

**IDE
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AND
ART
WORKS**

**NATIONAL
GALLERY OF ARTS,
TIRANA / 2016**

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**A SELECTION OF WORKS
FROM THE COLLECTION OF
LUDWIG MUSEUM, BUDAPEST**

**NATIONAL
GALLERY OF ARTS,
TIRANA / 2016**

LUDWIG MUSEUM
Museum of Contemporary Art
Kortárs Művészeti Múzeum
www.ludwigmuseum.hu

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Relations with European visual art institutions of primary stature and importance have been a constant and unbroken priority for the Albanian National Gallery of Arts following the fall of communism in 1990. This is a natural reaction if we keep in mind that, during the second half of the 20th century, Albania was a member of an ideological bloc different in its priorities, challenges, and orientation from the majority of the European countries—including the countries of the Eastern Bloc as well, with whom, on a theoretical level, we should have had a common platform in arts. The position of Albania shifted towards unknown territories, resulting in a prolonged isolation with long-term consequences, from which the country is coming out—with difficulty—as of today.

The ambition to make up for lost time concerning the discourses and complex developments in European and American art history of a period of nearly 60 years, has been a great and continuous challenge for everyone. Numerous leaders of the Albanian cultural and artistic life made their contributions over the years to build strong and enduring relationships with prestigious European partners. Our look, however—and not only of the politicians but of the artists, too—turned exclusively to the West. My opinion is that this has been the situation in almost all the countries of the former Eastern Bloc. Then, slowly and gradually, we began to rediscover the region around us.

On a personal level, it has been a particularly great pleasure to lead the Albanian National Gallery of Arts during a period when the relationship with Hungary, a historical partner of Albania, has reached an important peak in the visual arts as well. In 2014 we hosted the first solo exhibition of a contemporary Hungarian poster artist in our gallery. This was then followed

by a trip to Budapest, due to an invitation from the Ludwig Museum – Museum of Contemporary Art, to look into the possibility of having two exhibitions—the one in Tirana showing contemporary Hungarian art and the art of the 20th century, and the one in the Ludwig Museum showing a selection of Albanian art after 1990. I am really glad that this challenge managed to cross the threshold from a plan on paper to actual exhibitions.

Ideals and Artworks – A Selection of Works from the Collection of Ludwig Museum, Budapest, the exhibition that opens at the Albanian National Gallery of Arts, fills a very important gap in informing the Albanian audience about what was happening in other parts of Europe while we looked almost exclusively either in the direction of Russian Socialist Realism, or, after 1990, westward. The curatorial selection, on the one hand, shows the fracture between the Hungarian Socialist Realism and those artists who refused to follow the art clichés of the time, and on the other, presents the evolution of this approach following 1989, by revealing a wide repertoire of artistic expressions and concerns of different generations of Hungarian artists. In this regard the display opens a window onto a reality similar to ours, with which it has a direct dialogue; this does make it very valuable to us. The fact that it establishes a close and hopefully long-term relationship with the Ludwig Museum turns the exhibition into one of real historical value.

Artan Shabani
Director
National Gallery of Arts, Tirana

In June 1989, shortly before the political transition, in a period of political, ideological, and economic thaw that already signalled the end of the Cold War, Aachen-based art collectors and industrialists Peter and Irene Ludwig entered into an agreement with the Hungarian state about the establishment of a new museum, to be called the Ludwig Museum. The couple selected the founding collection of the new institution from important groups of works in their possession, contributing classical modern pieces (as those of Picasso), American Pop Art, which forms a significant part of the collection, and several works from the Soviet Union and East Germany, which Peter Ludwig had bought during his official visits in the 1980s, as a part of his mission of cultural policy. Shortly after the foundation of the Budapest museum, the Iron Curtain collapsed on the Austrian border, and then the Wall in Berlin, indirectly bringing about the success of Ludwig's mission.

The Ludwig Museum in Budapest became an independent institution in 1996, changing its name to reflect its new responsibilities, becoming the Ludwig Museum – Museum of Contemporary Art. In accordance with the vision of the Ludwigs, we undertook to collect and represent the progressive traditions and the latest developments of visual art in the region. This is a museum whose collection contains no works that would represent socialist ideology, Socialist Realism, or the official policies of pre-1989 times; only works of a uniformly high quality, which either follow up on neo-avant-garde thought, or reflect on important social issues from the 1990s onwards. This is the only one among the contemporary art museums of the former socialist countries that represents the development of the non-official (underground) public discourse in art in Hungary and East-Central Europe.

Here I cannot go into details about the diversity of the work undertaken by Ludwig Museum. Fully aware of the demands of our time, we made several initiatives that became practices to be emulated both in Hungary and internationally. As a museum, we seek to represent paradigm shifts in recent contemporary art, of which the selection of this exhibition provides a succinct illustration. We are a centre for training in contemporary museum education, and an exchange hub for techniques and technologies for the preservation and restoration of media art. We are available to sister institutions with professional advice.

There are 17 Ludwig Museums in the world, all established by the Ludwigs, though their collections run a wide gamut, from prehistoric art to historical applied art.

Dedicated supporters of the arts, the Ludwigs made it a permanent task of these institutions to present their collections to an audience as wide as possible, and to research contemporary visual art in their regions, and even beyond. Our exhibition in Tirana is the result of a professional exchange: at the same time as the National Gallery of Arts in Tirana presents Krisztina Szipőcs's selection from our collection, the Ludwig Museum in Budapest stages an exhibition of contemporary Albanian art. Albania and its art scene have been a revelation for us. It did not take long to realize how dynamic the development of contemporary artistic life is in the country, while the very small selection from the Ludwig Museum's collection offers an insight into the diversity of contemporary art of Hungary.

Our relationship to this region has been restricted to the context of the Balkans. We owe our appearance in Albania, above all, to the Hungarian embassy in Tirana, who have enthusiastically connected us to this leading institution of the city. We wish to express our gratitude to Ambassador Antal Heizer, Counsellor Judit Galambos, and Péter Pócs, who had a solo exhibition at the National Gallery of Arts, and gained professional insights into the operation of the institution. We are also grateful to Péter Fitz, retired director of the Museum Kiscell / Municipal Gallery, who helped us a great deal to establish professional links.

This exhibition could not have come about without our meeting with the great staff of the National Gallery of Arts, who were enthusiastic about the idea of an exchange exhibition from the start. We are grateful to Director Artan Shabani for the opportunity, and to Chief Curator Genti Gjikota for his professional contribution to the exhibitions.

We hope visitors to the National Gallery of Arts will find this exhibition interesting, and feel encouraged to see its sequel when they visit Hungary.

Julia Fabényi
Director

Ludwig Museum – Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest

Ideals and Artworks

A selection of works from the collection of Ludwig Museum, Budapest

In the second half of the 1960s, some young artists started emerging in Hungary, who were creating art independently of the central ideology and the state's art policy, joining the international movements of the time, in the spirit of artistic freedom and current trends. Still active today, these members of the neo-avant-garde generation laid the foundations of later endeavours with the tools of geometrical abstraction, pop art, or gesture painting. By the early 1970s, the criticism of the regime and of Socialist Realism was represented not only indirectly—in style and in the artists' exile to the second public sphere—, but also through actual symbols and gestures. Conceptual, photo-based works, art actions and performances often made well-known ideological and formal topoi—symbols of the workers' movement, the figure of the worker and the artist—and thus indirectly the regime itself subject to scrutiny and criticism.

The complex and often impenetrable social and political changes of the early 1990s in Eastern European countries—including Hungary—brought about a trend of old and new doctrines and life ideals, from individualism through consumerism to reawakening nationalism or religiousness, in the dissemination of which the media—most of all television—played a significant role. The new generation of artists emerging after 1989 could start their career without ideological and formal constraints, and in the spirit of thematic and stylistic pluralism, addressing questions of gender, national or religious identity, historical and art historical tradition, and the basic questions of living as an artist, the relation of life and art. This decade was characterized by intermedia, conceptual thought, and the renewed popularity of video and photography. The present day, the second decade of the new millennium is pervaded by an increasingly strong sense of crisis, which calls for new forms of activism and critical thought in art, simultaneously with and contrary to strategies of introversion and isolation.

