Architecture et du Patrimoine, Kertész arrived in Hungary in the early 1930s with a customs exemption granted by the Hungarian legate in Paris and three cameras, with work to do for French papers, as well as a commission from the Budapest Bath Directorate. That was when he photographed the Japanese Café. Kertész’s 1935 visit home might have been partially motivated by a vow. One of the files in Lili Buk’s estate reveals that the younger generation surrounding Angelo, including André Kertész, Lili Buk, Margit Horn, Árpád Passuth, Lenke Barcza, etc., pledged, on May 28, 1925, to meet in a restaurant called Ziegler ten years later. In the course of his Budapest stay, Kertész went to see Olga Szentpál’s school. Szentpál staged a marionette show entitled *Triangle* [*Háromszög*] in 1929, and would later participate in a joint performance with Hungarian puppet artists. Therefore, Angelo was not the only link between her and Kertész, as the two artists could also have met through their acquaintances in the world of puppet theater in the years Kertész spent in Hungary.



André Kertész: *Satiric Dancer*, 1927. Courtesy of André Kertész Memorial Museum, Szigetbecse, Hungary. One of Kertész's best known Parisian photographs portrays Magda Förstner, a former School of Orchestics movement artist, in the studio of Étienne Beöthy. Kertész took two photos of Förstner's alleged "improvisations." The geometrically composed position of the dancer's arms and legs were unarguably inspired by Beöthy's sculpture in the background.



André Kertész: *An Exercise of the Szentpál School*, 1935, *Függetlenség* [„Independence”] (publication), January 16, 1936.

In the course of my movement art research, I discovered a number of photo series hitherto unknown in Hungarian and international Kertész scholarship, taken of the Szentpál School in 1935. Kertész's first dance and motion studies, exuding a sense of novelty, were followed by additional such works, but his series have become dispersed, with individual photos currently being held in various public and private collections. The breakthrough in reconstructing his series was provided by a contemporary periodical entitled *Függetlenség* [„Independence”], which published Kertész's photos of the Szentpál School under the title *Health, Beauty and Grace* in its issue dated January 16, 1936. In the four newly found, internationally unknown Kertész series, there are two pieces of which very little is known. One of them reflects an image evocative of the arm and leg positions seen in the case of *Satiric Dancer*, with the photographer aiming for the abstraction of the body and the subordination of live matter to the rules of geometry. The picture depicts a school floor exercise in which

the model holds her lower legs perpendicular to her thighs. Her right knee is settled into her left sole, the “play” of the legs thus again resulting in an abstract form— in this case a triangle.

Kertész was likely driven by similar intentions when creating his other “dancers in black” series, although it is also possible that the single-piece series is an early example, or a sole remnant, of Kertész's experiments in representing the body as a means of ornamentation. In his other series, depicting dancers in white, Kertész treated the body as an ornament. It is the intertwining of figures that gives rise to the rhythm and lineation of the composition. Kertész's artistic vision echoes the long tradition ranging from Béla Balázs to Álmos Jaschik that saw human movement and dance as sources of ornamentation. Currently we have knowledge of four photos belonging to the series, two of which are owned by the Hungarian Theater Museum and Institute. One of the images published in *Függetlenség* shows the dancer by herself.



André Kertész: *Szentpál Dancer with a Hoop*, from the “dancers in white,” or more specifically the “dancers in white skirts” series, 1935, *Függetlenség*, January 16, 1936. In the course of his visit home to Hungary prior to traveling to the US, Kertész continued the sequence he had begun with *Satiric Dancer*, capturing movement art in photographs. In 1935, he created four photo series of the Szentpál dance group that have hitherto been unknown in international Kertész scholarship. Most of the pictures in question have been dispersed, but the discovery of the Szentpál School photos published by the periodical entitled *Függetlenség* provided a breakthrough in reconstructing the series. The various series can be distinguished on the basis of the dancers’ clothing (black, white).



André Kertész: *Motion Study of the Szentpál School*, 1935, *Függetlenség* [„Independence”] (publication), January 16, 1936.



Presumably André Kertész: *Szentpál Dancer on the Wall Bars*, 1935, privately owned. As the image exhibits one of Kertész's photographic tricks (the deception of the viewer's eyes), the picture is likely to have been taken by him.

The rigid, angular shape formed by her left leg is in stark contrast with the soft contour of the hoop placed on her arms. A further photo in the series pictures a moment captured in nature, with the dancers holding hoops in their hands as if they were parts of some kind of pattern. Yet another piece in the sequence, taken at the Szentpál School, is a purely geometrical composition governed by lines and colors (black and white). These latter images can be interpreted as experiments through which Kertész sought to explore and present primordial types of ornamentation, stemming from flesh and movement. The final piece of the series, *Dancers in front of a Screen*, reaches a level of abstraction in its composition that renders the image similar to writing, calling to mind Milča Mayerová's attempt to visualize the Czech alphabet via movement. In his last series

taken in 1935, Kertész made use of the wall bars, standard equipment at the Szentpál School, as a means for deceiving the viewer's eyes. With wall bars appearing identical from all directions, they unavoidably serve as a point of reference for making sense of space and the horizontal axis thereof: with this point of reference being turned, the viewer is faced with unrealistic images. The dancers performing a handstand in front of the wall bars appear as if they were hanging from the equipment, while another picture, only presumably taken by Kertész, shows a dancer almost floating on the bars.

Kertész settled in the United States in 1936, which most likely brought an end to his connection with Hungarian movement art schools for good. What can be known for sure is that never again did this theme resurface in his oeuvre with such intensity.



André Kertész: *Three Dancers on the Wall Bars* (Szentpál Dancers), 1935.
privately owned

André Kertész: *Three Szentpál Dancers on the Wall Bars*, 1935,
Függetlenség [„Independence”] (publication), January 16, 1936.

HOW TO USE THE PHOTOGRAPH ON THE WORKS OF PÉTER TÍMÁR

We are in a relatively fortunate situation, and this is one of my reasons for writing this paper: namely, that – uncharacteristically for the Hungarian culture of photography – a major portion of the oeuvre of a photographer, Péter Tímár, has been accessible and researchable in the form of a 618-page photo book titled *Photo_Book* since 2018. Indeed, we are not doing very well in terms of printed and/or digital publications, let alone of almost complete oeuvres. It is almost incidental, which author can/could have their work, or their photography series published, and informative websites are also not typical, which makes it rather challenging to try seeing beyond the current exhibitions and looking into the developmental course and focal points of a given artist's career.

Péter Tímár's oeuvre certainly deserves attention, as it encompasses not only photographic works but also active participation in organizing the Hungarian photography scene, as well as teaching and journal editing. Namely, a few years after graduating as an architect, Tímár left his profession and started teaching photography at the Secondary School of Visual Arts in 1979, where he later became the school's headmaster as well. He taught here for 31 years and taught as a lecturer at the Budapest University of Technology, the Kaposvár University, and the Budapest School of Communication. Since 1978, he has been a member of the Association of Hungarian Photographers and the Studio of Young Photographers, both of which he has also chaired as secretary. From 1990, he was editor and contributing author of *Fotóművészet* for 26 years, and in addition to regular book reviews, his professional articles were also published in the journal.



Péter Tímár: *Moving Away, Getting Closer*, 1976 (Courtesy of the artist)

Considering the main elements of his work, we can see that he has been present in almost all areas and aspects of photographic life. This fact certainly defines his photographic oeuvre in the sense that, since it is practically impossible and, in many respects, incompatible to be present in all aspects of the profession at the same time and with the same intensity, focal points and priorities will emerge. Tímár's career shows that the main focus of his photographic oeuvre falls on the 1970s and 1980s, when his most significant series are created, while in the later years, his teaching, organizational and editorial work significantly reduces his creative activity. Then, when he finishes with these tasks, his photographic works and series resurface, either by expanding, supplementing, recreating his previous projects, or by organizing and digitizing his oeuvre, one of the fruits of which is his digital photo album.

A shortcoming of the book is that – as Tímár concentrated mainly on the images and not on an informative and retrospective presentation of the oeuvre – it does not provide any information or text beyond a short biography and the titles of the series. We don't know when the series, or the individual photographs, were taken, and the individual titles of the images are also not included. Because of the focus on imagery, the series are not presented in a chronological order, starting with *Socialism Wich Can Be Lived* [Élhető szocializmus?], which was taken between 1979 and 1984, and ending with *Grief* [Gyász], which was taken between 1981 and 1983, even though the works span from 1973 to 2017. But this is only a shortcoming from a research perspective. It was Tímár's creative choice as to how and in what form he wanted to present his pictures. In this case, this was a compact, abundant album, without any words or commentary, in particular, just focusing on the pictures.³

Tímár's career unfolded during one of the most exciting periods of 20th century Hungarian photography and art, the 1970s. It is typical of the era that photography is able to have itself acknowledged as an art form for the first time in its history, and that the self-reflexivity of conceptual art finds probably its most important field of experimentation and medium in photography (as well); as Katalin Aknai puts it: "Conceptual art gave a theoretical impetus to the valorization of the practice of photography, which found a receptive medium in the *semi-underground* art world of the second public sphere."⁴ Photography crosses the boundaries of artistic disciplines, and it emerges almost everywhere – acting as a catalyst or even a virus – as a very important, if not the most important, creative practice. Photography *infects* and subverts almost everything. As Tibor Hajas puts it very precisely and radically: "Photography is the visual art of the seventies. »The« visual art. [...] Photography is the front. Photography will be the decisive battle. Photography is the global perspective of the century; it is, therefore, best suited to the role of the vanguard, the bridgehead, to crossing the trenches between particular perspectives."⁵ The valorization of photography in the neo-avantgarde movements was caused by the ambivalence of its mode of existence, the radical ambiguity of its status, role and meaning. After all, photography – as a god – is present almost everywhere, in all areas of life and human creation, but even knowing how and for what purpose it can be used does not define its meaning precisely. The photograph can be both a tool for scientific research and an artistic product. Photography reflects, absorbs, and distorts, obliterates the things of the world, its *likeness*. Thus, the essence of photography is *thought-provoking*, prompting medial self-reflection, implying questions of art theory, as László Beke writes in one of the first pieces that record and analyze the processes of Hungarian neo-avantgarde art of the time: "[Budapest artists] reach for the camera to raise questions about photography itself."⁶

The Hungarian art scene, including photography, was characterized by a very interesting mix of attraction and repulsion in the 1970s. Photography retains the unreflective, classical concept of the official, Communist culture; namely, that photography is a reflection of reality and that its main aim is to capture the right moment in the most aesthetic form possible by *fine art photographers* creating *fine art photography*. But also, especially in the *informal* culture, taking advantage of the gaps in the system and its blindness to new media or new ways of using specific media,⁷ the young generation of photographers, feeling confined in a reserve where no real art is generated, begins to experiment with the medium and to follow the concurrent developments in the visual arts.

And indeed, most young contemporary artists discover, use and appropriate photography, even if some of them develop different careers later, abandoning the use of photography. It is enough to look at the list of exhibitors of one of the most representative and important exhibitions, the exhibition titled *Exposition - Photo/Art [Expozíció - fotó/művészet]*⁸, organized by László Beke and Dóra Maurer in 1976, to see how all the people from Imre Bak, Ákos Birkás, András Baranyai, Miklós Erdély, Tibor Hajas, György Jovánovics, János Major, to László Méhes, Gyula Pauer, or Péter Türk express themselves in photographs, via photographs. Due to this blending and the theoretical reflection of conceptual art, boundaries become fluid, or more precisely, boundaries and frameworks are constantly questioned, making it difficult in many cases to define what the work being created is at all. This is reflected in the cautious, indecisive subtitle of the Hatvan exhibition, which leaves the question open, whether photography is art, and when it *is* art, whether it depends on its user, on the context, etc. In Hajas's reflection and definition, the concept taking shape, that is, the *new photography*, surpasses fine art photography and visual arts, and becomes something more, something different: "For »new photography«, the photograph is a natural medium, an environment of civilization; movies, television, the video recorder, press images and street posters, postcards, family albums, printed fliers and catalogues, slides depicting travels abroad, amateur photographers, the myriad of hobby photographers, photographic illustrations in books, and photographic reproductions have become so pervasive and so fundamental to our whole culture that new photography can denounce its alliance both with fine art photography and visual arts; its trends and achievements, at various levels, speak for the civilization as a whole, which has made this medium one of the foundations of its forms of communication."⁹ In the catalogue of the exhibition *Exposition*, László Beke, on the one hand, firmly separates this new use of photography from the unreflective, aesthetic *fine art photography*, and, on the other hand, differently from Hajas, but also formulates the transgressive, to-and-fro fermenting effect of photography. "Defining »photo/art« is not an easy task. First and foremost, the linking of the two words refers to the creative use of photography by visual artists, but not only that, as some of the exhibitors could be considered professional photographers, and traditional fine art photography also likes to characterize its own activity as creative.

However, we must clearly distinguish ourselves from the latter, or rather, from fine art photography, which sees its task as »capturing the hidden moment« or reproducing the sight of reality filtered through subjective feelings, and which

seeks to have an influence through the viewer's emotions via the »beautiful«, »interesting« or »shocking« photograph thus created. [...] The emergence of the photo/art frontier, of course, presupposes that visual arts can use not only traditional media but, in principle, all media – on the other hand, orthodox fine art photography is not unaffected by the use of photography.”¹⁰ At this special moment in Hungarian art and photography, fine art photography is also in sync with international processes, either by absorbing their influences, or by concurrently experimenting with the same contexts and modes of creation, or by creating something distinctly new and unique. It is no coincidence that the art of this era is becoming increasingly canonized, and that the artists and the works are also becoming more marketable. See notable examples of recent exhibitions put on display: Vintage Gallery's showcase highlighting the reconstruction of the exhibition *Exposition*; the exhibitions dedicated to artists such as Gábor Attalai, András Baranyai, Imre Bak, Károly Halász, György Lőrinczy, Dóra Maurer, etc., as well as acb Gallery's exhibitions and publications for Ferenc Ficzek, Károly Kismányoki, and Katalin Nádor. But we could also mention the exhibitions *The Freedom of the Past - A Selection from Róbert Alföldi's Photographic Collection* in 2016 at the Mai Manó House, or *Parallel Avant-Garde – Pécs Workshop 1968–1980* in 2017 at the Ludwig Museum. The exhibition of Tibor Hajas's works in the central pavilion of the 2017 Venice Biennale could also be considered a breakthrough. In terms of art historical reflection, one can note the last chapter of *Art in Hungary, 1956–1980: Doublespeak and Beyond*, written by Katalin Székely, titled “The Influx of Images: Photo, Experimental Film and Video Art in the Hungarian Neo-avant-garde.”¹¹ The photography-oriented description, classification and interpretation of the era was carried out by Sándor Szilágyi in his 2007 *magnum opus Neo-avant-garde Trends in Hungarian Art Photography, 1965–1984*, the English translation of which was published exactly 10 years after its publication.¹² Although problematic from many aspects, the work remains a landmark in the photographic research of the period, supported by the documentation of an immensely rich and abundant visual material. It is only regretful that the sequel mentioned as being in progress in the preface to the volume, dealing with the period between 1980–1990 called Postmodern, has not yet been published.¹³ One of the most crucial resource collections on the neo-avantgarde art of the period is the collection of the materials from the Balatonboglár chapel workshop – published by Artpool in 2003 –, which played a central role in the movement.¹⁴

Tímár's early career and his first series were embedded in this cultural context, trying to find their place, and they too, especially *Sequences* [*Szekvenciák*] (1975–2017) and *How to Use the Photograph* [*Hogyan használjuk a fényképet*] (1978–2014), are characterized by a high degree of medium-specific self-reflexivity and experimentation.

The *Sequences* series is composed of groups of images and matrices arranged along various principles and logic. The mere fact that Tímár does not think in terms of a single image, nor does he organize the images into one linear sequence or one context, indicates that the aim of his work is not solely to rely on the image – and reality – perceived through the retina, but to make the viewer snap out of the state of simple observation and reflect on the medium itself. He wants the viewer to interpret the work not as a transparent glass or a mirror but as a construct to be deciphered, a visual language. After all, “[...] we immediately begin to look for a connection, or the possibility of a connection, between the things arranged in an order. [...] The series of images – the sequence of images – therefore implies some kind of coherence within the viewer; some kind of logic, some kind of structure is assumed or sought, and this is obviously also the guiding principle of the person who arranges the images in a sequence.”¹⁵ Tímár's sequences, arranged in horizontal or vertical rows or a matrix of a few or more items, construct puzzles to be solved by means of very diverse procedures in such a way that the obvious decipherability is often obscured, derailed, or suspended. By reproducing and permuting the images, the artist performs an analysis, or analytics of the image, of the spectacle, fragmenting and reassembling it in different ways. Fragmentation can be a multiplication of the same image via different processes (reduction, magnification, rotation, mirroring, etc.) or a variation of images displaying different stages of a process.

A(n apparently) simple chronological line of images is rarely seen with Tímár. Such is the case with “Imagination Coming to Life” [*Megelevenedő képzelet*] (1973), which operates with cinematic effects and creating a narrative. The vertical series of five images, read from top to bottom, shows a little girl standing and waiting in front of a house. The little girl looks to the right, to the left, bends down, looks back, then turns around, while people pass by, an elderly woman, a group of three people, which breaks up in the next image, while three new characters appear. The little girl apparently has nothing to do with any of them; they are not the ones she has been waiting for. But the series of images, with its ironic title, is doubly mysterious and indecipherable. If we were to look only at the pictures, we would only see sequences of futile waiting, a very short, very prosaic photo-film.



Péter Tímár: *III/01*, (*How to Use the Photograph*) (Courtesy of the artist)

Péter Tímár: *III/09*, (*How to Use the Photograph*) (Courtesy of the artist)

However, the title raises suspicion and derails the viewer. What we see is one of the insignificant episodes of everyday life. There is nothing dreamlike or imaginative about it, except perhaps for the sepia toning of the images. The series of images functions as a haiku; it is short, quickly absorbable, yet enigmatic, forcing us to return to it again and again for more interpretation. Paradoxically, one cannot pass it by the way people pass by the little girl. Yet, the little girl's being an outsider, the way people come and go around her without taking any apparent notice of her. Without any connection being formed between them, one could assume that we see the little girl's imagination/dream, projecting the people coming and going around herself because she is bored. Or, it could be a sequence of images, a scene from a dream of someone, following the logic of dreams, partly understandable, coherent, but still mysterious as for the final reason: why.

The work is a simple chronological series of images; yet, we cannot decipher it because Tímár's omissionist way of editing and conscious exploitation of the relationship between image and text make this impossible.

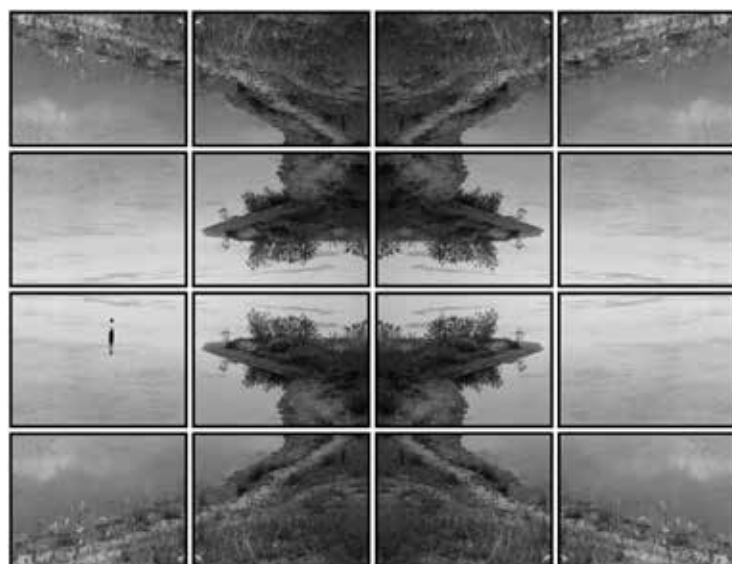
In this respect, the *Sequences* series is the most complex work of the artist's entire oeuvre because the structure of his next series, *How to Use the Photograph* (1978–2014), already showcases a more linear, transparent, and abstract permutation, the whole work itself is a variation, which emerges from a visual core, like Bach's *Goldberg* or Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations* in music.

The title of the work is functional rather than enigmatic; the relationship between image and text is explanatory, although it is not without irony.

It follows from the above and from the further development of his career that Tímár will always think in terms of various projects and will not return to the creative method and style he has already *exhausted*, possibly only completing, expanding his series with a few more images, using the subsequent technical possibilities, which he finds perfect for his purposes. The sequence titled "I Am Here, I Will Be Somewhere Else" [*Itt vagyok, máshol leszek*] (1976) seems to be a structurally logical continuation or, more precisely, a further elaboration of "Imagination Coming to Life;" it still retains the cinematic narrative, the semblance of a chronological sequence, but it consists of one fewer frame and is arranged in a matrix, i.e., its reading directions are multiplied. Here too, the blue tones of the picture seem to suggest a kind of dream-like quality. A naked woman is sitting on a bed covered with newspapers(?); reading the picture from left to right, we can see that in the first picture she stretches her right arm, but it is not clear what she is doing, as if she was conducting something; in the next picture, she is smiling with her legs half down; in the following one, she is saying something as she half gets off the bed, and in the last one she is about to leave, in a slightly strange, hunched position. Here, the title of the picture seems to be accurate and objective: the woman is leaving where she has been. But once again, Tímár gives us a key that will get us nowhere because we can see that she is going to leave.



Péter Tímár: *IV/4, (How to Use the Photograph)* (Courtesy of the artist)



Péter Tímár: *VIII/3, (How to Use the Photograph)* (Courtesy of the artist)

On the other hand, we don't understand the newspapers, why the woman is naked, we don't understand her gestures, and we can't hear what she is saying. What we see is a strange silent film in which, say, four of the thirty frames are shown by the creator. In other words, it does not only organize a chronologically unfolding action into a matrix, but there are already gaps in the sequence.

"Homage to the Danube" [*Hódolat a Dunának*] (1976) is one of the more accessible, relatively simple sequences based on a single *punchline*. Eight images are presented, arranged horizontally in a row, or rather just placed next to each other interchangeably, as we can see the same naked woman from behind, with the national flags of – possibly – the Danube countries painted diagonally on her hips and buttocks. The flag colors in the otherwise black-and-white photo were painted subsequently and by hand. The sequence "I Went to The Other Side" [*Átmentem a túloldalra*] (1976) is a portrait of a process in a strict chronological order; yet, what we see is a grotesque, absurd event that is difficult to interpret, with a mysterious twist at the end. A meat grinder grinds down a bouquet of mostly yellow flowers, but red blood is spilled on the tablecloth, which turns yellow in the last image, just as the barely visible end of the bouquet turns red. Even by comparison with earlier works, the relationship between the caption and the visual material is incomprehensible: an almost Dadaist gesture.

The 16-16 frame sequences of "Kriszta Is Undressing" [*Kriszta vetkőzik*] (1977) and "Wednesday Afternoon" [*Szerda délután*] (1977) follow a similar logic.

Both present the phase shots of an action, an event, which are shuffled, breaking the linearity.

In the first one, we can see the phases of a woman's undressing down to the waist, complicated by the fact that the phase images of the model are taken from different angles. As a result, the pictures of three series of events are mixed up: 4 showing the woman with her back to us, 5 showing the side view, and 7 showing the woman undressing from the front.

The woman getting undressed, displayed from the various angles and sequences, appears to be part of an endless process; what we can see is not the beginning or the middle of an action, but a repeatedly restarting and interrupted action or series of actions. Like an endless spiral or a Möbius strip, the gaze traverses the entire space of the image over and over again.

In the "Wednesday Afternoon" sequence, one of the characters of which is the artist himself, begins with a woman undressing in chronological order, then becomes muddled, all chronology is disrupted, the man, also undressing, appears, entering the woman's space, their duo outlines a love affair, attraction, and perhaps separation; in some images, the man embraces himself or clutches on his sweater in solitude, while undressing. The structure is intermittent; the title of the image *pulls* the sequence into the banality of everyday life, into the recollection of a concrete event. But we do not learn what exactly happened on Wednesday afternoon. Tímár's sequences range from the more abstract, structuralist structures to ones almost cinematic in effect, telling (in a very intermittent way), or many times rather hiding their stories.



