

Are You Glad If You Can Ask Something?



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LÁ ART MUSEUM

Thanks to:

Eggert Pétursson

Endre Tót

Géza Perneczky

Ingólfur Arnarsson

Kristján Guðmundsson

Kees Visser

Rúri

Sigurður Guðmundsson

László Százados

The Living Art Museum, Reykjavík

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When Zsóka Leposa, the art historian who works at the LÁ Art Museum, told me about her doctoral research; it immediately piqued my interest to know more, as this part of Icelandic art history had passed me by. After hearing more about this and gaining insight into this time in our art history, I asked her if it was not time to put this together in an exhibition. She agreed and the preparation began. Zsóka had researched this time for many years, interviewed some of the surviving artists involved, researched the collection of the Living Art Museum and now had to dive even deeper and she got the curator László Százados to join her who started researching in Hungary. Zsóka went on a research trip to Germany to meet the surviving Hungarian artists and interviewed them and also met up with the artists who were involved with this exchange.

“We hope that with this exhibition we will arouse even more interest in this part of history, when the freedom of writing, freedom of speech and freedom of movement were severely restricted.”

However, we did not expect the situation in Europe to be as it is now when we started planning this exhibition, that there would be another war and that all talk of East and West would intensify. The war in Ukraine is on the doorstep of Hungary and is causing a great deal of anxiety to the people there, as it is to people all over the world.

I would like to thank those who made this exhibition possible, the artists first and foremost, other researchers, art museums, galleries and collectors who have lent works to the exhibition, and I would like to personally thank Zsóka Leposa and László Százados for their thorough research and interesting exhibition.

Kristín Scheving
Director of LÁ Art Musum

NETWORKING THE NORTH ■ by Zsóka Leposa

“I am glad if I can ask something because I often can’t ask anybody anything. Then after a while, I want more and more to ask something at last [...].”

This is one of the works from the well-known series *½ Dozen Berliner Gladness Postcards* by Hungarian artist Endre Tót (PIC 1), preserved in the collection of the Living Art Museum in Reykjavík. In May 1977, Tót was awarded a scholarship from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) to travel to West Berlin. However, his attempts to secure a passport were consistently denied, as was generally the case when intellectuals attempted to leave Hungary in this period. With the support of international contacts, a foreign media campaign was initiated on his behalf. Within a year, the authorities gave in and Tót was allowed to travel. He was banned from returning to Hungary for five years though, and his apartment was confiscated by the state. “The postcard plays with the state of the creative crisis of the Hungarian – being in exile in West Berlin, achieving a temporary break from the relentlessness of the late socialist compromises. It also reflects on the dark side of emigration: loneliness, a craving for human contact, and professional networks”.¹

This essay will discuss the methods and possibilities that avant-garde artists from the Eastern Bloc found to connect to

the Western art world in the seventies, when communication was hectically censored, and travelling was strictly limited. It will also shed light on the period in the late sixties and the seventies when the Icelandic art scene was opening to Fluxus and mail art due to the widespread networking by the artists and artist-run galleries such as SÚM and Gallery Suðurgata 7. This two-sided attempt to connect resulted in lively correspondence and a few exhibitions by Hungarian artists where they sent works and instructions via post but could not be present in person.

However, the immaterial formats, such as stamps, postcards, questionnaires, etc., preferred by Fluxus and conceptual art were ideal for mail art exhibitions. In the Eastern Bloc, nevertheless, mail art became not only the means for initiating dialogues but also for finding out about developments abroad. During the socialist regime in Hungary at the time, uncensored small-format text works were often ironic answers to censorship, isolation, and suppression. We will see the subtle ways Hungarian artists had to choose to meet double artistic expectations: To be current and international in the Western art world on one hand while preserving their self and artistic identity on the other.

Ways to connect

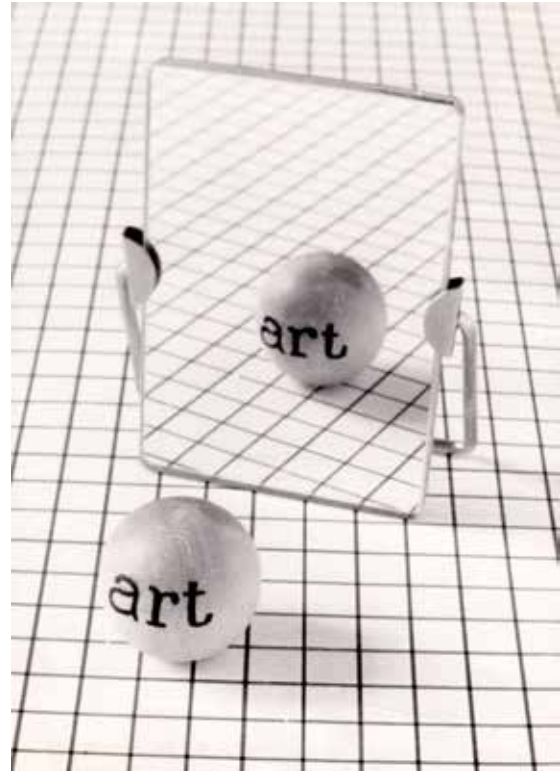
In the Eastern Bloc, Hungary was not as isolated as previously supposed. As of 1961, the Hungarian authorities were giving citizens permission to travel to Socialist countries, including Poland, which seemed like America from the Hungarian per-

¹ See: Klara Kemp-Welch, *Antipolitics in Central European Art 1956–1989. Reticence as Dissidence under Post-Totalitarian Rule* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2014; 2016) p. 181.



PIC 1: Endre Tót: *½ Dozen Berliner Gladness Postcards* (1973–1978), EDITION HERTA, Berlin 1979
From the collection of the Living Art Museum

PIC 2: Géza Perneczky: *Anti-Reflection*, 1971
Published in: Klaus Groh [ed], *Aktuelle Kunst in Osteuropa*, 1972



spective. “As the Hungarian artist Gábor Altorjay recalls, ‘With its liberal cultural policy, the country was our Mecca; we learned Polish, there was jazz; and Wajda, Polański, Gombrowicz, and Mrožek were shining examples. In 1965, we saw Fluxus (Cornelius Cardew) for the first time there at a night concert at the Warsaw Autumn, without knowing that it was Fluxus’.”²

Citizens could apply to travel to the East through the competent authorities, but refusal was justified without any explanation. As for travelling to the West, Endre Tót recalls, “We could spend thirty days in the West in every three years, but not always.” Anyone who got permission to travel to the West could expect to be observed in the future. A maximum of 70 USD could be applied for with a valid passport. If a larger amount was found on someone’s property, it was considered a crime. The amount of currency purchased was recorded on the currency chart attached to the passport.

When travelling options were limited, carefully compiled lists of global addresses became the means of initiating dialogues and friendships and finding out about developments abroad.³ Tót recalls that censorship of the mail was erratic, at best, “My letters were scarcely controlled, or not at all, and because of that, I could communicate very well with the Western world.” Periodicals, artists’ books, postcards, stamps, and other low-tech reproductions circulated through the ever-expanding networks.

At the end of the sixties, there was also increased interest in Western Europe about the artistic movements from the other side of the Iron Curtain. An important approach had been made by (West) German scholar and author Klaus Groh, who founded the First International Agency for Conceptual Art in Oldenburg. Petr Štembera, a Czech conceptual artist, took the initiative to collect works of concept, body, land and action art from Eastern Europe; and Klaus Groh published them in the book *Aktuelle Kunst in Osteuropa* [Current Art in Eastern Europe] a few years later, in 1972.⁴ (PIC 2) The publication represented artists in alphabetical order from the emerging neo-avant-garde art scene in Yugoslavia, Poland, the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Hungary. A wide range of conceptual art, Fluxus, mail art, and experimental film from Eastern Europe became available to Western audiences for the first time. The publica-

² Ibid. p. 105.

