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## **HUNGARY CAN BE YOURS / INTERNATIONAL HUNGARY**

### ALTERNATIVE COUNTRY IMAGE RECONSTRUCTION FROM 1984 WITH SECRET POLICE DOCUMENTS

In the art of the 80's, mail art was what the unlimited World Wide Web is for us today. Contrary to other forms of "art", mail art was neither a medium, nor a trend, but instead a chaotic, random interactive surface open to free movement that (theoretically) could only be governed by postal restrictions.

György Galántai originally intended the materials of the "Hungary Can Be Yours / International Hungary" exhibition for the **Hungary issue** of the **Commonpress** mail art magazine (Commonpress 51) and it only became an exhibition at the request of the Young Artists' Club in Budapest.

In Orwell's year, in the era of the 'happiest barrack', the image flowing from the works of 46 Hungarian and 58 artists from 18 countries did not fit in the current country image and was banned by the jury at the last moment. In the mid 1990s in the *Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security* documents from the Hungarian internal security service III/III were disclosed that provide a detailed description and interpretation / evaluation of the works of the 1984 exhibition and its opening events.

The "Hungary Can Be Yours / International Hungary" exhibition originally opened on 27 January 1984 at the Young Artists' Club in Budapest and was banned immediately by the authorities. Only 25 copies of the planned *Commonpress 51* "Hungary" issue could be produced then.

An exact reconstruction of the show was shown after the political changes in 1989, and the *Commonpress 51* issue could also be published in 300 copies.

The reconstruction of the exhibition in the context of the secret police documents discovered in the Historical Archives was shown in 2000 at Artpool P60, and in 2001 at the Galeria Centralis in Budapest.

[see more at: [artpool.hu/Commonpress51/](http://artpool.hu/Commonpress51/)]

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**MINISTRY OF INTERIOR**

III/III-4-b-Subdepartament

TOP

SECRET!

Received from: "Zoltán Pécsi"  
code named secret agent  
Received by: Tibor Horváth Police captain  
Place of reception: Public place  
Time: January 30, 1984

Subject: Exhibition of György Galántai

## R E P O R T

"György Galántai launched his newest "arts competition" in 1983 under the title "Hungary can be yours". Of the "works of art" he had received, he organized an exhibition at the Young Artists' Club (Budapest, district 6. Népköztársaság útja 112). The opening of the exhibition took place on January 27, 1984 at 7 p.m. at that address, in all premises of the Club where my acquaintance was present. Entrance was granted for holders of an invitation card. At the entrance severe guards (probably the organizers from the Club or the local Committee of the Young Communists' Organization) were posted this time too, who did not let in those without an invitation or holding a membership card even if they paid the HUF 10 entrance fee. Undoubtedly, these persons later slipped in by way of being "helped" by people who had an invitation card but came alone (one card was a ticket for two). The exhibition, however, was opened as a "private event" due to which disputes erupted at the entrance.

What is to be said in summary: For Galántai's competition several "works of art" (in reality plain botch-works) had been provided that are politically problematic, destructively criticize and, moreover – primarily some of those made by Hungarian "artists" – mock and attack our state and social order as well as the state security organs. Galántai was unable to separate these pieces from the rest of the works, which most probably would have been against his intentions anyway. Thus, the above mentioned seriously problematic works were exhibited too and as a great number of visitors were present, the exhibition fulfilled a politically harmful, destructive and disorientating role. This function was enhanced by the fact that the most radical representatives of the Hungarian "opposition" appeared at the opening and, though behaving relatively modestly (none of them spoke to larger groups), in small conversation groups of 3 or 4 they had a chance to propagate their views. At the opening there was an extraordinarily large number of people present (at least 250). The number of persons was more difficult to estimate than usually for the exhibition and the opening took place in three large rooms of the club and people were permanently fluctuating. Even hallways, stairways and the basement canteen (buffet) were occupied. Presumably, 30 to 40 people never even left the canteen; as this area was jammed, the number might have been even greater. On the whole, the maximum estimate is around 350 to 400 people. If so many were actually present, it was in defiance of the possibilities of the club for the size of the space allows for the civilized housing and entertainment of not more than 150 to 200.

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Among those present there were Miklós Haraszti, Gábor Demszky (and his lady friend "Rozika"), György Krassó, Gáspár Miklós Tamás, János Kenedi – all of them the most radical representatives of the "opposition". Also present were several known members of SZETA [Foundation for Supporting the Poor] such as András Nagy, Ottília Solt and their friend János Malina. Nagy and Solt were accompanied by two children of Solt, the elder daughter and the youngest son (Máté); 2 or 3 other children (aged 5 or 6) joined them.