Péter Tímár: *Wednesday Afternoon*, 1977 (Courtesy of the artist)

“An Attempt at Destruction” [*Kísérlet a megsemmisítésre*] (1975), similarly to “The Matrix of Pain” [*Fájdalom mátrix*] (1976), depicts a process of burning, the stages of destruction; in the former, we can see the destruction of a photograph of a girl, and in the latter a doll is destroyed. The 16 frames are shuffled in both sequences as if the same process is being repeated as a *perpetual motion machine*. Here, the intricate patterns already include repetitions as well, with a single image appearing more than once. However, “An Attempt at Destruction” is a more exciting matrix: it seems as if two copies of the same photographs of a girl, one with her smiling, and the other with a more serious expression on her face, would catch fire – we can see the photo paper catching fire and the other, identical photograph appearing underneath. Although even this is not evident because several images seem to have a

matte, faded film-like surface. The title of the image expresses the endlessness of the process, as the combustion starts repeatedly, with another image appearing under each one. Perhaps the best known of Tímár’s sequences is “Moving Away, Getting Closer” [*Valakihez közeledsz, valakitől távolodsz*] (1976). The sequence is simple in terms of its elements, consisting of only four images, each showing two stages of a woman’s approaching and receding, in such a way that the photos are mirrored, i.e., horizontally reversed, and thus stitched together. And this raises the question, which the *real*, original image is, and which is a mirror image? The image reflects on the medium of the analogue photograph, since the photograph is taken on a negative, which is then turned into a positive image in the laboratory through translation and *mirroring*. The question of the photograph (to itself) is what it is a faithful reflection of?

What does it reflect, and how? What should we believe? Our eyes? Our mind?

Looking at the image, we are caught in a spiral. The gaze does not come to rest, and just as the model, the eyes also move away and get closer, trying to master the vertigo of the image. Tímár's sequences are interactive; they can only be absorbed actively and if we do so, as if caught up in an endless short film, the matrix repeatedly draws us in.

In addition to the above, *How to Use The Photograph* (1978–2014) can also be interpreted as an implicit reference to Tímár's later career as a teacher. Both the title and the series of variations reveal, or *teach*, with almost didactic thoroughness, what can be done with a single shot, i.e., what happens when the photographer works, as opposed to what, for example, those who naively absorb the photographs believe, that the photographer just presses the exposure button, and an undistorted image of reality is produced.

Tímár's sequences, variations and experiments show that the photograph is an artificial construction, a building block from which almost anything can be built and developed. In his hands, the photograph resembles a musical note or a word, from which he creates sentences, texts, or even a series of musical variations. In his series, he colors and then dissects, mirrors, and permutes the elements with almost scientific thoroughness, thus creating new landscapes and worlds from the *original* landscape. *How to Use The Photograph* shows how many more pictures there are in a picture, almost like in fractals, i.e. the additional pictures behind the pictures, as in the case of the series *An Attempt at Destruction*. In most cases, these matrices of fewer or more elements produce a single coherent image, but sometimes their shuffling results in the disintegration of the unified order, the often mandala-like ornamentation, and 16 completely separate, unrelated, fragmented images are created.

Péter Tímár: *An Attempt at Destruction*, 1975 (Courtesy of the artist)





Péter Tímár: *Tourist Convention*, Kisoroszi, Hungary (*Socialism Which Can Be Lived* series), 1980 (Courtesy of the artist)

After his first two more experimental series, Tímár's career started to see a gradual transformation, a return to documentary, reference-oriented photography. The title of the series *Socialism Which Can Be Lived* (1979-1984) has been transformed from ironic to almost humorous over the years, since no matter how and when the socialist regime tried reforming itself into a liveable or "friendly" system, it always ended in failure for one reason or another. However, there is no doubt that following the 1956 revolution, the Kádár regime worked for many years to consolidate the system and turn Hungary into the happiest cell block. The documentary images of the series provide a view of the socialist system from below, showing sometimes funny, sometimes absurd, sometimes meaningless scenes of everyday life in grey-toned images. The artist underlines and emphasizes the insignificance and petty *absurdity* of the images depicting life in an *unliveable* socialism by the subsequent coloring of certain image elements. The highlights are infinitely ironic and arbitrary, since in a world of grey tones, color gains a great significance, draws the attention, and requests interpretation, but Tímár colors marginal things, a wisp of grass, a plank fence, a shirt, a pool float, a pioneer tie, a shopping bag.

Accessories of life that we barely notice, as they don't stand out in their ordinariness. The contrast between the system's huge ambitions, its intellectual construction, and the petty, lie-soaked social system that was established is powerfully, almost to the point of a joke, illustrated by the picture depicting one symbol of the GDR's top technologies, a visibly battered, and broken-down but green-painted Trabant, which is just about to roll past the gigantic, several meters tall Marx-head. As Péter Esterházy quotes from the user manual of the car: „[...] [it] grips the road exceptionally well. Its acceleration is first-rate. This, however, must not encourage reckless and irresponsible driving.”¹⁶ In Tímár's picture, even the grip of the car is rather poor. As a counterpoint to the life under the socialist regime shown in the series, the artist also created a subjective image of everyday life and spaces of post-communist Hungary, which is not more liveable, but rather even more bettered. This is presented in his series *Eastern Europe* (2004-2007), which, however, does not go beyond the familiar conventions of the Hungarian documentary style.



Péter Tímár: *Rock concert*, Budapest, (*Socialism Wich Can Be Lived* series), 1980 (Courtesy of the artist)

Péter Tímár: *Marx and Trabant*, Karl Marx Stadt, GDR, (*Socialism Wich Can Be Lived* series), 1980 (Courtesy of the artist)



Péter Tímár: *The Mortuary of the Farkasrét Cemetery*, Budapest (*Griefseries*), 1981 (Courtesy of the artist)

Péter Tímár: *Crematorium in the New Cemetery*, Budapest (*Griefseries*), 1981 (Courtesy of the artist)

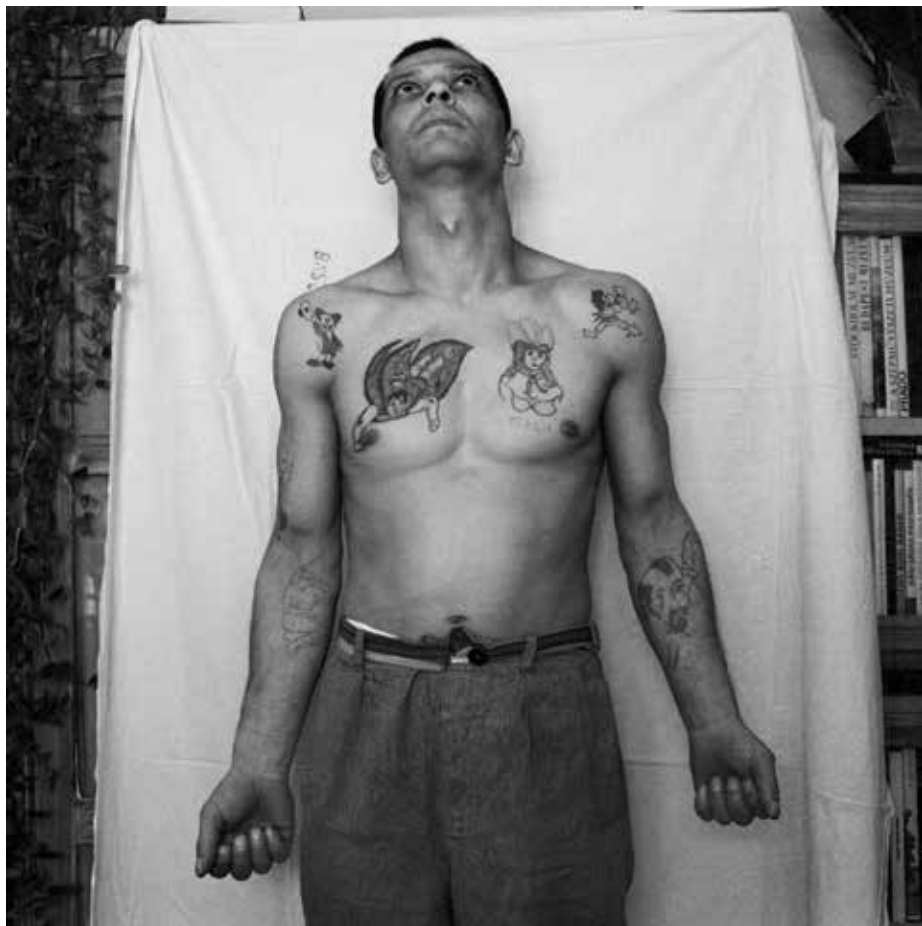
One of the greatest and most significant works of his documentarist turn is *Grief* (1981-1983), the motives of which the author describes the following way: “Death is no longer natural; the dead have become disgusting. It is just convenient to shove the dying person out of the apartment into a hospital, or a nursing home, entrusting a nurse to be with them in the last minutes of their lives, entrusting the autopsy master to »fix them up«, to dress them. But, of course, there is nothing else we can do now; the rules and laws have sanctioned this state of affairs. What a mess it would make if a slowly advancing hearse appeared on a Budapest-street, in the bus lane (!), with ten or fifteen black-clad mourners behind it with their red eyes, crying. Thus, this leaves us with industrial technology.”¹⁷ According to Tímár, the visual material of the series, which was completed in three years, consists of about 3000 photographs, and the best testimony to the fact that death is not natural is that the exhibition of the series, which opened on 28 July 1983 in the Adolf Fényes Hall, was closed by the state authorities on the same day. The material is an unblinking, unvarnished, and objective portrayal of the final journey of the dead, from the morgue to the crematorium and the cemetery. The virtue of the series is that its objectivity and its detachment does not stem in a cold uncompassionate attitude, while it is also free of unveiling intent and anger,

even though what we see is anything but what we think of a dignified death, a dignified burial.

But Tímár does not aestheticize, nor does he try to present the hellish circle that a dead person goes through as beautiful or stomach-churning. In the pictures, everything is self-identical: the dead are useless and ugly objects, treated exactly as such, moved around, pushed aside, thrown around, without any compassion. The people who do this are living people, on the job, for which they are probably paid starvation wages, who work in a workplace with no proper conditions for the dignified treatment of the dead. Everything is just junk, dirty, rusty, worn, tinkered with, because well, they don't give money for anything, and when they do provide the necessary equipment, it will probably be stolen and sold by the workers themselves. However, this incredibly harsh image of the cycle of death and corpses is probably much more stirring and says much more about the stakes of life, the weight of death, than a documentary series where the dead lie in perfectly life-like make-up and exemplary clothes in their various, lavishly decorated, luxurious coffins. Because the funeral customs and businesses of a developed Western or even American society perfectly professionally conceal the essence, the horror, and the *disgusting* image of death by doing everything possible to ensure that the dead lie in their coffins *as if they were still alive*..

Péter Tímár: *Pathology Department at ORFI*, Budapest (*Grief* series), 1982 (Courtesy of the artist)





Péter Tímár: **K 723 20**. Szeged, Csillag Prison (*Tattooed Prisoners series*), 1985 (Courtesy of the artist)



Péter Tímár: **K 741 50**. Szeged, Csillag Prison (*Tattooed Prisoners series*), 1985 (Courtesy of the artist)

Tattooed Prisoners [*Tetovált elítéltek*] (1985) is the next major project, which resulted in almost 1,800 photographs of almost every tattooed inmate in the prisons of Szeged, Kalocsa, Pálhalma, and Vác. Tímár photographed his subjects with incredible tenacity and scientific rigor, his aim being essentially social rather than artistic: “[...] I formulated a thesis and offered it as a research project to the Education Department of the National Correction Service. My hypothesis was that the motifs tattooed on these people might give us a glimpse into their innermost (and otherwise carefully concealed) world. By researching these motives and arranging them systematically, it may be possible to get closer to the character of each person, which may also help their education and reintegration into society. So a research was started, which gave me a good reason/excuse and at the same time a great opportunity to take these pictures.”¹⁸

As in the case of *Grief*, *Tattooed Prisoners* did not result in a major exhibition or publication of the material either; only fragments are known, and 18 images are included in the *Photo_Book*, all of them taken in the Csillag Prison of Szeged. The images of the inmates were taken against a uniform white background, apparently a tablecloth or sheet installed by the artist in the prison library, to support later research. How the images are installed is evocative and contributes to the meaning and reception of the images. Tímár did not strive for abstraction, that is, a flawless white background filling the entire picture field and background, but simply hung the canvas behind the model. This is how quiet and intimate puns arise: there are, for example, art books on the shelf behind the models like *The Dresden Picture Gallery*, or, even more ironically, the book *Leletek - A magyar fotográfia történetéből* [Artefacts from the History of Hungarian Photography]¹⁹ by Gábor Szilágyi and Sándor Kardos. The background also includes a long, hanging houseplant on the left, and in some of the pictures one can see that the canvas is fastened to the shelf(?) via books, that is, it is held up by books. In this material, too, Tímár successfully avoids the traps of becoming lofty, abhorrent, sentimental, aestheticizing, but also of meaninglessness, etc. He obviously had a good relationship with his models; in the pictures, we see interesting, more or less open people, not posing criminals, and the ordinary, everyday background of the photography session somehow underlines the realism and ordinary nature of life, not some moralizing preconception of crime and criminals. On the other hand, he also avoids an overly cold scientific objectivity, treating his models not merely as objects to be described, as objects carrying the skin samples of interest. It is a nice play of rhymes that Tímár also photographed Tamás Urbán's model, Butterfly, whose life journey Urbán followed for years in and out of prison.²⁰

I would like to highlight just one series from Tímár's later work, partly for reasons of space restrictions, and partly because I think that his other series and paintings are more thematically connected than conceptually, lacking the kind of systematic work and thoughtfulness, purposefulness and artistic stakes that characterize his large projects. We see nudes, stills, panorama images, and many, many abstract, build, or plant-filled spaces, in fair, well-constructed compositions, but with the conventional perspective and mode of framing of the given visual genres and subjects. The more coherent, unified *Bird's Eye View* [*Madártávlat*] (1989) is artistically and semantically less exciting, seeming more like an applied topographical work than the realization of a creative idea.



Péter Tímár: No. 047 (Portraits from Memory series) (Courtesy of the artist)

In *Portraits from Memory* [*Portrét emlékezetből*] (2006-2017), we see portraits of adolescents, photographed against a neutral white background, using a very restrained photographic toolkit. The images are objective rather than aesthetic, but there is something unsettling and dizzying about their effect, and it is difficult to explain why. The layers of each model's face seem to have shifted, twisted a little, as if their proportions and symmetry have been distorted, which fundamentally affects our spatial perception. The images have a slight 3D effect, with a greater depth of field than in reality, due to the swirls and spirals of the faces. We see apparently completely objective, referential portraits, which, however, do not *resemble* the models in their overall effect, even though they appear to present the same eyes, mouth, nose, hair, clothes.

Tímár *reset* and manipulated the structure of the whole. It is as if he is really trying to model the inaccuracies, errors, and subjectivity of memory.

The remarkable and exciting oeuvre of Péter Tímár is very difficult to summarize and to concisely characterize, since, as we have seen, it is made up of separate series, each with their own laws, often different from each other in terms of their foundations, and their approach to the medium. However, I would venture to say that the first phase of his career, his large experimental and documentary series, are definitely important and inspiring pieces of the history of Hungarian photography, and their presentation in exhibitions and albums would be very much needed, because only then could they really have an impact.

<http://www.timarpeter.hu> Downloaded: July 2, 2020
The typo in the title – “wich” instead of which – is that of the artist. (trans.)



¹ Although in the course of my writing I will analyze these series together with the main image information, but not all of them will be included, or only at the level of mention, so for better orientation in the Photo_Book, here is the date of each series in the order they are presented the album, thanking the creator for his kind permission: *Socialism Which Can Be Lived* (1979-1984), *Sequences* (1975-2017), *How to Use The Photograph* (1978-2014), *Portraits from Memory* (2006-2017), *Bodies and Souls* (1984-2014), *Tattooed Prisoners* (1985), *Vegetation* (2011-2017), *Spaces* (2005-2015), *City* (2005-2017), *Transformation* (2009-2017), *Eastern Europe* (2004-2007), *Bird's Eye View* (1989), *Still Life* (1991-2017), *Grief* (1981-1983).

² Aknai, Katalin. "Halász Károly - Fotómunkák 1971-79." *Privát adás/Fotómunkák 1971-79.*, edited by Károly Halász, Vintage Galéria, Budapest, 2010, p. 3.

³ Hajas, Tibor. "Jegyzetek." *Jelenlét*, 1989/1-2., *Szógettő*, p. 116.

Beke, László. "Fotó-látás az új magyar művészetben". <http://www.c3.hu/collection/koncept/images/beke1.html> Downloaded: July 2, 2020

As Katalin Székely puts it: "In contrast to painting and sculpture, photography, experimental film and video were less vulnerable to the control of the then exclusively state-maintained and controlled art infrastructure, since, unlike "grand art," the new art media were not given a significant role in socialist cultural policy."

See: *A kettős beszéd innen és túl - Művészet Magyarországon 1956-1980*. Edited by Edit Sasvári, Sándor Hornyik, Hedvig Turai, Vince Kiadó, Budapest, 2018. p. 332.

⁴ *Expozíció - fotó/művészet*, Hatvany Lajos Museum, October 24, 1976 – January 31, 1977.

⁵ Hajas, Tibor. "A fotó, mint képzőművészeti médium." *Jelenlét*, 1989/1-2., *Szógettő*, p. 115.

Beke, László. "Fotó/művészet." <http://www.c3.hu/collection/koncept/images/expozicioszovmain.html> Downloaded: July 2, 2020

⁶ *Art in Hungary, 1956-1980: doublespeak and beyond*. Edited by Edit Sasvári, Sándor Hornyik, Hedvig Turai, London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2018.

⁷ Szilágyi, Sándor. *Neoavantgard tendenciák a magyar fotóművészetben 1965-1984*. Fotókultúra - Új Mandátum Kiadó, Budapest, 2007.

⁸ Szilágyi, Sándor. *Neoavantgard trends in Hungarian art photography, 1965-1984*. Translated by Christopher Claris, Art + Text Budapest, 2017. "Our monograph is intended to present the transformational efforts of Hungarian photography from 1965 to 1990. The first volume covers the neo-avantgarde tendencies of the period 1965-1984, while the next volume - in preparation - will cover the post-modern tendencies of the period between 1980-1990."

⁹ Szilágyi, Sándor. *Neoavantgard tendenciák a magyar fotóművészetben 1965-1984*. Fotókultúra - Új Mandátum Kiadó, Budapest, 2007, p. 7.

Törvénytelen avantgárd - Galántai György balatonboglári kápolnaműterme 1970-1973. Edited by Júlia Klaniczay and Edit Sasvári, Artpool-Balassi, Budapest, 2003. https://www.artpool.hu/books/pdf/torvenytelen_avantgard.pdf Downloaded: July 2, 2020.

¹⁰ Bódy, Gábor. "Sor, ismétlés, jelentés." *Fotóművészet*, 1977/4, pp. 18-19.

¹¹ Esterházy, Péter. *Bevezetés a szépirodalomba*. Magvető, Budapest, 1980, p. 400.

¹² *Egy betiltott fotókiállítás képei - Tímár Péter: Gyász, 1980-1983*. https://maimanohaz.blog.hu/2016/09/18/egy_betiltott_fotokiallitas_kepei_timar_peter_gyasz_1980-1983 Downloaded: July 2, 2020

¹³ *Tímár Péter portréi a Csillagbörtön tetovált lakóiról* (1985-86), https://maimanohaz.blog.hu/2015/12/08/timar_peter_portrei_a_csillagborton_tetovalt_lakoirol_1985 Downloaded: July 2, 2020.

¹⁴ *Leletek - A magyar fotográfia történetéből*. Edited by Gábor Szilágyi and Sándor Kardos, Képzőművészeti, Budapest, 1983.

¹⁵ Cséka, György. "Vad táj (Urbán Tamás: Felesleges Pillangó)." *Fotóművészet*, 2020/1, pp. 4-20.

ON THE PHOTOGRAM: AS SEEN THROUGH DÓRA MAURER'S SERIES ENTITLED *BLIND TOUCHING*

Dóra MAURER: *Blind Touching*, 1-5, 1984, silver gelatin print, 41x30 cm (Courtesy of Vintage Gallery)

This essay is an attempt at repositioning the medium of the photogram by addressing aspects that have not previously received proper attention in the literature. My approach is more than merely complementing the modernist and (neo)-avant-garde perspectives, as the considerations I highlight have hardly been omitted by chance. I aim to establish a point of view that sheds light on the paradigmatic role of the photogram—a role which, as I will demonstrate, is grounded in the encounter of two basic phenomena: the imprint and the shadow. Dóra Maurer's series entitled *Blind Touching* [*Vak letapogatás*] lends itself to a reasoning about these two concepts and their significance.

It is also no accident that I rely on Maurer's works for my line of reasoning, as it was the artist herself who traced the photograms back to these two fundamental phenomena. She wrote in *Light-syntax* [*Fényelvtan*],¹ a book much needed on the Hungarian art scene, published in 2001: "The photogram can be considered to embody the ancient formula of representation: the shadow and the mark of presence, with the image being rooted in both." Maurer uses those notions prudently, making only a brief reference to the two phenomena. Nevertheless, her use of the two concepts is, in itself, enough to merit our attention and an exploration of the topic.

Shadow

A shadow is a physical occurrence with a relatively clear definition, but at the same time it is much more than that. It is a quasi-object that allows for numerous metaphorical interpretations. Dóra Maurer mentions some examples in her book: ancient Indian shadow plays, the story of Orpheus, Plato's allegory of the cave, film noir, and Chamisso's short story entitled *Peter Schlemihl*.² Despite such well-known appearances in culture, the shadow is nevertheless a much less studied subject than light or pictorial representation. For a long time, there was no research into the history

of the shadow, nor was its role in art thematized. Victor Stoichita claims outright that his 1997 book on the history of the shadow³ was the first comprehensive effort to explore the matter.⁴

I believe it is possible that art history's neglect of the shadow is rooted in negative Biblical and mythological connotations. For instance, the Greek word *eidolon*, found in the New Testament and translated as "idol," originally meant an illusory image - a phantom that had no grounding in reality, and the worship of such idols was strictly forbidden by Biblical texts. From the era of Greek mythology, the shadow has been a metaphor for the soul, with the spirits of the dead roaming the underworld—the kingdom of Hades—as shadows. The shadow continued to be primarily associated with rejected, frightening and undesirable experiences. It is likely that all of the above led, in combination, to art historians devoting less attention to the shadow than to the image itself or to light. Even the origin myth of pictorial representation, tied to the shadow, has proven to be insufficient for conquering such aversions. Although the shadow is indeed a negative entity, the absence of something is definitely not equivalent to nothing at all. Absence (in this case, the absence of light) is rather some kind of a quasi-object on the intangible border of thing and non-thing, generating an immanent intensity.





Dóra MAURER: *Blind Touching*, 1-5, 1984, silver gelatin print, 41x30 cm (Courtesy of Vintage Gallery)

Imprint

The imprint is another artistic gesture rich in internal contradictions and tension. “The imprint is both a process and a paradigm, combining the two meanings of the French word ‘expérience’: the physical meaning of an experiment and the gnoseological meaning of understanding the world.”⁵ This inherent tension is a medial characteristic of the imprint, and has a thought-provoking effect. The tension derives from the nature of the object, with the object itself compelling the onlooker to think, because thought provides a means for temporarily resolving the tension. I believe Didi-Huberman is talking about something like this when referring to an anachronistic point-of-view. As he puts it: “When adopting an anachronistic perspective—a point of view that neither seeks archetypes, nor can be characterized as modernist, post-modernist or anti-modernist—we are going further than simply rejecting the various alternatives available nowadays in the field of art criticism. Our rejection is forced on us by the object we are viewing: Does the creation of an imprint represent a connection to origins or the loss of origins? Does it demonstrate authentic presence or, to the contrary, a lack of unity that entails the possibility of reproduction? ... The auratic or the serial? Similarity or distinctiveness? Sameness or non-identifiability? A decision or coincidence? ... Contiguity or distance? The imprint could be called a ‘dialectical image,’ an amalgamation of all of the above: something that signifies contact, whilst also pointing to loss.”⁶

The photogram is a technique that depicts shadows and the imprints of objects. Let us explore how the two basic gestures of image-making come together in the photogram.