³ See more: Klara Kemp-Welch and Cristina Freire (eds), ‘Artists’ Networks in Eastern Europe and Latin America’, *ARTMargins* #2 [June-October 2012] p. 3.

⁴ Klaus Groh [ed], *Aktuelle Kunst in Osteuropa – ČSSR, Jugoslawien, Polen, Rumänien, UdSSR, Ungarn* (Köln: DuMont Schauberg, 1972).

PIC. 3-4: Géza Perneczky: *Yes-No*.
Dialectical pendulum

Published in: *SÚM á Listahátið í Reykjavík 1972*. Photos from the collection of the Living Art Museum



tion was very well received and was circulated among galleries and artists in the West. It disappeared though from the shelves of the Western bookstores in a short time because the publishing house – yielding under pressure of the Eastern countries – had to take the “anthology of provocative tone” back from the book market. By that time, however, artists and galleries had found contact and were in intense correspondence already.⁵

The publication and Klaus Groh himself played an important role in the first steps to connect Hungarian and Icelandic artists. It was him who invited the Hungarian Géza Perneczky, who already lived in West Germany at that time, to the international SÚM exhibition, held at the Reykjavík Art Festival in 1972:

I invite you on behalf of gallery SUM [reykjavik, vats-stig 3 B / box 110], to participate in the international art festival. Please send it very quickly (by April 1st) to: Sigurður Guðmundsson, 2e helmersstraat 35/I, AMSTERDAM / holland – – – for the catalogue, 2 pages in format 20.5 × 27.5 cm. You can send whatever you want to, you just have to pay attention to the format [offset printing].⁶

Organizers of the SÚM exhibition used what was a common method at that time to establish a low-budget exhibition with a catalogue by asking the participants to send in works in A4 format, which could be exhibited and reproduced in the cata-

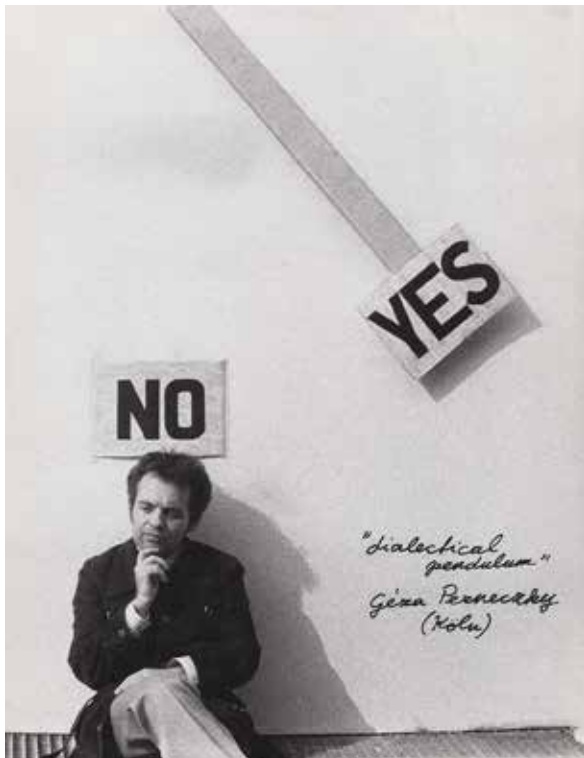
logue. The printed catalogue shows 58 participants and captures an interesting snapshot of conceptual approaches from Iceland and worldwide.⁷ Worldwide means mostly Western Europe (Germany, the Netherlands, and the USA) but also artists from the other side of the Iron Curtain were represented in the show (probably for the first time in Iceland): Petr Štembera from Czechoslovakia; four Hungarians: Imre Bak and Gábor Attalai from Budapest, and two artists already in emigration: above mentioned Géza Perneczky from Cologne and Janos Urban from Switzerland; Serbian poet and artist Miroslav Todorović from Yugoslavia. Klaus Groh himself took part with two sheets. All the original works on paper, sent for the exhibition, are kept in the archives of the Living Art Museum. (PIC 3-4, 5-6)

This format and technique perfectly fit the immaterial genre of conceptual art. In Hungary, the beginning of conceptual art occurred in 1971 when art historian László Beke sent a proposal to 28 Hungarian artists to create an imaginative exhibition under the title *Imagination*. In the proposal he says “It is possible to participate with any kind of and any number of artistic comments [...] the only condition is that the work should be described in such a way that we are able to get an idea of it [...]”

⁵ Mónika Zombori, Perneczky Géza, és a konceptuális művészet hetvenes évek eleji invázió-hulláma, in: Zsuzsanna Benkő (ed), *Perneczky Géza: Yes – No művészet* (Budapest: kArton Karikatúra és Képregény Múzeum Alapítvány, 2012) p. 19.

⁶ Letter written in German from Klaus Groh to Géza Perneczky, 14.02.1972 from the unpublished correspondence of the artist. See: A KÖLN – BUDAPEST KONCEPT. Bizalmas levéltári anyag az 1971–1972–1973-as esztendő magyarországi és nemzetközi Koncept Art mozgalmának a tudományos kutatásához, p. 131. Courtesy of Géza Perneczky.

⁷ Hreinn Friðfinnsson, Jón Gunnar Árnason, Magnús Pálsson, Kristján Guðmundsson, Sigurður Guðmundsson, Douwe Jan Bakker (eds), *SÚM á Listahátið í Reykjavík, 1972 4. júní / 21. júlí* [Reykjavík, 1972].



Consequently: the WORK = the DOCUMENTATION OF THE IMAGINATION. The materials submitted will probably be placed in a regular sized folder.”⁸ – And indeed, he collected and preserved the submitted works (most of them in A4 format), which were not available for viewing by a wide audience for the next forty years.⁹

Artists’ strategies: Humour, doublespeak, and hacking symbols

In order to better understand the ways of self-representation of artists from the Eastern Bloc, we need a deeper insight in the particularities of life in Central Europe at the time. From the early seventies on, a new form of resistance emerged in East-Central Europe. As Klara Kemp-Welch states in her book, the aim of the opposition after 1968 was to democratize society rather than the state. She quotes Czechoslovak poet Ivan Martin Jirous: “The goal of our underground is to create a second culture, a culture completely independent from all official communication media [...] put out by the establishment. It is to be a culture that does not have as its goal the destruction of the establishment, because by attempting this, it would – in effect



PIC. 5-6: Gábor Attalai: *When a man cannot get and cannot give informations (selfaction)* 1971

Published in: SÚM á Listahátið í Reykjavík 1972. Photos from the collection of the Living Art Museum

– mean that we would fall into the trap of playing their game.” And indeed, visual artists discussed below, albeit to different degrees and in different ways, were also ‘political’ because they did not ‘play politics’ and they insisted that their work was not ‘political’, as such.¹⁰