The presence of children especially aggressively highlights the irresponsibility of Nagy and Solt. In that environment small children naturally grew hapless and impatient in a short while. They constantly fell in the thick crowd, one of them hurt himself gravely (needed nursing), later they fought and danced on the stage in the darkened room (see below) provoking laughter from the audience. These small children were still in the club as late as a few minutes before 11 p.m.(!). Apart from these people, the audience included a few remote SZETA "sympathizers": a bearded and bespectacled man earlier seen in Nagy's apartment a few times (the one who wants to publish Orwell's *1984* in Hungarian) as well as László Algol and Péter Rácz. There was also a man addressed as "Tóth" who too is András Nagy's acquaintance and was at Nagy's several times. The number of artists and musician was significant. Apart from Galántai and Júlia Klaniczay, there were István Haász and Attila Pácser, the graphic artist. The number of artists providing works was probably much higher. László Beke and Éva Körner art historians; certain circles of the literary world, such as persons gathering around the "Lélegzet" [Breath] literary events were there too. Also present were Adám Tábor, Balázs Györe, Endre Miklóssy. János Tamás Katona, a philosopher was there too who earlier made himself known by organizing opposition activities at the Faculty of Arts. According to Adám Tábor, Endre Kukorelly, the poet, one of the editors of the "Jelenlét" [Presence] anthologies also was there.

It must, however, be emphasized that the exhibition was opened without permission. On this György Galántai and Júlia Klaniczay said the following (I was given a brief account):

It is not the club that selected the material to be exhibited but the usual jury procedure was conducted. To be the jury for the Galántai exhibition, the Club asked artists Adám Kéri and András Baranyai, who both accepted. Asking them is not hostile towards Galántai by any means as the two were in the same courses with Galántai at the Arts College; furthermore, according to Júlia Klaniczay, they had actively supported Galántai at various fora in the near past.

Kéri and Baranyay, however, having a closer look at the works got "frightened" and refused to judge them as suitable for an exhibition. In fact, the Club thus was not in the position to grant its permission. Despite this, Galántai mounted the usual glass show cases and displayed the non-painting type objects (besides paintings and graphic works several spatial objects and objects of use had been provided), requiring a minimum of thirty to forty hours of work by Galántai at home and on the site. The majority of visitors – facing a most regular "exhibition" – obviously did not even know that the exhibition was illegal. Some people whispered others the gossip that there was no permission and the whole thing would be closed down soon. According to Júlia Klaniczay, Kéri's and Baranyai's comment on the material was that what Galántai had wanted could have been somehow OK-ed, but this Hungary topic ... just would not go, this was already politics and was a tough thing. (They said this despite they had their own works exhibited.) First I will describe the "works" displayed.

Then I will turn to the events at the opening and to the various private conversations of my acquaintance.

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The first thing to be noted is that Galántai had received much fewer works and from much fewer artists, both from home and abroad, than in the case of the stamp competition. This is certainly to be explained by the political nature of the topic. Several of the competitors, while sending in a work, tried to hide the inevitable consequence of their act: notably that in one way or another, the "works" express an opinion on Hungary, a state and a society. About three-quarters of the works were absolutely apolitical, insignificant and neutral, and only revealed something about the personality and thoughts of the creators, and Hungary was but a vague "excuse". The best illustration of these little problematic works is a painting by a domestic artist showing a monk who prays in front of a fire and is clad in oriental garment in a clearing in the Himalayas.

The rising smoke winds into a spiral and lets see an unclear map of Hungary. Obviously, in this kind of painting any other country, or any other symbol could appear in the "smoke". There were, however, some gravely problematic and politically offensive and destructive "works of art" to be described here in detail.

Galántai separated domestic "pieces of art" from foreign ones and exhibited them in the so-called "small room" on the mezzanine floor. The two, undisputedly most aggressively oppositional works, were provided by the INCONNU group. One of them is the map of Hungary at the bottom of which it reads – cited nearly word by word: This map has been created to help the state security organs to better meet their task of tailing INCONNU. The creators wish them good luck!

(A word or two may be different but the meaning of the text was exactly this.) Next to it a French sign: "Où est l'inconnu?" which means "Where is the unknown?" or in a different interpretation "Where is INCONNU?" The map itself seems to find an answer (in an infantile way). The sign at the bottom of the map says that it has been created by INCONNU members Csécsei, Molnár and Bokros. They have located the towns Csécse, Molnári and Bokros in the map, marked them green and linked them as if INCONNU were there and should be looked for there. In the map the geography of Hungary had been considerably changed. The most conspicuous thing is not that regions had been pasted to different places, (for instance, the area around lake Balaton to the South of the South Plain, across the country border), but that huge lands had been "named after" the best known artists of the West of the 1970s (Cavellini, Rauschenberg etc.). As if these people owned estates in Hungary or regions and counties had been named after them. On the other side a huge sign reading "HUNGARY IS ART" [in English in the original] is running across.

INCONNU had submitted another, maybe even more aggressive "work of art". From a wood board mounted on the wall approximately 10 cm long nails stick out in a chessboard arrangement. A crumpled up paper map of Hungary, much smaller than the board, is pinned on the nails. Beneath, on a table black paint drops, imitating congealed blood, are sprayed on a heap of broken glass. The meaning of this "work of art" in a minimal interpretation might be that our homeland is humiliated and tormented. However, both the board and the nails being painted red, may bring further association (the red color being the symbol of the international workers' movement, communism or particularly the Soviet Union).

In a work by Miklós Erdély, a similarly poor "trick" is observed. In an artless drawing there is a three-strip flag (obviously the Hungarian tricolor) in black and white. In each of the strips the signs of traffic lights are drawn and marked "stop" "wait" and "go".