The Photogram and the Shadow

The most detailed discussion of the photogram in Hungarian literature can be found in Dóra Maurer’s *Light-syntax*. According to the book’s definition, “the photogram is an image created without a camera or a negative, generated merely with the use of light, light-sensitive material and chemicals that serve to transform the changes of the former two into a picture, with such representations mostly capturing the shadows of objects.”⁷ Maurer includes the shadow in her

definition of the photogram, equating it with the shapes appearing on the light-sensitive material. She considers the silhouette—which is simply a shadow cast as a result of light—to be the precursor to the photogram. The shadow also plays a central role in the legend of Butades, a story telling the origin myth of pictorial representation. “The origin of Painting is uncertain... but all agree that it began with tracing an outline around a man’s shadow,” Pliny the Elder relates in his volume *Natural History*.⁸

It is important to note that by mentioning the shadow and emphasizing its role, Maurer diverges from the established understanding of the photogram as outlined by László Moholy-Nagy. Moholy-Nagy approaches the concept through the phenomenon of light, viewing light and shadow as the source of spatiality and variability. The avant-garde and modernist tradition looked upon light as a form-shaping force, a newly conquered matter offering limitless creative possibilities. Maurer stays within the modernist conceptual framework of the photogram delineated by Moholy-Nagy, with the exception of her metaphorical take on the shadow. This is the only point where she succumbs to the temptation of symbolic interpretation: “We are unable to imagine the opposite of existence, which is non-existence,” she writes, “hence we find it expressible through the shadow, the metaphor of the insubstantial tied to substance.”⁹ That is, in Maurer’s view the various meanings of the shadow and the symbolism of the shadow in different cultures offers a potential perspective for understanding the photogram. This deserves emphasis here even though she herself did not attribute much significance to it in other places.

It must also be highlighted, though, that in the case of the photogram the shadow serves as the form-shaping element. A shadow essentially means the lack of light, i.e., a dark surface, which is always depicted in images with a darker color than the original tone of the object onto which the shadow is cast. In contrast, when an object is placed onto photographic raw material, everything is reversed. The paper will turn dark where it is exposed to more light, while it will remain brighter where only a little light touches the surface: the reaction of the medium yields the opposite result compared to the real conditions. In the case of the photogram, light and shadow conditions are the inverse of reality, with tones appearing contrary to how they are usually seen. The photogram is a negative image that presents the shadow as positive, with the form of the shadow thus becoming the central element of the picture, three-dimensionally emerging thereof due to its brightness. As a result, interpretations of the shadow carrying negative connotations may easily acquire a positive meaning. Perhaps it is not far from the truth to state that the change in attitude and the increased interest towards the history of the shadow has been tied to the chance for revisiting negative mental constructs, with such an opportunity arising from the discovery of photography, or, more precisely, the arrival of the negative as an object. Looking back on the history of the shadow in pictorial representations, I believe it was the independent existence of the negative image that created the technical means by which the shadow could be stripped of its negative associations. This is not to say that the shadow itself had never appeared as a theme in art history. My point is rather that the photogram



Dóra MAURER: *Blind Touching*, 1-5, 1984, silver gelatin print, 41x30 cm (Courtesy of Vintage Gallery)

is a medium whose inherent characteristics make it possible to interpret the form outlined by the shadow not as a lack, nor as a symbolic absence, but as a form in its own right and a positive entity. Owing to the reversal of tones, coupled with the positive potential lying in the ready image, the photogram is the medium most suitable for achieving such a goal.

The Photogram and the Imprint

From a technical point of view, the relationship between the photogram and imprint-making can be approached from two different angles. On the one hand, the mold used by sculptors for creating an imprint can be viewed not only through the perspective of form, but also as an intermediate stage necessary for producing the result, the positive cast. The negative mold becomes redundant once the work is done, while at the same time retaining the possibility of reproduction. Analog photographic procedures also typically rely on a negative medium, most often a roll of negative film, which contains an image with reversed tones, necessary for developing the picture with its actual shades. In this respect, the negative film corresponds to the sculptor's mold insofar as both function as an intermediate phase in the creation of the final piece. Conversely, the photogram—albeit also negative in nature, just like negative film or the mold—is not an intermediate stage but the intended end product itself.

The other technical aspect concerns the issue of contact versus distance. When generating an imprint to create a sculpture or graphic art, the object comes into close contact with the substance applied to it. The making of a photogram also mostly entails the photo paper directly touching the object, although contact is not necessarily a prerequisite. Still, this is a different form of contact. Neither is it close, nor does it involve the entire surface, and, furthermore, it is only single points of the object that touch the photo paper. Direct contact is primarily needed for visual reasons, as the photo paper will only remain white where the object touches the light-sensitive surface. Wherever the object is slightly lifted away, light will filter in, creating abundant shades of gray on the light-sensitive material that imitate three-dimensionality. Artists creating

photograms are generally satisfied if their image features an infinite number of gray tones from white to black, because they can then feel they have maximally harnessed the tonal potential of the paper. They can also thus be certain to have made the right decision when choosing tone-sensitive photo paper for making the imprint instead of simple paint. Like a mold, the photogram also conveys the sensuality of direct contact, but in a different manner: while in the case of a mold it is the absence of the object we see, the photogram presents an immediate afterimage of the object.¹⁰

Let me highlight that Maurer also mentions the aspect of sensuality in her book: "As we view the image bearing the marks of the object having weighed down heavily on the photo paper or having scarcely brushed against the surface as if floating, our tactile sense is triggered, rendering our experience more realistic. This feeling of freshness was aptly termed erotic by Jean Cocteau."¹¹

Blind Touching

Maurer's exemplary series *Blind Touching* combines all of the above discussed paradigms and anachronisms. Through the visual representation of tactile contact, Maurer intended to put on display and interpret the forms of different objects.

The series dates back to 1984. Maurer used a specialty of the Forte factory, Dokubrom paper, which was as thin as typewriter paper, exclusively manufactured in Hungary at the time. The production of this photo paper was discontinued with the closure of the Forte factory, and current manufacturers of photographic materials do not make anything similar. Nowadays, people—if at all familiar with baryta photo paper—will know versions with the thickness of cardboard, as that has become the customary format. Therefore, the qualities of Dokubrom paper will certainly appear curious to present-day viewers. Maurer's pieces specifically rely on the thinness of the paper, with the entire body of work being built on the features of this unique material, meaning that it would no longer be possible to recreate the artwork or the process itself. But what exactly was the process? While in the dark, Maurer moistened the light-sensitive photo paper and placed it on the chosen object; then, with the touch of her fingers, tightly fitted the paper around the object, precisely following the shape of the three-dimensional form. This process and the movements involved, other than being done in the dark with light-sensitive paper, is completely identical to the technique used by sculptors when making a mold. In this not-yet-ready state, the artwork is virtually indistinguishable from *papier-mâché* or plaster that is manually applied to a form. Both processes rely on contact to create a likeness.

Up to this point, Maurer's work is also created with the intention of accurately following three-dimensional forms and producing a spatial model thereof. However, from this point on the two processes follow different paths, with Maurer's piece becoming a work of art precisely because she takes the sculptor's technique of modeling or molding out of the context of plastic arts and turns it into a photographic procedure. She achieves this by exposing, then developing the light-sensitive paper, whose wrinkles faithfully follow and thereby convey the shape of the



Dóra MAURER: *Blind Touching*, 1-5, 1984, silver gelatin print, 41x30 cm (Courtesy of Vintage Gallery)

object. Remember here that the paper is capable of perfectly following the shape because of its thinness, allowing it to be formed even more easily. When the light-sensitive paper is exposed through its wrinkles and folds, varying amounts of light reach the different parts of its surface. Upon being developed, the result is an image rich in tones, enabling the viewer to infer from it the shape of the original object. The picture even reveals the movements of the fingers creasing and pressing the material: one can almost work out the direction the artist followed when feeling her way around the object, as well as the order in which she shaped and

folded the paper. While processing (developing-fixing-washing-drying), the paper regains its smoothness. The original flatness of the paper can be restored even though the physical damage caused by the creases remains discernible. After venturing into the third dimension, the paper once again becomes two-dimensional and flat. (In the 1970s, Gyula Pauer based his *Pseudo* objects on the same principle of imitating three-

dimensionality but used a different technique for achieving his goal.) The paradigm of imprint-making underscores an important connection between the two-dimensional techniques used in graphic art and the three-dimensional procedures of plastic art.

Maurer's series thus draws attention to the common origins of the imprint as used in sculpture and the imprint as applied in the creation of graphics. However, that is only one aspect of her work, albeit an intriguing one. One could say that it is not the theme of the piece, however. Its title, on the other hand, provides a precise guide to interpretation. Blind touching refers to the act of acquiring information about an object through our tactile sense, for instance when a visually able person closes their eyes, thereby excluding their sense of sight. Relying on the sensory function of the skin, touch is an independent sense sometimes becoming so sophisticated that it can partially compensate for vision, as in the case of blind or visually impaired people. I find Maurer's gesture of visualizing the very process that serves to replace eyesight to be a unique, synesthetic form of establishing connections. It is using touch as a substitute for vision that appears in the form of images in this series.

Many viewers may be familiar with the role of touch as a supplement to vision when getting to know things. Upon first sight of an object or element in their environment, people often also touch it to get a sense of its material or shape. When viewing the pictures of *Blind Touching*, one feels in their fingertips the movements through which someone with a delicate tactile sense could feel their way around Maurer's object hidden beneath the photo paper. The process is reversed here: it is vision that elicits a tactile sense, whereby we can try and trace back Maurer's movements to recognize her objects. At the same time, there is nothing to be touched because the paper is flat, not to mention that, as a classical work of art, the image is displayed in a frame behind a sheet of glass. Maurer not only made the objects visible, but also made one feel as if they were experiencing them by touch.

For the sake of a complete analysis of this series, let us also look at the role of shadow in the images. In some of the pictures, the distinct white shape of the shadow cast by the object becomes

the main motif of the composition instead of the object encompassed by it. Other images, however, cannot be identified as being positive or negative simply by looking at them, only if one has knowledge of the technique. The images of the series may recall Pauer's pseudo artworks, which were spray-painted, and appear dark where the paper was covered by paint, thus showing a true light-shadow relationship. In contrast, Maurer's objects, hidden beneath paper and discerned by touch, give rise to inverted images due to the properties of photo paper. Visually, though, the pictures do not appear to be either explicitly negative or positive, and thus leave the audience the option to decide. Maurer's creations are like footprints in the sand: they can be seen as either pits or bulges, depending on the perspective we take. However, while a positive image comes across more like a depiction of a subject, negative images offer a more abstract, more peculiar effect.

Interestingly, *Blind Touching* can be interpreted through the paradigm of touch and impression, but not at all in terms of shadow. Nevertheless, the visual tension of the images emerges from the uncertainty created by the reversed appearance of tones: the pictures are unusual and familiar at the same time.

It is perhaps worth noting that by her own admission, Maurer did not create her photograms with the intention of making works of art. The images of the *Blind Touching* series, she says, were primarily born out of a desire to experiment. In one of our talks, she referred to photograms as "groundwork," made in preparation for something specific—a work of art or a book cover, but then somehow they ended up being exhibited. Maurer spoke on multiple occasions of how art can come into being when one is "working on something with great commitment, and in the course of that work something may emerge which is perhaps art. Art occurs incidentally, rising out of the talent and the great attention we are devoting to a matter. Such an approach entails our respect for art, not a desecration of it. This is the road to spontaneous inception."¹² In my eyes, *Blind Touching* is an exemplary realization of that mode of artistic creation.

¹ Maurer, Dóra. *Fényelvtan. A fotogramról*. Magyar Fotográfiai Múzeum–Balassi Kiadó, 2001.

² Maurer, p. 9.

³ Stoichita, Victor. *A Short History of the Shadow*. Reaktion Books, 1997.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 8. "In fact, this is the first time such an inquiry has been undertaken in any coherent way."

⁵ Didi-Huberman, Georges. *La ressemblance par contact*. Éditions de Minuit, 2008.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Maurer, p. 7.

⁸ *Pliny the Elder. Natural History. Book XXXV. 15*. Translated by Harris Rackham, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952.

⁹ Maurer, p. 9.

¹⁰ Quotation of my own words published in an interview in the exhibition catalog *The Grammatica of Photography [Fotogrammatika]* (1988).

¹¹ Maurer, p. 11.

¹² <http://exindex.hu/index.php?l=hu&page=3&id=205> / last accessed: October 15, 2017.

WILD LANDSCAPE



Tamás Urbán: *Unwanted Butterfly*, Budapest, 1990

We have been waiting for Tamás Urbán's *Unwanted Butterfly* exhibition for nearly 26 years – since the main figure of the exhibition, Ferenc Deák, a.k.a. Butterfly, drowned in the Danube on May 7, 1994. Over the years, we have seen some parts of this work in newspapers and exhibitions both in Hungary and abroad, but it has not been properly presented in its entirety or published as a book. The present exhibition showcased at the Capa Center and curated by István Virágvolgyi provides an outstanding panorama of the life of this multi-talented norm-breaker in five chapters (*From the First Encounter to Freedom,*

Tattoos, Commune and Women, Life is a Performance, Epilogue), installed in a skillful, exciting way. It is also accompanied by an over 190-page innovative and thrilling catalogue of superb graphic design. We must mention its author here, Nóra Szűcs, who is also responsible for the exhibition's graphic design. The exhibit's intellectual forerunners enrich its context, including two excellent works at the Capa Center curated by Kata Oltai: the first is the 2014 *Second Skin*¹, where some images from the Butterfly material were already showcased, and the other is the 2017 *Golden Boundaries*² exhibition.

I would venture to say that the *Butterfly* material is not only extraordinary – probably a bit of a masterpiece – within Urbán's oeuvre, but it is also a significant artwork of the history of Hungarian photography. And even though it was delayed for 26 years, it does not appear to be late – it has stood the test of time, and it is still fresh, inspiring today, ready to be accessed, viewed, and researched. The significance of this work lies in that it is both more and less than photography, photojournalism, sociology, cultural anthropology, contemporary history, regime change history, prison research, or a short history of Hungarian underground music and (sub) culture. It touches various areas; it can be analyzed in a variety of ways. Its power stems from the unbelievably compelling attention characteristic of Tamás Urbán, who was not satisfied with photographing the daily life of a former criminal as an outsider but, to some extent, became part of his protagonist's life. He worked with a depth and intensity of which *Butterfly* himself took notice: "For Tamás, photography is like ink was for me. An obsession. He is an obsessed photographer!"³ Urbán was a mentor for him, and he *intervened* in his life in many ways, helping to turn it for the better; the last time was when he managed to get a passport for him, planning to take him abroad to a tattoo festival. Only *Butterfly*'s death prevented him from doing so. He also collected and kept everything related to *Butterfly*: his journals, his drawings, and the various tools he made in prison.

It is especially ironic that *Butterfly*, the *great criminal*, who spent almost half of his life in prison for his various crimes from theft through fraud and prison break to burglary and vandalism, and who was a regular at various detention facilities of the country from his adolescence, was born under the name, Ferenc Deák, in 1954, as the famous "Wise Man of the Nation," Ferenc Deák de Kehida. After his father's early loss, followed by his being expelled from school and sent to a foster home, he spent almost his entire life from the age of 15 until his death in prison, with some shorter or longer interruptions. Possibly the longest and probably the most successful free period in his life was the 2–3 years following his release from prison in 1989, which Tamás Urbán followed more closely. He got acquainted with *Butterfly* in the Csillag Prison of Szeged in 1988, or rather, that was when his attention was drawn to this – by then well-known – figure. First, he started photographing him, then he followed and assisted his release, of which we can see and read a lot of interesting, rough, and shocking stories.

This life story, which from a distance is not different from the standard journey of a criminal, is remarkable, exciting, and disturbing for Urbán and for us as well, not only because its protagonist is an especially creative, talented and clever man, but also due to the mostly self-made tattoos covering almost his whole body: he is a *spectacle*. But, ultimately, *Butterfly*'s

most important artwork is himself. He chose his nickname after Henri Charrière's novel *Butterfly*, which was translated and published in Hungary only three years after its original appearance in 1971. This world-famous book tells the story of a great criminal who claims to be innocent and escapes from life in prison; based on subsequent research, it is somewhat fictional and partly compiled from actual people's stories. It is, however, without a doubt that the author had a butterfly tattooed on his chest, just like Ferenc Deák's face and forehead were dominated by the butterfly motif.

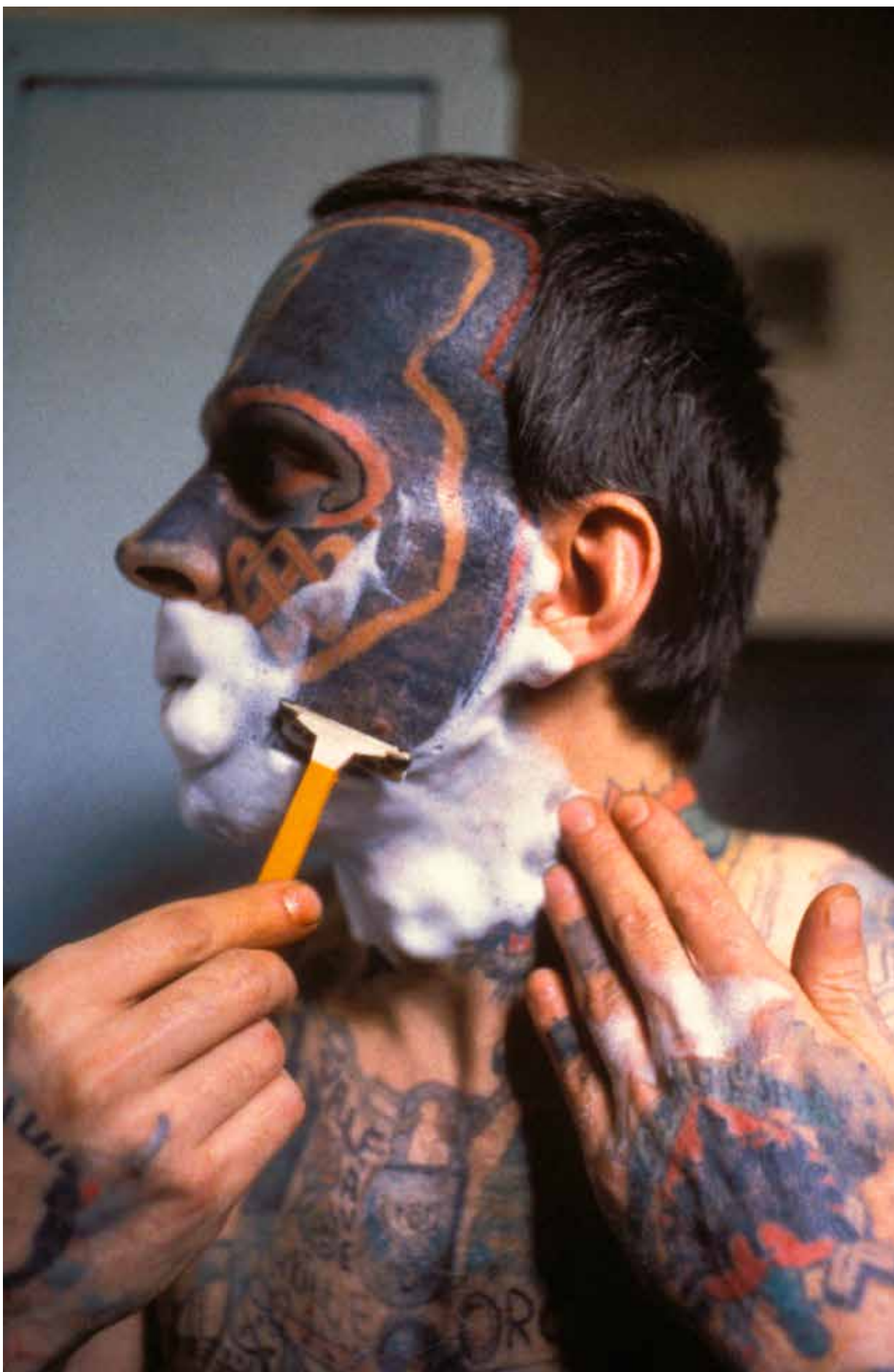
Yet, *Butterfly's turning into an artwork* took place gradually, and it started with the first tattoos in the foster homes and prisons. Prison tattoos have extensive literature and iconography; tattooing has always been there and probably always will be there in jails for a variety of reasons. One of the most prominent reasons is norm-breaking because it is forbidden, making it a suitable instrument of rebellion, but it is also a means of expressing association with a group, communicating with each other, remembrance, passing time, etc. In prison, tattooing is a system, a structure, but *Butterfly* takes it beyond a certain point, breaking the norm even within the norm-breaking, creatively detaching himself and developing a unique visual system in several aspects. Namely, tattoos covering almost the whole body, and especially the face, were not only unusual, peculiar, and startling back then, in prison and in contemporary Hungary surrounding the prison world, but they are viewed still so today.

Butterfly's transformation was not a conscious process from the beginning: "When I started, I didn't know where the whole thing would go."⁴ In another place, expressing a kind of *artistic credo*, he reflects on the circumstances and precursors of creating himself in a very sensitive way; he talks about how he always strove to become a *spectacle*, not conforming to anyone, and standing in opposition with basically everything, *guided only by his own inner self*; yet, he did have a forerunner: "I'm not entirely sure about how I decided to have my face tattooed. In any case, it requires quite a bit of determination. Because I think not many fellows are running around like this in the world. As far as I know, there is only one more beside me, in England. A guy named Karl Grün, and that is it. Perhaps it was partly controlled from the outside but forced upon me from the inside. And then when the idea came that it was time to get it done – nothing, nothing could have stopped me. I knew exactly what I was doing. [...] I knew it would lead to much inconvenience later – but I did it anyway. [...] This is how I wanted to look, I am the one wearing this head, if you don't like it, you don't have to look at me. They keep yapping about what I will look like when I get old. Well, I won't! I'll never live to be an old man anyway! I'll always be young, and I'll bite the dust young too."⁵



Tamás Urbán: *Unwanted Butterfly*, Self-tattooing at the Csillag Prison of Szeged, Szeged, 1989

Tamás Urbán: *Unwanted Butterfly*, Before his release from the Csillag prison of Szeged, Szeged, March 2, 1989



With his tattoos, Butterfly became twice separated from society – from *the conventional* and criminals and the norms in prisons – partly via the crimes he committed and partly via his body, skin, and appearance. He covers himself with signs and symbols to obstinately and inexorably create his uniqueness and peculiarity, “the Other.” In a way, he proactively prevents his own integration into any larger system or community: “I have to look like this so that I can be who I would like to be.”⁶ The singularity of his body and skin is immediately evident for everyone, provoking an immediate and apparent reaction, which he also expects. The most typical reaction is that he is believed to be a clown (“Come, Mr. Clown, paint my face too!”)⁷ or an actor in make-up. One time a child called out like this upon seeing him: “Mommy, look, a picture man!”⁸ The opinion of his contemporaries, or rather, of the adults much less accepting than children, is perhaps best expressed by a prostitute: “It’s not even human!”⁹ The proclamation of the prostitute could also recall the remarkable scene from Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*, when the protagonist and

narrator Ishmael must share his bed with a stranger for the night, who turns out to be tattooed from head to toe. His reaction is that of bone-chilling fear: he sees Queequeg as a *terrifying beast*.¹⁰ The *Moby Dick* points to an important characteristic of the spectacle created by Butterfly – the fact that creating himself, or the Other, was also a way of evoking the image of colonized, indigenous savages. This is how he distances himself from society, from the image of the *conventional* by evoking and imitating the uncivilized, the cultures conquered and subdued by Western civilization, via his appearance and skin. Thus, the reactions he triggers fit into centuries-old schemes. Butterfly also plays on that; upon his release, when Urbán takes him to a restaurant, he starts eating with his hands¹¹, which is shocking for everyone, including Urbán. Later on, in the talk show of Sándor Friderikusz, he allows himself to be presented to the world stripped to his underpants. Still, he is also proud to show off himself like a special animal when doing yoga in a park or performing at Sziámi concerts.