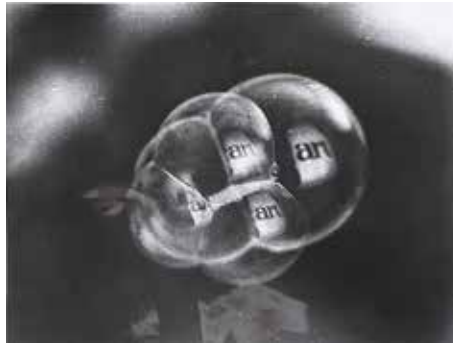
In Hungary in the seventies, censorship in the field of fine arts did not work in transparent ways. Every exhibition in the country had to be approved by law before the opening. A committee checked the works to be exhibited and could withdraw any of them or shut down the whole exhibition. However, authorities never referred to political reasons but usually they used formal terms. Meanwhile, doublespeak became general language in works of art as well. Artists played with colours, hidden or not so hidden political symbols and used subtle hints to historical events that everyone understood at the time but was difficult to point out by party authorities. “The spirit and practice of doublespeak permeated Hungarian society in countless ways: the country’s leadership communicated different things in domestic and foreign policy. The economy gradually transitioned from a Stalinist planned economy to a constantly changing ‘liberalized’ mixed economy, which could never be justified by the regime, but it nevertheless expected society’s tacit agreement. People spoke very differently in private, in the media, in literature and in the theatre, and a method of ‘reading between the lines’ came to be established, whereby certain signs in the text could be deciphered in a number of contradictory ways.”¹¹

⁸ Dóra Hegyi, Zsuzsa László, Eszter Szakács (eds), *IMAGINATION/IDEA: The Beginning of Hungarian Conceptual Art. The László Beke Collection 1971* (Budapest: tranzit.hu, 2014) p. BEKE [1].

⁹ For afterlife, influence, political and institutional background of the collection, bibliography, and much more, see: Dóra Hegyi, Zsuzsa László, Zsóka Leposa, Enikő Róka (eds), *1971: Parallel Non-Synchronism. A joint project of the Budapest History Museum, Kiscell Museum – Municipal Gallery and tranzit.hu* (being published in 2022).

¹⁰ Klara Kemp-Welch, *Antipolitics* 2016, p. 2–4.

¹¹ Edit Sasvári, *Autonomy and Doublespeak: Art in Hungary in the 1960s and 1970s*, in Edit Sasvári, Sándor Hornyik, Hedvig Turai (eds), *Art in Hungary 1956–1980: Doublespeak and Beyond* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2018) p. 17.



PIC. 7-8-9: Géza Perneczky: *Art Bubble* [1-2-3], 1972
Ludwig Museum – Museum of Contemporary Art,
Budapest

For Hungarian audiences, it was obvious how to read between the lines, but in shows abroad the double meaning of the artworks and most of the political hints remain hidden. Exhibitions only became successful if the artists could heave up their art practices to an international level.

Yes-No strategies in In-Out Center Amsterdam

In-Out Center was the first independent artist-run gallery in Amsterdam. In 1972, Michel Cardena rented the main floor of a small canal house in downtown Amsterdam and invited eight fellow artists to collaborate on an independent art centre that worked until 1974. Nine artists, coming from the Netherlands, Latin America, and Iceland, “offered a platform for everything that was new at the time: performances, video art, visual poetry, audio art, conceptual art and artist books.”¹² Michel Cardena, Ulises Carrión, Raul Marroquin, Hreinn Friðfinnsson, Sigurður Guðmundsson, Kristján Guðmundsson, Hetty Huisman, Pieter Laurens Mol and Gerrit Jan de Rook invited artists to exhibit, that created a very diverse artistic programme.

In 1973, when Géza Perneczky had an exhibition in the In-Out Center in Amsterdam, Sigurður and Kristján Guðmundsson had already had extensive experience running artists' galleries. Kristján founded Gallery Signal in his home in Amsterdam in 1971. The first three exhibitions were held there and then the gallery moved to Hreinn Friðfinnsson's place in Amsterdam. In 1972, they became organizers of In-Out-Center, with the Mexican

poet and conceptual artist Ulises Carrión. Perneczky and Ulises were friends and he got to know the Guðmundsson brothers in Amsterdam. In 1973 they invited him for a solo exhibition in the In-Out Center.

Géza Perneczky (born in 1936) emigrated to West Germany in 1970 in a rather unusual way. He had lived in Budapest and was art critic of the well-known weekly magazine *Élet és Irodalom* (Life and Literature). However, his writings drew more and more political attention and caused trouble in the weekly editorial meetings of the party that were responsible for political content in newspapers. So, when Perneczky had gotten an invitation to West Germany to a conference on art education, his boss let him know in a friendly manner that “those in the upper circles would not be angry at all if he would not come home from this trip”.¹³ And he also assured him that his family would not have any trouble after his emigration (that was often the case). And indeed, after the conference, Perneczky went to a fellow Hungarian sculptor, Lajos Barta, who lived in Cologne, settled down in the city and has lived there ever since.

Living abroad alone and completely cut off from his old ties, correspondence with family, friends and fellow artists now meant the whole world to Perneczky. When settled down in Cologne, he continued with his experiments in conceptual art. “The word art was the straw I clung to. I have tried to capture the concept of ‘art’ – ‘no art’ in every possible form. The starting point was simply the word itself, or its label or tabular form.”¹⁴ In his series

¹² For a very thorough online archive and history of the gallery, see: <https://inoutcenterarchives.nl/>, curators: Tineke Reijnders and Corinne Groot. I would like to express my special thanks to Corinne for all her help she provided in my research.

¹³ Géza Perneczky, *Egy disszidálás története I-II*, *Litera* 29.12.2017, <https://litera.hu/irodalom/publicisztika/perneczky-geza-egy-disszidalas-tortenete.html>

¹⁴ Mónika Zombori, *Perneczky 2012*, p. 15.



PIC 10: Installation of Géza Pernecky's solo show in In-Out Center, Amsterdam, 1973

Courtesy of In-Out Center Archives, Amsterdam

Art Bubbles, he developed this idea to a sophisticated and ironic level: he put the word 'art' in front of the window, so it reflected on the soap bubbles he blew. Pernecky's humorous and lifelike description of setting up the show and the opening in In-Out Center can be read in the catalogue. (PIC 7-8-9, 10-11)

Red-y made in the Netherlands and in the Icelandic lava field

One of the artistic ways used by Hungarian artists was the hacking of objects and symbols. "The goal was to infiltrate enemy territory: to take possession of symbols, to ironically re- and misinterpret them, and to sabotage. Gábor Attalai used red – the colour of the soviet flag and general symbol of Communism – to make things uniform and monochrome: Photos, objects, landscapes, and the artist [Marcel Duchamp] serving as the model for the pun – ready-made->red-y made."¹⁵ (PIC 12) The Duchampian ready-made became red-y made in the Eastern Bloc. At-

talai himself said: "Here everything was red – you went out on 1 May, and no matter where you went, everywhere everything was red, red, red."¹⁶ This pun and the ironic hint of overusing the colour red was obvious: "Everyone sensed irony at that time; [...] yet the police were unable to accuse him of subversive activity." – stated art historian László Beke by looking back at the art of seventies in Hungary.

Attalai extended the ready-made concept by Marcel Duchamp. For him, 'reality' in itself is ready-made: the whole world can be seen as a repertoire of ready-mades.¹⁷ This includes the elements of nature or the objects of the civilizational environment. For Attalai, ready-made was a tool for re-evaluating the existing world. The easiest way to do this was to take a photo and differentiate it from reality with the red-coloured interventions. Sometimes he used a natural element as a ready-made illustration. By painting it red, he isolated it from its surroundings (like the rocks in the Icelandic lava field or the one column in

¹⁵ László Százados, Gábor Attalai, in *Dada and Surrealism: Rearranged Reality* (Budapest: Hungarian National Gallery, 2014).