As the texts written for the individual works will also show, there are certain themes that run through the entire exhibition, and also reflect on the venue of the display as well as the special collection of the National Gallery of Arts in Tirana. Such is the theme of the controversial relationship between social utopias and “existing socialism,” the issues of reality and appearances, the representation of reality, and perception. Eastern European history appears in several of the works on view, along with its symbols and monuments, and the related collective memories and nostalgia. The relationship of the individual and the artist to the regime is a question of essential importance: the artists and works chosen give precedence to liberty and independence, in contrast to money and recognition. Several of the works investigate the message itself, the techniques of coding, or the issue of publicity, the question of public spaces: the workings of propaganda and advertising, to offer their own independent artistic positions as a critique of these. When social roles and expectations are considered, a special attention is devoted to the roles of artists, or those of women, which follow different ideals throughout the ages. Whether gender, national, religious, or professional, identity appears in these works as a complex fabric that emerges under the influence of internal and external forces.

It is our hope that these works from the collection of the Ludwig Museum, most of them photo and media-based, will bring the recent past and the present of Hungary closer to the viewer, along with the contemporary art of the country. In accordance with the vision of the founder, Peter Ludwig, these pieces from a collection, which was created in 1989, the year of Hungary's political transition, and which over the decades has been expanded with a number of works of art from East Central Europe, are also witnesses of their time, impressions of ideals and value systems that transfused everyday life and art. We look forward to presenting them to the audience of Albanian National Gallery of Arts.

Krisztina Szipócs
curator of the exhibition

Ludwig Museum – Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest

**ART
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“András Baranyay is a core member of the IPARTERV generation, even though he never overestimated the importance of this artist group,” writes László Beke, and this is also true of the graphic artist János Major, Baranyay’s friend, the man in this quasi-portrait from 1973.

Baranyay started depicting body fragments masked by black and white surfaces in his lithographic series around the turn of the 1960s and the 1970s. The round or square masks conceal curves of the body, fine details of skin, shoulders, arms, and fingers, representing, but not depicting the “whole,” the complete body and personality. Baranyay’s important points of reference are Kierkegaard and existentialism; more generally, an approach directed at the “I,” at human existence, attempting to record fragmented, evanescent everyday phenomena.

He started using photography around 1972-73, but he does not consider himself a photographer: he often colors, or draws on his black-and-white prints, manipulating them with various methods. The Major-portrait in four parts was made in 1973. The selected fragments are indicated in the original photograph (which is not part of the series) by squares marked with a pen. Instead of the entire face, Baranyay focuses on the “part,” this time on Major’s characteristic forehead, glasses, and chin highlighted with a heavy black frame.



Created with the so-called lenticular printing technique, which produces a spatial effect, this image features the portrait of a young man with a gold chain around his neck. The medallion hanging on the chain depicts—depending on the vantage point of the viewer—either the Cross or the Star of David; thus the movement of the viewer produces a slight, yet very important change in the image.

The so-called “winking wallet” was a typical, hybrid product of the 1970s: enterprising artisans obtained special postcards from the West, welded them to cheap imitation leather wallets, and offered them for sale at fairs and small stores.

Balázs Beöthy used this popular technique formerly associated with kitsch for the concise visual expression of a rather timely social issue of the early 2000s: the representation of belonging to one or another religious group, in other words, religious identity. Beöthy goes even further by highlighting the difference, an attribute with immense significance depending on the given historical context.

The post-socialist revival of religious conviction, a taboo topic in Hungary during socialist times, has now become an issue of increasing significance: the recent transformation of faith and the Church, with special regard to the expression and experience of Jewish identity—burdened so heavily by historical traumas—as well as the relationship of Christian values and those of other faiths.



Balázs Beöthy: Medium, 2002



Ákos Birkás produced his large paintings systematically from the mid-1980s to the end of the 1990s featuring a single motive: an oval shape filling the canvas almost completely, an abstract “head,” the countless variations of which—and the associations connected to the universal form—allowed for the interpretation of the painting as image space, as well as the condensed presentation of existential and philosophical questions.

As a result of his critical relationship to painting and his own art, Birkás suddenly returned to figurative painting at the end of the 1990s, this time incorporating aspects of the “technical image” (photograph, press photography, cinema, etc.) into his art. Between 1999 and 2001 he was working on a series of dual portraits: by way of juxtaposing two distinct panels, each depicting half of the faces of two people of different sex or personality, yielding a single portrait painted with vivid colors and light brush strokes. The abstract “I” is replaced by actual flesh and blood people—close and dear friends of the artist—, but the subject is still the interrelationship of the two half images: the contrast or possible unity of a woman or a man of light brown or dark hair, with blue or brown eyes, looking into the camera, at the painter, or at the viewer; the schism between the two halves (the two personalities) and the visual and emotional tension it produces.



Imre Bukta is one of the most unique artists in contemporary Hungarian art. His distinctive, so-called “agricultural art” depicts the special world of the post-socialist Hungarian countryside, its problems and characteristic figures. Bukta approaches this scene with great empathy, often treating it with irony, but always staying away from any sense of nostalgia or idealization.

With a history of forcible post-war collectivization under the aegis of Eastern European modernization, followed by post-socialist reprivatization and splitting up of land into smaller units, as well as the recent reallocation or appropriation of farmlands by today’s political elite, arable land in most of Hungary is associated with small villages with a dwindling and aging population and lives without prospects. Living in the eastern part of Northern Hungary, in the village of Mezőszemere, the artist depicts his immediate acquaintances: the old women who attend church and go to shopping centers, the laborers that have been left without work, the gypsies enduring hardship, the people of the local pub, in other words: the “other Hungary” that exists almost invisibly in the grey zone. Bukta employs a unique montage technique to create his paintings and graphics, which often feature the idea of hope in the form of the Virgin Mary and Christ—as an epiphany. The *Neighbor* is one such piece: the neighbor lady—dressed in a casual robe, her head wrapped in a typical headscarf—in a way elevates or projects into the landscape the image of the Virgin Mary (patron saint of Hungary) holding the Sacred Heart. The soft colors and forms of this pastel picture are interrupted with strongly defined, modernist, geometric shapes, which enrich the image with additional physical and metaphysical content.



István Csákány found himself in the role of the “worker” several times both during his years attending art school and afterwards. In order to make a living, he did manual labor at construction sites and renovations. This proved useful later, because knowing hands-on techniques was integral to creating some of his later work (e.g. oversized installation pieces), but it also proved meaningful in the sense that the experience gave him a sort of theoretical foundation to think about the current state of the working class and the worker, and to reflect on monuments erected in the past to commemorate the worker and their reading in a contemporary context.

Csákány erected a public sculpture titled *Monument to a Monument* in 2008 in Žilina, Slovakia. The “base” of the statue is a gigantic, out-of-service lamp post that had been originally installed in the 1980s to illuminate an oversized intersection. The artist modeled the statue after himself, and commissioned a crane to hoist his slightly larger-than-life likeness made of colored synthetic resin to the top of the lamp post. Dressed in workwear and wearing utility gloves, the figure holds a functioning solar panel above his head, and the renewable energy collected during the day is then used to illuminate the statue situated 20 meters above ground during dark hours. The woodcut was created based on a photograph documenting the installation process, and it captures the moment when the “real” workers had grabbed the statue to make it stand on its feet. The background is a typical panorama of the outskirts of an Eastern European city: apartment blocks, overpasses, traffic signs—symbols of modernization and urbanization, which have, by now, lost their sheen, which themselves are, in some way, monuments to the past regime.



László Fehér achieved international recognition at the 1990 Venice Biennale. Reduced to a few colors and basic elements, his paintings created at the time of political changes at the end of the 1980s return the viewer to the sombre, gloomy atmosphere of the 1950s. The overbearing historical atmosphere is softened by the sentiment of childhood nostalgia owing to the use of private family snapshots as the basis of these works. The ambivalent relationship of the grandiose architectural features and monuments—as seen from the perspective of a child—and the ephemeral human figures—often represented only by their outlines—captures the essence of the sense of those times. The artist offers his own private memories to let the viewer personally sense and experience the post-war history of Eastern Europe, with all its absurdity and irrational nature.

The 1995 painting of similar title is the basis of the installation *Grey House*, which depicts the participants—in the usual unflattering poses of amateur photos—in front of the building that inspired the title of the painting. The banal, laser-cut, flat figures of the “iron drawings”—the man with suspenders and wearing a beret, the woman with perm wearing a skirt—represent the generic and recognizable, typical figures of the 1950 and 60s. The overall effect recalls the unpleasant, empty, and irrational world of adults.



In the age of the “dictatorship of images” Gábor Gerhes found the appropriate form of imaging in the realm of carefully planned staged photographs. Imposing at first glance, aesthetically pleasing and concise as a poster, in terms of their meaning, his photographs are puzzling, humorous and at the same time rather unsettling.

