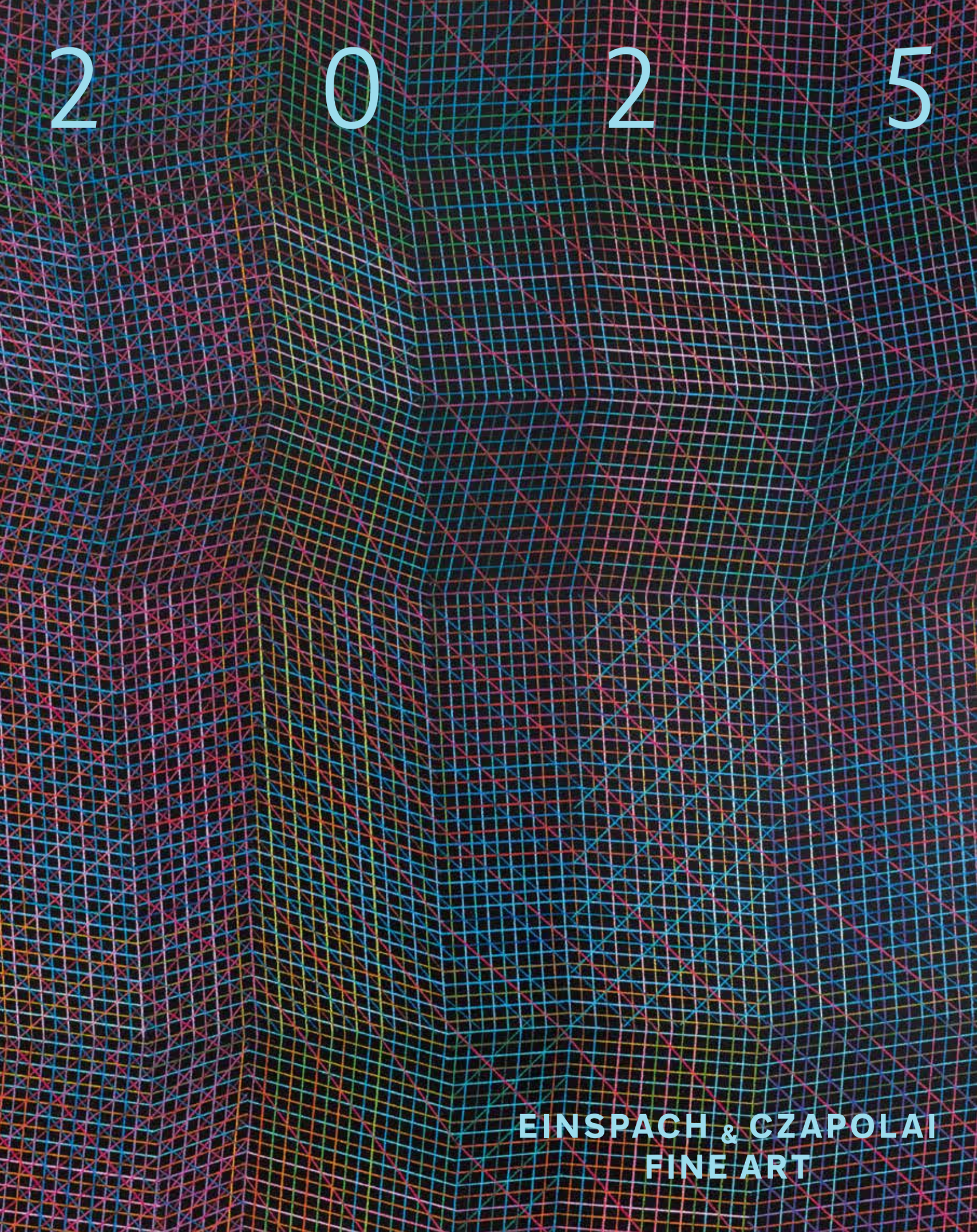
2025
EINSPACH & CZAPOLAI
FINE ART

CONTENTS

CONTRIBUTORS →

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László Beke (1944–2022) was an art historian, curator, and a central figure in the development of the neo-avant-garde and conceptual art in Hungary. He studied art history at Eötvös Loránd University and worked at the Research Institute for Art History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, serving as its director from 2000 to 2012. He curated numerous significant exhibitions, including *Global Conceptual-ism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s* (Queens Museum, New York, 1999). He taught at the Université Lumière Lyon 2 and various Hungarian institutions, and held leading positions at the Hungarian National Gallery and Kunsthalle Budapest.

Photo: Anna Juhász

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Based in Rome, Achille Bonito Oliva is a distinguished Italian art critic, curator, and theorist, internationally recognized for his pivotal role in contemporary art discourse. He is best known for formulating the concept of *transavanguardia* in the late 1970s, advocating a revival of expressive, figurative painting in post-modern art. Bonito Oliva has curated numerous influential exhibitions, including *Aperto '80* and the 45th Venice Biennale (1993), and has held a professorship at the Sapienza University of Rome. His extensive scholarly and curatorial work has profoundly influenced the critical reception and historiography of late twentieth-century and contemporary art.

Photo: Giordano Macellari

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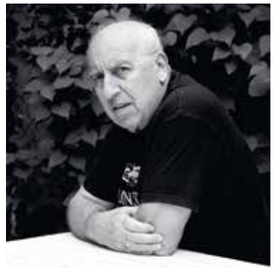
Júlia Fabényi is a Hungarian art historian and museum director. She has led several major art institutions, including the Baranya County Museums and, since 2013, the Ludwig Museum – Museum of Contemporary Art in Budapest. Her research focuses on Hungarian and international contemporary art. She has curated numerous exhibitions both in Hungary and abroad and authored several scholarly publications. In 2010, she received the Németh Lajos Award of the Hungarian Ministry of Culture for outstanding activity in art criticism and theory.

Photo: Zsófia Szabó



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László Fábián is a writer, art critic, editor, and translator. He studied Hungarian and Russian at Eötvös Loránd University and later worked as a dramaturge and film researcher. His essays on fine arts, photo-graphy, and architecture have appeared in prestigious Hungarian journals. He held editorial roles at several newspapers and journals, and received the Deák Ferenc Prize for his journalistic work in 1995. In 2015, he was awarded the Hungarian Gold Cross of Merit for his outstanding cultural contributions.

Photo: Bea Bulla

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Photo: Imre Kiss
(Museum of Fine Arts – Central European Research Institute for Art History)

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Photo: Gyula Gazdag

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He was co-director of the BBC film *Other, Like Me: The Oral History of* COUM *Transmissions and Throbbing Gristle* (2020). For twenty years, he was an editor and staff writer at *Frieze* magazine, and his essays and reviews have appeared in a wide variety of publications and journals.

Photo: Victoria Stevens

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István Hajdu is a prominent figure in contemporary Hungarian art criticism and art history writing, and a recipient of the Németh Lajos Prize. Since 1993, he has served as the founding editor-in-chief of *Balkon*, a leading journal of contemporary art.
His career spans nearly five decades, encompassing virtually every area of the Hungarian art scene from 1972 to the present. In addition to his shorter texts published in outlets such as *Magyar Nemzet*, *Beszélő*, and *Magyar Narancs*, his essays have appeared in numerous anthologies, scholarly volumes, and exhibition catalogues.
He has opened countless exhibitions and authored the curatorial concepts for several major shows. Since 1979, he has published sixteen books on some of the most significant figures in contemporary Hungarian art.

Photo: Gábor Hajdu

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Zsolt Miklósvölgyi is an editor and art writer based in Budapest, Hungary. He currently works as a curator at acb Gallery in Budapest and lectures at the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design. In 2014, he co-founded Technologie und das Unheimliche (T+U), a Berlin-Budapest-based art collective and publishing project, alongside Mark Fridvalszki and Márió Z. Nemes. He holds a PhD in literary and cultural studies and has been a visiting research fellow at Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany (2013–2014), and the Wirth Institute at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada (2016–2017). In 2021, he co-curated projects at OFF Biennale Budapest.

Photo: Adam Hruby

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Art historian Zsolt Petrányi currently holds the position of deputy general director and is the head of the Contemporary Collection at the Hungarian National Gallery. Previously, he was the general director of Kunsthalle Budapest. In 2007, as a national commissioner, Petrányi, together with curator Katalin Timár and artist Andreas Fogarasi, earned the prestigious Golden Lion Award at the Venice Biennale. As a curator, he has also organised numerous exhibitions in Hungary and abroad, including the *Peace on Earth* exhibition at the 57th Venice Biennale.

Photo: Balázs Pálfi

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Patrick Tayler (b. 1989, Pforzheim, Germany) is a painter and art writer whose work explores the liminal space between traditional painterly genres and ephemeral microtrends such as cuteness, sparklecore, and nu-metal, while also engaging with portraiture and still life. He earned a Doctor of Liberal Arts degree from the University of Pécs, focusing on pop-cultural references and critical approaches to ultracontemporary figuration. Tayler is a senior lecturer at the Painting Department of the Hungarian University of Fine Arts, where he has led a class since 2025.
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Photo: Krisztina Szalay

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Mónika Zsikla (b. 1979) is a Budapest-based art historian and curator. She earned her PhD in Aesthetics from Eötvös Loránd University in 2024. Formerly artistic director of Kisterem Gallery and curator at Budapest Gallery, she later led Q Contemporary before joining Einspach & Czapolai Fine Art as curatorial director in 2024. She lectures at the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design. Her recent projects include the Hungarian Pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale (2022), *The Image of Colour, the Mystery of Image* (MODEM, 2024), and *Ilona Keserü: Flow* (Muzeum Susch, 2024–2025), for which she co-edited the Hatje Cantz monograph.

Photo: Tamás Purger

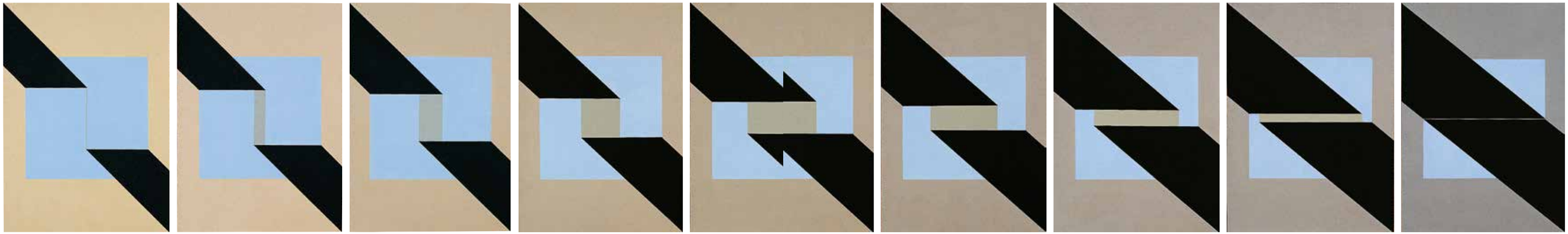
Orshi Drozdik, *Manufacturing the Self: The Pathological Body*, 1989/1995, installation view, Frieze Masters, London, 12–16 October 2022. Photo by Kojima Yosuke

FRIEZE MASTERS

15–19 October 2025
booth S26

The Regent's Park, London

In the Spotlight section of Frieze Masters, Einspach & Czapolai Fine Art presents a curated selection from the rich oeuvre of István Nádler (b. 1938, Visegrád, Hungary), a leading figure of Hungary's so-called Iparterv Generation, which emerged in the early 1960s. Named after two legendary semi-official exhibitions held in 1968 and 1969, the Iparterv group rejected the dominance of socialist realism and explored contemporary artistic currents, later incorporating elements of international pop art and post-painterly abstraction.



In the early 1960s, Nádler – alongside fellow members of the Zugló Circle – moved away from realist traditions and embraced abstraction. In his work, colour assumed a powerful emotional and symbolic role. While many of his peers aimed for a more neutral use of colour, Nádler created expressive contrasts between light and dark. His compositions often evoke abstracted elements of nature and reflect a dynamic interplay between central and peripheral forms. From the mid-1960s onward, his vigorous brushwork gave way to more uniform colour fields. His palette became increasingly bold, structured around vivid contrasts of red, yellow, and blue. After 1967, Nádler's paintings moved toward the industrial precision and geometric clarity that defined his work through the late 1970s. Nádler's practice represents a pivotal chapter in the Hungarian neo-avant-garde, where abstraction and structuralist composition coexisted in striking harmony.

István Nádler, *From Vertical to Horizontal*, 1972,
tempera on paper, 9 pcs, 80 × 540 cm (each 80 × 60 cm).
Photo by Brúnó Einspach

EINSPACH & CZAPOLAI FINE ART

CONVERSATION

Painting as a Space for Thought

MÓNIKA ZSIKLA
IN CONVERSATION WITH
ISTVÁN NÁDLER

Between 15 and 19 October 2025, Einspach & Czapolai Fine Art will present a selection of István Nádler's works from 1965 to 1979 in the Spotlight section at Frieze Masters London. The selection focuses on the period of his oeuvre where serial composition, the dynamics of colour, contemporary reinterpretations of folk motifs, and dialogue with constructive and avant-garde traditions gained particular emphasis. The paintings and graphics on display not only capture the imprint of that era but also preserve visual reflections that, in the context of late modernity, experimented with reinterpreting relationships between space, colour, gesture, and time. During this period, Nádler's painting combined the cool geometry of hard edge, abstract reflections of personal realities, Béla Bartók's use of folk motifs, and the teachings of Béla Hamvas – one of the greatest figures in spirituality in Hungary – blending distant impulses into a unique, autonomous visual language.

In this interview, we ask István Nádler about the intellectual and visual background of this significant period – discussing the legacy of the Zugló Circle, formative experiences from travels in France and Germany, dilemmas shaping compositional principles, and the philosophical horizons of the painting medium. We also touch on how the contemporary Hungarian scene related to this, and how Nádler viewed the positions of female artists like Ilona Keserü and Orsolya Drozdik during this time.

Previous spread: István Nádler, *Together*, 1970 (detail),
casein tempera on canvas, 130 × 80 cm. Photo by Brúnó Einspach

Below: István Nádler, *Untitled*, 1968,
acrylic on canvas, 100 × 120 cm. Photo by Brúnó Einspach

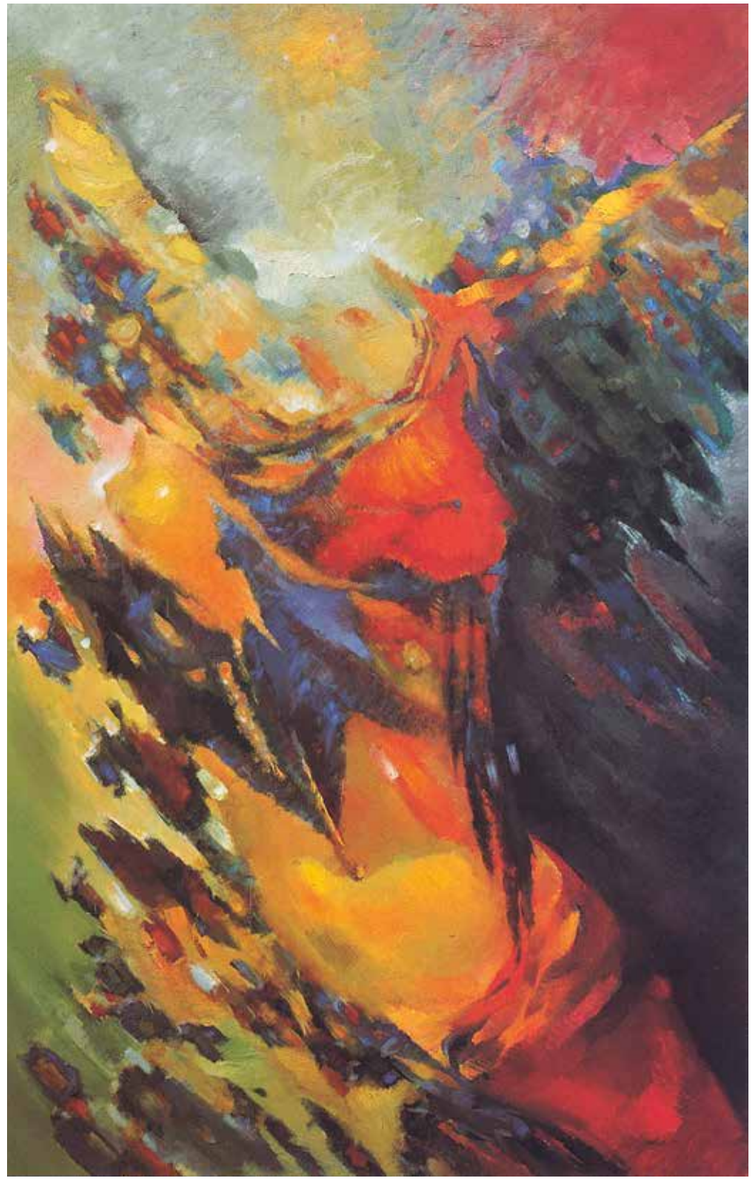
Opposite: István Nádler, *Nike*, 1963,
oil on canvas, 200 × 125 cm. Photo by Brúnó Einspach

Mónika Zsikla: What influences and inspirations guided you toward *art informel* in the early 1960s? How do you remember the founding and spirit of the Zugló Circle?

István Nádler: By the end of art school, we were already sensitive to abstraction – especially to the possibility of reaching a new visual language through a painterly rewriting of reality. In this regard, the École de Paris had a great impact on us, particularly the Jean Bazaine school, which mostly reached us through (black-and-white) reproductions. Éva Molnár played an important role here: thanks to her efforts, we gained access to many current journals and publications at the Fészek Artists' Club library in Budapest. We were also able to order foreign art albums and specialist books at the Foreign Language Bookstore. The information and visual impulses collected from these foreign-language journals and albums were decisive for us. It was during this period that I first reflected on a painterly trend associated with a specific ism. Particularly influential for me was lyrical abstraction and the abstract, spiritual painterliness of French artists around the École de Paris, such as Alfred Manessier. In 1963, my final year at art school, I painted *Nike*, which I still regard as a key work today: through an abstracted form, I represented a universal stance to which I added my own painterly expression through subjective use of colour. The composition's foundation was based on an image of the Nike of Samothrace published in one of Károly Lyka's books.

MZS: What new insights did painting *Nike* (1963) and the collective thought of the Zugló Circle bring you? What role did personal experiences and impulses related to painting play for you in this period?

IN: Sándor Molnár, Imre Bak, Pál Deim, and I shared a similar spirit. Looking back, for me it was always the path itself that mattered most – the recognition and resolution of contradictions, a process that was itself a kind of inner journey. My earliest related experience dates back to 1958, to my time at "Kiképző" – Secondary School of Visual Arts, when Pál M. Kiss screened a portrait film about Picasso and Braque to our class. In the film, we saw Picasso painting – I remember he painted the peace dove on a glass plate. Through his facial features, gaze, and gestures, the inner energies that "moved" the hands creating the composition became palpable. This experience left a deep impression on me. It was the first time I truly felt what inner energy and spiritual strength mean when it comes to creative, artistic processes. At the end of 1963, Imre Bak and I set out on our first joint trip – which also had an elemental impact on me. Geometry has always attracted me; for me, it is a manifestation of consciousness and something beyond that. By 1966, many of us felt a growing need to connect with Western art – to the extent that we hardly paid attention anymore to what was happening at home. That year, we set off hitchhiking to Paris but only made it as far as Stuttgart, where my suitcase – containing food and clothes – was stolen. At that point, Imre and



István Nádler, *Red Triangle*, 1975,
acrylic on canvas, 110 × 80 cm.
Photo by Brúnó Einspach

István Nádler, *Essen-W*, 1972,
acrylic on canvas, 155 × 122 cm.
Photo by Brúnó Einspach

Opposite: István Nádler, *Essen-W*, 1972,
acrylic on canvas, 162 × 130 cm.
Photo by Brúnó Einspach

I decided to return home. However, before leaving, we stopped by Galerie Müller, which already represented numerous American artists. The gallery owner we met advised us not to return home but to stay in Stuttgart instead. He helped us get work in a screen-printing workshop and introduced us to Dieter Honisch, then working at the Stuttgart Kunstverein, who was looking to connect with Eastern European artists. This was an extremely fortunate encounter – we often recalled it later, Imre and I. This was essentially the beginning of a long relationship with Dieter Honisch and Galerie Müller. Two years later, the gallery owner invited Imre and me to a joint exhibition, the works for which we prepared in Thomas Lenk's studio – the artist himself had generously offered the space to us. We were very lucky with these opportunities, and over time the professional connections we made developed into genuine friendships.

MZS: During this period – when a defining phase of your career was unfolding – other important oeuvres were also beginning to take shape or entering new stages. How do you remember your relationship with your contemporaries?

IN: I had a long and very close friendship with Sándor Molnár, yet interestingly, while our friendship endured, we spoke less and less about painting. By contrast, my travels with Imre Bak were extraordinarily significant and became defining experiences. On these trips, we visited museums, galleries, exhibitions, and of course discussed painting. These exchanges not only deepened our thinking but also fundamentally influenced both our artistic development – and the trials of travel at that time made our friendship unforgettable and strong.

MZS: I would also like to ask how you perceived female artists active in different stages of their careers during this time – such as Ilona Keserü, who represented an active and individual painterly language from the 1960s onward, and Orshi Drozdik, who began developing her conceptual and feminist practice in the early 1970s. What was your personal or professional relationship with them, and how did you see their place within the artistic context of the era?

IN: The inner energies shaping and defining a work's creation were perhaps most spontaneous in Ilona Keserü. This contributed to our relationship being very direct and friendly from the start – and it remains so to this day. Perhaps this harmony was also strengthened by the fact that Ilona and I were born in the same month and on the

István Nádler, *Sandbird II*, 1978,
oil and sand on canvas, 100 × 200 cm.
Photo by Brúnó Einspach

same day – I have always felt this implied a kind of cosmic connection: a similar character and inner structure operate in both of us. Ilona Keserü's oeuvre is just about unparalleled and was very close to the intellectual and painterly world in which I also worked. Through her, I partly came into contact with the New Music Studio. Although I had known this circle earlier through Laci Sáry, László Vidovszky, Ilona's husband, gave me even deeper insight. I knew Orshi Drozdik's work, though her activity emerged somewhat later. We met personally only in 2003 when I was in Zug, Switzerland, on a year-long fellowship from the Kulturstiftung Landis und Gyr – that's where we crossed paths. I find Orshi's art extremely exciting: in her radical expressions, she creates a special balance between visual intensity and delicate feminine sensitivity. In her works, too, you can feel the inner strength capable of shaping form, proportion, and structure – this is what makes her works truly powerful.

MZS: Among the works to be showcased at Frieze Masters were prints from 1972. What did paper as a medium mean to you in that period?

IN: For me, paper has always offered the freest and most spontaneous form of expression. It is a more relaxed medium than stretched canvas – I can establish a much more direct connection with it. If something doesn't work, I simply set it aside or discard it. In the case of the *Vertical* and *Horizontal* works, the place where they were created played a decisive role. In 1970, I worked in Vence, France, and the geometric compositions produced there still carried the experience of the landscape and the Mediterranean lights. From there, I travelled on to Essen in the Ruhr region at the invitation of Museum Folkwang, where I began to engage with a more abstract, conceptual interpretation of geometry. The relationship between "above" and "below" has always intrigued me – especially the direction of force: the energy rising from the earth, which I tried to capture and direct upwards. Following the paintings with a Mediterranean colour palette made in Vence, I created black-and-white compositions in Essen.
Around this time, I became seriously interested in the temporality of music and how one might "shift" from one space into another. I sought to express these ideas in my works as well. Béla Bartók was an important role model for me: I was fascinated by how he incorporated simple folk motifs into an abstract world of form and thought, seamlessly fitting them into the internal structure of his pieces.
Folk motifs contain that archaic power and universal stance that underlies every "true work" at its deepest level.
By 1968, I had read everything available on Bartók at the time – these writings deeply inspired me. This was supplemented by my experiences with Béla Hamvas and a growing interest in esotericism, which has remained with me ever since.

MZS: Did the 1963 Nike motif and later paintings created between 1965 and 1967 already anticipate your desire for formal synthesis?

IN: That period marked the beginning of my journey – an explicit realisation that it would be premature to directly connect the gestural painting I learned at art school with geometry. At the same time, processing folk motifs naturally related to geometric forms, and I increasingly pondered how this kind of geometry differed from, say, hard-edge painting. We instinctively turned to motifs known from folk art – myself, Imre Bak, and Ilona Keserü alike. Through the Nike *of Samothrace*, Malevich's works, and the labyrinth motif of the Knossos palace, the recurring question of synthesising seemingly opposing visual languages surfaced repeatedly. These precedents sparked the conceptual and formal reflections in me that would fully develop in my later series – painterly efforts based on searching for synthesis.

MZS: During this time, your use of colour changed noticeably in your painting. How do you now reflect back on the choices you made, for example, in emphasising contrasts of yellow, red, and blue or in using saturated, unshaded surfaces?

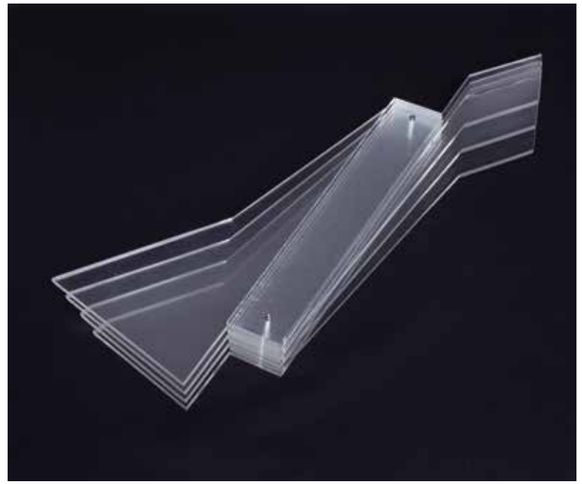
IN: Besides depicting contrasts, it was always important for me to perceive and paint the contrast between warm and cool colours. The sharper this contrast, the more tense the relationship between the colours. The "clashes" of green and blue as well as yellow, red, and black produced very powerful colour effects – these intense tensions fundamentally define my painting. I owe much to music during this period. The influence of Bartók, incorporating folk motifs, and deliberate colour use together laid the foundation for my hard-edge painting that synthesises subjective experiences. My painting has always been tied to personal lived realities – these experiences' abstract, intangible orientations are what I express in my compositions.
The inevitable closed boundaries of geometry could be dissolved and filled with life through the intensity of colour, just as, at that time, it retuned for us the inner reality behind the Iron Curtain. Since colour and space are closest to the inner image of the soul's freedom, I sought to enhance this effect by saturating adjacent colours with light through the relationships of warm and cool tones.

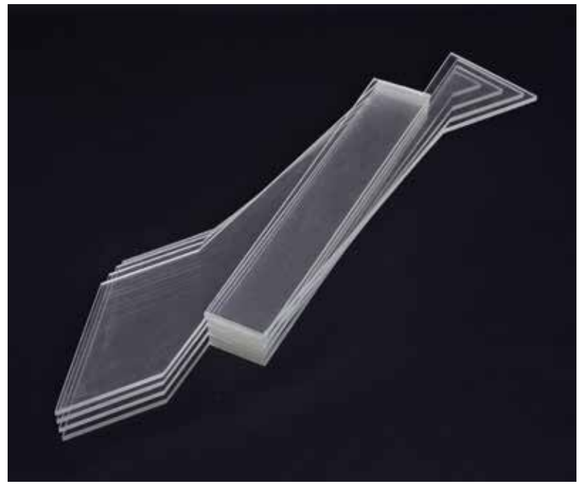
MZS: By the end of the era, in 1971–1972, when you received the Folkwang Museum scholarship in Essen, your colour palette and formal language changed radically. What brought about this shift?

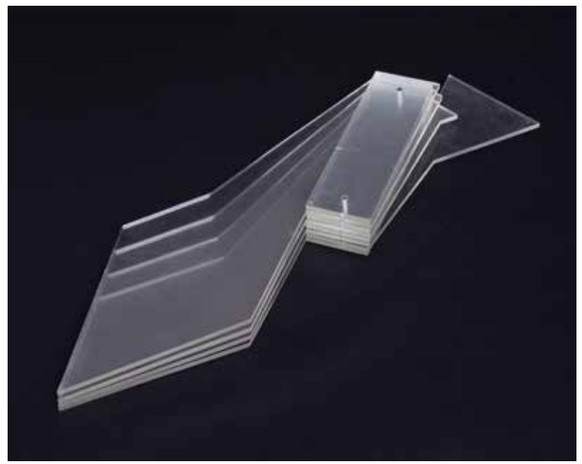
IN: On one hand, the change of environment had an extremely powerful effect on me – as I mentioned earlier. Traveling from sunny, Mediterranean Vence to industrial Essen in the Ruhr region meant moving to a place with a completely different character and light conditions. This transition hit me with primal force.
Geometry as a formal foundation remained, but my use of colour – shaped by the external experience of light and space – transformed significantly and took a new direction.

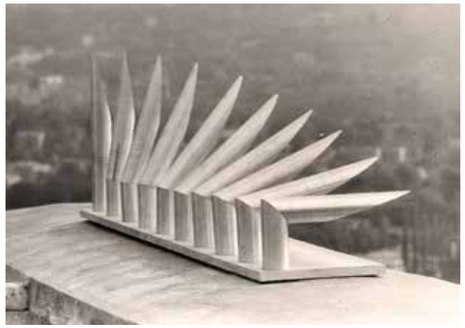
Opposite: István Nádler, *Mourning*, 1977, acrylic on canvas, 100.5 × 120 cm. Photo by Brúnó Einspach

Right: István Nádler, *Plexi I–III*, 1979, plexiglas, dimensions variable









István Nádler, *From Vertical to Horizontal*, 1972,
aluminium, 33 × 92 × 24 cm. Unknown photographer

Opposite: István Nádler, *In White Space I–III*, 1979,
oil and sand on canvas, triptych, 240 × 200 cm (each 80 × 200 cm).
Photo by Brúnó Einspach

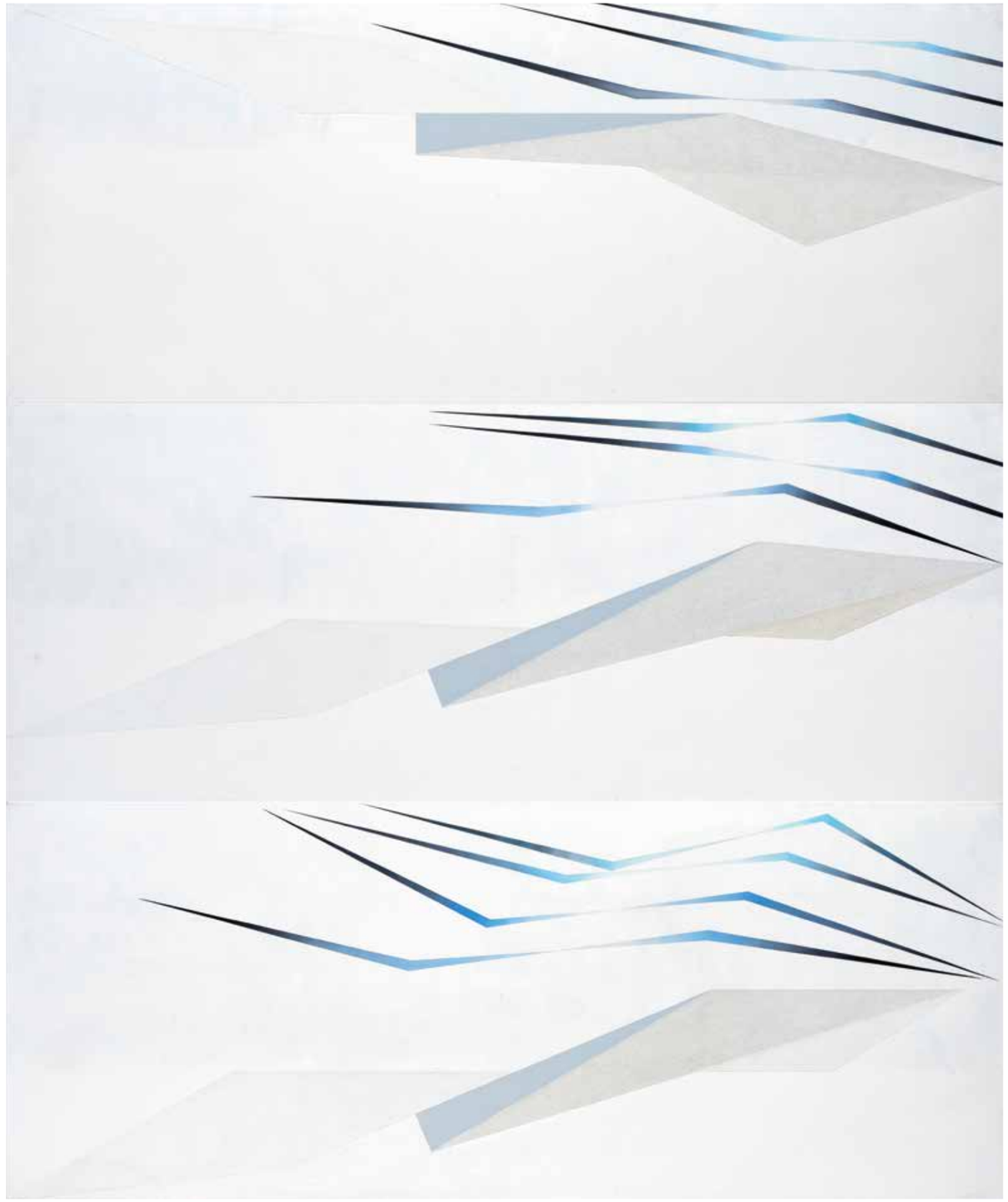
MZS: *In White Space* I–III (1979) introduced a new perspective. How did you view this "white turn"?

IN: During this period, I remained committed to geometry, a domain where I fundamentally felt at home – but by then the "bird motif" appeared in my painting, which I regarded as a symbol of rising or detachment. This motif pointed to a process of distancing: forms separated from one another, and the division also expressed an internal movement, the dynamic of moving apart. For me, this marked the beginning of a new pictorial era.
I aimed to reach an imagined, transcendental state – similar to what Malevich articulated in his white-on-white compositions. I used three different white pigments: titanium white, lead white, and ceruse white – each representing a distinct tone. To these differently hued whites, I mixed various types of sand to create textures and delicate structures that allowed me to separate the forms from one another.

MZS: How do you now view your creative period between 1968 and 1975, looking back over decades?

IN: I regard that time as a highly dynamic creative phase. Up until 1985, my art was characterised by a flowing process and an extremely joyful period. The era beginning in 1985 gradually brought me closer to transcendence – which for me meant a feeling of freedom and wholeness. It was then that I began again to explore how gesture and geometry – two seemingly opposed worlds – could be represented together. Malevich was always a spiritual companion and intellectual guide for me: his painting *Yellow Parallelogram* became a defining foundational reference.
As contemplation and music-inspired spatial experience appeared more intensely in my work, I increasingly turned toward spiritual and immaterial dimensions – while never fully detaching from materiality. The direction I embraced during my university years I attribute to Béla Hamvas, who regarded it as one of existence's fundamental laws: nothing can be itself without its opposite. On this inner path – the transformative process of opposites and their resolution – I have now come closer to the free, flowing, infinitely promising middleground. From a different place but with the same supporting force, I now initiate pictorial processes.
The recently opened exhibition *Resonance* at the Vaszary Gallery, which includes my homage paintings, clearly shows that from the very beginning, my painting has followed a path of spiritual experience.
While painting the cycle *The Seven Last Words*, through texts by Péter Esterházy and Haydn's music, I entered an inner state where words, images, and sounds began to resonate as a single unity. This experience was shaped by deepest contemplation, personal pain, and the search for cosmic unity – always driven by the desire to show how what lies beyond matter becomes perceptible and experienceable in the image. My goal has always been to reach a universal centre that is simultaneously an inner and outer axis, connecting above and below, gesture and structure, memory and presence.
This path – my own path – is the recognition and acceptance of karma. I did not want to illustrate others' ideas but resonate with them – using gesture and silence, colour and rhythm as my tools. In the homage paintings, too, this resonance is the formative force, a connection with another, preconscious energy. This is how that subtle state of coexistence between the subconscious and the conscious arises, where the memory of the other becomes not a mere recollection but a presence.

7 July 2025, Feketebács, Hungary



Published on the occasion of the eponymous exhibition at Kunsthaus Dahlem, Berlin (23 September 2023 – 28 January 2024) and Gerhard-Marcks-Haus, Bremen (10 March – 2 June 2024), the exhibition catalogue *Péri's People – Peter László Péri* (1899–1967) delves into the life and work of Hungarian-born artist Peter László Péri, who found himself forced to emigrate from Berlin to London in 1933 due to racial and political persecution under the National Socialists. This beautifully illustrated 152-page book showcases Péri's evolution from his acclaimed 1920s works in Germany to his lesser-known, figurative cement sculptures created post-emigration.

Péri's People
Peter László Péri (1899–1967)

Edited by Arie Hartog, Dorothea Schöne, Veronika Wiegartz
With contributions from Dorothea Schöne, Arie Hartog, Veronika Wiegartz and Robert Burstow

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Peter László Peri, *Reflections*, 1960s.
Photo by Jake Walters © The Estate of Peter László Peri

PROFILE

LÁSZLÓ FEHÉR

LÁSZLÓ FEHÉR (b. 1953, Székesfehérvár, Hungary) is one of the most prominent representatives of figurative painting in Hungary. He graduated from the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts in 1976 and was a recipient of the Derkovits Scholarship from 1978 to 1981. He was awarded the Munkácsy Prize in 1993, the Kossuth Prize in 2000, and the Award for Hungarian Jewish Culture in 2003. He exhibited at the Venice Biennale twice (1980 and 1990), with his 1990 showcase in the Hungarian Pavilion receiving significant international acclaim. Major retrospective exhibitions of his work have been held at venues including the Neue Galerie in Graz (1988), the Barbican Centre in London (1989), the Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig in Vienna (1997), the Ludwig Museum in Budapest (2007), the Musée d'art moderne in Saint-Étienne (2011), and the Parkview Green Museum in Singapore (2017). In 2014, his pastel self-portrait became part of the world-renowned self-portrait collection at the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence.

Fehér has long been considered a realist, even hyperrealist painter, as his early works from the 1970s had an exceedingly high degree of veracity, and even his paintings after this early period featured conspicuously life-like forms and realistic outlines. His pair of *Underground Passage* paintings indicated, as early as 1975, 1978 respectively, that „reality" had broken to pieces. Shards of sight appear along the cracks, suggesting fragments of memory, imagination, and retinal impressions, impossible to be separated.

Truthfully rendering figures and objects, his first black-and-yellow and black-and-pink paintings from the late 1980s profoundly differed from realism. Since his 1988 *Balkon* at the latest, Fehér's fundamental inquiry is not into the grasping of reality but, rather, into questioning its very existence. Does reality, indeed, really exist? And if it does, is it as we see it? Does its visual surface open to us conceptually? Does it reveal what is beneath and behind it? The transparent contour-figures written into massive colour blocks of his late 1980s works pointed to layer upon layer of apprehension and cognizance as well as the interconnectedness of the layers. Photographic precision aside, it is not possible to grasp how much memory, imagination, and optical experience merge in a visible entity, and how much the sight hides rather than reveals.

In fact, Fehér is a surrealist rather than a realist, even if his receptivity to the surreal gradually proceeds from the visible forms and motifs towards underlying contents and meanings. His early, allegedly photonaturalist paintings need to be reconsidered from this new perspective. Since most of them are based on photographs, in which the figures are posing in a long-established, customary way, it is suggested that they intend to be preserved in the family album exactly so – as others in a similar situation. Such compliance with traditional patterns turns the posing figures into shells of murky, perhaps chaotic inner worlds.

Importantly, it is not the American photorealist tradition that Fehér is interested in. Not the perfectly rendered cold details of professionally cleaned and reflecting glass surfaces of buildings and diners without people. He is inquiring into amateur photography, which offers an entirely different take on life, a psychologically bottom-up view, as it appears in the early works of Christian Boltanski, Edward Hopper's carefully selected scenes, or the early works of Fehér's Hungarian predecessors, Tibor Csernus or László Méhes. Susan Sontag also underlined the unique character and visual world of amateur, family photos.

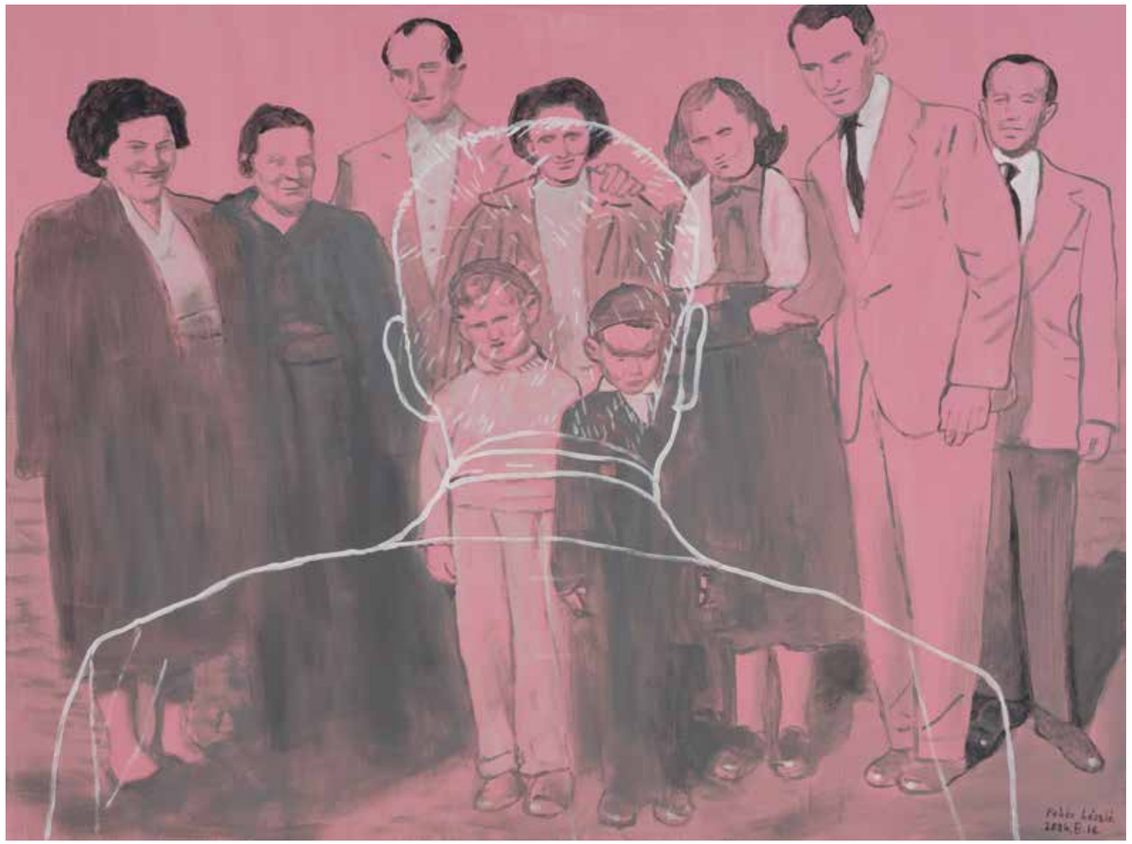
A lot of what such photos capture do not reveal, but, much rather, hide contents. Including details that may elude attention and remain imperceptible in real life, Fehér gives a sense of the complex underlying worlds that see through his paintings of banal moments. The happenstantial poses of family photos showing accidental scenes follow deeply traditional patterns that involve all the historical and psychological layers that had formed the poses. To confirm the underlying contents, Fehér often uses unusual, or even irreal motifs to play down the relevance of the figurative veracity. He is tackling the fundamental question of realism: not only does he question what exactly we see, but also questions the relation of what we see to what really exists. The way people pose for amateur photos offers him an inexhaustible treasure trove to trace surreal contents behind scenes that claim to be real. What does a Mickey Mouse cap tell about a person who wears it, as the cap overwrites the natural shape of the human head? What does it say about a person to cooperate with such a globally accepted sign of an already insignificant myth? Or there is the image of a young girl wearing a huge pair of sunglasses, leaning over her own drawing. Children's drawings, highly appreciated and studied by the expressionists as well as the surrealists of the early twentieth century for their spontaneously truthful expression of the unconscious reveals here the contrast between the manifest and the hidden. The girl's drawing is true, the realistically rendered sunglasses are the means of hiding. The fashion accessory hides the real world of the child.

Previous spread: László Fehér, *Memory*, 1985 (detail), oil on fibreboard, 200 × 170 cm. Photo by Miklós Sulyok

Opposite: László Fehér, *Hannus' Drawing*, 2023, acrylic on canvas, 250 × 180 cm. Photo by Miklós Sulyok

László Fehér, *Zoo Stories I*, 2010,
oil on canvas, ø 200 cm. Photo by Miklós Sulyok

László Fehér, *Zoo Stories II*, 2010,
oil on canvas, ø 200 cm. Photo by Miklós Sulyok



László Fehér, *I Look Back at Myself*, 2024,
acrylic on canvas, 150 × 200 cm.
Photo by Brúnó Einspach

Some of Fehér's paintings are divided into two fields, juxtaposing internal and external scenes. The two spheres, however, get close to each other also in the human–animal pictures as well as in the pink paintings, where the strong hue of pink, very far from being natural, overwrites and transilluminates the photographic realism of the motifs.

Fehér's self-portraits represent himself in trapper hat, the flaps of which fly around his head as exclamation marks highlighting the fact that the picture is not a photographically truthful image because its most emphatic motif is, as much as the portrait is concerned, dysfunctional. As a projection of his inner self, it is meant to shine light on the artist's personality, not his visible appearance.

While the classic surrealists used precise realism for the details of their paintings, so the images' dreamlike character originated from the incompatibility of the narrative motifs, Fehér, already in his early works, layered the planes of inner contents and external veracity. In the last decade or so, he includes blatantly irreal, often pop-art-like details in his paintings as if warning his viewers to not take them at face value. In *Danube Story* (2023), for example, an iron anchor, positioned in the foreground of the painting, dominates the entire image downgrading the figure in the water and the landscape – motifs that had rich meaning in his former paintings – into mere background. The rigid industrial object has an overpowering presence here, and though its prominent clamps are not as unusual near

László Fehér, *Riverside Story*, 2023,
acrylic on canvas, 150 × 200 cm.
Photo by Miklós Sulyok

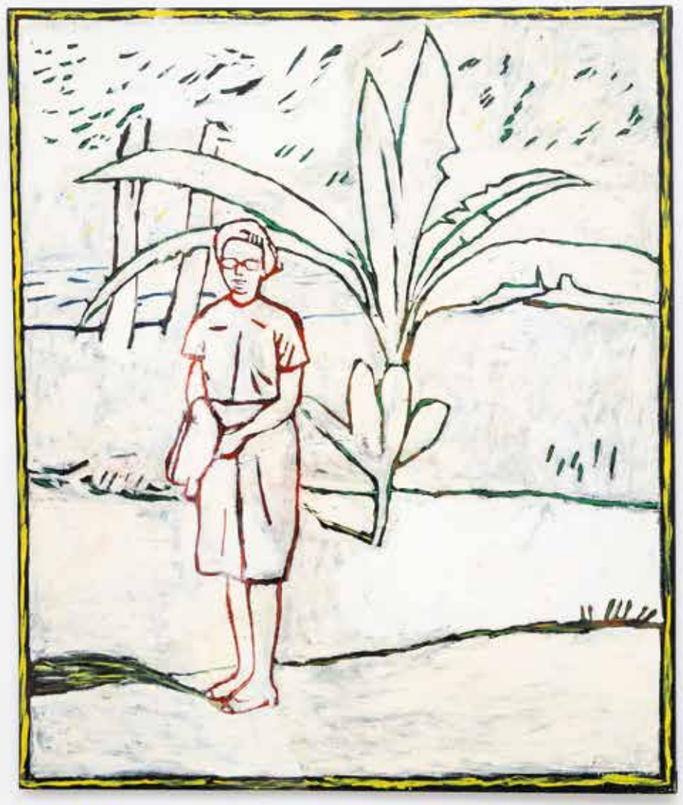
a river as are the surrealists' poetic mix of "an umbrella and a sewing machine on a dissecting table," it puts the banal bathing scene into a threatening perspective. Fehér's recent paintings suggest that nothing is just natural. There is not a Micky-Mouse-capped figure in front of a house, a smiling face, a child, or a cactus that is not the outer shell of a highly complicated inner entity, the front of endless layers of time, and unknown mass of contents.