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(These signs are not colored either, the whole drawing is black and white (probably carbon paper was used). The sign beneath reads "villanyrendôr" [the word by word translation is "electric policeman", which in Hungarian is a popular name for traffic light]. Even viewers with little fantasy are able to make the connection between the tricolor flag as the symbol of the state with the word "policeman", and with the drawing of the traffic lights. Thus, the meaning of the work is: "Hungary is a police state". (This meaning is, however, not directly expressed, and Erdély can easily defend himself saying that the drawing means something completely different; for that particular audience, however, the above described interpretation was absolutely clear.)

Several other problematic "works of art" had been sent in by Hungarian artists. In one of the corners, for instance, four paper panels were hung from the ceiling to make the walls of a "room". People could "slip in" from under and see a series of photos inside. The photos are of a staircase in which 50 to 60 persons are walking; the majority of them are young, one teenager is grimacing and flailing his arms in high spirits. In some of the photos, however, faces of Gáspár Miklós Tamás, György Krassó and Ferenc Kôszeg can be recognized by those who know them. So it turns out that the photos of the groups had been made at some "opposition" event – maybe at an illegal "flying university" – and the series popularizes the "opposition". The photographer is István Jávör.

The English title of another series of photos pasted on a sheet is "The invasion of Hungary" [in English in the original]. On a table, the map of Hungary is formed of slices of bread spread with pork fat, and the people sitting around the table gradually "annihilate" the map by picking up the slices and eating them. In another picture a fork is stuck in an apple, which is painted in the national colors, and a knife is peeling the apple. On the top of the picture the title reads: "The situation is hopeless but not hard" – the inverse of the well-known phrase "The situation is hard but not hopeless". This may rouse associations that fall in line with the Western propaganda. (The picture obviously means that life nowadays in Hungary is not especially hard but to break away from the alliance or to fundamentally change the current social system in terms of internal politics is "hopeless". It is hardly doubtful that most viewers interpreted the knife peeling the national colored apple as the Soviet Union "exploiting" our homeland. This kind of claim was found in some of the foreign works.)

There was a strikingly large number of pictures showing Greater Hungary, and other old maps copied and pasted. Besides graphic works and paintings, there was a number of purely literary works. (Here "literary" is meant as a genre category and to assess their value is beyond my undertaking here.) Endre Kukorelly, for instance, typed a long poem over the map of Greater Hungary, while another provider sent in a four-page plan on "Draining Hungary". (This work fits in the creative direction known as "project art" [in English in the original]: the artist designs a piece of art or action but does not actually carry it out, only exhibits the plans. In this case the plan itself is absurd: the author plans to drain lake Balaton through the Sió channel, then, inspired by a farfetched idea, would keep pumping until the whole country goes down to the Black sea.) At the beginning of this mess of pathological ideas one can read that the artist was inspired by a conversation published in the 5th issue of "AL", Galántai's periodical.

Among works by native artists, the topic of food and eating featured frequently. The same is found in works by foreign artists which Galántai exhibited in the basement show-room.

That foreigners were "taken" in the direction of hunger and eating and food is due to several factors. First of all a linguistic accident: in English the word for Magyarország is Hungary, which is pronounced almost identically with "hungry" or "hunger". The sound

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of the letter *a* is hardly pronounced at all. This has been the ground for foreign puns on our homeland and Hungarians for decades. At the exhibition too, there is a foreign "picture" of an empty butcher's shop. The title: "And what about Hungary?" [in English in the original] (With the word Hungary, a little bit distorted, it says "And what about the hungry?"). Many European "artists" do know, of course, that our country has a well-developed agriculture and food industry, and there is a large food supply. Thus, in some of the pictures, next to "hunger" there are abundant piles of food, among them pepper. Similarly trivial are clippings cut out of advertisement brochures of Hungarian restaurants and bars.

However, there was an even more characteristic reaction by foreigners to the competition. In many works – obviously made independently from each other in different foreign countries – pages and entries of encyclopaedia are haunting, among them old ones (from the period of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy). There is only one explanation to that. Foreign "artists", having received the invitation to the competition, had thought that they did not know anything about Hungary. In order to start at least thinking, they applied the easiest solution: opened up an encyclopaedia. Later they copied in their pictures what they had found. A similar response is found in the work by the German Klaus Groh, though with a slightly different solution: he used the method of "brainstorming" [in English in the original] to invoke thoughts about the word "Hungary". He lists the first ideas (which, by the way, politically are not critical, for instance he has the names of Bartók and Moholy-Nagy). A Dutch artist writes: "I don't know anything about Hungary, never been there."

One can find the other extreme, too, though in a smaller number: Galántai's personal friends, who "know a lot" about Hungary, and also know people personally. A series of paintings of six death's heads, for instance features Galántai himself, then Róbert Swierkiewicz, László L. Hegedûs, and the Inconnu members.

More concretely political works in the foreign sector are very rare. There are some, however, which are illustrations of the topic of the "iron curtain" or of Hungary being "closed". In a photo sent from abroad there is a wooded area with a huge sign in the center "Border zone!" Entering is strictly forbidden!" Another "work" bears a mocking English title "I love the Hungarian border guards". Only one single work was more offensive: an Italian artist wrote in English: "I sympathize with the brave Hungarian people who have to suffer a lot from their overlords" ["overlords" given in English]. Those who speak English well may find an anti-Soviet attitude in the word "overlords". The same Italian author also mentions that one of his grandmothers was born in the territory of Hungary.