¹⁶ Dávid Fehér, TRANSFER IDEAS: Notes to the conceptual works of Gábor Attalai, in *ATTALAI GÁBOR: Konceptuális művek / Conceptual Works 1969-85* (Budapest: Vintage Galéria, 2013) p. 16.

¹⁷ See: Ágnes Gyetvai, Attalai Gábor: *Red-y made az egész világ*, Művészet Évkönyv, 1978, p. 235-237.



PIC 12: Gábor Attalai: *Red-y made series/59*, 1974

Museum of Fine Arts – Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

PIC 11: Opening day of Géza Perneczky's solo show in In-Out Center, Amsterdam, 1973 (in the background Kristján Guðmundsson and Krisztina de Châtel)

Courtesy of In-Out Center Archives, Amsterdam and Géza Perneczky

front of Galerie Lóa in Haarlem) and turned it into a ready-made illustration of itself.

In Haarlem, in the Netherlands, Kees Visser, Rúrí, and Helgi Friðjónsson founded Galerie Lóa in 1976. They might have come across names of Eastern European artists in Amsterdam through Ulises Carrión, the bookstore Bookie Wookie, and different artists' magazines. They invited Gábor Attalai to have a solo show in 1977. As the artist was not able to go to Haarlem in person, they managed the whole show via post through lively correspondence, which remains in the archives of the Living Art Museum. Attalai, remaining true to his origins and a well-worked-out brand by 1977, planned a red-y made exhibition at Galerie Lóa. He asked Rúrí to take photos of the environment and to send him the developed pictures. He made some interventions on the photos with red paint and sent them back with his wishes regarding the design of the invitation card and the poster. He also asked Rúrí to paint some of the objects outside red (part of the street and even one of the columns), which had to be discussed with the neighbours. He also designed red arrows to be placed inside the traffic signs surrounding the gallery, pointing in the opposite direction. Attalai had a complete exhibition with his red-y made objects exhibited inside and the artistic interventions outside. (PIC 13-16)

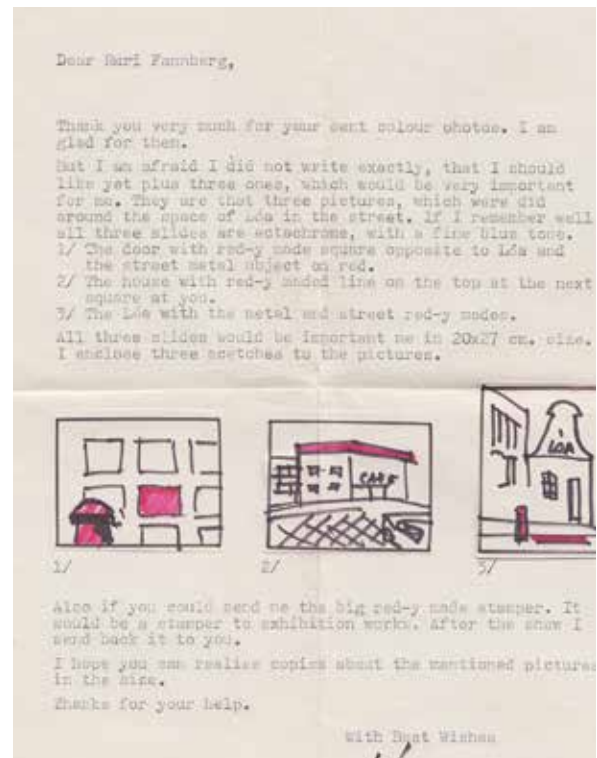
A year later, in 1978, Attalai was invited to Iceland for the second time for a solo show, this time in Gallery Suðurgata 7. The gallery began operating in 1976, but in the first year, they mainly

worked on the house. Eggert Pétursson and Ingólfur Arnarsson worked there as students of Magnús Pálsson, who was teaching at Myndlistaskólinn at that time. At the beginning of 1978, Magnús Pálsson invited Robert Filliou to the school, who had great influence with his theory of the "eternal network" and a wide connection with artists worldwide. He gave a list of foreign artists to Eggert and Ingólfur and they started writing letters to artists, offering them place and possibility for exhibitions. Gábor Attalai responded (among many others) and they started creating a project with a very similar concept to the one in Galerie Lóa. Via post because the artist did not have the chance to take the journey from Budapest to Iceland. Attalai asked the young artists to take photos of Reykjavík's streets and of the gallery building and to send him the developed photos, which he sent back with his red interventions. These 'propositions', the developed photos in A3 format, carefully overtaped with red tape or painted red with lacquer, are kept in a *RED-Y MADE book* in the collection of the National Gallery of Iceland.¹⁸ He also gave instructions for painting the stair, the door and the window frames in the gallery red, how to install the photos, how to produce rubber stamps with the red-y made inscriptions, and how to design the invitations. As an extra feature, he asked Eggert and Ingólfur to paint rocks in the lava red. On a Sunday trip, they went with the car of Hannes Lárusson and looked for the exact rocks in four locations to make the Hungarian artist's project complete. (PIC 17-18)

¹⁸ Gábor Attalai: *RED-Y MADE book*, A3, 1978, National Gallery of Iceland, Inv. Nr.: LI-4135.



PIC. 13: Gábor Attalai's letter to Rúri Fannberg, 7 April 1978
From the archive of the Living Art Museum



For his show in Suðurgata 7, Attalai added an extra twist, including the human body, performance, and illustration in the ready-made world. As Rúri lived in Iceland at that time, he asked her to send him seven copies of her portrait. Attalai sent the copies back with different red lines on her portraits. During the Suðurgata exhibition, Rúri decorated her face with red lipstick to match. She had to wear that red line on her face the whole day and do all her errands in Reykjavík and even in Selfoss like that. According to her memoirs, people she met on the street were shocked; some of them wanted to send her to the hospital believing that she had hurt her face.

Darkjavík rain in Gallery Suðurgata 7

A few months later, in late autumn of 1978, works by the Hungarian artist Endre Tót were exhibited in Gallery Suðurgata 7. He also answered the inquiry that had been sent out worldwide a few months earlier. As he stated in a recent interview, his Reykjavík show had been realized in the most crucial time of his life: during his emigration from Hungary to West Berlin. Even the correspondence between him and the Suðurgata artists keeps track of this life-changing event; planning and preparations were sent to his Budapest address while all the instructions how to design the invitation card and execute the show were posted to Reykjavík from West Berlin, the other side of the Iron Curtain.