Not unlike a psychotherapist, Fehér, with few exceptions, keeps on studying the inexhaustible topic of his family, friends, and personal surroundings. This is what he knows best, and which keeps on surprising him, revealing newer and newer things. It entails endless realms of secrets the surface can only hint at.

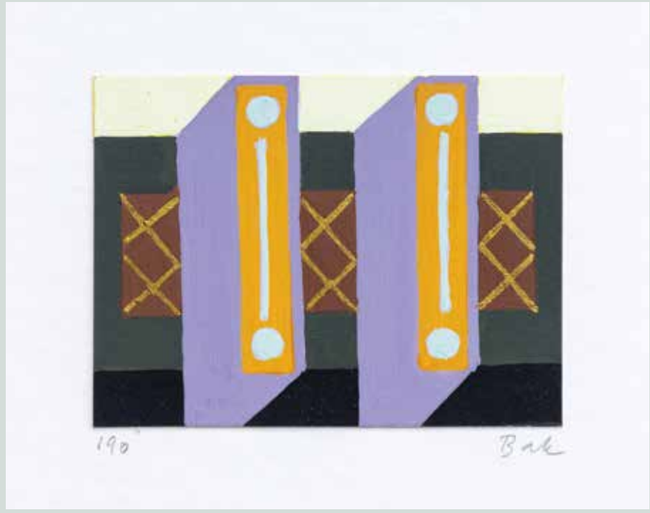
A great number of Fehér's paintings are in public and private collections in Hungary and worldwide. Through their motifs and the way they are painted, they illuminate a specific life experience in Hungary while the thorough examination of this lived experience extend their validity to a larger, shared human condition.

/ Éva Forgács

This text was written on the occasion of the exhibition *László Fehér: Capturing Memory*, which was on view at Q Contemporary in Budapest from 29 September to 25 November 2023.



Tendencies from the 1980s: An Exhibition by Orshi Drozdik, István Nádler, László Fehér, Tamás Soós, György Szőnyei, and Sándor Molnár, installation view, Einspach & Czapolai Fine Art, Budapest, 7 May – 5 June 2025. On the left: László Fehér, *Memory*, 1985, oil on fibreboard, 200 × 170 cm; on the right: László Fehér, *Untitled (Shop Window)*, 1985, oil on fibreboard, 194.5 × 250.5 cm. Photo by Brúnó Einspach



IMRE BAK
ILLUMINATIONS
1982–2003

All photos in this article: Imre Bak, miniatures created between 1982–1999, tempera on paper, 200 pcs, dimensions variable (each appr. 6 × 9 cm / 9 × 6 cm). Photo by Brúnó Einspach

Back in the day, in the course of conversations with Imre Bak, it never once occurred to me that his small pictures – perhaps we could even call them miniatures, if their function or role were comparable to those of historically defined, small-scale tempera works created to illustrate and explain texts, though the depth of their solitary creation and the circumstances surrounding them might indeed be comparable – might most closely evoke the *Illuminations* series by Dezső Korniss. This is true even if Korniss admittedly did not regard his works as phases, as modifiable, developable, variable foundations or first steps, but rather as *capriccios*, études, improvisations – that is, as the materialization of a realization, a moment of *illumination*. And perhaps also as poetry: because of the tiny surface, the joyful, thrilling solitude of creation, the lyricism of the act itself. For this is true image-writing, at least in the sense that the limits and focus of the "gesture" arise from the harmony between the hand and a piercing yet fertile glance.

"Across all sizes – though in the case of sketches done on thin cardboard, this is not entirely consistent – a 6:9 ratio grid is applied: this is a virtual grid that never actually appears on the paintings themselves, and the grid lines were not drawn onto the surface, rather, the forms were drawn directly, calculated and composed on the canvas according to the current enlargement factor. In the smallest works, this factor is 1:1, meaning they measure 6 × 9 cm per piece. All of these are tempera works; [Imre Bak] only began working in digital media in 2003, after which the small pieces started to be printed. However, even these were painted over, resulting in seven different sizes overall, with some compositions painted in as many as three different scales. Although the starting point was identical, paintings of the same motif rendered in different sizes almost always differ in some respect. In the 1990s, particularly toward the end of the decade, he began overpainting the small sketches with acrylic, since he used these to test and arrange color relationships. Separate color trials were conducted, but for the sake of overall harmony, he would paint the color he deemed most appropriate directly onto the tempera sketch."[1]

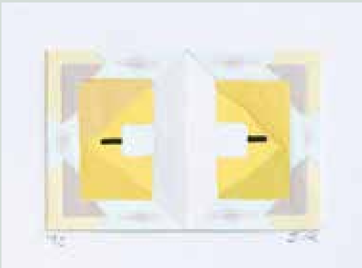
As Heidegger has suggested, "The material is all the better and more suitable the less it resists vanishing in the equipmental being of the equipment."[2] Imre Bak's use of material and equipment faithfully follows this intention. Yet he goes even further, doing everything possible to ensure that matter cannot reveal itself even in a metaphysical sense.

"(…) consistency is not necessarily rationality, but rather the simple human desire not to lose sight of a certain central force, Heisenberg, I believe, refers to it in those terms, and instead to maintain focus on it at all times. I approach my practice in a completely analogous way: at times, external forces may pull me to one side or the other, but I always strive to return to that central axis, and this leads to a process in which, after completing a given series, I try to assess what on earth actually happened. So rather than planning everything in advance, I reflect afterward on what it is I've done. This may seem like a strange contradiction in relation to such a constructed, geometric world, but it is not the result of rational deliberation; rather, it stems from a struggle with perceptions, in other words an effort to understand what the work reflects back to me.

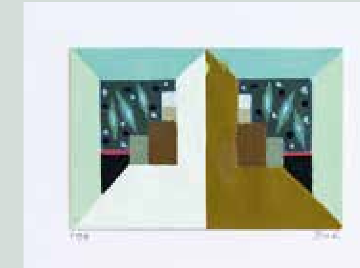
Does the fact that you arrive at the final image through multiple phases not diminish the immediacy, sensuality, or spiritual quality of the work?

It does. Several people have suggested this. When that exhibition at Bartók 32 was held,[3] where many of the small sketches were on display, several viewers remarked that the sketches still bore all the traces of groping, searching, and inner struggle, and these traces later become rigidified and impersonal in the final works. That may well be the case; I'm not in a position to judge. However, what I trust in and what I strive for as I go through the process is to have the image, which in the early stages remains uncertain and not fully clear, gradually become more resolved. When the small, expressive sketch is realized at a somewhat larger scale, I try to clarify the image, and that's when I notice if certain parts still remain obscure. Then, in the next stage, I aim to polish or clear up those obscurities as well. So each step presents further tasks for me. It's an ongoing series of new challenges and problems to solve, which I find quite inspiring, and it also generates a certain tension that, I believe, keeps the work from growing weary."[4]

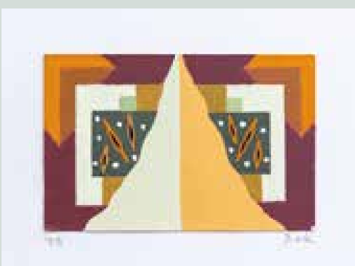
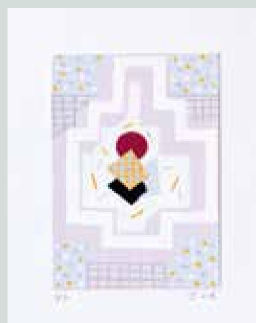
"On the one hand, the first visual manifestation of an image, one that might occur to me while riding the tram or during a sleepless night, suddenly appearing almost fully formed, complete with shapes and colors, emerges in a tiny sketch about the size of a matchbox. When I begin making these sketches, I try to bring that imagined, already complete image into alignment with what is taking shape on the table. (…) These small-scale sketches aren't truly miniature in nature, to be later enlarged to three or four meters; rather, the imagined image is already conceived at that larger scale, and I only create it in small format for technical convenience. If the image were genuinely intended to exist at such a small size, then, like a balloon, it would eventually burst and become absurdly empty. So what I produce at the table is a visually reduced version of the image, but even within those few centimeters, the full four-meter dimension is mentally projected. (…) The painting process itself, of course, is governed by rather strict technical



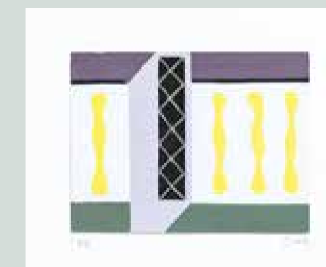


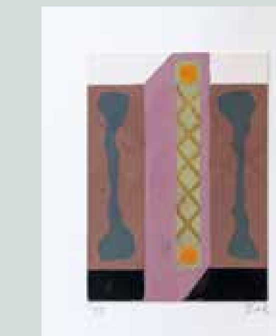
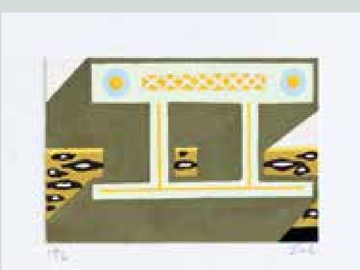


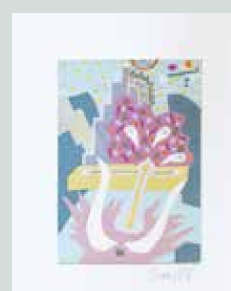
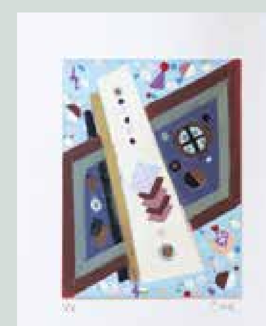


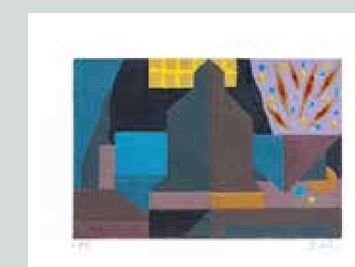
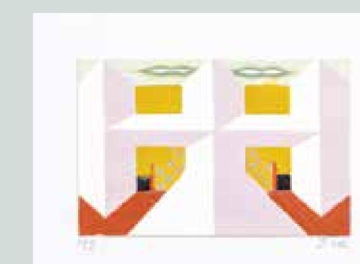



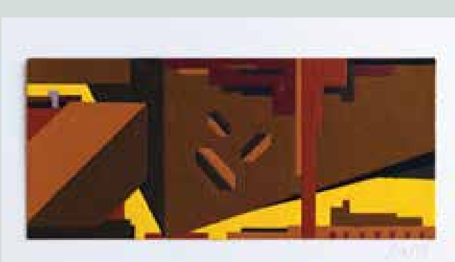


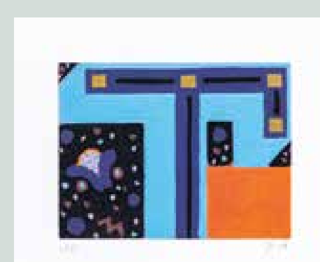


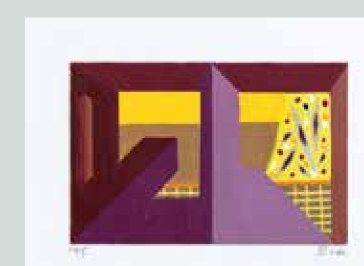




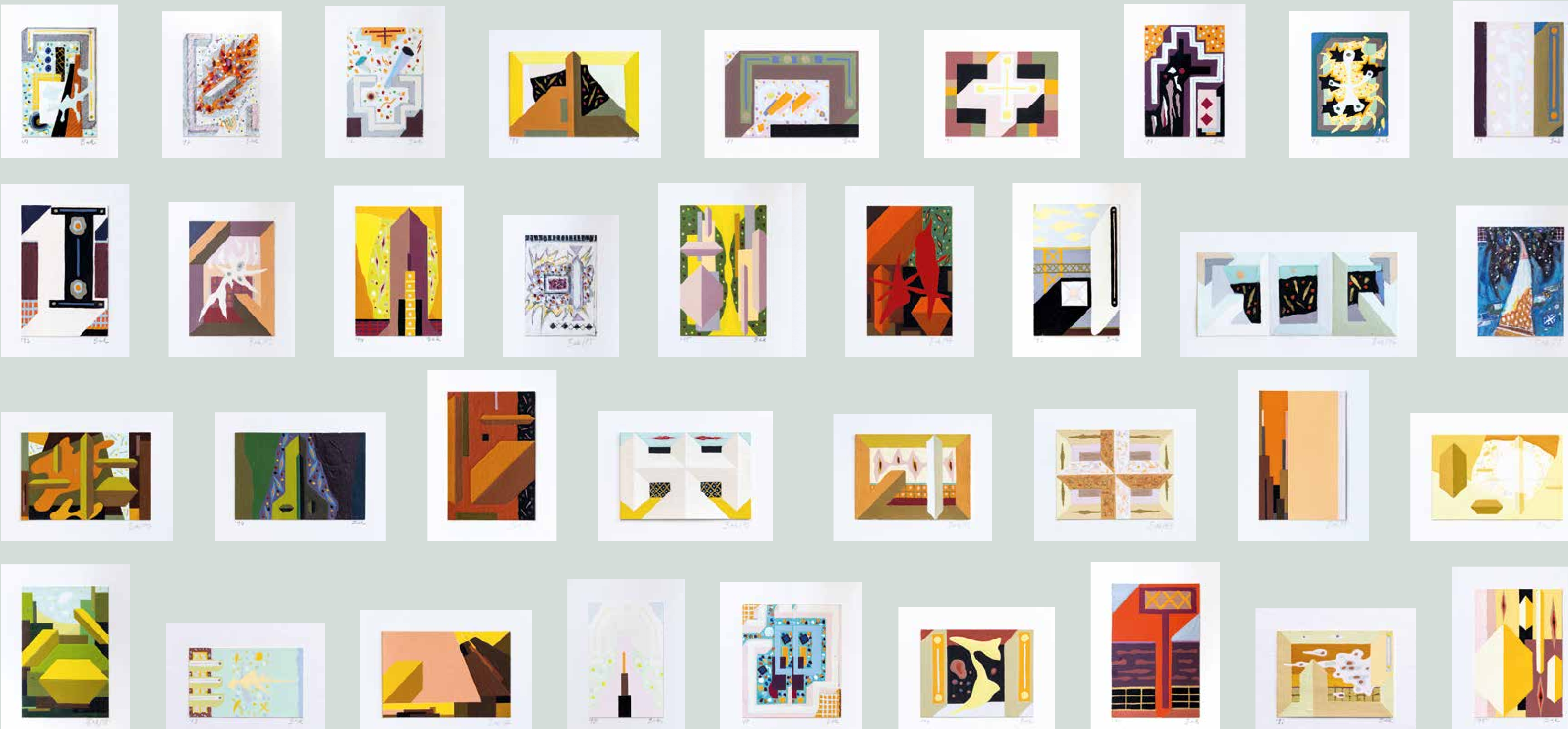









criteria – how one achieves the desired visual effects, how to ensure the surface isn't too blotchy or overly textured, yet also doesn't become so flat and uniform as to resemble an industrial finish, like a car sprayed with lacquer from a compressor."[5]

The signature of the artist's hand, the undeniable expressivity that reveals itself in the small paintings – the artist's intention notwithstanding – gradually loses its personal character in the course of "development." The subtle, highly sensitive accidents of hand movement, which are controlled yet unpredictable, become smoothed out across increasingly large planes and surfaces, ultimately conveying content of a more spiritual nature.

The works painted by Imre Bak from the early 1980s to 2003 faithfully illustrate his sensitivity to time, his boundlessly joyful response to the challenges of a changing era.

The major theoretical development in art at the end of the 1970s, reduced here to its most essential terms, can be seen as a rhetorical shift through which, and under whose logic, Arthur C. Danto (frequently and justifiably invoking Hegel) and later Hans Belting proclaimed that art history had reached its end. By that time, the literary postmodern had already been known for about a decade, and around 1975, with Charles Jencks, architectural postmodernism had also transformed both the theory and practice of the decade's turning point. These new tendencies "recycled" the "art of two thousand years," and even the history of thought itself, with a spirit of joy, anarchy, or perhaps a heightened sense of responsibility. What mattered, however, was that the content of art over the next twenty years (or to put it differently and with a slight step to the side, the spirit of the age) was shaped by the dynamic interplay of certainty and uncertainty, each spiraling around and through the other. For Imre Bak, the period that followed became a time of new certainties, not least because, despite the possible misinterpretations of the statement he once uttered ("I always consider the most current artistic conception to be valid for myself"[6]) it was never mere contemporaneity that interested him, but always the *era* itself.[7]

In the end, naturally, I acknowledge that the following assumption is, first, a retrospective projection and, second – since it never occurred to me during our conversations, nor did Imre Bak himself mention it – that the size of his "visually miniaturized images" in some way corresponded to the dimensions of reproductions found in the small art books and series published in France and Switzerland in the 1960s, as if their surfaces had found incarnation in his work. After all, both theoretically and in a visual/emotional sense, the legendary square-format monograph series published by the Swiss publishing house Skira represented a decisive experience for him, and also exerted an enormous influence on the "self-education" of the generation emerging in the early 1960s. Alongside and beyond this influence, Bak engaged with twentieth-century art history in a deeply deliberate way, treating it as a form of study, and just as figure drawing and painting were part of the academy curriculum, so too did he undertake pictorial analysis with comparable rigor. He recognized that by manually retracing the history of the "isms," he could arrive at a deeper understanding of painterly intent. Through his "miniatures" – visual aphorisms, image-essences – and their repeatedly enlarged variants, he was, in the end, continuously analyzing and reanalyzing himself.

Repetition itself is born of movement – movement brings about modification, and modification in turn brings new facts to light, and these facts, once organized into information, present themselves to us as new knowledge (as knowability). Repetition, when structured with regularity, offers not only intellectual information but also a sensory experience, thereby opening pathways to other forms of knowledge as well, but it does so in a way that continually regenerates itself and posits itself as something endlessly resounding. Repetition, then – naturally not in the sense of mechanical reproduction, but rather as a rhythmic (virtual) movement organized by spirit and will, one that does not disdain the contingencies of permutation – is a peculiar product of metaphysics and dialectics; a self-identical constancy that moves forward through the constant relinquishing of its own sameness, presumably or, indeed, certainly toward the boundless. Toward the boundless, despite the fact that the act of repeating, the repeated, and the process of repetition are all framed, enclosed, and solidified, simultaneously signaling a state of disconnection and severance, a cutting-out from structure – a condition perceived as objective, yet suffused with melancholy.

/ István Hajdu

Translated by Thomas Cooper

1 As communicated by Zsuzsa Albert.

2 Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper-Collins, 1985), 46.

3 *101 Pictures, Exhibition of Imre Bak*. Bartók 32 Gallery, Budapest, 17 September – 18 October 1992.

4 "Érték és érvény: Bak Imrével beszélget Hajdu István [Value and validity: István Hajdu in conversation with Imre Bak]," *Balkon*, no. 6 (1994): 12–16.

5 Excerpt from a conversation over the course of several days recorded in the autumn of 2000, a shortened and edited version of which was published in the catalogue of the exhibition held at Platán Gallery from 4 December 2000 to 10 January 2001.

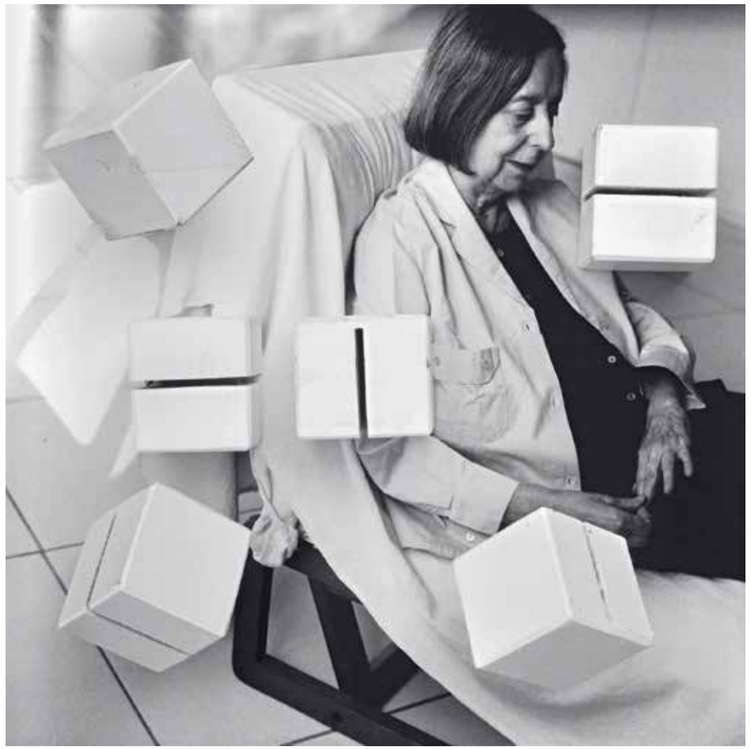
6 János Frank, "Bak Imre," in János Frank, *Szóra bírt műtermek* [Studios brought to speak] (Budapest: Magvető Kiadó, 1975), 275–278.

7 See István Hajdu, *Imre Bak* (Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, 2003).

PROFILE

KATALIN HETEY

Katalin Hetey (1924–2010) was one of the most significant representatives of Hungarian abstract art, which gained international recognition in France after World War II. Her artistic direction, spirit, and complexity align with those of her fellow Hungarian émigré artists. At the Budapest Academy of Fine Arts, Hetey studied alongside prominent artists like Simon Hantai, Judit Reigl and Vera Molnár, who also later found success in Paris. After leaving Hungary in 1956, Hetey initially settled in Italy, where she was exposed to a wealth of cultural influences, including encounters with key figures of *arte povera*, such as Afro Basaldella, Alberto Burri, and Marino Marini. Altough this brief period in Italy was a formative experience, it was not until she moved to Paris in 1957 that she fully integrated these influences into her work, absorbing the ethos of French *informel* and *art brut* and shaping her own artistic voice.

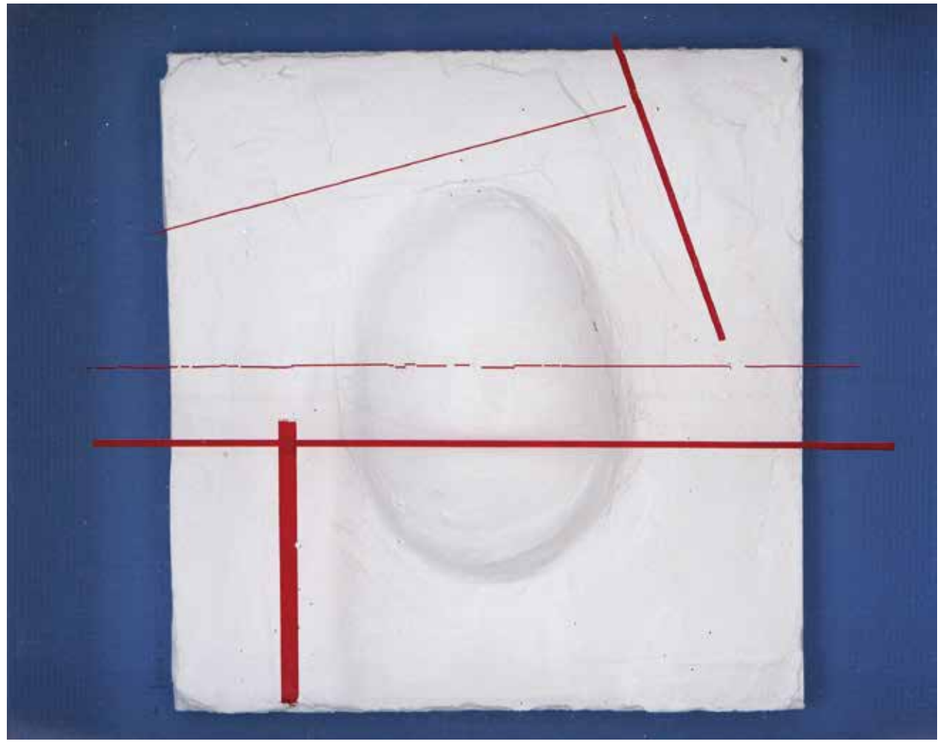


Above: Katalin Hetey, *Relief Collage*, 1988, acrylic, plaster, and paper, 19 × 23 × 5 cm. Photo by Brúnó Einspach

Left: Katalin Hetey. Photo by Tamás Féner

Previous spread: Katalin Hetey, *Frieze of Pictures and Reliefs*, 1968–1973 (detail). Photo by Brúnó Einspach

Opposite: Katalin Hetey, *Fragments in Box 1*, 1988, plaster, 20 × 23.5 cm. Photo by Brúnó Einspach



In her early years in Paris, she supported herself through illustration and graphic design, including designing album covers for the record label Vox. In 1958, she participated in a competition organized by the National Bible Society of Scotland in Edinburgh (also known as the Scottish Bible Society), and exhibited these works in New York in 1959. That same year, she undertook a study trip to Spain, and joined the Cercle Culturel de Royaumont, an international community of artists, scholars, critics, and art theorists, based within the walls of the former medieval abbey of Royaumont. This cultural circle also hosted conferences and concerts, offering an ideal environment for creative work.

Katalin Hetey presented her first solo exhibition at Galerie Lambert in 1962. In 1963, she spent a year in the United States on a grant from the H. Hartford Foundation. During her fellowship in California, she photographed giant trees and canyons in Pacific Palisades, analyzing the imprints of primal creative force and the "sculptural" power of organic forms. Following this period, she began creating small, white organic sculptures made from plaster and white cement mixed with binders and marble dust, which she later arranged in box-like spaces.

By the late 1960s, in addition to her sculptural expression inspired by nature's elemental forces, two dominant tendencies emerged in Hetey's work: the monochromatic simplification of her colour palette and the elevation of white as a key element. Among the important influences on her use of white were Kazimir Malevich's *White on White* square – an attempt to evoke the fourth dimension in non-objective painting – and Robert Ryman's work, a major representative of analytical/fundamental painting in the 1960s. Ryman's practice focused on exploring the boundary between artwork and object, seeking to strip painting of all content and colour (working almost exclusively in white) in order to foreground the process and form within these reduced conditions. For Hetey, white held similar significance. It helped her move beyond two-dimensional representation and explore three-dimensional, structured forms, allowing her to experience the essence of matter (which occupies space) in a profound way. Her first museum exhibition took place at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1964.

Katalin Hetey, *Frieze of Pictures and Reliefs*, 1968–1973.
Photo by Brúnó Einspach

In the late 1960s, another significant innovation in Katalin Hetey's work was her relief experiments, through which she moved beyond the two-dimensional plane of traditional painting. It was during this time that she created her first relief works, which fused the "plane" of the painted canvas with the "space" of sculpture – producing relief-like paintings and embossed textile pieces. These efforts to unite the spatial dimensions of painting and sculpture, combined with her material experimentation, resulted in what can be understood as a metaphysical process, which culminated in 1973 with the creation of a frieze composed of small reliefs and paintings, known as the *Frieze of Pictures and Reliefs* series. In these panels, arranged with a sophisticated sense of proportion and playful lightness, the subtle shift in the depth of plastic layers, the impulsive colour palette of the painted canvases, and the serene emptiness evoked by the white and light-coloured relief spaces all come to life as a unified whole. Notably, this frieze marks the first appearance of a soft pink hue in Hetey's oeuvre – an allusion to organic existence – achieved by mixing English red pigment into the originally white material. The frieze shown in the reproduction is a reconstruction of small reliefs and paintings from the artist's estate, based on an image published in the Hetey monograph in 2005. The tension between part and whole, articulated in this work, would later become even more pronounced in Hetey's three-dimensional *Part and Whole* sculpture series.

Katalin Hetey, *Objet Trouvé*, ca. 1965,
metal, 35 × 50 × 20 cm. Photo by Marcell Perina

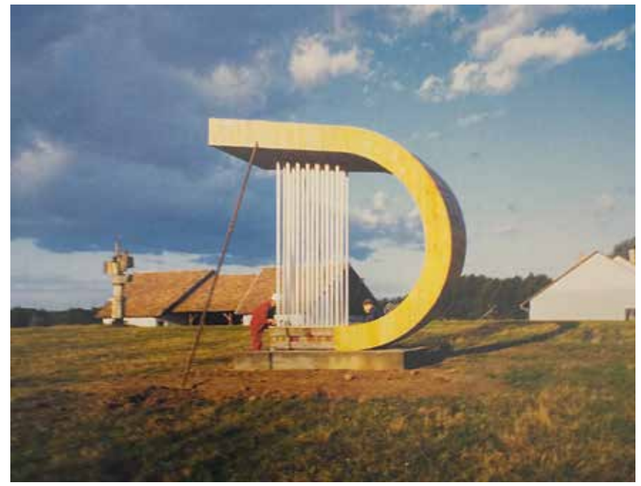
Opposite: Katalin Hetey, *Hetey 100*,
installation view (detail), Einspach & Czapolai Fine Art,
Budapest, 17 October – 8 November 2024.
Photo by Brúnó Einspach

Towards the end of the 1960s, Hetey began creating white reliefs using a mixture of cement, marble dust, and binders. She did not cast the malleable material into a mould, but instead allowed the material to flow freely, letting it determine its final shape. The primary aim of this process was to study the role of movement in the formation of the form, while she used the colour white because she regarded it as a measure of perfection. It was at this time that she began addressing the problem of chaos, in parallel with her explorations of self-forming, flowing material. In her photographic compositions made from scraps of paper, she investigated how the forces of motion affect the material, and how chaos can give rise to a system.

Her large-scale acrylic paintings of the early 1970s already suggested sculptural concerns in their formal structure. *Yellow Relief* (1969–1973), a textile piece in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest, was created during this period. The work – based on the contrast between organic and geometric elements – became an important foundation for her later works. From the 1970s onwards, her ambitions shifted increasingly toward pure forms, leading her to create space sculptures and models.

Katalin Hetey, *Yellow Relief*, 1969–1973,
acrylic on embossed canvas, 122 × 122 × 6 cm,
9 kg, Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest

Opposite: Katalin Hetey, *Part and Whole*, 1981,
steel, 13 × 18 × 9 cm. Photo by Brúnó Einspach



Katalin Hetey, *Windkamm (Szélfésű)*, 1986,
Nagyatád, Hungary. Unknown photographer

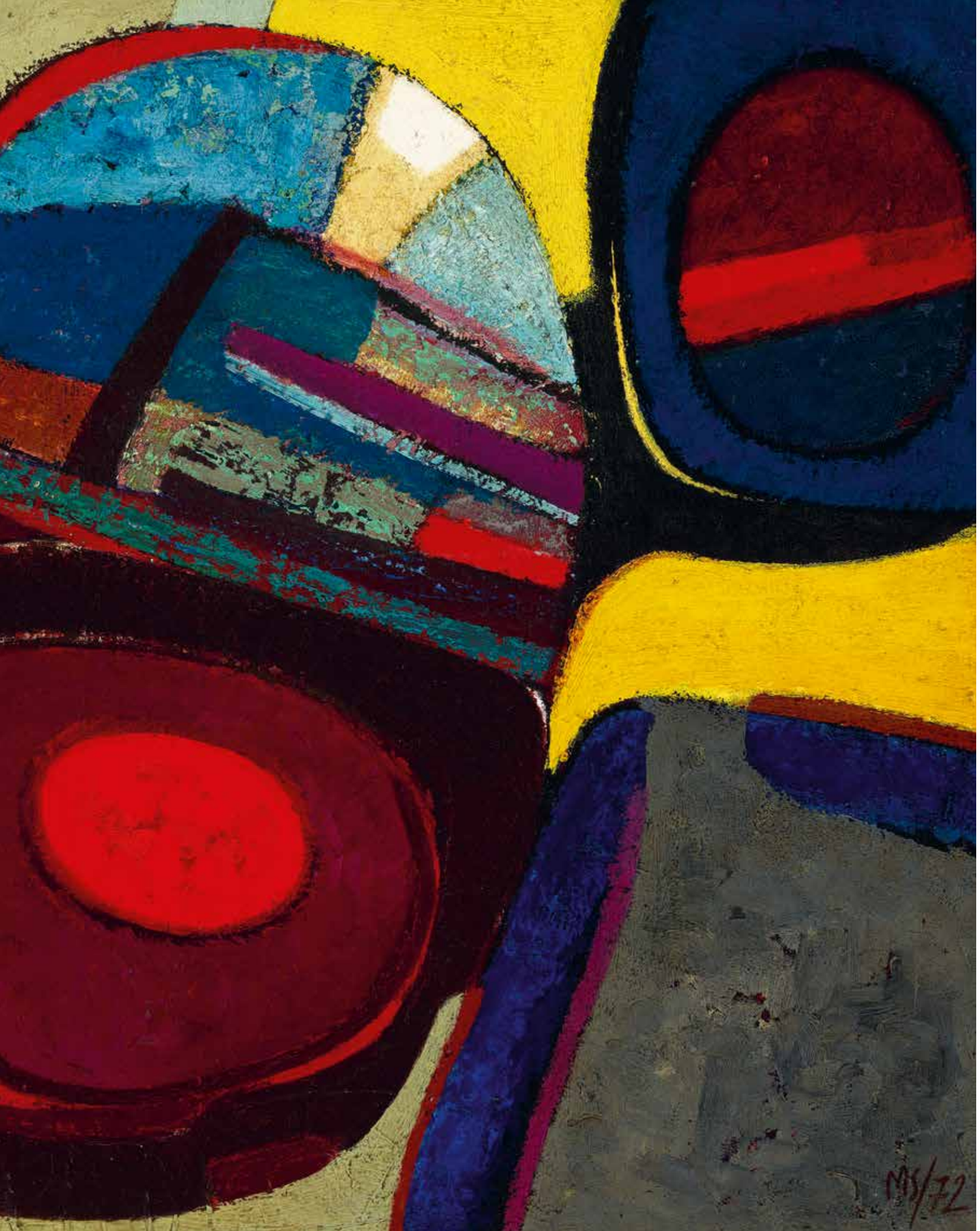
In 1970, Hetey began her collaboration with the Schlégl Gallery in Zurich, which represented her work for twenty-two years until the death of its owner, Dr. István Schlégl. From that year onward, she regularly participated in the Basel Art Expo and gallery exhibitions. That same year, she created her first small metal sculptures at a foundry in Aarau, Switzerland. After casting, she completed all the work herself, and her experience with factory processes led her to integrate industrially produced metal moulds and tubes into her work. In 1979, she held a major retrospective exhibition at the museum in La Chaux-de-Fonds. Her first exhibition in Hungary took place in 1981, alongside her husband Tamás Konok, at the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest, where they presented a large-scale retrospective of their work created in Paris and Switzerland.

At the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, she engaged with new philosophical questions. Her work emphasised the search for the inner life of form, the movement within stillness, and the relationship between the constant and the variable. She also experimented with new technical methods, researching the geometric spatial forces in the geometric space, using divisions of cubes, slabs, and spheres to create movable sculptures composed of moveable elements – her *Part and Whole* series, inspired by Heisenberg's thought pieces. Her sculptures are primarily made of steel, and her works are characterised by their technical perfection.

Her most famous monumental public fountain, *Windkamm (Szélfésű)*, was created from wood and aluminium at the Nagyatád Symposium in 1986. Her graphic work also forms an important part of her oeuvre. In the early 1970s, she produced large-scale etchings on plate using automatic and instinctive movements, and she created her own relief prints in her Paris studio. Her graphic album of screen prints was published in 1992 on the occasion of her exhibition at the Vasarely Museum in Budapest. Katalin Hetey passed away on 25 April 2010 in Budapest.

/ Mónika Zsikla

Katalin Hetey, *Part and Whole*, installation view,
Einspach Fine Art & Photography, Budapest,
27 May – 24 June 2022. Photo by Dávid Biró



PROFILE

SÁNDOR MOLNÁR

SÁNDOR MOLNÁR (1936–2022) was a Kossuth Prize-winning Hungarian painter, sculptor, and a key figure of the post-World War II generation of Hungarian abstraction. He studied at the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts in Budapest (1955–1961), where he was mentored by János Kmetty. In 1958, he founded the Zugló Circle, an underground forum for abstract art in Budapest during the state-socialist era. In 1965, he traveled to Paris and connected with Jean Bazaine and his circle, the *peintres de tradition française*. A year later, he developed his painter-yoga theory, which shaped his lifelong artistic path. In 1986, he was a guest professor in Nîmes, France, and from 1990 he taught at the Hungarian University of Fine Arts. In 1993, he became a member of the Széchenyi Academy of Letters and Arts. His estate is now represented by Einspach & Czapolai Fine Art.

The "spiritual kinship," the "chain of descent," so often dismissed as mere "influence," is more important than anything else. It is this clearly traceable lineage that ensures the living circulation of art through all ages. This is not just a one-way movement from the past towards the future; it flows the other way too, from the present to the past. Since Van Gogh, we see Delacroix's painting differently: more vibrant, more ablaze with inner force. The list of such examples is endless; in the case of every great artist, the situation is the same. One who merely practises their talent stirs no past, no spirit, and takes no part in the spiritual bloodstream of art. This living flow of tradition is the very essence of what we call art.

None of this is possible without the serious and passionate study of archaic, historical, and contemporary art and thought and without copying, without absorbing and digesting influences. This is intellectual nourishment, spiritual fertilisation. Those who do not feed their spirit, die of spiritual starvation; those who are not fertilised, remains barren.

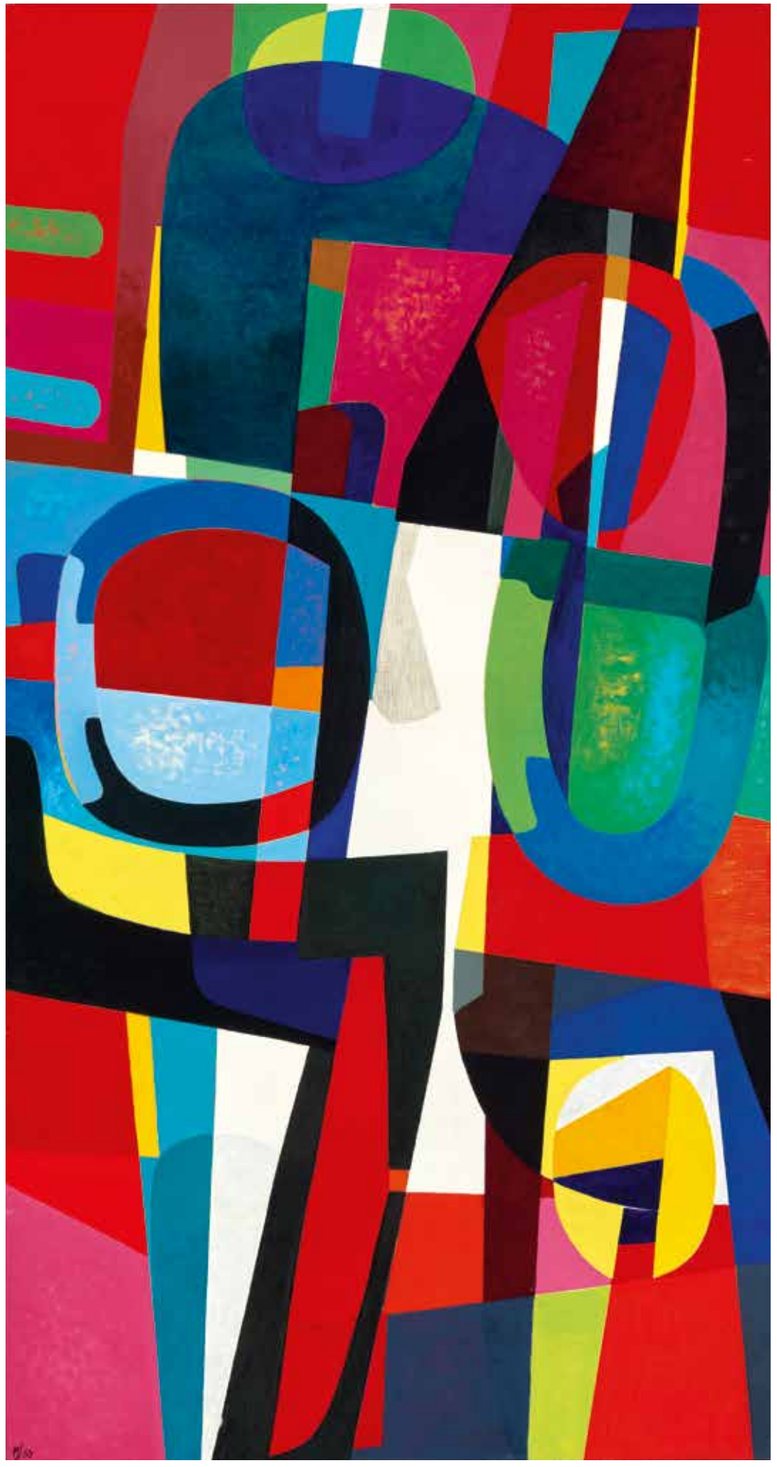
The aspiring painter must seek out those classical museum-level artists whose personalities most closely resonate with their own. They must find several such artists, from different eras. By studying their pictorial language, they must discover the elements closest to them and use them to help construct their own artistic identity.

Previous spread: Sándor Molnár, *Landscape*, 1972 (detail), oil on fibreboard, 40 × 50 cm

Below: Sándor Molnár, *Memory I*, 1960, oil on canvas, 80 × 190 cm

Right: Exhibition opening at the KFKI Club in 1968; Tamás Lossonczy, Béla Hamvas, and Sándor Molnár. Unknown photographer

Artwork photography by György Darabos



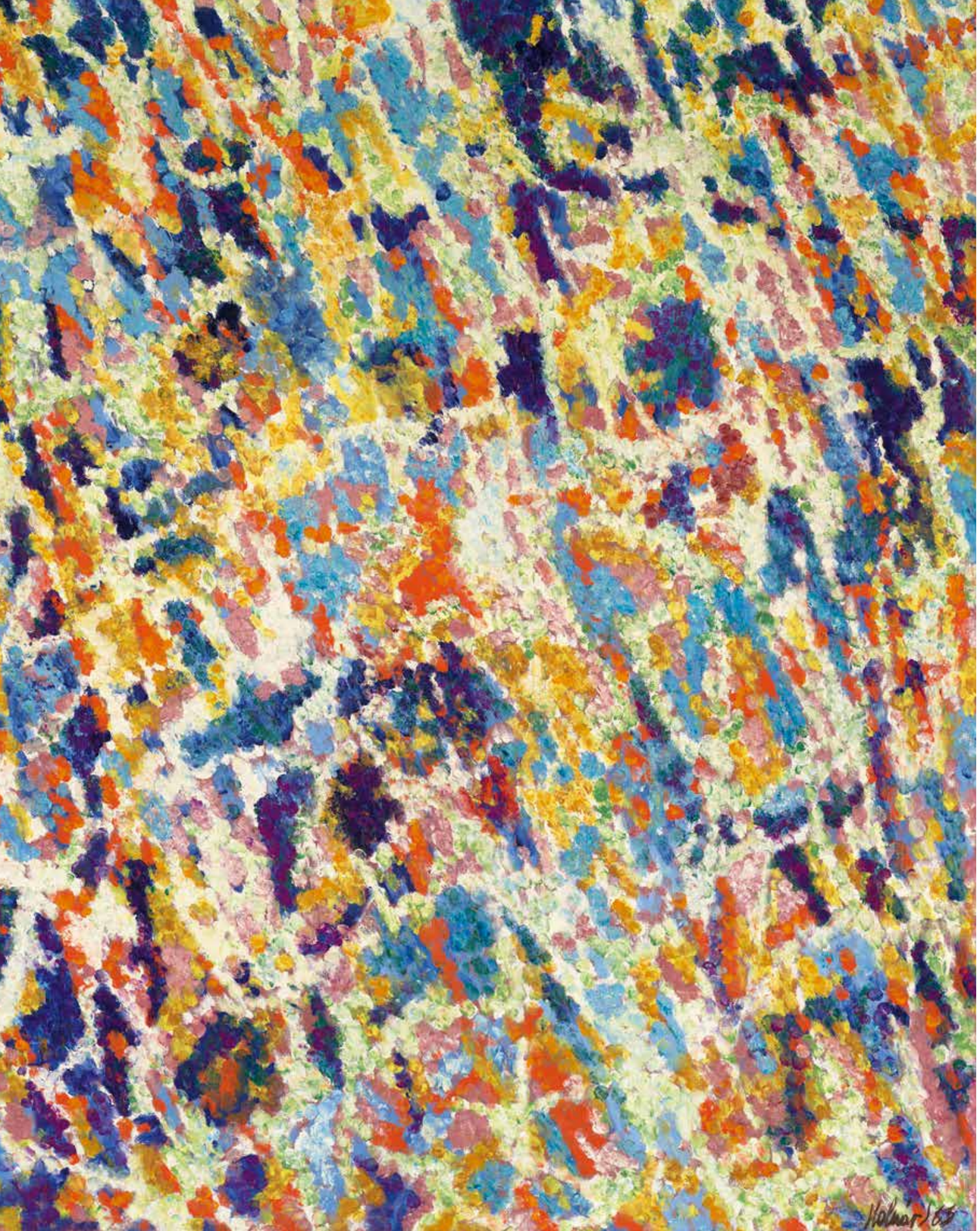
Sándor Molnár, *Memory III*, 1960,
oil on canvas, 190 × 100 cm

Opposite: Sándor Molnár, *On the Beach*, 1969,
oil on canvas, 70 × 120 cm

The old masters support them like stakes support a vine as it climbs. The importance of selecting artists from various periods lies in being able to distinguish between the "eternal" forces with which they are related, and their "timely," era-bound versions. Choosing only one master leads to epigonism. It is among this personal pantheon of artists that they must cultivate their own individuality. From their inner traits, the student forms a system of signs and symbols within their imagination and from that point on, they see and reflect the world in accordance with this internal system. Thus, their individual voice is born.

The most crucial insight is the recognition of abstract centres in the art of the past – that hidden presence in art, that wordless knowledge, which is the abstract living soul of art. This is what forges the chain of descent. This chain is the hallmark of authenticity. It means: I know what art is about, where its centre lies, and where its boundary is – the line beyond which what we do can no longer be called art. It means: I know who my spiritual father and mother were, who my twins, siblings, blood relatives and friends are. It means I circulate the same blood in the body of art that they did.

Sándor Molnár, *Landscape*, 1972,
oil on fibreboard, 40 × 50 cm



And all art must be internalised: music, sculpture, architecture, literature, thought, all interpretations of existence, and so on. My spiritual kin include Mexican archaic art, Gregorian chant, Bach, Penderecki, the *Rondanini Pietà*, Gothic cathedrals, Indian temples, Dostoevsky, Bernhard, Pascal and Nietzsche, the *Upanishads*, Laozi and Béla Hamvas, the New Testament, the Gospels. Among painters: Tintoretto, Grünewald, van Eyck, Csontváry, Bazaine, and Brzozowski.

An artist must find their own "chain of descent," their kin, to whom they are linked in both language and spirit. This requires many dead ends to be explored. Finding one's lineage is neither easy nor obvious – it is hard-earned, gained only through much wandering, misjudgement and difficulty. However, no artist can avoid this task.

Art is not an image of the artist's ego. Anyone who claims to "draw only from within themselves" and insists they have not been touched by art is making an absurd statement. Finding one's spiritual family is a great joy; a painter's true oeuvre begins here, and it usually happens halfway through their life.

In Hungary, art criticism consists of naming who "influenced" the artist, and once this is identified, they are judged and then executed, as though they never existed. Critics cannot grasp what art truly is, nor what past it can awaken and nourish with living blood, thereby preserving it in immortality. That is the *strength* of art, not its weakness.