Another, more political work illustrates a claim of Western propaganda that Hungary "has moved away from the ideals of communism" and is a "half socialist and half capitalist" country. In the picture there is a Coca-Cola can with a conspicuous Cola sign – a realistic representation. In the place of the brand logo, however, there is a classical Marx portrait.

There were also some bizarre works "out of line". For instance, a foreign artist wrote that he "hated government states [government states given in English], but hated anarchist states just as much". As practically all countries on Earth have governments, what the author wants to tell us is that he does not like any of them, even if there were countries where anarchy broke out. And as if this were not enough, he adds: "furthermore I hate all varieties of this two social maladies" (i.e. government rule and anarchy). Another work sent from Brazil – probably guided by true anti-fascist and leftist views – warns: Hungarians,

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do not forget what fascism was!" (This title is written exclusively in English. An indication how educated the author was that he had misspelled *fascism* twice). In the photo mass hanging, tortured men – maybe in a concentration camp –, destroyed neighborhoods are seen as well as a portrait of Hitler. (This work, if meaning anything at all, obviously is about the Brazilian junta rather than present day Hungary. Nevertheless, Galántai put this one on the wall, too.)

Events at the opening only loosely relate to the material of the exhibition. Galántai used the occasion of the exhibition to present his collection of sound recordings. The recordings, however, could have been played at any other exhibition or performance. The place of the main presentation was the darkened main room of the club. The audience here were seated in rows as if in a movie but nothing was projected, a sound montage was played on a stereo system. The montage was made up of short sections, on average 4 or 5 minute long each. The majority of the excerpts were recordings of pop bands, which, however, were not popular and well-known bands but groups having appeared in the last 2 or 3 years with scarcely any professional musicians among them. In many of the groups literary people and artists are trying to "do music", though the result is not music but recital of texts or unarticulated howling accompanied by a few instruments. There were, however, in between the musical parts, readings of poems and prosaic excerpts, and even parts of recorded every day conversations. The invitation letter by Galántai lists all the bands as well as the authors of the literary excerpts. Among the latter there are infamous members of the "opposition" such as István Eörsi. Listed are the deceased Tibor Hajas and Tamás Szentjóby, who have "expanded" the domestic art as far as to include pathological sadism and symptoms that would require mental treatment. The sound montage itself is of a very bad recording and playing quality. Although some of the audience patiently listened to the pieces, in reality neither the "musical" nor the prosaic recordings were intelligible. The only exception was the politically absolutely uninteresting composition by a punk group ("I'll call you on the phone"). As for the rest, only snatches and fragments of sentences could be discerned. In one of the "poems" one could hear that "socialism is nice but communism is going to be even nicer because even toilet bowls will be made of gold ..." though several lines of this poem too could not be heard. (It may have been the passage by István Eörsi.) Another "account" said that the narrator for the first time in his life went in the District Council to pay taxes and the officer there makes the following statement: "That Taigetos was not such a bad thing after all." (This text did not have anything politically objectionable passage.) There was also one "lyrical" poem-like attempt in which the author relates his prison experiences – or rather a dream about a prison; in the middle of the cot there is a mirror from which not he himself but a stranger is looking at him. There were regular poems too, for instance by Ádám Tábor, but one could know it only later when Tábor himself said that it had been his work.

According to the invitation card, the sound montage included something from the CPg punk group. This is the group which has made a name for itself even in the radical "opposition" circles by writing harsh anti-state and anti-party attacks and by using an obscene language. In the montage, played by Galántai, there was a "musical" part which kept repeating "mother fucker", though it might not be the CPg. (András Nagy earlier mentioned that Péter Erdős, the director of Hanglemezgyár [Records Company] and head of the Pro Menedzser Iroda [a management agency] was called that dirty and

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obscene name for a newspaper article of his. Erdős' name, however, could not be heard in Galántai's montage.)

Galántai's comment on the montage was that the "Eszperantó" group heard is not the same as the "Eszperantó Eszpresszó" from the town of Szentendre (a fairly conventional pop band playing at avant-garde art events such as the Lajos Vajda Studio) and the abbreviation VHK stands for a band named Vágtázó Halottkémek [Galloping Coroners]. (Galántai seemed to have a special liking for this band.)

Some of the members of various punk groups came personally to the opening. My acquaintance was witness of a conversation of Galántai and a very young, 17 or 18 year-old musician in which the bad quality of the recording was complained about.

At the opening not this sound montage was the only "event". Galántai placed megaphones in the other two rooms (the "small room" on the mezzanine, and in the basement, in the room for foreign works), and also a TV set in the latter. Various materials were played there too. The material played in the small room on the mezzanine was not identical with the montage "broadcast" in the darkened main room. The former was made up of movement and mass songs. Galántai did not select the best known mass songs of the 1950s and 60s but the newer compositions of the 1970s, among them songs of the KISZ [Communist Youth Organization] and the of the workers' militia. (In most recordings there were choirs, soloists and the orchestra.) The total of the recording was longer than the montage in the main room, movement songs coming one after the other for over one hour and a half. Galántai's selection of the newest musical pieces was presumably a conscious choice. Older ones would strike this audience as outmoded, which had been mocked, disparaged by earlier performances, and sharply criticized even by official publications. The newest movement songs, however, contain a good many elements of pop music and seem to be closer to the taste of the young. For viewers at the Young Artists' Club, deeply sympathizing with the opposition, these songs seemed to be more suitable to provide a "counterpoint", to create the contrast with the works exhibited. Several of the songs caused great amusement.