Gerhes’ photo series—started at the end of the 1990s—makes diverse characters, objects, gestures, and motifs share the same image space, which at first glance seem like an incompatible combination—like a graphic puzzle in a magazine—, but suggest the presence of some hidden meaning that brings all the parts together. The works of Gerhes pose questions about how images are read and interpreted, and inspect the relationship of image and text, all the while expecting active participation from the viewer. *Finding T* could be a successor to the 1999 piece *Planting a Letter T*. The earlier image depicts the artist in the process of digging a hole in the ground for a large wooden object in the form of the letter T—like any hardworking farmer would. The later image shows the artist and a companion, who—dressed in detective trench coats—discover the T that had developed roots in the ground, but is noticeably smaller than the one planted and the environment is also obviously different. So what could have happened in the meantime? Gerhes takes on various costumes and roles for the sake of his images as well as in his personal life, and the “contemporary artist” is only one of them.

Gábor Gerhes: Finding T, 2002



The Cobblestone Is the Weapon of the Proletariat: this is the title of Russian artist Ivan Shadr's 1927 sculpture, whose reproduction was widely known in the Eastern Bloc, and which was held as a textbook example of Socialist Realism and propaganda art in the 1950s. The hero of the composition is the unknown proletarian, who turns his weapon of a paving stone against those who exploit and oppress his class, in the hope of creating a more just order.

By the early 1970s, the idea of a world revolution had lost its sheen, and gained a new meaning. The illusions of the 1956 Hungarian revolution, the 1968 student movements, and the Prague Spring had dispersed, and like other symbols, the cobblestone started to appear in the conceptual framework of irony and a critique of the political system. The motif appeared in the work of several Hungarian artists from 1971, and in 1972 art historian László Beke put out a call for new works under the theme of *Cobblestones and gravestones*. Between 1971 and 1974, Gyula Gulyás made several conceptual works with the use of genuine basalt cobblestones. He posted a version painted in the national colors to Endre Tót on the occasion of 15 March, the day of the 1848 revolution and war of independence. With useful handles and the inscription "Made in Hungary," this other piece waters down the former weapon and turns it into a merchandise: the price for the consolidation and the "Goulash Communism" of the Kádár era was a practical compromise with the regime, which entailed, above all, a relinquishment of the ideals of the 1956 revolution.

Gyula Gulyás: Portable Cobblestone, 1972



Tibor Gyenis' photographs usually record actions that feature himself as main character: the "hobby artist" doing his work against all odds. His art is unaffected by the outside influence of trends and expectations, but at least it is "independent and free" this way.

The new generation of artists in the 1990s was not hoping for exactly this kind of freedom, much rather for the appearance of a Western-type system of galleries, built on private collectors and private capital, offering predictable livelihood and a chance to become part of the international mainstream. This hope has barely materialized, if at all, leaving these artists with no choice but to rely on provisional solutions and activities, such as teaching, applied arts, or work outside the sphere of art. Most of society still treats art as if it were a sort of hobby: a useless activity, bourgeois pastime, a form of entertainment. "Carries water into the sea," goes the Hungarian proverb that describes work of no use, and one of Gyenis' photographs visualizes this very proverb. As part of his *Details from the Ten Superfluous Gestures* series, Gyenis pours water that he dyed blue into the sea, he attaches foreign, unfitting fruits (tumors?) onto trees, he is toiling to make rusted railways shiny again in the middle of the forest—the point, if there is one, of this striking and endless work being the actual physical activity, the "struggle itself," which all Hungarian schoolchildren know all too well from Imre Madách's drama, *The Tragedy of Man*.

Tibor Gyenis: Details from the Ten Superfluous Gestures, 1999



Tibor Gyenis had first introduced one of his genetic engineering experiments as part of his series of “superfluous gestures”: he had tied some yellow-green fruits of unknown origin and type to young trees. As a follow-up to his newfound hobby, this time he took on the role of a genetic engineer by intervening into an existing setting in an urban environment: he planted watermelons of various sizes among existing vines climbing up a concrete wall, giving the illusion of a natural scenery with proliferous vegetation embellished by oversized fruits.

In reality genetic engineering is a cellular intervention process, whereby DNA is processed via biotechnological methods—a common technique by now—, but its possible consequences and downsides (including related ethical issues) are not understood by most. Gyenis uses his own primitive technique to create a fictional and personally constructed visage that is at once beautiful and bizarre. As a result, the attention of the viewer is focused on the latent problems associated with the phenomenon: the greed of profit-oriented agriculture and the unfavourable impact of genetic engineering on nature and the biosphere.

Tibor Gyenis: Hobby Genetic Engineering of Examples, 1999



Tibor Hajas' university studies—started in 1965—were suspended following an arrest for participating in street protests. He was later pardoned and set free. Hajas never received a formal art education, but he was a remarkable presence in the unofficial art scene—the so-called „second public sphere”—with the overwhelming force of his personality and intellect, reinforced by his total commitment. His poems were first published in 1967, he wrote essays and a novel; from the mid-1970s he started doing action art, and presented radical, self-destructive performances of disturbing impact. Hajas set as his goal the revision and transformation of socially and historically established forms of communication; he treated art as a form of gaining experience that is “inseparable from the meaningful idea of freedom.” He was killed in a car crash in 1980.

A Letter to My Friend in Paris is the photo documentation of a street action, displaying sections of a letter written on buildings around Budapest, addressed to his friend living in Paris. An important aspect of this piece is its public nature: messages—akin to graffiti, but much more abstract—are placed in public spaces, available for all passers-by to look at or even add to. The backgrounds of the texts are banal urban settings that are at the same time important locations in the life of the addressee. Some of the ideas that come into focus through this work are the relationship of written and image-based communication, the issues of personal versus public realm, and the space and time-related characteristics of the message. “Be public, be direct” and “get your future replaced before its warranty expires” are the messages he shares with his Parisian friend and the people roaming the streets of Budapest.

Tibor Hajas: A Letter to My Friend in Paris (To the Streets with Your Message! I.), 1975



Judit Kele first studied textile art, then set and costume design. In 1979 she decided to take a radical step and declared her own self to be a piece of art. She continued consistently along this path through the mid-1980s. *I am a Work of Art* was a performative action wherein she took the place of the textile to be woven at the loom, and presented herself as a work of art in the grand setting of the Museum of Fine Arts, in a spot where an El Greco painting—on loan at the time—would normally be shown. The cordoned-off, live work of art spent three days in the museum under the gaze of visitors, as well as the watchful eye of a uniformed, armed guard, protecting the piece as if it were another one of the high value assets on display.

