

Miklós Erdély (1928–1986)

Activity in the 1960's and 1970's (professional biography):

The most significant personality of the avant-garde that underwent a revival in Hungary in the second half of the 1960's. Sculptor, film director, poet, action artist, a noteworthy representative of Environment and Conceptual art, painter, theorist and educator – by training, an architect. To this day the influence of his writings, his lectures, his works and his educational activity, as well as his immense personality, can be felt among artists active in various branches of the arts and showing an inclination towards the avant-garde.

In 1951, following his brief studies in the art of sculpture, he received a diploma in architecture and subsequently worked at various architectural firms. A number of innovative proposals and inventions are linked to his name. Around 1966/67 he developed the photo-mosaic, the technique of “transferring photographs or other depictions onto a mosaic surface similar [in effect] to the appearance of the original,” with which he thereafter not only ensured his own subsistence, but also provided work for numerous other artists, primarily within the creative community MURUS, which he established around 1980.

In addition to his work in the field of architecture he began already by the mid-fifties to write and subsequently to draw and paint. In 1960 and 1963 he applied for admission to the Academy of Dramatic and Cinematic Art but was rejected. He nevertheless did not abandon his ideas concerning film-making and wrote screenplays and produced sound-montages. In 1964/65 he worked as an editor at Hungarian Television. He completed his first montage film out of film scraps found in the second half of the sixties. He obtained his first passport to travel to the West in 1963 and, according to the correspondence that remains, following his half-year long stay in Paris (which constituted a significant milestone in his life) persistently attempted to publish his writings in Hungarian journals. Nevertheless, until the mid-1980's his poems and short stories were published only in samizdat publications and Hungarian periodicals printed abroad, for example the Paris based *Magyar Műhely* (Hungarian atelier). In 1974 the Magyar Műhely publishing house also printed his collected edition entitled *Kollapszus orv.* (Collapse med.) for which in the same year he was awarded the Kassák-Prize, established in Paris and named after the eminent Hungarian representative of the classical avant-garde. In contrast to his literary works, his writings on art criticism, theories of art and film appeared in Hungary, for example his first influential essay on film theory, *Montázs-éhség* (Montage-hunger), published in 1966.

In the 1960's he partook in the regular meetings in downtown Budapest cafés where artists who distanced themselves from the official art world would gather. It was here that he came into contact with Gábor Altorjay and Tamás Szentjóby, representatives of the younger generation of

artists, and through them with the Happening and Fluxus movements, which gave him renewed momentum to exhibit his works to the public. In 1966 he collaborated in the realization of the first happening in Hungary. From the mid-sixties he participated in various exhibitions and events held in community cultural centers and semi-official exhibition spaces with montage-films, sound-montages, conceptual “textual actions” and photographs accompanied by theses. Actions were also held in his own garden.

In 1970, at the “R” exhibition organized in one of the clubs of the Technical University (which played an important role in the history of progressive art in Hungary), he exhibited objects for the first time (for example: *Tavalyi hó*, Last year’s snow), along with an environment, and from here on he became a regular participant in avant-garde exhibitions in Hungary and abroad. He took part in a total of 41 group exhibitions (or events) in the seventies, 16 of them having been organized abroad and 25 in Hungary. Of the latter he himself organized 9, the majority of which were connected with his pedagogical activities. He had only one solo show during this period and we count ten actions and presentations – independent of the above mentioned exhibitions – from the seventies, four of which took place within the framework of exhibition openings. Among the exhibition spaces in Hungary we must emphasize György Galántai’s Chapel Studio in Balatonboglár, which during the summer months between 1970 and 1973 was the most important exhibition locale of Hungarian avant-garde art, and the exclusive Young Artists’ Club (FMK) in Budapest, which after the banning of the Chapel Studio in Balatonboglár became a locale of similar importance for art. Erdély organized two exhibitions at FMK in 1975 and 1976 entitled *Montázs* (Montage) and *Möbiusz* (Mobius), as well as a series of lectures entitled *Eseményhorizont* (Event-horizon) in 1974. One of the goals of the lecture series was to initiate discussion between artists and scientists on the relationship between art and science.

In the first half of the seventies Erdély became engaged with the international correspondence network and exhibition programs that had developed primarily in the spirit of conceptual art (art historian László Beke and artist Dóra Mauer should be mentioned here as significant organizers in Hungary). His name appeared on the correspondence NET list established by Jarosław Kozłowski and Andrzej Kostołowski. In his bequest there were letters dating from this period from, among others, Walter Aue, Peter van Beveren, Ugo Carrega, Ken Friedman, Jorge Glusberg (CAYC), Richard Gollner, Klaus Groh, Elwyn Lynn and Jiří Valoch.