During and after the events of the opening, my acquaintance had several private conversations.

He could meet Galántai and Júlia Klaniczay only briefly for they were "passed from hand to hand"; everyone seemed to want to talk to them. Apart from the issue of permission, described above, it was once again raised that my acquaintance placed some of his poems written in the 1970s in Galántai's archive (Art Pool). They agreed that my acquaintance would call Galántai in 2 or 3 weeks to set a date for a visit. (Despite the many months that have passed, Galántai received my acquaintance in a friendly way.)

A longer conversation took place between Ádám Tábor, Györe and Rácz and my acquaintance. The leader of the conversation was Györe, who talked about what he had seen in the Attila József Circle (JAK). Györe seems to plunge ever deeper in the activities of the Writers' Association and of the Circle, which is not characteristic of the rest of the member of the group "Lélegzet" [Breath]. Györe said that there were preparations conducted in the Attila József Circle for the election of a leadership. He himself had been elected member of the committee to nominate the secretary. Ákos Szilágyi was a potential candidate for secretary. (A man not known by his name joined the conversation at this point and noted that many JAK members did not trust Szilágyi, though distrust was even greater towards young poets and writers with few

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publications and less reputation than Szilágyi. Szilágyi elected, he said, might find himself in the role of the "spin": he will not be able to get the Circle accept what the Ministry wants, while demands of members will be regarded out of question by the Ministry.) It was also mentioned that at a JAK meeting – held that day or 2 or 3 days before – Gáspár Miklós Tamás was present and made a longer speech. In his speech he had not addressed JAK issues but had presented his opinion on world politics and home politics in a sharp and aggressive way. Balázs Györe said that Gáspár Tamás' speech was harmful for the cause of the Attila József Circle and had better present his views at some other forum for it was not suitable there. (The discussion here turned back to the "Mozgó Világ" [Moving World, a periodical] meeting at the law faculty of the Budapest University, at which Gáspár Tamás confronted Dezső Tóth deputy minister.) Ádám Tábor said that the last "Lélegzet" evening had been a great success and they were planning to organize another one. Also the idea of founding a literary periodical was raised again. Allegedly, members of the "Lélegzet" group had already drafted a request for permission of launching a periodical to be submitted to the authorities in the near future."

"Zoltán Pécsi"

Evaluation: "Zoltán Pécsi" code named secret agent brought reliable, and from the operative perspective valuable information on Galántai's exhibition held in the Young Artists' Club, where several works representing enemy ideas were on show.

On Galántai's invitation, enemy persons belonging to the opposition came to the opening. There were, for instance, Miklós Haraszty, Gábor Demszky, Ottilia Solt and János Kenedi etc. present.

Action: On the circumstances of the exhibition and on the material representing enemy ideas an informational report will be drafted for the upper leadership.

On the planned presentation of the exhibition material in MTV a verbal signaling will be provided to the chairperson of MTV.

Task: Task assigned to secret agent concerning György Galántai.

Budapest, February 13, 1984

Tibor Horváth, Police Captain

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**MINISTRY OF INTERIOR**

III/III-5-a-Sub-Department

\_TOP SECRET!

To: Camarada Miklós Jávör, police major  
Head of Sub-Department III/III-4-b

Local

Hereby I forward you our information from a confidential and reliable source:

"In Studió '84 one of the crews was preparing to film Galántai's exhibition. In the course of preliminary meetings, the editor in chief warned György Baló that in this case he must consult the superior organs: the Party Headquarters or the Ministry. To my

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knowledge, it was decided in these consultation meetings that no interview will be made with Galántai, but only a silent film of the exhibition will be shot. It is a common practice in Stúdió that they consider fact that there is a difference between an exhibition or theater performance or film seen by only two or three thousand people and such events being propagated to millions. The editor in chief has requested the opinion of superior organs on several occasions, or in case of a film already shot, it is shown to the Chairman or the Deputy before putting in the program. In Galántai's case the Chairman decided that the film cannot be shown in the program, though the editor in chief and György Baló had known it before that this material was problematic and they must consult their superiors before broadcasting. The crew was not frustrated at all at leaving the film out of the program as seeing the exhibition themselves they judged it was not suitable for the public."  
Budapest, 9 February 1984

Zoltán Kazai police captain  
Head of Sub-department

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**MINISTRY OF INTERIOR**

III/III-4-b-Subdepartament

TOP SECRET!

On the basis of authorized permit, since 1979 we have been holding an official inquiry under the code-name "Painter" to detect and hinder the hostile activity displayed by György Galántai, non-party painter. We processed the data obtained according to provision 4-1501/83.