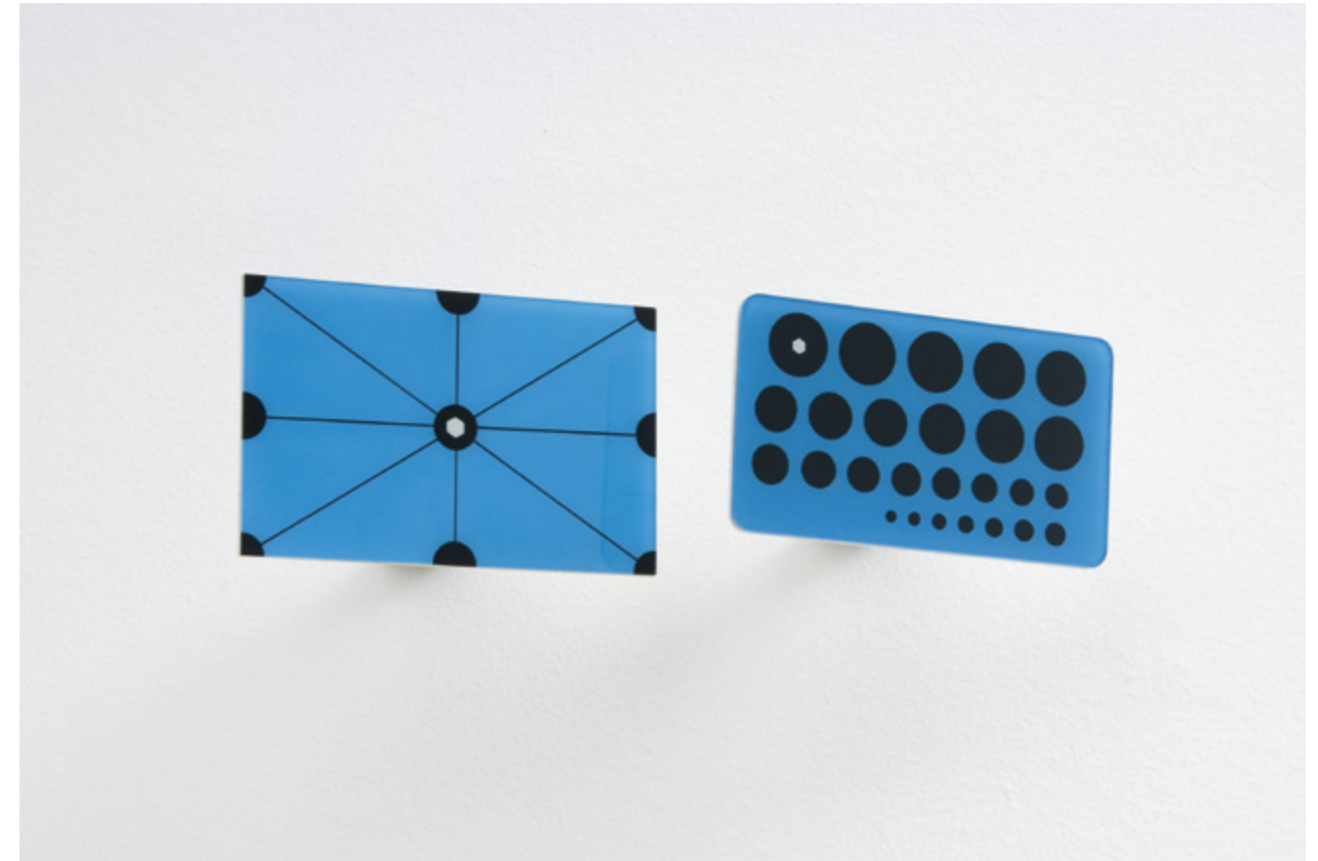
In 1980, as a logical progression of her earlier work, Kele decided to take a provocative, yet—as far as her status as an Eastern European female (artist) was concerned—rather ambivalent step. She placed an ad in the Parisian newspaper *Liberation*, whereby she solicited offers from men to marry her, and the selected finalists could then bid on her as a piece of art. The auction was held as part of the acclaimed Paris Biennale, and the highest bidding “collector” purchased the work for himself. The thin line between life and play suddenly dissolved when Kele entered marriage with the buyer at a ceremony held in Budapest under the gaze of several plainclothes police officers, and moved to Paris. A few years later Kele spoke in a French television interview about the asymmetrical relationship of the “art piece” and its owner, i.e. the relationship that had become rather complicated between the penniless young Hungarian émigré and the wealthy Frenchman.



Ádám Kokesch makes glossy colored paintings with a special, so-called reverse glass painting technique, and also combines these images with other objects to construct Futurist installations and models, which perplex the viewer. These compositions are attached to a TV-stand, or a photo tripod, or the wall. While these—sometimes illuminated, rounded, or at times geometrically shaped, three-dimensionally folded, inter-referential—objects and the abstract shapes presented on them have no apparently obvious function or meaning, they still clearly correspond to the generic idea of the *high-tech object* (omnipresent in our environment), shaped by consumer taste and the connected industrial design aesthetic that serves it. The objects referenced by way of form-based association—possibly a monitor, camera, dish aerial, solar panel, traffic sign—are mostly active information gathering or communication devices, interfaces, and Kokesch's objects fall into this category as well, yet it is nearly impossible to exactly decode them. The artist offers no guide or key to the special database or code system he built, and in fact, it is likely that one of his aims is to create a sense of uncertainty in the viewer as to the nature of these objects: are these modernist icon paintings, a visual message constructed with individual icons, or perhaps design objects decorated with attractive colors and shapes, with no particular underlying meaning?

Ádám Kokesch:

Untitled (Blue Panel No. 1–2.), 2005–2009



Antal Lakner's "passive work tools" scrutinize and criticize a contemporary phenomenon: the employees of our times—not the "workers" and "farmers" from the days of yesteryear—working in the service sector, who sit all day in offices (62% of people employed in Hungary), do not have to do any real physical activity or even move much at all. To compensate for this inactivity they have little choice but to rely on the machines inside fitness centres to stay in shape. But the work done and muscle energy released in these facilities is completely wasted, and the only result of the toil is an attractive muscle, shapely buttocks (and hopefully general well-being and good health as well).

Reflecting on this phenomenon, the artist a) tries to return humanity to the world of real and useful work and production; b) protects humanity from the perils of labor by way of inventing copycat machinery based on real tools. The *Wallmaster* is useful in imitating the movement used to do real wall painting, but with no downsides: users face no danger of soiling their clothes, in fact no use of actual paint is required, therefore the whole process becomes cheaper and simpler. This exercise is great for developing muscles in the upper arm as well as those of the back, the legs, and the abdomen.

Antal Lakner: Wallmaster, 1998



László Lakner made his photorealist painting by enlarging a photograph found in the major Soviet illustrated magazine *Ogoniok* (no 49., 1972.) featuring Kazakh cotton-pickers. Wearing colored shirts and uniform caps, the strong and lively men smile happily for the camera from the top of a massive cotton bale; the smaller canvas accompanying the painting features the title and data of the magazine in Cyrillic letters.

Photorealism in Eastern Europe differed from the one in Western Europe in terms of the reality it represented, which was quite different from consumer society, but the “truth” on which the paintings were based was also not self-evident. Based on socialist ideals but in practice defined by a one-party dictatorship, the regime was built on lies and hushing-up, and it was mainly the privilege of those in possession of power to represent the common worker as happy and content. The photograph chosen by Lakner was part of the Soviet propaganda, which was meant to point out the achievements of both the Soviet Union’s ethnic policy and its economy: the problem-free assimilation of Kazakhs into the empire and the successful Soviet economic policy. The “reality” was entirely different: Russianization and collectivization entailed the liquidation of national heritage and traditional economic forms, and the forcible production of cotton, the “white gold,” led to an ecological disaster (the drying up of the Aral Sea and the related public health hazard) among other things. Lakner’s painting is an example of the controversial relation of illusion and reality through the phases of the choice, use, and analysis of a photographic document.