Tamás Urbán: *Unwanted Butterfly*, Before his release from the Csillag prison of Szeged, Szeged, March 2, 1989

Tamás Urbán: *Unwanted Butterfly*, First lunch after his release at the Szentendre Street housing estate, Budapest, March 2, 1989



Tamás Urbán: *Unwanted Butterfly*, with Péter Müller at a concert of the Sziámi band in the Black Hole underground club, Budapest, 1990

Rather wittily, he describes himself as a picture book: “For example, when I’ll have a child, I won’t have to buy picture books. I just undress, he flips through me, then I put myself back to the shelf.”¹² His tattooed skin, as opposed to the un-tattooed skin, stretched over the uniform, *conventional* bodies, is not the mere wrap of the flesh and bones, but an image, a map, a landscape on its own right. Butterfly is both the creator and the medium of his own painting. Living among other people, he is constantly aware of his skin, and he carries it *on display*. This is both an exhibitionist and a reserved gesture. It is exhibitionist because the person communicates, advertises, offers himself from far away via his appearance. But it is also reserved because the person, especially his face and gaze are almost completely hidden, concealed behind *pictures*, the *wild landscape* of his skin. And the spectacle he offers is unintelligible as a whole, it is complicated, and the symbols are often only understood by the person who did the carving.

His skin is a strange, mysterious, and endless sea of folds, resisting decryption and classification. Butterfly’s relationship with people and society is twofold; on the one hand, he rejects them and detaches himself, and on the other hand, he desires admiration, reverence, and recognition. Namely, he yearned for the recognition of what he has created – his dignity is that of the artist, who stubbornly refuses to do (regular) work: “I have told you anyway, I will sue anyone uttering the word ‘work’ in relation to me for defamation!”¹³ Yet, he is really proud of his talents and creativity at carving tattoos and drawing. And, actually, it would have been considered a popular occupation and a great way of making a living in a different society, in a later era. At that specific moment in history, he was “the unwanted Butterfly,”¹⁴ as his journalist friend, Urbán, defined him. He was a man not defined either by his crimes or by his creativity, not capable of adjusting to anything but living like an (underground) rock star.



Tamás Urbán: *Unwanted Butterfly*, at the Black Hole underground club, Budapest, 1990

At the same time, the uncategorizable nature, the uniqueness, and the attitude of Butterfly have a conventional side too. His relationship with women is the usual, patriarchal, repressive, objectifying kind, and he does not emotionally connect with anyone. Characteristically, one cannot find names of women on his skin, although the customary tattoos depicting mostly naked women are there: “[...] there are all kinds of things you can find on my body, but I sure don’t have any girl’s names on me. For one, it would only take up space, and then I would also have to have a new name tattooed every second day.”¹⁵ He has stereotypical texts tattooed on his genitals, symbolizing pride and power, intended to be funny: “Bagged daddy’s milk. Ahead with full steam, you, naughty valiant. Hitler’s arm.”¹⁶ He daily exchanges his partners, often beating them too. He imagines a stable, *serious relationship* also in a patriarchal way, in the form of a blindly faithful, devoted, and not incidentally virgin woman with no independent will: “[...] I could never figure out what women liked about me. Mostly, I must have my way, although I am not so demanding either. [...] I have a girlfriend now as well. [...]

She knows my habits and requirements, so by and large, she also wants to become who I am. If I chain a steady woman to myself, she must be devoted and characterized by chastity.”¹⁷ His diary, of which the catalogue includes the month of February 1990, hardly contains anything of interest or originality; it is a stereotypical text, mostly about where and with whom he drank and with whom he had sex. A touch of prudence characterizes his language use in this area; he calls making love almost in every case *having sex*, only once does he write *screwing*, as if it was a slip of the tongue. He also shows another important attribute of the traditional male image: he cannot handle unsubmitive women or women who take the initiative. When this happens, he is almost frightened, retreats, and feels his masculinity to be *blemished*: “There I stand on bus 85, and this pretty girl comes up to me saying: would you please come with me to my place. It was just so sudden, and I was rather surprised. But then I found my voice: sorry, but I’ve already had sex last night.”¹⁸ In prison, besides creating a tattooing machine, he also uses his creativity for building a *jerking machine*, among other things.

Tamás Urbán: *Unwanted Butterfly*, Budapest, 1990



Tamás Urbán: *Unwanted Butterfly*, Budapest, 1989





Tamás Urbán: *Unwanted Butterfly*, Budapest, 1989



Tamás Urbán: *Unwanted Butterfly*, Budapest, 1989





Tamás Urbán: *Unwanted Butterfly*, In the flat of one of his “road dogs,” Budapest, 1989

The greatest virtue of Tamás Urbán's *Unwanted Butterfly* is that it provides a highly accurate image of an intricate, controversial man who is interesting, peculiar, and conventional at the same time, intertwined into the patterns of the given era. The photographer's special gift is that he can go up close to his protagonist, almost *touching his skin*, and getting entangled in his life, his fate, while keeping his distance via his camera and optics. Yet, his depiction never becomes cold or stern in the process.

Tamás Urbán: *Unwanted Butterfly*

March 5 – April 5, 2020

Capa Center

Curator: István Virágvolgyi

¹ *Second Skin – Visual Codes of Social Constructions*, September 30 – November 2, 2014.

² *Golden Boundaries – Youth Culture in Contemporary Photography*, December 4, 2017 – March 18, 2018.

³ Urbán, Tamás. *Felesleges Pillangó*, edited by István Virágvolgyi, Robert Capa Kortárs Fotográfiai Központ – Archive of Modern Conflict - Bone Idle Books, 2020. p. 93.

⁴ *ibid*, p. 47.

⁵ *ibid*, p. 53.

⁶ *ibid*, p. 47.

⁷ *ibid*, p. 47.

⁸ *ibid*, p. 24.

⁹ *ibid*, p. 17.

¹⁰ Melville, Herman. *Moby Dick vagy a fehér bálna*, translated by Imre Szász, Európa Könyvkiadó, 1994, 47–48.

¹¹ Urbán, Tamás. *Felesleges Pillangó*, edited by István Virágvolgyi, Robert Capa Kortárs Fotográfiai Központ – Archive of Modern Conflict - Bone Idle Books, 2020. p. 15.

¹² *ibid*, p. 56.

¹³ *ibid*, p. 20.

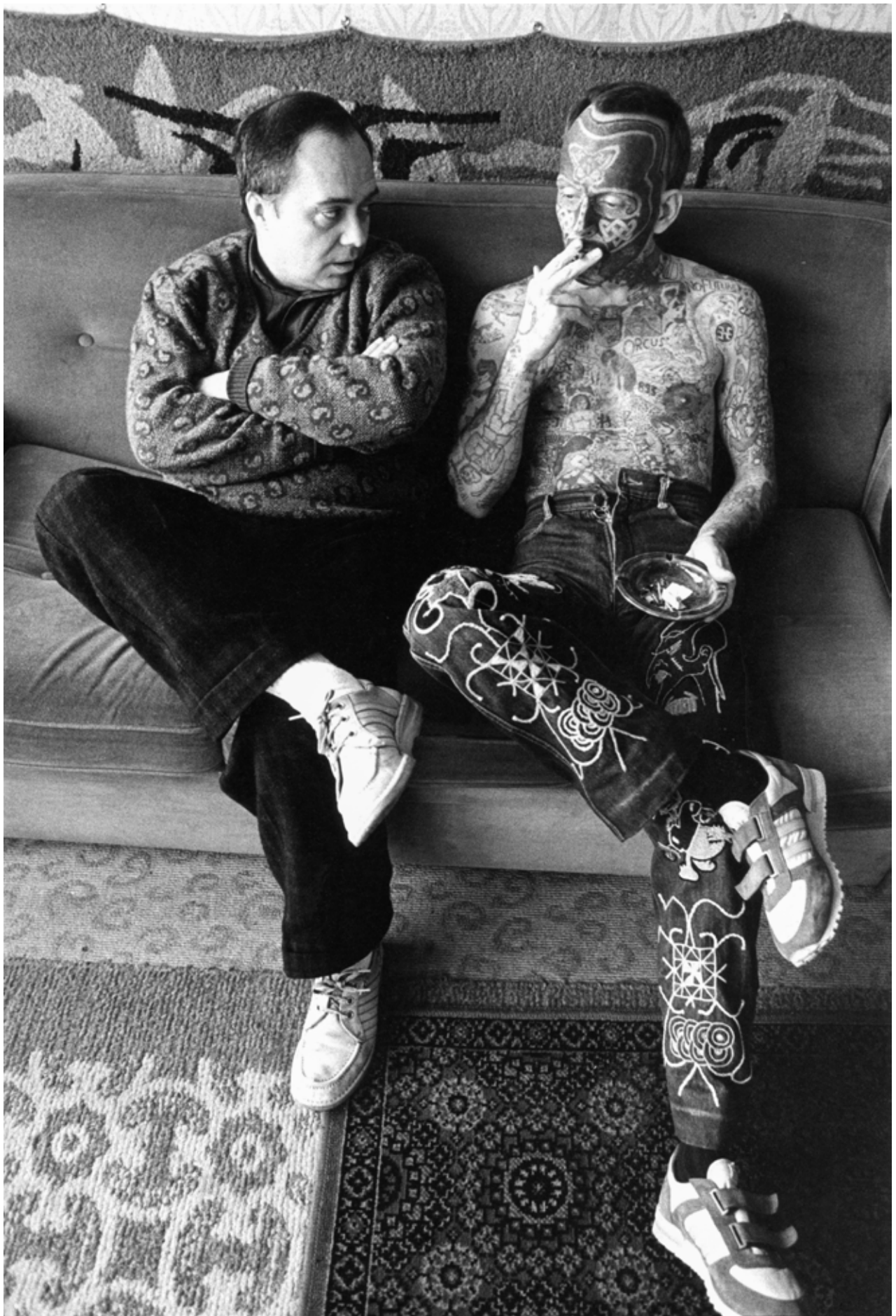
¹⁴ *ibid*, p. 16.

¹⁵ *ibid*, pp. 54–55.

¹⁶ *ibid*, p. 57.

¹⁷ *ibid*, p. 89.

¹⁸ *ibid*, p. 145.



RECYCLING

Memories of Forgetting – Photo/Model 2

Hungarian University of Fine Arts, Budapest

February 16 – March 25, 2018

What photography preserves is garbage, wrote Sigfried Kracauer in 1927. For the archaeologist seeking to learn something about daily life, the rubbish heap of the town will always prove to be one of the most intriguing and thus most precious sources, offering an abundance of information about everyday occurrences. If we accept Kracauer's claim, the photograph is also a landfill from which the curious or knowledgeable viewer can collect bits and pieces seen by others as insignificant or of no value. The items thus gathered can then be arranged into a system following a predetermined concept, or each element may itself dictate various alternatives for structuring what we see. Such systemizations can give rise to incredibly diverse interpretations, through which different accounts of the same story are made possible, whether completely imaginary or based in reality. For those who wish to reconstruct certain stories of an era using the photographs of the period – be they pictures taken by a professional photographer or amateurs; for leisure purposes or with the goal of literally immortalizing a subject– everyone will have to face the challenge, or rather the temptation, of freely recreating history after one's own preferences.

What gives this opportunity its strong appeal is the fact that certain readings cannot be checked or verified, and thus refuting them is impossible. This freedom gives onlookers the liberty to construct a historical reality based on their own imagination, to which the photograph offers itself as evidence. Pál Závada plays such a game with readers in his novel entitled *Natural Light* [*Természetes fény*].¹ Despite fiction being present in multiple ways and in multiple planes, it still feels authentic to the reader, with text and image reinforcing one another, invoking one another, and thereby becoming references for one another.

Kracauer also called for an exploration of what happens when the “right” interpretation of a photograph is necessary to understand it, which would require verbal information or stories that have already been lost and forgotten, and thus can no longer reveal the circumstances of how a picture was taken, nor convey knowledge about the depicted situation, era, people, or objects. In Kracauer's view, in this case the essence of the photograph is completely transformed, with the objects portrayed (including people, also objects in this sense) losing any additional meaning beyond themselves, thus permitting onlookers to interpret the picture freely and associate with it any meaning (stories) of their choice. Viewers of later ages are thus faced with a further *temptation* upon seeing a photograph.

In the 1970s, when collecting photographs, including old, so-called vintage prints (enlargements or contact prints), started to gain broader appeal in New York (and most likely in other US cities, too), Susan Sontag highlighted a peculiar phenomenon. She wrote in an essay² that all old photographs become valuable simply by virtue of being *old*, with the adoption of the photograph by museums accelerating this process. This is either so because certain pictures are inherently unique objects (due to the photographic procedure, e.g., in the case of a daguerreotype, a direct positive, a photogram, or any other similar technique), or, if that is not the case, then because the negative—which would have allowed the reproduction of the image at a later time—had already been destroyed, or at least lost. The old photograph as an object thus rises into the realm of the sublime, gaining worth and significance due to its individuality, specialness, singularity, and irreproducibility. These are the qualities that primarily lend the photograph its value on the art market. Old photographs thereby inevitably turn into works of art, even if they were originally not meant as such by their creators.

Sontag's observations are definitely worth considering if one sets out to view *Memories of Forgetting – Photo/Model 2*,³ an exhibition at the University of Fine Arts, which, as well as being an artistic project, provides insight into the history, daily life, and past of the university as well as being. Similar to the earlier exhibition entitled *PHOTO/MODEL, Images between Art and Nature*,⁴ this show—housed in the Barcsay Exhibition Hall and the lobby—is also a two-in-one in the sense that it is partly comprised of photographs from the library, archives, and art collections of the university; and partly of works created by doctoral school students as reflections on the images

displayed and phenomena showcased. The 2016 exhibition primarily featured photographs, albums, and periodicals preserved in the various collections of the university, and of international importance but long forgotten; and included the works of a number of photographers and studios that played a pivotal role in the history of photography, such as Adolphe Braun, Wilhelm von Gloeden and the studio of the Florentine Alinari brothers. The focus of the first exhibition was photography as a *model*, and the relationship between photography and its depicted “theme,” also understood as a model. The show sought to explore how the world, nature, and art can become a model for photography, and how a photograph can serve as a model for the painter, drawer, engraver, or lithographer. Model here can simultaneously mean an example to be followed, an ideal, a representation, or a reduced-size replica of something, which, of course, does not necessarily need to match the original in all aspects, as the creator of the model can ultimately decide which details are relevant and thus worth capturing, and which are inconsequential and should thus be omitted. The photographs from the collections

of the predecessor of the University of Fine Arts offer many hints suggesting that when serving as models, the photographs were not so much sources of *inspiration* but rather a *means* of copying and thereby visualizing or conveying their original subjects.

This year’s exhibition, entitled *Memories of Forgetting – Photo/Model 2*, has shifted its focus, placing more emphasis on the photograph as one of several technical/optical media. Curator Miklós Peternák set out this time to draw attention to the fact that in addition to traditional photography, stereoscopic photography and panoramic pictures also enjoyed great popularity in Hungary at the turn of the century. (Of the latter, Árpád Feszty’s cyclorama called *Arrival of the Hungarians* [*A magyarok bejövetele*] [1895], a painting depicting the entrance of Hungarians into the Carpathian Basin, is essentially the only piece to have become renowned. The *Transylvanian Cyclorama* [*Erdélyi körkép*] or *Bem-Petőfi Cyclorama* [*Bem-Petőfi Körkép*] [1897], portraying the Battle of Nagyszeben during the spring campaign of 1849, as well as the *Cyclorama of Hell* [*Pokol körkép*] [1896–1897], dreamt up and managed by Géza Gárdonyi, have remained almost or completely unknown, perhaps because one has only survived in fragments, while the other has been lost altogether.) Whereas a stereoscopic image creates an illusion of depth, a panoramic picture is a monumental image filling the viewer’s entire field of vision. In its original, 19th century form, the cyclorama—considered the spectacle of its time, together with Daguerre’s diorama—was a forerunner of the visual experience encountered later in movie auditoriums, albeit without the sound and light effects (already present, though, in Wagner’s opera house).

On the screen to the left: Manuel F. Contreras – Anna Peternák: *The Experience of Remembering*, 2018, documentary film, 21 minutes. The five large images forming the upper row on the wall are blow-ups from *The Marble Mine of Ruszkicza*, a 1912 album by Marianne Strobl (1865–1917), consisting of 29 photographs. Original size: 23×29 cm photographs on 34.5×513.5 cm sheets. (Collection of the Hungarian University of Fine Arts, accession no.: 5618.) On the table to the right: Anna Peternák: *Mátyás Strobl Telling Stories*, 2018, special stereoscope, image projection and audio guide, 19 minutes. © Photo credit: Éva Kozma.





Images and documents connected to the oeuvre and photo collection of sculptor Adolf Huszár (1843–1885). © Photo credit: Éva Kozma.

In the present exhibition, photographs appear to be more than mere models that are recommended for copying and are particularly suitable for illustration. Other possible uses of photographic images are apparent. One such use is self-representation, meaning, in this case, showing the work done at the institution, within the educational and pedagogical programs, and the resulting artwork. Photographs can take the place of the original creations, representing them in the manner described in a passage by Miklós Barabás, quoted in the exhibition catalog.⁵ The images stand in for the originals, thus rendering them visible, and allowing viewers to experience them in their entirety through perfect depictions. Another similarly important function of photography is *documentation*. On the one hand, the images put on display capture the work done in the institution and the studios, together with the artworks found there, already completed or still in the making. On the other hand, the pictures record and eternalize the exceptional occurrences that happened in the life of the institution.

In pursuing the goal of documentation, the institution collaborated with and commissioned prominent Hungarian photographers of the era, such as György Klösz, Antal Weinwurm or, on some occasions, Mór Erdélyi. Importantly, the accumulated photographs—one part collected, one part acquired through regular targeted purchases, and one part commissioned—convey more than their primary meaning construed at first sight. Photographs thus become the rubbish heap referred to earlier, treasured by the archaeologist as a valuable *source*, with tremendously exciting objects (events, details, etc.) waiting to be unearthed, as the pictures document not only (or not at all) what its contemporaries found meaningful, significant, and worth preserving. On the contrary, they capture (or also capture) what seemed trivial, deplorable, or good for nothing at the time, but what nevertheless formed part of the era; thus, it adds to, deepens and clarifies the understanding of an era. Péter Pettendi Szabó's work entitled *Slow Viewing* [*Lassú látás*] directs our attention to this view, which is crucial from a methodological standpoint. Present-day viewers of images tend to content themselves with the

gratification gained from quick recognition and the instant deciphering of information. However, each photograph offers an abundance of subtleties to be discovered if we take the time to notice those details by truly fathoming their presence and registering their existence. Such an approach allows us to notice minute, seemingly inconsequential particularities, which may be gestures, movements, glances, or objects, possibly inspiring a range of unanticipated thoughts or questions. The task of this kind of discovery, though, is essentially left to the audience, as the research carried out in preparation for the exhibition rather concentrated on exploring—as in the case of the first show—who took the photographs found in the university's collections, for whom, why, and how the university came into possession of the pictures. The show's groundwork has uncovered compelling stories, shedding light on erstwhile relationships and associations (even if at times only short-lived or temporary) between professors, colleagues and their family members, contemporary devotees, audiences, viewers; as well as administrative bodies and other institutions, with the mere existence of such connections already serving as important cultural-historical findings for those wishing to understand the era from another perspective.

At the same time, research for the exhibition also sheds light on the typical habits characterizing visual media consumption in Hungary at the turn of the century, as well as the relationship between

“new” and traditional visual media and production techniques. Viewers can learn how popular panoramic pictures were, how painters undertook the creation of huge cycloramas—a genre that was, in fact, scorned by artists—and how the press raved about the ability of such pieces to make the stories of great Hungarian historic figures accessible to less art-literate audiences. It is also intriguing to observe how enthusiastic wealthier burghers were, for example, about stereoscopic photography.

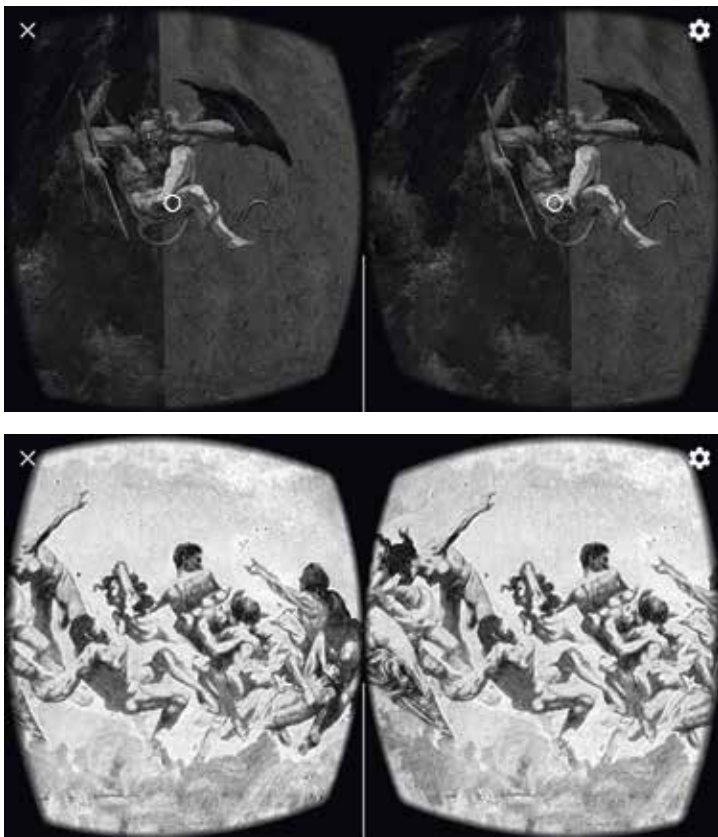
Similarly important, and at the same time entertaining, are stories told by Mátyás Strobl (grandson of sculptor Alajos Strobl) both in his book and in a long interview made for the show, viewable in the exhibition space from a video recording. It is partly from his accounts and partly from short comments written by faculty members of the Hungarian Royal Drawing School and Art Teachers’ College⁶ that we know, for example, how Alojzia Kratochwill, wife of Alajos Strobl, learned the technique of stereoscopic photography; who taught her how to take photographs; and how all this is related to József Strobl and his wife, who lived in Vienna and ran a professional photography business first there, then later in Hungary.

The photographs found in the university’s collections are a testimony to a great many things. Perhaps answers to the questions initially formulated by the organizers are not so evident upon viewing the pictures, as those issues mostly require systematic historical and photo historical research. However, the images do provide insight into what the studios of certain sculptors or painters looked like, how students stood or sat in front of their easels, and how different models posed for the would-be artists. Of at least equal significance, the photographs often draw attention to seemingly marginal details that are, in fact, relevant pieces of information from a different viewpoint, allowing posterity to fill substantial gaps in knowledge. For instance, where did a certain statue stand? What did its “model” look like? What was it like when originally erected? What can be known about the debut of the one-time college at the *World’s Fair in Paris*, opened on April 15, 1900? Kracauer claims that part of what photography conserves is refuse—petty details that are consequently disposable—as opposed to our mind, which only

retains important events, motifs, and “images” that are in some way relevant and emotionally motivated; structuring and synthesizing such occurrences into memories. In the case of the exhibition, though, what Kracauer considers a negative quality becomes *positive*, since it is precisely the subtleties, at times captured by the photographer unintentionally, that would have otherwise been forgotten, but acquire significance here and become—by virtue of their mere existence—treasured by modern-day inquisitive onlookers.