Art is a language that expresses the entirety of existence. It rearticulates the art of the past for the present. That is why it is vital for an artist to incorporate the past into their own oeuvre. During the search for direction, the artist must explore the possibilities of connecting to the artistic past – that absolutely vital possibility, without which neither artist nor art can come into being. One who does not find this source, or who is unable to make use of it, produces lifeless, styleless, weightless works.

This vital transfusion is condemned in our country – and with it, the whole of art and tradition are airily cast aside. The immortality of art is denied; people crave single-use art, confusing it with toilet paper, which indeed we use only once.

The greater the past an art form can stir and fill with living blood, the more significant it becomes. Just as a form is greater the more elements it refers to, so too is an art greater the more of the past it embodies.

Edited by Eszter Molnár from texts written by Sándor Molnár in 2007 and 2013.

Opposite: Sándor Molnár, *Autumn*, 1964 (detail), oil on canvas, 100 × 80 cm

Sándor Molnár, *Moonlit Night*, 1970, oil on canvas, 120 × 50 cm

ORSHI DROZDIK
INDIVIDUAL MYTHOLOGY
1975–1977

I started to make performances for the purpose of creating photography. *Individual Mythology: Free Dance* was an attempt to connect my work to the modern free dance movement which I had discovered in books, with their photographs of female free dancers, in the library of the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts. I was intrigued by the connections between free dance and early Hungarian and eastern European feminism.

The only way I could conceive to unfold my interests was to imitate and re-stage the movements of the dancers I saw in the photographs. The first four performances took place in the Fall semester, 1975, and were very casual and loosely mimetic. The black-and-white photos were taken during the performance and printed afterwards.

The experience of making the very first performance helped me learn how to develop the work. For the fifth and the sixth performances in the Spring semester, 1976, I used the photos of the dancers I had appropriated. Performed in the large studio at the Graphics Department, with the assistance of fellow students and friends, these performances were better organized. The audience was mainly drawn from students in the Graphics Department, some from other departments at the Academy, and a few students from other universities, including the Hungarian College of Applied Art, the Hungarian Theater and Film Collage, and Eötvös Loránd University, who showed up by word of mouth.

Some photos were made using a release cord, others taken by fellow students and friends who had cameras (to whom I gave the film). Cameras were still uncommon and expensive at that time, so only a very few students or their families owned one. I offered what I view as an important declaration at this time: "all images made of my body and my performances are my images and my artworks." It was a manifesto of sorts for all the work I made, and connected with the feminist program I was developing. My friends and colleagues supported the declaration; I collected the films from their cameras and printed them in the darkroom.

For the third performance, I used an old overhead projector which I had found, projecting onto my dancing body the photographs of dancers that I had already printed. A series of exhibition panels covered with white bed sheets formed the backdrop for the projections. The seventh and eighth performances in the Fall semester, 1976 and Spring semester, 1977 were accompanied by projected photos and color slides – which now included not only images of dancers, but also photographs of my own dancing body taken during previous performances. In these last two performances I danced naked and wearing just a light fabric, emulating the earlier dancers.

/ Orshi Drozdik, 2021

(excerpt from the book *Adventure in Technos Dystopium: Work, Writings, Exhibitions, 1970–1995*, edited by John C. Welchman [MER, 2024])

Orshi Drozdik, *Individual Mythology: Free Dance*, 1975–1976, red offset print on paper, vintage, 9 pcs, 198 × 144 cm (each 66 × 48 cm). Photo by Orshi Drozdik

ORSHI DROZDIK
PORNOGRAPHY
1978–1979

I started to work on the subject of pornography in 1978, soon after I arrived in Amsterdam. The series of performances and photographs titled *Pornography* offers a critical analysis of the patriarchal pornographic gaze onto women's bodies, on the production and consumption of pornography, on embedded sexism, and on gender inequality and the subordination of women.

At that time, the liberating power of the youth movements of the sixties and seventies still haunted the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Amsterdam. The youth and hippie movements were especially critical of bourgeois prudery and muzzled sexuality. The socialist regimes of Eastern Europe were also critical of bourgeois prudery, but they exercised strong control over pornography, as their political programs narrated only one path for the equality and emancipation of women. There was no engagement, however, in the Amsterdam art scene at the time with pornography. My work on pornography attracted no support from the city's well-developed art world.

The commercial sex industry in Amsterdam had a startling effect on me. Seeing almost naked women's bodies in the shop windows, offering their bodies to men for sex, was seriously shocking. I immediately decided to make a new art project on the subject of pornography. I collected cheap porno newspapers, rephotographed the images, and projected slides with a slide projector and photos with overhead projector onto my own performing body. I performed mainly for my camera, using an extended cable release, but also for an audience, a small group of friends in a borrowed studio. I titled this series *Pornography: I Project on Myself* (1979). Earlier I had produced another series of performances and photographs in which I photographed myself as a porno star (I tried to act like one) and manipulated (mainly by double-exposure or overlapping the negatives) these images in the dark room. In this series, *Pornography: I Embrace Myself* (1978–79) I identified myself with the woman who has been abused by the porn industry, embracing her as my alter-self, my other self. Connecting my artist's body with the women caught up in the porn industry was a deeply felt and visceral experience.

/ Orshi Drozdik, 1978; edited in 2019

(excerpt from the book *Adventure in Technos Dystopium: Work, Writings, Exhibitions, 1970–1995*, edited by John C. Welchman [MER, 2024])

Orshi Drozdik, *Pornography*, 1978–1979, gelatin silver prints, 12 pcs, 118 × 168 cm (4 pcs 34 × 42 cm; 8 pcs 42 × 32 cm). Photo by Orshi Drozdik

LÁSZLÓ FEHÉR
FROM TÁC
1987

The silver sky multiplied the mirror of the spring's water. This was where animals – cattle, horses – were brought to drink, and the wild creatures of the surrounding land also came here to quench their thirst. This water was life itself. In the distance, fields under the plough and low hills crowned the landscape.

At the time I painted this scene, I was deeply immersed in the poetry and folk art of the Altai region. I was fascinated by the scenes and animal figures once drawn on cave walls. These memories found their way into the landscape of Tác – the signs of a distant past seem to flicker before us, and a simple sun-spun wheel rolls across the picture. All this unfolds in Tác, at the edge of the village. I wanted to show something utterly constant – a place where the changing and unchanging world coexist eternally. No people are visible in the painting, yet their presence is still deeply felt.

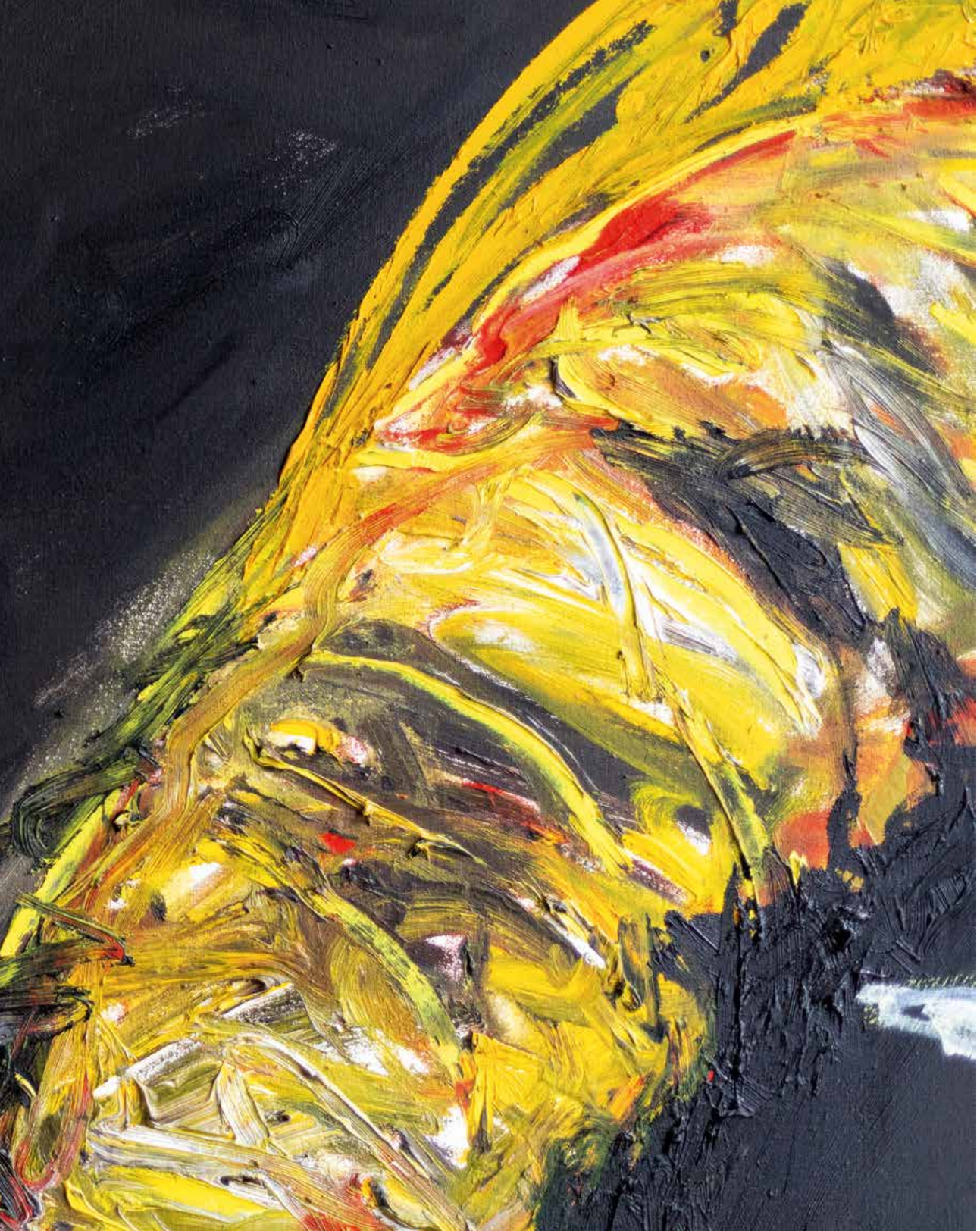
To me, this beautiful, simple world is the setting of my childhood. Even now, I still love walking out into the fields beyond the village. My studio was also built here in Tác. This beauty is, for me, the miracle of everyday life – a source I can always draw from.

This painting was purchased by Mr. Ludwig during his visit to Hungary. Not far from the spring shown in the painting lies the Roman settlement of Gorsium, much of which remains unexcavated to this day.

This piece was created during what is known as the New Painting period. In 1988, I had a solo exhibition of works from this era at the Neue Galerie in Graz, spread across eleven rooms. It was curated by Professor Wilfried Skreiner. The museum acquired three of my paintings from that exhibition.

/ László Fehér, 31 May 2025

Amy Sillman, *Oh, Clock!*, exhibition view, 22 March – 31 August 2025, Ludwig Forum Aachen, Germany. Photo by Annik Wetter



PROFILE

BÉLA SZILÁRDI

Béla Szilárdi (b. 1940, Budapest) graduated from the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music in 1963. Until 1970, he played in various symphony and pop orchestras. That year, he also began working as a photographer for several Hungarian newspapers (*Gyermekünk*, *Óvodai Szemle*, *Tükör*) and at the Research Institute of Art History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. In 1971, he moved to Saarbrücken, Germany, and joined the *Saarbrücker Zeitung* as a photographer. He later worked in Munich for magazines such as *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Münchener* Mosaik, and *Quick*. From 1980, he worked as a graphic designer, creating postcards and wrapping paper for twelve publishers and paper mills. He joined the Bavarian Artists' Association (BBK) in 1985 and the Hungarian Artists' Association in 1987. In 1990, he studied Computer Design in Munich. In 1993, he returned to Hungary, settling in Gutaháza, a small village in Vas County, where he built a studio next to his home.

Opposite: Béla Szilárdi, *Hommage*, 1988, oil on canvas, 115 × 85 cm

Right: Béla Szilárdi, *Man of Sadness 1*, 1998, oil on canvas, 95 × 95 cm

Previous spread: Béla Szilárdi, *Man of Sadness 3*, 1998 (detail), oil on canvas, 95 × 95 cm

All photos by Brúnó Einspach

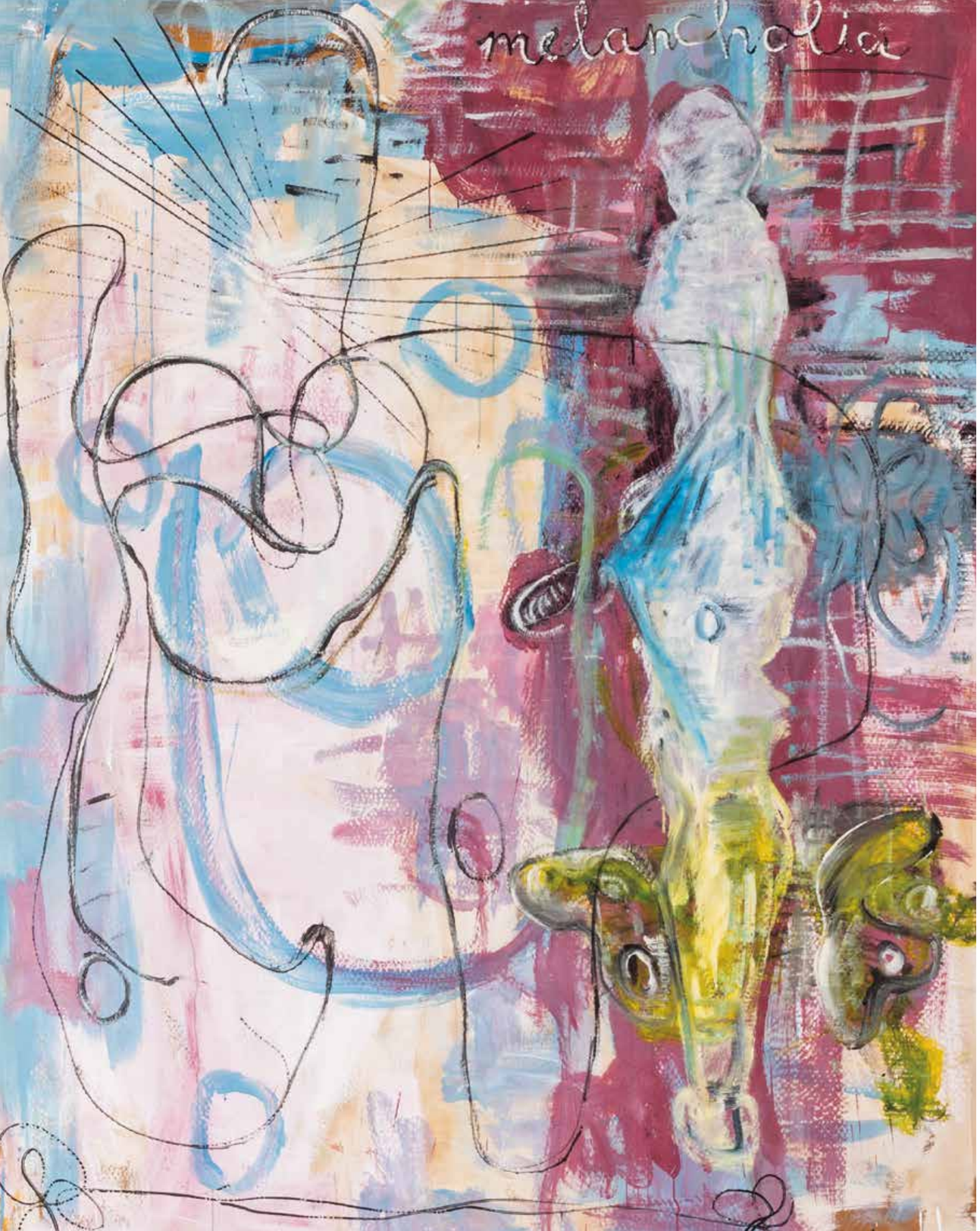
"In 1988, the analysis of Beuys was presented as a strategy of image and counter-image in Szilárdi's work. Beuys denies and eradicates the entire visual world of modernism, as he can communicate more through human action than the romantic idyll that was outdated for the twentieth century, without taking a position. He is blasphemy itself, and with his complete radicalism he unleashes forces that demonstrate the possibility of a new clarity about the tangibility of existence in the universe. Szilárdi adopts Beuys' symbolic signs for his painting. He captures, like a photographer, small elements, emblematic figurative compositions that become the central message of his paintings, almost like painterly notes to the Beuys oeuvre. They are not illustrations, but translations towards a new interpretation. The series made between 1988 and 1998 is Szilárdi's reminiscence of the work of the great modernism denier. Once again, we are back to the question, as with the Nietzsche pictures made later, of how free are we to reassign something to a position that denies or rejects that position. This is only possible with the freedom with which Béla Szilárdi creates. Everything is possible as long as the necessary energies are capable of generating valid work. Szilárdi achieves this with his own personal impulse and visual creative logic."

/ Julia Fabényi

"Beuys' art – at least for Béla Szilárdi – became a subject for deeper analysis (and at the same time something to be processed and appropriated) because he saw in it a unique path which – undoubtedly in Beuys's manner – offered the possibility of modern form composition, and in this medium, which became his own, he found a truly distinctive individual painterliness. This was an approach to the philosophy of the distinguished master that was built not on the master's gestures, but on the spirit that radiated from him – thus, it can accurately be classified as *hommage*, and in this way, it is unquestionably a 'world of its own' and, of course, an opportunity for further steps, or rather an initiative. As a result of an exciting personal encounter, a conversation that expanded into a lecture, he felt compelled – and this is the most important thing to clarify in itself – to explore the essence of the modern painter's worldview: liberation from outdated dogmas, that is, discovering in himself the urgent creative task – the necessary, albeit individual, handling of material constraints…"

/ László Fábián

Béla Szilárdi, *Hommage à Beuys 2*,
1989, oil on canvas, 85 × 105 cm



PORTFOLIO

TAMÁS SOÓS

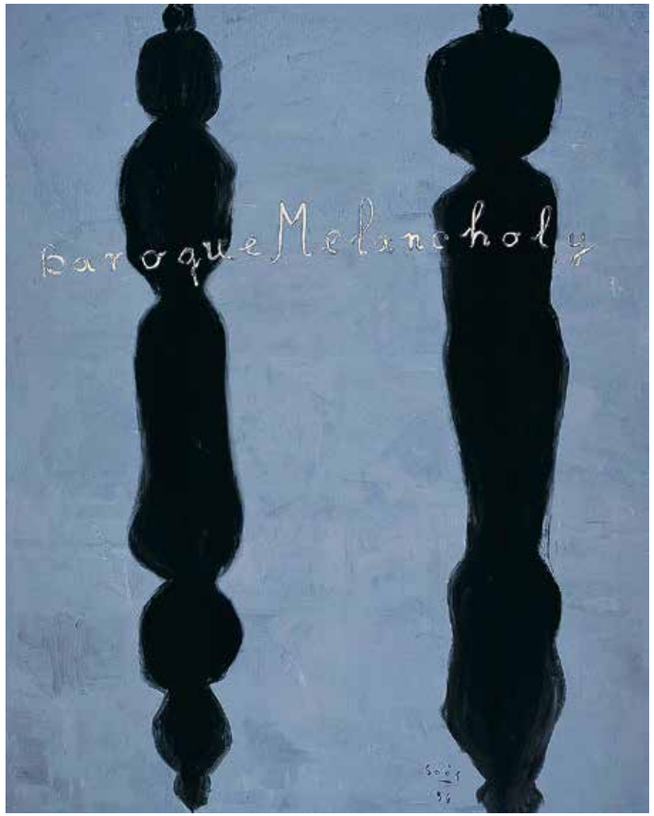
TAMÁS SOÓS (b. 1955, Budapest, Hungary) graduated from the department of textile design at the Hungarian University of Applied Arts in 1985. Between 1987 and 1989, he was awarded the Derkovits Scholarship, followed by a residency at the Hungarian Academy in Rome in 1994 and a grant from the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris in 1998. In the 1980s and 1990s, Soós exhibited internationally alongside artists such as Erwin Wurm and Yuko Shiraishi, and took part in the New Sensibility group exhibitions curated by Lóránd Hegyi, which represented the Eastern European “trans-avant-garde.” In 1995, he had a major solo exhibition at the Ludwig Museum in Budapest. His works are held in numerous public and private collections both in Hungary and abroad, including the Ludwig Museum – Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest; Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest; Albertina, Vienna; Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz; Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, Aachen; Lentos Art Museum, Linz; and Kupferstich-Kabinett, Dresden.

BAROQUE MELANCHOLY

The works of the Hungarian artist Tamás Soós – let they be paintings, sculptures, or drawings – are saturated by Baroque melancholy. He depicts the *horror vacui* that is the very own of art, with shapes that appear as the shadows of life. These are abstract shapes reproducing the virtuality of an inner movement, manifested in the connection of abstract and figurative.

The state of melancholy is a basic condition for the creativity of the artist, as Soós is aware of the fact that art operates in the sphere of the virtuality of language and not in the reality of things. Form is a tool adapted for self-expression in painting and sculpture, but it is not suitable for representing the world in a mimetic way. When we devoid this form from its materiality, we reach emptiness. What is visible is the recognizable external image of man, contrasted by the artist with the universe of forms compatible with his own internal world, which remains invisible as long as it is not formalized by the process of artistic creation.

Tamás Soós' works are impregnated with a characteristic neo-Platonic philosophical stance typical of and maintaining Mannerism and Baroque. Art creates forms that suggest movement, that is, a sense of abstract life. This indeterminacy leads to the melancholic state of the artist, who makes his experience of life productive via the dynamism of creative work. Soós has a preference for the colours of ruby and black, because he strives at precision in the expression of psychological states. To create art is to manoeuvre in the space between the divergent force of melancholy and the definite force of the form.



Soós gives a unique task to art, the task of formal definition; this alone is able to liberate the psychological aspect of the subjective will, save it and shift it towards objective visuality comprehensible by all. For him Baroque does not mean adapting a hedonistic and spectacular style, but the only one suitable for the purpose. This is not the sunny and Mediterranean Baroque, but the Central European and mental. Form still preserves its conceptual ability to be the shadow of the material and the sculpture when it is manifested in the language of sculpture.

It is heraldic and funerary at once: the works of Soós show the silent external appearance of a conscious man, who knows that he can populate the world of shadows with his forms. However, this world does not express animosity or pain, rather it contrasts the positivity of the noise of life with the negativity of silence.

Tamás Soós, *Baroque Melancholy (Blue)*, 1988–1994, oil on canvas, 250 × 200 cm. Photo by Iván Jaksity

Previous spread: Tamás Soós, *Melancholy*, 1983/1989 (detail), acrylic on cardboard, 260 × 200 cm. Photo by Brúnó Einspach

The life of art is a peculiar one: it is filled with forms, which are then linked to other forms that decrease the weight of matter and help to recognize the invisible. Soós does the exact opposite of what Klee did, who proposed to make the invisible visible by making the former concrete and independent – Soós highlights the invisible, clears it from daily ephemeralities and represents it as the only and absolute form of condition for art and artists.

Even when the forms seemingly take on the organic way of nature, they do not express eroticism or vitality, rather the ability of the shadow to multiply itself and the ability of the melancholic state of mind to create differences and movement. Thus art overcomes the conditioning, according to which melancholy would result in paralysis and develops a surprising productivity of self-propagating forms built into the immaterial essence of language.

/ Achille B. Oliva

Translated by Andrea Szekeres

This text was originally published in the exhibition catalogue *Tamás Soós: Barokk Melancholia / Baroque Melancholy*, edited by Judit Kállói (Budapest: Ludwig Museum, 1995).

Tamás Soós, *De l'esprit – Early Works*, installation view, Einspach Fine Art & Photography, Budapest, 16 November 2023 – 12 January 2024. Photo by Brúnó Einspach

The Einspach & Czapolai Fine Art booth at Frieze Masters 2024, London, with works by Tamás Soós. Photo by Károly Tendl

Tamás Soós, *The Testament of Beauty (Red)*, 2024,
acrylic on canvas, 180 × 140 cm. Photo by Marcell Perina

Tamás Soós, *The Testament of Beauty (Raw Canvas)*, 2024,
acrylic on canvas, 180 × 140 cm. Photo by Marcell Perina

Tamás Soós, *The Testament of Beauty (Yellow)*, 2024,
acrylic on canvas, 180 × 140 cm. Photo by Marcell Perina

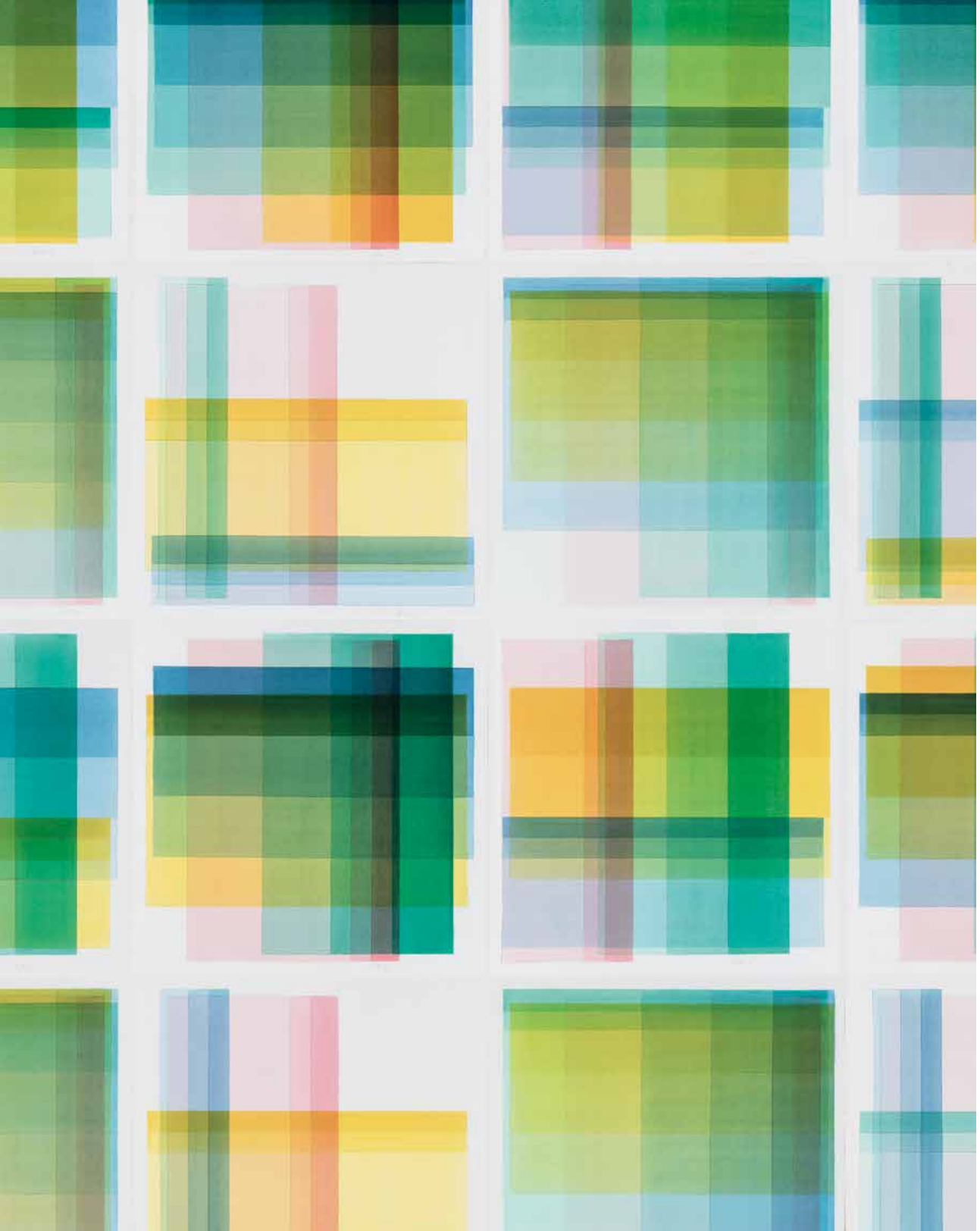
Tamás Soós, *The Testament of Beauty (Light Yellow)*, 2024,
acrylic on canvas, 180 × 140 cm. Photo by Marcell Perina

Tamás Soós, *Zen Notes*, 1978,
acrylic and ink on cardboard, 211 × 136 cm.
Photo by Marcell Perina

Tamás Soós, *The Testament of Beauty*, 2025,
acrylic on canvas, 180 × 130 cm. Photo by Marcell Perina

Tamás Soós, *The Testament of Beauty*, 2024,
acrylic on canvas, 250 × 180 cm. Photo by Marcell Perina

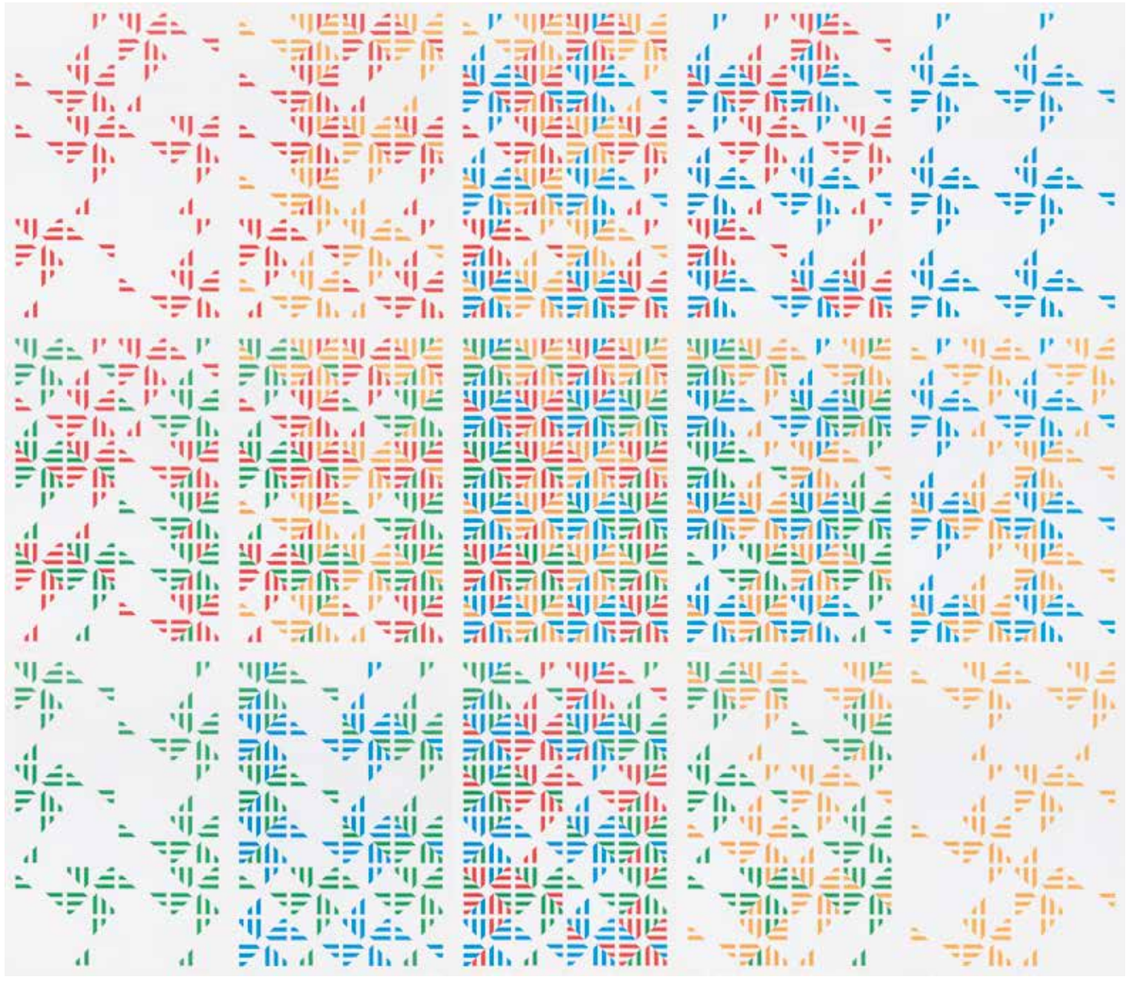
Next spread: *Tamás Soós, The Testament of Beauty*, 2025
(detail), acrylic on canvas, 150 × 200 cm. Photo by Marcell Perina



PROFILE

GIZELLA RÁKÓCZY

Gizella Rákóczy (1947–2015) was a Hungarian painter, visual theorist, and educator whose artistic legacy exemplifies the enduring vitality of abstract art as a site for philosophical, spiritual, and systematic inquiry. Working quietly for decades in Budapest, outside the circuits of major art capitals, Rákóczy developed a coherent and complex visual language that brings together mathematical precision, colour theory, and metaphysical reflection. Her practice offers a compelling bridge between the Hungarian neo-avant-garde and a broader, transhistorical tradition of constructive abstraction.



EARLY INFLUENCES AND INTELLECTUAL FORMATION

Rákóczy received her training in a milieu deeply influenced by the Bauhaus legacy and postwar Hungarian Constructivism. As a student of Géza Fónyi, and later a close collaborator of Miklós Erdély – one of the most influential conceptual artists and thinkers in Hungary – she was exposed early on to a mode of art-making that privileged rigorous inquiry over aesthetic flourish. Her interest in structuralism, semiotics, and combinatorial systems reflects the intellectual ferment of 1970s and 1980s Central Europe, where artists turned to logic and language as tools of resistance and transcendence under authoritarian constraints.

It was in this context that Rákóczy began to explore the generative power of systems. Her artistic output, especially from the mid-1970s onward, emerged not from spontaneous gesture but from deeply considered formal operations: colour sequences, modular geometries, and permutational logic. Rather than depict the world, she sought to disclose the invisible structures that underlie perception, cognition, and belief.

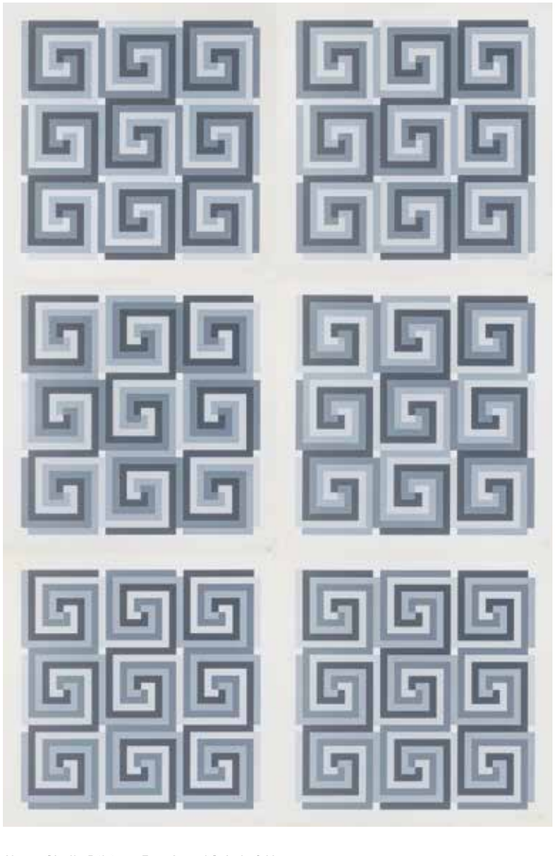
THE SPIRAL AS STRUCTURE AND SYMBOL

Among Rákóczy's most enduring contributions to the visual lexicon of abstraction is her use of the „four-armed spiral" – a motif that she first introduced in 1976 and returned to throughout her life. These forms, based on a limited set of rules and numerical values, unfold into intricate patterns that resemble labyrinths, crosses, or mandalas. They function simultaneously as visual puzzles, symbolic diagrams, and architectural grids. Often executed in watercolour, pencil, or tempera, her spirals oscillate between microscopic precision and cosmic resonance.

The spiral also carries spiritual weight. In interviews and notebooks, Rákóczy reflected on the relationship between visual form and inner transformation. She regarded the spiral not only as a compositional tool but also as a metaphor for human development, meditative focus, and sacred geometry. Her attention to symmetry, rotation, and recurrence aligns her work with a lineage that includes Hilma af Klint, Emma Kunz, and other artists for whom abstraction was a language of the soul.

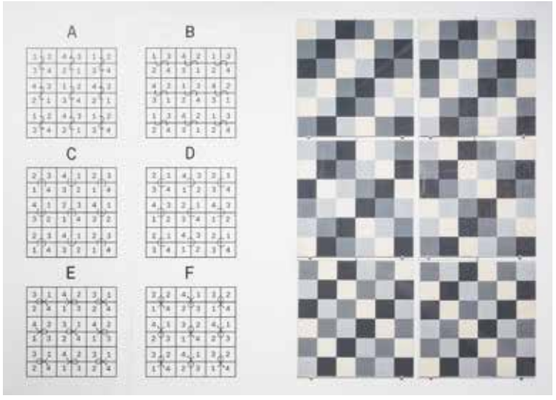
Previous spread: Gizella Rákóczy, *Four Tones of Four Colours 96 N*, 1998 (detail), aquarelle on paper, 96 parts, each 62.5 × 62.5 cm. Photo by Ferenc Eln

Opposite: Gizella Rákóczy, *System I–XV*, 1982, serigraph on paper, 15 parts, each 76 × 52 cm. Photo by András Bozsó



Above: Gizella Rákóczy, *Four-Armed Spirals 6 N*, 1978, silkscreen print on plastic plate, 6 parts, each 58.6 × 58.7 cm. Photo by András Bozsó

Below: Gizella Rákóczy, *Spiral Nucleus 6 N*, 1979, tempera on paper, each 42.5 × 42.5 cm. Photo by Ferenc Eln



Left: Gizella Rákóczy in her studio, 2007.
Photo by Tamás Török

Below: Gizella Rákóczy, *Four Tones of Four Colours 96 N*, 1998, aquarelle on paper, 96 parts, each 62.5 × 62.5 cm.
Photo by Ferenc Eln

CHROMATIC SYSTEMS AND THE ETHICS OF FORM

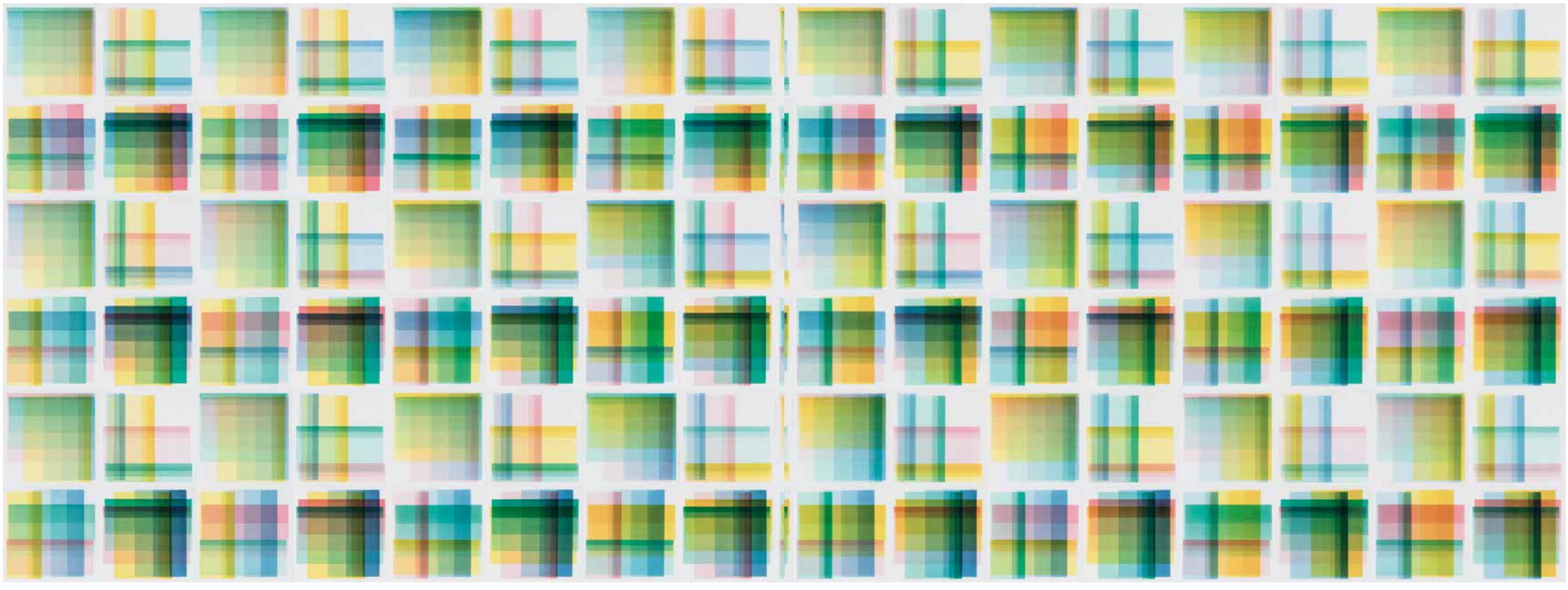
Colour in Rákóczy's practice is never decorative. Working primarily with a set of four base colours and their tonal variants, she created elaborate grids and modules that unfold across surfaces like living organisms. Each colour has a place; each sequence is derived from a rule. Yet the result is never cold. On the contrary, her paintings radiate warmth, attentiveness, and a quiet devotion to craft.

This commitment to structured beauty – formulated through laborious, hand-executed repetition – speaks to an ethical dimension in her work. By refusing improvisation, Rákóczy relinquished the ego of authorship and instead entered into dialogue with the logic of the system itself. Her compositions suggest not only visual harmony, but moral and intellectual clarity.

THE STUDIO AS SANCTUARY

Rákóczy worked in relative isolation in Budapest, often producing large-scale works in modest conditions. As art historian László Beke has recounted, she would climb ladders in her small studio to gain a higher vantage point on her canvases – literally ascending to survey the totality of her compositions. This gesture, both practical and symbolic, encapsulates her approach: she painted from above, from within a perspective of contemplation.

Her solitude was not reclusive, but chosen. Rákóczy taught, wrote, and remained active in the intellectual life of Hungary, but avoided the art world's cycles of promotion and fashion. She was, in a sense, an artist's artist – devoted not to recognition but to rigor.



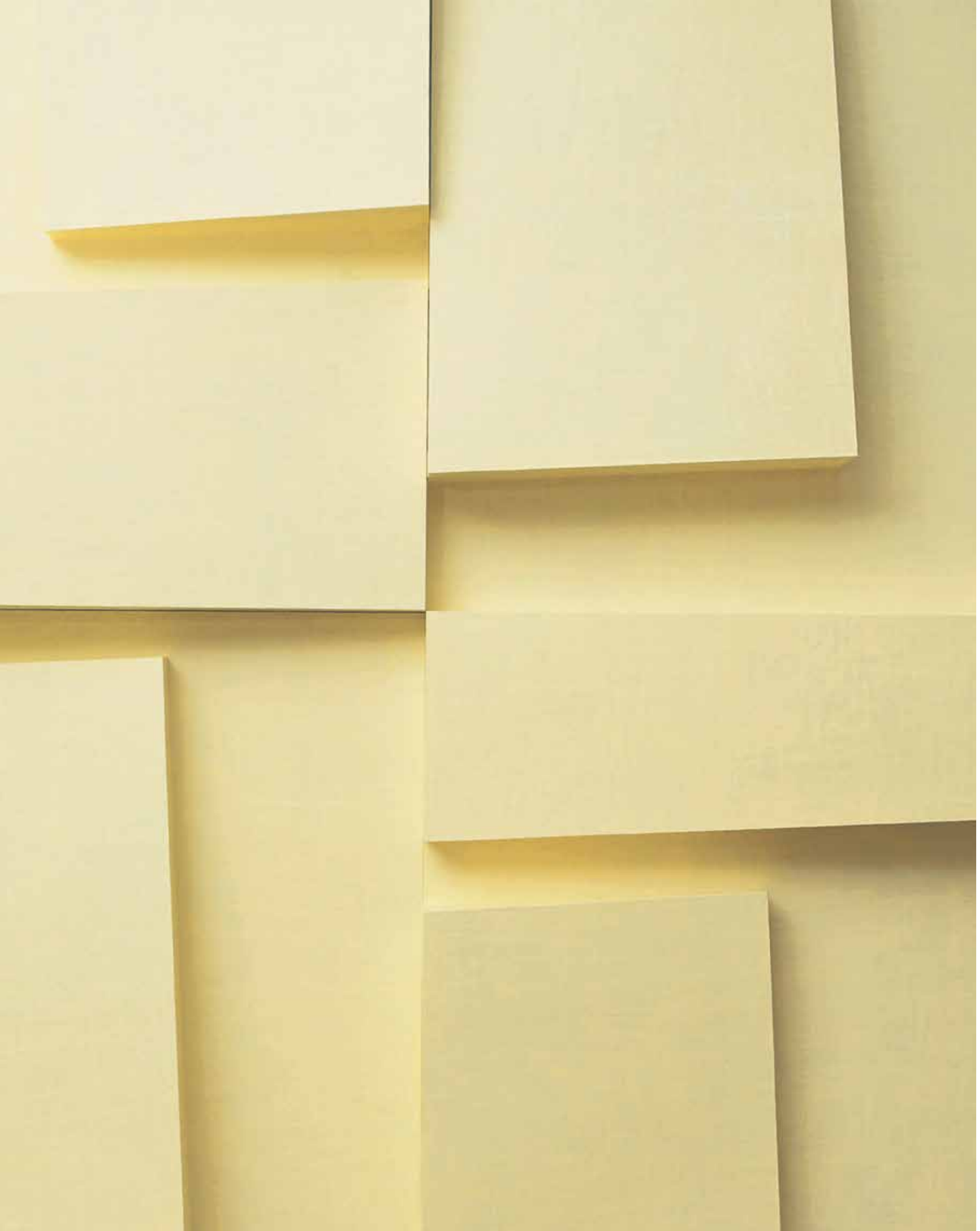
Gizella Rákóczy, *144 N*, 1995–1996, tempera on paper, 24 parts, each 178 × 119 cm, installation view, Gizella Rákóczy, *Transparent Labyrinth*, New Budapest Gallery, 21 September – 18 November 2018. Photo by Ferenc Eln

LEGACY AND CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in artists who combine abstraction with metaphysical exploration – particularly women whose contributions were overlooked in canonical narratives. Gizella Rákóczy's work fits powerfully within this reappraisal. Like her contemporaries Vera Molnar and Dóra Maurer, she developed a visual language that is as intellectually disciplined as it is emotionally resonant.

Rákóczy's art invites the viewer to slow down, to consider the structures beneath appearances, and to enter a space where logic and lyricism coexist. Her legacy is one of quiet magnitude: a reminder that abstraction, far from being a closed historical chapter, remains a living method for investigating the world and our place within it.

Her posthumous recognition – particularly the acclaimed 2016 retrospective at FUGA in Budapest – has laid the groundwork for deeper international engagement. Following Gizella Rákóczy's death, a foundation was established to preserve and promote her artistic legacy.



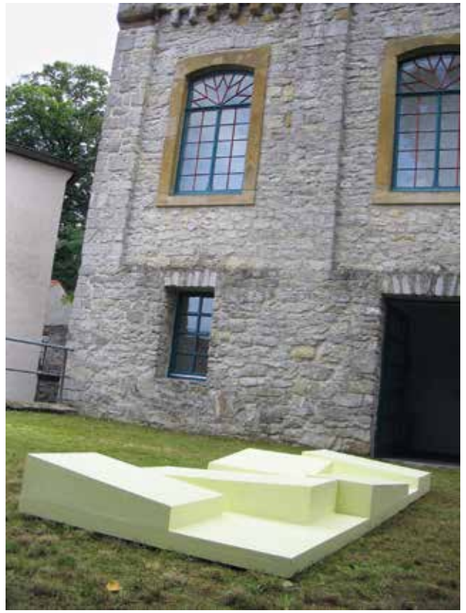
PROFILE

ISTVÁN HAÁSZ

ISTVÁN HAÁSZ (b. 1946, Gönc, Hungary) is a visual artist based in Budapest. He studied at the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts and has been exhibiting his work both in solo and group shows locally and internationally since the 1970s. In 1992, he was awarded a DAAD scholarship, followed by the Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant in New York in 1996. He received the Munkácsy Prize in 2002 and was honored with the Merited Artist Award of Hungary in 2010. Haász took part in the artist-in-residence program in Krems in 2014 and 2015. He has been a member of the Open Structures Art Society (OSAS) since 2006, and a full member of the Széchenyi Academy of Letters and Arts since 2009. His works are held in prominent museums and private collections worldwide.