László Lakner: Cotton-pickers in Kazakhstan, 1972

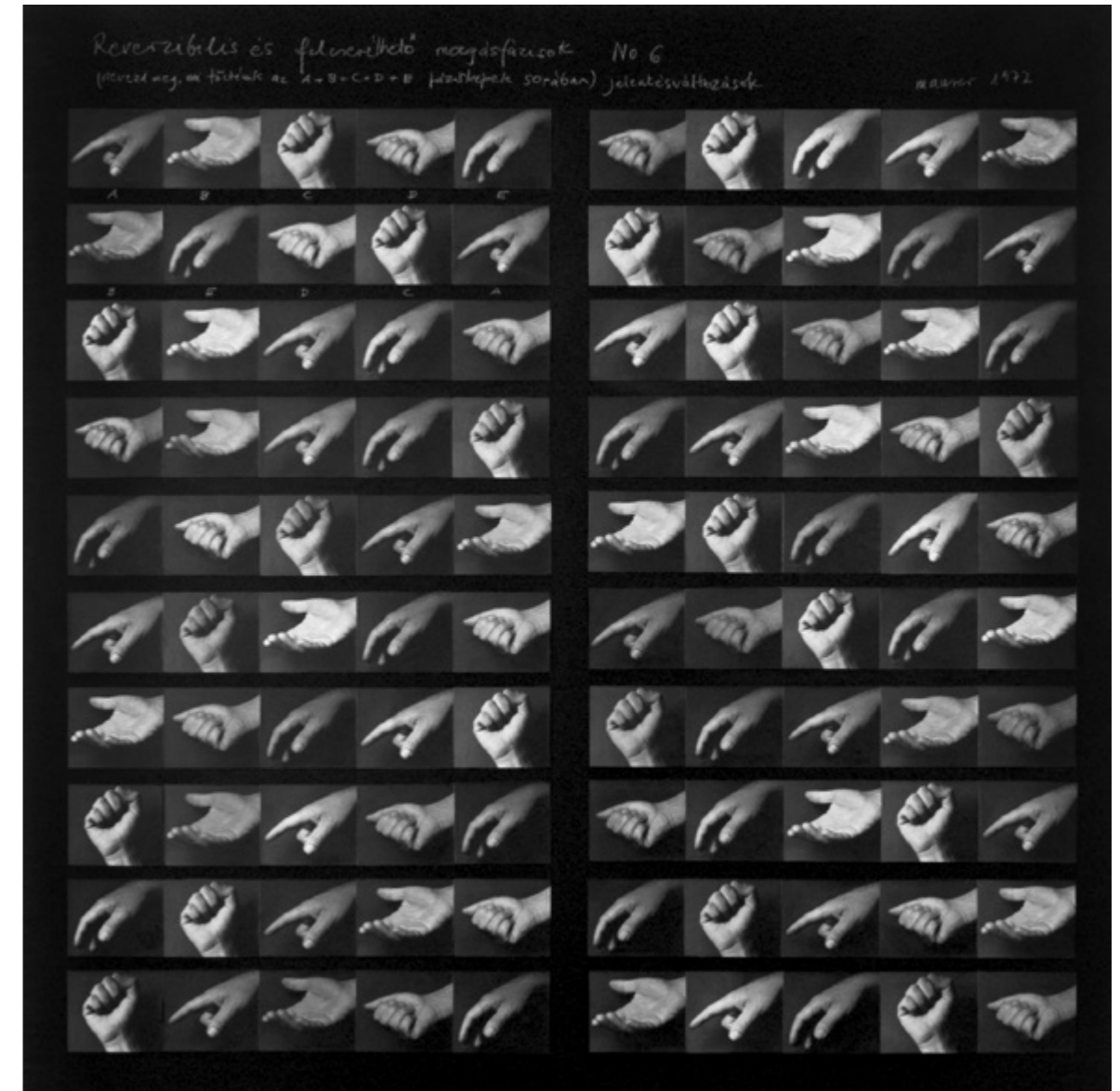


Dóra Maurer's conceptual series explores the changes in visual meaning: photographs of the phases of a given subject's movement are arranged in different orders, thereby modifying how the series reads. She considers individual photographs simple "signs," which are assembled into different "texts." Read from left to right, the different sequences of motion can be interpreted as simple actions, in accordance with the artist's request written as a caption: "name each event line by line."

Dóra Maurer studies the elements of art, the structure itself, more precisely the phenomenon of change and shift. Her attitude is that of the researcher who creates models, researching with selected elements and making a specific set of rules for each, strictly focusing on the problems inherent to art. "My works document changes in the way I think," she considers her works intellectual products and not merchandise. As banal as it may sound, this kind of analytical and creative approach to art was in itself considered suspicious and nonconformist in the period: artistic abstraction, progressive Western tendencies, neo-avant-garde art existed in the grey zone, as tolerated activities. Modernism was confined to industrial design and architecture. Among her contemporaries, Dóra Maurer was almost the only woman artist who persevered in her consistent artistic program, which also had very significant educational aspects.



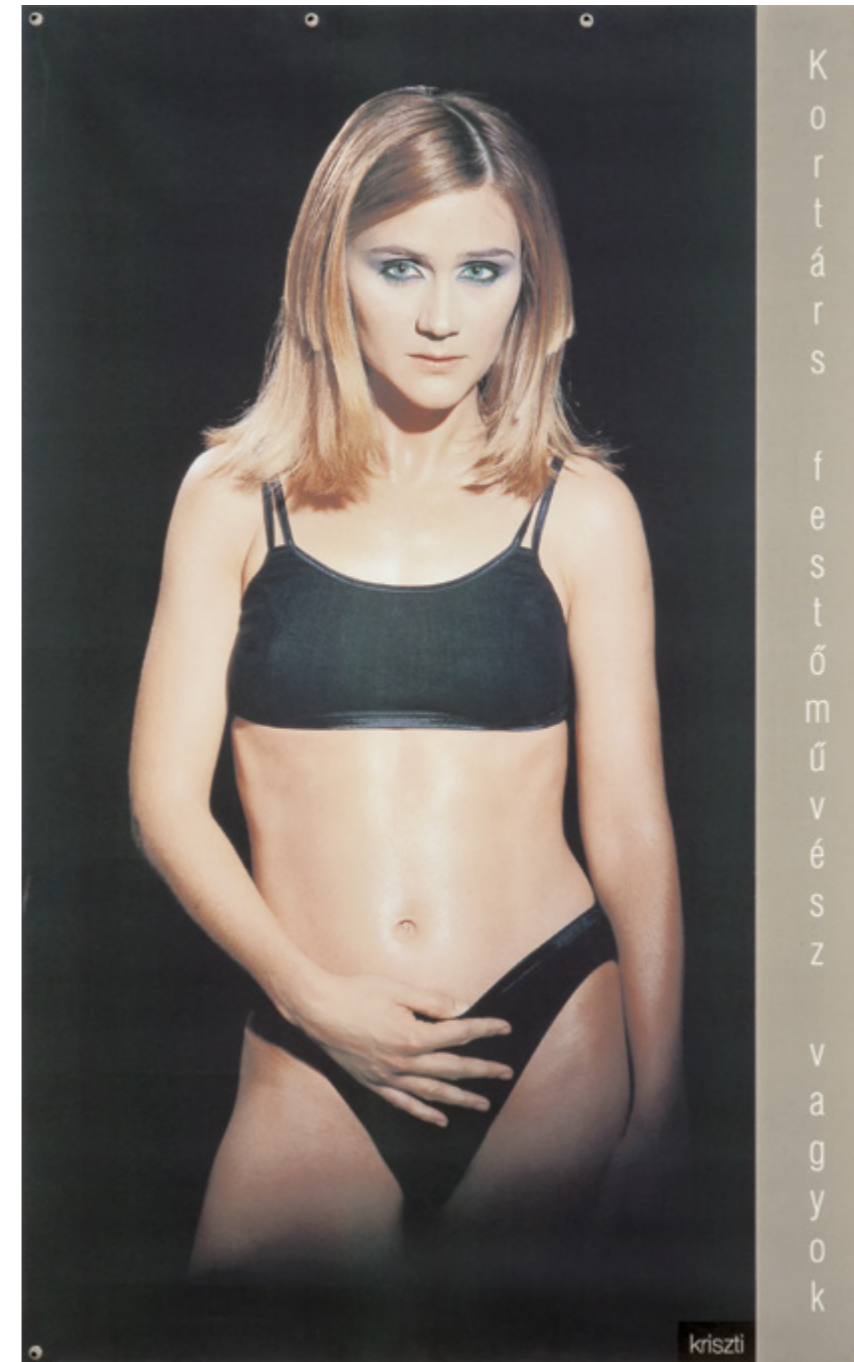
Dóra Maurer: Reversible and Interchangeable Phases of Motion No. 4 and No. 6, 1972



Kriszta Nagy (alias Tereskova or x-T) is a painter, intermedia artist, singer, and rabble-rouser, who has recently published a video message offering her expert help to the political elite in order to facilitate the revival of contemporary art and the international success of Hungarian artists.

Depicting the artist in the style of lingerie advertisements, *I Am a Contemporary Painter*, a billboard installed temporarily in 1998 on the Lövölde Square in Budapest—and later elsewhere in different versions—is a calculatedly effective and provocative piece. Hiding behind a plethora of roles (while having an ambivalent relationship with these roles), the artist advertises her merchandise—her painting and herself—with the most powerful marketing tool: the attractive female body. With her provocative gesture, she raises awareness of various anomalies in contemporary art life: the antagonism between the elitist notion of art and media culture; the precarious situation of contemporary artists; the desires and limits of commercialization; and in the background of all of this, the significance of money.

Kriszta Nagy: I Am a Contemporary Painter, 1999



C-print, 198 × 125.5 cm

The significance of the Bauhaus-style building in Csaba Nemes's painting lies in the fact that it was this two-storey, not too spacious house where János Kádár, first secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party and the political leader of Hungary between November 1956 and May 1988 took a rest from his tiresome life every summer.

It is an interesting coincidence that Kádár's mother, "mutter," worked as a maid in the beginning of the 20th century in Opatija, the favoured summer resort of the Monarchy, at the Villa Austria. Taking a role in the illegal workers' movement and later the communist party, Kádár was imprisoned in 1952 after a show trial; as compensation after his pardon, he received a four-week holiday among other things.

After the 1956 revolution was crushed, the Kádár era transformed Hungary into the "happiest barrack" of Eastern Europe, where the price of the illusory idyll (apartment, car, summer cottage) was collective historical amnesia. The party's holiday resort was built for the communist elite, where such privileged personalities spent their vacation as Fidel Castro, Erich Honecker, Ho Chi Minh and Leonid Brezhnev. House no. IV stands abandoned today like its peers, consumed by decay with all its furnishings. Occasionally it is visited by illegal disaster tourists and photojournalists. Csaba Nemes intends to counteract amnesia and apathy with his works, as these are still components of the general Hungarian way of thinking.