Needless to say, it is not only in the present that it is worth reflecting on the era’s mixed emotions about technical media. Miklós Peternák thought it important to convey what the painters and photographers (and sometimes also sculptors) of the time thought about these matters in a short, but substantial therefore, brochure, published as an accompaniment to the exhibition. Mostly, these opinions are not expressed in the form of long treatises, but rather single offhand sentences, chance remarks, or, in the case of Bertalan Székely, correspondence with the Frenchman Étienne-Jules Marey. It is with good reason that Peternák included the unfinished dialog that began in the spring of 1863 in *Koszorú [Wreath]*, a journal of literature and art criticism edited by János Arany, in which Bertalan Székely, despite showing an interest in other fields, expressed his preference for painting in a rather one-sided manner. This is what led Miklós Barabás to enter into a dispute with him, calling attention to his prejudices, fallacies and the resulting erroneous conclusions.⁷

Equally intriguing is the fact that Peternák calls our attention to the murals of Károly Lotz. The artist, already renowned and widely commissioned, was congratulated on his later works by his Viennese master who—despite no longer being able to see Lotz’s original paintings—knew them well from photographic reproductions. In this context, reference to Walter Benjamin’s often cited 1936 essay entitled *A Short History of Photography*, already published in 1931 in the form of a “book review,” is almost inescapable. Although Benjamin did not necessarily view the option of technical reproduction in a negative light, nor did he condemn such procedures, he definitely associated them with the loss of an artwork’s aura. In contrast, it is worth noting that—as testified by Horst Bredekamp and Franziska Brons in their joint paper *Photography as a Scientific Medium [Fotografie als Medium der Wissenschaft]*—art historians living closer in time to the period presented in the university’s exhibition, such as Wilhelm Lübke or Hermann Grimm, “recognized in it ‘a perfectly vivid, direct representation of the original work.’”⁸ Moreover, Grimm even argued that “through projection, the ‘artistic’ appears with more authenticity than when perceived with a naked eye.”⁹ Bredekamp and Brons also highlight that while Grimm and his colleagues saw “the authenticity of the original work preserved and enhanced in photographic reproductions,” they were also aware of the “instrumental function of the auxiliary means [the projection of slides as reproductions of artworks].”¹⁰ Such thoughts are completely in line with Miklós Barabás’s observations made decades earlier in the above-mentioned article written in response to Bertalan Székely, cited by Miklós Peternák in the brochure accompanying the exhibition.¹¹



Anna Barnaföldi: *Go to Hell!*, 2018, VR application + guide to the *Cyclorama of Hell* by Molnár and Trill (1896, copy). Two of the reconstructions were created with the help of virtual reality and surviving reproductions.

These views on the relationship between photography and art, contradicting the commonly accepted standpoints of the present (grounded predominantly in critical philosophy and the notions of authors emphatically critical of photography, such as Vilem Flusser), allow us to transcend—or at least try to soften—rigid approaches that draw a clear line between art and photography, as well as between different modes of photography.

Such a perspective adds to the significance of the fact that, as in the case of the previous exhibition two years earlier, the show features reflections on the material on display by the students of the university's doctoral school. We can view their related propositions as independent research efforts, together with the artworks emerging from those efforts or grounded in them. In a sense, the research carried out can be likened to the archaeological procedure whose methodology Michel Foucault developed in the context of sciences in his 1969 treatise *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.¹² However, it is not so much Foucault's description that offers valuable insights in this case, but rather that of Friedrich Kittler, who followed in the steps of Foucault in forming his views of "optical media," literary criticism, German higher education, encryption, and codes.¹³ Kittler turns to the texts and images of the past in order to identify connections which, in the absence of questioning, have so far remained hidden. Such discoveries can help current phenomena be seen in an untraditional light, which opens up the road to a different kind of understanding.

The new works—showcased not in a separate space but interwoven with the material from the collections—are built on questions raised by the students regarding situations, stories, and historical facts connected to individual pieces in the collections, as well as the resulting dialogs. In her two pieces entitled *Rearrangement* [Újrendezés] and *Memory Shifter* [Emlékváltó], Bianka Dobó offers commentary on a recent manifestation of memory politics. Reflecting on the history of the Kossuth statue in Budapest in two different ways and through two different media, her works invite the audience to actively participate by practicing the gesture of rearrangement, while also urging them to contemplate the past and present situation. Anna Barnaföldi presents a closer examination of one of the City Park's millennial attractions. The *Cyclorama of Hell* [Pokol körkép], a project dreamt up and managed by Géza Gárdonyi, was considered to be a failure despite attracting some 100,000 visitors. With the pictures having been lost over time, the artist based her exploration on a Dante edition translated by Gárdonyi, containing illustrations that relied on the original images.¹⁴ Margit Koller also addresses the theme of memory, with her own family's history serving as her starting point. Projecting two separate threads of their story on one another, she ties family historiography to the past of the institution, and through her own person to its present as well.

In the period covered by the show, Alajos Strobl was a defining figure of the Hungarian Royal Drawing School and Art Teachers' College, later the Hungarian Royal College of Fine Arts. However, Strobl is also featured in the exhibition as a prominent sculptor of the era, not just as a young adult working as a paid model to make ends meet and finance his studies. His and his family's story, intertwined in many ways with that of the institution, are rendered in a documentary filmed by Manuel F. Contreras and Anna Peternák, with the help of Mátyás Strobl, grandson of Alajos. In another piece, Peternák uses the stereoscopic images taken by Strobl's wife, Alojzia Kratochwill, together with pictures by some unknown photographers, to showcase Strobl's studio, his works, the models for his sculptures and, of course, the technique

itself through which all of this is presented. Interestingly, by creating an illusion of three-dimensionality, the stereo photographs virtually give back the sculptures and other objects their spatial quality, which—as one of their main characteristics—had been lost due to the medial characteristics of photographic reproduction. The images are accompanied by commentary from Mátyás Strobl, who uses language to bring life to the silent and motionless scenes.

The 17th and 18th century saw the custom of the *Grand Tour* gain broad popularity, with affluent young Englishmen setting out from Great Britain to travel, for example, to Rome, where they would visit once lavish, monumental buildings—silent witnesses of ancient times. On a visit to Rome, Bence György Pálinkás started exploring how one-time structures became organically united with vegetation (ailanthus trees), with the flora gradually demolishing the buildings, while aluminum constructions were applied to counteract this. Two pictures (a photograph and an engraving) found in the collection of the institution, depicting different stages in the excavation and cleaning process, were elements central to Pálinkás's research.

Péter Pettendi Szabó's previously mentioned installation entitled *Slow Viewing* [*Lassú nézés*] is based on photographs showcased in the exhibition, from which he was able to select and enlarge seemingly insignificant details, thanks to the technology and photographic raw materials used in the past.¹⁵ The artist draws attention to apparently incidental and irrelevant minutiae that convey no substantial information and have no historical or cultural significance whatsoever. Although photography preserves such details as debris, in excess, as a surplus consisting of supposedly meaningless and pointless particularities, due to the conventional mode of viewing images—and especially the bizarrely short one or two seconds dedicated to images nowadays—those subtleties remain hidden, despite being present in the pictures. By substituting “Slow Viewing” with a technical solution and thus focusing our attention, Pettendi Szabó offers a crutch that again relieves us from the tiresome work of careful examination, but at least emphasizes the worth and importance thereof by confronting the issue.



Anna Peternák: *Stereo Cards*, 2018. Photographs by Alajos Strobl (1856–1926) and his wife Alojzia Kratochwill (1876–1964), as well as unknown photographers. The original images were photographed on glass plates, which have been partly damaged, and the pairs of images belonging together have been separated over time. The reconstructions are digitized versions of the original glass plates, joined in pairs, resized to fit the manual stereoscope standard, and then printed, thus again made viewable in stereo independently of the one-time viewing device. © Photo credit: Anna Peternák.

Evidently, it is this manner of viewing images (not only technical images, but especially them, as in their case the numerous minor subtleties present in the final picture are often captured without even the photographer being aware) that lends the pictures importance beyond their commercial value, making them precious in a different sense to those viewing in posterity who are capable of spotting the additional information they entail. The essence of this approach is the showcasing of memories against a richer and more complex backdrop, which—by creating a stark contrast—allows memories to be extracted from the gray and homogeneous cloud of forgetting.

¹ Závada, Pál. *Természetes fény*. Budapest, Magvető, 2014.

² Sontag, Susan. “Photographic Evangsels.” *On Photography*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977, p. 110.

³ <http://www.mke.hu/node/37925>; <http://www.mke.hu/fotomodel2/>

⁴ *PHOTO/MODEL. Images between Art and Nature*. February 9 – March 15, 2016, Hungarian University of Fine Arts, Barcsay Exhibition Hall, Budapest. (<http://www.mke.hu/node/36115>)

⁵ “As a means of copying, photography cannot be rivaled by painting—free-hand drawing, that is. [...] I am convinced that by replicating the original in reduced size with absolute fidelity, the photographer managed to convey all of Kaulbach's sentiments, which are indeed more precious than the copying artist's individual sensibilities.” In: Peternák, Miklós. *A felejtés emlékei Fotó/modell 2*. Hungarian University of Fine Arts, without date or location, p. 9.

⁶ <http://www.mke.hu/mintarajztanoda/konyv2-14.htm>

⁷ See Farkas, Zsuzsa. “BARABÁS MIKLÓS (1810–1898) / ... hiány, mit ecsetjök pihenése okoz?” *Fotóművészet*, no. 5–6, 2006. (http://www.fotomuveszet.net/korabbi_szamok/200656/asiklos_18101898?PHPSESSID=ca6fd4af04d7991b7967f86f6a8d541e)

⁸ In: Burda, Hubert, and Christa Maar, editors. *Iconic Turn. Die neue Macht der Bilder*. Cologne, DuMont, 2004.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Peternák. *A felejtés emlékei*, p. 9.

¹² Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Vintage, 2012.

¹³ Kittler, Friedrich. *Optical Media*. Polity, 2009.

¹⁴ Alighieri, Dante. *A pokol*. Translated by Géza Gárdonyi, Budapest, Singer és Wolfner, 1896.

¹⁵ Large-sized photographic raw materials (gelatin dry plates and later cellulose nitrate sheet films), together with the large format cameras necessitating the use of such bases, resulted in a photographic technique that makes it possible to produce high-quality (tonally rich and at times even sharp) enlargements of details using either the surviving photographs or preferably their negatives. The blow-ups thus created can essentially be considered independent images, equivalent to the prints enlarged (or sometimes copied/contact printed) by the one-time photographer from the negative exposed at the time on location.



ZSÓFIA SOMOGYI

The unimportant and the essential'

On the photographs of Ildi Hermann

IT IS DIFFICULT TO LOOK AT THE SERIES OF A PHOTOGRAPHER, WHO DIED YOUNG AND UNEXPECTEDLY, AND CALL THEM AN OEUVRE. THEIR ANALYSIS AND THE UNFOLDING OF THE ARTISTIC JOURNEY LEAVES US WITH A SENSE OF DEPRIVATION: THE SOBERING AWARENESS OF THE NON-EXISTENCE OF NEVER-BORN NEW TOPICS, NEW DEPTHS, NEW INTERRELATIONS. AND THE DEPRIVATION OF TRULY NEW, NEVER-SEEN IMAGES: "NAMELY, ILDI HERMANN IS CAPABLE OF WHAT ONLY THE BEST OF PHOTOGRAPHERS CAN DO: TO CREATE IMAGES THAT HAVE NOT EXISTED BEFORE."²

Ildi Hermann: *Our Daughters*, 2012 © Hermann Ildi



Ildi Hermann: *NHL*, 2007 © Hermann Ildi

Ildi Hermann's work was awarded by a myriad of prizes and exhibitions.³ She was acknowledged, valued, and she became one of the most talented artists of her generation. As many of her contemporaries, she also started off from the subjective documentary tradition. Her black and white images of people and their environment highlight well-captured moments of everyday life and their interactions with the author. Her photographs present scenes that condense general characteristics of certain places, lives, atmospheres, context, and/or micro-events captured in visual conjunctions, which may "only" create an amusing, or exciting, visual experience. Already her photographs taken at the Poprad Roma settlement⁴ show her composition skills and a touch of her creative empathy. One of the first more significant series is also created in this spirit: Hermann is selected from a pool of photographers to photograph the visual material of Ottó Bence's *Vision Avenue* [*Látvány körút*]⁵. The fifty feuillets of the book are accompanied by 70 photographs, providing for an intriguing interplay between the text and the image.⁶ The perspective, which will continue to be a kind of trademark for Hermann from this time on, first appears in her series *Milieu* [*Közeg*], which depicts "empty interior spaces evoking the 1980s, where geometrical order and symmetry are emphasized in the relationships between objects."⁷ These images present the self-contained order and universe of human-made spaces and their furnishing, their distinctive aesthetic qualities, and the materialization is made possible precisely within this perfect stillness and immobility induced by the absence of the human figure.

This continues to unfold in the series *In Milieu* [*Közegben*], where the spaces permeated by this same perspective are populated by objects, and the human figure creating/using them also appears, but, at this point, only as staffage. The person blends into the milieu: it is not the story or personality that matters (not even when the person faces the camera in a staged position). The figure points to how space and people (can) relate to each other. The figure's goal is not to override the spectacle, not to obscure our found and visualized world, but to further elaborate on it, adding or enhancing a new dimension: the dimension of absurdity. We are presented with surreal examples of the encounter between the two forms (milieu and person). The apparent informality and triviality of the staging conceal a susceptible composition, which finds and extracts⁸ those conjunctions in the given scene, which becomes interesting enough to become an image only via this strong gesture of emphasis. Our insignificant objects, which usually do not merit our attention, let alone our wish to capture them, gain a whole new framework here. While they fundamentally define our everyday life as sets on a stage, they rarely, if ever, appear as subjects of our gaze. This is the shift that Hermann is taking.⁹ And this perspective is so powerful that the mere viewing of many of Ildi Hermann's photographs is capable of shaping how we ourselves look at the world.

This is the fundamental visual language that will determine almost all works of Hermann for the years to come, while it will go through significant changes in terms of content. In contrast to the above, later series with the same or at least similar spectacles will seem to be loaded with more stern, sometimes utterly cumbersome substance at first glance.



Ildi Hermann: *Weekend Houses*, 2006-2007 © Hermann Ildi

The first one of these following the *Milieu* and the *In Milieu* is the series *Weekend [Nyaralók]*,¹⁰ where this visual world is expanded and perfected. The first part of the series *Weekend* submerges the viewer into the world of small uniform bungalows of Szentendre Island built in the 1960s and 1970s, which were furnished as islands of “possession” and “freedom” in the Kádár system by the vacationers, with worn-out furniture and objects they did not need at home but would be still good for the bungalow, thus preserving an impression of the era’s DIY culture as well.

Many of us spent summers of our youth and childhood here, and as such, these are significant places of remembrance, which have been in use ever since, thus conserving and maintaining the past – they simply continued existing under the aegis and within the framework of this past. Thus, the bungalows and the vacationers within appear in Hermann’s photographs in the parallel reality of an unexamined time and era that goes on in the dimension of everyday life.¹¹ The author structures the series in triads, which results in an exciting visual interplay, and enhances the process of interpreting the visual interrelations as patterns.



The floral porcelain plate on the floral tablecloth with the leftover stew and the remnants of the melon capture the essence of our summer holidays with their taste of Socialism, unchanged over the past decades, while the interplay between the colors and forms results in a peculiar composition. Although many of the images present the dwellers of the bungalows as well,¹² possibly right in the process of using the house, and we know that the given person compiled the space and the objects we see in the image, so they are impressions of his or her existence – the pieces of the triads still seem interchangeable. The uniform nature of Socialism was not only evident in the floor plans of the bungalows but also in the material and visual culture and the holiday habits as well, resulting in uniform memories.¹³ Hermann's representation of human beings is another aspect of her art, which provides a sound basis for analyzing her series. The perspective mentioned above, that is, handling the human figure as a kind of staffage, resurfaces in her later series, *Tattoos* [*Tetoválások*],¹⁴ and her last New York and London series¹⁵, and comes a really long way: from the human pattern we arrive at works with a very focused depiction of the person with each tiny momentum, and everything that is essential to and apprehensible about his or her story or personality.



Ildi Hermann: *NHL*, 2007 © Hermann Ildi

The *NHL* series represents a turning point in Hermann's art both in terms of the meaning of the objects and spaces, and in that the human figure appears as a specific person.

In 2007, following the birth of her daughter, the photographer was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, a relatively curable type of cancer. The illness, understandably, completely transforms Hermann's life; moreover, it overwrites a very significant chapter in adult life, which is very difficult on its own right as well: she does not get a chance to experience the often long and burdensome process following the birth of a child: that of becoming a mother. The anxiety after the birth of a child, caused by the responsibility and the burden of having to sustain another life, is intertwined with the struggle for her own life.

The series is presented in image pairs: they interpret and provide a framework for each other, which keeps us from falling instantly into the abyss of the emotions created by the dramatic moments depicted in the images.

And, to some extent, uphold Hermann too. Just as everything is reevaluated in a state of fearing death, and our gaze at the world is altered, so does creating photographs become a handrail for her during these months. It creates a distance and automatically calls in an "outside" perspective, just as the active subject of taking the photograph becomes the object of her own gaze. She does not only experience her own story from the inside, but for the duration of creating a visual diary, she can rearrange it as well. She can create the image that can be turned into a memory, creating a communicable narrative of the illness for herself and for us as well.¹⁶ The photographs depict seemingly ordinary moments: the apparently meaningless interiors, stills and genre pictures created with the perspective described above alternate with the images depicting dramatic, and often symbolic moments, places and accessories of the illness, so the former are constantly reframed and reinterpreted with the experiences related to the illness and the therapy.¹⁷



Ildi Hermann: *NHL*, 2007 © Hermann Ildi

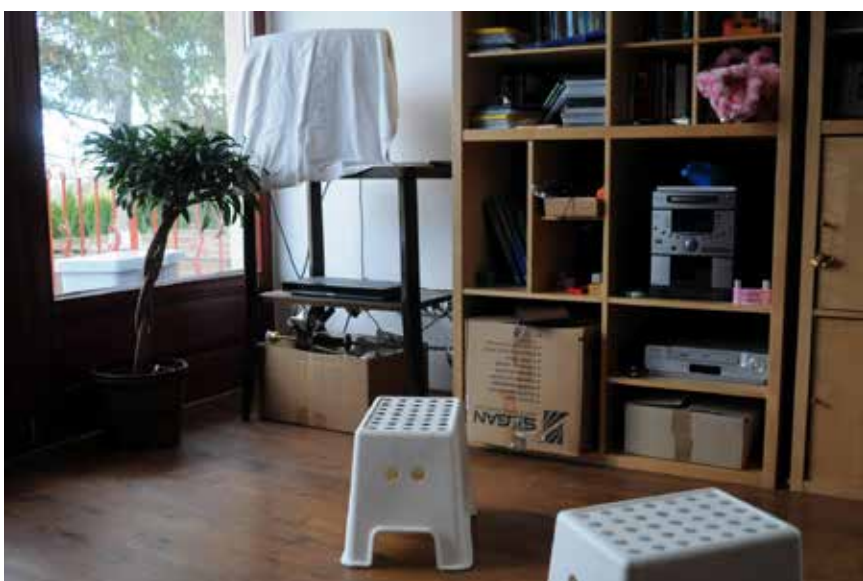
This is how the series expresses that between the extremities of hope and fearing death, the flow of everyday life gained ground, sneaked back because there was no other way.

One of the image pairs depicts the shaving of the head. This parting with the symbol of femininity is also a symbol of the life force dwindling away from the body, and it is, of course, one of the tropes of cancerous diseases too. A friend of Ildi Hermann did her the favor of doing the shaving for her so that she would not be left alone in the process. As the locks of hair – which had been framing the face, making its features more gentle, and providing a force field as well – fall down one by one, we see the emerging of an Ildi Hermann face, which is unknown, more stern, ascetic and exposed.¹⁸

A face of illness, pain and struggle, the face of someone who has been altered by these experiences inside and out.

The image pair that provides a condensed experience of the whole situation with a shattering power is where we see

her with her daughter. In the first image (on the left) the baby is shown from behind, with the feathery baby hair on her head, which she had hardly enough time to grow. She is held by her mother, who is looking towards the center of the image so that we can see her from behind as well – with the same hair. However, hers is like that for just the opposite reasons – with her, this is the sign of departure from life. They meet at one point of intersection. At this point, it is still a question, where each of them is headed. At the same time, their similarity and their postures both result in that we see them as one, as one inseparable entity. This feeling is enhanced by the pair of this image, which also depicts the two of them. Still, both of them facing us: the baby radiating life with every fiber of her body, with her mom smiling behind her, but hardly discernible, just a blurred shape fading away.¹⁹



Ildi Hermann: *3 Months 3 Days*, 2011 © Hermann Ildi

The series right after this, *3 months 3 days* [*3 hónap 3 nap*] also elaborates on a very painful topic.²⁰ It pays tribute to the baby of her friends, who passed away unexpectedly. Specifically, it explores the feeling of unspeakable desolation following the loss of a child: the stills and the empty spaces without human figures only start radiating the terror, freezing the family into a state of shock after learning about the background. Children's pictures on the wall: drawings of the baby boy's sister drawn on the day of his death. A box of pills – that was for the mother to help her milk to dry up. The photos of the covered mirror and television appearing in the series are the ones that provide a visual context beyond what we see.



