

LABOR

Collaboration between the C3 Foundation, the Young Artists' Studio, and the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts
Képiró u. 6, Budapest 1053

Opening Exhibition: The Time of an Artwork / The Artwork through Time

2007 October 11 - November 25

Miklós Erdély: Moral Algebra. Solidarity Action (1972). Photo collage, reconstruction (digital prints 2005)

György Jovánovics: Construction Pressing into the Ceiling (1971). Wood, steel springs, cardboard cylinder; double-exposure photograph by György Galántai (1971/2007), 50 x 75 cm

Works using "**Construction Pressing into the Ceiling**" by Miklós Erdély, László Lakner, Tamás StAuby. New enlargements from the original 1971 negatives (2007). Various sizes (50 x 75 cm, 18 x 24 cm)

Little Warsaw: Cyrill & Method (2005). Digital video, in color, with sound, 1.5 min. (2005/2007)

Each of the works on exhibit has its own relevance to the chosen topic: how does a work of art relate to a given period – to the time in which it was created, and to the present at any moment thereafter? How does it change in time and through time, and what kind of connection does it find with its audience, and with the changing social and cultural environment in which it has meaning?

György Jovánovics' "Construction Pressing into the Ceiling" is a well-known installation, often reproduced, even displayed on several occasions – yet it has never appeared in an exhibition space as the artist would have set it up. Furthermore, the photographic works that involve it have never been seen, outside of printed reproductions, by anyone in Hungary (aside from those who took part in the work's creation).

Little Warsaw's 2005 piece was an attempt – partly along the lines of the present exhibition – to reconstruct Tamás Szentjóbby's 1972 "Exercise in Exclusion," a classic and emblematic work of the Hungarian avant-garde, elevating it from its retro-existence and making it visible – but the re-staging was more than just a presentation of the original with the collaboration of the artist; it resulted in an entirely new work of art.

The original of Miklós Erdély's montage series was probably viewable only in the Foksal Gallery in Poland; its fate thereafter is unknown.

For the Hidden Holocaust exhibition in 2005, art historian Annamária Szóke reassembled for the first time reproductions and still-available preparatory materials. The newly re-constructed work is enriched in the current exhibition by the fruits of modern research, and an expanded context that facilitates understanding.

Each of these works became public 35 years ago, in 1972. Despite the somewhat art-historical methods we have employed in assembling this show roughly a generation later, we intend it not primarily as a retelling of history, but a demonstration of the works' existence in the present, to the contemporary viewer. It is an attempt to discover their message to the Hungary of the present.

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Construction Pressing into the Ceiling, 1971

Klaus Groh, a gallery owner and manager-purveyor of idea art living in Oldenburg (West Germany at the time) once decided to put together and publish a volume about the new creative avant-garde in Eastern Europe, then isolated from the West – even in the physical sense, by the Iron Curtain and mined borders.

That volume was published by the Cologne-based house of Dumont Schauberg in 1972 as part of the “DuMont Aktuell” series that bore the title *Contemporary Art in Europe*; the book presented work by artists from Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland, Romania, and the Soviet Union – three of these being countries that no longer exist.

At Groh’s request that I send 4 pages’ worth of material, I constructed *Construction Pressing into the Ceiling*. This object itself was never intended for exhibit, but rather to hold my chair, table, and the reading I was doing at the time against the ceiling in my room, enabling me to document this with a photograph. **This photo itself is the work.** (It was made by György Gadányi with a double exposure, which is why the device appears double.)

So I had one page already. Instead of sending three more, I thought it would be more interesting to ask three colleague-friends of mine, also invited by Groh, to employ the device as they saw fit in their own environments. So I took them the camera and the pressing rod.

Miklós Erdély’s arrow wants to fly with double force: the compressed springs only increase the effect of the press contraption. The arrow’s path has three breaks to it. Through the rod, the springs press the middle of the arrow (not the ceiling) upwards, causing the bowstring to be pulled taut downwards, stretched by the arrow’s lower end. The tip of the arrow is up, touching the ceiling at one sole point; its upward path is limited. At the moment of aiming, the arrow is already in its target.

This construction was already in place as Erdély had originally planned, when he had a further idea. A plumb line was quickly rounded up and attached to the tip of the arrow. This weight meant a new line of force: a downward one, reinforcing the ceiling to withstand the doubled force of springs and arrow, lest it be pierced. The photos are by György Erdély.

László Lakner first pressed his palm into the ceiling, then his favorite volume of Lukács, and finally a photo of his hand bound to the Lukács book.

Stjóby: A Molotov cocktail, a cat, a dog, and himself.

The idea went like this: I would affix a cat more or less to the middle of the rod, then quick as a flash step out of the field of view (backwards, towards Gyula Zarand, who was taking the picture). The cat would likely try to jump down; at that moment, Stjóby would appear from a bend in the hallway, with a dog on a leash ready to pounce on the cat. The cat would have no escape route other than up along the rod, and knock off the Molotov cocktail at the top, which naturally would explode.*

(It was no easy task executing this action. The first time around, it didn’t come off at all: the dog and cat were both too wild, and the cat ran away. Zaránd had no time to make a usable picture. It was a good while before Stjóby found new animals. He had neither a cat nor a dog, and the ones we had already used were out of the question. Still, the second time around, everything worked.)

After the 4 pages of photos, I did nothing more with the contraption.