Csaba Nemes: Kádár's Summer House No. 4., 2009



This installation—comprising three gynaecological examination chairs covered with rabbit hair, moss, and red velvet—is one of those works of the artist that model the interrelationship of the self and its environment, including basic perception or socially determined roles. The end results of these kinds of compositions are self-explanatory and sensitive representations of otherwise verbally hard-to-express artistic ideas interwoven with various social scientific concepts and “discourses.”

The medical examination chair may bring to mind the notion of female disease or pregnancy, or that of the male gaze, and the idea of female helplessness. The various wrapping materials symbolize desire, fertility, sexuality—thereby referencing the female body that is not directly present in the piece. All three materials have the common trait of tactility, therefore affect our most basic sense—beyond vision—of touch.

The ethnic Hungarian artist living in Slovakia turned her attention during the first decade of the new millennium to such social and sociological issues as the relationship of the public and private spheres, the present and historical state of Eastern Europe, the identity of its population, social prejudice and intolerance, the relationship of authority and the individual. All of Németh's work are focused on current and consequential issues, and the artist initiates—especially via her public art pieces—social discourse about these unavoidable topics.

Ilona Németh: Private Gynaecological Surgery, 1997

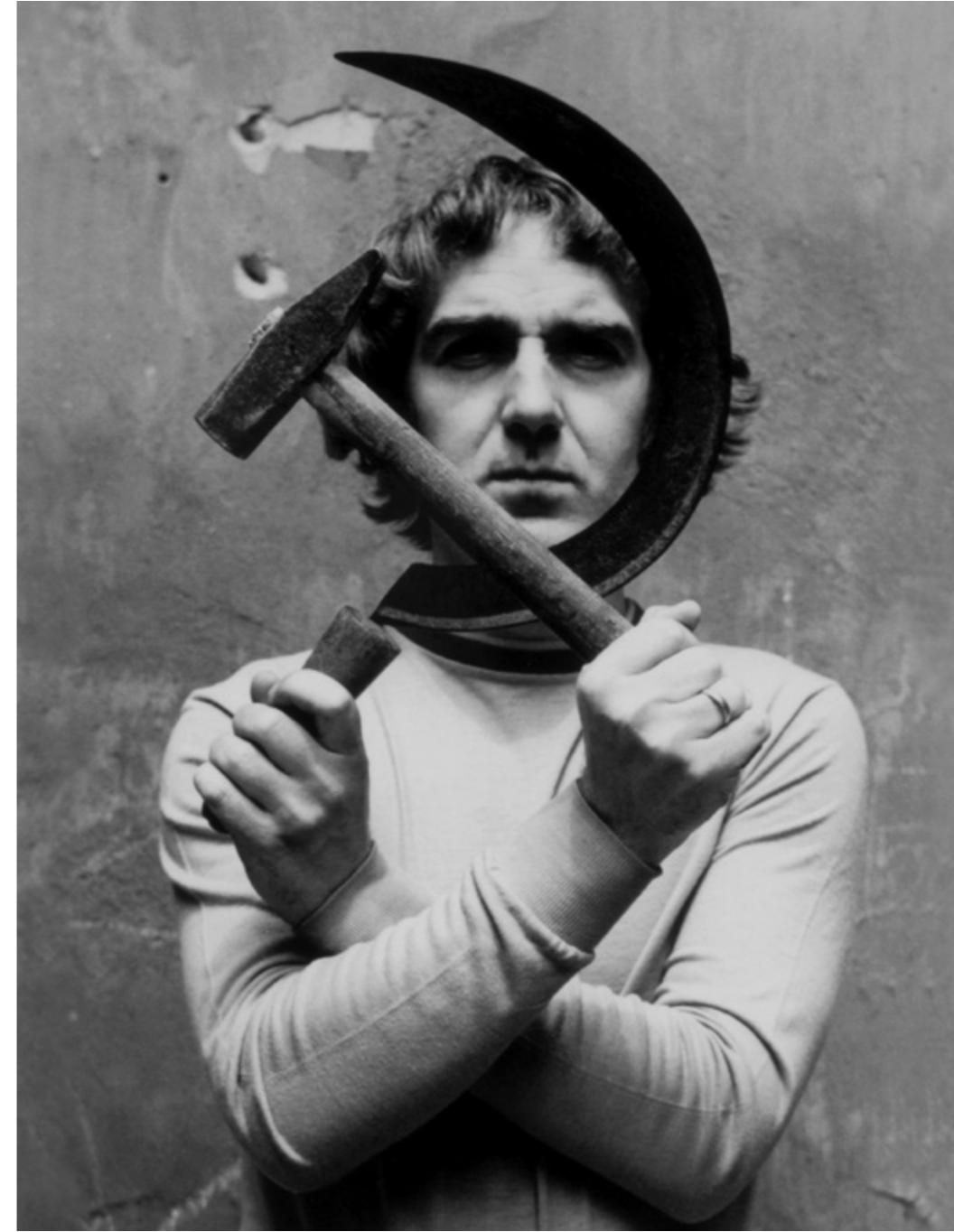


At the beginning of the 1970s, Sándor Pinczehelyi turned his attention to the appropriation and decoding of the symbols of the labor movement, by way of creating conceptual art and graphic design. His set of iconography was later expanded to include specific Hungarian national symbols, such as the Hungarian tricolor (red, white, and green) and other characteristically Hungarian motifs (wheat, bread, goose, pig, paprika, etc.).

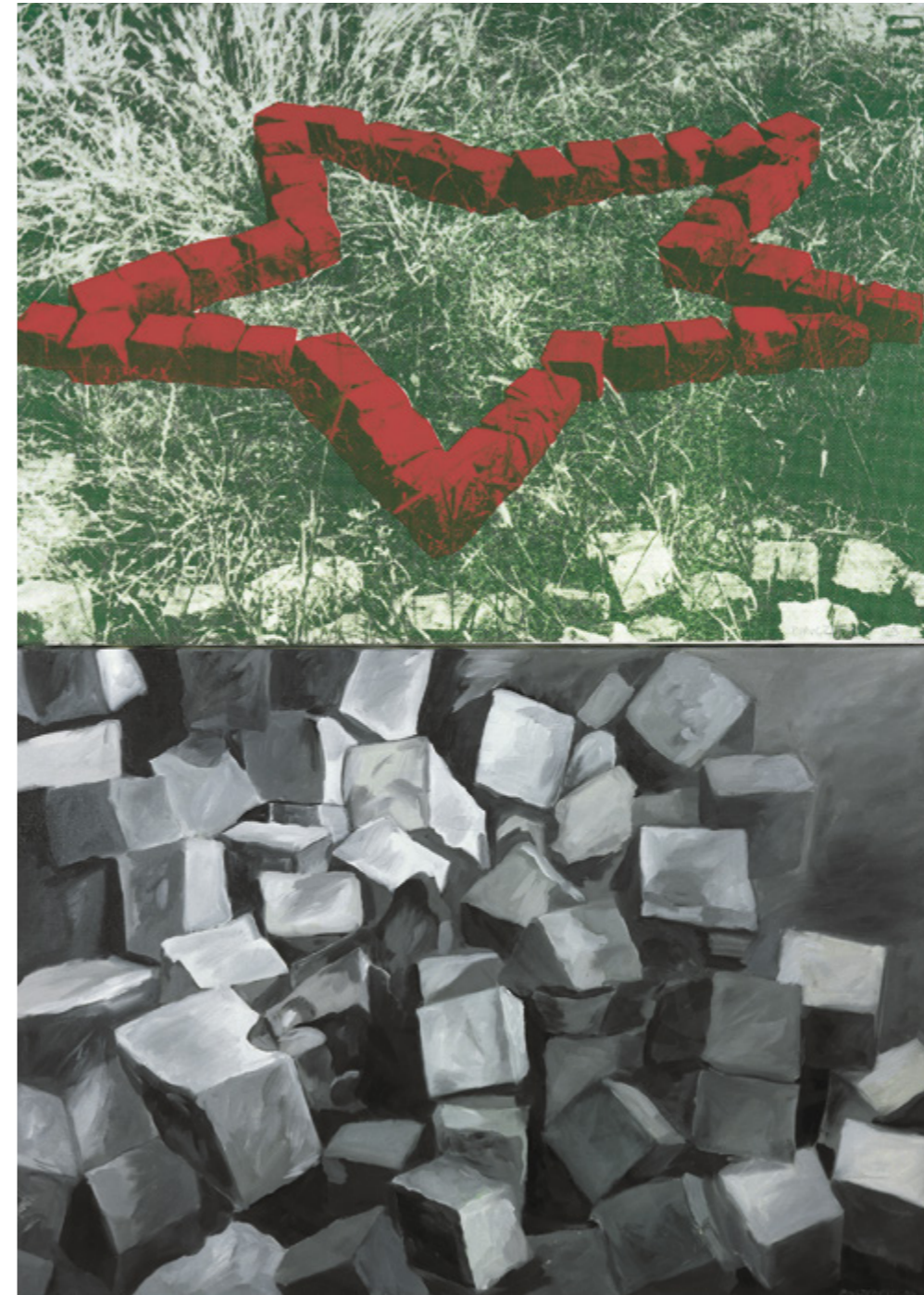
The five-pointed star and the hammer and sickle were in some Eastern European countries declared “totalitarian symbols” after the 1989 regime change, while they are still in use in other places, as state symbols or political party signs. It is an ongoing debate even today just what exactly these signs symbolize in their changing historical context, and what kind of personal sensibility may lead to them being judged offensive.