"It is hard to find a category of genre for István Haász' three-dimensional works. They are painted objects but not paintings because they rise from the plane massively; they are not pictures because they don't depict anything. Despite their spatiality, they are neither sculptures nor reliefs: they lack plasticity, the organic quality a work assumes from modelling or carving, and they lack the convexity of reliefs. Instead of installations, they are geometric environments – minimalist and concrete ones. The works rise from the ground 5 to 10 cm – be the ground the wall plane or the floor surface. This height or depth corresponds to a thicker frame or a flat box. The work plane is parallel with the ground only in theory, because in practice it is divided into further oblique squares and rectangles at different angles to the ground. Their placing on the floor is more unusual than hanging on the wall, as the former implies the temptation to step on it, but also inherent is a sort of tombstone character. The yellow colour is almost exclusive, replaces white and gold, and its presence warns that the artist does not wish to enter the field of polychromy, and is wary of symbolic explanations, too. His works tend to close into themselves. They are ideally concrete works – István Haász is an ideal concretist."

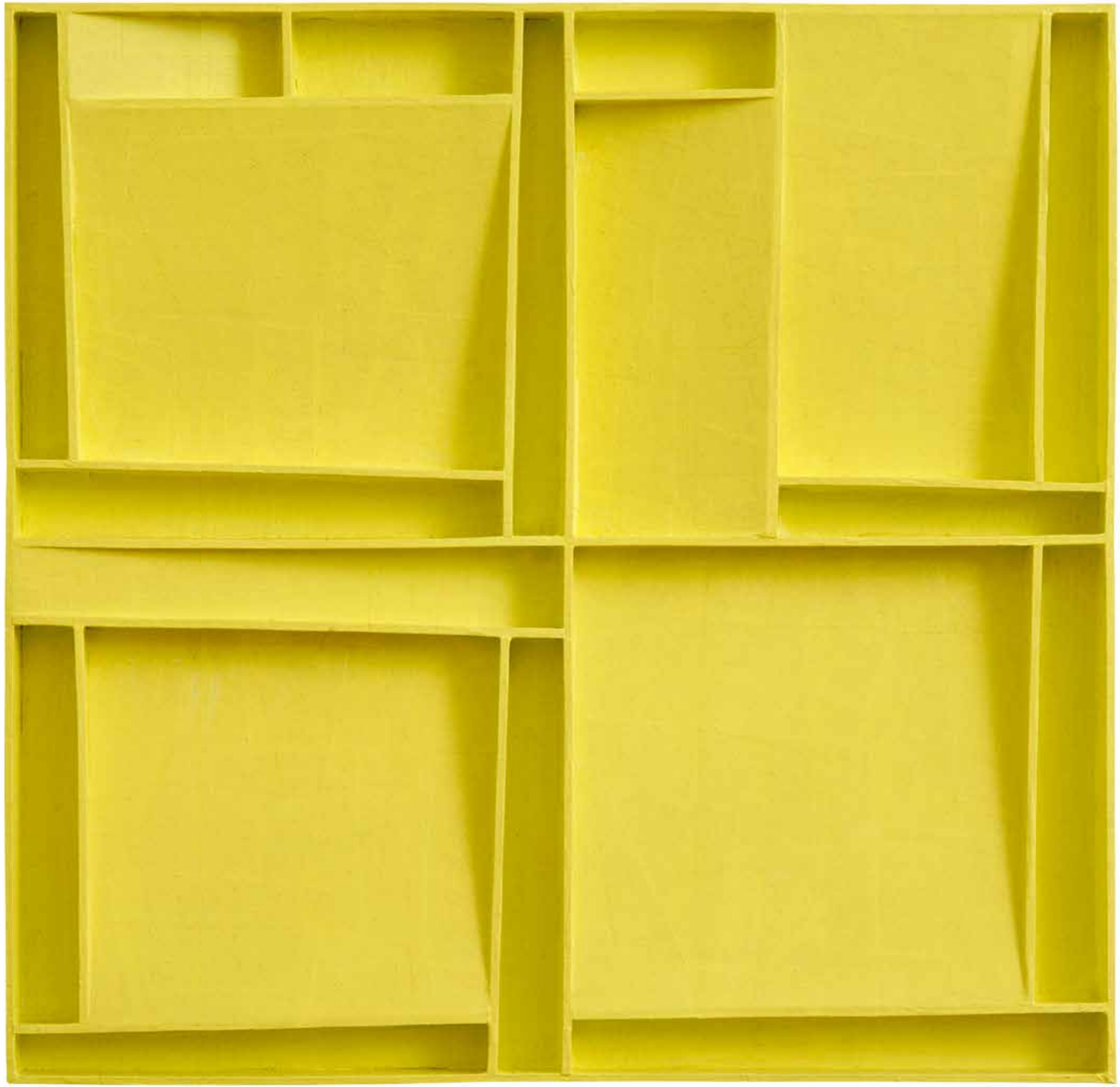
/ László Beke

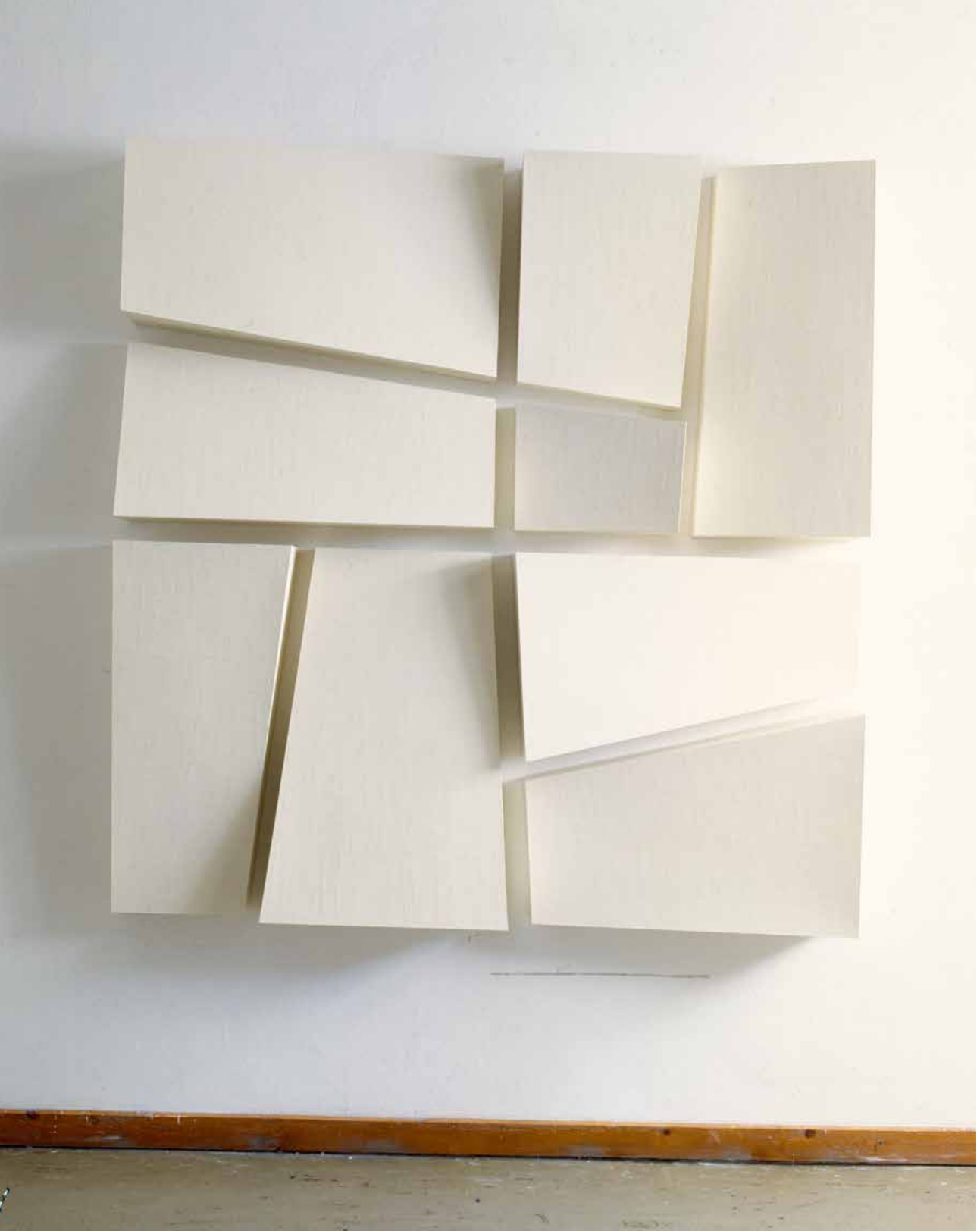


Previous spread: István Haász, *Structura Solida III*, 2000 (detail), acrylic and collage on wood. Photo by Péter Deim

Opposite: István Haász, *Object R.A.*, 1998, acrylic and collage on wood, 44 × 44 × 4 cm. Photo by Miklós Sulyok

Below: István Haász' public sculpture in front of the Oerlinghausen Synagogue, 2005. Photo by István Haász





Opposite: István Haász, *Large Quadrate*, 1994, oil and collage on wood. Photo by Péter Deim

Right: István Haász, *Prelude II*, 2003, acrylic and collage on wood. Photo by Miklós Sulyok

STYLISTIC QUESTIONS, THE HISTORICITY OF HAÁSZ' WORKS

István Haász' works are closest to the stylistic realm of deconstruction, with precedents in the broken factures and sculptural masses of Cubism. The gesture which makes Giacometti's *Cube* allude to the polyhedron of Dürer's *Melancholy*, or to irregular crystals. In a certain sense, László Péri's concrete reliefs also belong here, whether figurative or non-figurative, concerning the problem of the relationship between work and wall plane. In French art, a similar road leads from André Bloc's sculptures to the buildings of Claude Parent and Paul Virilio or some present-day deconstructive architects. Among the German and Swiss artists, Haász' parallels can be found among the older concretists, and later among the artists of painted, designed wooden elements (including Imi Knöbel). Analogies can also be found in the work of the Croatian middle generation, in Goran Petecol's oeuvre.

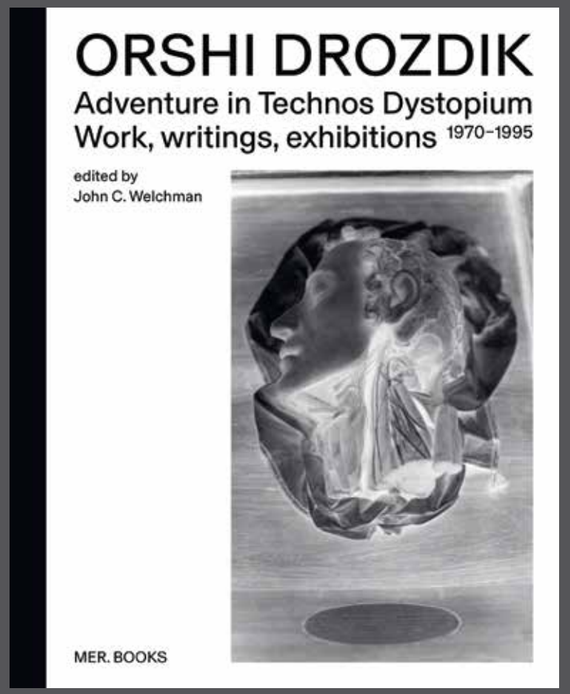
In the course of the development of his artistic personality, Haász arrived from neoconstructivism and installation to projections hallmarked by the Polish artist Antoni Mikołajczyk and by János Megyik, to "facultative geometry" as understood by György Jovánovics. The most recent challenge for him along the road from the neo-avant-garde to the postmodern, is joining the MADI group. Although István Haász' recent works are not devoid of light and serenity, he himself is far more rigorous and disciplined than to adopt the light and playful attitude of this international trend unhindered.

/ László Beke

August–September 2006
Budapest, Hungary

(excerpt from László Beke's essay titled *István Haász' Yellow Reliefs*, included in the 2007 Haász monograph published by Vince)

A comprehensive overview of
Orshi Drozdik's practice
in the first decades of
her fifty-year-long career,
including several of her writings.



Orshi Drozdik
Adventure in Technos Dystopium
Work, Writings, Exhibitions, 1970–1995

Edited by John C. Welchman
Published by MER. BOOKS
312 pages
ISBN 978-9-46393-324-7

€39.99

The book is available
on the publisher's website.
www.lespressesdureel.com

ORSHI DROZDIK (b. 1946, Hungary) is a post-conceptual and feminist visual artist. Her career began in the early seventies under the socialist regimes of Eastern Europe. Her work consists of drawings, paintings, photographs, etchings, performances, videos, sculptures, installations, and academic writings through which she exposes social issues that are embedded within our cultural system. By exploring themes that undermine the traditional and erotic representation of women, Drozdik has had a significant role in the history of women's art and has greatly influenced a generation of artists to follow.

Opposite: Orshi Drozdik, *Adventure in Technos Dystopium: Dystopium Infinite, X-Ray*, 1988–1989, photo enlarged on X-ray film, mounted on glass, lead, metal, 125 × 75 cm

GÁBOR FÜLÖP
BIOBOT
2025

Gábor Fülöp's artistic practice focuses primarily on the reinterpretation of traditional sculptural techniques. His work explores the relationship between living organisms and their environment, and more recently, the interdisciplinary domains emerging between artificial life, artificial intelligence, computational biology, and synthetic biology. A recurring theme in his sculpture is the human body – its materiality, formal characteristics, and identity – which he now reimagines within the interplay of natural and artificial realms. His latest sculptures depict avatar-like armored amazons, whose bodies are clad in hexagonal units resembling shimmering sensor membranes, or in protective shells of 6,000 corten steel scales. Their poses evoke the gestures of ancient Greek statuary, merging the legacy of archaic human culture with the virtuality of artificial life. The term *biobot*, invoked in the titles of the sculptures, refers to a type of robot inspired by cyborg design: a hybrid machine equipped with muscles and nerves.

Gábor Fülöp, *Biobot*, 2025,
brass and oak wood, 185 × 45 × 45 cm.
Photo by Sándor Benkő

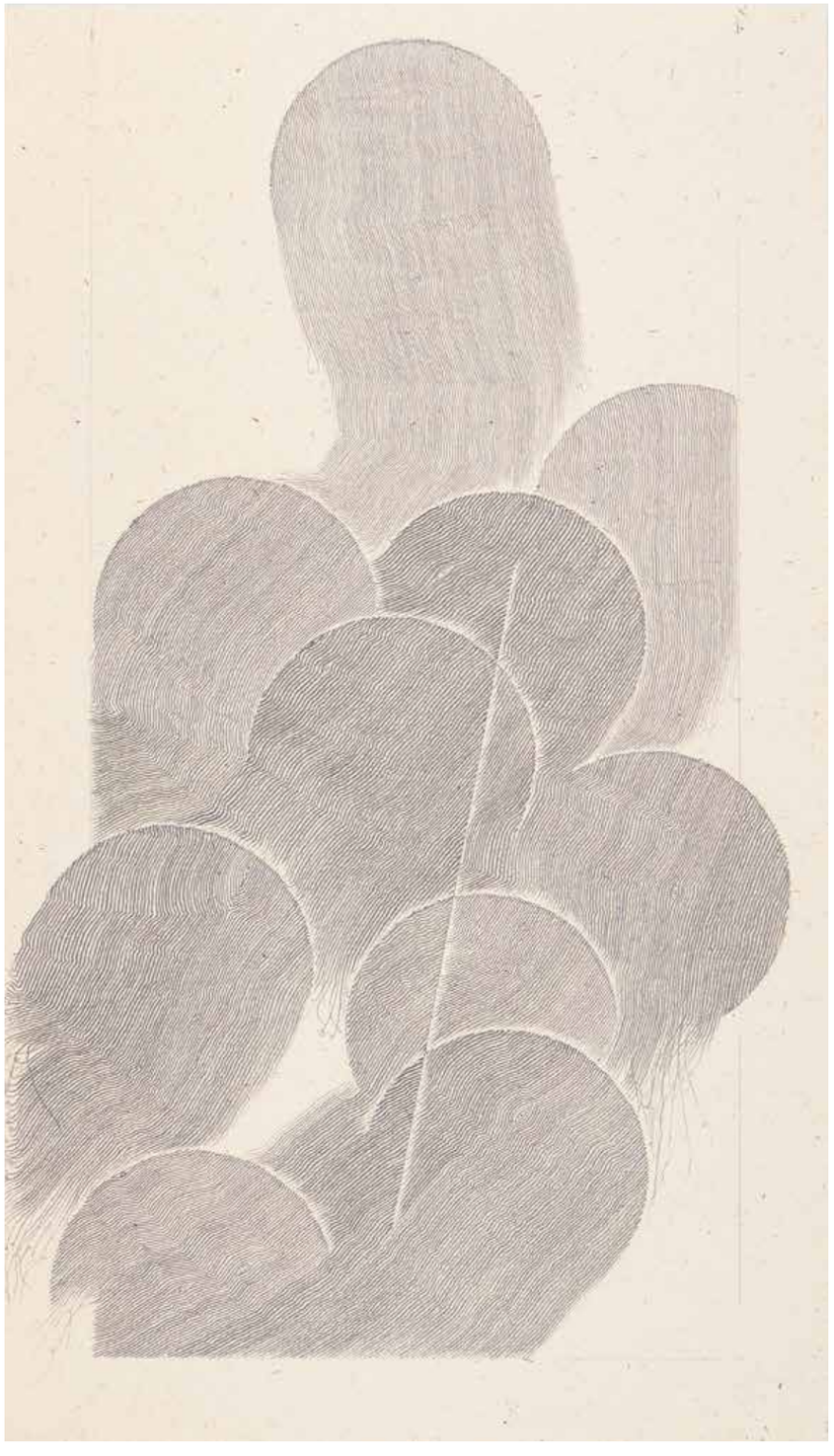
Gábor Fülöp, *Biobot I*, 2025, corten steel and oak wood, 400 × 120 × 50 cm, installation view, *Gábor Fülöp: Biobot*, Parthenon-Frieze Hall, Hungarian University of Fine Arts, Budapest, 1–11 April 2025. Photo by Julianna Nyíri

Peter Perri, *Stem*, 1993 (detail)
golden pheasant feather on board,
60 × 45 cm. Photo by Jake Walters

PORTFOLIO

PETER PERI

PETER PERI (b. 1971, London, UK) is a London-based artist whose work spans painting, drawing, and sculpture. His practice explores the tensions between figuration and abstraction, shaped in part by his personal connections to modernism – most notably through his Hungarian grandfather, Peter László Péri (1899–1967). Peri has exhibited at major institutions including Tate Britain, London and Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland. His work has also been shown internationally at galleries such as Almine Rech (Brussels, London, Paris), Bortolami (New York), Arcadia Missa (London), and Pearl Lam Galleries (Shanghai, Hong Kong, Singapore). His pieces are held in the collections of Tate; the Victoria & Albert Museum; the Arts Council Collection, London; and the Farjam Foundation, Dubai. Peri's forthcoming monograph will be published by Einspach & Czapolai Fine Art in autumn 2025.



All photos by Jake Walters

Previous spread: Peter Peri, *Henge*, 2025 (detail), graphite on unbleached paper, 32.5 × 18.5 cm

Above: Peter Peri, *Cyclopoida*, 2025, graphite on unbleached paper, 27 × 16 cm

Opposite: Peter Peri, *Henge*, 2025, graphite on unbleached paper, 32.5 × 18.5 cm

WEATHER REPORT

Up close these drawings look topographic. The lines could be contours measuring elevation and slope. You might also imagine the space between each row of marks to be passageways through a labyrinth and that these works are the key to a secret maze. Step back, and the drawings retreat into abstraction, but they do not hide there for long. Let the imagination pick them over and they yield to something more atmospheric, if stylised; decorative symbols representing powerful trade winds on an old map, or measurements of high- and low-pressure air currents. In *Scopus*, a drawing made in early 2025, Peri fills the bottom half of the composition with a dozen grey semi-circles. Further up the page, these clusters divide into two columns, lighter in shade, as if they are receding into the distance, or plumes of smoke climbing into the sky. Zoom in on the gap between the columns, and you will see that the pencil marks are hard at the top edge of each form, and at the bottom they fade out, or – and this is a trademark Peri technique – trail off like unruly strands of hair. These fades and straggles create the effect of light. They bring air into the composition, making the gaps look like mist filling a valley. This is how weather appears to get into the work, modelling the way cloud and snow can erase or alter the visible shape of mountain ranges, or how wind whips, pinches, and blows ocean water into waves.

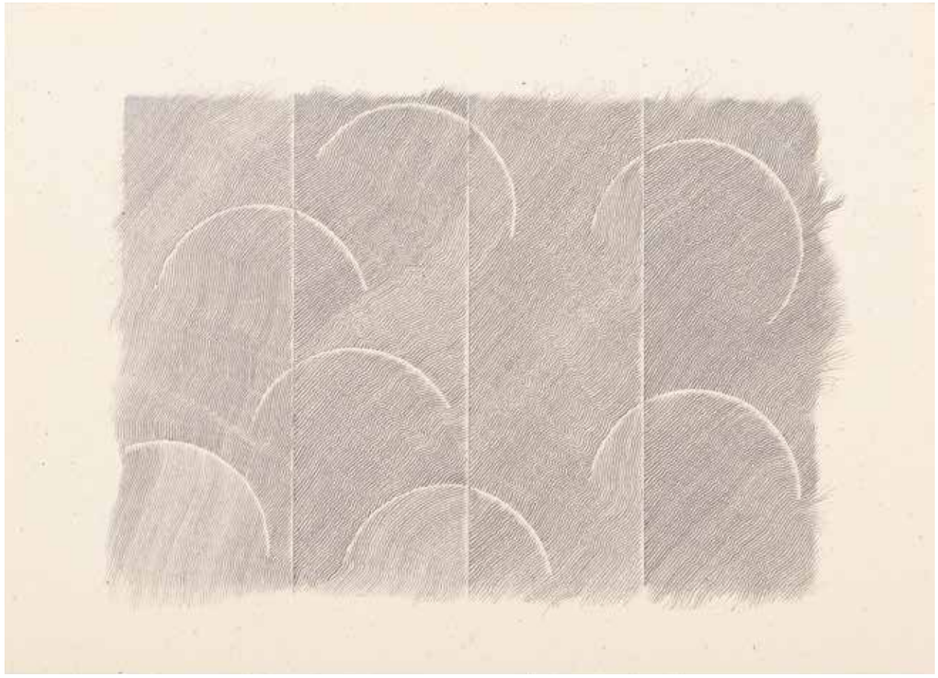
Peri studies landscape painting made a millennia ago in China and Japan; *shan-shui* in Chinese, *sansui* in Japanese, which translates to “mountains and waters.” A good comparison would be with Ma Yuan’s brush and ink seascapes, painted in the early thirteenth century. He fills the picture edge-to-edge with the repeating rhythm of waves, dark near the bottom, fading towards the top-left of the frame, as if disappearing into mist or blinding sunlight. (These works rhyme too with Vija Celmins’ photorealist ocean drawings of the 1970s.) Ma was known for his “one corner” compositions in which he would concentrate his subject in a single quadrant of the work and leave empty space around it, like terrain obscured by fog or snow. A similar effect is made by the gently faded marks in a Peri drawing, or the way his compositions drift off-centre, pulled to the sides of the paper by a mysterious gravity, leaving blank areas where the eye wants there to be form. Peri also customises the Eastern landscape technique of scattered perspective for his own purposes. In traditional *shan-shui* landscapes, scattered perspective gives the viewer a sense of looking at a scene from multiple viewpoints in space, rather than one fixed focal position. (Cubism a thousand years before there was Cubism.) Standing vertically, they have the effect of immersing the viewer inside the landscape, placing them at the foot of a mountain or a waterfall. *Shan-shui* landscapes were often made to capture the spirit of a place, of an emotional connection between person and place. Peri’s drawings cannot be called landscapes in the conventional sense, yet in all of them there is a strangely tangible sense of spatial distance and proximity, the feeling that both an actual space and a state of mind are being recorded.

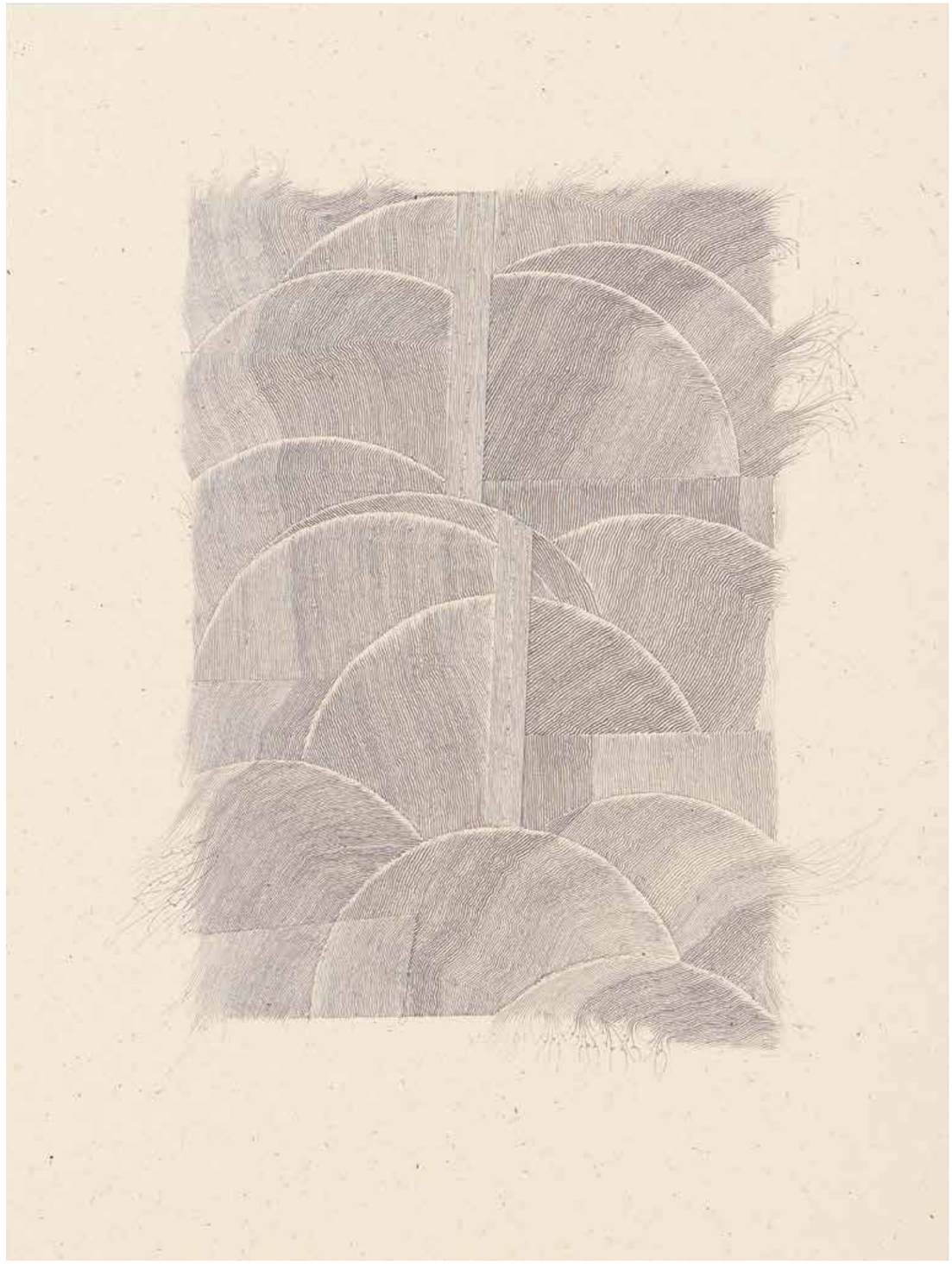
/ Dan Fox

(excerpt from the gallery publication *Peter Peri*, edited by Mónika Zsikla [Budapest: Einspach & Czapolai Fine Art, 2025])

Below: Peter Peri, *Red Rainbow*, 2025, graphite on unbleached paper, 29 × 40 cm

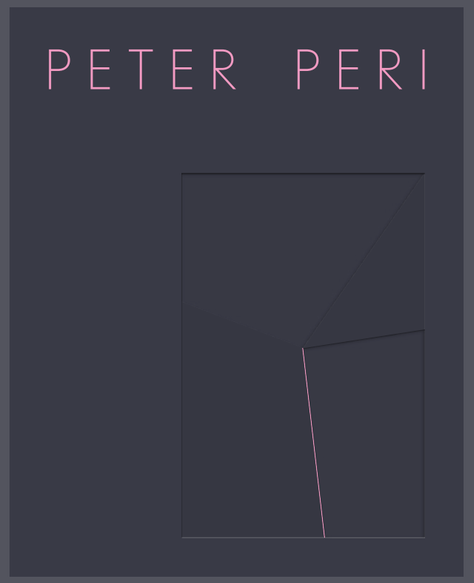
Opposite: Peter Peri, *Tract*, 2025, graphite on unbleached paper, 40 × 30 cm





Peter Peri, *Scopus*, 2025,
graphite on unbleached paper,
28.5 × 22 cm

Peter Peri, *Night Vigil*, 2025,
graphite on unbleached paper,
28.5 × 17.5 cm



This forthcoming publication aims to present a comprehensive overview of the last three decades of work by British-Hungarian artist Peter Peri, whose practice reflects a complex engagement with political history, abstraction, and transgenerational memory. The project highlights Peri's unique position as both a contemporary artist and the grandson of Peter László Péri, a key figure in early 20th-century European modernism. The publication will draw connections between their work while positioning Peter Peri's practice within current discourses of identity, history, and cross-cultural reflection.

Peter Peri

Edited by Mónika Zsikla, PhD – Curatorial Director, Einspach & Czapolai Fine Art (Budapest)

Contributors:
Dan Fox – British writer and editor (former *Frieze* editor-at-large)
Neal Brown – British critic and curator
Federico Campagna – UK-based philosopher and author (*Technic and Magic*, *The Last Night*)
Dr. László Baán – Director General, Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest
Dr. Dávid Fehér – Director, Central European Research Institute for Art History (KEMKI), Budapest

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To order, please send an email to info@einspach.com.

Peter Peri, *Tract 1*, 2024 (detail), mixed media on canvas, 152 × 122 cm. Photo by Jake Walters

CONVERSATION

The Inner Structure of Meaning

ZSOLT PETRÁNYI
IN CONVERSATION WITH
TAMÁS MELKOVICS

This year, thanks to the generosity of the Circle of Patrons, a large-scale sculpture by Tamás Melkovics has been acquired for the Contemporary Collection of the Museum of Fine Arts – Hungarian National Gallery. The nonprofit organization Friends of Contemporary Art Ltd. was founded in 2021 by six dedicated contemporary art collectors – Attila Brezóczki, Sándor Gönczy, Gábor Pados, Katalin Spengler, Zsolt Somlói, and László Vágó – with the aim of supporting the expansion of the Museum of Fine Arts – Hungarian National Gallery's contemporary collections. The group was inspired by similar initiatives that assist major international institutions such as the Tate Modern in London and the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

To mark the occasion of the acquisition, Zsolt Petrányi, Deputy Director General and Head of the Contemporary Collection at the Museum, spoke with Tamás Melkovics about the challenges facing contemporary sculpture, his artistic inspirations, as well as the conceptual and technical background of his modular works.

All photos in this article: *A day in the studio – two hands, a thousand thoughts*, art quarter budapest, 2025. Photo by Dávid Biró

Zsolt Petrányi: What do you think are the challenges facing contemporary sculpture today?

Tamás Melkovics: As nearly every field of life, sculpture, too, faces numerous challenges. However, for me, these are more like problems to be solved, since sculpture stems from inner motivations, or rather from a cluster of motivations. But if I try to look beyond my own perspective, then of course, every era has its own particular challenges. Today, perhaps one of the main challenges of spatial articulation in the classical sense is temporality – and this applies not just to sculpture but to the entire field of visual art. The kind of information boom that's defined our culture since the late nineties presents enormous challenges for individual creators. Beyond the sheer volume of available information, there's less and less attention paid to individual works; reactions have to be fast, the environment is information-hungry, and it's hard to convey content that requires time to absorb. That's why, across various branches of art, including sculpture, there's a strong tendency toward information compression and content reduction. It's difficult to reconcile classical forms with the temporality of the present.

ZSP: When you mentioned temporality, I thought you meant durability – whether something will still be valid in five years.

TM: Not just in five years, but in a thousand. If I'm looking for a personal challenge in all this, it's to identify patterns in cultural history that point to enduring, valid values – ones that clearly emerge along the timeline of our culture. What I find most beautiful in sculpture is that it enables us to create information that can be well-preserved over time, from which the personal imprint eventually fades, the subjective aspect disappears, and what remains is a cultural fossil – or a time capsule – stripped of its original intentions. And if someone takes the time to examine when it might have been created, in what cultural context, and what characterized that culture, then a great deal of information can be extracted from it. I'm deeply motivated by articulations of this kind. The kind of contemporary sculpture I'm interested in the most is rooted in the past and carries the potential for the transmission of information.

ZSP: Can you name some artists who have influenced you?

TM: There's a sculptural lineage that can be traced back to the 19th century, which has been deeply influential for me. In my interpretation, it begins with Rodin, then continues with Brâncuși – who, along with others, connects to Isamu Noguchi. Antony Gormley visited Noguchi's studio, and he's someone I see as a keeper of that sculptural canon that fascinates me so much.

ZSP: Are there stylistic traits in their work that particularly resonate with you?

TM: I'd highlight the timelessness of their work. They were able to operate in their own eras while conveying content that remains relevant through the ages. What's most exciting about Brâncuși isn't the stylization *per se*, but that the stylization is merely a consequence of his way of thinking. I sense a search for universal values at the core of his intent. Marina Abramović also references him frequently – for instance, his idea that "What you're doing is not important. What is really important is the state of mind from which you do it."

ZSP: Was this aim of timelessness already important to you back at the University of Fine Arts?

TM: No, not at all during art school. Back then, it was more about experimentation. I don't think the point of university is to graduate as a fully-formed artist – in fact, I believe that's a false path. It's more important that during that time we can experiment and try different things without taking risks.

ZSP: How did you arrive at the modular elements that still define your work today?

TM: During my university studies, alongside the required courses, I did a lot of formal experimentation. My professional and personal relationship with Dániel Sallay in Ádám Farkas's class was particularly significant. He began making palm-sized clay sculptures based on a kind of internal automatism. Another memorable and formative experience was assisting Norbert Kotormán in creating a large-scale sculpture. With both Dani and Norbert, we often discussed the nature of form – what makes a surface tense, where internal energy can be felt. How to "pump" inner energy into a static material, and how to make that visible through the language of sculpture. Many artworks carry this formal surplus – an almost tangible sense that fills the object. There's something strangely mystical about it, though of course it also has a masterable technical side. I engaged with that visual language for quite a long time – about nine years. Then, at some point, I felt that this visual vocabulary I had developed had become stagnant and hollow in meaning. That's when I began combining and assembling the formal units, which initially resulted in *ad hoc* abstract compositions – with no logical basis. I felt this was an empty formalism and realized I needed a guiding principle to make the work acceptable to myself. At that time, I wasn't yet thinking of the individual elements as modules. That only began to take shape after university. A particularly memorable moment was a friendly yet very professional conversation with composer Bálint Baráth, who was just then delving into the world of modular synthesizers. It was then that the term "module" really crystallized for me. From that point on, I began treating individual forms as modules. It was at this stage that I started seeing a formally resolved unit not as an independent shape, but as part of a complex system. I linked this to a simple arithmetic principle in my practice – a rule that at every point of branching, the form splits again, creating an organic structure, a kind of fractal.

ZSP: So you established a system of rules?

TM: I'd say I was looking for a position outside myself – something external that would complement and enrich the object with additional content. I believe that abstract art on its own can't truly function; it always needs a deeper layer of thought. This doesn't necessarily have to be visible, but one that exists within the artist as intent. Without that, the result is meaningless objects that can't convey lasting value.

ZSP: But you don't even consider yourself an abstract artist!

TM: No, in fact, I actively try to avoid falling into that role – which is actually very easy to slip into, because that's how the human brain works. It can only really orient itself when it can sort things into categories. But the world doesn't actually function like that.

ZSP: Earlier, you mentioned that your arithmetic thinking led to an organic outcome. Does that mean the system can also be shaped randomly during the creation process?

TM: Yes, there's definitely a degree of randomness involved.

ZSP: How do you shape your sculptures? An outside observer might assume that your works are made up of a set number of elements that you begin arranging freely – like playing with LEGO bricks. Or do you already have a clear idea in mind of what you want to assemble?

TM: I don't know in advance what they'll look like. I do make models, but I end up deviating from them too – I make changes during the composition process. The goal was to find a flexible system, one that makes use of classical sculptural foundations, but also moves beyond them. I wanted to create a formal language that doesn't come across – either to the viewer or to myself – as a declarative statement or a definitive endpoint. When you look at my works, it's precisely their segmented nature – the visible connection points, the built-in rhythm, the suggestion that the parts are interchangeable – that can evoke a sense of something in flux. That's not typically a quality associated with sculpture. The genre usually aims to express an ideal – for example, when classical forms try to capture the most archetypal position of a gesture and preserve it as the strongest possible statement, like a declarative sentence. But sometimes I feel incapable of making declarative statements with my work. It's extremely difficult to make universal claims in a reality that's constantly shifting and flowing.

ZSP: Is the reason you chose aluminium for your sculptures because it's the most suitable material for casting?

TM: When choosing materials, I've always been driven by my own sculptural questions – I was looking for the right solutions. The first modular sculptures I made were carved by hand. That posed a problem in terms of time – it took ages to produce a single piece – and also physically, because the joints often broke. I started looking for the reasons behind this and for possible solutions. I eventually realized that if I don't fix the joints permanently, but instead treat the elements as a fluid, adaptable system – stacking them like toy blocks – it solves a lot of those issues. And it opens up a whole range of new possibilities in the composition process. I came across a quote from Tony Cragg about

his work *Minster*, where he said, "gravity is the glue." That really struck a chord with me – it showed that you don't need permanent joints, no welding or dowelling; you can just stack the pieces, and gravity will hold the sculpture together.
The first layered works came about around 2020, during COVID, and were still made from MDF. With that sculpture, I realized that small imperfections in the elements can lead to major discrepancies when building something larger. That's when I started using 3D design and printing – for its precision.
I worked with sand casting for the first time in 2019 at Dunai Vasmű (Danube Ironworks). Before that, I had only used traditional sculptural casting, the lost-wax technique. My diploma project took me a net total of 800 hours to complete, and it became clear that if one sculpture requires that much time, then it's not a sustainable way to make a living. That was one of the reasons I started searching for a new creative strategy. I had a goal – and then I began looking for the key to achieving it.
So aluminium wasn't a pre-planned choice – it was more of a technical solution to a set of challenges.

ZSP: What you said about gravity is interesting – how much your work is shaped by the stability of weight and balance. Your sculptures are vertical, and even the extended parts have to stay in balance for gravity's cohesive force to work.

TM: Yes, that's a key element of my work. But the goal isn't to create very static forms – what interests me are the boundaries: to evoke a sense of dynamism while still maintaining overall stability.

ZSP: In your latest works, figurative elements are appearing too – a head, a hand, a Native American mask with a pipe, a skull.

TM: The portrait has been a recurring motif in my art since university, but in 2019 I started consciously opening toward representational forms. At the Dunai Vasmű's steel sculpture symposium, I created a five-element character sequence, which included a hand, a Buddha-like head, a tree, a drop, and an apple.
These were easily recognizable forms with symbolic meaning, and alongside the free-association potential, my goal was also for each one to offer a chance to explore a different mould-making technique. One was perforated, another solid, another split – while in terms of content, they were meant to be simple symbols. The resulting set of forms opened up interpretation in ways I found incredibly exciting.
Take the drop shape, for instance – it could be water, a tear (symbolizing emotion), or blood (suggesting death), or oil (evoking energy) – it's always up to the viewer.
The gesture of the hand recalls Buddhist sculpture: it can be a sign, a reminder, or a symbolic pointing gesture.
To me, the meaning of these elements is open-ended. In the history of sculpture, when you look at a thousand-year-old or even older work, the sculptor's original intent has usually vanished. It's we who now attach new or current meanings to it, in our own time.

ZSP: Why Buddhist sculpture specifically? Were you drawn more to the form or the content?

TM: Both – it's impossible to separate the form from the meaning. But the same goes for Christian, Egyptian, or Aztec sculpture too. So the reference isn't only to Buddhism – I'm looking for universal characteristics. I want to draw out values from these overlapping cultural spheres that show deep connections – concepts that appear in remarkably similar ways across cultures separated by both time and geography. And there's nothing banal about why that happens. Think about it: one of the first things a baby responds to is eye contact. The pair of eyes, the face – they've always been a mirror of our own existence, regardless of culture or religion.
The motifs I reference carry values that are hard to put into words. They feel so fundamental – like the Flower Sermon of Buddha, where he didn't say a word, just held up a flower to his audience. A minimal, condensed gesture – and yet somehow, everything is contained within it.

ZSP: Tell me about the pedestals you use – they're always made from unique materials.

TM: I really dislike the classic solution, where something an artist has worked on for months is plopped onto a hastily thrown-together white plywood box. It feels like a necessary evil. Sculpture exhibitions often turn into forests of pedestals.

But how we place things in space is a fundamental issue in sculpture. A sculpture interacts with the space it's presented in, so I think it's something we have to pay attention to. The way we install a work absolutely matters – you can't ignore it. Brâncuși was very aware of this too – he often used leftover materials in his studio to build constructions for his sculptures.

ZSP: Since we're already talking about spatiality – how important is it to you that your sculptures can be viewed from all sides? Or do your works have preferred "angles"?

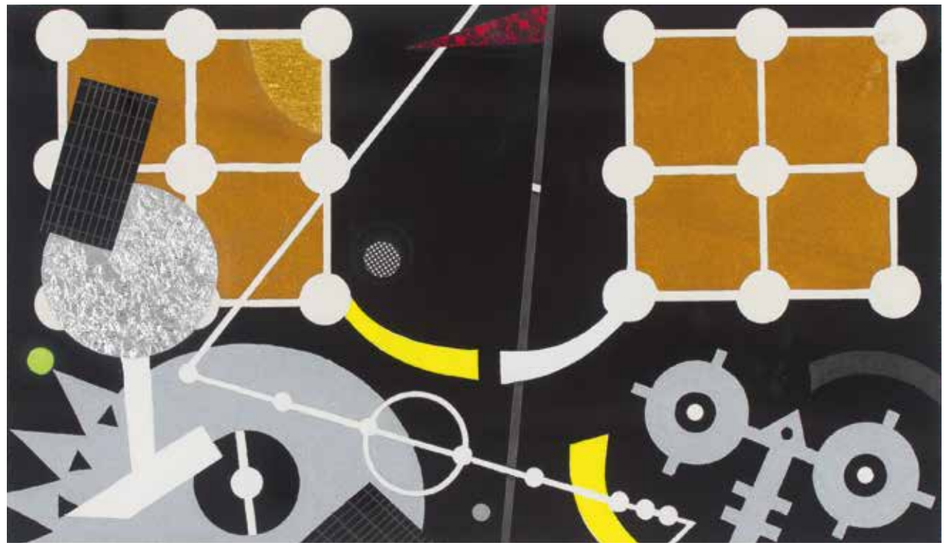
TM: That particular feature of sculpture is something I find really exciting. But it's not always a conscious decision to make the piece "interesting" from every direction. Usually, as I'm composing the sculpture, one primary viewpoint naturally emerges – one that best reveals the character of the work.

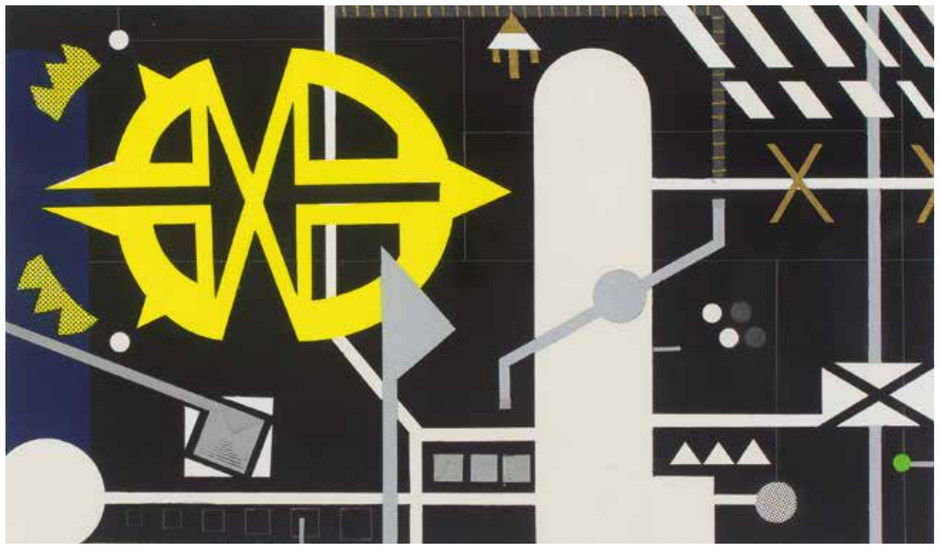
ZSP: What's your experience with how non-specialist viewers understand your work?

TM: Interestingly, I get almost entirely positive feedback. My pieces often trigger the kind of free-associative thinking in people that I'm aiming for. I have no intention of forcing my own interpretations on anyone. I try to express my ideas in an indirect way, leaving room for personal interpretation – and even so, I've had really good experiences. It's a different story with the professional art world, though. It's harder to communicate what I'm trying to do there, partly because the changes in my work happen gradually. It can take years before I reach another phase in my practice. I often feel that the art scene lacks patience. There's this pressure to produce a new sculpture every two weeks just to stay visible.
I work a lot, but I can see how dangerous this territory is – when a sculpture becomes a well-packaged product, and the sculptor turns into a brand. I feel that risk myself, and I think the only way to avoid it is through small but steady shifts, staying alert, and practicing ongoing self-reflection.
But ultimately, I don't make work just for the viewer of today. I also create for the viewer of the future. My goal is that in, say, three hundred years, these pieces still say something about our time – whether that's through the fact that I created them from a repetitive, industrial element that was typical of my era, or through the way I use my own artistic character to reflect on culture. I want to pass on the values that I see recurring across our entire cultural history – values that have endured – and complement them with my own insights, reflections, and the often very ambivalent zeitgeist of our time.

Opposite: Tamás Melkovics, *Alloy Series Free Composition 3*, 2024, aluminium cast, 208 × 65 × 65 cm

Below: Tamás Melkovics, *Panta rhei*, installation view, Ferenczy Museum, Szentendre, 17 March – 26 June 2022. Photo by Dávid Biró





BCT
BUDAPEST CONTEMPORARY

25–28 September 2025

Bálna, Budapest

At Budapest Contemporary 2025, Einspach & Czapolai Fine Art is delighted to showcase a selection of museum-quality works by our represented artists.

György Szőnyei, *Stories in Black I–IV*, 1989–1990, tempera and appliqués on paper, 32 × 45 cm

EINSPACH & CZAPOLAI
FINE ART

TAMAS DEZSÖ
LADDER
2025

I

Ladder (2025) contains fallen branches and pieces of bark collected from a global selection of fifty-two ancient trees – considered the oldest and thus, most well-known trees in the world. These trees, often located in secret or hard-to-reach habitats for their protection, yielded their dead parts to me through a process spanning several years. Using Google Maps, I located people living near the chosen trees and contacted them via email, WhatsApp, or phone to help gather the raw materials. I was surprised by the enthusiasm with which people from all continents, ages, and professions immediately joined the collaborative project. Some paddled for hours through primeval swamp forests, others collected fallen pieces from trees they professionally guarded, and one person even rode a motorcycle for five hours in the Iranian desert to procure the requested branches. Among the collectors were a South African tour guide, an American librarian, artist, and boat dealer, and a Scottish priest who sent pieces from a yew tree in his churchyard. Besides these foreign helpers, friends and acquaintances also contributed to the collection, but, of course, I also personally traveled to America, Austria, Denmark, Germany, and Italy to retrieve certain parts.