A decade and a half later in May of 1985, two young art historians at the Budapest Galéria, Gábor András and Tamás Török, put on an exhibition called “101 Objects”. They requested the object, which still happened to be around. To my great surprise, they assembled the chair and the table at the same time! (I had not even realized this was possible.) That is how it appeared at the show, and a photo of it appeared on the invitation and poster.

Another 15 years later, it was exhibited in Ljubljana, then in Berlin, by yet others.

In 1995, I exhibited a photo of the Stjóby version in the Hungarian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, as a case study of an artwork that does not have one sole person as creator.

Thirty-six years after it was completed, I myself set it up in its original version.

Budapest, October 2007

György Jovánovics

*Note that Szentjóby’s version **describes** the Molotov cocktail phenomenon (verbally, in the title) rather than **documenting** it, as there was in fact no gasoline in the bottle. It did not explode.

Miklós Erdély: Solidarity action

(Script of a concept realized in photo-montage and statistical tables), 1972

1. It is generally known that war is institutionalized murder or rather, institutions become murderous in war.
2. Institutions are established for the purpose of serving people, but in our days they have become the masters, determinants, and often the murderers of people.
3. Along with retaining the useful role of institutions, people should be given the opportunity to express their superiority to institutions.
4. When each person makes the same gesture at the same time, a form of human solidarity manifests itself which reaches beyond leaders and the led, conflicting states or groups, or guards and the guarded, a solidarity which shows that, for instance, the similarity between the prisoner and the warder is greater than between the warder and the prison, or between the prisoner and captivity.
5. According to the logic of massacre, if everybody kills two persons, all of humankind can be exterminated in thirty-two moves, considering that a person cannot be killed twice.
6. If each soldier kills two persons on the average, at least half of the victims will be people who have not killed anybody – irrespective of the number of those involved in the battle. (The number of innocent victims will be the same in the case as well, if each killer kills always a killer and an innocent person – which proves the absurdity of revenge.) And the weapons of mass destruction distort this proportion to an incredible extent.
7. The diagram of massacre is like a reversed genealogical tree. The last killer alive could not have been the cause of the chain reaction of massacre, as the whole process is over by the time he appears on the scene. It looks rather as if the numerous innocent victims (in the last row of the diagram) are those who start and cause the murderous process. This is the reverse of the genealogical tree, where the ancestral progenitor is obviously the cause of all the descendants.
8. The way of defence is the following: each man is to warn two other persons in case of emergency. According to the principle that a man cannot be killed twice, they have to be individually marked (as Göring recommends in the case of the pacifists). In this way it is avoidable that a person is informed twice while others are kept in the dark.
9. If everybody marks only two persons without using any institutional and communicational means, all people in the world can be warned in a very short time and they will be able to defend themselves collectively. At a given moment, the siren-test of solidarity runs around the world.
10. Let us fill the dead numbers of statistics with life!

(Source: Hungría 74. Muestra presentanda por el Centro de Arte y Comunicación. Noviembre Diciembre 1974. CAYC, Buenos Aires)

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IPUT organised the «**Exclusion Exercise Punishment Preventing Autotherapy**» in a Roman Catholic chapel, in 1972. The dispatcher was sitting 8 hours/day for one week with a pail on his head. On the wall he displayed questions which visitors could put to him:

I. You can ask from the selfsentenced anything
and

II. You can ask the following:

- Are all life-styles immoral which exclude even one other human being?
- Can one form a community with another person without being free oneself?
- Is culture real purpose to make one conscious of the identity of one's fate and history?
- Is it the most important thing to discover and realise what is needed by life?
- Is it true that those who bear the unbearable know nothing about life? Know nothing about that interdependence that is contained in life?
- Can he bear himself without us, or is everything hopeless?
- Can the blockade of the present be broken only by a new attitude?
- Is the realisation of the future in the present an acceleration of our lives?
- Because historical time applies to the totality and not to the individual, would you try to live the facts of the present and your future desolation simultaneously?
- Is this all to manifest difference and therefore there to activate a potentially different matter?
- Can the changeable also be unfinished? Is the unfinished to be changed? Is constancy: suffering? Is unfinishedness: suffering?
- Do you hope that you can make interdependence conscious by demonstrating that we are all at each other's mercy?
- Does your action include the punishment?
- Does your punishment include the action?
- Is action a sin? Is punishment a sin?
- Is sin action?
- Is action punishment?
- What is a sin?
- Is that action the sin that causes suffering?
- Is that action the sin tha causes no change?
- Is there anything at all that you can call an action, would it not produce a change, and is its existence provided to decrease suffering?
- Are you punishing yourself because by selfpunishment you accept the punishment of selfpunishment and by this you release the punisher from the punishment that is not worthy of action: the sin?
- Do you feel particularly exposed because you can not see whom you are talking to?

Tableau Vivant (2005)

Little Warsaw presents:

"Tableau Vivant"; a project, with the aim of a new perception of artworks of the past.

In this project artworks of the sixties and seventies will be "revived", reconstructed in a new context, quite different from the one, in which the work was once presented. We are interested in how the reframing of the context would change the meaning and the message of the work. In the first "Tableau Vivant"; we will reconstruct "Exclusion Exercise" (1972) a work by Tamás Szentjóby. This is a performative work, so the reconstruction will be a performance as well, made by the artist himself. The repetition of his legendary exercise would pose the question: how do we perceive the same performance after a long time and whether the performance really would be the same within a different framework of time, way of perception, and changed notion of performance art itself? The reconstruction would have an art historical significance as well, since an event of the past would be available for direct contemporary perception.

(Little Warsaw, 2005.II.4.19.00h)