Endre Tót (born in 1937 in Hungary) started his artistic career as an especially talented painter in abstract expressionism. How-

ever, around 1970 he gave up painting altogether and went over to mail art and conceptual art on a conscious decision: "Here I would like to highlight a very important motive as to why I stopped painting: communication with pictures was impossible in the Hungarian reality at that time. It was not even possible to send the pictures to Košice [in the neighbour country Slovakia], let alone Vienna, and not overseas. Censorship, practical things, millions of things prevented us from leaving the Hungarian border with paintings. The post office, on the other hand, was able to fly through the Iron Curtain, so I had some serious solo exhibitions in the 1970s, but the original publications that had been published about me at the time all fit in a small envelope. So that's how communication came about. And later it was possible to build on that."¹⁹

Tót's first *Gladness* piece, of 1971, was a postcard with the sentence *I am glad that I could have this sentence printed*, printed, signed and dated, in Hungarian and English. In order to comprehend the significance of the piece, we need to know how authoritarian control worked during state socialism in Hungary at the time: In order to use any type of mechanical reproduction equipment (printing press, stencil, xerox), one had to get autho-

¹⁹ István Hajdu, Totaljoy. Beszélgetés Tót Endrével, in István Hajdu, Előbb-utóbb. *Rongyszönyeg az avantgarde-nak* (Budapest: Orpheusz, 1999), see online: Totaljoy • Tót Endre [1995] [artpool.hu]



PIC 14-15-16: Gábor Attalai: *Red-y made* series for Galerie Lóa, 1977

Courtesy of Vintage Galéria Budapest

rization for the content. So, the artworks of the seventies communicated by not communicating. Tót later recalled: "My 'Joys' were reflections of the totalitarian state of the seventies. I responded with the absurd euphoria of Gladnesses to censorship, isolation, suppression sensed in every field of life, though this suppression worked with the subtlest means, hardly visible."²⁰

As for his show in Gallery Suðurgata 7, he offered a mail art exhibition and wrote in a letter to Eggert and Ingólfur about the topic of his planned Reykjavík (as he called it, Darkjavík) show: "My project for your summer program: rain." For his exhibition entitled *Rainy Questions*, he sent a questionnaire with hardly legible questions regarding rain and existence and asked the organizers to print it in 250 copies and send it out to artists worldwide. Nearly 50 artists sent it back, including almost all Icelandic avant-garde artists, Daniel Spoerri, Hervé Fischer and Meret Oppenheim, among others. (PIC 20) The exhibition with the filled in documents was installed on the second floor of the gallery, accompanied by an audio installation with a recording of rain – in monotonous clicks on a typewriter. After the show the organizers returned the questionnaires to the artist. The

rainy works have been part of the brand of Endre Tót's oeuvre, such as his *Gladnesses* – his face with a forced grin appears in all his letters and he often begins his sentences with "I am glad that ... " as it was the case with the advertisement placed in the newspaper *Þjóðviljinn* before the show, or in the correspondence between the artist and the organizers. As the organizers wrote to the artist in a letter from April 1978: "Your advertisement has just been printed. In fact, we were prohibited to print more 'strange' ads in the afternoon newspaper [*Dagblaðið* and *Vísir*], although we paid for them (they are getting angry phone calls). Then we went to the editor of one of the morning papers [*Þjóðviljinn*] and now we have a weekly column."²¹

After moving to West Berlin and a few years later to Cologne (West Germany), the Western world opened for Endre Tót; censorship and political control were not present in everyday life – yet the sudden change led to a creative crisis. His basic ideas, the *Gladnesses*, the *Rains*, the *Zeros*, the *Demonstrations*, came from Budapest of the seventies, albeit indirectly, but they were motivated by political background at the time. "And when I came to the West, it was gone. The ideas became groundless.



PIC 17-18: Gábor Attalai: *Red-y made* series and *Red-y made* series/566, Project for Painted Rocks, 1978

Museum of Fine Arts
– Hungarian National
Gallery, Budapest

²⁰ See: Orsolya Hegedüs, Conceptual Actionism: Addendum to the interpretations of the series Very Special Gladnesses by Endre Tót, in *Tót Endre: Very Special Gladnesses* (Budapest: Robert Capa Kortárs Fotográfiai Központ, 2017) p. 14–21; and Klara Kemp-Welch, *Antipolitics*, 2016.

²¹ Correspondance of Tót Endre, Central European Research Institute for Art History (KEMKI) – Hungarian National Gallery, box 22, envelope 289.

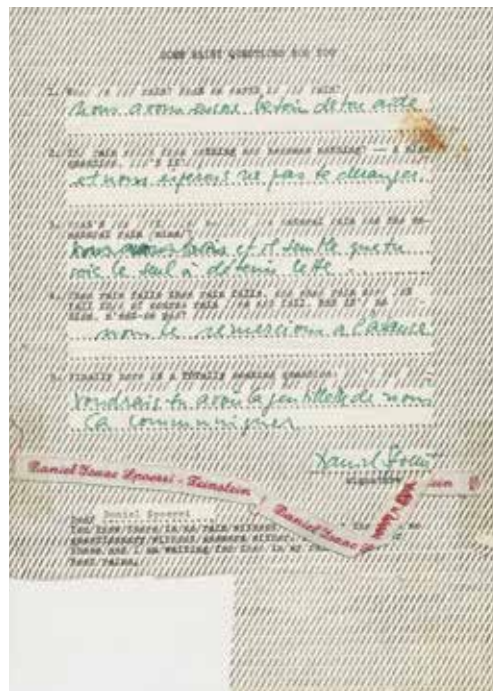


◀ PIC 19: Endre Tót: *½ Dozen Berliner Gladness Postcards (1973–1978)*, EDITION HERTA, Berlin 1979

From the collection of the Living Art Museum

So, the inspiration somehow dissolved. And in West Berlin at the time, where I ended up, it was hard to go on like this in a whole different milieu. Surprisingly, I didn't feel this because the ideas hinted, after all, so indirectly at political things that I don't think I would have devaluated."²²

And indeed, exhibitions in Gallery Suðurgata 7 or in Galerie Lóa in Haarlem became successful only if the artists adapted their artistic brands to the environment. Gábor Attalai and Endre Tót were masters of this cultural transfer: the red-y mades were equally adaptable in an old town milieu in the Netherlands and in the lava fields of Iceland. Endre Tót also found the perfect match for his Reykjavík exhibition that fit his authentical brand of *Rains*, mail art and the ironic reaction to general questions of existence. In Perneckzy's case in In-Out Center in Amsterdam, we see a consequent use of his early conceptual works, and it is exciting to follow how his dialectical (yes-no) concepts and experiments with the word 'art' became part of the beginning of conceptual art in Hungary in the Beke collection, and went on to Iceland to the SÚM exhibition or to a solo show in Amsterdam.



PIC 20: Endre Tót: *Rainy Questions*, answered by Daniel Spörri, 1978

Courtesy of acb Gallery, Budapest

PIC 21: Invitation card to the mail-art exhibition at Gallery Suðurgata 7 *Rainy Questions* by Endre Tót, 1978
From the archives of the Living Art Museum



²² See: István Hajdu, *Totaljoy* 1999.

I would like to express my special thanks to Kristín Scheving, director of LÁ Art Museum and Hlynur Helgason, Senior Lecturer at the University of Iceland for supporting my research from the early stages, without them this exhibition and catalogue could not have been realized.