The collection includes special specimens like camphor tree, giant sequoia, baobab, and Japanese cedar (*sugi*). Their ages range from a few hundred to several thousand years old. Many of these trees hold unique cultural-historical significance – for example, the pedunculate oak that inspired Pinocchio's story, the sacred fig tree that once towered over Buddha, and the white oak of Atlanta, endowed with its own personal rights. To emphasize the personal nature of the work, I also included part of my favourite tree – a pedunculate oak that served as a hideout throughout my childhood. The minimalist, almost industrial-style ladder was crafted by carpenter István Komjáthy, who also helped design the piece.

II

Human and plant temporalities differ radically: human time is subjective and event-centered, while plant time relies on strict external and internal rhythms. Human time is linear; plant time is cyclical. Human time carries awareness of mortality and finitude, whereas for plants, time means exposure and adaptation, as well as continuous repetition and renewal.

The time span of a tree growing over centuries or millennia surpasses human experience. Ancient trees have become symbols across cultures of permanence, immortality, and human life's transience. Their existence demands a radical shift in perspective: a millennia-old tree has outlived not only individuals, but also empires, civilizations, and entire historical eras. Our constructed numerical time and narrative compulsions create the illusion that trees witness human history. Human culture treats its past as absolute, though biologically its scale is negligible. This anthropocentric projection exposes the limits and impossibility of truly understanding plant existence. Reverence for ancient trees and their cultural constructions reflect our anxiety over our own limited time horizon.

The ladder is an ancient symbol of the quest for understanding. Its industrial and cold, functional use of wood, standardised sizing, and everyday form works to dismantle illusions tied to ancient trees. The wood, sourced from diverse and distant parts of the planet, is united – much like Earth's ecosystem – into a single system. The ladder also evokes the planet's unified, deeply woven networks: a global garden where all existence is interconnected.

/ Tamas Dezsö

Tamas Dezsö, *Ladder*, 2025, wood, fallen fragments from 52 of the world's most renowned ancient trees, 230 × 105 × 85 cm. Photo by Tamas Dezsö

III

The materials used for the sculpture come from the following trees:
General Sherman (United States) – giant sequoia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*): 2700 years old
President Tree (United States) – giant sequoia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*): 3200 years old
Hangman's Elm (United States) – elm (*Ulmus sp.*): 310 years old
Kongeegen (Denmark) – English oak (*Quercus robur*): 1500–2000 years old
The Major Oak (United Kingdom) – English oak (*Quercus robur*): 1100 years old
The Ivenack Oaks (Germany) – English oak (*Quercus robur*): 1000–1200 years old
El Árbol del Tule (Mexico) – Montezuma cypress (*Taxodium mucronatum*): 1500–3000 years old
Methuselah (United States) – Great Basin bristlecone pine (*Pinus longaeva*): 4853 years old
Pando (United States) – quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*): 16000–18000 years old
Fortingall Yew (United Kingdom) – common yew (*Taxus baccata*): 2000–5000 years old
Llangernyw Yew (United Kingdom) – common yew (*Taxus baccata*): 4000–5000 years old
Sarv-e Abarkuh (Iran) – Persian cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens*): 4000–5000 years old
The Sagole Baobab (South Africa) – African baobab (*Adansonia digitata*): 1200–1300 years old
The Huon Pine (Tasmania, Australia) – Huon pine (*Lagarostrobos franklinii*): 3000–4000 years old
Tree That Owns Itself (United States) – white oak (*Quercus alba*): 200 years old
Buttonball Tree (United States) – American sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*): 350 years old
Jaya Sri Maha Bodhi (Sri Lanka) – sacred fig (*Ficus religiosa*): 2308 years old
Castagno dei Cento Cavalli (Italy) – sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*): 3000–4000 years old
Prison Tree (Australia) – boab (*Adansonia gregorii*): 1500 years old
Ελιά Βουβών – The Olive Tree of Ano Vouves (Greece) – European olive (*Olea europaea*): 2000–3000 years old
Olivastro di Luras (Italy) – European olive (*Olea europaea*): 3000–4000 years old
O Patriarca (Brazil) – jequitibá-branco (*Cariniana legalis*): 2000 years old
Alerce Milenario (Chile) – Patagonian cypress (*Fitzroya cupressoides*): 5200 years old
Goethe-Ginkgo (Germany) – ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*): 250 years old
Cipresso di San Francesco (Italy) – Mediterranean cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens*): 800 years old
Il Quercione di Pinocchio (Italy) – English oak (*Quercus robur*): 600 years old
Olivo dei 30 zoccoli (Italy) – European olive (*Olea europaea*): 2000 years old
Olivo della Strega (Italy) – European olive (*Olea europaea*): 3500 years old
750-jährige Zirbe (Austria) – Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*): 750 years old
Sobreiro Monumental (Portugal) – cork oak (*Quercus suber*): 236 years old
Olivier millénaire de Roquebrune-Cap-Martin (France) – European olive (*Olea europaea*): 2000 years old
Gümeli Porsuğu (Turkey) – common yew (*Taxus baccata*): 4113 years old
Seven Sisters Oak (United States) – southern live oak (*Quercus virginiana*): 1500 years old
Foo de Tee (Italy) – European beech (*Fagus sylvatica*): 500 years old
Stelmužės ąžuolas (Lithuania) – English oak (*Quercus robur*): 1500–2000 years old
The Eternal Sisters (Lebanon) – olive tree (*Olea europaea*): 5000 years old
Newton's apple tree (United Kingdom) – apple tree (*Malus domestica*): 400 years old
Thimmamma Marrimanu (India) – banyan tree (*Ficus benghalensis*): 550–650 years old
Robinia pseudoacacia, Square Viviani (France) – black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*): 418 years old
Tiglio di Napoleone (Italy) – small-leaved lime (*Tilia cordata*): 350 years old
Schenklengsfeld Dorflinde (Germany) – linden (*Tilia sp.*): 1257 years old
Italus (Italy) – Balkan pine (*Pinus heldreichii*): 1230 years old
Old Veteran of Point Lobos (United States) – Monterey cypress (*Hesperocyparis macrocarpa*): 300–400 years old
Tausendjährige Eiche (Austria) – English oak (*Quercus robur*): 1200 years old
Kandelaberfichte (Austria) – Norway spruce (*Picea abies*): 600 years old
Santa Gertrude (Italy) – European larch (*Larix decidua*): 2300 years old
Jōmon Sugi (Japan) – Japanese cedar (*Cryptomeria japonica*): 4000–7200 years old
Le Cèdre Bossu (Morocco) – Atlas cedar (*Cedrus atlantica*): 900–1000 years old
Kamoh no Ōkusu (Japan) – giant camphor tree (*Cinnamomum camphora*): 1500–2000 years old
Pouakani (New Zealand) – tōtara (*Podocarpus totara*): 1800 years old
Zsennye Oak (Hungary) – English oak (*Quercus robur*): 700 years old
Tamas Dezsö's favorite childhood tree (Hungary) – English oak (*Quercus robur*): 80–100 years old

Paris Photo

13–16 November 2025
booth B30

Grand Palais, Paris

Tamas Dezsö examines the relationship between the human and the nonhuman world, with a particular focus on vegetal existence and the problematization of human self-conception. He responds to the radical questions of the Anthropocene, employing a theoretical grounding and a sensitive use of materials. His photographs, sculptures, and installations do not represent but create relationships. A forest millions of years old, unknown forms of microscopic plant sections, and grand images of alpine ground vegetation all evoke the silent presence of the nonhuman world and explore the limits of human perception. Dezsö's works gradually dissolve the privileged position and experience of the human being; thus, his photographs are not reflections of nature, but a tangible proximity to it – a recognition of shared materiality and ontological interdependence. This year, alongside his most recent works, we would also like to showcase examples of his earlier, highly successful series *Notes for an Epilogue*.

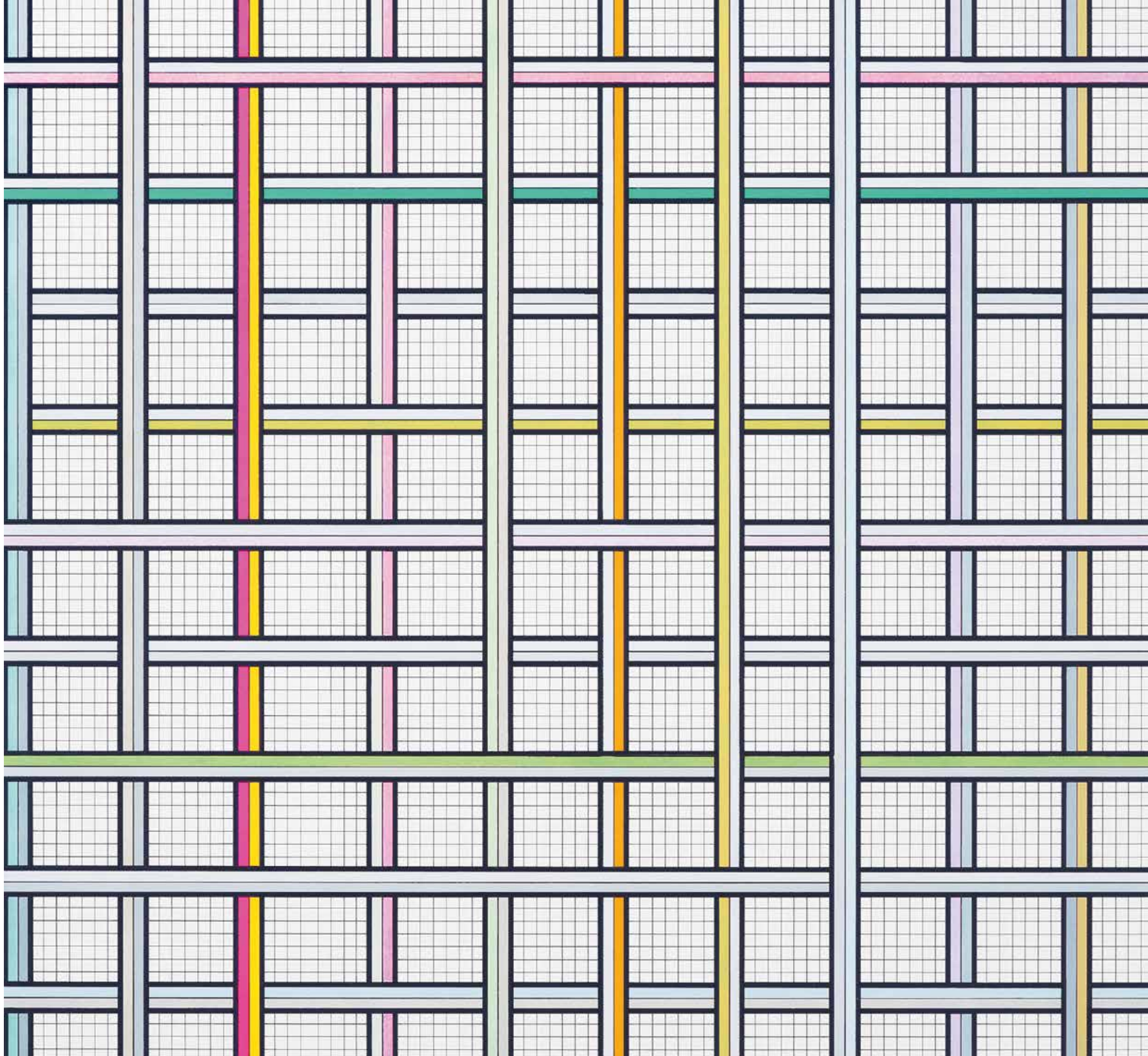
Tamas Dezsö, *Tout se met á flotter (Spring)*, 2025, archival pigment print on Hahnmühle Photo Rag Baryta paper, diptych, 205 × 310 cm

EINSPACH & CZAPOLAI
FINE ART

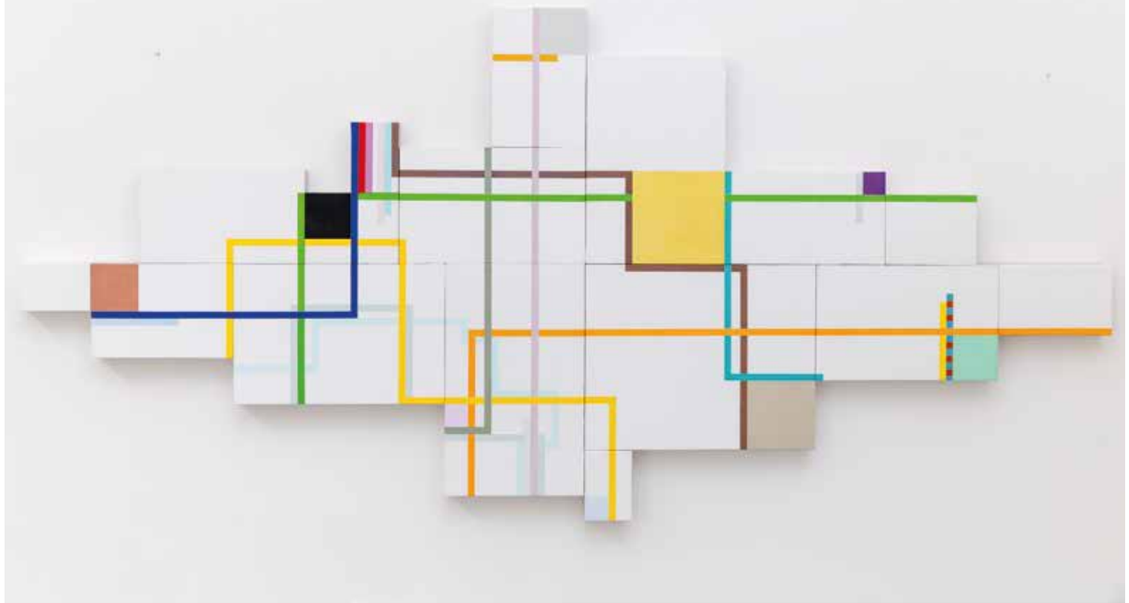
CONVERSATION

Entering the Mess

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN
ESTHER STOCKER
AND TAMÁS JOVANOVICS
ABOUT THE MESSY SIDE
OF MINIMALISM



When Tamás Jovanovics (b. 1974, Budapest, Hungary) and Esther Stocker (b. 1974, Silandro, Italy) first met in Vienna, it was clear that they spoke a similar visual language – the language of minimalism – yet with striking differences. In this conversation, held alongside their 2019 joint exhibition *Entering the Mess* (*Perplexing Geometries*) at Várfok Gallery in Budapest, the two artists reflect on their fascination with structures and repetition, the balance between precision and imperfection, and how minimalism can be both a rulebook and a playground. Through dialogue, they reveal how questioning order can become a form of expression in itself.



EXUBERANT MINIMALISM

Tamás Jovanovics: Esther, I believe, we both have something to do with minimalism, but in a paradox way. We both use a fundamental, geometrical, reduced visual grammar in our works, but at the same time we both use repetition and spread the reduced formal vocabulary in an all-over way across the whole painterly field, so that the result is often a complex system of shapes and grids. This is what I tend to call *exuberant minimalism*. Would you agree with this paradoxical definition?

Esther Stocker: Yes, I agree. And I have a passion for paradoxes. Never heard the expression *exuberant minimalism* before… I wonder if there is an exuberant aspect in historical minimalism, in the sense that reduction can be exuberant. What would you say to extravagant minimalism? Anarchic minimalism, unreflected minimalism, irrational minimalism, imprecise minimalism… careless minimalism, slacker minimalism… Does it hurt a little to have those words together?

TJ: It does a little bit, and it should so. I of course like them all, even if I think exuberant is the one that expresses the contradiction most evidently with the original meaning of minimalism, which is the *par excellence* manifesto of the "less is more" type of philosophy in art. Less is more, for sure, but it is a more intriguing challenge entering the mess and see if you can get out of it somehow. I like to take risks; I like to battle too. I like it that I have to draw that line two hundred times, and that I don't have the right to miss a single one of them.

DIG YOUR WAY THROUGH

ES: Entering the mess is something I can agree with, and it might be a deeper truth of making art as well. And there is so much mess to enter: all the possibilities of materials, forms and colours, all the limitations of these… so many great artworks of the past, but still so many great artworks missing, still to be created. So many past styles and movements of art, so many theories and countertheories of art… ideas or concepts in art can be messy. I mean, there is really no rule for how to continue, how to progress. There is all this big field of possibilities and you have to dig your way through that.

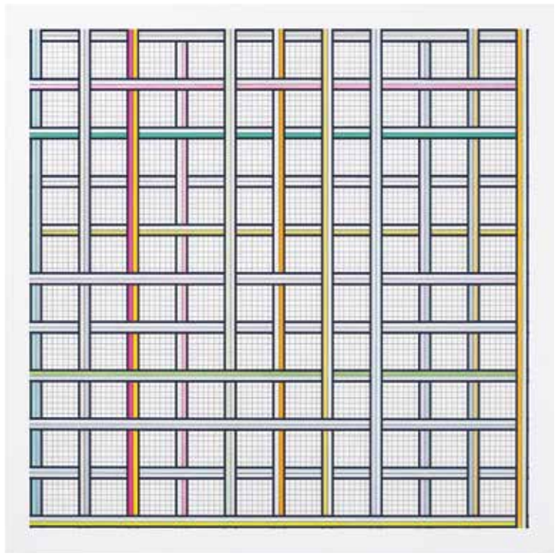
TJ: Yes, as you say: dig through your way. I like to see this digging through in a painting, and at the same time, I still want the painting to create a metaphysical space within the real space, a floating something, disobedient to gravity. I want to see minimalism, but an exuberant, overwhelming minimalism when I am painting paintings.

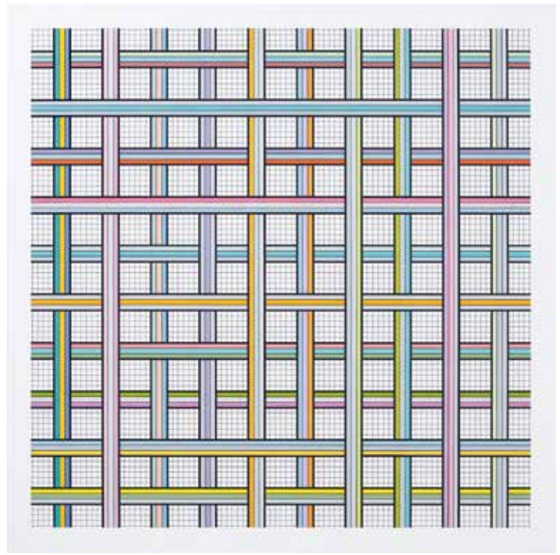
ES: If you look at very reduced forms, either people's emotions could respond in an exuberant, exalted way or there appears a strong need for exuberant or exalted forms. I believe I belong to the first group. Reduced forms can move me, create a passion inside of me, "exuberate" me. But not every form of reduction… Just as the absence of something creates the hunger of the opposite or a deeper consciousness of what is missing.

Above: Tamás Jovanovics, *Axis (The Yellow Bun of Summer Rain)*, 2025, acrylic on fibreboard, 102.5 × 102.5 cm

Previous spread: Tamás Jovanovics, *Hybrid Hierarchy II*, 2019 (detail), acrylic, fibreboard, wood, aluminium, varnished, 102.5 × 102.5 cm. Photo by Dénes Józsa

Opposite: Tamás Jovanovics, *Nine Squares Against the World*, 2025, acrylic on canvas board, 110 × 235 cm. Photo by Brúnó Einspach





Which brings me to the fact that in every talk I am asked about colour. Why? I can only explain it to myself that the absence of it makes people aware of it. Do people regularly ask you about colour – your relationship with it? And what is your answer then?

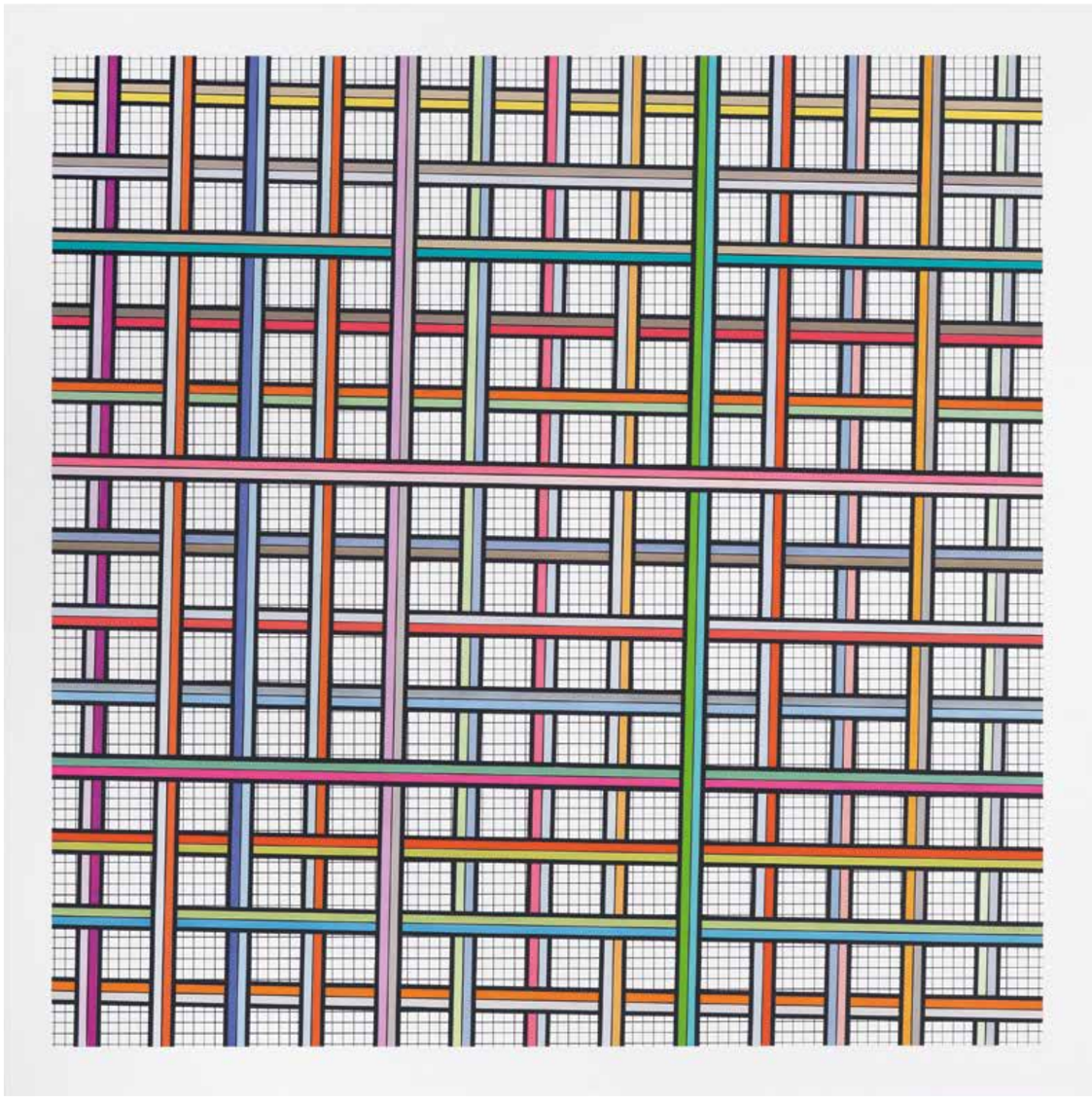
COLOURS, BLACKS, AND WHITES

TJ: This is funny: you don't use colour (I mean, apart from black and white, which I do consider colours) and you constantly get asked about it. I do use colour, in fact, I like to think of myself as a kind of colourist, and no one asks me about it. That's fine, as I think colour has a very mysterious nature, and I would struggle to define a colour theory or strategy that I employ. But to answer you, I would say, that I use colour as a double strategy. Firstly, as I said, I think colour is so mysterious. It is everywhere, yet it is immaterial – you cannot touch it, you cannot grab it, you have no direct relationship with it. It is always beyond you. Secondly, exactly since it is everywhere, there is also a demystifying factor in using it freely: it creates a bond between the artwork and the world as a whole as we know it. Black and white, or any other reduction, like using only yellow, is more ethereal, metaphysical in a straightforward way. I don't mind if my work gets noticed as ethereal, or metaphysical, but I still wish to have the above-mentioned bond and challenge that using colours mean.

ES: That's a very beautiful description of colour. I have never thought of black and white as metaphysical before – to me, they've always felt closer to analytic thinking, the colour of form and the structure, used to define relationships. I find it very fascinating that you say you cannot have a direct relationship with colour. Why do you think in that way? Still, colour is so seductive. And, for me, annoying when too strong. Is black and white less seductive? Is there more pleasure in colour and more thinking in black and white? Then again, there is, clearly, pleasure in thinking.

TJ: I think black and white do not exist, at least not for perception. The perfect white is way too bright; it would blind you, and the perfect black is way too dark; you simply would see nothing at all if you were in front of it. So at the end of the day, there are only shades of white and shades of black that we see, and those shades do, let's say, import the quality of the so-called real colours, because these shades render the black and the white yellowish, or bluish, and so on. I mean I am very sensitive to the subtle and less subtle yellows and blues that I see even on the white of the computer screen. What people call black is for me a very dark version of blue, brown, red, etc., and what they call white for me is a very light version of yellow, pink, orange, etc. For me, the distinction is not so much between black and white and the other real colours, but more between reducing or not reducing your palette to a certain number of colours. I decided to reduce my formal grammar, but not to reduce in any way my colour palette, whereas you took the decision to cut even your colours down to these two extremes, which are intriguing not only because they are extremes, but also because of what I described above. They basically contain all the other colours too, just at a very subtle level.

ES: It could all be shades… One of the most beautiful book titles I ever read is "Il mondo va considerato all'ombra,'' by Domenico Papa. "The world is considered in the shadow." Black and white is close to light and space, to all or nothing, and to knowing the truth. Let me exaggerate a little and call it the real colours of passion.



Opposite (left): Tamás Jovanovics, *Hybrid Hierarchy II*, 2019, acrylic, fibreboard, wood, aluminium, varnished, 102.5 × 102.5 cm. Photo by Dénes Józsa

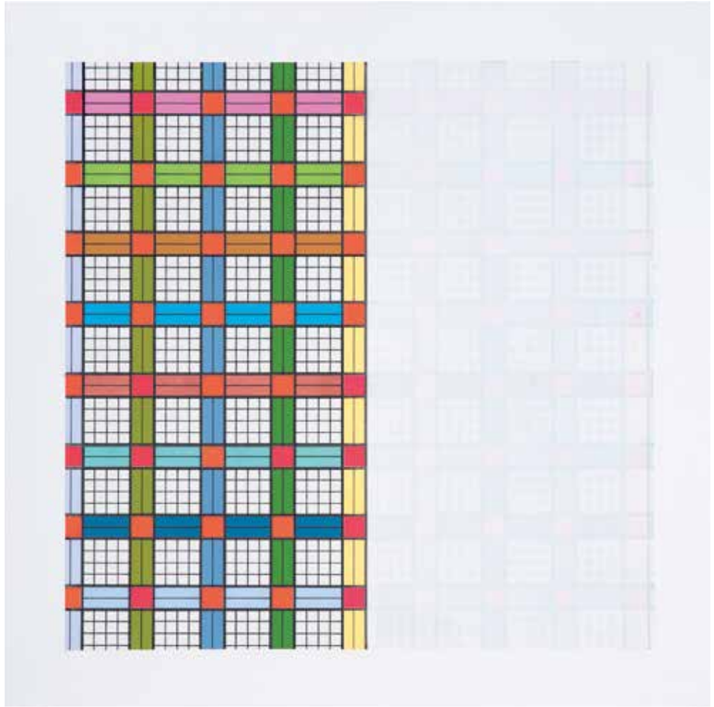
Opposite (right): Tamás Jovanovics, *Hybrid Hierarchy V*, 2019, acrylic, fibreboard, wood, aluminium, varnished, 102.5 × 102.5 cm. Photo by Dénes Józsa

Above: Tamás Jovanovics, *Hybrid Hierarchy III*, 2019, acrylic, fibreboard, wood, aluminium, varnished, 102.5 × 102.5 cm. Photo by Dénes Józsa

ALL-OVER: HORROR VACUI OR JOY OF REPETITION?

TJ: Getting back to the all-over and exuberant nature of your and my paintings, I liked how you defined, in an interview in the catalogue of your duo show with Anna-Maria Bogner, the difference between the works of you two. You said: "It seems to me that in the artworks of Anna-Maria Bogner, there is no fear of the singleness of forms; she is not afraid of placing very few lines into the space. Whereas me, on the other hand, I am indeed afraid of the singleness of the elements, of their loneliness, so to say." This is almost exactly how I would have defined my work compared to Anna-Maria Bogner's. But is there really, as you say above, a fear factor that drives you towards multiplying the elements? Is it possible that this fear is driven by the so-called *horror vacui*? I feel like there is a link between *horror vacui* and the so-called all-over type of painterly approach...

ES: I believe many things we do, many forms we create are motivated by fear. Or the desire to overcome that fear. If there is one solitary element on a canvas, I have to put something next to it. That makes me feel better. Even better, if there is a structure, if there are more elements that can relate to each other. I am not sure if it is *horror vacui*, although I surely suffer from that too. Because one solitary form or element can already solve the problem of *horror vacui*. It might also be a perceptual-paradoxical issue, that you want to let people know about that complexity. In a way it doesn't feel right for a form to stand alone, because I need to describe that all forms are only what they are because of others. In contrast to others.



Tamás Jovanovics, *Less is More*, 2018, acrylic on canvas board, 60 × 60 cm. Photo by Dénes Józsa

TJ: I am not totally sure about the *horror vacui* factor either. But that doesn't mean it is not there. I mean when someone fills up a surface as intensively and consequently as you or I do, then, from a psychological point of view, I have to accept if someone thinks there is a certain degree of self-defence, an obsession aspect to it too. And both are, somehow, related to fear, I think...

BEING OVERWHELMED...

ES: Is it not strange that being overwhelmed is a thing that scares and fascinates us at the same time? Being overwhelmed might be a fundamental experience in art – if a good one. How would you describe your emotions about art in general? Thinking about it more, it might be the fear of death. We have to defend ourselves from that fear perhaps. Of course, we cannot overcome it, and we know that, but art can last longer than one's life, and communicate over time.

TJ: Possible, but at the same time I always feel that there is also simply a joy factor. In our case, the joy of repetition.

ES: I would say that repetition also serves survival. Many willing and unwilling acts in our existence are repetitive: heartbeat, breathing, walking... I believe it was Kierkegaard who said that repetition serves to overcome fear. Ha, the fear again! But that is actually another crucial point for me: the dissolution of meaning. I think it was Frege who described this process. When you repeat a word many times, it starts to sound absurd; it becomes more abstract, I would say. I think the same thing happens to forms: if you repeat them, you weaken their context, their meaning can fall into pieces. At the same time, you are forced to look at them again and again. So this could be another process of minimalism and reduction...

Tamás Jovanovics, *The Rebellion of Sun Wukong*, 2023, oil-based coloured pencil and acrylic on fibreboard, 2 pcs, 102.5 × 205 cm (each 102.5 × 102.5 cm). Photo by Dávid Biró

THE DISSOLUTION OF MEANING

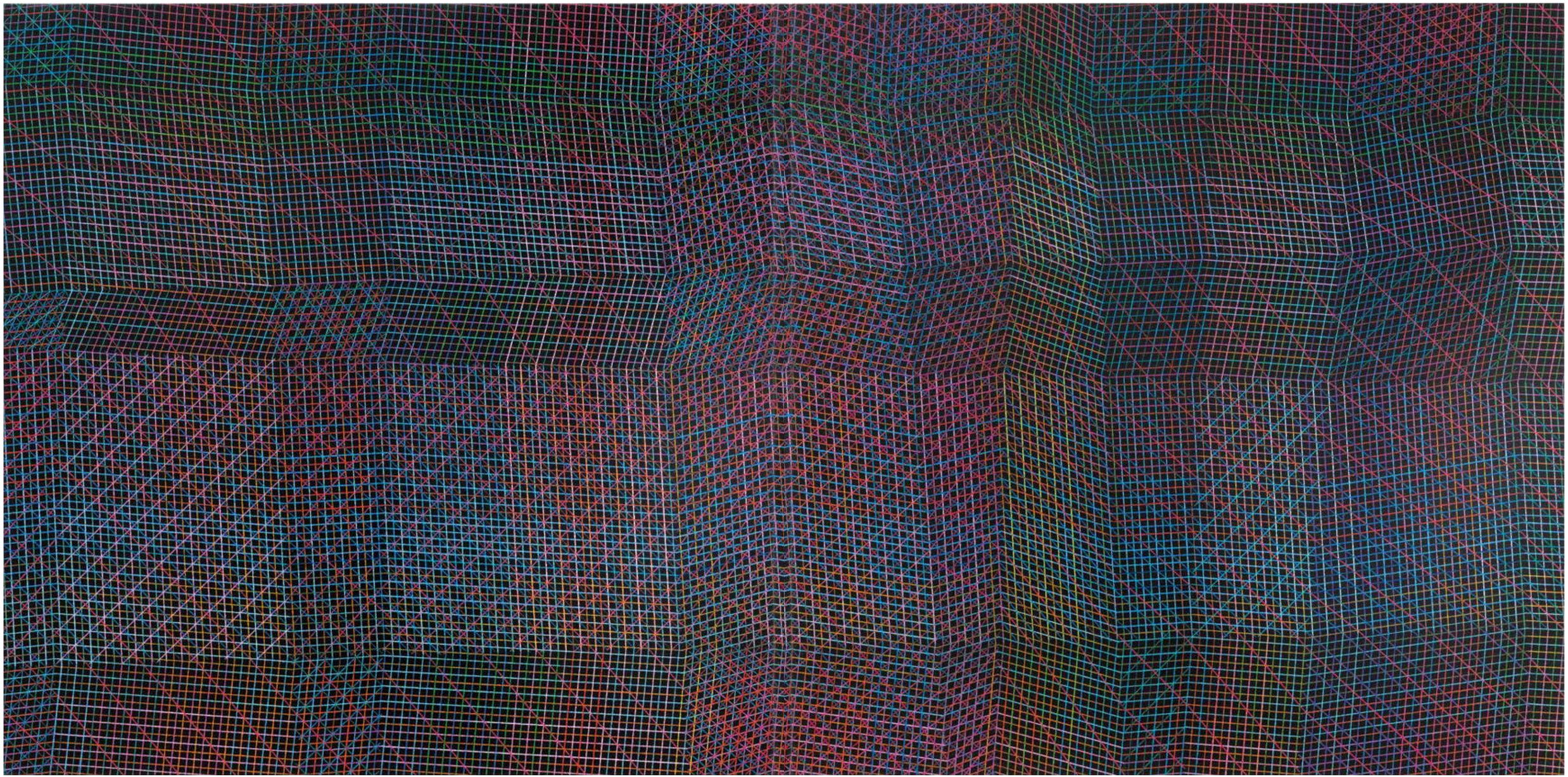
TJ: The dissolution of the superficial meaning layers is one of the most fundamental experiences for me too in painting. Robert Irwin said that "Seeing is forgetting the name of the thing one sees." (Probably the most beautiful and meaningful definition of art/painting I have ever heard.) And as you say, in our case, this meaning decomposition, meaning dissolution is also due to the repetition process that is so important for both of us. And I believe this decomposition, dissolution aspect is a factor of joy too. This is why I call it the joy of repetition, because, by destroying a certain meaning, you immediately generate another one. You are right, repetition is often essential, like breathing or the beating of the heart, and I often cite these examples when people ask me about my *Horizontal Lines* paintings or my *One Centimeter* series. But I believe there is another aspect to repetition too, like letting a table tennis ball pop on the bat a hundred times, or the fast beat in music, or the rhythmicity of the sexual act, all of which are related to joy, even ecstasy. But there is an even greater joy when a shift, an accident happens within that repetition. It is this mixture of the repetition (the structure) trying to keep growing all over, even beyond the visible border of the painting, notwithstanding the shift, the accident that just intervened, that just tried to break its certainty, its machine-like nature. I remember, when just next to me in Marseille, a guy who had just stepped off a local bus was shot by two killers who had gotten off the same bus with him. They quickly covered their faces with a mask and started shooting at him with two submachine guns. The guy was hit by dozens, if not hundreds, of bullets in his body. I remember vividly that he still tried to run away, as if there was a way to escape. Our works might not be that dramatic, but there is a similar pattern to the systems, and the accidents that happen to them.

ES: This is quite a shocking story. What did you think then?

TJ: For a first second, I thought I had accidentally entered a movie set. The next second, I realized it was reality, so I just made sure that I make myself as small as possible to avoid ending up myself with a bullet in my body. But looking back, in the larger context, I could even decrypt this event as a reminder that things are never clear and straightforward. At that time, I was doing a master's degree in art in Aix-en-Provence, but with a philosopher, not an artist tutor. He spoke for uncountable hours about the American minimalists, mostly about Carl Andre and Donald Judd, and their very cutting, rather dogmatic ideas about art – how clean and clear it should be. Even back then, as much as I liked their works, I felt very suspicious about their theories, and I always felt much closer to the more organic, messier side of minimalism, like the works of Robert Morris or Richard Serra. So there was this young painter dude from Eastern Europe with a scholarship from the French Government – he listens and studies carefully how and what art should be, and a few minutes later he is in the middle of a mafia shooting with blood flowing all over the place. I think the two things together are called reality, and, at the same time, something totally different than reality – and yet just as complex, as exuberant, as paradoxical as reality.

ES: We talked so much about fear, and now a new thought comes to my mind. Looking at forms, more closely, I start to think that occupying oneself with questions of forms is perhaps a good way to deal with fear. All you deal with in the end is the preciseness of relations. And fear is always the fear of yourself in relation to the other – the unknown, death, the things we cannot understand. And fear shapes our life and existence.

The conversation above is an excerpt from the exhibition catalogue *Esther Stocker, Tamás Jovanovics. Entering the Mess: A Dialogue about the Messy Side of Minimalism* (Budapest, 2019).



Tamás Jovanovics, *The Rebellion of Sun Wukong*, 2023,
oil-based coloured pencil and acrylic on fibreboard, 2 pcs,
102.5 × 205 cm (each 102.5 × 102.5 cm). Photo by Dávid Biró

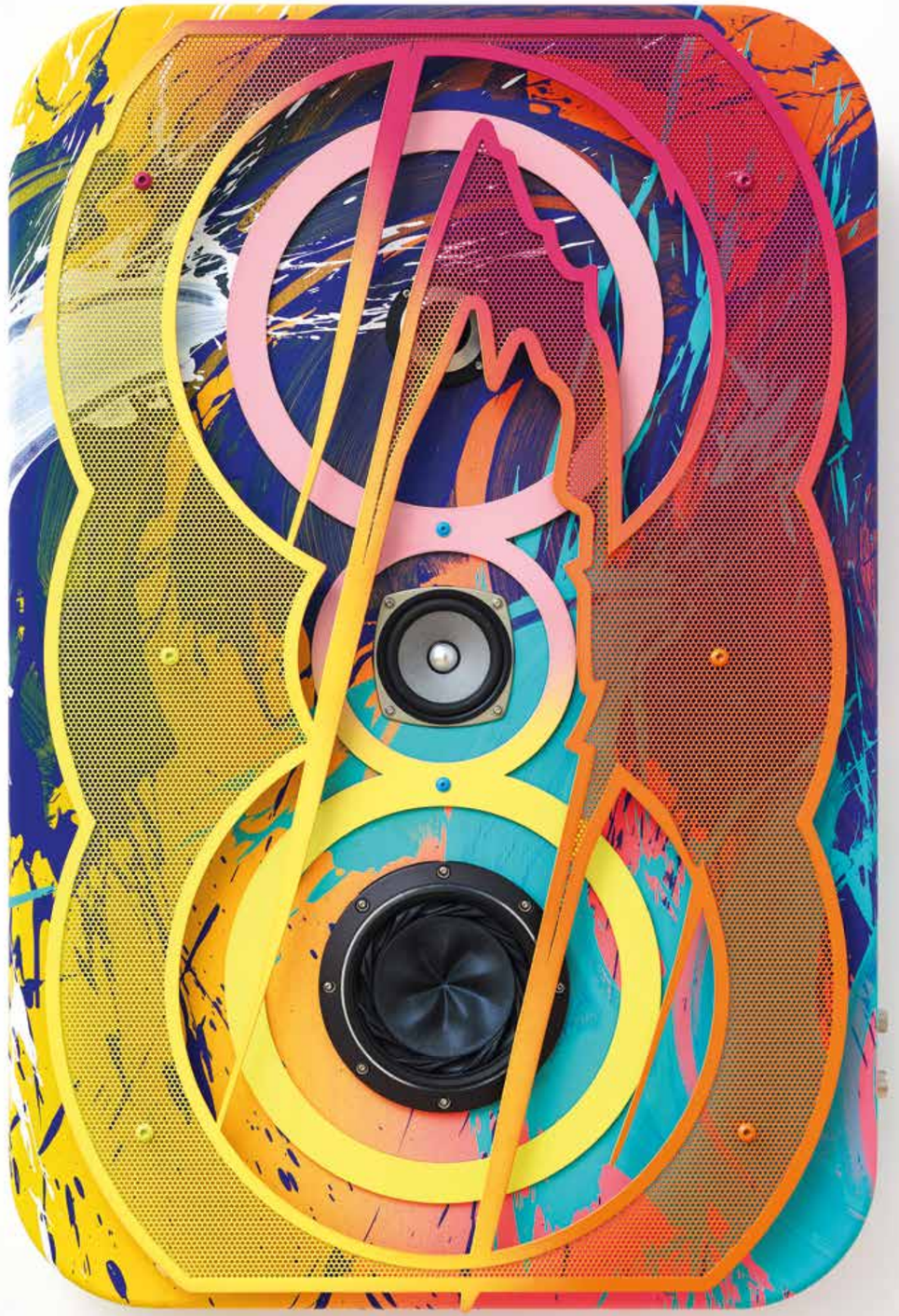
11–14 September 2025
booth A3

Messe Wien, Halle D

VIENNA CONTEMPORARY

Between Vision and Structure –
Four Positions in Contemporary Hungarian Art

Einspach & Czapolai Fine Art presents a four-artist selection at viennacontemporary 2025, showcasing three generations of Hungarian contemporary art: sculptor Tamás Melkovics (b. 1987), multimedia artist Márton Nemes (b. 1986), and painters Tamás Jovanovics (b. 1974) and Tamás Soós (b. 1955). The booth explores intersections between sculptural modularity, metaphysical painting, as well as perceptual and immersive sensorial abstraction. Melkovics builds dynamic, reconfigurable structures inspired by music and language; Nemes fuses colourful abstraction with the immersive atmospheres of escapist countercultures; Soós merges existential reflection with baroque visual codes; while Jovanovics transforms geometric abstraction through optical vibration and post-digital sensibility. Together, the presentation creates a dialogue between matter, spirit, rhythm, and visual structure across time and medium.



Márton Nemes, *Stereo Paintings 09B*, 2025, loudspeaker, perforated steel sheet, plywood, laser-cut steel, car paint, acrylic, canvas, wood, MDF, electronics, 99 × 66 × 15 cm. Photo by Dávid Biró

EINSPACH & CZAPOLAI FINE ART

ESSAY

MÓNIKA ZSIKLA

Constructions of Identities and Types of Parallels in the Art of Tamas Dezsö

Tamas Dezsö (b. 1978) is an internationally acknowledged press and documentary photographer. His photographic volume *Notes for an Epilogue*, brought out in English by the German publisher Hatje Cantz in 2015, marked an important milestone in his artistic career. He worked on the book's photographs for nearly six years, with the cooperation of journalist Eszter Szablyár, who participated in the project by creating the texts accompanying the images. The pictures reveal the comprehensive nature and painful legacy of East European social and cultural identity, presenting the effects of Ceaușescu's dictatorship in Romania three decades after his regime was overthrown. Yet the photographs depict not only a location-specific social reality, but also a broader East European identity, in which past and present are in close dialectical relation. Travelling through Romanian villages and towns, Tamas Dezsö rendered the mementoes of the gradual transformation of a post-communist society, while documenting natural beauty, ancient traditions, images of deserted industrial landscapes, and lives marked by hardship.

Following the publication of this photographic volume, the documentarist, photographic perspective in Tamas Dezsö's art was followed by a quiet and absorbed period of reading philosophy. As a result, his new creative period began in 2017. Leaving behind the restlessness of a documentarian pursuing pictures, the stoic contemplation of a researcher desiring to find and create images became characteristic. He was most inspired by universal philosophy – modern and contemporary theories –, which not only influenced him intellectually but also serves as a comprehensive and diverse reference framework within his artistic practice.

In this new creative period, significant changes can be observed in his use of media. His works – drawing on a multitude of cultural and philosophical references – can be mostly characterised by a diversity of mediums. While Dezsö has not given up the more classical, two-dimensional picture formats, he now also creates installations (occupying entire spaces or parts of them), objects (incorporating natural formations), readymades, and sculptures. In addition to his less frequent small and medium-sized works of art, he tends to compose enormous diptychs and triptychs, which he sometimes draws in charcoal, sometimes in pencil or crayon, and at other times he creates as conceptual photographs using special high-resolution cameras. In parallel with this diverse use of media, Dezsö's works, integrating philosophical theories and demonstrating the phases of comprehension, can be characterised by prolific diversity, as well as an enormous span with reference to time and scale regarding their themes, since objects involving a large number of scientific, historical, and cultural reminiscences turn up in Dezsö's artworks besides the inspiration of philosophical discourses. That said, in the works of art, the various scientific appliances and objects are not only used by the artist merely as objects, but also as symbolically and culturally charged elements. Each is connected to different periods and phases of human knowledge and understanding, and thus they link not only certain timelines but also the questions of philosophy, science, and art in Dezsö's "researcher's" approach.

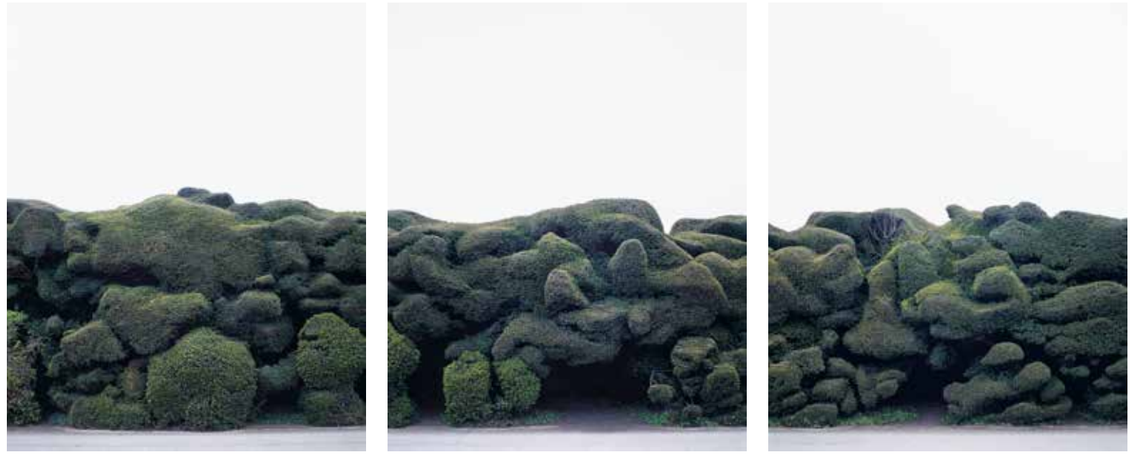
The artworks, created and executed professionally in this way, organically unite centuries of achievements in philosophy, science, and imaging (pictorial representation). Furthermore, the heterogeneity of media and themes approaches the philosophical, ecological, and social issues of the present in a novel way. Thus, Dezsö's works can be interpreted as potential answers in relation to the search for post-humanist and speculative realist ways forward for post-anthropomorphic approaches, which respond to the most pressing problems of the present.