It was likewise from the early 1970’s that he regularly visited the Béla Balázs Studio (BBS), which was the workshop of independent and experimental film making in Hungary. In the studio he participated primarily in the work of Gábor Bódy’s *Film Language Series* focusing on the semiotics of film (1971–1973) and, beginning with 1976, in the work of the so-called K-section, which was open to cinematographic experiments and the attendant arts. He made all of his five films at the

BBS between 1974 and 1985 and numerous writings of his on film appeared in the studio's various publications. Of the three films he shot in the seventies two were banned and on the whole his films became accessible to the wider public only after his death.

From the mid-sixties Erdély increasingly became the definitive personality of the Hungarian underground or avant-garde art world. This was due not so much to his "live art" appearances or works of his that had been on exhibit as to the fact that he was continuously present at every level of the art scene, from social gatherings to the organization of programs, and he strove to initiate polemic conversations everywhere. Discussion was vital to him, and he commented on its paucity in the art world on several occasions. The artistic courses and fine arts circles that he led in various community cultural centers and later in private homes from 1975 until his death under such names as *Creativity Exercises*, *Fantasy Developing Exercises*, and later *Inter-Disciplinary-Thinking* (InDiGo) can be regarded as an endeavor to create a context for his own thoughts and works. He perceived them as the experimental workshop of a pedagogical principle forged out of the working methods of contemporary artist movements, educational methods associated with the tradition of Eastern philosophy, and numerous other sources. The joint exhibitions (primarily from the period of Indigo, from 1978 onwards) and programs open to new and unusual phenomena and prompting problem-solving thinking were the personality-shaping school for a new generation of artists.

It is not just his art-pedagogical activity and lifestyle that is characterized by intense theoretical orientation and openness, but his works of literature, film and fine art as well. His erudition and interest in theory and philosophy are clearly perceptible in his writings concerning the theory of art, the texts he prepared for certain of his works and his explicitly text-based works. Art constituted an existential necessity for him, while at the same time an analytical view of the nature of art, the definition of art and the peculiarities of various artistic media characterize nearly all his works. His analysis of the form of the work of art as discourse intertwined with an exploration of the possibilities for a discussion of human existence, while the analysis of the process of artistic creation or the process of creating an artistic work was bound to a demand for the development of a life within a perceptive and creative community. It is in this respect that his works can be regarded as "conceptual" and, in certain respects, as having a content of radical "social-criticism".

Participation in exhibitions abroad in the 1970's:

Biennale de Paris, Paris, 1971.

Kunstzone. Erste Freie Produzentenmesse, Jakobsplatz, Munich, 1971.09.07–12.

st.jauby – jovanovics – lakner – miklós – pauer – tot, Galeria Foksal, Warsaw, 1972.05.

Tendencija 5., Galerija Suvremene Umjetnosti, Zagreb, 1973

Aspekten van Hedendaagse Hongaarse Kunst, T'Hoogt, Utrecht; Prinsetún, Leeuwarden; Arnheim; Hoozeveen, 1973–1974

Information / Perception / Reflexion, Södertälje Konsthall, Södertälje, 1973.11.30–1974.01.13.

Festival Húngaro 1974., CAYC (Centro de Arte y Comunicación), Buenos Aires, 1974.04.16–05.10.

4. Triennale Rysunku, Muzeum Architektury, Wrocław, 1974.05.24–06.

Najnowsza Sztuka Wegierska, Galeria Sztuki Najnowszej, Wrocław, 1976.04.20–05.20.

Osteuropese Konzeptuele Fotografie, Technische Hochschule, Eindhoven, 1977

Osteuropese Konkrete en Visuele Poëzie, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, 1978

I am. Performance. International Artists' Meeting, Galeria Remont, Warsaw, 1978.03.28/29–04.06.

(V.) Miedzynarodowe Triennale Rysunku (The International Drawing Triennial), Muzeum Architektury, Wrocław, 1978.06.09–08.

Elements of Drawing (a Miedzynarodowe Triennale Rysunku, Wrocław részeként), Studio Teatr Galeria, Warsaw, 1978.09.21–10.15.

European Dialogue, Biennale of Sydney 3., The Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1979.04.14–05.27.

Works and Words. Foto-tentoonstelling van beeldende kunstenaars uit Hongarije, Nederland, Polen, Tsechoslowakije en Joegoslavië, De Appel, Fundatie Kunsthuis, Amsterdam, 1979.09.15–30.

Works in database:

Tavalyi hó [Last year's snow] 1970

Morálalgebra. Szolidaritási akció, [Moral-algebra. Solidarity action] 1972

Két személy, [Two personas] 1972

Major János kabátja, [János Major's coat] 1973