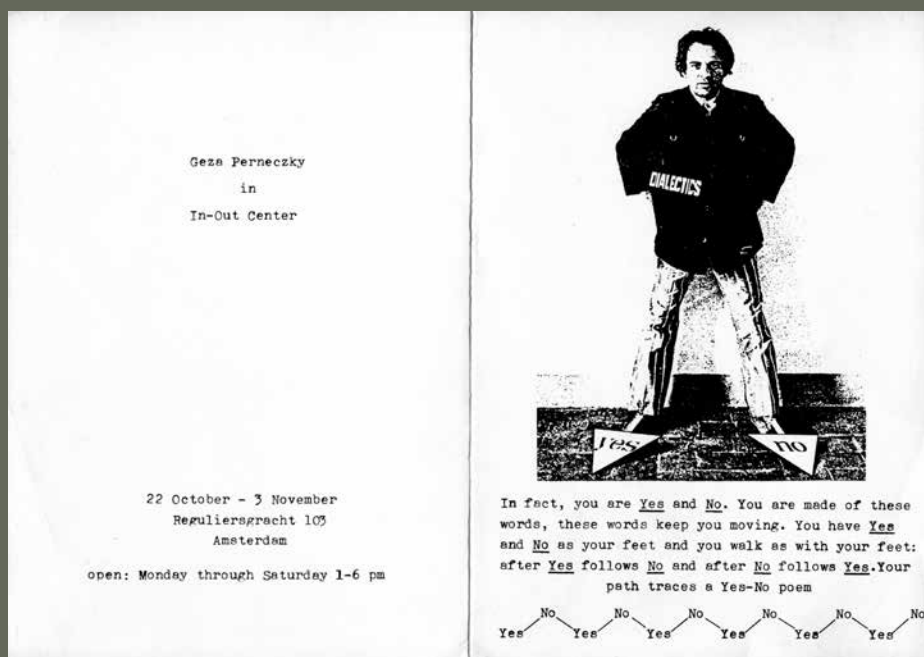
Dear Géza,

You know where to send the sheets for the catalogue: S. Gudmundsson –2E Helmesst. 35, Amsterdam, and the materials for the exhibition you have to send to: Galerie Súm – Vatnsstíg 3 B, Reykjavík – Iceland. With best regards, Sigurður P.S. Don't forget to send me the biography as you want it to be printed in the catalogue.

Dear Géza,

I hope to see you on the Monday, 22 October.

My best regards, **Sigurður**



Courtesy of In-Out Center Archives, Amsterdam and Géza Perneckzy

Courtesy of In-Out Center Archives, Amsterdam and Géza Pernecky

[Géza Pernecky to his parents] 5-11-73

My dear parents,

[...]

“

Amsterdam is a busier city than London, and its intellectual life is on a par with that of London, since for the last twenty-five years it's been in the common market, becoming more modernized but keeping its charm. It was all the stranger to see, yesterday, on television, Amsterdam on a Sunday with no traffic due to petrol shortage. Complete emptiness, only cyclists on the streets.

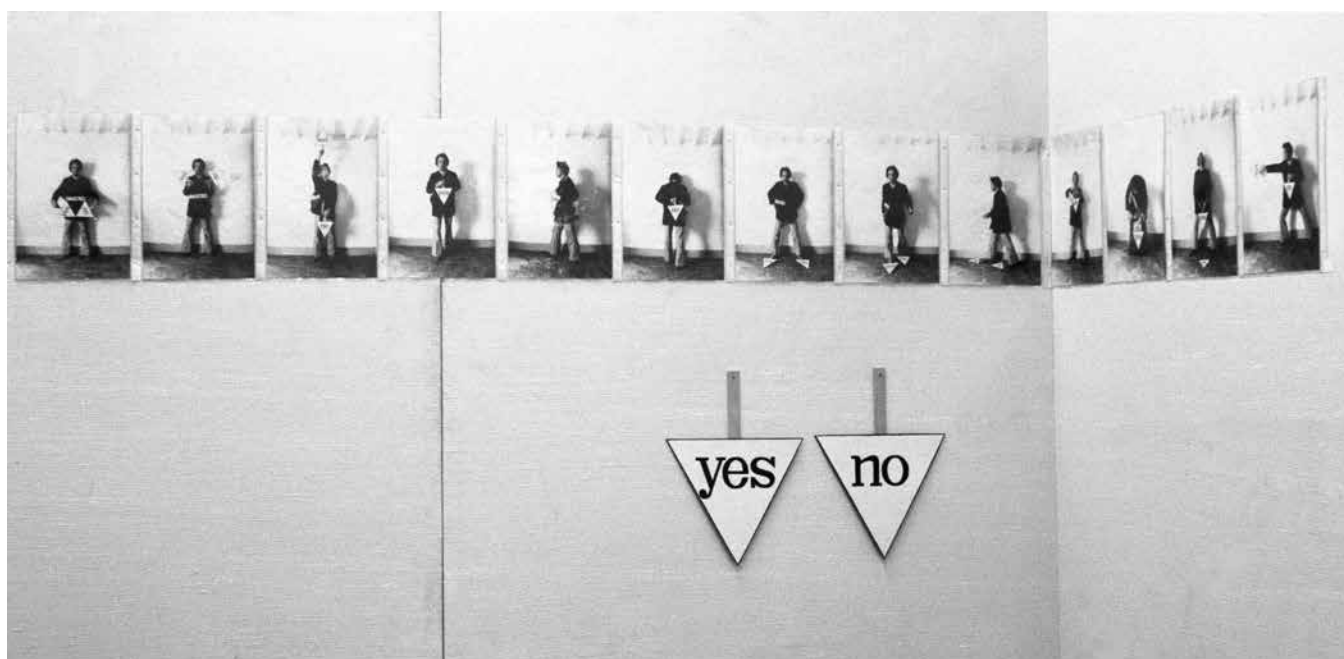
The opening of my exhibition – it's been two weeks! – was very intimate; the gallery is small and has white walls; the door is so thin that it disappears if you close it. It was perfect for my photos, which I hung up evenly around the walls. There is a real Dutch canal in front of the house, with boats, and the street is very 18th century. The only people at the opening were the young artists running the gallery, and a Hungarian-born girl, whose number I happened to know and whom I called that morning to come. Invitations were sent out, but with no vernissage date because the organizers forgot to tell me when they wanted it. Apart from the professionals who don't come when they said they would, there aren't many visitors. Although mine is their fifteenth show, they have sold nothing so far.

But that's not their goal anyway. All nine artists running the gallery dabble in conceptual art and wanted a place to show their art, not to sell it. They are good artists, I saw their work, and during the modest opening event (which consisted of me bringing out the schnapps, left there by my guests from Pécs, and passing it around following the photos on the walls – equivalent to a clockwise rotation); now, as this was going on, somebody came, panting, and told us he'd just arrived from Paris where one of them [Sigurður Guðmundsson] had won first prize at the biennale. The news had a profound effect, and the schnapps was gone in a matter of minutes.

After this, I went to a café with the Hungarian girl I mentioned, who teaches dancing in an Amsterdam art school,* and, since she also took good swigs from the bottle, and became talkative, we had a good chat.

* The young woman was ballet dancer Krisztina de Châtel who was born in Hungary to Dutch parents and later moved to Amsterdam; about this time she was hoping to establish herself at one of the city's music or dance institutes. Soon after, she was made first soloist and then choreographer at Dansgroep Amsterdam and went on to become a prominent figure of the avant-garde branch of Dutch modern dance.

GÉZA PERNECKY
LETTERS & MEMOIRS
IN-OUT CENTER, AMSTERDAM





Front of **In-Out Center**, Amsterdam, during the exhibition of Géza Perneczky [Hetty Huisman, Ineke Guðmundsson and Katrín, Sigurður Guðmundsson, Sólveig Magnúsdóttir, Kristján Guðmundsson], 1973

Courtesy of In-Out Center Archives, Amsterdam and Géza Perneczky

Sigurður Guðmundsson:
Hommage à Grieg, 1971

Photo from the archive of
the Living Art Museum



Dear listeners, here is an account of the Perneczky exhibition in Amsterdam.

As the people at In-Out Center told us, Perneczky's is the fifteenth show at this friendly gallery. They kindly asked me not to set prices for my works, since in their fourteen-show run not a single picture, or object, was sold, and it would be odd if someone decided to buy something now. They also said they had no, or at least did not know of any, visitors – it could be that visitors sneak in during the night, switch on the lights, see the exhibition, and then vanish into thin air. Also, I should not expect any journalists; that's too commercial anyway. I should, however, expect them, the artists and co-workers of the gallery, to show up once I'm done hanging the pictures. Besides, a senior associate, Ulises Carrión, who came to the Netherlands from Mexico, would give me a hand.