Sándor Pinczehelyi: Sickle and Hammer 1–4, 1973



At the beginning of the 1970s, Pinczehelyi took these symbols and returned them to everyday reality: he handled the sickle and hammer as utilitarian objects, used actual cobblestones to build a barricade and a five-pointed star, and then used the photo documentation of these actions in exhibitions as well as in his graphic artworks. He investigated the ideology behind these symbols, how they had lost their substance, and contrasted or merged them with Western symbols (e.g. Coca-Cola). In the 1980s and the 1990s, all of this reappeared in the form of painting and turned into (self-)irony; symbols familiar from earlier are used as self-quotations, and appear as visions of the past in the painting entitled *Farewell*.



Péter Rónai's enigmatic assembly of objects is composed of a tub filled with hemp-tow and a small, turned-on TV set, which always displays the analogue terrestrial broadcast available for reception on site. (In Hungary, with the digital transition being complete, no such broadcast is available since 2013 and the screen displays white noise.)

Interpretation of the piece is aided by its title that refers to Diogenes, the ancient Greek philosopher known for his unconventional, scandalous behaviour, who lived in a barrel, despised vanity, rejected material possessions and comfort, but valued the human spirit and, above all, freedom.

The philosopher and orator is replaced by the TV set, the premier mass communication device of the times, a communication channel enjoying a monopoly status from the 1970s onward: the "magic box," the "electric fence," the "chewing gum of the eye," which puts the viewer at ease, weans the viewer off thinking, and commandeers our free time. (Hungarians on average spend four hours watching television each day.) The Internet, as an alternative means of gathering on-demand information and entertainment had only become standard by the second decade of the new millennium, yet the power of television still remains overwhelming. TV programming is one of the most effective avenues of manipulation, a mainstay of celebrity as well as the foundation of political success. Some of the issues brought into the limelight by Rónai's installation are connected to the ideology and values communicated by televised content, and the piece inquires into what has emerged to replace philosophy, individual thought and opinion in the present day.



The name of the French–Hungarian artist duo—founded in 2004—plays with the notion of Socialist Realism, but its meaning is closer to the idea of “being a realist,” i.e. a group or society conforming to the given state of things and having faith in reality. “Our work is created from the connection of art and ideology, it is born from the fertile encounter of soviet and EU ideology, our topics comprise a mix of French colonial past and soviet heritage, and—of course—are intermixed with the contemporary hegemony of American influence,” explain the artists in a 2011 interview.

The duo raises questions connected to 21st century society, more specifically, issues directly affecting Europe, by way of employing typography, audiovisual tools, national and supranational emblems, maps, color codes, borders, and language. Their query focuses on ethnicity, identity, language, history, migration, borders, the economy, and politics. *Windroad* is a work of art in the form of a street sign giving directions to more or less short-lived states that existed sometime during the course of the 20th century, but have since disappeared: the directional boards read the names of long forgotten republics. Whoever heard of the Mura Republic? Is there anyone who knows where Gagauzia is? What two states’ names are combined to produce the term Litbel? These states were born out of ethnic, national, or geopolitical interests, however, these interests did not prove strong enough to withstand the tide of history. The revision of state borders and the creation of a new status quo produce a lot of pain and bloodshed, which is well demonstrated by the course of 20th century history.



János Sugár—an internationally known artist and teacher at the Hungarian University of Fine Arts—used stencil and spray-paint to create the following text on the facade of a privately owned exhibition space in central Budapest: “Wash your dirty money with my art.” The owner filed a criminal complaint against the perpetrator, and the court handed down a suspended sentence of five months in jail.

The sentence seems rather harsh considering the small size and sophisticated appearance of the graffiti, as well as the cost of restoring the original condition of the wall. The action of the artist most likely enraged the owner—whose business venture focused on presenting popular shows and the management of up-and-coming artists—due to its critical content. The venture—that has since gone bankrupt causing the exhibition space to close—treated young artists as commodity, who could be turned into viable products within a short few years, by way of some investment and the application of appropriate marketing techniques. Sugár used his public action to question the businessman’s genuine intent and competence, in turn the man addressed declared the action to be provocation and “non-art.”

“When the work was shown at the Kunsthalle Budapest, I felt that the essence of the piece would be lost if it stayed in this safe and elitist setting. It only becomes relevant on the street. . . I was interested in finding a way to make an otherwise not so obvious position apparent,” said the artist.

János Sugár: Dirty Money, 2008



The essence of Pál Szacsva y's "found images" and "reprojections" is the confusion of senses, the overlaying of different layers of reality, the analysis of the relation between medium and reality. He first projects the selected photograph onto a surface that is difficult to identify—mostly common items found in his apartment—, and then takes a photo of the two combined. The different scale and quality of the two photographs, the two realities fuse into perplexing union in the final print.

The artist often uses photographs depicting cars and other vehicles, and prefers contrasting their shiny and spotless surface with the structure of an unmade bed or clothes lying around. The background wrinkles and distorts the projected surface, and the lustrous world of auto salons is mixed with the homely sloppiness of private sphere. The car is one of the status symbols of the period of democratic transition: throughout the past decades, most car owners have replaced their Skodas or Ladas with Western cars, even at the cost of becoming indebted for life. The car industry is one of the main economic sectors in Hungary, with a number of foreign car factories and their parts distributors employing more than a hundred thousand people.



Born in Vojvodina in the former Yugoslavia, Szombathy started his career as a founding member of Bosch + Bosch, a group of progressive artists. Since the early 1970s, he has been engaged in poetry, mail art, performance, and graphic design. He has edited a number of art journals as well.

On the 1st of May 1972, the usual Labor Day parade was held in Budapest: hundreds of thousands representing the working people marched down Dózsa György Road in front of the tribune with the waving figure of the leader János Kádár, to eventually get rid of their signs, banners, and other accessories and take a break in the City Park with some beer and sausage. Bálint Szombathy's action started after this: grabbing a procession sign with Lenin's portrait, he continued rambling through the streets of Budapest, stopping in front of houses and fences, wandering into courtyards. Appropriating the sign depicting the leader of the Great October Socialist Revolution for the purposes of his own action, he practically removed Lenin from his original environment and placed him into a different context. The well-known symbol could suddenly be seen in different light: as the tool of a private artistic demonstration, it was confronted with the hopelessly grey and depressing "existing socialism," which was the direct opposite of the colorful and falsely optimistic parade.



Bálint Szombathy: Lenin in Budapest, 1972



Attila Szűcs often makes photo-based paintings, but his style is far from photorealistic. Blurry details fading into foggy haze, overpainted hidden motifs, and color and light effects endow his paintings with a mysterious atmosphere that is sometimes nostalgic and other times eerie.

In the centre of the painting *Playground at Night*, a typical playground from the 1960s-1970s emerges through the haze, with a sandpit and the typical benches surrounding it—red planks on precast concrete legs. Built to fulfil a social utopia, socialist housing estates witnessed generations growing up, with “panel kids” hanging out every afternoon at the playgrounds between the blocks. The former settlers of these housing estates have grown old, kids have grown up, and the houses have grown worn. Virtually indestructible, the street furniture survived in these places until around 2004, when the iron monkey bars in the shape of cats, the tower-like rockets with platforms, and the slides began to be replaced according to EU standards.