György Galántai is continuing his decentralizing activity aimed at the general and cultural policy of the party by establishing still closer links with the prominent personalities of the opposition, and by copying and distributing illegal materials. Without an official permit, he maintains an archive named "Art Pool", where some part of the materials is of adversary nature. As a part of his actions, he publishes a samizdat brochure entitled "Aktuális Levél" (Actual Letter), of which 9 issues have been brought out so far.

Some articles published in these brochures mostly glorify and boost underground art, while others draw the readers' attention to the existence, activity and actions of the opposition.

For the back numbers of "Aktuális Levél" materials appropriated in the Center for Executive Training of the Ministry of Culture and Education, Meat and Corn Industry Trust as well as in the Pedagogical Library and Museum were used.

In 1984 György Galántai organized an exhibition entitled "Hungary Can Be Yours". The bulk of the materials exhibited there were of hostile content, such as a map of Hungary made by the "Inconnu" group and recommended to the state security organization as

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an aid to trail the members of the group. Many exhibits tried to prove Hungary being a police state. The official jury banned the exhibition, and Radio Free Europe dealt with the event, too.

György Galántai actively helps the hostile activity of the opposition by planning and making its propaganda materials.

Last year the painter rented a basement room at Kavics Street 3, Budapest, for a studio, which is now being reconstructed. In his opinion, here he could meet his friends and organize "any kind" of programs. To make these meetings legal, he would like to set up a "Society of Contemporary Art", and has already applied for a concession at the Ministry of Culture and Education. He wishes to avoid having to ask for a permit to organize "social programs", and tries to build into the statutes several back doors.

At György Galántai's request, the Soros Foundation of the Hungarian Academy of Arts and Sciences gave him a 240 000 Ft grant. He shall spend the sum on arranging his collection and publishing new issues of "Aktuális Levél". After a detailed account, the sum can be applied for again. The only condition of the Foundation is that Galántai should work out a conception as to the way the "materials" may go into a public collection.

The person observed went to France in Januar, 1985 with an official passport. On returning he got a "Lada" car, which had been payed for abroad. According to our latest information, a Canon type xerox machine will also be sent for him. Lately there have been considerable changes in his connections: the measures taken have had the desired effect. His cooperation with the new acquaintances is aimed at obtaining grants.

Most of his acquaintances are among the ranks of the Hungarian opposition as well as persons on the periphery. He also recommends his friends working as typographers to others.

Our work has had the following effects:

We have prolonged the technical measures No 3/a, which has been very useful, because we were informed of his plans, ideas and illegal activity in time.

We investigated his connections and made a proposal for the study of two persons.

We have drawn two social delegates (those under the code-names "Designer" and "Viktor") into the tracking work successfully. We have enlarged the intelligence activity of those under the code-names "Zoltán Pécsi" and "Kalocsai". Through the network, we learnt of his connections with several personalities of the opposition, and the most important sides of his illegal copying as well as distributing activity.

We successfully co-operated with the III/III-5 and III/III-2 departments of the Ministry of the Interior, and Budapest Police Office and the III/III department of Szolnok county.

György Galántai's hostile activity was evaluated continuously, and the leadership was also informed of it in due time, and the illegal publications were also sent to it.

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To prevent "Painter" from developing his connections with the hostile West, we suggested keeping back 95 propaganda items and several materials of subversive content from abroad. Sometimes we proposed to detain the materials.

We also concentrated our attention to eliminating the copying possibilities. Therefore we warned by word of mouth the following persons:

1. the director of the Executive Training of the Ministry of Culture and Education,
2. the general director of the Pedagogical Library and Museum, and
3. the head manager of the Meat and Corn Industry Trust.

As a result of our information, the printing possibilities at the places named above were put an end to.

Despite the measures taken by us, "Painter's" hostile activity grew and became multifold. It can be felt that he tries to conspire in his connections.

He heartily works on the "Actual letter" and gets considerable help from his wife, Júlia Klaniczay. His connections with the opposition are growing, and he does his best to assist the fulfilment of its plans and ideas.

On the whole, it can be stated that the hostile activity of the person observed can be counted on in the future, thus the confidential investigation on the basis of the 4-1501/83 provision of the Ministry of the Interior needs to be conducted in the future as well.

We take care that the intelligence possibilities shall expand and we do our best to carefully choose and study the persons to be recruited.

We will consider the possibility of "Painter's" control through operative technical measures 3/e and make a proposal to inbuild the measures in case of need.

The point now is to prevent "Painter" from displaying oppositional activity. We will draw our attention to detecting and considerably reducing copying possibilities. The printing houses detected will be orally admonished.

Budapest, 27th March, 1985

Agreed:

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## **THE CHAPEL STUDIO OF GYÖRGY GALÁNTAI**

### **BALATONBOGLÁR 1970-1973**

György Galántai's rental of a funeral chapel at the small village of Balatonboglár 1969-1973 as a site for summer exhibitions, performances and other art activities was a central project of the Hungarian neo-avant-garde.

The Chapel Studio in Balatonboglár between 1970 and 1973 functioned as the island of freedom in the midst of the police state. The conceptual art works, happenings, films, theater shows, visual poetry and sound poetry created or brought there reflected

awareness of the wider international art language and art scene of the era and were, at the same time, politicized through and through in a specific way that differed from the political contents and overtones of the Western art of the same period.