At exhibitions, his artworks are mostly presented in spaces resembling Wunderkammers, which avoid linear strategies and the traditional approaches of curators. Instead of such methods, they allow us to gain insight into the comprehensive nature of Tamas Dezsö's intellectual universe. His works reveal the extremely exciting interconnections between science and art, as well as past and present, as subjective interpretations.

In the following sections of my study, I try to examine, with the help of some pairs of notions, what philosophical dilemmas and types of parallels have been present in Tamas Dezsö's art since 2017.

Previous spread: Tamas Dezsö, *Equisetum*, 2019 (detail), archival pigment print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag Baryta paper, diptych, 130 × 210 cm / 155 × 255 cm

Opposite: Tamas Dezsö, *Hedge*, 2017, archival pigment print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag Baryta paper, triptych, 105 × 250 cm / 130 × 320 cm



CONSTRUCTIONS OF IDENTITIES

`personal identity vegetal identity`

I would first associate two works, the triptych *Hedge* (2017) and the group of works *Variations on the Self* (2018–2022), with "personal and vegetal identity" concerning the constructions of identities. Both reflect on the notions of identity from different aspects and their presumed or real human and vegetal nature. Primarily due to the dominance of the anthropocentric world view focusing on the human being, in the history of philosophy vegetal existence was pushed to the periphery of attention for thousands of years. As a result, the vegetal world was classified among organisms of the low(est) grade for a long time. However, due to shared evolutionary ancestors, there is far more similarity than difference between vegetal and human-animal embryogenesis, ontogenesis, and mode of existence. Despite this, philosophers – especially the representatives of existentialist philosophy and existentialist ontology – tended to create the notions of personal identity and the self primarily by emphasising differences. Unlike the Modern Age thinkers of Western philosophy, who largely ignored vegetal ontology, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who conducted prominent botanical research alongside his literary activity, was the first to write about the identity and temporality of plants, and their persistence through time. As a philosopher with a holistic view, he regarded botany as essential for the understanding of nature as a whole. He believed that vegetal existence was a power capable of creating hidden forms – namely, that plants constantly reinvent their own forms through their growth and propagation. In his book *The Metamorphosis of Plants* and his poem *The Metamorphosis of Plants*, he introduced the principle of vegetal creative power, which declared that all the organs of a plant derive from the metamorphosis of an archetypical leaf (Urblatt). He believed this metamorphosis – i.e., the principle of epigenesis – was true for all living organisms: not only plants, but also animals and humans. Although his holistic approach – which was ahead of its time – could not surpass the anthropocentric worldview, his writings are important forerunners of contemporary evolutionary theories, such as the theory of metamorphosis associated with the internationally prominent Italian philosopher Emanuele Coccia, currently doing research in France, whose work is very significant for Dezsö and others. According to Coccia, the phenomenon of metamorphosis enables the same life to exist in bodies that differ across space and time. This connection links all the living and non-living, since, wandering in the form of material, the particles of the Earth constitute various living and non-living organisms. Bacteria, fungi, plants, animals – and even we ourselves – are carriers of the same substance. After all, we share the same ancestry and exist in transitory states, as mediatory organs. And perhaps the analysis of vegetal identity has never been as urgent as at it is now, in an era afflicted by climate and ecological catastrophes.

Not only does Tamas Dezsö's triptych *Hedge* (2017) represent the image of a several-hundred-year-old hedge, it also reflects on the issues of vegetal identity, how it is possible that we can talk about the same hedge for centuries while the assemblage of plants consisting of several, mainly yew trees is in constant and continuous renewal. How can the hedge, and the plants constituting it, remain themselves throughout continuous metamorphosis if their components are constantly replaced, if their details, their structure and form constantly renewed? A single tree can repeat this process for thousands of years, and due to their lifespans spanning multiple human generations, the Druids, for example, regarded yew trees as sacred.

The issues of personal (human) identity come to life as stations of transformation and metamorphosis in Tamas Dezsö's black-and-white photo series *Variations on the Self* (2018–2022). The images in the series may still call to mind the artist's documentarist practice: the frames of the process-work document the stages of carving and then "decarving" a Carrara marble bust. However, beyond the documentarist connotation, the photos of the series, in fact, show an identity emerging and perishing through time. Dezsö's friend, the sculptor Gergő Ámmer, sculpted the bust of Ludwig Wittgenstein, who is regarded as one of the most influential philosophers of the 20th century for his theses on logic and the philosophy of language (and of whom no commemorative statue exists anywhere in the world). The sculptor continued carving the true-to-life marble bust until the block of marble became the miniaturized version of its starting form. The images documenting the physical process represent temporality in relation to the human course of life – as humans are created from nothing and disappear into nothing – as well as the metaphysical dimensions of a person's or identity's development and disappearance. From Dezsö's viewpoint, all the stages of this process are equally valid; transformation, for him, is a metamorphosis without a zenith.

Tamas Dezsö, *Variations on the Self*, 2018–2022,
archival pigment print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag Baryta paper,
220 × 305 cm, Innovinia Collection, installation view,
Foto Wien, Atelier Augarten, Vienna, Austria, 2022

EXPERIENCE OF TIME

human temporality vegetal temporality

Fundamental ontological differences can be observed between the experiences of time in plants and humans. While human awareness of human originates from the recognition of life's finiteness, plants are not aware of their own finiteness; therefore, their existence constantly adjusts to the temporal rhythm of their surroundings and obeys their laws. Lacking self-awareness, plants commit their existence completely to life.

In order to understand vegetal temporality, it is vital to examine the role of the circadian clock. Tamas Dezsö's kinetic installation *The Garden of Persistence* (2020–2022) presents the invisible molecular metronome responsible for vegetable time perception. Fifteen antique metronomes stand on the moving surface of a table. Plants from 19th-century herbaria are attached to each pendulum. The combination of the antique metronomes and the herbaria symbolises the fusion of mechanical and organic life. Dezsö represents the otherwise invisible rhythm of vegetal temporality through the process of communication and synchronisation between the metronomes during the operation of the plant-metronomes.

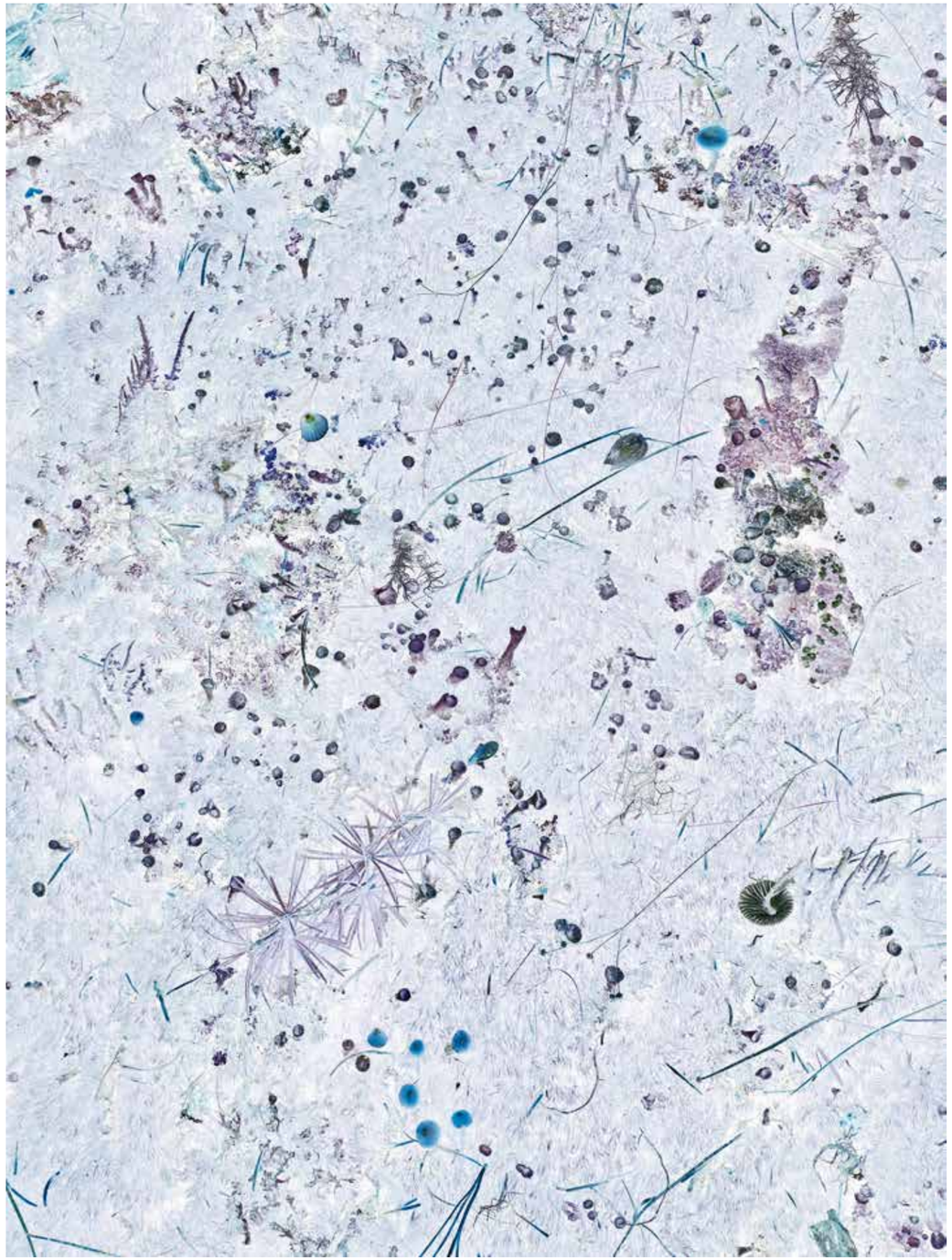
The alternation of parts of days and seasons in vegetal and human experience of time can be regarded practically as a "collective cross-section." Over the past two years, Dezsö created two-dimensional representations in the format of diptychs dedicated to the four seasons in Tyrol – *Tout se met à flotter (Summer)* (2024), *Tout se met à flotter (Autumn)* (2024), *Tout se met à flotter (Winter)* (2024), and *Tout se met à flotter (Spring)* (2025).

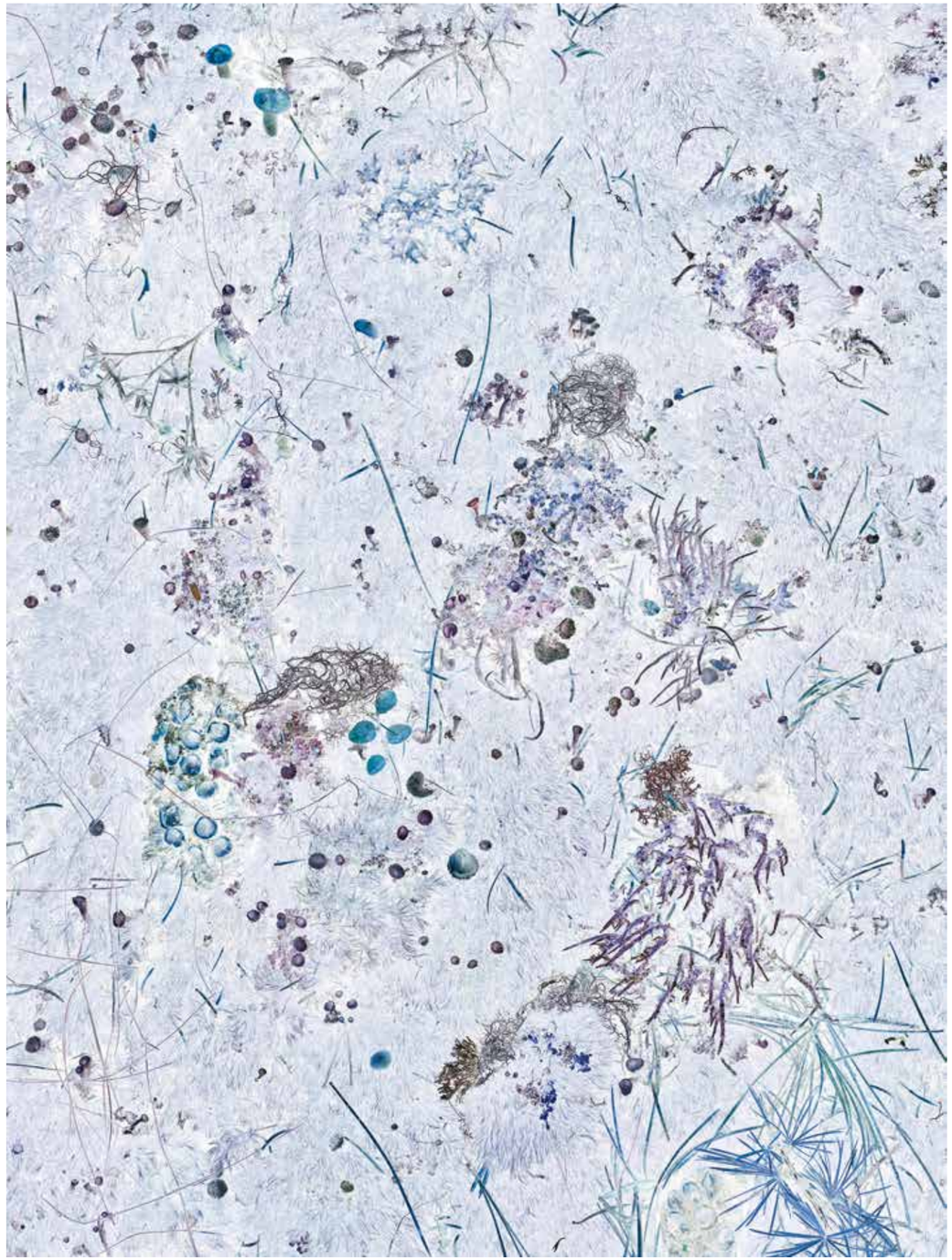
The diptychs representing the seasons render the seasonal proliferation as well as the bleakness of forests' surface vegetation in colour photographs of gigantic size. Dezsö reverses his digital photographs into negatives, and as a result, due to lack of shadows, our perception of space ceases, and *tout se met à flotter* (everything begins to float). The loss of depth perception, the intensity of forms, and the absence of horizons force perception to seek meaning in the familiar and unfamiliar forms of leaves, fungi, and other plants. The inverted colours, hues, and contrasts – replacing the ancient green setting – makes the mind relearn. As a result of this inversion, the represented places cease to be places; and the original forest surfaces transform into images of a strange, alien, decentralized, and unusually non-hierarchical organisation of vegetative actors. Dezsö's intention is to confuse human perception and thus draw attention to its limitations. Importantly, one consequence of these limitations is that for mankind vegetal existence and the ontology of plants have long occupied a position at the very bottom of intellectual hierarchy – despite the fact that it is plants that create and continuously sustain the atmosphere essential for human life.

The series *Tout se met à flotter* responds to the realisation of Antoine Roquentin, the protagonist of Sartre's *Nausea*, who, lost in reverie over a chestnut root, recognises himself as merely one of the accessorily existing objects around him. Following this astonishment, his human viewpoint becomes insignificant. His personality dissolves in the infinite multitude of the impersonal, while existence – with its disorder, absurdity, and nakedness – becomes alien.

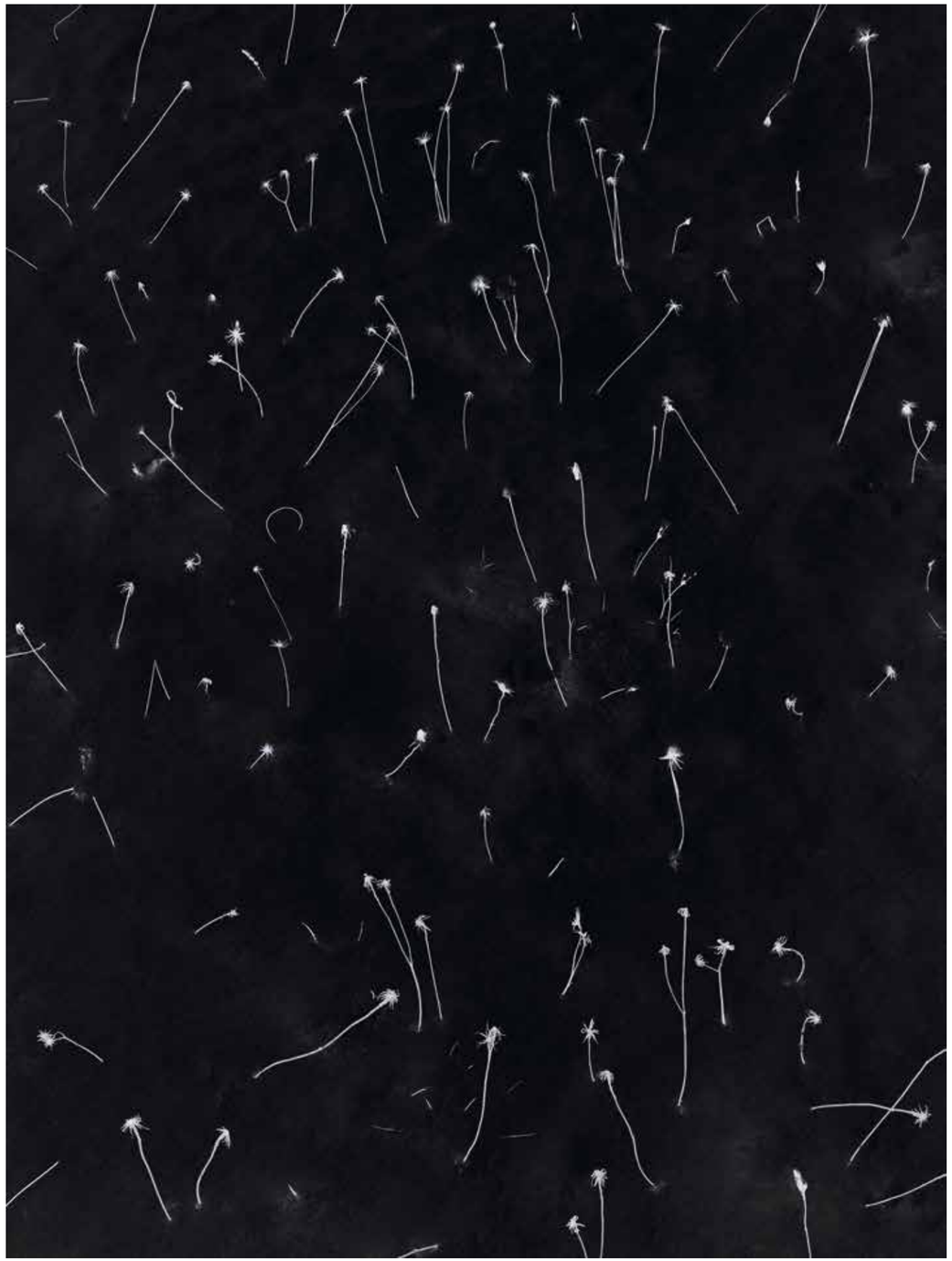
Thus, Tamas Dezsö's works of art question not only the ontological boundaries between nature and the human being, but also the metaphysical aspects concerning the position of the human being in the world, along with its transitory nature and relativity. Besides the analysis of philosophical issues, his works illuminate the close yet complicated connections between human existence and nature – as well as between time and space.

Opposite and above (detail): Tamas Dezsö, *Garden of Persistence*, 2020–2023, kinetic table, wood, steel wire, magnets, antique metronomes, 19th-century herbarium specimens, 110 × 200 × 120 cm, installation view, *Hypothesis: Everything is Leaf*, Foto Wien, Atelier Augarten, Vienna, Austria, 2022. Photo by Zalán Péter Salát and Csaba Villányi





Tamas Dezsö, *Tout se met á flotter (Autumn)*, 2024, archival pigment print on Hahnmühle Photo Rag Baryta paper, diptych, 205 × 310 cm, Innovinia Collection



Tamas Dezsö, *Tout se met á flotter (Winter)*, 2024, archival pigment print on Hahnmühle Photo Rag Baryta paper, diptych, 205 × 310 cm

Tamas Dezsö, *Forest (afterimage)*, 2018,
archival pigment print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag Baryta paper,
diptych, 155 × 250 cm, Innovinia Collection

Tamas Dezsö, *Equisetum*, 2019,
archival pigment print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag Baryta paper,
diptych, 130 × 210 cm / 155 × 255 cm

CHANGE OF SCALE

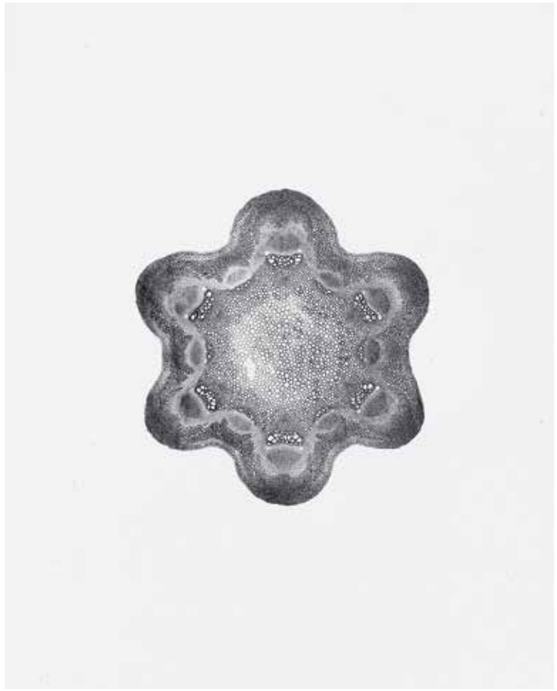
macrodimension microdimension

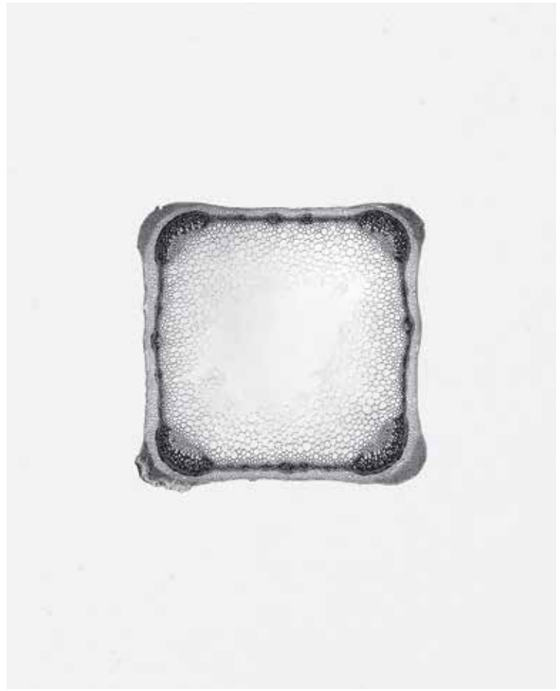
Special attention should be given to those compositions by Tamas Dezsö made since 2017 that operate with the means of scale change, confusing human perception. The forest as a motif is a frequently recurring element in these works, which for the artist symbolically sums up all the criticism and scepticism concerning the subject of the anthropocentric worldview and the limits of human perception. For Dezsö, the forest is not only a site of never-ending dramas but also the place of continuous change, transformation, and dynamism. Plants, animals, fungi, and other constituents in the communities of forests are in constant metamorphosis – they change from the beginning of their lives to the end, while certain species and individual entities emerge and disappear. As already mentioned in connection with *Hedge* (2017), humans speak of the same forest for centuries, while it is merely the location that remains a constant factor in connection with a forest.

The diptych *Forest (afterimage)* (2018) presents details of a forest in two enormous photographs. The flora and fauna in the Azores, the scene of the artwork, existed in isolation for centuries, and the region was regarded as a laboratory of natural evolution until the end of the 19th century.[1] However, the native vegetation was gradually overtaken by four species introduced by people from Asia and Australia in the past 100–120 years. *Pittosporum undulatum* (Australian cheesewood), *Cryptomeria* (Japanese cedar), *Dicksonia antarctica* (man fern), and *Hedychium gardnerianum* (Kahili ginger), all of which can be seen in the diptych, symbolise the human-driven transformation of the natural ecosystem.[2]

Representing the image of the plant at a macrodimensional scale, the diptych *Equisetum* (2018) plays with the chaos of scientific concepts of time and thought. The forerunners of *Equisetum* (horsetail) developed 400 million years ago, in the fourth period of the Paleozoic Era, during the early Devonian period, which began 416 million years ago and ended 359 million years ago. In the following millions of years, it dominated the undergrowth, and some subspecies grew as tall as thirty metres, accounting for forests that cover vast areas.[3] *Equisetum* is regarded by science as a "living fossil," since these plants lack the ability to flower, and, unlike the evolutionary path of most living organisms, have not developed new forms throughout their history. Thus, *Equisetum* can be interpreted as the symbol of "standstill," which reminds us that evolution does not always serve development or progress, rather from time to time viability and survival.[4]

While large-scale landscapes such as *Forest (afterimage)* and *Equisetum* represent an almost incomprehensibly broad timescale and evolutionary history for the human eye, Dezsö's microscopic images – e.g., the photographs made from microscopic slides – reveal invisible, tiny worlds that are beyond the limits of human perception. The series such as *Segments* (2016–2022) and *Flesh of Flesh* (2019–2023) open up microscopic worlds imperceptible to the naked eye, and due to their scale and structure, they are radically different from the domains of usual human perception. All the visual points of reference that would help orientation – background, horizon, proportions, and directions – are absent from these images, and as a result, the viewer's perception becomes destabilised. This kind of perceptive uncertainty results in cognitive confusion: we do not know what we are seeing, how big it is, what material it is made of, or where it is going – that is, in what kind of world it is situated. Thus, the images not only make a hidden reality visible, but also retune our relationship to perception. They unsettle the dichotomies of familiar and unfamiliar, near and far, natural and artificial, and thus they drive the viewer to the periphery of two-dimensional understanding.





Tamas Dezsö, *Sections*, 2016–2022, archival pigment print on Hahnmühle Photo Rag Baryta paper, dimensions variable

ORGANIC VERSUS ARTIFICIAL

For his works, Dezsö tends to use microscopic slides of organisms which were made before the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century – at a time when the purity of the air still made it possible to observe microscopic worlds free from pollution. This historical perspective not only explores the connection between nature and industry/technology, but also makes temporal and environmental relationships visible, while drawing attention to the effects and consequences of human intervention.

Dezsö's latest artwork, *Ladder* (2025), similarly refers to the relationship between nature and human involvement. The work incorporates branches and pieces of bark that had fallen to the ground from fifty-two legendary trees – each several hundred or even thousand years old. These trees are situated in various parts of the world, often in secret or closed locations. The process of collecting the pieces of wood was able to happen with global and communal cooperation whereby unknown helpers and friends mailed to Budapest dead pieces of branches and bark fragments from ancient trees located in distant parts of the world, or secret locations which were difficult to reach. These organic wooden materials, often embodying sacral, cultural, and historical significance, were put together by the artist in the form of a ladder, regarded as an ancient symbol of the human quest for understanding. *Ladder*, while evoking clean, industrial production, simultaneously represents the power of human union, the timelessness of nature, and the aesthetic opportunities of the organic–artificial engagement.

In summary, it can be said that Tamas Dezsö's art involves a sensitive and consistent research into the boundary between the visible and the invisible. His works explore the limits of human perception, rethinking the relationship with nature, and questions about the notions of time and scale. The enlarged images of microscopic worlds, the installations that follow the slow rhythm of vegetal time, and the ensembles of objects made from the oldest trees in the world, which also preserve personal mythologies, all reflect an artistic ambition which translates the scientific and philosophical discourses into a sensitive and visually reflected language. His works are not merely displays, they create uncertainty and dislocate us from everything we consider as natural with regard to seeing, perception, and knowledge. They offer a perception of the world where what we see is not an illustration of reality but a reflection of a deeper experience of existence. His oeuvre raises philosophical questions, while simultaneously providing a poetic experience and a visual manifestation of contemporary ecological thinking.

1 Luís Silva, Elizabeth Ojeda Land, and Juan Luis Rodríguez Luengo, eds., *Invasive terrestrial flora & fauna of Macaronesia. TOP 100 in Azores, Madeira, and Canary Islands* (Ponta Delgada: ARENA, 2008).

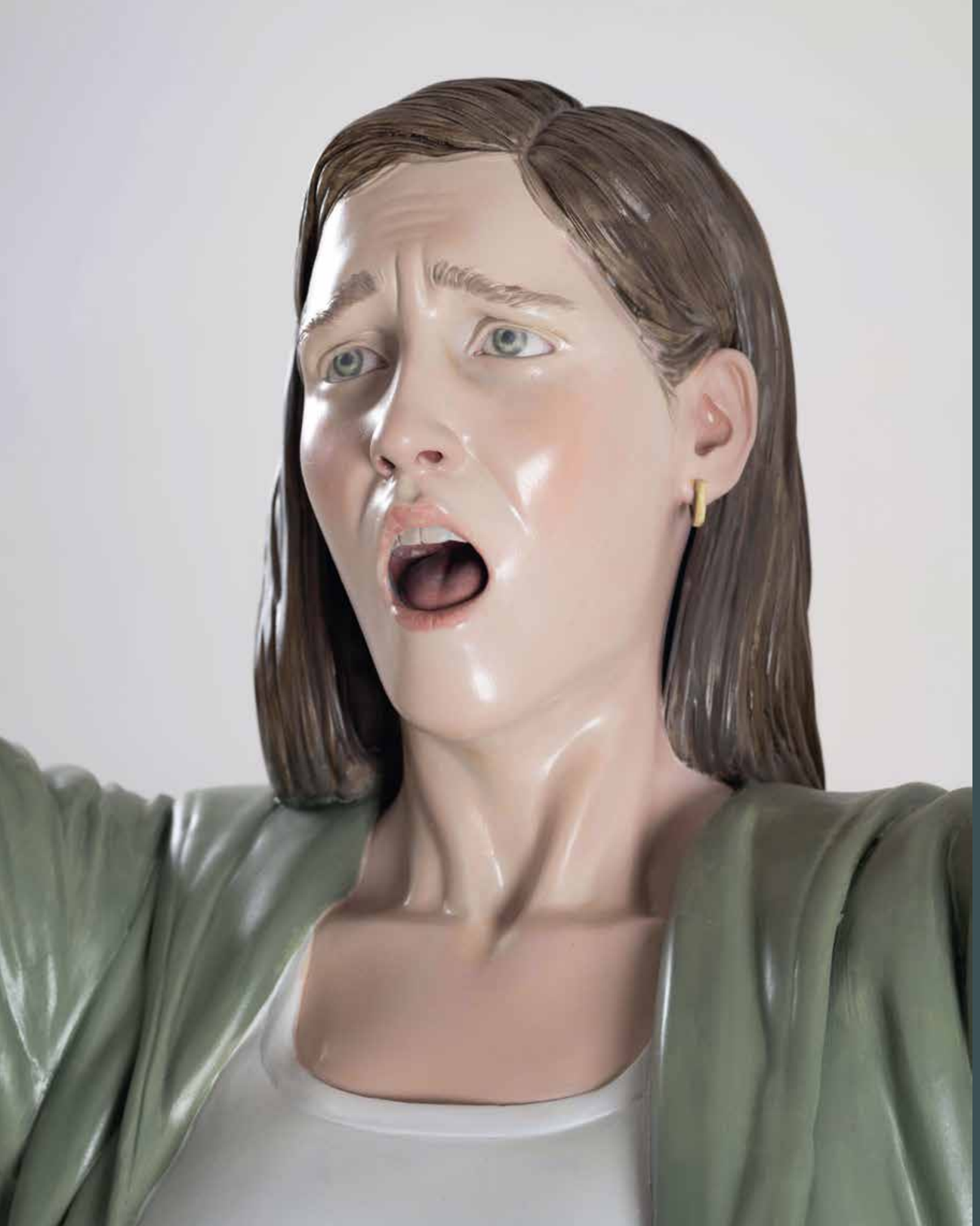
2 David M. Richardson, Petr Pyšek, Marcel Rejmánek, Michael G. Barbour, F. Dane Panetta, and Carol J. West, "Naturalization and invasion of alien plants: Concepts and definitions," *Diversity and Distributions* 6, no. 2 (2000): 93–107. https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1472-4642.2000.00083.x.

3 Andrés Elgorriaga, Ignacio H. Escapa, Gar W. Rothwell, Alexandru M. F. Tomescu, and N. Rubén Cúneo, "Origin of *Equisetum*: Evolution of horsetails (Equisetales) within the major euphyllophyte clade Sphenopsida," *American Journal of Botany* 105, no. 8 (2018): 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1002/ajb2.1125.

4 Stephan Jay Gould, *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002).

Tamas Dezsö, *Resistance*, 2025, bronze thorns, 19th-century clockwork, metal, dimensions variable, installation view, *Momentary Minds: Exhibition of Tamas Dezsö and Nóra Szabó*, Budapest Gallery, 30 April – 6 July 2025

The Einspach & Czapolai Fine Art booth
at SPARK Art Fair Vienna, 2025



PORTFOLIO

MUNTEAN/ROSENBLUM

MUNTEAN/ROSENBLUM is the artist duo of Markus Muntean (b. 1962, Graz, Austria) and Adi Rosenblum (b. 1962, Haifa, Israel), based in Vienna. They are known for their collaborative work that explores contemporary identity, consumer culture, and existential themes through a combination of painting, drawing, and installation. Working primarily in figurative painting, they appropriate the visual language of advertising, juxtaposing melancholic youth figures with philosophical texts. Since forming their partnership in 1992, their work has been exhibited internationally, including solo presentations at institutions such as Tate Britain, London (2004); MOCAK, Museum of Contemporary Art, Krakow (2018); and Städel Museum, Frankfurt (2024). They have also participated in group exhibitions at venues such as Albertina, Vienna; Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Israel; and the Royal Academy of Art, London. Muntean/Rosenblum's work is held in several prominent public and private collections across Europe and beyond.

Our paintings are based on appropriated material from the almost unlimited images provided by mass and social media. These standardized and processed images are almost like forever-young phantoms of ourselves. They reduce our collective perception of what the image of a human being is like to only the young and perfect. They seem to function like armor and shields against transience. By narrowing down our selection and depicting almost only young people, we try to intensify and mirror this specific context.

Recently, we added to our vocabulary of appropriated images from social media screensaver and wallpaper motifs, mainly landscapes. This is a continuation of our research into gestures of pathos and the impact of social media on aesthetic values – specifically, how these platforms have shifted beauty standards and influenced our perception of what is considered beautiful. As in our other works, we infuse these contemporary visual materials with the elements conspicuously absent from them: the feeling of transience, melancholia, and ambiguity.

We aim to scratch the perfect and smooth surface to get back to the *memento mori* and the fragility of our transient existence. As Paul Celan put it beautifully into words – we try to "reach through time" – through it, not above it and beyond it.

On the other hand, we are inspired by the singular power of figurative painting. It is a depiction of the sensual world and a highly abstract symphony of colours and brushstrokes at the same time.

The water lily paintings display a very intense and vibrant luminescence that points towards the kind of vivid colours generated by contemporary LCD screens. It is made possible by the unique technique we developed over the last few years: a combination of oil and pastel chalks. The figures are literally submerged and seem enthralled by their own reflections in the water, hinting at the famous Narcissus from Greek mythology. The surface of this pond literally transforms into a kind of screen that reflects our present condition: it is a state of being in the world we all seem to share, while it also isolates us as subjects and delivers an individualized approach to our worlds. The obvious reference to the canonical series of works by Monet is intensified by the fact that these paintings are among the most popular screensaver motifs.

Inspired by painted terracotta sculptures of the early Renaissance – and Niccolò dell'Arca's famous *Lamentation* group in particular – we created for the first time a series of life-size sculptures that present a direct transformation of the painted figures into space: paintings that detach from the wall and become three-dimensional. Painting remains the core, but is given a new stage.

This further development opens up new possibilities: the familiar motifs become tangible and alive.

/ Muntean/Rosenblum

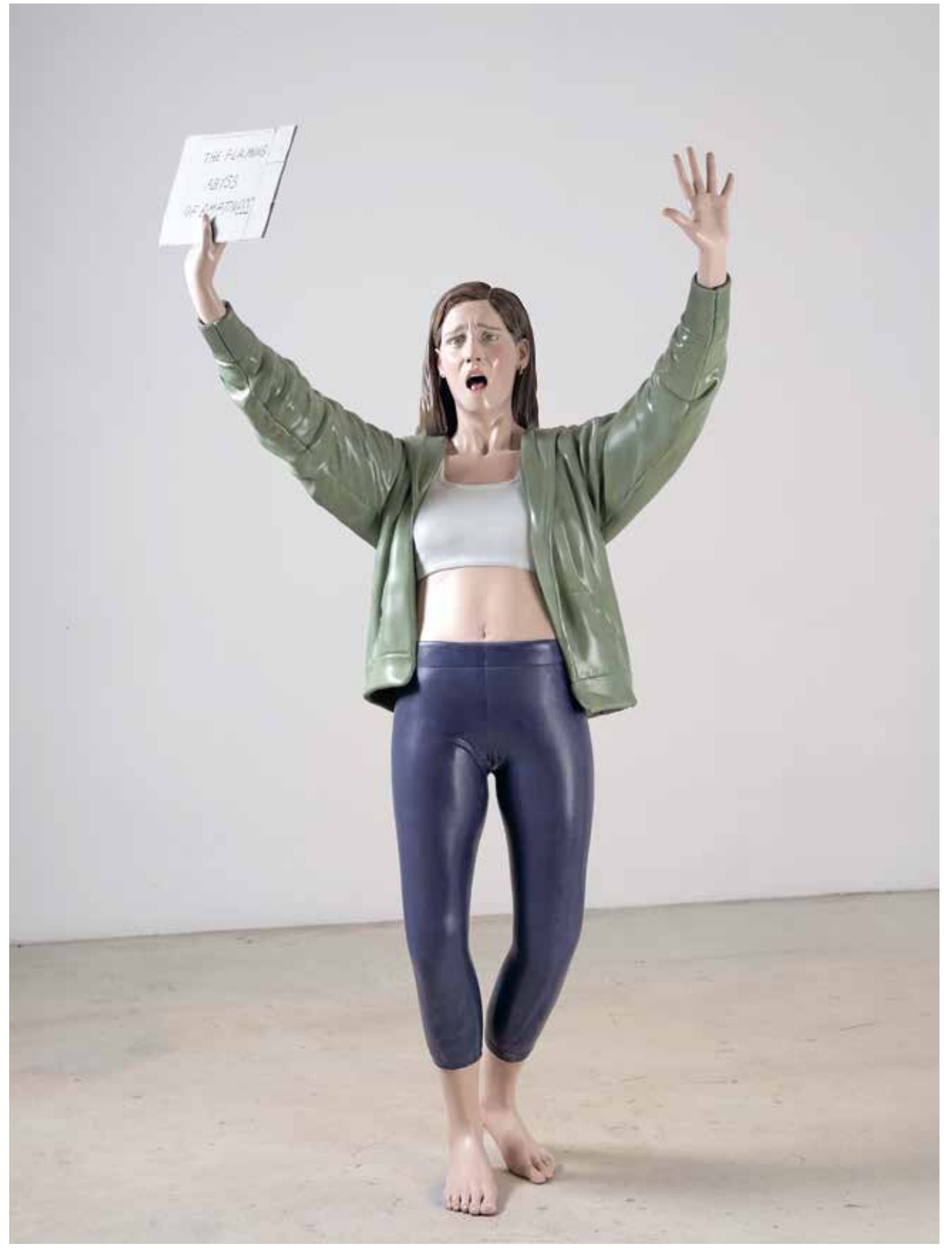
Above: Muntean/Rosenblum,
Untitled ("I want to shed my fears…"), 2024,
pastel chalk and oil on canvas, 110 × 85 cm.
Photo by Walter Zarbl

Previous spread: Muntean/Rosenblum,
Untitled ("The flaming abyss…"), 2025 (detail),
mixed media, 187 × 78 × 97 cm. Photo by Walter Zarbl

Opposite: Muntean/Rosenblum,
Untitled ("Being unafraid makes…"), 2025,
pastel chalk and oil on aluminium, 110 × 85 cm.
Photo by Walter Zarbl

Muntean/Rosenblum, *Untitled ("To be lost is to be..."),* 2023, pastel chalk and oil on canvas, 190 × 246 cm. Photo by Walter Zarbl

Muntean/Rosenblum,
Untitled ("Tell what can not be…"), 2025,
mixed media, 219 × 120 × 38 cm.
Photo by Walter Zarbl



Muntean/Rosenblum,
Untitled ("The flaming abyss…"), 2025,
mixed media, 187 × 78 × 97 cm.
Photo by Walter Zarbl

The Einspach & Czapolai Fine Art booth
at viennacontemporary 2024. Photo by Dávid Biró

PROFILE

GÁBOR KIRÁLY

GÁBOR KIRÁLY (b. 1979, Kecskemét, Hungary) is a distinguished figure in contemporary Hungarian art, known for his characteristically grotesque and ironic visual language. Since completing his studies at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Pécs in 2006, he has maintained a strong and consistent presence in exhibitions in Hungary as well as Belgium, Germany, Italy, and the US. Over the course of nearly two decades, his practice has been acknowledged with numerous awards, including the Gyula Derkovits Scholarship (2005), the Grand Prize of the Szeged Biennial of Panel Painting, the Grand Prize of the Vásárhely Autumn Exhibition, and the Artist Scholarship of the Hungarian Academy of Arts (2020–2023).

The last time I wrote about Gábor Király's art, I attempted to capture the peculiar experience his works evoke with the oxymoron "unknown familiarity."[1] In his paintings, everything feels homely and familiar, as if we had already seen or walked through the depicted spaces and environments. Everyday visual experiences are filtered through the traditions of art history, transforming into a magically mysterious yet self-evident visual world. We glimpse rural landscapes that span across epochs and eras, and motifs of nature representation that echo classical painterly tropes. Yet what we see is far from a bucolic idyll; there is always something subtly unsettling. Upon closer inspection, the seemingly obvious motifs begin to slip out of reach of descriptive language. What we initially identify as human may not be human at all; the animals are not clearly distinguishable, and even the stylized houses may not be inhabitable – perhaps the figures depicted wouldn't even fit inside them. Viewing these images, we sense that Király is exploring the intermediate zone between human and animal, much like how the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze described Francis Bacon's paintings:[2] the human assumes animalistic traits, while the animal takes on human features in this world that, despite its familiarity, remains unknown – and thus, threatening.

Previous spread: Gábor Király, *Plant Exchange*, 2025 (detail), acrylic on wood panel, each 85 × 25 × 6.5 cm; 70 × 31.5 × 7 cm; 85 × 25 × 6.5 cm

Opposite: Gábor Király, *Collectors*, 2024, acrylic on canvas, 108 × 115 cm

Right: Gábor Király, *Plant Exchange*, 2025, acrylic on wood panel, each 85 × 25 × 6.5 cm; 70 × 31.5 × 7 cm; 85 × 25 × 6.5 cm

Below: Gábor Király, *Herbal Tincture*, 2024, acrylic on canvas, 111.5 × 64.5 cm

All photos by Brúnó Einspach

Király writes about the indeterminacy of his motifs: "The shaping of figures and animals unfolds in the duality – and unity – of reality and vision. The deformation of the human body stands in stark contrast to the landscape's static realism, while the animals' forms are born of fantasy, though their natural gestures and actions lend them a sense of familiarity – as if we somehow know, or intuitively sense, where these taxonomically unidentifiable creatures belong, to which species they might be linked. Similarly, the plants cannot be classified; those that humans collect or cultivate may represent rare species whose exact habitats are known only to the locals, who preserve this knowledge, never allowing it to escape the simple cycles of their established living environment."[3]

A recurring motif in his work is the plant-based vegetation he references: the barren tree branches and the sharply pointed leaves of palm-lily-like – yet botanically unidentifiable – plants that remain green even in winter. Humanoid creatures moving through the landscape gather them as fodder (*Collectors*, 2024). These spiky plants reappear in domesticated form within interiors – sometimes in pots as decorative houseplants, at other times held by figures as healing entities (*Herbal Tincture*, 2024). Occasionally, the figures' heads are adorned with flower petals (*An Afternoon*, 2025), or forms resembling leaves or feathers (*Windy Days*, 2025). Leaf-like tendrils grow from rugs on the floor, as if the furnishings were echoing the shapes of nature. In the rooms, the coat rack becomes a white, transformed version of the barren tree (*Those Who Return Home*, 2025). The boundaries between outside and inside, natural and artificial, continuously dissolve – just as a particular reciprocity emerges between human and animal.

Gábor Király, *Sideboard in the Living Room*, 2025,
acrylic on canvas, 147 × 104 cm

Opposite: Gábor Király, *Windy Days*, 2025,
acrylic on wood and canvas, 116 × 93 cm

I am inclined to see Gábor Király's work as existentialist painting, centred around vulnerable, identity-less figures. They lack gaze, their faces are featureless, they communicate little, if at all, and exist closed within themselves and their bodies – like inhabitants of Eden after the Fall, now living through the cold that follows the warmer seasons. Human, animal, and plant life become nearly inseparable; different forms of being and ontological layers blend and hybridize. Their experience of time appears to merge into a single plane.

Király's latest works, along with the concept he associates with them – biotope – recast this Baconian existentialist bodily painting in a new context. According to its dictionary definition, a biotope is "a habitat, a closed living space shared by plant and animal communities requiring identical environmental conditions."[4] This closed space might be a room or a natural landscape – either way, it frames the cohabitation of diverse life forms. The idea of cohabitation is key, and it is equally significant that the focus shifts from the human figure to the environment, and to the communities formed by different life forms. Can we envision the world through the eyes of animals – or even plants?

I am not claiming that by invoking the concept of the biotope and the fusion of life forms and ontological levels, Király's art takes a posthuman turn or interrogates coexistence from within the Anthropocene. What is clear, however, is a subtle shift in emphasis and perspective. Király is concerned with the relationship between humans and nature – yet he regards neither concept as a given. Rather, he explores how humans construct nature, and how nature constructs the human.

The French philosopher Michel Serres wrote evocatively on these questions in his celebrated book *The Natural Contract*: "… earth, waters, and climate, the mute world, the voiceless things once placed as a décor surrounding the usual spectacles, all those things that never interested anyone, from now on thrust themselves brutally and without warning into our schemes and maneuvers. They burst in on our culture, which had never formed anything but a local, vague, and cosmetic idea of them: nature."[5]

In Király's paintings, it is precisely this "mute world, the voiceless things" that become the central subject. These landscapes do not depict conquered or exploited nature, but a silent, uneventful coexistence.

"In bygone days, the individual subject was practically invisible, blended in or distributed on this Earth among the forests or mountains, the deserts and ice floes, lightweight in body and bone. There was no need for the whole universe to take up arms to crush him: a vapor, a drop of water was enough to kill him. Swallowed up like a single point, that was man of not long ago, against whom the climate was winning the war. If we imagine that a satellite, in those eras, had been flying over the plain, what observer, on board, could have guessed at the presence of two peasants standing there at the hour of Millet's *Angelus*? … A frail bent reed, man thinks, knowing that he will die of this universe that, for its part, does not know that it is slaying him; he is more noble, therefore, more dignified than his conqueror because he understands this. Nil in the universe, dissolved in the locality of being-there, man thus hadn't attained physical existence: this is his state, naturally weightless, at the hour of Millet's *Angelus* or of farm ontologies."[6] Serres here paraphrases the famous lines of Blaise Pascal.