Attila Szűcs transforms the collective memory of a former socialist playground into a dream-like night scene of peculiar atmosphere. Most of the image space is covered in a vast dark surface, with the deserted playground hovering in its centre like an empty stage.

Attila Szűcs: Playground at Night, 1995



In this work Bea Veszely appropriates famous depictions of women from the history of art, or more precisely, their photographic reproductions. Bernini's funerary monument to Ludovica Albertoni, Philippe de Champaigne's painting *Ex voto*, Tintoretto's *Susanna and the Elders*, Bellini's nude and Tiziano's famous *Venus of Urbino* each represent the ideal woman of a different age. Alongside biblical, classical, and renaissance nudes, there is the *Blessed Ludovica*, who devoted her life to the poor after the death of her husband, and *Catherine de Sainte Suzanne*, the painter's daughter who was miraculously cured from her disease with the help of God. Depicted by men, ideal women originally became part of art history as models or subjects of artworks.

Veszely appropriates these reproductions of artworks with a unique method: she punctures the color cibachrome surface with a tiny needle, leaving it intact in some areas, and covering it in a dense mesh of holes, or destroying it completely in others. The pattern or "embroidery" damages, but also transubstantiates the original image: the small holes make the thick photographic print transparent and airy, resulting in a fragile object resembling handiwork such as lace or filigree. *Time-Laces* represents the tendency in the 1990s when women artists began successfully introducing unique feminine aspects and methods to contemporary art.

Beáta Veszely: Time-Laces, 1995



Exhibition checklist

73

András Baranyay (Budapest, 1938–)

Details (János Major) No. 1–4, 1973

gelatin-silver bromide, 29.5×21 cm each
Purchased with assistance of the Hungarian
Ministry of National Resources, 2011
2011.7.1.1–4.

Balázs Beöthy (Budapest, 1965–)

Medium, 2002

C-print on prismatic board; 71×56 cm
Purchased, 2002
2002.17.1.

Ákos Birkás (Budapest, 1941–)

Untitled (16.1SAA-M2), 2001

oil on canvas, 131×108×8 cm
Purchased, 2003
2003.5.1.

Imre Bukta (Mezőszemere, 1952–)

Neighbor, 2011

pastel, lead, ink, gouache, color pencil, paper, tape, 110×140 cm
Purchased with assistance from the National Cultural Fund, 2012
2012.3.1.

István Csákány (Sfântu Gheorghe / Sepsiszentgyörgy, 1978–)

Erecting, 2008

woodcut on paper, 110×158 cm
Purchased with assistance of the Hungarian Ministry
of Education and Culture / National Cultural Fund, 2009
2010.8.1.

László Fehér (Székesfehérvár, 1953–)

Grey House, 1997

iron, wood, tarsheet, installation dimensions variable
Purchased with assistance of the Hungarian Ministry
of National Cultural Heritage, 1999
1999.40.1.1–5.

Gábor Gerhes (Budapest, 1962–)

Finding T, 2002

C-print, 125×154 cm
Purchased, 2002
2002.16.1.

Gyula Gulyás (Miskolc, 1944 – Budapest, 2008)

Portable Cobblestone, 1972

basalt, dispersion paint, Letraset, metal, 15.5×38×19 cm
Purchased, 2003
2003.18.1.

Tibor Gyenis (Pécs, 1970–)

Details from the Ten Superfluous Gestures V/I, V/3, 1999

C-print, 1/5, 50×60 cm / each
Purchased with assistance of the Ministry of Education
and Culture / National Cultural Fund, 2006
2006.17.1. and 2006.18.1.

Tibor Gyenis (Pécs, 1970–)

Hobby Genetic Engineering of Examples V/IV, 1999

C-print, 3/5, 50×60 cm
Purchased with assistance of the Ministry of Education
and Culture / National Cultural Fund, 2006
2006.20.1.

Tibor Hajas (Budapest, 1946 – Szeged, 1980)

A Letter to My Friend in Paris (To the Streets with Your Message! I), 1975

gelatine silver print mounted on black cardboard,
white chalk, 100×70 cm
Purchased 2009
2009.1.1.

Judit Kele (Nagykanizsa, 1944–)

I am a Work of Art, 1979

digital print, 2 pieces, 110×90 cm and 90×110 cm
Purchased from funds provided by Peter und
Irene Ludwig Stiftung, Aachen, 2011
2011.16.1.1–2.

Ádám Kokesch (Budapest, 1973–)

Untitled (Blue Panel No. 1–2), 2005–2009

acrylic on plastic, glass, plexiglass, metal brackets,
silicon glue; I: 14×22×1.4 cm; II: 12×21×1.4 cm
Purchased with assistance of the Ministry of Education
and Culture / National Cultural Fund, 2009
2010.10.1.1–2.

Antal Lakner (Budapest, 1966–)

Wallmaster, 1998

C-print on vynil, 140×295 cm
Gift of the artist, 2009
2009.20.1.

László Lakner (Budapest, 1936–)

Cotton-pickers in Kazakhstan, 1972

oil on canvas, 140×190 cm; acrylic and screen print
on canvas, 60×60 cm
Purchased, 2008
2008.1.1.1–2.

Dóra Maurer (Budapest, 1937–)

Reversible and Interchangeable Phases of Motion
No. 4 and No. 6, 1972

gelatine silver prints mounted on fibreboard,
acrylic, 120×120 cm each
Gift of the artist, 1997
1997.35.1–2.

Kriszta Nagy (Szolnok, 1972–)

I Am a Contemporary Painter, 1999

C-print, 198×125.5 cm
Purchased, 2001
2001.11.1.

Csaba Nemes (Kisvárd, 1966–)

Kádár's Summer House No. 4, 2009

oil on canvas, 110×150 cm
Purchased with assistance from the National Cultural Fund, 2009
2010.2.1.

Ilona Németh (Dunajská Streda / Dunaszerdahely, 1963–)

Private Gynaecological Surgery, 1997

gynaecologist examining chair, moss, velvet, rabbit's hair,
wash basins, buckets, installation dimensions variable
Purchased with assistance of the Hungarian Ministry
of National Cultural Heritage, 2002
2002.10.1.1–3.

Sándor Pinczehelyi (Szigetvár, 1946–)

Sickle and Hammer 1–4, 1973

gelatine silver print, 25.4×20 cm each
Purchased, 2002
2002.15.1–4.

Sándor Pinczehelyi (Szigetvár, 1946–)

Farewell No. 2, 1973–1996

acrylic and screen print on canvas; oil on canvas; 140×100 cm
Purchased 1997
1997.68.1.

Péter Rónai (Budapest, 1953–)

Neodiogenetics, 1985–1995

tub, TV-set, hemp-tow, 62.5×64×58 cm
Gift of the artist, 1997
1997.47.1.1–3.

Société Realiste (2004–2014)

Ferenc Gróf (Pécs, 1972–)

Jean-Baptiste Naudy (Paris, 1982–)

Windroad, 2011

aluminium decor, silkscreen print on steel,
metal tubes and fixing rings, 180×210×210 cm
Purchased from funds provided by Peter und
Irene Ludwig Stiftung, Aachen, 2013
2013.28.1.1–7.

János Sugár (Budapest, 1958–)

Dirty Money, 2008

spray, typewriting on paper, 70×100 cm;
digital print on paper, 21×29,7 cm
Purchased, 2009
2009.3.1–2.

Pál Szacsva y (Târgu Mureş / Marosvásárhely, 1967–)

Found Image V, 1999

C-print, 200×300 cm
Purchased from funds provided by the Hungarian
Ministry of National Cultural Heritage, 2002
2002.14.1.

Bálint Szombathy (Pačir / Pacsér, 1950–)

Lenin in Budapest, 1972

gelatine silver print, 13 pieces, 30×40 cm each
Purchased from funds provided by Peter und
Irene Ludwig Stiftung, Aachen, 2011
2011.5.1.1–13.

Attila Szűcs (Miskolc, 1967–)

Playground at Night, 1995

oil on canvas, 168.5×257.5 cm
Purchased from funds provided
by the Budapest Sewage Works Plc, 1997
1997.3.1.

Beáta Veszely (Budapest, 1970–)

Time-Laces, 1995

cibachrome with pinpricks,
1 piece 30×32 cm, 3 pieces, 30×40 cm each
Purchased 1997
1997.54.2–5.

Colophon

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