Our Daughters [Lányaink] is Hermann's thesis at MOME,²¹ which brings her the attention of the wider public. It is partly due to the subject, despite that the work is not created under the aegis of the pink glaze laid onto the world of little girls. The series started at one of the most prominent moments out of the many surreal moments of living with small children: in a safari park for children, where they could explore giant cardboard animals, where you can say "There is my daughter in front of a huge, grey cardboard buffalo."²²

Perhaps this was the first time that, in a sense, Hermann's daughter became an image for her: this is where she looked at her with the kind of photographer's eye instead of that of a parent's, which was necessary for creating a work of art. She was sensitive to this unbelievably absurd world anyway: it recalled and activated her previously described fundamental approach of capturing and interpreting such situations as images.²³





Even if the photographs seem to present a dance class, a birthday party, an excursion, or an evening bath, it is all far from the ordinary or the celebratory, that is, from the moments we strive to capture in our private photographs. The photograph does not capture how sweet the little girls are doing ballet dancing with their tutus, but how their figures line up by the rail in an exciting pattern, providing for a special symmetry of movements. With the evening bath, the point is not to capture the sweetness of the child enhanced by the water and the foam, or this whole intimate or aggravating situation as such. Rozi, lying in the bathtub, turns into a kind of statue, with her red hair floating around her in the water, while the plastic toy animals are swimming in this sea of hair, arranged around her face, creating an utterly startling spectacle.²⁴ Thus, animals²⁵ have a special significance in this series, and not only at its beginning.²⁶ Specifically, because it is rather the eye of the photographer

and not of the mother, which predominates these images, we cannot clearly call this series a personal journal. Although they track Rozi's changes, details of certain events, and although the photographs would probably recall dear memories for the participants, the series would rather be interpreted as a montage of pictures of various types. It is a series of moments, which emerged from the flow of life as distinct images, or spectacles, regardless of the given subject, and became self-contained entities stepping out of the constraints of space and time. We feel that this is underscored by one especially peculiar piece of the series titled "Family in the Fog" [Család a ködben]. The family and friends on this excursion in the foggy, winter landscape surround Rozi like a protective circle in the background while she is standing alone in the foreground, looking straight into the camera. The beautiful spectacle of the figures dissolving in the fog leads us into a timeless reality experienced together.²⁷

Following *Our Daughters*, the table turns in *Finnish Remake* [Finn Remake]²⁸, and Ildi Hermann appears as a girl. The order seems logical. As a parent, one reinterprets his or her childhood and starts looking at oneself in a new context: whose story do I carry on? For creating Finnish Remake, she followed in the footsteps of an old holiday trip made by her parents. She looked up the scenes of their photographs, but she did not only replicate the gaze cast at these places, but she took her parents' place in the images. The image pairs are not entirely symmetrical, and the passing of time is indicated by a number of elements, like the stronger colors of the new pictures, as well as the changes in the environment and details. Like in the "find the differences between the images" games, our gaze is moving from one point to the other between the images to compare everything with the original. At the time of the parents' journey, the photographer was around the same age as her daughter at the time of creating this material. This pulls the continuity and connection between generations even tighter.²⁹

The series *Faceabout* [HátraArc] is her first photographic work that turns towards the subject of the Holocaust. As the still photographer of *Son of Saul*, she submerged herself in the atmosphere the movie-makers created.³⁰ The portrait series was created based on the concept of the director László Nemes-Jeles and cinematographer Mátyás Erdély,³¹ who gave her the Polish photographer, Tomasz Kizny's album, which included portraits of people sentenced to death in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, taken just before their execution.³²

The analogy was obvious, as those living in death camps were all sentenced to death, even if they could not know for sure how much time they had left and where exactly they would be killed after all. Hermann's three-quarter view, portrait orientation, a little larger-than-life-size portraits were taken of the actors and actresses playing the dwellers of the camp,³³ still in their costumes and with their make-up on, immediately after the shooting of the scenes, when they were still "in character," with the terror evoked by the scene still lingering in them, apparent in their faces, their postures, their eyes.³⁴ Looking at the series, one feels that these portraits actually stand for the images of those whose portraits could never be taken. People we will never get to know and never get to look at from up close. We have no way of knowing who perished there actually. Besides being deprived of their dignity, they were also deprived of their personality, taking away the possibility of remembering them.³⁵ At the same time, these portraits work as mirrors too: we might get the feeling that we could also be there in those images, which are, in a way, substituted by these photographs. The exhibition showcasing these portraits from the movie gave way to the reality of death camps besides this fictitious dimension, or forms of constructed remembrance:³⁶ in a separate room, there were three photographs, which were retrieved from a camera buried in Auschwitz.³⁷ The exhibition embeds these into a thick fabric: around them, on the walls of the room, we can see excerpts from notebooks buried in glass jars on the premises of the death camp.³⁸

Ildi Hermann: *Face About*, 2015 © Hermann Ildi



Ildi Hermann: *Face About*, 2015 © Hermann Ildi

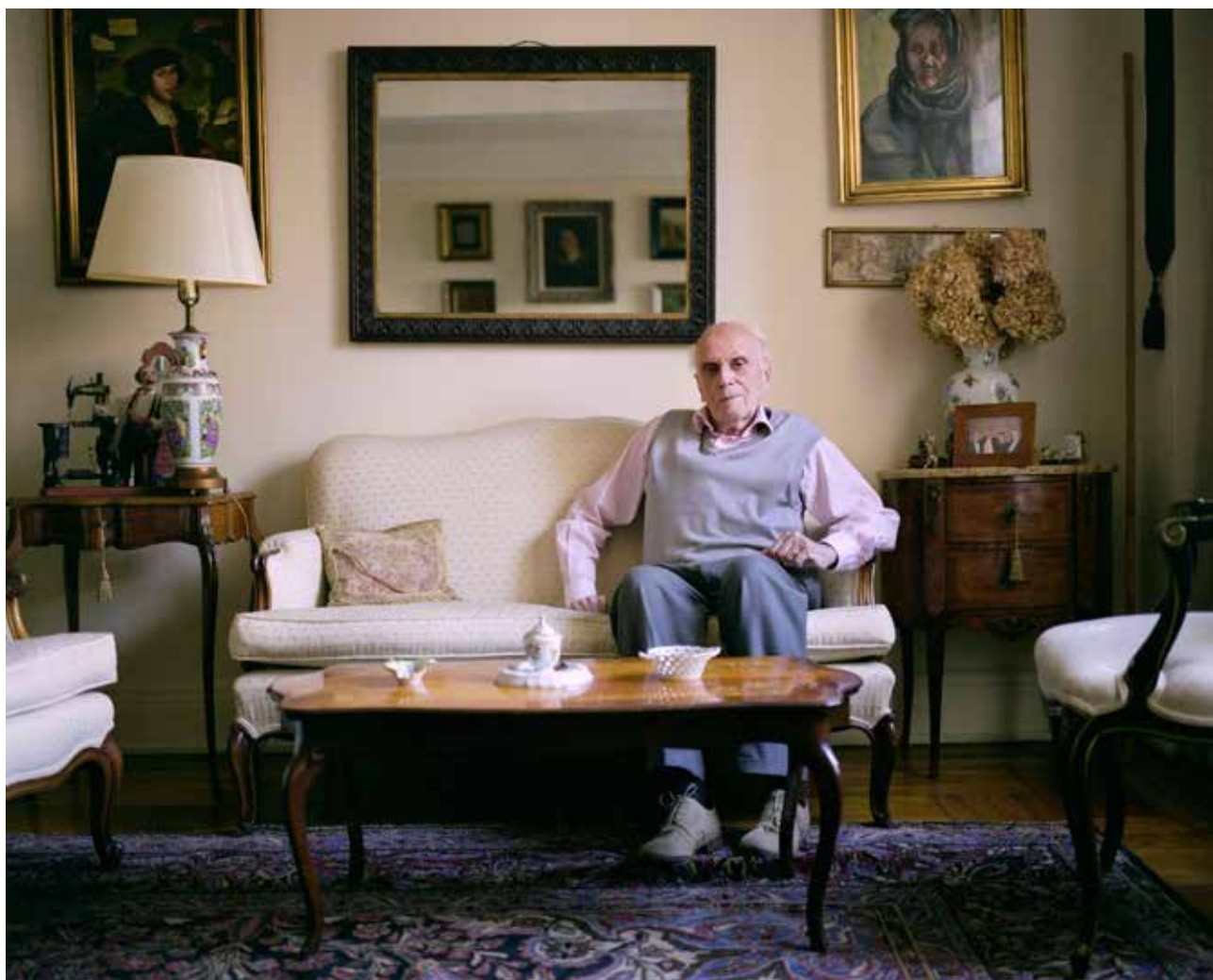




Ildi Hermann: *Missing Stories*, 2017 © Hermann Ildi

The horrendous texts describing the real world embrace the complementary images like a kind of mesh. And here, at these points of reality and remembrance turned into text, the series *Faceabout* relates to the following, last great series, *Missing Stories* [*Hiányzó történetek*].³⁹ This showcases Hermann's interviews with and portraits of Hungarian Jews who had survived the Holocaust and presently live in New York. The inspiration was partly personal: the absence of her grandmother's story gave her the initial push – she never asked her to tell it, thinking that there was enough time. There was not. While in New York, she noticed Hungarian flags on some synagogues,⁴⁰ but eventually, because these were rather closed communities, she did not work with Hungarian religious circles, but with people found with the help of acquaintances and

then through the recommendations of the portrait subjects. They do not know each other, but their stories and – interestingly – their homes, where the photographs were taken, do carry similarities. The former is due to the horrendous times they all lived through. The latter is partly because of the staging: the pictures were usually taken in their living rooms while sitting comfortably on the couch, that is, in a highlighted part of the apartment. It is exciting to see how much these interiors look alike: we can see well-situated, healthy people feeling well, living in a bourgeois milieu facing us through the camera. Hermann also created stills, where she had the opportunity, about objects that somehow connect the subjects to the memories, to their Hungarian past. But perhaps even these could not indicate the horror that the texts unravel.



Ildi Hermann: *Missing Stories*, 2017 © Hermann Ildi

In sharp contrast to the series *Faceabout*, here we can actually learn about some personal stories, we can look into some faces – faces, which could have been in the images of the previous series, or rather, the images they substituted. We could say we see people sentenced to death after their execution that never came to pass. It is a chilling, numbing feeling to read how near they came to it.⁴¹ And just like in the *Faceabout* portraits, Hermann did not photograph her subjects in action. They are looking straight into the camera, with no specific expression – the terror radiating from their eyes (*Faceabout*), and the weight of the gaze at the evoked past provides the essence of the portraits.

In this case, the memories of the survivors overflow the walls of the exhibition space in the form of printed-

out texts, completely covering the surfaces on which the almost life-sized photographs were laid out.⁴² The size and landscape format of the photographs enhanced the viewers' feeling of being present and sitting in front of the subjects. The text does not surround these images but covers up certain parts, which is also an allusion to that when generating our memories, creating our stories, and recalling these – momentums disappear and appear from and within them. The installation method modeled how memory creates context for the individual, how the person is upheld and outlined by his or her own story, which is there and operates even when the other person does not know all the details.⁴³

The rich oeuvre of Ildi Hermann, despite her young age, requires further analysis. These were not carried out in her lifetime,⁴⁴ partly because of the absence of a specific reason (a comprehensive exhibition, album etc.), and also because we believed there was still time. There was not.

Gabriella Csizek's words written of the *Our Daughters* series can be applied to the whole creative world of Hermann: "[...] there is no difference between the essential and the unimportant because both are parts of life, they are the process itself. After all, who could, at this moment in time, discern what will have proven definitive looking back from the future?"⁴⁵ Ildi Hermann knew what was essential and what was unimportant, and also that the two could blend, and the seemingly unimportant could become the most powerful vessel for significant experiences. And she did not only know, but she was also able to show this to us.

¹ The title originates in Gabriella Csizek's text, which is quoted and referenced in its entirety at the end of this article. I would also like to thank Gabriella Csizek for her help with writing this article.

² Mélyi, József. "Becsillanó Fény. Hermann Ildi: Lányaik." *Artmagazin*, 2012/6. pp 34–37. <https://www.artmagazin.hu/articles/nyomtatott/badbc005955fc620ba189faaed6984ef>. Accessed 2 March, 2019.

³ Including: 2006–2008. József Pécsi Photography Grant, 2011; main prize of the Photobiennale Dunaújváros, 2011; The grant of the Budapest Gallery to Helsinki, Finland, 2012; Lucien Hervé and Rodolf Hervé Award – special prize of the jury (*Weekend*); 2018 New York Asylum Arts Grant (*Missing Stories*); 2019 Capa Grand Prize Hungary (*For Last Survivors – Missing Stories of Hungarian Jews Who Stayed Home*). More: <https://capa-nagydiij.capacenter.hu/main>, Accessed 15 February 2019.

⁴ Poprad, 2002.

⁵ Bence, Ottó and Hermann, Ildi. *Látvány körút. Budapest az ezredfordulón*. Budapest, Palatinus Könyvesház Kft., 2003.

⁶ See: Dukai Nagy, Ádám. "Bence Ottó – Hermann Ildi: Látvány körút. Budapest az ezredfordulón." *Szépirodalmi Figyelő*, 2004/6. http://www.epa.hu/01400/01433/00017/pdf/04-6-035-Bencze-Hermann_Dukay.pdf Accessed 21 January 2019, and Somogyi, Zsófia: "Bence Ottó – Látvány körút – Budapest az ezredfordulón Hermann Ildi fotóival." *Fotómozaik*. March 2004.

⁷ Csatlós, Judit. "A nosztalgia nyomában. Hermann Ildi: Nyaralók, Dorottya Galéria." *Fotóművészet*, 2007/4. http://www.fotomuveszet.net/korabbi_szamok/200704/a_nosztalgia_nyomaban. Accessed 15 January 2019.

^{8a} However, taking a closer look, we can see that in contrast to fairy tales, it is more about reality: the objects stand out from their environment sharp and cold. After all, this is the photographic world of Ildi Hermann: not carved out of the world of tales, but cut out from reality, starting off from a different environment and arriving somewhere else, which is most cruelly presented in the series 3 months, 3 days." Mélyi: *ibid*.

⁹ It is not only Hermann, who photographs her surroundings this way, but we can see this approach most powerfully and consequently in her work. E.g., we can think of the early works of Péter Puklus, Enikő Hangay, or Judit Elek in connection with this photographic perspective.

¹⁰ *Weekend I-II*. The first solo exhibition from part I: Dorottya Gallery, August 21 – October 6, 2007. The second part included bungalows built on the water at the Oroszlány cooling pond, in the shadow of a still operating plant; in some cases, as panorama images, and in some cases as standard aspect ratio, standalone pictures, using a similar visual approach. See also: Horváth, András Dezső. "Hermann Ildi: Ott állt a lányom egy nagy papírbőlény előtt." *Fidelio*, 20 December 2012. <https://fidelio.hu/vizual/hermann-ildi-ott-allt-a-lanyom-egy-oriasi-sotetszurke-papirboleny-elott-55690.html>. Accessed 25 February 2019.

¹¹ "Yet, Ildi Hermann also creates a powerful contrast with the reality of our present by making the long-ago – and by many, rather loathed – serenity, apparent peacefulness, slowness, steadiness, that is, timelessness, palpable. Everything that lured the contemporaries of that era into a false feeling of safety, and what is completely missing, painfully for many, from our present life; all the things that were, under the given circumstances and within the existing system, premonitions of the certain end due to their inherent logic – which is, once again, ignored by an increasing number of people." Pfisztnér, Gábor. "Totális kikapcsolódás. Hermann Ildi Nyaralók című kiállítása." *Új Művészet*, November 2007, pp. 46–47.

¹² "The first series included images divided into three parts: the house, the owner, and a genre image from the interior of the bungalow." Horváth, András Dezső: *ibid*.

¹³ "The photography series and exhibition Weekend could gain significance because it carries the various approaches towards a certain era, and its remnants. These bungalows, together with the countless tools and accessories, bring such cultural strata to the surface, which exist in our memories, in our mind as well." Csatlós: *ibid*.

¹⁴ Klág, Dávid and Barakonyi, Szabolcs. "A strandon minden tetkó egyedi, de mindegyik ugyanolyan." *Index*, Nagykép https://index.hu/nagykep/2016/08/27/a_strandon_minden_tetko_egyedi_de_mindegyik_ugyanolyan/. Accessed 2 March 2019.; and Klág, Dávid and Ajpek, Orsi. "Oda van írva, hogy bűn az élet." *Index*, Nagykép, https://index.hu/nagykep/2018/09/18/nezd_ez_az_uj_tetkom/. Accessed 2 March 2019.

¹⁵ At the time of Ildi Hermann's death, there was a compilation of these in preparation on an on-line portal. Several photographs of the series were also published by Hermann on her own Facebook and Instagram pages.

¹⁶ Horváth, András Dezső: *ibid*.

¹⁷ "Isn't it rather that Ildi Hermann dispenses the objective and the subjective, the anecdotal and the strictly composed with astounding certainty? Moreover, she can do this in such a way that the familiarity of the various stations is maintained, making it possible to be immersed in the experience. We become attached to this unknown woman. We become concerned about her health. Yet, as the order of the images does not follow the narrative of the illness and healing, despite all its familiarity, the next stop is unpredictable. The pulsing of the objective and the personal, the familiar and the unexpected is condensed into an image pair and becomes scarring in its own right." In: Horányi, Attila. "Kiszámítható és kiszámíthatatlan határán." Introductory text. *Megfigyelések, Folyamatos Jelen VI. („Observations,” Present Continuous V)*

¹⁸ Besides the image pairs, she continuously creates self-portraits as well. These were only showcased at the exhibition created with the exceptionally beautiful and sensitive curatorial concept of Gabriella Csizek, where they were screened in a chronological order. These allow us to trace the slower processes of the transformation, which show the stages of her deteriorating health, and then her state during the therapy and after the recovery. The mentioned exhibition was showcased in 2012 in the Mai Manó House with the title *NHL/Private Images [NHL/Privát képek]*; it was a joint exhibition of Hermann and Judit M. Horváth. Horváth's series was visually an exciting counterpoint to *NHL*: more poetic, softer, more emotional, representing a different type of intimacy, putting a special emphasis on the apparent detachments of Hermann's series. See also: Somogyi, Zsófia. "Ahányan így együtt vagyunk. *NHL/Privát képek*." *Műértő*, May 2012.

¹⁹ "Perhaps, precisely because of the excision of people and objects, we can hear a tragic overtone also in the series *Our Daughters*, with the concept of transience hovering over everything. And, this feeling, which is actually rather a feeling than the result of an analysis based on the visual elements of the photograph, is involuntarily backed by the earlier series exploring Ildi Hermann's own, serious illness, where the reference point of life was also marked by the child." Mélyi: *ibid*. ²⁰ See the relevant Mélyi quotation cited in footnote 9 for a different context.

²¹ 2012.

²² Horváth, András Dezső: *ibid*.

²³ *ibid*.

²⁴ "The plastic animals left in the bathtub or floating among Rozi's curls capture moments from the flow of everyday life, which include multiple layers of meaning beyond the actual identification of the person and the situation. The little girl in the bathtub becomes a portrait, the animals floating among the



islands of foam constitute a still, carrying meaning beyond themselves. Each of the images is entirely surprising, even though they present well-known situations, ordinary actions, everyday objects, and familiar locations. In: Csizek, Gabriella. "Hermann Ildi fotósorozata. Lányaink." *Fotóművészet*, 2013/1. http://www.fotomuveszet.net/korabbi_szamok/201301/hermann_ildi_fotosorozata?PHPSESSID=5bdec882eafe9290ddac638e4f9fb67f. Accessed 10 February 2019.

²⁵ Horváth, András Dezső: *ibid.*

²⁶ "[...] the tiny plastic animals, which appear several times in the images, either floating in the water, or lined up on the edge of the bathtub, or even arranged in a genre image in the children's room, completely overturning the dimensional patterns. They are realistic and small, they seem to have their movement aimed at something, and so they fill the space around them. Beside them, the child is also engraved into a new reality: she becomes large. Of course, in this diary-like world there is no obvious pattern of dimensions or story to be unraveled, not even linearity: we see time in itself, stripped of its stories." Mélyi: *ibid.*

²⁷ "There is still one timeless image, which stands out from the others. In a misty landscape, probably on a trip, the child is standing in the foreground and loosely grouped behind her, as if coming towards the camera, there are six adults, men and women, in the fog. This picture is a little like the final scene of Pál Sándor's famous film *Football of the Good Old Days*, where Minarik, as the only moving figure, is trying to find his way among the people waiting motionless at the railway station. He passes by important figures from his life, who are standing there as if in a wax museum. Ildi Hermann's spectral, and at the same time intimate image also includes this time-travel between generations, as well as the wax museum-effect, while the movement is substituted simply by setting apart the little girl. We see an image emerging from the fog, which, in effect, could have been composed by anyone, but which, in the context of the series, is abruptly attributed a more complex meaning, placing the further photographs seemingly depicting a children's world at first sight into a more expansive temporal dimension. Mélyi: *ibid.*

²⁸ 2011.
²⁹ See also: Somogyi, Zsófia. "Közegek és emberek." *Magyar Lettre*, issue 84., spring 2012. (The text is a comprehensive presentation of all of Hermann's series created until then.)

³⁰ Which, despite all the superficiality, created such a strong atmosphere resembling the Auschwitz death camp that in the first few days of the shooting it made the photographer think about what all this must have been like in reality for her grandmother. See: Neményi, Márton. "'Nem mosolygott senki'. Így készültek a Saul fia portréi." *24.hu*, 15 December 2015. <https://24.hu/kultura/2015/12/15/nem-mosolygott-senki-igy-keszultek-a-saul-fia-portreil>. Accessed 2 March 2019.

³¹ The photographs were taken on the same medium, 35mm film, as the movie *Son of Saul*, which intertwines the reality of these two artworks in a very intriguing way, so that they complement and support each other even more powerfully. See, for example: Gabriella Csizek's curatorial text, <http://maimana.hu/kiallitasok/hatra-arc-portrek-a-cannes-i-nagydijs-saul-fia-cimu-filmbol/>. Accessed 2 March 2019.

³² Csizek: *ibid.*

³³ Specifically of the members of the Sonderkommando, which may be a distinct analytical approach for the future.

³⁴ "These photographs were taken in interim time, on a peculiar borderland. The actors are momentarily not acting, but they have not left their character yet, and it has not left them either. They become one with their character in the

movie and look into the camera together. Thus, the portraits open a window at the past, into the reality matching the characters, while they also exist in the created-constructed world of the movie. Their peculiar power partly stems from the artistic perpetuation of this ambivalence." Csizek: *ibid.*

³⁵ There are several international programs aiming to counteract oblivion. One outstanding example is the Children of Saul Memorial Program, which was started by the filmmakers and the Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives in 2018 with the mission to collect all available information on the Hungarian children who fell victim to the Holocaust. <https://www.milev.hu/blog/saul-gyermekei-emlekprogram>. Accessed 2 March 2019.

³⁶ See for example: Csizek: *ibid.*

³⁷ Hermann, Ildi. *Faceabout – Portraits taken on the set of the movie Son of Saul*. Exhibition at the Mai Manó House. November 22, 2015 – January 3, 2016. <https://2014-2018.maimanoarchiv.hu/en/kiallitasok/faceabout-portraits-taken-on-the-set-of-the-movie-son-of-saul/>. Accessed 2 March 2019. Curator: Csizek, Gabriella.

³⁸ Libor, Anita. "Nemhogy nincs vége, még csak most kezdődik." *Index*, Nagykép, 7 December 2015. https://index.hu/nagykep/2015/12/07/hermann_ildi_-_hataarc/. Accessed 18 January 2019. The texts were mostly painted on the walls by Hermann and Csizek.

³⁹ First exhibition: Hermann, Ildi. *Missing Stories*. 2b gallery, July 6 – August 6, 2017. Curator: Somogyi, Zsófia. Ildi Hermann started working on the compilation of an album from this series with the Scholar Kiadó publishing house. Following her death, this work will be completed with the coordination of Anna Fabricius, and the volume will be published already in 2019 (see this issue of *Fotóművészet*.) She wanted to continue collecting these stories: she received the Capa Grand Prize Hungary for 2019 with her project proposal titled *The Last Survivors – Missing Stories of Hungarian Jews Who Stayed Home*.

⁴⁰ Bihari, Ágnes. "'Megtisztelő, hogy elmondták nekem' - Interjú Hermann Ildivel." *Artportal*, 23 July 2017. <https://artportal.hu/magazin/megtisztelo-hogy-elmondtak-nekem-interju-hermann-ildivel/>. Accessed 12 February 2019.

⁴¹ "This time the subjects are real; their faces can reflect their own, personal stories. However, the covered-up texts become imaginary films, into which everyone can project their own familiar but put off world. The portrait format, large photographs of the Sonderkommando series and the landscape format portraits of the Holocaust-survivors living in New York, resembling paper prints, overlap in the eyes of the spectators, even more sharply accentuating the void." Mélyi, József. "A teljes kép és a hiány." *Élet és Irodalom*, MŰBÍRÁLAT - TÁRLAT - LXI. 30., 28 July 2017.

⁴² "If we see the installation on a picture, it is like huge pages of a book opening up, with the photographs just lying on them." Mélyi: *ibid.*

⁴³ Namely, the texts were not readable on the walls even at this size, but it was not intended that they would be. Due to their length and the difficulty of the content, the stories were available in a takeaway format, as a separate booklet.

⁴⁴ Hermann's exhibitions and materials were always discussed in a timely manner by experts (Gábor Pfiszner, Attila Horányi, Gabriella Csizek, Zsófia Somogyi), as well as in non-professional writings, recommendations. Presently, we do not know of any more analyses providing a comprehensive presentation of all the series, except for the one mentioned in footnote 30. In her article cited above, Judit Csatlós mentioned the series completed up until then (see footnote 8); yet, the one person who included Hermann's works created up to that given point in his deeper analytical works, referencing them to each other, was József Mélyi; see his writings also cited above (footnote 2 and 43).