Király paints these invisible subjects, swallowed by forests and mountains. He looks back to an ancient mode of existence, depicting timeless scenes with no defined era or location. His figures are immersed in "being-in-the-world," their vulnerability to the world and their rootedness in their local "here-ness" becoming central. Serres identifies the peasant and the sailor as human types exposed to nature and time – both using the same tool as a paddle or oar, employing nature without exploiting it.[7] Király similarly writes of the figures in his landscapes: "In this vision, human existence is marked by determination, yet also humility and obedience, taking only what is absolutely necessary from the environment – no more, no less. The depicted person is in motion, performing daily tasks – because only in this way can one survive in a harsh and yet peace-radiating landscape. In the surrounding wilderness, the figure of an animal sometimes appears as a tamed companion, a helper in everyday life. Despite these activities, the overall mood of the painting is one of undisturbed silence, unmistakable permanence."[8]

Opposite: Gábor Király, *Those Who Return Home*, 2025, acrylic on wooden beam, 225 × 130 × 25 cm

Right: Gábor Király, *An Afternoon*, 2025, acrylic on canvas, 170 × 100 cm

Gábor Király, *Floodplain in Winter I*, 2025, acrylic on canvas, 169 × 219 cm

When Serres states that "we have lost the world,"[9] he refers to the disruption of this balance. Király's monumental landscapes evoke such lost worlds in a visionary way. *Floodplain in Winter I–III* (2025) is a melancholic landscape in bluish-gray, evoking the tradition of *grisaille*. A world dominated by water. The misty atmosphere might remind us of painting-historical forebears, from Joachim Patinir to Pieter Bruegel the Elder, where human, animal, and plant life coexist without event. Like an archaeological find from a distant, half-forgotten past. Like the remains of a faded fresco. Water not only dominates the landscape – it also seems to condense onto the surface of the canvas. The running paint forms abstract structures, veil-like layers, reminiscent of the way snowflakes "condense" on the surface of Bruegel's *Adoration of the Kings* (1563) in Winterthur's Am Römerholz. The apparent uneventfulness of Bruegel's painting is an important reference point for understanding Király's art.

The *grisaille* landscapes (in addition to *Collectors* and *Floodplain in Winter*, also *Backwater*) are mirrored by their inverse compositions: interior scenes where figures appear in sheltered spaces, surrounded by domestic animals and plants. In some cases, a window opens onto a landscape rendered like a painting (*House by the Lake*, 2024), but in most cases, the natural environment appears in its tamed, constructed form. The domestication of plants – their placement in pots – is a metaphorical gesture, as in the triptych resembling a winged altarpiece titled *Plant Exchange* (2025). The triptych *Those Who Return Home* (2025) raises similar questions: on each side panel stands a humanoid figure (a woman and a man) facing a central image of a table with two potted plants. The man is about to place a third plant between them. Behind the table stands a coat rack, its form resembling that of the plants. Above it, another potted plant hangs down from above. The table resembles an altar, the hanging plant an eternal flame, lending the entire composition a strange sacrality. A horizon line crosses all three panels, and a sky-blue strip above evokes landscape. Yet it is not a real landscape – just as the potted plants merely allude to the lush vegetation of nature. A rubber bone lies at the woman's feet (its spherical pair hangs from the rack), hinting at the presence of an animal. The bone is not real – nor is the woman's black-and-white animal-patterned bag, which only distantly references the animal world.

Gábor Király, *Floodplain in Winter II*, 2025, acrylic on canvas, 169 × 219 cm

Gábor Király, *Floodplain in Winter III*, 2025, acrylic on canvas, 169 × 219 cm

What does it mean to return home? To what extent is the landscape a home for these humanoid beings, and how do they adapt the patterns of the landscape to create their own protected spaces? What kind of habitat is this from the perspective of the animals and plants? The figures stand on wooden beams – the very support of the paintings is made of wood. Various perspectives, dimensions, and ontological planes converge, overlap, and blend within the compositions.

"We have lost the world. We've transformed things into fetishes or commodities, the stakes of our stratagems,"[10] Serres writes. Király, I believe, is asking how we might regain the world – not to possess it, but to once again experience "being-in-the-world," and to create a new balance. A habitat. A return home.

/ Dávid Fehér

Translated by Sára Wiszkidenszky

This text was written on the occasion of the exhibition Gábor *Király: Biotope*, on view at Einspach & Czapolai Fine Art from 7 May to 5 June 2025.

1 Dávid Fehér, "An Unknown Familiarity: On the Works of Gábor Király," in *Király Gábor: Törékeny égbolt* [Gábor Király: Fragile sky], ed. Ágnes Képiró (Szolnok: Damjanich János Múzeum, 2024), 7–11.
2 Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, translated from the French by Daniel W. Smith (London and New York: Continuum, 2003).
3 Gábor Király's manuscript on his new works, 2025.
4 The definition of the expression in the Hungarian *Dictionary of Foreign Words and Expressions*.
5 Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract*, translated by Elizabeth MacArthur and William Paulson (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), 3.
6 Serres, 1995, 17.
7 Serres, 28.
8 Gábor Király's manuscript on his new works, 2025.
9 Serres, 1995, 29.
10 Serres, 29.

Gábor Király, *House by the Lake*, 2024, acrylic on canvas, 125 × 175 cm

ESSAY

ZSOLT MIKLÓSVÖLGYI

Gábor Pap and the Force of Provisional Painting

FURY, MATERIAL, AND THE REVOLT FROM THE MARGINS

In the contemporary discourse of art, the question of origin – where an artist comes from – too often overshadows the more essential inquiry of where the artist is headed. The interpretive urge to reduce creative identity to biography, or worse, to geography, restricts the potential for understanding art as a forward-driven force. This observation – poignantly articulated in my opening speech for Gábor Pap's recent exhibition at Einspach & Czapolai Fine Art titled *The Studio of an Artist on Death Row* – serves as both a critique of identity politics in art and an entry point into a deeper reading of Pap's practice. His work emerges not from a romanticized provinciality or a fixed cultural narrative, but from a dynamic and restless energy – *kraft* – that propels his painting into a realm of instinctual creation and philosophical urgency.

Pap, who lives and works in the village of Öcsöd in eastern Hungary, has often been positioned by critics and curators in a quasi-anthropological frame, as though his rural location were as exotic to the urban cultural elite as a faraway postcolonial locale. Yet to emphasize this exoticism is to misread the core of his practice. As the *Hungarofuturist Manifesto* suggests, the marginalization of rural space is a function of a deeper verticality of power – an aesthetic and cultural centralism that Pap's art resists and undermines. His studio props – rickety divans, grimy jackets, salvaged domestic relics – are not nostalgic tokens, but elements of a constructed counter-space: a *revenge of the peasants* that brings material resistance into the conceptual centre.

PAINTING FROM KRAFT: THE INNER PRINCIPLE OF SENSUAL ACTIVITY

To understand Pap's work as emanating from *fury, momentum, propulsion*, or more precisely, *kraft* – in the sense defined by the German philosopher Christoph Menke – is to grasp its essential nature. *Kraft* is the generative force of sensual activity that resists conscious control. It is what drives artistic transformation at the deepest level, the force that turns unconscious images into conscious form. In this light, Pap's art is not a reflection of his environment, but a visceral force field of becoming. It embodies a transition – simultaneously personal and collective – from image to form, from emotion to expression, from silence to speech.

This dimension of *kraft* is vividly apparent in the tension Pap maintains between abstraction and figuration, clarity and chaos, completion and collapse. His paintings are haunted by a refusal to resolve, a deliberate friction that recalls Georges Bataille's concept of *l'informe* (the formless) – a kind of anti-form that undermines classical composition by remaining irreducibly raw. As such, Pap's works inhabit a zone of permanent liminality: neither fully narrative nor entirely abstract, they dwell in the interstices of meaning.

PROVISIONALITY AS RESISTANCE

It is within this framework that Pap's alignment with the *provisional turn* in painting becomes crucial. The term, popularized by Raphael Rubinstein, refers to a contemporary aesthetic that privileges imperfection, transience, and doubt over polish, resolution, and formal mastery. The provisional painter adopts a visual language that is vulnerable, hesitant, and incomplete – often as a critique of commodified virtuosity and the spectacle-driven market logic of high art.

Pap's canvases, often self-designed or irregularly shaped, are imbued with signs of process: erasures, corrections, exposed layers, embedded found objects. These are not affectations but intentional gestures that foreground the act of making over the fetish of the final product. In this, Pap echoes artists such as Michael Krebber and Raoul De Keyser, whose minimal, often near-empty compositions challenge the very necessity of representation. Likewise, Albert Oehlen's chaotic brushwork and David Ostrowski's casual nihilism find kinship with Pap's refusal to *finish*.

But unlike many of these artists, Pap's approach is deeply rooted in materiality – not just in the physical sense, but in a conceptual one. The objects he incorporates into his work – greasy jackets, chipped washbasins, studio stools – are not just relics of domesticity but signs of a social condition. They point to a classed and localized materiality often excluded from elite cultural production. In this, Pap's art performs a kind of aesthetic insurgency: a way of reintroducing the *base materials* of everyday life into the sacred space of art.

Above: Gábor Pap, *bedpainting – Shadow Lily*, 2025, acrylic, pencil, felt-tip pen, and pen on canvas, 60 × 50 cm + 30 × 20 cm. Photo by Brúnó Einspach

Opposite: Gábor Pap, *The Studio of an Artist on Death Row*, installation view, Einspach & Czapolai Fine Art, Budapest, 17–30 April 2025. Photo by Brúnó Einspach

Previous spread: Gábor Pap, *before the eyes of god (under the aspect of eternity :$)*, 2025 (detail). Photo by Dávid Biró

BETWEEN CONDEMNATION AND CREATION

In a cultural climate where artistic interpretation often falls prey to the reductive trap of origin stories, the work of Hungarian artist Gábor Pap (b. 1991) resists easy classification. His art is not a symptom of where he comes from, but a challenge to where art might be going. While some curators and critics emphasize his geographic distance from urban centres – Pap lives and works in the rural village of Öcsöd – as though that location were as culturally remote as Equatorial Guinea or Burma, such framing risks misunderstanding the essence of his artistic drive. Rather than drawing from local colour or exotic marginality, Pap's work emerges from a deeper force: a visceral, existential *kraft*, as German philosopher Christoph Menke would call it – the inner engine of sensual activity that transforms unconscious images into form.

Pap's recent exhibition, *The Studio of an Artist on Death Row*, presented by Einspach & Czapolai Fine Art, is a culmination of this restless artistic energy. The title alone invites existential inquiry. It echoes Jean-Paul Sartre's notion that to be human is to be "condemned to freedom" – a condition of perpetual self-invention under the shadow of mortality. In this framework, Pap's studio is not merely a physical workspace but a metaphysical site of both doom and defiance: a space in which artistic creation becomes an act of resistance against annihilation. The reference to death row is not metaphorical flourish but an active philosophical and material terrain through which the exhibition unfolds.

The artist draws specific inspiration from the story of Magda Marinkó, a notorious Hungarian criminal who began painting during his years of solitary confinement. Pap was captivated not by Marinkó's crimes, but by the existential impulse behind his turn to painting. What makes someone, locked away from the world and all its prospects, reach for a brush? This question – what, why, and for whom does one paint – cuts to the heart of Pap's practice. His own brush with punitive authority and feelings of unjust marginalization amplify this inquiry. For Pap, creation is not simply therapeutic; it is existentially necessary.

Opposite: Gábor Pap, *Post-It 7*, 2023,
oil, acrylic, felt-tip pen, and pencil on shaped canvas,
185 × 155 cm. Photo by Brúnó Einspach

Gábor Pap, *brand-new flashes – BFF*, 2024,
oil, acrylic, felt-tip pen, pastel, and tesa tape on shaped canvas,
200 × 171 × 8.5 cm. Photo by Brúnó Einspach

Pap's work is heavily grounded in materiality – sometimes even in a literal sense. The exhibition includes a site-specific installation that recreates a fictional prison cell using real, personal, and inherited objects. Visitors are immersed in a hybrid space where memory, metaphor, and matter collide. A worn bed in the corner (*Ecce Homo*) becomes a symbol of domestic punishment and inherited suffering. An ancestral feather pillow, stained by decades of saliva, becomes a totem of "inherited sin, inherited Hungarianism, national bitterness and inherited alcoholism." Elsewhere, a vulva-shaped, spiked *vasfogas* (iron hanger), a kinetic cloud sculpture (*Felhőbari*), and a washstand filled with rainwater and a laminated childhood photo create a dreamscape of associations – simultaneously intimate and surreal, tragic and absurd.

The exhibition aesthetic recalls the principles of *art brut* – Jean Dubuffet's term for raw, outsider art produced by visionaries, prisoners, and the mentally ill. Pap's visual language similarly eschews conventional refinement. His canvases are shaped, sometimes self-designed, and frequently stitched together like painterly patchworks. His compositions emerge through an additive, collage-montage method that straddles genres, materials, and disciplines. The result is a swirling, kaleidoscopic amalgam of imagery and matter: stories without beginning or end, fragments that resist resolution.

This aesthetic aligns Pap with the broader international movement known as the *provisional turn* in painting. Art critic Raphael Rubinstein coined the term to describe a trend in early twenty-first-century painting that embraces incompleteness, vulnerability, and visible process over polish and perfection. Provisional painters like Raoul De Keyser, Albert Oehlen, and David Ostrowski prioritize the *act* of painting – the hesitations, corrections, and indecisions – as essential elements of the final work. In this tradition, Pap's work does not seek to seduce through mastery but to confront through honesty. His art makes visible the fragility and friction of making, rejecting hollow virtuosity in favour of expressive force.

Indeed, Pap's aesthetic is deeply cinematic – not in terms of narrative structure, but in affective sensibility. His paintings hover between stasis and motion, like stills from a fragmented film without clear chronology. They create a space of psychological immersion, one where the viewer is not invited to *understand*, but to *feel*. This resonates with the work of Béla Tarr, whose films depict slow, decaying worlds imbued with metaphysical heaviness. Like Tarr, Pap portrays the condition of being as one of trudging resistance – of enduring time and creating under the shadow of finality.

Gábor Pap's *The Studio of an Artist on Death Row* is more than a display of paintings. It is a philosophical statement, a material excavation, and a painterly cry from the periphery. It challenges not just aesthetic conventions but the social hierarchies that undergird them. In Pap's hands, painting becomes a site of revolt: against aesthetic decorum, against social erasure, against death itself. He reminds us that art is not merely what survives us, but what allows us to survive.

Gábor Pap, *bedpainting – Baby's Breath*, 2025, oil, acrylic, pencil, felt-tip pen, and pen on canvas, 40 × 30 cm. Photo by Brúnó Einspach

Opposite: Gábor Pap, *brand-new flashes – Hikaru and the Queen*, 2024, oil, acrylic, felt-tip pen, and pencil on shaped canvas, 196 × 165 × 8.5 cm. Photo by Brúnó Einspach

Gábor Pap, *brand-new flashes – So-Called Oriental*, 2024,
oil, acrylic, felt-tip pen, and tesa tape on shaped canvas,
205 × 152 × 8.5 cm. Photo by Brúnó Einspach

BEYOND THE STUDIO, BEYOND THE FRAME

Ultimately, Gábor Pap's art demands that we rethink what painting can be in the twenty-first century. Far from being a provincial anomaly or an eccentric outsider, Pap is at the forefront of a broader painterly resistance – one that challenges the spectacle, the overworked, the decorative, and the conceptually thin. His embrace of the provisional, the raw, and the impure is not a weakness but a profound philosophical stance: an aesthetic of force, not finesse.

His art speaks not of origins, but of urgencies. It is not a map of where he is from, but a record of where he is going – and where we might be going, too, if we dare to abandon the polished surfaces of certainty and descend into the textured uncertainty of creation itself. In this way, Gábor Pap is not merely painting pictures; he is painting resistance, transition, and the restless potential of becoming.

Gábor Pap, *before the eyes of god (under the aspect of eternity :S)*, 2025, installation view, *What We Believe In – Esterházy Art Award 2025*, Ludwig Museum – Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest, 6 June – 14 September 2025. Photo by Dávid Biró

PROFILE

ORSI NYÍRI

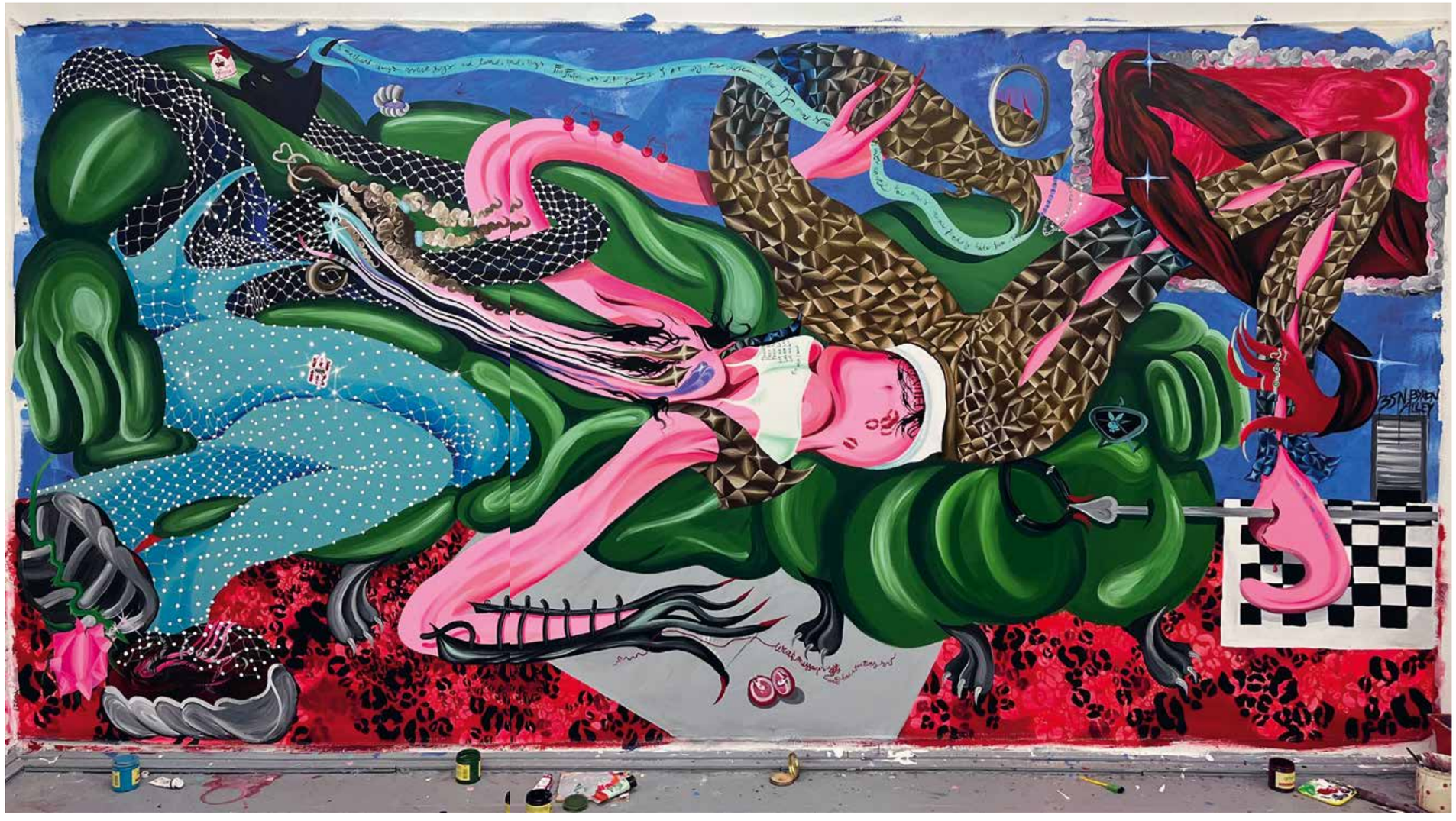
ORSI NYÍRI (b. 1995, Kaposvár, Hungary) graduated in 2023 from the painting department of the Hungarian University of Fine Arts, having previously studied graphic design at the Mihály Zichy Secondary School of Applied Arts. Her works have been featured in several solo and group exhibitions, including at Molnár Ani Gallery, Q Contemporary, and Aurora Project Space in Budapest. Her most recent solo exhibitions were held at Horizont Gallery (*The Will is Strong, but the Flesh is Weak*, 2024) and Művház (*That Without Which* It Is Not, 2025). Nyíri is a member of the Studio of Young Artists' Association (FKSE) and the Odd Spot art collective. She currently lives and works in Budapest as an active member of the art quarter budapest community.

"NOW I CAN'T UNSEE THE SCENES MAMA TRIED TO HIDE FROM ME"

In Orsi Nyíri's paintings, everything feels strangely familiar yet deeply uncanny. Her work blends iconographic codes, visual traditions, and references from art history and mass culture, morphing them into new forms – as part of a world simultaneously aversive and aversively alluring. It is as if we are witnessing fragments of a dreamscape, where meanings gently drift, where associations flow freely. A dream world filled with shapes and figures blending into one another, as if it were a story with no beginning or end, whose fragments are arranged side by side in endless continuation. The coexistence of the various layers of time and space further reinforce this impression. Nyíri crowds her paintings in the name of a sort of excessive *horror vacui*. Her recklessly additive compositions – constructed by stacking motifs – evokes not only the traditions of narrative painting, but also the parallel structure of comics and even the associative juxtaposition of body tattoos. In the context of *horror vacui*, I would like to highlight the word *horror*, as in aversion and fright, which are defining components of Nyíri's painterly world. This fright – paradoxically merging attraction and aversion – culminates in a surreal, saccharine dream world.

It is no coincidence that in this figurative world – where horror appears as beauty and beauty as horror – certain iconographic topoi take on new forms. The seven deadly sins (pride [*superbia*], greed [*avaritia*], lust [*luxuria*], envy [*invidia*], gluttony [*gula*], wrath [*ira*], and sloth [*acedia*]) dominate the world – populated by strange hybrid creatures (heroes and anti-heroes, fairy-tale figures fused with zombies and vampires?) – not so much as actions, but as pervasive states of being. This world is mostly no other than a room. The sequence of rooms becomes a house – transformed into a building reminiscent of *Busytown*. In this peculiar universe, *Busytown* is no less than an apocalyptic world vision. The painting evokes, all at once, a mural, a children's book, a comic, a cartoon, and an altarpiece; it simultaneously references the iconography of the *Last Judgment* (from Giotto to Hans Memling), Renaissance paintings of open architectural spaces, and the aesthetic of vintage video games. Together, these elements form – in one of Nyíri's monumental paintings – the house as an ambivalent metaphor for the world (*Our House*, 2024).

Our house – or rather, our world – is made up of rooms. The narrative basis of Nyíri's painting is the room that serves as the space of the subject: at once a physical as well as an imaginative space, that signifies a person's immediate environment. Her 2021 drawing *My Hair, My Room, My Loves and My Addictions* makes this clear: a figure dominates a room that feels more psychic than physical. Here, scattered objects function as projections of the self. In this way, not only the figure, but the entirety of the space can be regarded as a mental portrait. Indeed, the paintings are none other than grounds for analysis, and – not seldom – for introspection. The compositions might be defined as identity-building symbols and also an excessive patchwork of objects.



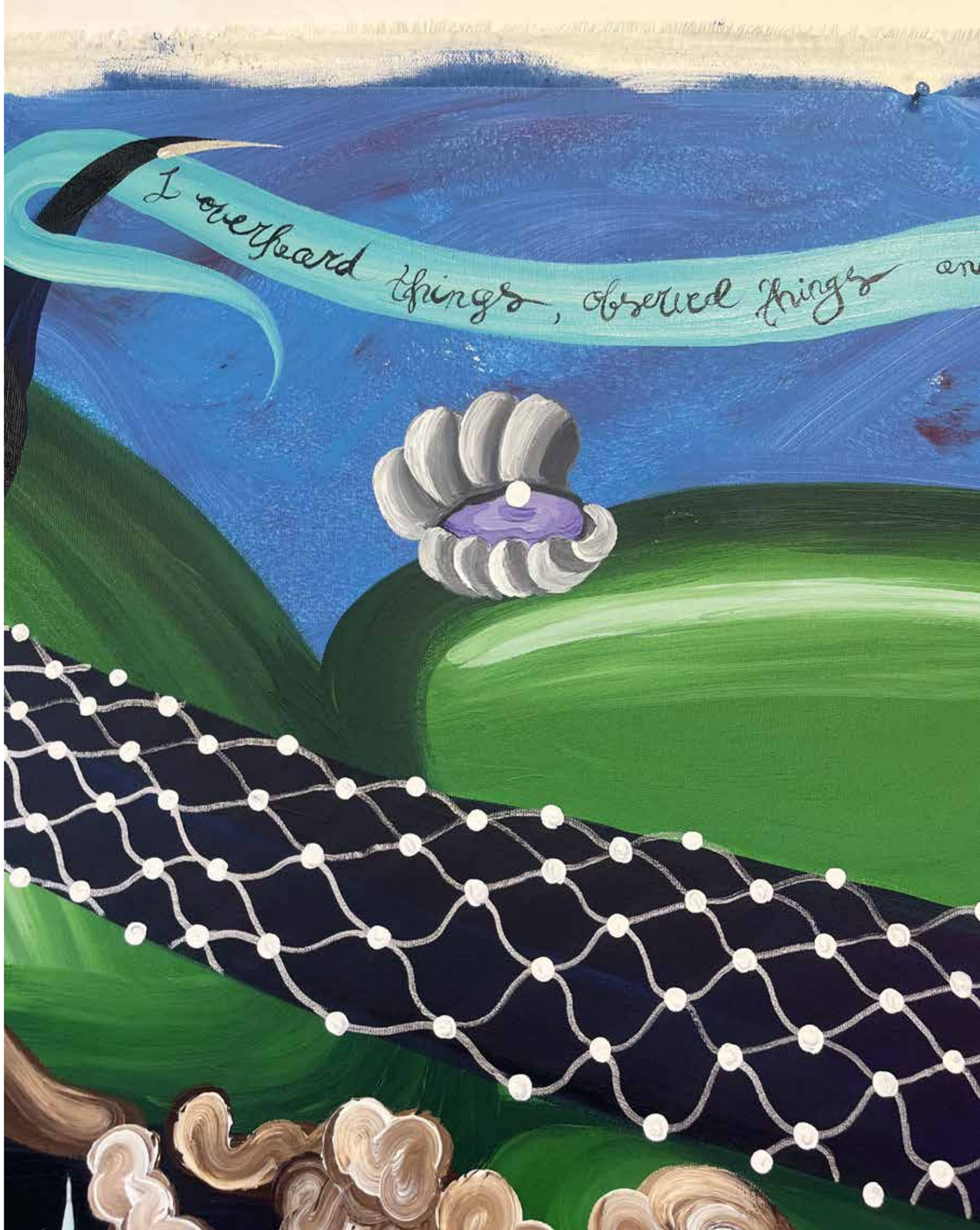
In the realms of her most recent painting, Orsi Nyíri reimagines the structure of her previous works. The title reads: *Here I Am, Sandwiched Between Heaven and Hell, Oh What, They Don't Exist*? Manifesting in an apocalyptic space – the environment of the subject, trapped between heaven and hell –, transforming into the projection of visions and doubts, the painted location is once more, a room converted to a mental universe, whose elements had never been so volatile. Metamorphosis, as an innate state, suitably defines the occasionally identifiable, but at times unidentifiable shapes. In this painting, the space is dominated by a pink female figure. She seductively lies on a sofa, channelling a sort of Venus or anti-Venus. The couch resembles that of the 2023 painting *Saligia*, however, this time, it is not burgundy, but green; it is not symmetrical and stable, rather inordinately deformed and dynamic. It evokes a strip of land, a range of hills, or a landform that floats between the sky-blue wall (heaven) and the lava-red carpet (hell). Although – similarly to its burgundy predecessor – the piece of furniture stands on animal legs and grasps fiercely onto the carpet with its claws, it still appears to be floating. The armrests recall a muscular beast's clenched fists – both predatory and embracing.

Above and all other details in this article:
Orsi Nyíri, *Here I Am, Sandwiched Between Heaven and Hell, Oh What, They Don't Exist?*, 2025, acrylic on canvas, 220 × 420 cm.
Photo by Orsi Nyíri

The pink-coloured female figure is not alone on the sofa. Her head surreally merges with that of her black counterpart, who may also be interpreted as her shadow or as her alter ego dressed in a pearl net. The star-like shimmering eyes spark and merge, as the figures confront each other like opposing and complementary allegorical figures – such as the embodiments of the Sun and the Moon, Day and Night. It naturally evokes the duality of conscious and unconscious, the two aspects of the self, as also suggested by the title of a miniature painting pair connected by thread and depicting complementary faces related to the theme: *I Fell in Love with Myself Again* (2025). Paradoxically, on the monumental painting, the black shadow figure appears more innocent: her clothed body is covered with real pearls, her shoe soles resemble shells, and above her head appears an actual shell, evoking the Birth of Venus – though the devilish claws of her black hand cast doubt on the divine association. In contrast, the pink female figure, with her open legs and barely covered upper body, appears lustful more than anything. This reading is reinforced by the surrounding objects and motifs: the five cherries on her arm (alluding to the iconography of the Fall of Man, and already present in the artist's 2021 work *On My Red Cherry Tree at Midnight*), the five lipstick marks on her stomach that echo the cherries, the tattoo on her lower abdomen reading "always hungry," just emerging from beneath her pants and underwear labelled "heaven," the Playboy bunny watch (the artist's own) beside her thigh, and the cigarette butt stubbed out in a makeup mirror under her hand. The black figure's pearls appear only on the pink figure's anklet.

Orsi Nyíri piles motifs up in her paintings. The rabbit is not only an emblem of a men's magazine but also a symbol of fertility. The watch and cigarette butts serve as close-to-cliché vanitas motifs (a mirror also appears behind the woman's leg). Reading from left to right, the narrative moves from the Fall through fertility symbolism to the ideas of vanitas and transience – concepts that pleasure and lust can at most mask but never resolve. The Smiths lyrics printed on the low-coverage garment over the woman's breasts underscore this desire, both literally and figuratively, as musical accompaniment: "So please, please, / please / Let me, let me, let me / Let me get what I want." It is as if we were witnessing the dialectic of longing and the unattainability of desire. A spear (like an inverted clock hand) pierces the couch and the woman's leg, deformed into a carabiner-like shape: it appears as a phallic weapon or Cupid's arrow whose tip forms a heart yet inflicts a bleeding wound, binding the body to the furniture.

The composition simultaneously evokes erotic odalisque depictions and apocalyptic scenes. The motif and image associations are shaped by a play of contrasts, seemingly echoed by the black-and-white chessboard motif in the painting. The crushed cigarette butt beneath the pink woman's hand is counterbalanced by the "cigarette-shaped chewing gum" pack near the black woman's hand. The pseudo-cigarette is a peculiar metaphor for childhood longing for adulthood – reinforced by the word "Princess" printed on it. The phrase "with smoke effect" on the pack seems to materialize in the black woman's hair, braided into swirling smoke. A similar smoky entity frames the opening on the right side of the image, which, composed as a painting within the painting, may also be interpreted as a window. The window opens onto a red landscape, and a demonic hand reaching through it – with a snake-shaped ring symbolizing the Fall – seems to grasp the pink woman's leg, as if tearing it apart between heaven and the paradoxical hell. The black woman's figure and the demonic hand's claws resemble the ever-lightening shadows of cherries. The Hungarian playing card by the black woman's thigh – the ten of hearts, a symbol of happiness – balances motifs of desire's unfulfillment and unattainability. The leopard print on the rug beneath the couch recalls the lip prints but also resembles boiling lava and rose petals of hell.



Iconographic codes swirl and mingle in the organised chaos of the painting. Beneath the picture within the picture, or rather the mirror motif, a new opening is revealed, which overlooks not only another dimensional plane, but also new fields of reference. The door under the sign "35N Byron Alley," with its nearly fully drawn-down shutter opening into darkness, is a direct quotation from the film *The Substance* (2024), one of Nyíri's key inspirations. Directed by Coralie Fargeat, the body horror movie's protagonist, Elisabeth Sparkle, a TV star in her early fifties, who – driven by societal pressures around body image – begins using an illegal substance to create a younger, "perfect" alter ego named Sue. Crossing a door grants access to the substance. Thus, the door symbolises the motif of decision and crossing – leading to self-duplication, the struggle between two selves, and ultimately self-annihilation. This symbolism touches on sensitive issues of body image, identity, vanity, objectification, and aging. Simultaneously, it questions how and to what extent the essence or substance of the ever-changing subject, materializing as ever-new bodies, can be grasped. Nyíri does not illustrate the film *per se*. The figures in the painting are not to be equated with the film's dual protagonist but, similarly from a contemporary perspective, engage with the complex dilemmas of vanitas.

The title of the current exhibition, *That Without Which It Is Not* (*sine qua non*), also points to the irreconcilability of opposites that define and presuppose each other – and the aporia that stems from it. It alludes to the experience of a fractured subjectivity and to the sensitive, often taboo-laden questions surrounding body image.

The other fundamental inspiration for the painting might be surprising: Lawrence Alma-Tadema's painting *The Roses of Heliogabalus* (1888). The piece freely evokes a story preserved in the *Historia Augusta*, according to which Heliogabalus – the Roman emperor known for his decadent feasts and debauched lifestyle – once organized a banquet where he released such an overwhelming quantity of flower petals from the ceiling that the guests suffocated under the sea of blossoms. Nyíri incorporates several specific motifs and compositional elements from the academic painting into her own work (think of the rose-like shapes, the clasped garments revealing the body, the snake-shaped body jewellery, the table legs ending in animal claws, and the petal-like forms in the foreground). Yet, the connection seems deeper than direct reference. What captivates her is the ambivalent beauty of pleasure and horror intertwining – an excess that overrides even the affectedness of kitschy imagery – characteristic not only of Heliogabalus's tale but also of the body horror portrayed in *The Substance*. To play with words: what preoccupies Orsi Nyíri is nothing less than the beauty of horror and the horror of beauty.

This is reinforced by the following part of the lyrics from Doechii's song *Oh The Places You'll Go*: „I overheard things, observed things / And learned things / Fear Factor was like my comedy, I sat way too close to the TV screen / Now I can't unsee the scenes mama tried to hide from me." The lyrics as a whole can be intricately read alongside Orsi Nyíri's painting (along with many others by her). Take, for instance, the line not quoted in the image: "Welcome to my room of doom," or the verses just above: "Colouring the sky pink like / Sucked into oblivion, idolizing my future feminine / Worshipping the woman I have to be / Fully imagining things more real than everything they have to be / More real than anything I'll ever be, like." Or think of the images and associations evoked by "hot lava," "fighting teddy bears," and "fucking Barbie dolls." Fairy tale and horror intertwine; innocence merges with corruption; the fear-based reality show becomes indistinguishable from comedy.

"Now I can't unsee the scenes mama tried to hide from me," the song goes (as does the painting's ribbon-like motto and its "background music"). It is as if Nyíri was painting these scenes or colouring them in her works.

At the bottom of the painting, another sentence offers a response to the Doechii lyrics. A thread strung through a sewing needle that props open a chewing mouth shaped by fingers of a fetish glove forms a text rendered in a visual style reminiscent of the opening title of *Hungarian Folk Tales* (*Magyar népmesék*). This reads: "weak messages create bad situations." The widely known tattoo text this time seems to refer to the painting's narrative strategies and its mode of "message encoding:" Orsi Nyíri communicates strong messages through enigmatic means – iconographic constellations that are partly legible, partly inscrutable, woven into a dense texture of references. The needle once again alludes to tattooing – a practice of great significance to the artist – while also evoking sewing, the threading of motifs, and the strands of storytelling. Nyíri's increasingly complex visual textures are composed of these various threads, collectively resonating with the malleable structures and fragile questions of identity – revealing the ambivalent beauty of horror and the ambivalent horror of beauty.

/ Dávid Fehér

Translated by Sára Wiszkidenszky

This text was originally written for Orsi Nyíri's solo exhibition, *That Without Which It Is Not*, curated by Mónika Zsikla and held at Művház in Budapest from 5 March to 15 April 2025.

ESSAY

PATRICK TAYLER

A Helter-Skelter Mythology

COSMIC BOOGIE WOOGIE

Aren't you just aching to plunge into the depths of an eye-popping, off-beat universe? Come on, then! Take a cooling dip into Ákos Ezer's one-of-a-kind pictorial mix! Set your eyes on saturated youngsters disintegrating into heavy-loaded abstraction, polychromatic, meandering limbs navigating in fields of dazzling colour, deconstructed and re-skilled new figuration & further adventures of painterly pizzazz! Let your gaze wander around the squiggly grooves of a sneaker's sole, a T-shirt pattern delivered in an offhandish, straight-out-of-the-tube demeanour, or a post-heroic protagonist disappearing under an ice-blue crown of slick hair! Vibe shifts and mood changes. Snakes and ladders. Evanescent moments of sweet introspection followed by cacophonic crescendos of unchoreographed chaos.

Gliding through this wacky space-time continuum is a no-brainer once you discard the dreaded grid of perspective and throw away your charcoal-stained anatomy atlas. While you are at it, get your hands on the updated human prototype and check out the Vitruvian man vibing to the psychedelic beat! With his unique take on the prehistoric quest of representation, Ezer subverts the pre-set hierarchy between figure and backdrop, bodies and spaces – shuffling the layers of fore-, mid- and background like a magician, shattering the Cartesian notion of forehead-heavy identity, well-tempered corporeality, and mercilessly ticking temporality – bamboozling your serious brain with the laser-show of meltdown madness, eliciting: laughter.

His sneaky pictorial contraptions will play you like an accordion, squish you flat, fold you like a cardboard box, and freeze-frame-stun you mid-air, making you giggle and grin in the non-digital glow of the painted surfaces. But hey, it is OK to be entertained!

You might be eager to blurt out that the paintings' fictional depths are – well, actually… like, man…like – *terraformed*, so that your pop-culturally-inclined, smart-ass mind may inhabit these no-nonsense realms of existence. While a Spartan horizon line rubs eyeballs with a frothy gradient, an all-over pattern of pudgy leaves adorns an ever-expansive main character, and a row of rugged floorboards provides the stage in a story where gravity plays the award-winning role.

In their blissful ignorance, the characters of Ezer remain unaware that they are surrounded by the wizardry of painting. These dazed and confused, rubber-necking figures transform into racing tracks for your overstimulated mind. In other cases, we glimpse the laid-back individual in one swell, undisturbed flow with the universe. But we also see him grappling with anxieties, crammed into icky box-like spaces with no elbow room. The elegant silhouette breaks into a crooked graph outlining the negotiation between a number of competing forces: self-expression confronts pictorial logic, and physical facts melt away in the stand-uppish rhetoric of material. In this revised theory of relativity, the figures bend time and space – and vice versa. Existential drama and brouhaha jokes are woven into the sick jives of the stumbling protagonists. So, why not fall over with style? Your next slick move might just inform the galactic flow, and there is no secret agent to halt the cosmic boogie-woogie. Jazz hands! We could be shaping, bending, and twisting existence itself. Can you #¡@☠% believe it?!

BOOM…CRASH…BANG…

In the spectacular blooper reel of the World Wide Web, the slapstick-style super-combo of falling-flat-on-your-face holds a prominent place. It's an embarrassingly banal archetype with an automatically resounding *laugh track*. The art-historically loaded symbol of tumbling recalls the shenanigans of the playing children scattered across Pieter Bruegel the Elder's masterpiece and the tipsy figures in David Teniers and Adriaen Brouwer's innscapes. Tumbling presents the *grand entrée* of Ezer's absent-minded protagonists, who fall through the imposing rectangle of painting sporting bright, constructivist pants, eelishly elongated shoe-wonders, and unyielding flip-flops. Pushing and spin-kicking the stubborn edges of Leon Battista Alberti's metaphorical window, they rock the stage as permutations of Henri Matisse's idea of "expression."

Expression here is the dialogue between the flexible figure and the shape of the canvas. As the well-spoken, orderly professor Henri Matisse claimed, "Expression … does not reside in passion bursting from a human face or manifested by violent movement. The entire arrangement … is expressive: the place occupied by the figures, the empty spaces around them…"[1] Likewise, in Ezer's scenes, the mind-blowing power chords of bendable ligaments turn into a pictorial *tour-de-force* of abstraction *par excellence*. The emphasis, however, shifts from the expressive to the witty – a wry visual humour takes charge, a form of storytelling seeped in light-hearted fun.

It would seem that "…having a body is [a form of] daily comedy."[2] In this vein of physical jokery, the Chaplinesque aspect that Gábor Rieder alludes to[3] becomes an introspective gesture, an invitation to share weirdly personal moments. In an essay titled *Shit Happens*, painter Amy Sillman talks about the aesthetic quality of "funny, homely, lonely, ill-fitting, strange, clumsy things" – that, simply put – "feel right." Awkwardness – a seemingly trusty indicator of down-to-earth honesty – is propped up against traditions of "the great and noble" and "the cynical."[4] Awkwardness is stamped into these overworked whippersnappers who find themselves stuck between conflicting emotions, abstraction and figuration, work and play, self-conscious embarrassment, and the banal freedom of uncertainty. Relatable? Big mood.

In the Ezerian funfair, you look, you laugh, you look… The sweet and sour self-criticism melts into painterly bonanza and vice versa: the half-smirked *gravitas* of social commentary clashes with the trampoline effect, the upwards lift and the joy of pictorial freedom. At the bottom of the line, there is Monsieur Henri Bergson typing away the perfect description of the situation's complex dynamics: "… through lack of elasticity, through absentmindedness and a kind of physical obstinacy, as a result, in fact, of rigidity or of momentum, the muscles continued to perform the same movement when the circumstances of the case called for something else." – the author muses… let's imagine him lighting a pipe! – "That is the reason of the man's fall, and also of the people's laughter."[5] It is from the deep pits of quasi-machine-like behaviour that the "comic" springs from, unfurling in the blind spots of dreamy oblivion.

Previous spread: Ákos Ezer, *Moving Service*, 2019 (detail), oil on canvas, 200 × 260 cm

Above: Ákos Ezer, *Earl Grey*, 2020, oil on canvas, 147 × 135 cm

Opposite: Ákos Ezer, *Silent Disco*, 2021, oil on canvas, each 200 × 170 cm

There is, however, also a calligraphic element to this routinely practised, zany nosedive. It has a distinguished role in the syntax of Ákos Ezer's pictorial sentences. "By remixing … the body – using it as a groovy typeface that can be stretched in many ways – [Ezer] tells stories of human society."[6] In this particular alphabet, the falling figure presents a canvas-shattering "X", an unapologetic "Here I am."

IN YOUR FACE!

Once upon a time, Ezer articulated the following dilemma in his thesis: "Are [my figures] staring absentmindedly, or are they looking at something? … I don't want to decide."[7] Once you start to dabble with the conventions of portraiture and representation in general – breaking the fourth wall in all kinds of subtle ways – you are transgressing very ancient customs. The faces Ezer depicts seem to be moulded by the weight of judgemental, external gazes. Try and "'act natural' as your face begins to leap around on your skull, struggling for a seeming-unwatched expression that feels so impossible because 'seeming unwatched' is, like 'acting natural', oxymoronic."[8] Full-on aporia ensues: you become your own model, your model becomes *something else*, and you drift into the treasure trove of Deleuzian "micromovements" – disintegrated nuggets of squirming visual data. A deconstructed and atomised self-portrait for your invisible face.[9]

In his oil paintings, ceramic sculptures and crayon drawings, Ezer obviously doesn't work *after life*. Instead, his protagonists are programmed from the various codes of legacy painting, personal insights and well-observed sensations of *somesthesia* (or body perception). But don't be fooled, what you see is not a Frankensteinian experiment! In Ezer's work, the various veins of representation run through the mirror of self-reflection as the artist acts as his own part-time model, using his hands and features as a reference. In a strict sense, these are neither self-portraits nor hymns to the absent, beloved individual, nor algorithm-driven Zombie Figuration, which relies on half-arsed gimmicks! Ezer takes the "mud," the "magic beans," and the "crocodile tongues" of painting – the building blocks of so-called pure abstraction – and moulds them into human form.

Ákos Ezer, *…and the livin' is easy*, installation view,
Einspach & Czapolai Fine Art, Budapest, 12 June – 4 July 2025.
Photo by Brúnó Einspach

Opposite: Ákos Ezer, *Voicemail*, 2023,
oil on canvas, 170 × 200 cm

It might be hard to muster in today's overheated socio-political circumstances, but Ezer is unconcerned with the "pathos of identity and identification."[10] Instead, he is intrigued by the quest of "disfiguration" in a way that recalls modernist precursors and a range of contemporaries who delve into the queasy realm of the unconscious, reimagining the body in these *pøst–proto–©ybe®–hyper–modern* times. Instead of dehumanising the figure – destroying the face to procure the shiny diamond of the soul, paraphrasing Kundera's paradigmatic text on Francis Bacon – Ezer is invested in humanising the painted surface, making abstraction anthropomorphic, clumsy, and frantic.[11]

While you close-read the flow of paint, you might miss the magic tricks that Ezer plays while transforming the faces into complex semiotic structures that resist delivering direct meaning. You might as well try and reverse-engineer the painterly construction of the triangular, cherry-red noses, the cool gazes and the inexpressive, open mouths – faces that seem to say, "Oh, sorry, my mind drifted!"

Initially, Ezer's Non-Playable Characters (NPCs) were defined by exactly this comic detachment from themselves: a lagging sense of self-consciousness disrupting the intense trip. Caught up in their everyday struggles, they didn't pay much attention to the well-combed viewer. As the characters started to assume more meditative, psychologically intricate modes of existence and grew into gargantuan, demigod-like figures, their gaze turned upwards, piercing the infinite. The viewer was thus invited to join and stare at the boundless sky with a professional poker face.

In his latest series titled *Balance Artist*, Ezer transforms the visage into a microcosm cropped in landscape format, proposing a masterful subversion of genres. While disconnected objects levitate above the metallic faces, a cutesy Superstar, a shiny cereal bowl, a Duchamp–Beuys catalogue, and various other items get registered on the mental check-list. A simultaneously surreal and mundane compilation of discarded thingamajigs levitating above the portrait as an objectification of the restless mind in the age of acceleration. In *Voice Mail* (2023), the human face is taken to the extreme, with a nanoscopic shirt collar pitted against a brutal pillar of a neck, maybe as a symbol of the raging *ego* going off charts. In the end, the face becomes the vehicle of storytelling, a powerful constellation of forms and proportions confronting us with the *façade of the self*.

Ákos Ezer, *Dandelion*, 2020,
oil on canvas, 147 × 135 cm

Ákos Ezer, *Firewood Collector 2*, 2022,
oil on canvas, 235 × 200 cm

PLAY & PAUSE

While tragedy focuses on the individual's fate, comedy showcases the laughable "type."[12] Following this argument, it is easy to discern something inherently dramatic in the fathomless gaze of the "autonomous portrait." At the same time, the logic of the comic is infused into Ákos Ezer's single-figure compositions. We observe the figures gawking with jovial clairvoyance at their awkward reality, becoming invisible to themselves as they put their minds on hold. Comedy is about a protagonist who is invisible to himself but "observable to everyone else." Comedy inadvertently exchanges the lonely ranger for a collection of sidekicks, staffage figures who focus on their own machinations instead of the world around them.

In Ezer's work, however, "running solo" is not a straightforward term. The individual is divided here into competing insecurities, somewhat neurotic vacillations, and fragments of self-doubt. This is highlighted by the limbs that twist and turn with a will of their own and the grimace of shock: am I really picking these oversaturated berries (*Picking Berries*, 2022)? Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? This uncertainty is shaken off by the brutal materiality of the painting: the razor-sharp edges and fuzzy corners where the gleaming expanses of oil paint bump into each other, the nightmarishly vivid strokes of stroboscopic tones.

In this post-gamification universe, "work" and "hobby" are two sides of the same coin. You've never been so drained and yet so engaged in collecting firewood! Cooling down with a steaming cup of *Earl Grey* (2020) or gazing romantically at the dirty stem of a dandelion is equally cumbersome (*Dandelion*, 2020). Manifesting like a maniac is also a very effective form of physical exercise in this *endless artificial afternoon*. One moment you find your limbs are akimbo; in another, they helter-skelter around your body. Or would you rather discover your inner Zen while riding a spring-swinging duck? Give it a go!

Ákos Ezer, *Picking Berries*, 2022,
oil on canvas, 174 × 147 cm

Ezer seems to have a recipe to chill your sizzling mind: there is always time to whistle a happy tune while being shipwrecked in solitary confinement (*Shipwrecked*, 2022) or doggishly scratch your neck with your shins while balancing a huge column of Hockneyesque birch branches (*Firewood Collector* 2, 2022). Every experience is an out-of-body experience for the professional daydreamer!

