



***Focus on collecting Central European art:
an interview with Lorand Hegyi
member of the UniCredit & Art Scientific Committee***

Born in Hungary, Lorand Hegyi is one of the foremost European curators art historians and is member of the UniCredit & Art international acquisition committee. He is currently the director of Le Musée d'art moderne de Saint-Etienne and he has recently published with Skira the book „Fragilità della narrativa. Nuovo approccio all'arte contemporanea e la Mitteleuropa come paradigma”, focused on Central European artists.

He is the former director of the Museum Moderner Kunst / Ludwig Foundation, Vienna, and founding director of the new Centre Arte Contemporanea in Naples, il Palazzo delle Arti di Napoli (PAN).

He is author of numerous publications on contemporary art and cultural criticism.

His publications include "New Sensibility - Change of Paradigm in Contemporary Art" (Budapest, 1993), "Roman Opalka's Places" (Prestel, 2000), and "The Courage to Be Alone - Re-inventing of Narratives in Contemporary Art" (Charta, 2004).

Lorand Hegyi was co-curator of the Venice Biennial in 1993; artistic director of the Sculpture Triennial of Stuttgart in 1995; and curator of the Valencia Biennial 2003. He has recently been appointed as curator of the Poznan Biennale.

His recent thematic exhibitions by Lorand Hegyi include: "Co-existence of Art: Central European Artists" (Venice Biennial, 1993), "Europe/Asia: Positions of Contemporary Sculpture (Sculpture Triennial of Stuttgart, 1995), "Abstract/Real - Reference: Malevich, Duchamp, Beuys" (Vienna, 1996), "La Casa, il Corpo, il Cuore - Construction of Identities" (Vienna, 1999), "Concepts of Space" (Barcelona, 2002), "Solares: The Ideal City or the Optimism" (Valencia Biennial, 2003), "Settlements: Search for Possible Places" (Saint-Etienne, 2004), "Passage Europe: Art from Central and East Europe" (Saint-Etienne, 2004).

You are a critic specializing in modern and contemporary art from Central and East Europ. What about collecting art from that area?

Generally speaking the strategy of collecting art from Central Europe should not going on at the usual roads like art fairs, galleries, auctions because these artists are only in a very limited way present in the Western professional institutions.

Could you briefly explain us the political and social issue of Central and East Europe in the 50ies?

During the so-called Cold War period the Central European culture was not completely isolated from the Western cultural movements.

At the creative fields of film, theatre, literature, music, architecture, design as well, as visual art there were several connections between artists and writers, theoreticians, architects of the both side of the Iron Curtain.

From the late 50ies and even stronger from the earl 60ies we can see real cultural parallelises between the Western countries and Central Europe. Even if the so-called „official culture” neglected the different forms of that time avant-garde, there were very important artistic events and productions all over Central Europe. Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana, Prague, Budapest, Varsava, Bucarest and Sophia manifested this „modernist wave” of the 60ies.

If a Western collection wants to create a historically correct structure it should begin to collect the main artists from the period between 1960 and 1980.

Roman Opalka, Zbigniew Vinarsky (Poland), Zdenek Sykora, Karel Malich, Stanislav Kolibal, Stano Filo, Richard Sykora (former Czechoslovakia), Gyorgy Jovanovics, Tamas Hencze, Istvan Nadler,

Imre Bak (Hungary), Julie Knifer, Dean Jokanovic-Toumin, Braco Dimitrievic, Marina Abramovic (former Yugoslavia), etc.

Then, what happened in the 80ies, the period of the so-called „perestroika”?

The young artists of the period of „perestroika” and „glasnost”, that means the reformation of existing socialism with its contradictions and limited liberalism could make profit from the transitional society which manifested a deep crisis of all cultural values and political sensus comunis. There was a period of step-by-step „pragmatical” opening and the establishment of new international rules of art life. This generation could already go to abroad and could participate in international events, processes, even market.

Some of the leading figures of these artists got recognition today in Western institutions and are present at the art market.

Dan Perjovschi (Rumania), Nedko Solakov (Bulgaria), Laszlo Feher, Laszlo Revesz (Hungary), Jiri David, Ivan Kafka (former Czeckoslovakia), Goran Petercol, Dubravka Rakoczi, Marjetica Potrc, Mrjdan Bajic (former Yugoslavia), Miroslav Balka (Poland), etc.

After the Fall of the Berlin Wall, how has the situation changed?

After 1989 the situation has changed radically in the whole Central European world. New free market strategies are fighting with conservative ideas of the closed economy and the centralized interventionist economical policy as well, as liberal and democratic – New Labour like – political visions with the different forms of new fundamentalism of any type (like radical nationalism, neo-conservative religious fundamentalism, extreme right authoritarian ideas, nostalgic leftist egalitarianism, etc.). The situation in the Central European countries has become even more contradictory after the opening of the European Union towards the new member states in the region. Anti-European politics – connected mostly, but not exclusively with hyper-nationalism and isolationism – present a new danger against European integration and democracy. In this turbulent period a new generation of artists emerged which represents a basically international, global view on art and politics, economy and culture. This young generation is everywhere present at the art fairs, is working with Western galleries, is going to live – at least shortly – in some favourite Western capitals, first of all in Berlin. Their art is still easily to buy, their prices are not yet high and they are very mobile and open minded.

Denica Lehoczka, Erik Binder (Slovakia), Agnes Szepfalvi, Zsuzsa Mojzer (Hungary), Hanna Rajkova, Mihael Milunovic (Serbia), Veronika Holcova, Katarina Vincourova (Czeck Republic), etc.