⁴⁵ Csizek: *ibid.*

ABOUT A PORTRAIT

ISTVÁN LÁBADY: PORTRAIT OF ASZTRIK VÁRSZEGI, ARCHABBOT OF PANNONHALMA



István Lábady: *Portrait of Asztrik Várszegi, Archabbot of Pannonhalma* in the Archabbot Portrait Gallery of the Benedictine Monastery, 2019
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The portrait of Asztrik Várszegi, former Archabbot of Pannonhalma, was completed and installed in the Archabbot Portrait Gallery of the monastery in November of 2019. It was taken by István Lábady, a Balogh Rudolf Prize-winning photographer. My study was inspired by this portrait because it is the first photograph in the several-centuries-old portrait gallery. I will first discuss the importance of this fact, and then, for a deeper understanding of its significance, I will examine and compare the characteristics of painted portraits and photographs. Finally, in a section dedicated solely to the photograph of Asztrik Várszegi, I will explore the specifics of this work, while recapitulating the dilemma put forward in my study.

Why Photography?

Why is that a question? What objections could there be to having Asztrik Várszegi, the Archabbot of Pannonhalma, who resigned last year, portrayed in a photograph? The portrait gallery of mainly 19th- and 20th-century archabbots has included only paintings until now, but then, why shouldn't the first 21st-century image be a technical one? It can, obviously; there are countless examples of photographic portraits of presidents, monastic leaders, university rectors, corporate directors, entire theater companies, and graduating seniors in yearbooks. Today, nearly 200 years after the first photograph was taken, it is second nature for people to use photography to capture the human face. So it is definitely possible. The main question to be addressed is whether it is necessary. What strong arguments might have compelled the Hungarian Benedictines to have the leader of the congregation not painted, but photographed, for the first time in their history?

The simple answer would obviously be that this is what modern times demand. But modern times had already demanded that several decades ago – the portraits of many previous archabbots have been created using photography, and the past half century has seen a plethora of representative photographic portraits. If one is really considering doing things in the current fashion, they could just print out a smartphone photo that has been uploaded to Instagram and hang it on the wall. The point is, using photographs would have been a contemporary move years ago, and choosing to use this type of medium today is not really something new.

On the other hand, why should a portrait be done the modern way, especially a portrait of a monastic leader in an order founded 1,500 years ago and established in Hungary over a millennium ago? And does modernity matter at all for an image that, with a little luck, will be on display for centuries, in ages different from ours, in which this technology will have been long considered obsolete? But if the simple answer, modern for the sake of modernity, does not work, what else could be a more compelling response? What is photography capable of that painting is not? What is important enough that it could compensate for the loss of what a painting is capable of? Or is this too much speculation already? Am I overthinking a decision which was no more than “giving it a go?”

Let us see how this argument plays out. An improvisation (which may even be seen as playful) would not be surprising from a monastery that has been involved in, or rather deliberately entered, a number of unconventional situations over its many centuries of existence. Neither running schools nor education are part of St. Benedict's rule, yet at the beginning of the 19th century, the monks undertook the task of restarting a high school in Győr previously founded and run by the Jesuits; and how convenient was it when, at the dissolution of monastic

orders in 1950, only the four monks that ventured into education were allowed to stay. Then again, having businesses in cultural and pilgrimage tourism is not part of the Benedictine life either, yet Pannonhalma took this route with the support of substantial EU funds.

Can it be inferred then that the “trial and error” mentality is no stranger to them? It is clear that a different calculation is needed to assess whether cultural tourism is a viable and appropriate option for the abbey than the one needed to determine whether the memory of a superior of theirs should be preserved via photography; but these calculations are not independent of each other either in the context of the establishment's millennial history. Calculations must be a priori unusual in an abbey that has continually existed in Hungary since the death of Joseph II (which is also proven by the series of portraits). So a sassy “why not?” looks like another possible answer. But while possible, it does not relieve the critical observer of the task of examining what a photograph is capable of that a painting is not; or what might a portrait lack if it is not painted; and why could a photograph be worth it, given these considerations.

The Painted Portrait

Besides fitting in the traditional mode, a painted portrait possesses two important properties provided that it is relatively well-rendered. The first one is connected to time; more precisely, to the time of execution. Creating a portrait without the painter intensely watching their model for a long time, scanning their physiognomy and physical constitution, is hardly possible. Furthermore, painting itself also takes up a fair amount of time – the translation of the body, the head, and the face into brushstrokes by hand complements the observational work and the time consumed by portraitist eyes. And there is something else worth mentioning that is another important feature of painting – by scanning and turning the images into brushstrokes, the painter somehow appropriates the model. Not in the sense that the painter's style will dominate over the subject's appearance, as he either has a style or he does not, but it is the painter's focus and controlled movements that create the figure on the canvas, the paper, or the wood.

There is a very important consequence of this prolonged attention and work, which is perhaps the third important feature of paintings – it takes a great deal of effort and/or artifice to make a painting (especially a portrait) seem natural. The random and the momentary are usually not part of the expressive language of paintings. Instead of the contingent, it is the general that appears in the painted image. But that general is not equal to the universal human; instead, the artist captures a version of the model's image that emerged in their mind while contemplating them. It is the essence of the model, which, due to the specific temporality of the process, escapes

the moment to become timeless – but not ageless, as the outfit, the environment, and even the painter's style will inevitably place the model in a specific era. Still, it will exceed time, as if made for eternity.

But what does eternity mean here, for it is surely not to be taken in the theological sense, but in the context of creating (visual and fine art) and observing portraits? For the model, it means that there will be an image bearing their features far beyond their lifetime, and the lifetimes of their descendants, relatives, and other forebearers. For most of us, this period spans about four or five generations, or 100 to 120 years – which is easy to envision, hence considered the foreseeable future. Anything five, 50, or 500 years beyond that exceeds our comprehension, and is thus the equivalent of eternity. Most people do not care about this kind of eternity – at least in terms of images. They are, rather, interested in the appreciable future, and when it comes to portraits, how they will live on in the memory of their loved ones. We do not really know what one will see in our portrait, and what they will think of it and about us (our face, body, attire, posture, and gesture), provided that it still exists, say, 320 years from now.

It is different for historical families, though, in whose tradition a gallery of ancestors has occupied a privileged place for centuries, thus they have first-hand experiences outside museums and archives of faces looking at them from the distance of time. The situation in monastic communities is quite similar, since the portrait gallery of the Benedictines of Pannonhalma has been in existence, and expanding, since the 1800s; and even includes a couple of old archabbot portraits that survived the dissolution of the order by Joseph II. As in the living traditions of aristocratic families, so too in the Order (or at least in some regions and monasteries) do their members' memories go back centuries – they know who the people in the portraits were, what they did for the family or the community, when they were weak, and when they were strong.

These portraits and the legends accompanying them maintain a tense relationship, as later observers can report on why people look the way they do in the portraits and can tell with whom and how the portraitist was more generous than the subject would have deserved based on their life. From this point of view, the Benedictine portraits are not made for eternity, but for the future that will inevitably come, despite occasional cataclysms, as they may somewhat influence the perception of elders in future Benedictine generations.

The image seen in this portrait is certainly not a literal one. It is composed of memories and traditions, extant writings, chapters in the order's history about the person, and, from more recent decades, photographs, perhaps some video recordings, and, of course, this archabbot portrait. Archabbot portraits are shaped by three gazes from three conceptual angles (but as to what

kind of concepts these were, and when and to what extent they shaped the portraits are questions for historians).

The first one is the portraitist's (how they saw the physical and spiritual being of the given archabbot); the second one is the model's (how they want to see themselves); and the third belongs to the congregation, which, being the client, provided not only the financial but also the intellectual framework for the portraits. Even if a portrait is every archabbot's due, the picture is part of the homage to the person, expresses the community's pride in their leader and, occasionally, their bragging about him. Concurrently, it can be a very subtle account of his achievements and virtues, as well as his limits.

These ideas strongly influence the choice of place, attire, formal decorations, facial expression, and the gaze of the archabbots in the painted pictures. Consequently, the painting dissociates the subject of the portrait from the moment, drags it out of time, and thus is able to show the general aspect of the model beyond the unintentional and capture his essence (if it is done well). This is, to varying degrees, affected by what the model wants to look like and how the painter sees them (and, of course, by the painter's talent). These images are mostly made for eternity beyond the horizon of the present day, as their direct impact is hardly conceivable beyond a couple of generations. At the same time, portraits of members of historical families and monastic orders (and rulers and politicians under certain conditions), which are portraits fitting into a living tradition, have the future (and the present in retrospect) as a horizon instead of eternity; and the model-portraitist relationship is complemented with the gaze of the client community.

The Photographed Portrait

The creation of a photograph, unlike a painting, happens in an instant. However, that is not entirely true. First of all, in order to take a photograph like the one István Lábady has taken of Asztrik Várszegi, one has to carry out massive studio preparations or, as happened in Pannonhalma, create a whole studio on site using backgrounds, lights, and tripods. To do this, the photographer needs to dream up the visual environment in which they want to show the model, as well as the size and aspect ratio of the future image; the composition is thus designed in the preparatory stage. The size and ratio can be customized during post-production as well. Besides eliminating flaws, this phase is also about saturation, hue, and contrast adjustments, and pottering about the details of the picture as with a painting. And even though the actual image – capturing light beams reflected by the body on a photosensitive surface – is shot in a fraction of a second, there is almost never one single image taken, but several dozens of images in a single session, and there can be multiple sessions. For the portrait of Várszegi, the Archabbot sat for three sessions.

In conclusion, although it does take an instant to collect and capture the reflected light, the complete process of image production still takes up a good deal of time. In certain cases, it can be even longer than described, since the preparatory phase may be preceded by a lengthy field inspection to get to know the subject, their surroundings, colleagues, friends, and lifestyle. This is what happened with the Archabbot. After accepting the commission, Lábady spent six months preparing, including a three-day visit to Pannonhalma, not counting his years at the Benedictines decades earlier, being an alumnus of the Pannonhalma school. The composition was formed during this half-year period.

The photographer can therefore prepare for the portrait, and create his own image of the person, which will be dependent on the subject's surroundings and the special perception the client-community holds of the person, his vocation, his position, and, more broadly, his life, virtues, and failings. This collective view manifested through conversations and formal and informal situations unravels the past and present of the model as well as how the community wants future generations to see him. As for the model, he can also play an active role in outlining his own image, with or without words, to the photographer during the photo-shoot or in the preliminary phase. Painting and photography are thus two parallel and completely symmetrical progressions making our initial question even more urgent: Why did a photograph have to follow years of paintings in the Archabbot Portrait Gallery of Pannonhalma?

The general explanation is related to the specifics of the two media – photographs and paintings work differently. A photographer may spend as much time as a painter creating a piece, and the photo might not be made in an instant after all; yet this, the reality of the moment, is what justifies the existence of the photograph. Of course, it is usually just an illusion that the photograph is a snapshot of the momentarily reflected light – since not only composite images but also portraits can be compiled of dozens of shots during post-production – but this illusion is an inseparable part of photography, and this is what no other medium is capable of. There is no painting (except maybe those that seek to capture a single gesture) that can create the illusion of the reality of the moment; and, in turn, photographic images that give up this reality/illusion are certainly not photographs at all. They are definitely technical images, they may have been taken with a camera, but they are not photographs. The essence of photography is the illusion of the reality of the moment, the illusion of the “it was.”¹ This reality of the moment (even if it is an illusion) is what ensures the singularity of the view, that is, in contrast to the painting, the subject of the photo does not appear on a certain level of generality or as a type

of themselves. The reality of the moment lends a unique and one-time presence to the model, a presence that can also be very fragile.

The Portrait of Asztrik Várszegi

István Lábady styled the portrait of Asztrik Várszegi, former Archabbot of Pannonhalma, to conform to the paintings in the portrait gallery in several respects. The image has a frame which is approximately the same size as the others; the face of the Archabbot is also similar in size to the faces in the other portraits, and he is seated, as are several other archabbots in their portraits. Asztrik Várszegi wears his black monk robe like many of his predecessors; however, unlike most, his robe is not adorned with decorations acknowledging his merits – he only wears a very simple archabbot pectorale.

Perhaps the first striking difference between this photograph and the paintings is that the cross has slipped aside on his robe, which is a situation that would simply not be appropriate in a painting. But it is not just the cross that has been slightly displaced – Archabbot Asztrik also tilts his head, and barely combed wisps of hair curl out from under his small round zucchetto. All this further strengthens the sense of unintentionality as well as the presence of a personality that transcends all formalities. This is accompanied with a smile that constitutes the most definitive trait of the slightly tilted head, welding the lips, the cheeks, and the gaze together. Perhaps serene is the most accurate word to characterize this smile, which is complemented by the focused attention in his eyes.

In this picture, the Archabbot seems to be present for his community today and in the future, with his attention, with formalities overlooked, and with indulgent (?) and forgiving (?) serenity. The power of the image of Archabbot Asztrik granted by photography is this attentive and serene presence, which at the same time may turn into its opposite in another era; at another point in the future of the Order nothing precludes monks from asking what the Archabbot was so fixated on, and why on earth he had to smile. These questions may also be valid today. However, paintings generate such questions much less frequently.

István Lábady did his best to portray the Archabbot's presence and at the same time give distance to it. He placed the photograph in a very simple-yet-characteristic frame. Designed by Anna Breuer, it is made of the same black walnut as the furniture of the renovated church of the abbey, including the archabbot's chair in which Asztrik is sitting. (With this chair, the photographer references Father Asztrik's activity rebuilding Pannonhalma, and, indirectly, to the renewal of the congregation after the change of regime, of which he was also the leading figure.)

In addition to the choice of frame, the color scheme, obtained using light filters, is also an instrument of elevation. The coldness of the blue light is compensated for with a yellow-filtered lamp, brightening the scene (it is worth observing how these two filters color the white of the background; this is most conspicuous to the right and left of the Archabbot's elbow). The two shades relieve the monotony of the pure white backdrop. This, together with the unexpected cropping (clipping the Archabbot's hands in half) and the slight displacement of the model from the frontal-hieratic position, give a subtle dynamic to the photograph. These distinctly compositional decisions all add to the distancing effect (even if I previously associated the posture with informality).

The photographer deals with the image as an image, his work being more than simply conveying the Archabbot's presence as transparently as possible. This visual complexity is what separates the portrait of Archabbot Asztrik from the multitude of other technical images, and even from

those that were taken of him. For the biggest downside of a photo portrait is that, because of the medium, it can easily become banal, disappearing into the deluge of digitally created and reproducible images spreading on social media and other channels, and swiftly becoming mundane. Leonardo's Mona Lisa is a common example: It has been seen by everyone so many times in so many forms that it is almost impossible to really 'see' it. But this is not entirely true – if someone gets a chance to study the real image up close, or even without the protective box, and has patience and practice in observing images for a long time, they will see something completely different from the overused media image. They will see a painting - a painted wooden board with a peculiar surface and texture hardly imaginable and perceivable in reproductions. This is also often the case with old photographs (which is why vintage prints are important), but for recent prints, the difference becomes almost negligible.

István Lábady: *Portrait of Asztrik Várszegi, Archabbot of Pannonhalma* in the Archabbot Portrait Gallery of the Benedictine Monastery, 2019
© Lábady István © Pannonhalmi Főapátság / HUNGART © 2020



In order to avoid the banalization of the portrait of Archabbot Asztrik, the commissioning community decided that only a single copy would exist, hung on the monastery wall, and the only image that should go public must be of the framed photo shown within the actual interior of the gallery. Ergo, although the image is digital, the clients try to maintain the status of a painted image. This is understandable, even if success is doubtful for many reasons. It is not because the Archabbot's portrait, cropped and downscaled, can still make it to, say, Instagram, but because the original one does not have much more to look at (apart from its size and placement in the portrait gallery). So you can shut the image away, but this gesture might not help to preserve its aura². Its visual complexity, however, stands up against the banalizing effect of the image flood. Still, whether it can withstand the other threat to digital prints - becoming a poster - remains to be seen. The thick wooden frame is sure to protect the image in a way – who would put an IKEA poster on their wall in such a frame? On the other hand, the white mat is a risky solution. The use of the white square is justifiable, as a full-bleed image might have made the thickly framed portrait look stuffy; at the same time, the fact that the mat and the wall are of the same color eventually evokes the appearance of posters. And it does not change a thing that the shot was taken with one of the most professional medium format cameras currently available (Phase One XF with 150-megapixel iq4 digital back), and printed on fine art quality paper.

Taking stock of what has been said so far and asking the initial questions again, the following can be concluded: No, it was not necessary that the first portrait of the Archabbot of Pannonhalma in the 21st century be a photograph. However, it was possible, and so the question arises - should the next entry in the Pannonhalma portrait gallery be a photograph, too? The answer to this, however, unfolds as a rather complex and virtually insurmountable dilemma with criteria such as generality and tradition vs. uniqueness and informality vs. banality and fragility vs. contemporary medium and serene presence. But if it is so, the best reaction appears to be to play it cool and skip the question altogether with the boldness of "let's try." It is even better to pair this boldness with perseverance, because it is only knowing the outcome of four or five other archabbot photo portraits that it will be possible to determine whether the risk of banality and fragility was real or merely imaginary. In other words, even if at one time it was not necessary for the Pannonhalma archabbot portraits to be photographs, it surely is now and will be in the upcoming decades.

Asztrik Várszegi was born into a bourgeois family in Sopron in 1946. After graduating in 1964, he applied for admission to the Order of Saint Benedict, where, after completing his theological studies, he was ordained as a priest in 1971. Between 1971 and 1976 he studied History and German at

Eötvös Loránd University, where he also obtained a PhD degree in 1997. He taught at the Benedictine high schools in Győr and Pannonhalma, as well as at the College of Theology of the Order in Pannonhalma, and was Rector of the Central Seminary in Budapest for a short time. He was ordained a bishop in 1989, and in 1991 was elected the Archabbot of the Benedictine community of Pannonhalma.

Through three terms, or 27 years, he was the Archabbot of Pannonhalma and the Prelate of the Hungarian Benedictine Congregation. He repeatedly stated that he had two main aspirations as the superior of Pannonhalma. One was to preserve Pannonhalma for the future, continuing the work that was started 1,000 years ago under the leadership of the first abbot, also named Asztrik. The renovation of the Saint Martin Basilica of Pannonhalma in 2012, carried out according to a design by John Pawson, took place as part of the fulfilment of this goal. The guiding principle of the renovation was to revise the 800-year-old edifice within its historical context to ensure that it could provide a home to the contemporary monastic community – with a liturgy and identity renewed after the Second Vatican Council – after many years marked by provisional subsistence since 1965.

The second aspiration of Archabbot Asztrik was to make the Archabbey and the Hungarian Benedictine Congregation economically independent. The introduction of viticulture and wineries, the opening of restaurants, the development of monastic products, the publishing of books, and the strengthening of religious and cultural tourism all served this purpose, saving the order from exposure to outside influences. In 2018, Asztrik Várszegi was succeeded by T. Cirill Hortobágyi in the archabbot chair, whom Asztrik involved in the leadership of the Benedictine community for many years to prepare him for the role, just as his predecessor, András Szennay did decades earlier.

István Lábady graduated from the Hungarian University of Applied Arts in 1997 (today's Moholy-Nagy University of Arts and Design). Since then, he has become one of the most sought-after Hungarian fashion and commercial photographers. He was a regular contributor to the legendary *The Room* magazine. His clients include Aeron, HBO, Toyota, BMW, HM, and Mastercard, among others. He is a portraitist of artists, actors, and musicians. He received the ministerial award of photography, the Balogh Rudolf Prize in 2009. He lives in Budapest with his wife and five children.

¹ Roland Barthes: *La chambre claire: Note sur la photographie* [Camera Lucida: *Reflections on Photography*], 1980

² Walter Benjamin: *A műalkotás a technikai sokszorosíthatóság korában*, trans. Andrea Kurucz & József Mélyi, 2003. http://aura.c3.hu/walter_benjamin.html

FLÓRA BARKÓCZI

The Present, Future and Past of a New City: Plan D, Dunaújváros



*Plan D: An Exhibition by the Studio of Young Photographers in ICA-D
ICA-D, Dunaújváros, until March 19, 2019*

Members of the Studio of Young Photographers went to Dunaújváros and cast their eyes upon the city. They combined fieldwork with an exploration of the local cultural, intellectual, and historical heritage. We visited the ICA-D to see the outcome of their project.

D-terv

A Fiatalok Fotóművészeti Stúdiója kiállítása

A Fehér Vera, Fromm Balázs, Kiss Richárd, Lázár Dóri, Martinkó Nagy Tibor, Németh Domonkos Tamás, Pólya Zsombor, Regős

Kurátor: Cséka György, esztéta

A „D-terv” a városról, annak múltjáról, jelenéről, jövőjéről. Letapogató térkép. A város jelének, képeinek, hangjainak olvasása, nyombagyús, történetes, relatív „jár”: az 1950-es években születte a semmiből, egy ideológiai vámt, vagy inkább utópiai természetűnek, jelennek körülírása. Felosztások és motívumok, kirozgatások, újítások, elvezetnek. Egy másik topográfia.

A „D-terv” a Fiatalok Fotóművészeti Stúdiója több mint fél éves projektjének eredményeképp jött létre. Céljai között szerepelt, hogy inspirációs forrásul Dunaújváros történetét, sajátosságait, kísérletet tegyen a város valószínűleg rejtett rétegeinek feltárására. Szektori alkatot a megszokott, sok esetben a topozsokot használó Budapest-központúsággal, rá szeretett volna mutatni a fővárosi alig egy órára távolra, kiküszöbölve vizuális és gondolati teret.

A nyolc napos munka vagy inkább kísérletzés során a projektbe bekapcsolóztak meghívottak: Kaszás Tamás képzőművész, Fehérvári Zoltán és Nagy Zoltán fotóművészek, Németh Z. Mária költő, kritikus, esztéta és Balázs Ákos Dunaújvárosihoz kapcsolódó, inspiratív előadásait. Az előadásokat kísérte a város bejárása. A későbbiekben pedig az egyéni tervek, ötletek közös kidolgozása, megvalósítása. A folyamat eredménye a kiállítás, amely a város elvezetését, terét, képét mutatja meg Dunaújvárosról.

A projekt a Fiatalok Fotóművészeti Stúdiója és a Kortárs Művészeti Intézet közösen együttműködésében, a Nemzeti Kulturális Alap, a Magyar Fotóművészeti és a Modern Művészeti Központok támogatásával valósult meg.



Márk Martinkó's work entitled *1:10,000*. photo credit: Benedek Regős.

Despite all efforts, we seldom look beyond Budapest's visual art scene. When we occasionally do so, our attention is perhaps mostly drawn to the towns located along the Danube, starting from Győr, through Szentendre, and southwards to the Pécs region, with that route also including Dunaújváros, the city hosting the exhibition *Plan D [D-terv]*, and serving as its focus. Formerly called "Stalin City," Dunaújváros—home to the Danube Ironworks—has been a pivotal meeting point for artists since the 60s. It gained significance in the art world thanks partly to the Dunaújváros Steel Sculptor Workshop and Symposium, which was organized every few years between 1974 and 2000; functioning as an international event starting in 1983, when foreign artists were first invited.