By 1972 the picturesque cemetery hill and the chapel-turned-into-studio had turned into a permanent art festival of a uniquely liberated and creative atmosphere where a number of site-specific works were created and genres that had been unknown in Hungary before appeared. The workshop also inspired international projects.

The Balatonboglár Chapel Studio was a unique experience that reflected the struggle of the artists for the free artistic expression in the Kádár era as well as the manipulations of the officialdom to curb and ultimately suppress these activities. The documents of the involvement of ministerial departments as well as the secret service in the scrutiny and the final ban of the workshop reveal the anatomy of bureaucratized state-socialism and its cultural institutions in action.

Documents of the activities at this site were published in a volume edited by Júlia Klaniczay and Edit Sasvári (*Törvénytelen Avantgárd*, or *Illegal Avant-Garde*, Budapest, 2003) in Hungarian

Éva Forgács, 2008

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## **MEETING OF CHECK, SLOVAKIAN AND HUNGARIAN ARTISTS**

August 26–27, 1972

(organized by László Beke)

*László Beke:* I somehow happened to come across an English language periodical with a special issue on Czechoslovakia. It featured a fascinating photo of the unified troops, which had just marched into Czechoslovakia, lining up to play a game of “tug-of-war”, immediately before or after occupying a village.

Thus, I organised a tableau vivant to this effect in Balatonboglár.

The whole thing was put together in a very naïve manner, of course: instead of using a rope, Hungarian and Czechoslovakian artists, separated into two groups, played tug-of-war with the issue of the aforementioned periodical. The story is a bit forced, as I suddenly realised that this was not only a political allusion but also, in some way, the magical annihilation of a photograph, while also being a scenario of a picture within a picture. It was similar to composing a tableau vivant to reconstruct an event for a historical painting. I had a great time coming up with this idea and, all in all, it is good that we did this.

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Interview with László Beke, 1998 published in: *Törvénytelen avantgárd... [Illegal Avant-garde...]*, Artpool–Balassi, 2003 (ed. by Julia Klaniczay and Edit Sasvári)

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## THE MAILED ART OF RAY JOHNSON

by Clive Philpot

[...]

Ray Johnson's practice, as expressed in his mail art – the idea of the one-to-one communication; the irrelevance of what is physically original; the collaboration; the gift; the casting of art into the mailstream – adds up to a view of art that is not only a true alternative to most current art practices but implicitly questions the normal machinery of the Western art world. In fact, such an attitude to art may have more in common with the practices of other nonliterate cultures except for his dependence upon friendly postal workers as art handlers, and on copying technology.

[...]

In spite of the unusual, utterly personal character of his art and his methods and his seminal role in mail art, Ray Johnson can be seen to have ties to POP art, to early conceptual and performance art, as well as to Fluxus and other manifestations. When the history of the recent past is rewritten, when the revolutionary changes in art in the '50s and '60s are better defined, and when there is a more perceptive articulation of elements that are common in the work of George Brecht, Marcel Broodthaers, Robert Filliou, Allan Kaprow, Yves Klein, Sol LeWitt, George Maciunas, Piero Manzoni, Seth Siegelaub, Ben Vautier, and Lawrence Weiner, Ray Johnson will be an essential additional figure in this reassessment. [...]

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From: Clive PHILLPOT: *The Mailed Art of Ray Johnson*, in: *Eternal Network. A Mail Art Anthology* (Ed. Chuck Welch, University of Calgary Press, Canada, 1995)

[[artpool.hu/Ray/Publications/Phillpot.html](http://artpool.hu/Ray/Publications/Phillpot.html)]

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## THE BUDAPEST STORY OF RAY JOHNSON (excerpt)

György Galántai

It was in July of 1979, during one of Artpool's Art-Tour journeys in Italy, that we got RAY JOHNSON's mail address from Romano Peli in Parma. Peli had a serious mail art archive and he organized exhibitions. He was just preparing the "RAY JOHNSON NOTHING" exhibition. It was then that we met Cavellini for the first time, and agreed to do an exhibition in Budapest with him the following year. It was easy to deal with Cavellini because he responded immediately to everything, but we didn't get any replies to our letters to Ray Johnson.

In 1982, the American artist, Ginny Lloyd, who knew Johnson personally, was visiting Artpool and found it strange that Ray hadn't answered us. I then decided to make one last try with a postcard action: I made twenty postcard-collages and one after the other, I posted them in twenty days.

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The answer arrived soon after, the first "send to" letter with drawings, demanding that we send it to Wally Darnell in Saudi Arabia. The drawing or the letter? The demand wasn't clear to me, so I decided not to passively deliver the letter, instead I wished to become

a part of the action, so I photocopied the drawing. There were four numbered Fan Club stamps on the drawing, with four characteristic "bunnies", I thought I should rearrange them, in this way, allowing further additions.

A new decision was next: For the upcoming "ARTPOOL'S RAY JOHNSON SPACE", I would invent a background institution, the "BUDA RAY UNIVERSITY" (modeled on the Buddha University).

The modified drawing was multiplied and then sent to all of Artpool's mail connections, then back to Ray Johnson.

October 13, 1982 – He posted the second drawing with the "add to" stamp on it., on November 3, 1982 – he posted the third drawing.