All this was said in the weary Nordic tone which is common to all Icelandic intellectuals living in the Netherlands, whose work includes pieces like the one where a record player, on a stool, in the heather, is playing Solveig's Song from Grieg, while arrows are being fired towards the cloudy Scandinavian sky to honour the great composer. One of them takes pictures with two-word titles, such as "pavement, road," or "table, chair." These are simple photographs of the two things in the title with an actual, 3D-looking comma, probably made of plastic, between them as if the table and the chair were elements in an enumeration separated by a grammatically correct comma [see: the reintroduction of linguistic signifiers into reality, or a sign system of the third kind; this is about rather abstract relational phenomena and their visual analysis].

The opening took place on a Monday, at 2 PM; foreign artists from the gallery's circle started to arrive with their Dutch wives and their children, whose nationality remained ambiguous, as well as a real "visitor," a young woman, who happened to be my guest and who teaches modern dance in Amsterdam. She left her phone number in my Cologne mailbox last summer, while

I was in France. Those with an invitation were unable to come since the cards gave no date and made mention of Monday as the only day when the gallery's closed.

I'd just opened the exhibition (which consisted of me nailing up the last label and saying, "aaand, ready – I'm finished") when, shrouded in gloom, another very blonde and bearded Scandinavian appeared and said, dryly, that one of their colleagues had won a prestigious prize at the Paris Biennale and had sold his work to the organizers, and at a fine price, too – and he must know, he just came from Paris. This made everyone happy, which meant that they patted each other's backs and handed around, in complete silence, the Hungarian palinka I brought with me just for the vernissage (a gift from my thoughtful guests).

A wanderer called Sigurður Guðmundsson, with hair pouring down on his shoulders like brown sustained tenor notes, said to me in a sorrowful voice that they, Icelanders, were barbarous and rude people and that he was afraid they were going to be most uncivil and drink my palinka. I grabbed the bottle (not having tried it before) and immediately gave it back because it was so strong. The Hungarian girl who teaches modern dance and has a German husband (which is nonsense, because this, as is known, often implies a marriage of convenience; she is, after all, a child of Dutch parents living in Hungary; in short, it's complicated), she, for one, was good at drinking it. As a consequence, after the vernissage, the two of us went to a pub where we ordered sherry and fixed all the world's problems.

ABOUT GALERIE LÓA

■ Interview with Rúrí

Why and when did you go to Haarlem?

Why and when did you go to Haarlem?

I went to the Netherlands to continue my art studies at De Vrije Academie Psychopolis in The Hague in the autumn of 1976 and rented a house in Haarlem, together with a few other young artists.

How did you meet Kees Visser? Where did the idea come from to open an art gallery?

Ólafur Lárússon had previously studied in Haarlem, where he got to know Kees Visser, and together they rented a house. Later, Kees visited Ólafur in Iceland and that's where I first met him.

When a few of us, former schoolmates, were planning to study in the Netherlands, while Ólafur was moving back to Iceland with his family, a couple of us ended up renting his part of the house. This was a fine arrangement, and we became good friends. Shortly after I arrived, Kees suggested opening a gallery. I immediately took to the idea, and so Kees, Helgi Þorgils and myself opened Galerie Lóa in a small old house in Lange Raamstraat. The house was around 300 years old and we immediately took to renovating it so that it could accommodate the gallery. Later that winter, Rúna Þorkels moved to Haarlem and joined us.

Was Haarlem a cultural centre at that time? Were people open to see new art?

Haarlem is a small city, close to Amsterdam. It is well known for old cultural cities to have a flourishing art scene; they attract artistic

talent. Amsterdam has a long history as a cultural city and at the time it was a sort of centre for experimental art in Northern Europe. Artists from all over the world came there to stay and to exhibit. The small cities around the big ones tend to be less active in this area, as high culture (as it was often referred to) can so easily be accessed in the big city.

Haarlem was a very relaxed and pleasant city to live in, with good museums for classical art, but it wasn't rich in experimental art.

Openings at Galerie Lóa were always popular and important people from the Amsterdam art scene attended. There was also a group of locals that were regular visitors, but some of the neighbours may have found it a bit weird, as it goes.

How did you put the exhibition programme together, what were the preferences? (I mean, did you have a theoretical preconception like showing conceptual art, or Fluxus etc., or it was rather about showing "good art" and good artists)

Our aim was to exhibit good and interesting art, contemporary art that was not on display in other galleries in Haarlem or even in Amsterdam. We didn't limit our choices to our close surroundings, nor to particular nationalities. Our artists came from all over the world but also from the Netherlands. Concept art and Fluxus were popular at the time so naturally we had quite a few such exhibitions. We also exhibited works by Eastern European artists, but they couldn't travel outside their countries, so they had to send their works by mail and we took care of installing their artworks and exhibitions.

Was Ulises Carrión a key figure in networking at that time?

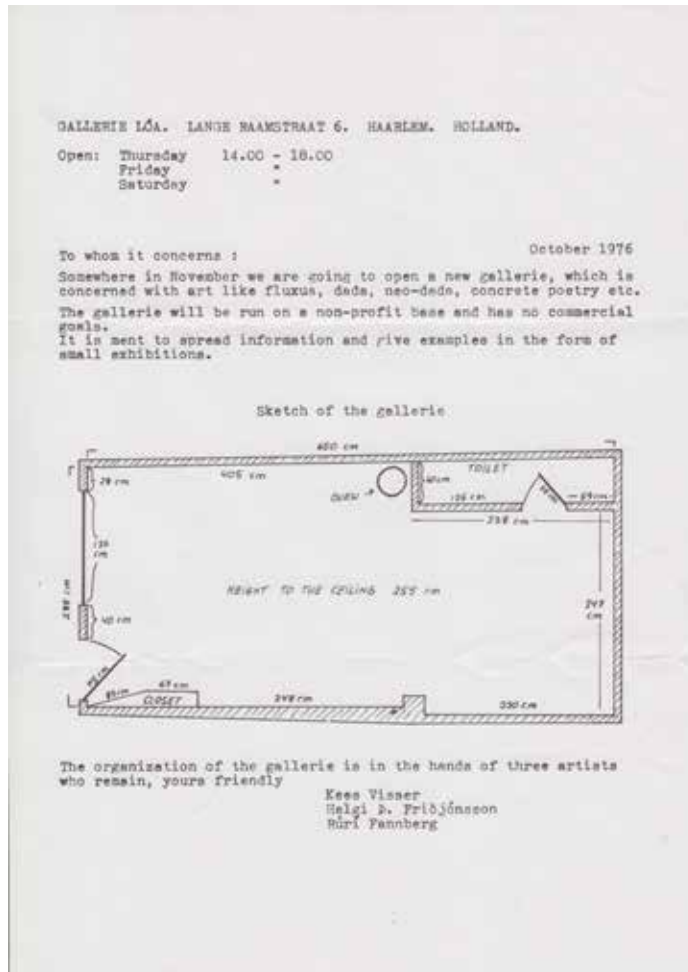
It is safe to say that in our particular field of art, access to magazines and books published by artists and artist initiatives was crucial. Other Books and So, run by Ulises Carrión and Aart van Barneveld, was the only place that offered access to such publications from all over the world. It was an extremely important source of information regarding experimental art and artists whose existence we might never have learned of otherwise.