The establishment of the ICA-D (Institute of Contemporary Art – Dunaújváros) in 1997 as a successor to Uitz Hall, in a museum building designed by Péter Juhász, marked a milestone in the cultural life of the city. In the years that followed, experts such as Livia Páldi, Zsolt Petrányi, János Szoboszlai, and Franciska Zólyomi worked towards realizing the institute's guiding principle—formulated as part of the founding concept—namely, that the ICA-D should "integrat[e] the activities of the fine artists and applied artists of Dunaújváros into the national and international art scene through the exhibitions of the Institute" (source: ICA-D website). Therefore, it is not just statistical likelihood that has resulted in a considerable number of artists from Dunaújváros becoming defining figures of contemporary art, including Tamás Kaszás, Zsolt Keserue, Tibor Horváth, and Gyula Várnai (not to mention musicians and actors such as Tibi Kiss, Livius Varga or Ervin Nagy). They exerted a great

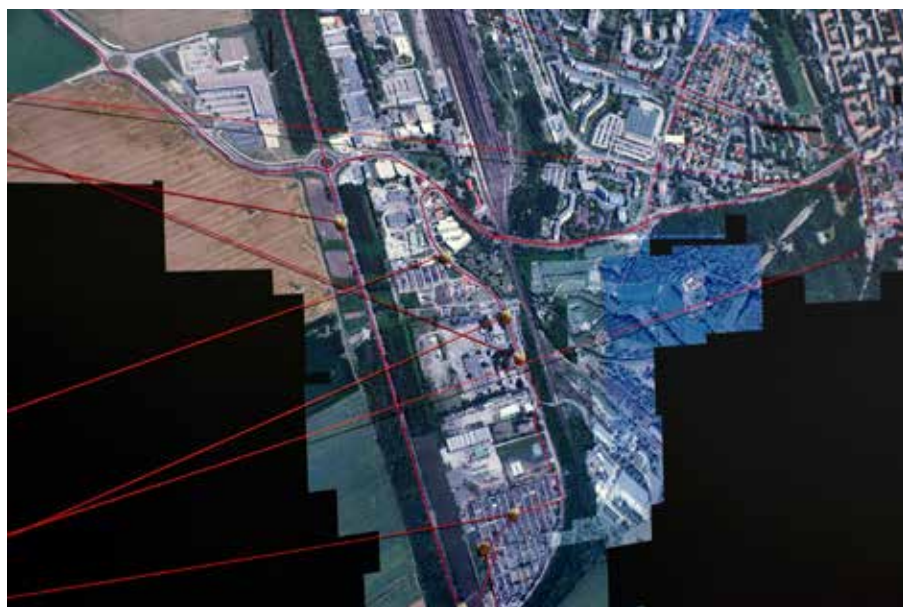
deal of influence upon the city's cultural scene in its persistent attempts to reinvent itself and its art mediation strategies. The Dunaújváros Photo Biennial, organized three times between 2007 and 2011 (but discontinued in part due to the crisis unfolding in 2010, contributed to the integration of the Hungarian photography landscape.

The current exhibition aspires to draw on such traditions by showcasing the works of nine members of the Studio of Young Photographers, an organization representing young photographers at the start of their careers. The creations on display are grounded in fieldwork conducted as part of a program launched for Studio members in March of 2018, during which applicants studied, with the help of lectures by subject experts and workshops, the cultural, intellectual, and historical heritage of Dunaújváros. The exhibit, curated by György Cséka, is the result of those efforts. It presents how participants, who remained active throughout the project, explored—both artistically and physically—questions, ideas, and problems related to the past (primarily the works of Balázs Fromm, Márk Martinkó, Tibor Nagy and Benedek Regős); the present (mostly from Vera A Fehér, Richárd Kiss, Domonkos Németh, and Zsombor Pólya); and the future of the city (focused on Dóri Lázár's work); while also establishing new points of connection. Upon entering the exhibition space from the street, visitors are welcomed by Márk Martinkó's *1:10,000* and Vera A Fehér's *Star Map [Csillagtérkép]*. Although the two works embody separate concepts, their formal similarities would allow for their interpretation as a synchronized installation. Martinkó conjures up the operation of the Danube Ironworks with an installation



consisting of a recording of industrial noise and a 3D maquette of the city. Imitating a city, the maquette consists of prisms with identical square bases but varying heights, which thus lend the rendering its dynamic structure and creates a sense of a fictional metropolis. Although the allusion to monumental skyscrapers makes it evident that the work is not a model of Dunaújváros, the industrial design and repetitiveness of the piece nevertheless evoke an association with the Steel City. Vera A Fehér's *Star Map* approaches the city's anatomy from a different angle, with Dunaújváros's street plan serving as her starting point for rethinking its structure, using her own body and vigor for the creation of a new map. Reflecting on the socialist past of what was once Stalin City, the artist walked the streets following the lines of an imaginary red star, capturing

Vera A Fehér: *Star Map*, 2018, photo credit: Benedek Regős.



her itinerary with a smartphone's satellite-based position tracking system. The outcome is a map (colored red) somewhat different from the creator's original plan as well as several photographs, which can be seen in the exhibition as part of the *Star Map* installation and the series entitled *Variationen zu einem Thema*. Vera A Fehér's five-pointed star concept has reverberations of a number of avant-garde artworks that focused on the interpretation of the red star in the 70s, including Gábor Attalai's *Negative Star* [*Negatív csillag*] (1970–71), Sándor Pinczehelyi's ephemeral piece entitled *Star* (cobblestone) [*Csillag* (utcakö)] (1972), and Gyula Pauer's *Plan with Red Eyeglasses* [*Vörös szemüveg terv*] (1971).[i]

Vera A Fehér: *Star Map* (detail), 2018, photo credit: Benedek Regős.



Tibor Nagy: *Imprint*, 2018–2019, photo credit: Benedek Regős.

Tibor Nagy's *Imprint* [*Lenyomat*], a product of research carried out in the archives of the daily paper *Népszava*, also offers reflections on Stalinist traditions. A study of Dunaújváros's past inspired the artist to explore the human and social ideals of the Stakhanovite, a worker in the former Soviet Union who was exceptionally hard-working and productive. Having been a socialist model city created from nothing, Dunaújváros aspired to become a prime example of sovietization, with the power structures that controlled media propaganda playing a dominant role. One part of Nagy's artwork is composed of details from reproductions of newspapers from the archives, featuring Stakhanovite portraits published for propaganda purposes. (The display of Stakhanovite portraits in isolation, stripped from any individuality, calls to mind the governing theme of Tibor Nagy's instagram project *999_golems*, which articulates criticism of the capitalism-fueled selfie society of our present.) Another focus within the image collection consists of representations of Lajos Kugler, a Stakhanovite worker of the Diósgyőr Metallurgical Works, whose three portraits appear set against a red background. In the first picture, a detail from Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin's (ed.) *Short Biography* (1949) serves as the frame for a silhouette of the worker's portrait. A second silhouette is filled with an excerpt from an account detailing Lajos Kugler's life ("Ranking first among the best, Stakhanovite Lajos Kugler was a distinguished roll-train foreman"), while the third portrait is a blown-up reproduction of Kugler's photograph published in *Népszava*. Through his investigation of portrait photographs, Tibor Nagy sets out to analyze the socialist vision for society, while also inquiring into the possibility of deconstructing that ideal.

The focus of Benedek Regős's photo installation entitled *Offset* [*Kiegyenlítés*] is István Kiss's erstwhile public statue of Lenin, which stood until 1990 on what was formerly Lenin Square (present-day Városháza Square) and has been on display at the Intercisa Museum—primarily a collection of archaeological artifacts—in Dunaújváros since 2003. Regős based his piece on photographs held at the Intercisa Museum depicting the Lenin statue being torn down in 1990. Placed on view in a separate exhibition space, the installation is centered around two images projected onto one another, showing Lenin's left fist and open right hand, respectively. Fusing the two gestures, the composite of the projected layers projects the power once epitomized by the statue—a representative symbol of socialist Dunaújváros—with this effect further enhanced by the scale of the installation. The small-format photo blow-ups lined up behind the projection show the process of pulling down the statue, placing at center stage the people participating in the feat rather than the sculpture itself.

Benedek Regős: *Offset* (detail), 2018, photo credit: Benedek Regős.



Benedek Regős: *Offset*, 2018, photo credit: Benedek Regős.





The past and present of the Steel City, as well as the co-existence of the two eras, serve as the theme for *A City Built of Steel*, a series by Balázs Fromm. The photos on display are part of a larger project born out of Fromm's desire to explore the past and present of socialist industrial cities established according to plan after 1949 and specializing primarily in heavy industry. The series specifically addresses the changes post-Soviet cities had to undergo following the change of regime regarding their production strategies, the plant closures necessitated by the new economic system, and the resulting phenomenon of rampant unemployment.

Balázs Fromm: *A City Built of Steel*, 2018,
photo credit: Benedek Regős.



Richárd Kiss's multimedia installation entitled *Transmutation* [Transzmutáció] delivers four artworks found in the Dunaújváros Statue Park into the exhibition space through a virtual transformation realized with the help of AR technology. Black, plinth-like pedestals feature sculptures: József Seregi: *Dimensional Sculpture* [Térplasztika], 1974; Ildikó Bakos: *The Moon Cart* [Holdszekér], 1989; Mihály Schéner: *Spiral Hussar* [Csikóhal huszár], 1985; György Galántai: $\frac{1}{2} X=V$ (Felix=Victoria) [$\frac{1}{2} X=V$ (Félix=Viktória)], 1979 via reproductions available on Google. Integrating a smartphone into the installation as an AR scanner, the onlooker needs to direct the camera of the device onto each set of photographs in order to see the three-dimensional version of the given sculpture on the phone's display, which can be walked around and viewed from all angles, though in a rather amorphous rendering, as the images are rather under-reproduced. In addition to highlighting the tension between artworks put on view in public spaces and showcased in museums, Kiss's piece also draws attention to the possibilities and limitations associated with technology, insofar as the sculptures and their virtual replicas are interpreted in disparate visual systems, with differences beckoning to something beyond the use of augmented reality.



Richárd Kiss: *Transmutation*, 2018–2019, (AR technology: Máté Barkóczi), photo credit: Benedek Regős.

Richárd Kiss: *Transmutation* (detail), 2018–2019, (AR technology: Máté Barkóczi), photo credit: Benedek Regős.



In his series *Performing Better* [Jobban teljesít], Domonkos Tamás Németh presents an imprint of the city through the documentarian's lens, revisited by means of image manipulation. Németh contrasts the campaign slogan "Hungary is performing better" with everyday sights in Dunaújváros. By reworking photos—each capturing a detail of routine city life—along the lines of hyperbole and multiplication, he arrives at a three-legged cinema-goer, a monumental dog waste bin and a man with two penises, among others.

Domonkos Tamás Németh: *Performing Better*, 2018, photo credit: Benedek Regős.



Dóri Lázár: *City for the Future* (detail from the series), 2019, photo credit: Benedek Regős.

Dóri Lázár's piece *City for the Future* [*Város a jövőnek*] is a participatory art project—the artist organized a drawing contest in Dunaújváros among students in the first four years of primary school, with the theme being how the children imagined their city in the future. Lázár's goal was to generate reflections on former Soviet utopian visions for the city, while also encouraging the children to rethink Dunaújváros as an urban space. The drawings were assessed on the creativity of the depicted "urbanist idea," not on the quality of artwork. The pictures from the children that were deemed to be the most innovative became the basis for the artist's own creation: "I digitized the selected works to create vector graphics, which I then had engraved onto an iron sheet made in Dunaújváros, thus overwriting notions of the past with the children's ideas." (A one-day pop-up show organized during the exhibition will display those drawings.)

Granted an exhibition room of its own, Zsombor Pólya's work consists of a total of 691 photographs displayed across three walls, with the images—taken between 2018 and 2019—showcasing the entire range of artwork available in Dunaújváros. With a focus on visual arts, *Inventory* [*Készlet*] features public sculptures as well as pieces from the ICA-D collection and the Intercisa Museum. Coupling his characteristic conceptual approach with museological research work, Zsombor Pólya has created something of a *Wunderkammer*, offering insights into the curatorial past of Dunaújváros.

Plan D is notable not only for tackling the past, present, and future of Dunaújváros through a problem-centered artistic perspective, but also for featuring works from the Studio of Young Photographers—an organization with a complex history and no self-owned exhibition space—in a museum. In light of the measures seen in Hungarian cultural policy and the limited opportunities available to creatives on the fine arts scene, it is of utmost importance that more exhibitions similar to this one be hosted outside of the capital. The show reminds us all that in addition to the Plan B's in Budapest, *Plan D* is likewise worthy of our attention.

[i] For more on the topic, see: Fehér, Dávid. "A negatív csillag. Megjegyzések Attalai Gábor konceptuális művészetéhez egy kamarakiállítás ürügyén." *Balkon*, Jan. 2011, pp. 18-22.

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Zsombor Pólya: *Inventory* (detail), 2018,
photo credit: Benedek Regős.



BIOGRAPHIES – ARTISTS

André Kertész (1894–1984, born Andor Kertész) Hungarian-born American photographer. In his early years, André Kertész worked as a stockbroker, then served in World War I, in the meantime photographing people and places wherever he went. He moved to Paris in 1925, where he spent his time with other Hungarian emigres, including Brassaï for example. In his photographs, he captured everyday life and its minutiae in an unclassifiable style, often characterized by humor or a dreamlike quality. His favorite theme was Paris, but he also shot portraits and still lifes. In 1936, he traveled to New York with a one-year contract, but could not return due to World War II, and thus spent the remaining part of his life there. Through his photographs, he invented his own unique universe, and within it, the language of modern photographic vision. His lyrical images are defined by an intertwining of subjectivity and modernism. Kertész's deeply humanist and personal, but also universal images have something to say to all of us.

Máté Bartha (1987) visual artist. He obtained a master's degree in Visual Communication at the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design in 2011 and in Documentary Directing at the University of Theatre and Film Arts in 2019. In 2018, he was awarded the Capa Grand Prize Hungary. His short film entitled *Bajnok* ["Champion"] earned him the special prize at the 2018 Budapest International Documentary Festival. In 2019, he received the Recontres d'Arles Louis Roederer Discovery Award for his series entitled *Kontakt*. Bartha addresses social issues in his art, relying on ambivalence as the central structuring principle of his works. With a documentarian's perspective and a creative method grounded in observation, he uses a visual language that often gives rise to a sense of being

staged. Instead of constructing an accurate illusion of reality, with each of his images, Bartha leads the viewer further into uncertainty or offers new interpretations of the subject matter under exploration.

Tibor Gyenis (1970) visual artist, photographer. Having completed his studies in metalsmithing at the Pécs High School for the Arts, from 1988 to 1992, he went on to learn at the Janus Pannonius University's Institute of Arts. After obtaining his degree, he attended the Art Master School of the same university until 1995. Following his graduation from the Master School, he worked in Hannover through a Haus am See creative scholarship, then in Geneva through a scholarship from the Galerie Attitudes, and then traveled to Berlin for a two-year study stay. Since 2000, he has participated in symposia and art residencies, and he is the founder and organizer of the Déli szél ["Southern Wind"] art camp in Krapanj, Croatia. His first solo exhibition was on show at the House of Arts in Pécs in 1992, and it has been followed by regular solo and group exhibitions in prestigious galleries both in Hungary and across Europe. His works have been recognized with several grants and awards, including the Munkácsy Mihály Prize in 2010. Gyenis's art integrates familiar biological processes into historical and fictional imagery, relying on the logical extension of basic anthropological or zoological concepts for the creation of novel pictorial and spatial situations. The freedom and richness of his figurative fantasy are defining features of his classically balanced compositions, which are also characterized by an expressive use of material.

Ildi Hermann (1978–2019) photographer. From 1997 to 1998, she studied at South Trafford College in Manchester, UK. She obtained a degree in Hungarian

and Cultural Management at the Teacher Training College of Eötvös Loránd University in 2002. She completed the Kontakt ["Contact"] Photo Art School training in Budapest between 2000 and 2002. From 2002 to 2004, she worked as a photojournalist for the weekly magazines *Magyar Narancs* ["Hungarian Orange"] and *168 Óra* ["168 Hours"]. In 2002 and 2004, she took part in the Poprad Summer School of Photography in Slovakia through a scholarship. She was a member of the Studio of Young Photographers between 2004 and 2007. She started her master's studies in Photography at the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design in 2010. From 2002, she worked as a photographer in various film productions, including Peter Greenaway's *The Tulse Luper's suitcases* and László Nemes Jeles's feature film *Son of Saul*. In 2006, she became a freelance photographer. In the past decade, her photos have been exhibited in Vienna, Moscow, and New York. In 2012, she was awarded the Lucien Hervé Prize for emerging photographers, and in 2019, she was a fellow winner of the Capa Grand Prize Hungary 2019. She died in January 2019 with tragic suddenness. Her uniqueness lay in her wry humor, her empathy, her profundity, and her aptitude for the absurd, which surfaced in her photographs regardless of whether she captured silent interiors, perplexing groups of objects, everyday happenings or exceptional moments.

István Lábady (1969) photographer. In the 1990s, he worked as an assistant in New York studios, then earned his master's degree in Photography at the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design in 1997. Working as a fashion and advertising photographer, he completed commissions for several renowned brands, and shot editorials for *The Room*, *Pep*, *Elle*, and *Glamour*. Resulting from his original intention to become a cameraman before engaging with

photography, Lábady's visual language was shaped by a clearly distinguishable cinematographic approach, with his works being saturated with the chromatic atmospheres of film noirs and thrillers. The recurrent topics in his practice are urban and natural landscapes, interiors, and portraits, which he usually presents using stark lighting, meticulously staged, yet spontaneous-looking compositions and bold colors. His work was recognized in 2009 with the Balogh Rudolf Award.

Dóra Maurer (1937) visual artist. She completed her studies in 1961 with a major in Painting and Graphic Arts at the Hungarian College of Fine Arts. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, she predominantly created conceptual photographic works that often examined the linguistic nature of visual meaning. In line with the artistic ideas of the time, these works can either be interpreted as a documentation of performances that took place without an audience, or as images that were always meant to be two-dimensional. From 1975 to 1977, she led the study circle Creativity Exercises at Ganz-MÁVAG with Miklós Erdély and later as part of the InDiGó Group (1981–1983). Alongside her own creative praxis, her pedagogical and organizational/curatorial work is also important. Thanks to a grassroots reform, she began teaching at the Hungarian College of Fine Arts in 1990. She has been active in a number of genres and media, and aside from paintings, she produces graphic works, photographs, films and installations. Employing geometry, color theory and various theories of perception, her series are at once playful experiments and scientific observations. Her works have been recognized with the Munkácsy Mihály Prize in 1995 and the Kossuth Prize in 2013. From 2019 to 2020, she had a major retrospective exhibition at the Tate Modern.

Péter Tímár (1948) photographer. He earned his bachelor's degree in Architecture at the Budapest University of Technology in 1972. It was during his university years that he first ventured into photography and had his first photo exhibitions. At the beginning of his career, he was interested in photography mainly as a visual art, but later, in his series of photos and essays, the documentary function of photography came to the foreground. His *Grief-series* (1983) revealed the lack of tribute in the execution of funerals. He also shot a large photo-series on tattoos in various Hungarian prisons. In the meantime, he was also a photojournalist and a photo editor of the cultural journal *Magyar Szemle* ["Hungarian Review"], and from 1990 onwards he was the editor-in-chief of the Hungarian quarterly magazine *Fotóművészet* ["Art Photography"] for 26 years. He has played a significant role in reforming photography education in Hungary, and his articles on the topic have also been influential. In 1996, he was awarded the Balogh Rudolf Award.

Zsuzsanna Ujj (1959) photographer, performer, songwriter, and rock musician. She is a self-educated artist who debuted with her first exhibitions and first concerts concurrently on the *New Wave* underground scene that unfolded in the early 1980s. She has been the first Hungarian female artist to organically combine visual art and alternative rock music in her career. In Ujj's oeuvre, visual art, music, written texts and poetry are present synchronously, often intertwined. The visual world and message of her early performance photos, mostly made in the 1980s, are not illustrations for her contemporary poems and texts, but engender an equally powerful, independent world. Ujj's works touch upon the core and depth of (human and womanly) existence in sensuous

ways that often seem to be brutal, sometimes employing metaphorical means. Her works were presented at a comprehensive exhibition entitled *Gender Check* at MUMOK Vienna in 2009, and a few selected pieces of hers were featured in *A Bigger Splash: Painting after Performance* at the Tate Modern in London in 2012–13.

Tamás Urbán (1945) photojournalist. He studied at the Journalism School of the National Association of Hungarian Journalists (MÚOSZ), where he was taught by Éva Keleti and Tamás Féner. He started doing photography in 1961, working as a photojournalist for the communist magazine *Magyar Ifjúság* ["Hungarian Youth"], the daily newspaper *Pest Megyei Hírlap* ["Pest County News"], the monthly periodical *Ifjúsági Magazin* ["Youth Magazine"] and the German *Stern* magazine. He was awarded a grant to research the history of Hungarian police photography. In 2018, he received a Lifetime Achievement Award for Photojournalism. He was one of the few people in the socialist era who showed—and was allowed to show—the negative sides of society and the system. He did so with very high quality, artful images, which bear witness to an undeniably positive approach. Therefore, he could shoot photo series showing abortions, the juvenile home in Aszód, drug-addict youths, prisons, fatal accidents and ambulances, and everyone else who found themselves on the periphery of society. From 1988 to 1994, Urbán followed and captured the life of a man known as the Unwanted Butterfly. Entirely covered with tattoos, the Unwanted Butterfly was an unusual sight in Hungary, who spent half of his life in prisons but was also comfortable on the Budapest underground scene. The pictures portraying him were put on display at the Capa Center in 2020.

BIOGRAPHIES – ARTISTS

Manó Vajda (born Mór Weisz, Manó Vajda from 1900, M. Pál Vajda from 1920, 1874–1945) photographer. The government of the Hungarian Soviet Republic organized a march on May 1, 1919, and published a 36-page photography album of this event a month later. The album was edited by Manó Vajda, who was a photographer and also the leader of the Photo Propaganda Department at the time. How did the city look like on May 1, 1919? Who participated in the march? How did people dress and behave? What programs were organized? And more importantly, how did photographers capture these events? What pictures were included in this publication, which served propaganda purposes? These are the questions discussed in this study.

Tibor Várnagy (1957) visual artist, gallery manager, curator. As the founder and manager of the Liget Gallery since 1983, he has conceived and arranged over 400 exhibitions, with experimental genres (performance, experimental photography, intermedial endeavors, New Wave art) being in the focus of his exhibition program. Since the 1980s, he has been a representative of the so-called alternative art scene and has also actively pursued fine art photography. He is a founding member of the artist collective *Hejettes Szomlyazók* (*Substitute Thirsters*) and participated in the group's shows between 1984 and 1990. He draws, occasionally paints, and creates collages, objects, and installations, with experimentation and social sensitivity being defining characteristics of his artistic activity. He has been involved in several periodicals and publications as editor and author and is a regular writer of critiques. He has run his own photography blog since 2006 and his own video blog since 2009. His art has been regularly showcased at exhibitions since 1985, and his works have earned him numerous awards and fellowships.

One of the earliest specialized museums in Europe, the **Budapest Museum of Ethnography** is considered to have been conceived on March 5, 1872, when János Xántus (1825–1894) was appointed head of the Ethnography Department of the Hungarian National Museum. The Budapest Museum of Ethnography, one of Europe's most prestigious social science museums, houses more than 200,000 ethnographic artifacts, coupled with a unique archive of photographs, manuscripts, folk music recordings and films. In addition to its incomparable collection on Hungarian folk culture, the museum holds the largest body of material on foreign cultures in the country and is also an important resource for researchers of contemporary cultural studies.

PHOTO/MODEL 2: MEMORIES OF FORGETTING was an exhibition organized by the Library, Archives and Art Collections of the Hungarian University of Fine Arts (HUFA) and the Doctoral School. The Hungarian University of Fine Arts has been uncovering and processing its Art Collections for over two decades, in parallel with ongoing research on the history of the institution. The University regularly makes the results of this undertaking accessible to the public and to scholars in the form of exhibitions, publications, and on its website. This show can be regarded as a continuation of the exhibition held in 2016. It explores the following questions within the context of the Art Collections: Who used photographs, who took them –or had them taken–, when, how and why? Who at the Hungarian Royal Drawing School (the predecessor institution of the HUFA) was engaged in photographic activities? What did they think of this new medium? What was it good for and what wasn't it suitable for?

The Studio of Young Photographers was founded in 1977 and has been operating since as the affiliate of the Association of Hungarian Photographers. The Studio is a professional organization for young artists dealing with photography as a medium of expression, with its activities including showcasing the portfolios of its members, organizing workshops and lectures, and offering its members publicity through international and local programs. It aims to assist its members in finding their true artistic selves and provides them guidance in launching their professional artistic careers.

Cover photo:

Tibor Gyenis: Details from the **Ten Superfluous Gestures**, 1999, lambda print on wood, 50x60 cm

Back cover photo:

Máté Bartha: **Kontakt**, 2018.

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