September 28, 1983 – the fourth drawing's inscription "Thank you for yaur" refers to the former letter (after nine months), and continues with "send to Peter Below", and the drawing: a duck in a cloud with the inscription DUCK CLOSE and with a ball-point pen OH BOYS ALWAYS THE SAME STYLE.

The BUDA RAY UNIVERSITY gained more and more participants through the continuous posting of the first four letters. The University published a book in 1985 that contained a selection of the letters that had been received up to that time.

February 13, 1986 – Ray posted the fifth drawing "BILL de KOONING'S BICYCLE SEAT" which arrived enclosed with a catalog of the Nassau Museum, in exchange for the Ray Johnson Artpool Book.

The fifth drawing was the most successful, 272 answers arrived in a short time. These were too many answers for the dimension of a book, so that we had to use another form of publication: the exhibition.

The ARTPOOL'S RAY JOHNSON SPACE with contributions from 316 artists from all over the world was shown between 1986 and 1993 14 times in 8 different countries, as part of events or sometimes, as independent programs.

[[artpool.hu/Ray/RJ\\_history.html](http://artpool.hu/Ray/RJ_history.html)]

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## REMEMBRANCE OF A MESSAGE

György Galántai

In 1976, I did, and then put on exhibit, a series of silkscreens based on a self-portrait taken with a photo automat. The series meant to investigate the questions of personality, existence and the ego.

I asked Miklós Erdély to open the exhibition. He told me to get a copy of the International Code of Signals. At the exhibit, Erdély read out the text explaining a particular code, while I signalled the code with flags. At the same time, two other friends of ours tried to strike a fire for the purpose of sending smoke signals.

Miklós Erdély died in 1986.

Miklós Erdély was not just a colleague of mine, my teacher and my friend, but also one of the greatest figures of Hungarian art. It was so that his spirit might live on that I've prepared this memorial, which develops the theme of the 1976 opening.

I've used parts of a lecture of his by way of introduction: they provide a program that is still relevant today. (CHARACTERISTICS OF THE POST-NEO-AVANTGARD ATTITUDE)

Miklós Erdély

### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE POST-NEO-AVANTGARD ATTITUDE

1. One must recognize one's responsibility for one's life and fate, and insist on this responsibility at all cost.
  2. This responsibility extends to everything that touches on one's life either directly or indirectly.
  3. Consequently, there's nothing to which one's responsibility does not extend.
  4. One must dare to notice whatever is bad, mistaken, painful, dangerous or senseless, however widely accepted and unalterable that situation or thing might seem.
  5. One must dare to suggest even the most unrealistic, the most unrealizable of alternatives.
  6. One must be able to picture these options as realizable.
  7. One must consider low-probability alternatives that promise great benefits every bit as seriously as high-probability alternatives that promise few advantages.
  8. One must do without delay whatever one can, given the limited means at one's disposal.
  9. One must refrain from every form of organized or institutionalized activity.
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## INTERNATIONAL CODE OF SIGNALS (extractos)

F D MY POSITION IS INDICATED BY VISUAL OR SOUND SIGNALS  
E W MY POSITION IS ASCERTAINED BY ASTROLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS  
E Y I AM CONFIDENT AS TO MY POSITION  
Z S MY VESSEL IS "HEALTHY" AND I REQUEST FREE PRATIQUE  
P C I HAVE DESTROYED THE DRIFTING MINE/S/  
N E YOU SHOULD PROCEED WITH GREAT CAUTION: THERE IS A BOOM ACROSS  
N F YOU ARE RUNNING INTO DANGER: THERE IS A RADIATION HAZARD  
N G YOU ARE IN DANGEROUS POSITION  
C G I WILL STAND BY TO ASSIST YOU /OR VESSEL INDICATED/  
C L I OFFERED ASSISTANCE BUT IT WAS DECLINED  
O R I HAVE STRUCK A MINE  
O Y FAIRWAY IS MINED  
P B YOU SHOULD KEEP CLEAR OF ME: I AM EXPLOIDING A FLOATING MINE  
V F YOU SHOULD HOIST YOUR IDENTITY SIGNAL  
Z F MY LAST SIGNAL WAS INCORRECT. I WILL REPEAT IT CORRECTLY  
M S MY VESSEL IS A DANGEROUS SOURCE OF RADIATION  
J N I MUST BEACH THE VESSEL  
J H I AM AGROUND, I AM NOT IN DANGER  
H L I AM STILL LOOKING FOR SURVIVORS  
F Z DO YOU WANT ME TO CONTINUE TO SEARCH?  
M Y IT IS DANGEROUS TO REMAIN IN PRESENT POSITION  
J Y LEAK CAN BE CONTROLLED IF IT DOES NOT GET WORSE  
G U IT IS NOT SAFE TO FIRE A ROCKET  
G V I HAVE NOT A LINE-THROWING APPARATUS  
D U I AM ADRIFT  
U S NOTHING CAN BE DONE UNTIL VISIBILITY IMPROVES  
E D YOUR DISTRESS SIGNALS ARE UNDERSTOOD  
G Z ALL PERSONS SAVED  
R R LIGHTS WILL BE SHOWN OR FLAG WAVED AT THE BEST LANDING PLACE  
U W THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR COOPERATION. I WISH YOU A PLEASANT VOYAGE

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