Or take, for example, *Night Routine* (2020). The partially hidden face is struck by a free-falling mobile phone overheated by paranoid algorithms. The portrait, broken down into independent colour bands, flattens as the two displays – the touch screen and the human face – collide. It's such a relatable yet unsung story, you almost cry out, "Ouch!" The O-shaped lips spring forth from the plane of the face, guided by the seesaw principle triggered by the nose being pressed in by the landing object. This is machine aesthetics at its finest. However, you might also recall certain misfortunes cartoon characters have endured for your selfish entertainment. The petty event becomes a routine: the scroller's daily punishment is the device hammering him in the face. Congratulations! You have doom-scrolled so long that you have reached the limits of perception.

In Ezer's paintings, as we witness the picaresque protagonist's everyday annoyances, we are also reminded of our own banality. Let's face it! Existence is not as grand and engrossing as a novel, and most of the time, we engage in trifling deeds. Instead of plot twists, we write shop lists. Apart from the age-old terms of *vita contemplativa* (contemplative life) and *vita activa* (active life), Ezer's images introduce the notion of *vita banalita* as a way of navigating this barmy screwball of a planet.

Above: Ákos Ezer, *Shipwrecked*, 2022,
oil on canvas, 145 × 135 cm

Left: Ákos Ezer, *Night Routine*, 2020,
oil on canvas, 110 × 133 cm

Opposite: Ákos Ezer, *Moving Service*, 2019,
oil on canvas, 200 × 260 cm

THE GORDIAN KNOT

To get your grips on the evolutionary wonder of the "homo inflexus"[13] – a term coined by art selector, wordsmith and curator Sasha Bogojev, a long-time supporter of Ezer – you have to flip through art history at breakneck speed. While the groovy heroes' Gordian entanglement – unfolding on the following pages – confronts the viewer with permutating spatial riddles, a rhetoric of wavy and crooked limbs, there is a narrative that runs through the centuries, shedding light on Ezer's morphological vision.

For donkey's years, the human figure's depiction was based on anatomical discoveries. In contrast, it is a textbook cliché that the succession of historical styles called for certain modifications to this idealised image. Art historian Arnold Hauser claimed that the story of modernism, and thus the "modern body," started with the general *vibe shift* of Mannerism, when the viewer was, for the very first time, "…confronted with a conscious and deliberate deviation from nature," which arose from "an urge for expression that … renounced the known and familiar picture of things."[14]

According to Hauser, these eccentric distortions expressed a new, melancholic paradigm, as "the objective world ha[d] grown unintelligible, the identity of the self had been shattered, had grown vague and fluid."[15] This viewpoint was combined with the idea of a topsy-turvy model of the universe – that revolved around the modern, superemotional subject – and which emerged from the "…feeling that there is no firm ground" anymore.[16] According to the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, the discontinuities in the painterly representation of the human figure in the twentieth century sprang from a similar recognition of identity's enigmatic obscurity. Nancy recalls Sigmund Freud's claim that the human subject had suffered three mighty blows in the modern era: the Copernican overturning of the geocentric worldview, the Darwinian confrontation with the "animal origins of mankind," and the Freudian unveiling of the limitations and struggles of the (un)conscious mind.[17]

Proponents of the *isms* experimented with radical transformations, shattering the body's typeface, questioning its integrity. These pictorial algorithms were further developed in the studios of legendary masters, such as Picasso, Matisse, Beckmann, and – the godfather of machine-enamoured Tubism – Léger. We arrive thus at the careful dissection of the paintings' modernist musculature: pictorial dynamics.

The twists and turns of art and propaganda gradually shifted the spotlight from the figure to the philosophical or ideological background structures. The steely-muscled heroes of Agitprop, the flattened workers of the Mexican murals, and the clay-cast individuals of the London School presented the human figure in ever-new variations, expanding and distorting the self-image of man. The crashing waves of figuration continued to refresh the topic ever since.

Ezer's *homo inflexus* emerges from this genealogy, entering a dialogue with a range of thrilling contemporary artists who tick the box of new figuration. His depictions are influenced by the behaviour of 3D objects in virtual spaces, the hysteria of high-speed animation scenes, the axioms of *cartoon physics*, the notion of the self-asserting *plasmatic bodies*,[18] and the hilarious glitches of NPCs in video games. (It takes only a split second to recognise the pop-cultural references that contaminate the lush, painterly exquisite surfaces.)

While agitated souls find solace (or hell) in each other's company, they inhabit a drawn-out present tense. Being *together alone*, they deconstruct the idea of singular individuality and, following Nancy's thoughts, reveal existence as *co-presence*.[19] Simply put, hanging out with others is when you are truly yourself – for better or worse. Ákos Ezer emphasises this by mingling the limbs of the rectangularly compressed figures, tying them into one body, expunging the negative spaces of the background, preparing, in essence a situation where the independent figures can morph into a weird collective ego. A "We" – "I" divided and united at the same time. Weird person singular.

Instead of self-pitying "forever alone," you get the equally frightening "forever together." In *Moving Service* (2019), the guys seem to be hauling something darn heavy – even though you really have to squint to see what all the fuss is about… After peeling away the figure's angular, sculpted faces and hands, one catches sight of the sofa. This mode of *overfiguration*, with its endless twists and turns, might unlock memories of the 3D pipes screensaver. By staring into the abyss of unorganised vogueing, into these make-shift frames of jumbled and shuffled arms – which consequently embrace further details of further humans – we lose ourselves in the *mise en abyme* of mortals.

NIGHTVISION MODE

IT'S DARK HERE, BUT NOT DARK ENOUGH FOR IT TO BE AN EXCUSE FOR YOUR BLUNDERING! – Paraphrasing Sancho Panza's inner monologue is an adept reaction when looking at the characters bumbling through Ezer's compositions.[20] These stories unfold on the periphery: the edge of light and dark, the zone of horror,[21] between the last sign of the city and the final backyard, the in-between zone of partying and regret.

In the messy alternative realities of Ákos Ezer's early paintings, in these sticky and boozy scenes of illuminated youngsters loitering around moonlit backyards, one could already sense a proclivity towards the nocturnal.

Many of these images unfolded in nightmarish, visionary turbulence. Olive-green snarls bled into palette-knife-wounded stretches of canvas, churning the greyish umber of the ground with the chugging rhythm of a Thor-inhabited sky. Sickly clouds swirl above unsettling events, ready to burst into a symphony of destruction. There was a heavy metal aesthetic lurking in the corners, but also a snarky sense of humour. Pathos transformed into bathos, emotion into subversion. Even though the comically parallel pair of legs protruding from the bushes might ring an alarm, we laugh off the entire charade: look at him doing his thing again! What an idiot!

In the paradigmatic painting *Spaghetti Dinner* (2014), a dark-haired lad digs into a plate of pasta that might remind you – with its scraped and tortured brushstrokes – of the theatrical surfaces of lyrical abstraction. The disconcerting red sauce transforms into ketchup, blood, and sensually applied paint simultaneously. In the background, distorted pine trees line up to colonise the sky, while the scraped-off paint reveals the guts of the landscape.

Brutal and post-apocalyptic – the way most well-planned holidays turn out in the end. Jokingly evoked as afterparty anecdotes of scrambling around in the rain-soaked mud and the fog of mind, these scenes are reconstructions from the day after, flashbacks that illuminate faded memories. While the disfigured beer cans and the obnoxious guys roll around in the gloomy night – friendly campfires, electric torches and the light draining through forgotten windows shed light on them. Ezer twists the romantic pictorial tradition inside out: instead of the unharmed Rückenfigur staring in awe at nature's sublime power from the safety of a dainty bay window, the protagonists find themselves in the mosh pit of reality.

In recent works of Ákos Ezer's "darker side," the electric torch – a spotlight encapsulating densely juxtaposed strips of colour – has become a mythical tool, a prism breaking the midnight monochrome of the figures

Ákos Ezer, *Bar, Music, Smoke*, 2015,
oil on canvas, 250 × 200 cm

Ákos Ezer, *Lost Signal*, 2020,
oil on canvas, 100 × 80 cm

Ákos Ezer, *Stealth*, 2022,
oil on canvas, 200 × 235 cm

with the explosion of a pocket-sized rainbow. The moon-like, white ellipse of the torch's protective glass appears as a mystical source of painting, a gentle allusion to creativity's anonymous, faceless origin. The combination of electric torches and faces elicits the historical tradition of chiaroscuro but also the party trick that turns slightly scary stories into fright fests.

Lost Signal (2020) works the other way around. Instead of animating the figure, the mobile phone's light petrifies the unconnected user. Frozen and unmoving, he stares at the "blue screen of death" radiating from the small screen, while the world around him explodes into multicolour madness. In the trilogy of *Silent Disco* (2021) and in *Stealth* (2022), we see the figures' colour blocking to the extreme, transforming into monochrome surfaces of electric chroma. It is a mood.

#if you know, you know.

THE TRAP OF NATURE

Does the hustle make you want to go on holiday? Postpone the hardships of existence! Even if the destination isn't farther than the backyard, contemplating nature is *the* ideal escape strategy.

Let's briefly gaze upon lore ancient and new-fangled! The hunted nymph in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Daphne, flees an overenthusiastic lover by sprouting myriad branches, morphing into a laurel tree. In the epigrammatic meme, Homer (the animated one!) recedes into a suburban stargate of green leaves.[22] He vanishes into the monochrome shrubbery to avoid the white lies told by his friendly neighbour, Ned. Stark contrast, but pop culture seems to prop up everywhere, merging wacky sequences with forgotten tales of heroic deeds.

Whether Ákos Ezer's sources are legends, memes, or cryptic symbolism from his dreams, this particular series of works revolves around the mythological depths of the many-leafed labyrinth. In this garden-variety Laocoön Group, there are no deadly serpents coiling around the heroes, however, the snaky, multicolour limbs convey a sense of candy-crusted claustrophobia. The fragmented protagonists seem dangerously lost in the tightly knit pattern of artificial-looking smoke, rubbery foliage, and overemphasised drop shadows.

The juxtaposition of cartoonish, highlighter-tinted, smooth surfaces, bristled and busy brushwork and layers of thickly or thinly oozing oil provides a lush, painterly texture. Caught up in the grasp of tiny branches and the noisy staccato of stubborn leaves, the characters stumble upon new exit routes during the never-ending hideouts, ambushes, and various other outdoor games that unfold in these shop-window-shallow spaces.

One could – well, kind of – claim that Naturalism was a contest about spotting the most shades of green on a cloudy day. Here, in terms of attitude, we experience the polar opposite. There is an almost mechanical, machine-like quality to these clockwork leaves, which oscillate between olive, may green and the bluish end of the spectrum. While in the initial compositions, each leaf was a luxuriously thick, easy-going double-dab of material, the latter images boast a more extensive variety of types: oak, beech, poplar, and more generic assortments spawned in endless numbers.

These paintings are not scientific-botanical studies but rather a recoding of nature through ornaments, patterns, and arabesques. Can you peek across nature's obstacle – turning it into an all-over surface of abstract statements? Can you poke your head through the bucolic scenery?

In Ákos Ezer's recently manifested mixed-media installation titled *Hedge Sculptors* (2023), the artist invites us to join the adventure. While the polychromatic, post-digital, 3D-modelled figures dive garishly into the void of the white cube, recalling how the Greeks adorned their bronze figures in preposterous tinctures, the leaves remain a massive block of uniform green. Mimicry and camouflage wouldn't work here, as the triumvirate's intense wavelength clashes with the suburban fortification's well-kept unit. It is up to the disconnected team of *Hedge Sculptors* and their respective, free-flowing peppermint stick limbs to break this dominant wall of vegetation. Do they have appropriate tools for the job? What's in the inventory? A shiny, fuchsia pink party hat, a bright red can of bubbly refreshment, a finely crafted, jazzy, leather shoe, and an endless chain of exhaled smoke that frames each movement with a hazy mist of cartoon puff formations. *Snap! Explosion! Boom!* The formless, animated "fight cloud" devours each figure, swallowing them whole. But don't fret! It's all good, clean fun: everybody will escape the escapade.

WIDESCREEN EXTRAVAGANZA

Standing in front of these cinematic-scale tableaux vivants, bustling living pictures immortalised in lush layers of hyperactive material, one feels dwarfed by the constellation of colossal, unblinking figures. We step into a mode of history painting that commemorates what might happen in a blink of an eye somewhere within a grand narrative, a finale that has drifted into Mozartesque, Pintéresque[23] or even South Parkesque absurdity recalling the seconds when you can't follow the fast-paced plot anymore, but have a nagging sense of what the dealt-out cards might have to offer – a type of figuration that cranks up the intensity of its clashing visual codes and ever-switching representational dialects, juxtaposing jarringly monochrome sneakers with cool shirts embalmed in late-afternoon shadows and prickly patterns.

Ezer slices up your attention into bite-size painterly explosions: in one area of the canvas, frosty and fiery colours pop with humongous bangs. A few generous steps away, a prop appears with brutal materiality. You might set your eyes on an excessively sensual pie's innards unleashed from a metallic plate or a sketchy – but at the same time disarmingly tactile – bark of a birch tree, a Spider-Man mask with highlights creeping around the surface as nimble, eight-legged creatures or a docile hobby horse, whose absurdly perfect tones are overpowered by an endearing smile. While the paint seems excited to perform various jumps and somersaults, you can kick back and feel at ease. The game has been mastered. It's about pure enjoyment at this stage.

Look! It is as simple as plug-and-play. Peeking at the surface turns the scenes of convoluted bodies into a spectacle of paint jigging and jiving. This draws attention to that special shimmer that animates the unfolding events. The extravagant storytelling strategies of these self-deprecating fables, drenched in empathy and humour, showcase Ákos Ezer as an artist for whom the human figure is not there as the muscular-allegorical embodiment of mythological lore, religious-transcendental or political sentiment but as a blunt stunt double animating notions such as foolishness, clumsiness, awkwardness, and uncoordinated action, in other words, a candid vision of humanity, stripped from all of its mythological robes and pompous accessories.

In these monumental, museum-scale compositions, Ákos Ezer switches into berserk mode. The director's cut provides additional side narratives, extras, and goodies. It is rewarding to invest the extra leg work into exploring these two- or three-piece mega constructions.

Whenever I visit Ákos Ezer in his studio and walk among these wild beasts of unhistorical history painting – or "ironically twisted socialist-realist painting," as the curator Sandro Droschl once categorised Ákos's work[24] – I am flabbergasted by the sheer power of figurative painting, which Ákos Ezer doesn't shy away from. As the famous nursery rhyme hits on the simple truth: "Can't go over it! Can't go under it! Can't go around it! Got to go through it!"[25]

And alluding back to Gábor Rieder's notion of the "multi-coloured mace & the relentless gates of the international art world,"[26] this is exactly what Ákos does, bursting through the walls and safety nets that the muses of figurative painting have constructed during the lengthy history of the genre. The amplification goes off the scale as the format "Hulkifies," growing to this unconventional, *widescreen extravaganza*. Whether casually propped up against the wall in his studio or presented in a hangar-like white-cube venue – which recently took place at the artist's solo show titled "*At least we had fun today*" (2023) hosted by L21 Palma – this particular mode of painting is loud: stadium-rock loud, and as the paintings' lionheart-attitude attest, the main goal is being fearless in an uptight and disoriented age. Everything else is a fun side-quest.

Each extended episode throws you into an entirely fresh, thrilling environment, a new chapter where you learn more about the characters of Ezer's multifaceted, unfolding universe. And… oh, yes! Welcome to the cosmic boogie-woogie! Catch you on the flip side!

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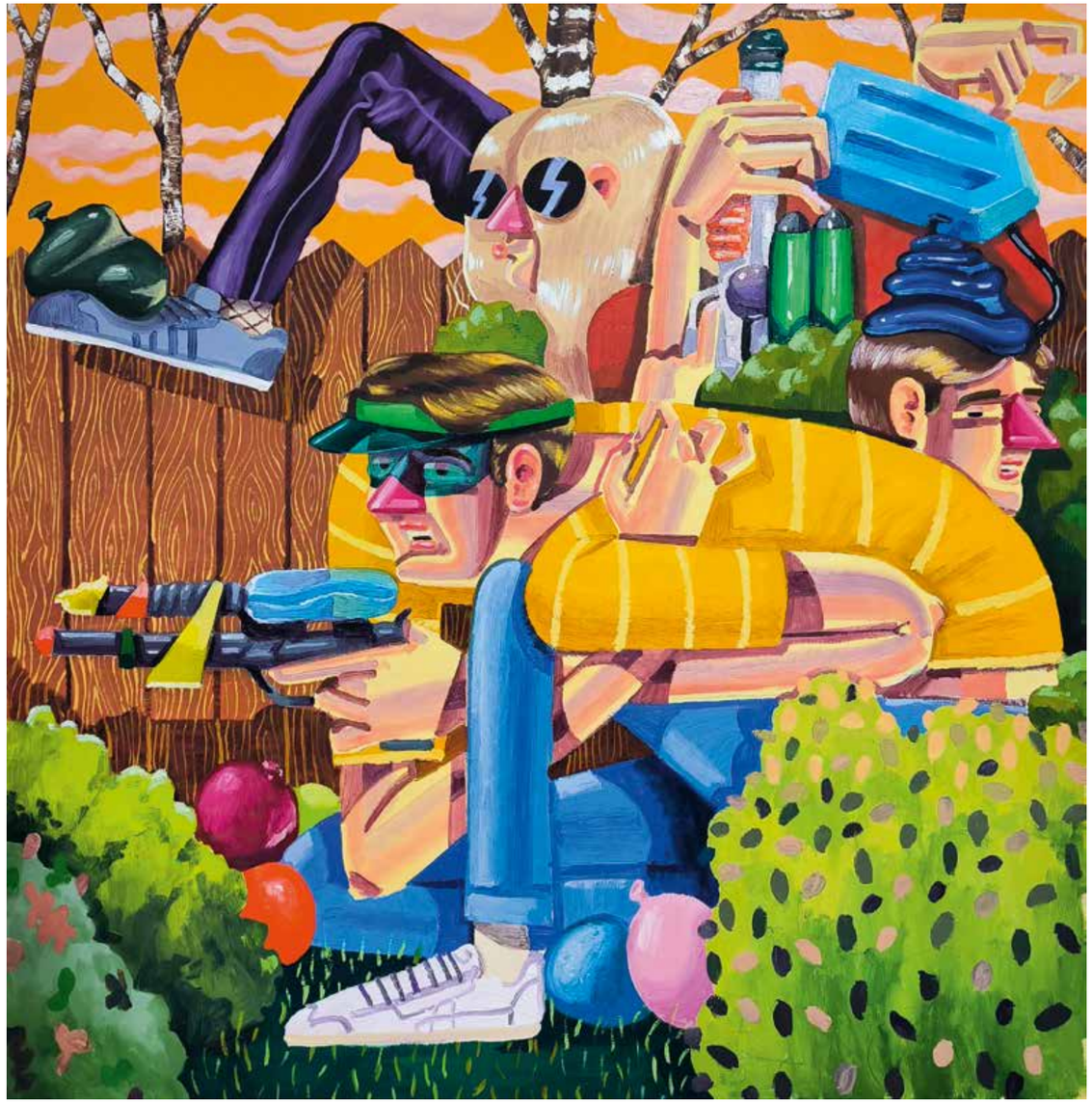

Ákos Ezer, *Water Balloon Battle (Summer)*, 2024,
oil on canvas, 200 × 200 cm

Next spread: Ákos Ezer, *Hedge Sculptors*, 2023,
paint on PVC and metal, mixed media, 230 × 350 × 50 cm

Discover the first comprehensive monograph on Hungarian artist Ákos Ezer, covering more than a decade of his artistic practice.

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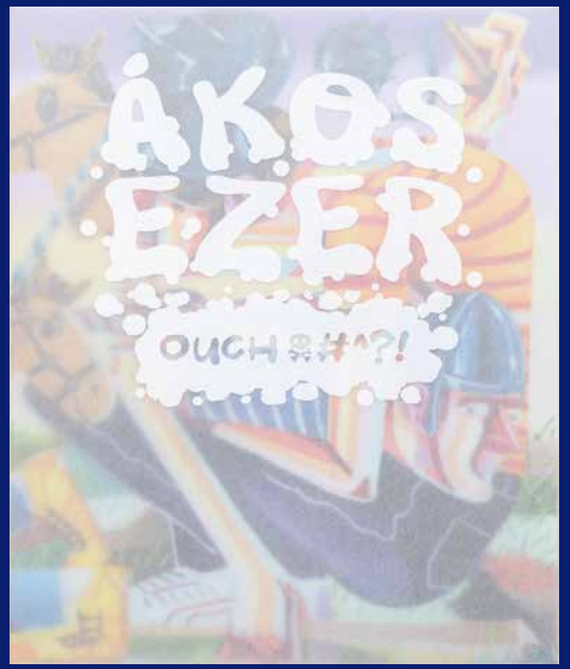

Ákos Ezer – Ouch#^?!*

Edited and curated
by Patrick Tayler, DLA,
the volume features insightful essays
by art historian and curator
Gábor Rieder, PhD, and by Tayler
himself, a visual artist and
art writer – offering valuable context
to Ezer's ever-evolving body of work.

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Ákos Ezer, *Medieval Games*, 2022 (detail),
oil on canvas, diptych, 235 × 400 cm

PROFILE

MIRA MAKAI

MIRA MAKAI (b. 1990, Budapest, Hungary) is a Budapest-based visual artist whose work encompasses ceramics, acrylic painting, and oil pastel drawings. Her works have been showcased in various group exhibitions at museums and non-profit venues, including the Künstlerhaus – Halle für Kunst & Medien, Graz; Collegium Hungaricum Berlin, Ludwig Museum – Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest; and the MODEM Center for Modern and Contemporary Art, Debrecen. She has also exhibited her work in art galleries across Europe such as L21 Gallery in Barcelona and Mallorca, Susan Boutwell Gallery in Munich, Galerie Droste in Berlin, and art fairs like viennacontemporary, Untitled Miami, and ARCO Madrid. Her pieces are part of the Esterházy Private Collection and the Janus Pannonius Museum's ceramic collection. She is a recipient of the Esterházy Art Award 2015.

When you gaze at the stars in your back garden, the basic experience – you will find – can be summarised by a whole lot of squinting and an ample portion of *Zen-like stillness*. It's either we who squint, or the sky does. For sometimes, the gelatinous canopy of the sky showcases the galaxy's collection of teardrops: a majestic and devilishly intricate, exquisitely crafted matrix of the Infinite. We try to dispel the flickering gloom with scientific speculation, but to no avail. Not even the humongous lenses of telescopes gathering dust in the glass cases of technology museums can capture the exact image of white giants, red dwarfs, black holes, and other stellar beings. The asterisk (*) – whose alt-code[1] on the keyboard is (perhaps not coincidentally) the number '42', made famous by Douglas Adams[2] – is a symbol of pondering. It sometimes stands as a triad on the page[3] (***), denoting a pause in the flow of the plot, inviting us to replace the horizontal plane of the pages with the boundless – albeit conceptual – starry sky. Mira Makai's solo exhibition *Don't Forget to Look at the Stars* invites us to do something along these lines in the light-filled spaces of Einspach & Czapolai Fine Art.

Between speculative alien worlds and the infinite – conjured up in black and white from cryptic graphic symbols – on the amorphous stage of "in-betweenness," in the collective imaginary, lurk our most beloved beings: humans cursed with perpetual embryonic fragility; jagged-toothed crabeater seals plunging into the deep sea; flower heads bobbing under the weight of crisis; bacteria in a merry death dance; and other entities emerging and escaping from their Derridean "semantic cages." In this post-taxonomic gathering of kindred souls, the desperate permutation machinery of finitude and existence snarls and sputters at each other. The self-perpetuating logic of this poetic ecosystem is *creativity*.[4]

***

No matter how hard you squint, the silhouettes of the stars are never sharp enough. As my great-uncle Roger once remarked, "… the theoretical astrophysicist does not usually try to calculate the properties of a particular star. Instead he studies a wide variety of possible stars."[5] Stars do not yet penetrate our light-sensitive corneas in high definition, nor can our cognitive apparatus fully extract their essence – there remains an irreducible speculative domain. And yet, somehow – through the tools of visual art, which fictionalise transgression with elastic elegance – for example, in the cathartic chorus of Mira Makai's ceramic relief titled *Celebration* (2024) – the impossible happens. The cartoonishly protruding eyes of the deep-sea-dwelling and simultaneously high-mountain-roaming "goblin-cat-vegetable-demons," "lemon ghouls," and speckled "cloud flowers" are imprinted with weird star parasites. Through this ambiguous symbiosis, the eye is no longer a mirror of the soul enclosed in the body, but rather a transformative conduit through which we can immerse ourselves not only in the kaleidoscope of this shadow world – searching for our name tag at the table of the end-of-the-world feast—but also plug into the transcendent phenomenon itself. Directly.

Above and previous spread (detail):
Mira Makai, *Celebration*, 2024,
glazed ceramic, 80 × 160 × 10 cm

All photos by Brúnó Einspach

Next spread (left): Mira Makai, *Chasing Starlight*, 2025,
glazed ceramic and textile, 124 × 162 × 3 cm

Next spread (right): Mira Makai, *Blooming Festival*, 2025,
glazed ceramic and textile, 124 × 162 × 3 cm

This "star-eye" is, as it were, an electro-eclectic, direct-contact, multicoloured, hexagonal USB stick. (In other words, high tech.) It is no coincidence that lightnings zigzag, arcs break into fragments, and space-confetti-like leaves fly about. Busy! For in the aura of scenes evoking the density of blood-soaked Inca reliefs, something is constantly shaking us up. Here, starry-eyed seers not only observe the multitude of constellations, but their luminous pupils are sculpted by the transcendent draught into *universal telescopes*. As Emily Dickinson observes, in a similar vein – touching upon the posthumanist discipline of *animal studies* – horses always turn towards eternity[6] – but this is more direct here! Turquoise-blues and further chromatic sensations tint and tattoo the jelly of the eyes, and the monochrome mandala of the irises is bathed in rays of Neapolitan yellow or fruit-yoghurt-like pigment, suffusing the formations of rapture and catharsis. Who would have thought that the viceroys of the apocalypse would arrive in fondant coats and frosting jackets? That the saturation of the colour palette at the end-of-the-world feast would sweep us away like this? (Where is the dark, ominous post-apocalyptic varnish of post-humanism now?)

Makai's ceramic reliefs are divided into several segments by the logic of the grid, but one can also observe a splintering reminiscent of the way arid lands disintegrate – a sign of an imminent tectonic rearrangement. These fault lines, however, do not hurt anyone, because the fate of all "grand-panorama stories" is to be divided into chapters and segments, and every luscious surface will sooner or later become enriched with a web of cracks and patina. The sense of fragmentation is further heightened by the heterogeneous *materiality* of the scenes: glamorous surfaces give way to humorously flattened, strategically clumsy details, while loose formlessness is juxtaposed with an almost cereal-like storm of crunchy, hyperactive pictograms. It's as if we were witnessing a meeting of an inner drive to tell a story and the enigmatic nature of the untellable – only to be hunted down by tasty details (yes, we are the ones being hunted down!). While the retinal fireworks of sunlit colours melt and foam in appetising abundance, we also find footing for our star ontological musings. The ceramic's intricate play of light hints at the internal structure of inaccessibly distant yet somehow familiar phenomena. As if counting our ribs, we come to realise that we share almost everything with the macrocosm that bends over us like a distorting mirror.

The glazed knick-knack planes and ceramic islands embedded within the rich tapestries give *Chasing Starlight* (2025) and *Blooming Festival* (2025) a kind of hypnotic quality. Confusing our sense of gravity, they emanate ambivalent signals from their labyrinths of cosiness. In the name of some well-earned "hygge," we'd gladly wrap ourselves in these scenes – even though they unfold as subversive, explosive surfaces – or imagine them hidden deep within the halls of a step pyramid, shimmering in their unawakened latency, waiting for an explorer's searchlight.

There is a palpable yearning for *phantasmagoria* in the air anyway. Think of the imagination exercises of the podcast-verse! Bigfoot conspiracy theories everywhere; anaconda hunts illustrated with AI-generated imagery and narrated through cigar smoke; ancient feathered men attempting to disseminate knowledge after the Ice Age… Just as this weird *slop* is infiltrating the ever-growing, darkening unconscious of social media, a parallel series of phenomena is emerging in the visual arts – reminiscent of Dürer's nightmares and echoing the fear factor of the viral contents of his time. Neomedievalism with a fantasy bent; futurist visions rendered on old PlayStation consoles; cuteism flirting with horror; cybergothic cybergoblinisation; and utopia- or dystopia-evoking installations. None of this is anywhere near decadent classicism!

Perhaps all these tendencies are necessary for us to discover the legends of Atlantis in the proliferating post-internet realities of Mira Makai's works, which seem to channel an eco-anxiety-driven urgency – a mourning for a lost, rich, and magical world. Or is it simply nostalgia for the turquoise and bright orange plastic figures of the 1990s? All of this is complicated in the exhibition's accompanying text authored by the curator Mónika Zsikla, and we can almost see – or perhaps feel – how anxiety, divination, delusion, trippy longing, a sense of community, catharsis, and other giant concepts are expressed in the movements of the figures, who knowingly and proudly assume their minuteness.

This particular point of view recalls something E. T. A. Hoffmann wrote about the protagonist in *The Golden Flower Pot* (1814), who finds himself enclosed in a glass bottle: "You are drowned in dazzling splendour; everything around you appears illuminated and begirt with beaming rainbow hues: in the sheen everything seems to quiver and waver and clang and drone. You are swimming, but you are powerless and cannot move, as if you were imbedded in a firmly congealed ether …"[7] Behind the wide smiles and floating sensations elicited by Mira Makai's colourful figures, there is also something unsettling – like the decontextualised grin of the Cheshire Cat, the fate written in the pattern of the oh-so-many teeth.

On the other hand, perhaps it's not all that dangerous… Mira Makai's peaceful, totem-like figures, inducing a subtle spatial movement, recall her exhibition *Unseen Creatures*[8] (2018, Art+Text Budapest). These increasingly anthropomorphic figures (so-called *Guardians*), which have enriched the artist's installative practices and permuted through various iterations over the past few years, occupy the space along their neat, carpet-like, tufted trails. Here, the peace pipe has apparently already gone around. Monochrome and multicoloured figures – placed on a floor reimagined as a game board – participate as avatars, embodying and allegorising the artist's feelings, thoughts, and conceptual moves – but they do so with the graceful slowness of magical creatures.

Opposite: Mira Makai, *Chasing Starlight*, 2025 (detail), glazed ceramic and textile, 124 × 162 × 3 cm

Mira Makai, *Masks of Flora*, 2025,
glazed ceramic and textile, ca. 90 × 65 × 10 cm

As expansive and corpulent cousins of the Japanese *netsuke*[9] statuettes – which act as talismans and proto-key-holders – these "Guardians" make for a fine ensemble. On their luck-bringing charming little faces, cheeky wisdom curves into a language of shapes even more enigmatic than the "archaic smile." Their multifarious morphologies oscillate between a joyful, abundant corporeality, the "kneadable dough" of saccharine cuteism, and the joyous recklessness of certain veins of sculpture (think of the Arcadian vibe of Niki de Saint Phalle's leaping figures). Actually, the *netsuke* genre was introduced to the children of the nineties (including Mira, a member of the *YouHu Generation*[10]) through the Kinder Surprise *netsuke* series,[11] which boasted a number of off-white figures open to dual interpretation – perhaps an influence contributing to the nostalgia permeating the formal world of the works.[12] A similar, toy-like association is evoked by Mira Makai's shelf-dwelling entities in the exhibition, which opt for a plant-like gentleness rather than an over-active beastliness, resting atop the gallery's bookshelves and the exquisitely chic "rococo-minimalist" agate shelf in the elegant lobby of Einspach & Czapolai Fine Art. In the company of these creatures oscillating between slumber and wakefulness, the clatter of the banqueting pots seems distant. The end-of-the-world luncheon proposed by Mira Makai's speculative fantasy has its moments of serene clarity.

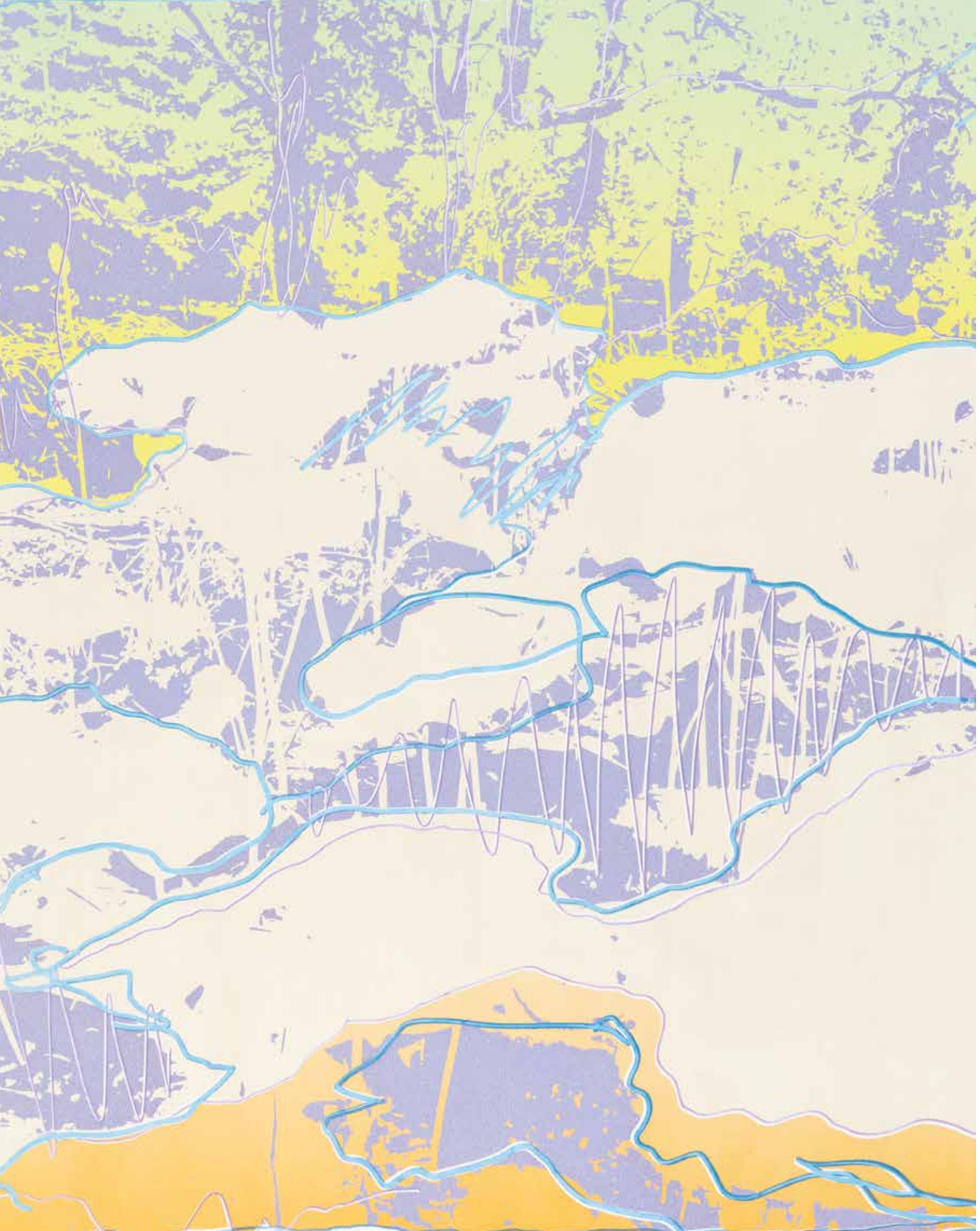
Whether we want it or not, we are here, called upon by something bittersweet – perhaps the memory of the weight of fulfilment, annihilation, and transcendence – and it is, probably, no use preparing; we have endlessly repeated the melancholic, exalted rehearsal cycles of the planet's final hours in the private laboratory of our dreams. Perhaps we don't need to judge whether the exhibition presents us with a utopia or a dystopia: let us wander together across the sweet and sour surfaces like tiny highlights conjured up by the medium of ceramics, and charge and lose ourselves in the rays of art!

/ Patrick Tayler

The text above is an extended version of the opening speech for Mira Makai's exhibition *Don't Forget to Look at the Stars*, which was on view at Einspach & Czapolai Fine Art from 29 January to 28 February 2025.

1 Go on, and try it! Turn on your numpad and type Alt+42!
2 Douglas Adams, *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (London: Pan Books, 1979).
3 The symbol is usually referred to as *dinkus* (***).
4 Since 2008, I have been haunted by the evolution simulator in the computer game *Spore*.
5 Roger J. Tayler, *The Stars, Their Structure and Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 70.
6 "I first surmised the Horses' Heads / Were toward Eternity –" Emily Dickinson, *Because I Could Not Stop for Death* (479), 1890.
7 E. T. A. Hoffmann, *The Golden Flower Pot* (1814): https://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks06/0605801h.html.
8 Patrick Tayler, "Unseen Creatures," *Új Művészet Online*, 4 December 2018, https://ujmuveszet.hu/art-today/unseen-creatures/.
9 A netsuke (根付; [netsɯke]) is a miniature sculpture, originating in 17th-century Japan.
10 Zita Sárvári and Gábor Rieder, eds., *YouHu: The New Generation of Hungarian Contemporary Art* (Budapest: Kieselbach Galéria, 2022). The volume presents a number of Y-generation artists from Hungary.
11 Kinder Surprise, "Netsuko Ferrero Totem Double," 1999.
12 Good news! I asked the artist, and she said I unlocked a memory with this reference.

Mira Makai, *Feast*, 2024,
glazed ceramic, 80 × 160 × 10 cm



PROFILE

DÁNIEL KÁRMÁN

DÁNIEL KÁRMÁN (b. 1991, Jászberény, Hungary) graduated from the Hungarian University of Fine Arts in 2019, majoring in graphic art. He is part of the experimental artist collective Birds of Cool, founded in 2022, which has since presented collaborative works in group exhibitions at two institutions in Hungary, including the MODEM Center for Modern and Contemporary Art in Debrecen and Q Contemporary in Budapest. His solo exhibition *2two* was on view at BarabásiLab Showroom in 2022 and his work *Interrealism* was displayed at the János Tornyai Museum in Hódmezővásárhely in 2021. Kármán has presented two solo exhibitions at Einspach & Czapolai Fine Art: *Every Morning* in 2023, and *Stains on the Back of an Imaginary Bird* in 2025.

Dániel Kármán, *From a Minute's Distance*, 2024,
oil and acrylic on canvas, 115 × 90 cm

Dániel Kármán, *mgehalunk*, 2024,
oil and acrylic on canvas, 115 × 90 cm

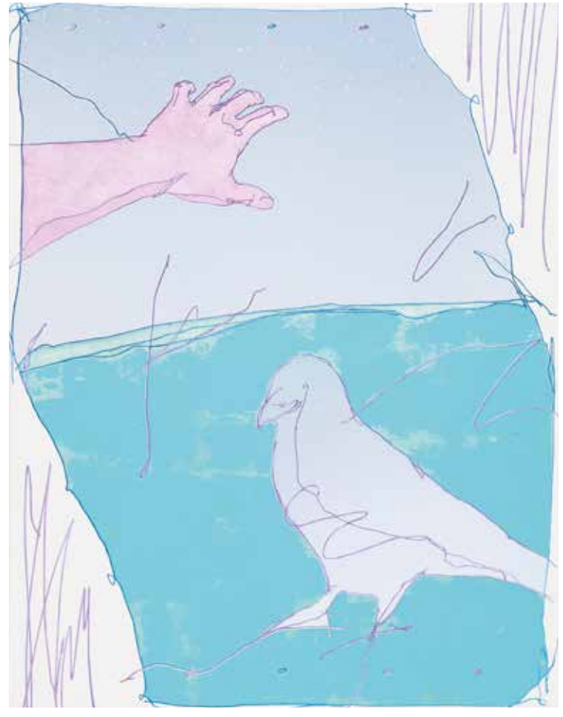
Previous spread: Dániel Kármán, *I Did Write It on the Back of Something*, 2025 (detail),
oil and acrylic on canvas, 190 × 160 cm

Next spread (left): Dániel Kármán,
The Things I Can't Do Alone, 2025 (detail),
oil and acrylic on canvas, 150 × 120 cm

Next spread (right): Dániel Kármán,
Stains on the Back of an Imaginary Bird,
installation view, Einspach & Czapolai Fine Art,
Budapest, 9–30 April 2025

All photos by Mátyás Gyuricza

Dániel Kármán, *Constantly Moving Branches 6*,
2024, oil and acrylic on canvas, 115 × 90 cm

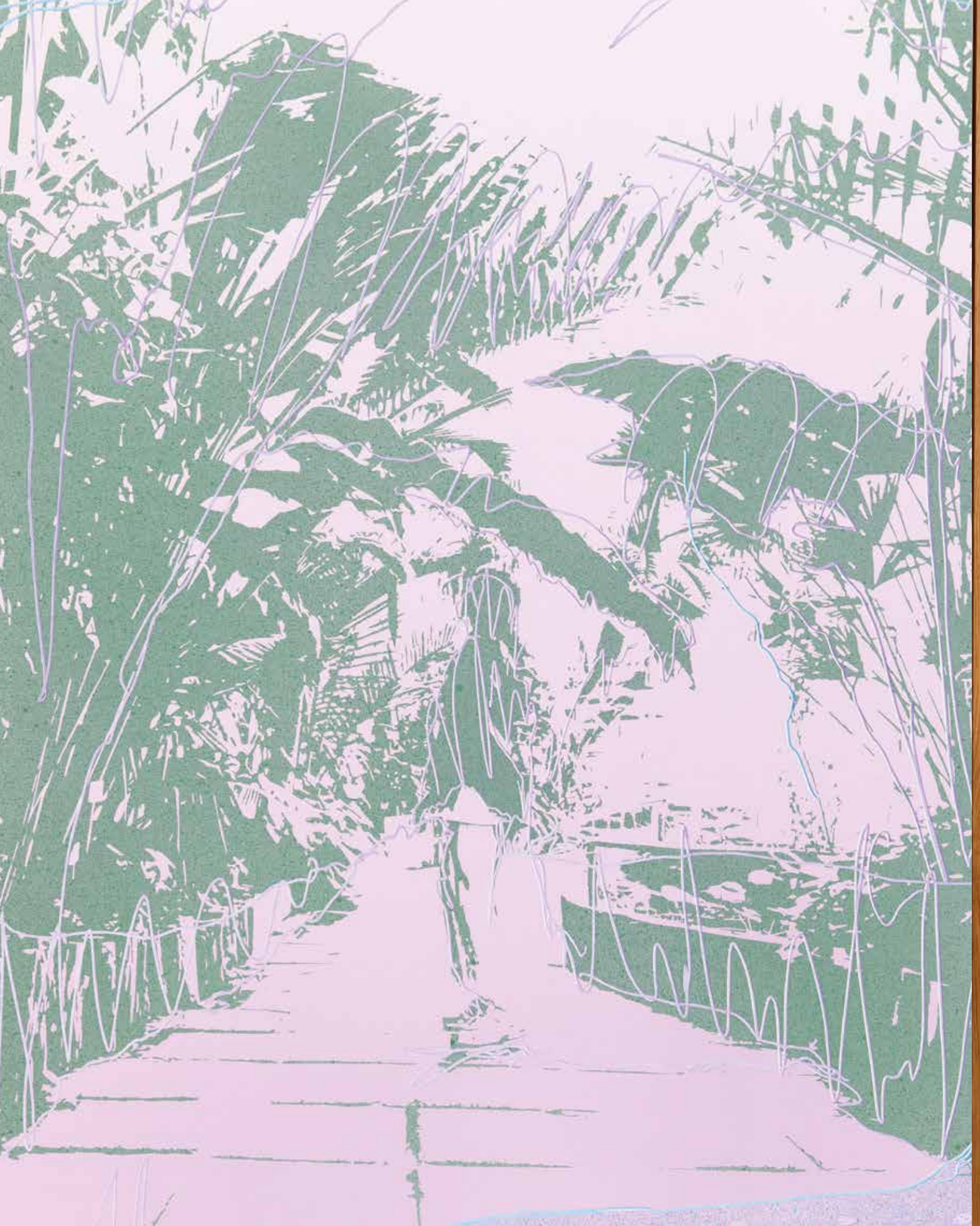


Dániel Kármán, *Bird Feeder*, 2024,
oil and acrylic on canvas, 115 × 90 cm

The young artist's consistently developing work oscillates subtly between figurative and abstract movements of pictorialism, graphic and painterly possibilities of image-making, and digital and analogue (manual) qualities of creation. He employs photographic foregrounds as the basis of his painted compositions, which he always captures himself. His subsequent reflections on the images are always elongated and multi-phased. He digitally (re)edits the shots he uses and transforms the edited compositions into manually painted, delicate tableaux spaces. He engages with a single image for weeks, often creating fifteen to twenty edited versions of a single photograph. He eventually reduces the number of these to two or three, imagining how the visual effect would change if the light from the monitor were replaced by the sight of the painted image. The figures, animals, and landscape details that come to life in this way are always the imprints of specific experiences captured in photographs, which the painter gives universal validity to on the plane of the universal and collective experience of time and passing. He also often refers to his earlier series as "reflections on time," on its passing and on the subjective and objective experiences of this.

Kármán's painting, and thus also his latest series, can be placed in the succession of events: the lived and the liveable, the passing, the perceptible but not concealed and uncapturable time and the anxiety associated with it, and the unresolvability of everything, are his chosen themes. Perhaps this is why the technical process of the creation of his compositions is so interesting: how the fleeting events of photographs captured in particular perspectives and moments like waking up in the morning, a hike, or even the squawking of crows, first become digitally fixed dead moments, then digitally revived, and finally preserved in the materiality of paint into eternity. The experience of time and timelines is unclear, which is perhaps why Kármán prefers to refer to his paintings as unfinished metaphors, whose "completion" and interpretation is left entirely to the viewer. He does not want to control and influence the personal interpretative process on which the viewer of his works relates to his approach.

/ Mónika Zsikla



Dorottya Szabó and Levente Bagossy, *Different Spaces*,
installation view, Einspach Fine Art & Photography, Budapest,
6 February – 1 March 2024. Photo by Brúnó Einspach

EINSPACH & CZAPOLAI FINE ART
2025

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ON THE COVER

Tamas Dezsö,
Resistance, 2025 (detail),
bronze thorns, 19th-century
clockwork, metal.
Photo by Tamas Dezsö

László Fehér,
Memory, 1985 (detail),
oil on fibreboard,
200 × 170 cm.
Photo by Miklós Sulyok

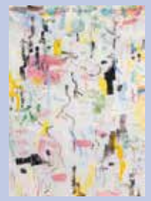
Tamás Melkovics
in his studio at
art quarter budapest,
2025. Photo by
Dávid Biró

Tamás Jovanovics,
The Rebellion of Sun Wukong,
2023 (detail), oil-based
coloured pencil and acrylic
on fibreboard, varnished,
2 pcs, each 102.5 × 102.5 cm.
Photo by Dávid Biró

Muntean/Rosenblum,
*Untitled ("We were
always...")*, 2024 (detail),
acrylic and pastel chalk
on canvas, 288 × 387 cm.
Photo by Walter Zarbl

István Nádler,
Avar Motif, 1967 (detail),
tempera on paper,
110 × 110 cm.
Photo by Brúnó Einspach

Peter Peri,
Tract 2, 2024 (detail),
mixed media on canvas,
148 × 114 cm.
Photo by Jake Walters



Tamás Soós,
The Testament of Beauty,
2024 (detail), acrylic on
canvas, 250 × 180 cm.
Photo by Marcell Perina

Einspach & Czapolai Fine Art is a leading contemporary art gallery in the Central European art scene. Specializing in contemporary and post-war art, it hosts both international and Hungarian exhibitions in the heart of Budapest. The gallery represents emerging talents, established Hungarian and international artists, and significant post-war creators who work across several disciplines, ranging from painting and photography to ceramics and sculpture.

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The gallery is open from Tuesday to Friday
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