You took a very big part in setting up of the show of Gábor Attalai. How did it go?

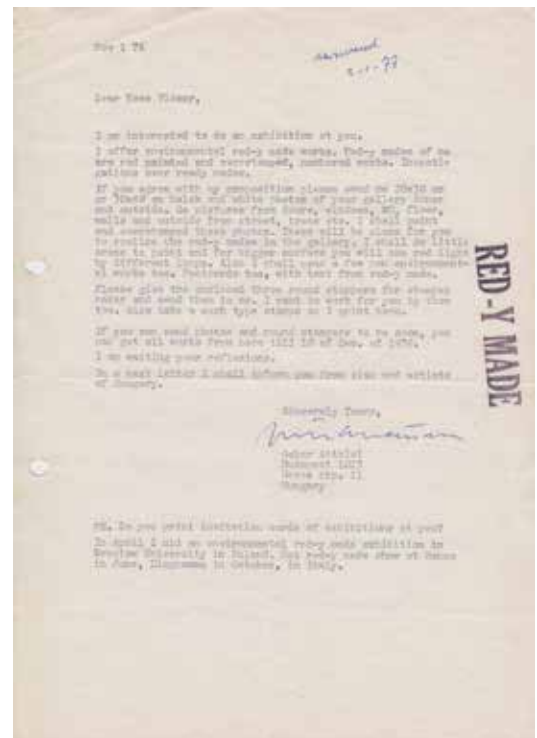
We who ran Galerie Lóa worked on the exhibitions together, so I was of course a part of that. However, it was Kees who negotiated with our neighbours if their approval was needed regarding some aspects of the exhibitions, as he spoke the language and knew some of them from the time that he had lived in the house in Lange Raamstraat himself. The neighbours were generally positive towards Gábor Attalai's work and we managed to fulfil most of his wishes regarding the space outside the gallery.

Was it common at that time to put up a show only by instructions sent per post by the artist?

As a rule we would offer the artist all the assistance we could manage, but I can't remember any other instance where we put this much effort into carrying out the wishes of the artist in realising his works.



Invitation to participate
in an exhibition at Galerie
Lóa and Gábor Attalai's ap-
plication from 1 November
1976. From the archive of
the Living Art Museum



Gábor Attalai: *Red-y made*
series (Rúri at Galerie Lóa),
1977. From the collection
of the Living Art Museum



Gábor Attalai: *Red-y made*
arrows installed in the
streets of Haarlem, 1977.
From the archive of the
Living Art Museum



Invitation card of Gábor Attalai's solo show at Galerie Lóa, 1977. From the archive of the Living Art Museum



Did you like the show?

Yes, it was really enjoyable to display Attalai's great works that he mailed to us, and also fun to venture outside the building with his installations.

Did you keep in touch with him? Can you tell me about the performance you did during the Gallerí Suðurgata 7 show in 1978?

When Gábor Attalai's exhibition was ready, we documented it, both the works inside the gallery, the installations outside and the opening. We had also documented the installation process. We sent him the photographs, so he could see the results, and for his enjoyment.

It so happened that when we were painting his works on pillars and on the curb in red, I had stuck a small paintbrush in my hair to

keep it in a knot, and the handle of the brush was in the same red colour that Gábor used. It was one of those small, meaningless coincidences in life, but Gábor had noticed it in one of the photographs he received from us.

When the exhibition of his works at Gallery Suðurgata 7 came about, he wished to get a photograph of my face in a few copies. I prepared these and sent them to him. He sent them back to the gallery, having painted sharp, red lines, about the width of the paintbrush handle, on my face. There were seven photos, I think, each with a different line for each day of the week. The performance consisted of me painting a line on my face each morning, to correspond with the photo of that day. I became a living artwork, went to Café Mokka at lunchtime, had coffee and spoke to people, and ran my errands for the rest of the day. Once I had to go to Selfoss, so the per-

formance went on there as well. The photos of my face with the red lines were part of the exhibition in the gallery.

I lost contact with Gábor Attalai after that, perhaps because I was very busy at the time and moving around a lot, I went abroad for a while, worked on founding an artists' union and so on. Later, when I arrived in Budapest for my exhibition there, I inquired about him, but by then his health had deteriorated, so we never met.

Gábor Attalai: *Red-y made series (Rúri) I-VII*, 1978

From the collection of the Living Art Museum



INTERVIEW WITH KEES VISSER.

The small house in Haarlem was in the property of your family. When and how did it become an art gallery? Where did the idea come from to open an art gallery?

I obtained the little house in 1970 and then fixed it and lived in it. It was my first studio. Later I moved to another house that I shared with Ólafur Lárusson. It was then, early in 1976, that Ólafur suggested that we turn the little house into a gallery, which we did over the course of the next months. On an evening at the house of Kristján Guðmundsson we were talking about a name for the gallery, when Kristján said, "why don't you just call it Galerie Lóa?"

Was Haarlem a cultural centre at that time? Were people open to see new art?

Haarlem had a small art world, but it also had Ateliers 69, which was an independent art school. Amsterdam was the main art centre. A year earlier, Wies Smals had opened De Appel in Amsterdam. Ulises Carrión was running 'Other Books and So'. Harry Ruhé had opened

Galerie A. And with these three venues we had good contacts and they came to Haarlem to the openings. We also shared artists. There was a dynamic atmosphere and there were a lot of good galleries in Amsterdam. Stedelijk Museum also had a lot of performance on its programme.

How did you get to know Icelandic art and Icelandic artists?

In 1975, Douwe Jan Bakker had a show in De Vleeshal in Haarlem where he showed his pronounceables. It was a group show in which Siggí and Kristján Guðmundsson and Hreinn Friðfinnsson participated. I visited Douwe to talk about his work and the show in general. I was surprised by the Icelandic artists who clearly differed from what was happening here on the continent. Douwe showed me slides of Iceland, which impressed me so that I went there the next summer. He also introduced me to Ólafur Lárusson and with Óli I went to Amsterdam to visit the Icelanders. They too came to the openings when we started the gallery, so there was a lot of exchange between Haarlem and Amsterdam.

I also met Rúna at that time, who became my girlfriend and helped with the gallery.

When the gallery opened, Rúrí and Helgi Friðjónsson and Kristinn Harðarson who came to study in Holland, joined the team.

How did you put the exhibition program together, what were the preferences? (I mean, did you have a theoretical preconception like showing conceptual art, or Fluxus etc., or it was rather about showing "good art" and good artists?)

We repainted the gallery and put in spotlights. Together we started to make choices. We were interested in performance, conceptual art and Fluxus. The choice for artists came from these three movements, a very interesting mix of mostly young artists, about the same age as we were. We often went to Other Books and So and discovered artists there through special magazines, often published as a personal initiative. We mixed with the Amsterdam art scene and met people through the Icelanders. So, it was a very dynamic and adventurous time. That's also how we met Pieter Laurens Mol who was the first artist to



Gábor Attalai: *Red-y made*
(*Galerie Lóa*), 1977.

Courtesy of Laszlo Vago.

exhibit in the gallery. Pieter already had a certain reputation although he still lived in Breda. We got to know his friends there, Harry de Kroon and Sef Peeters, who both showed at the gallery later. They all did performances in De Appel.

Was Ulises Carrión a key figure in networking at that time?

Ulises's place was one of the places in Amsterdam that we visited a lot, but also De Appel. There were performances there every Wednesday and also in the weekend.

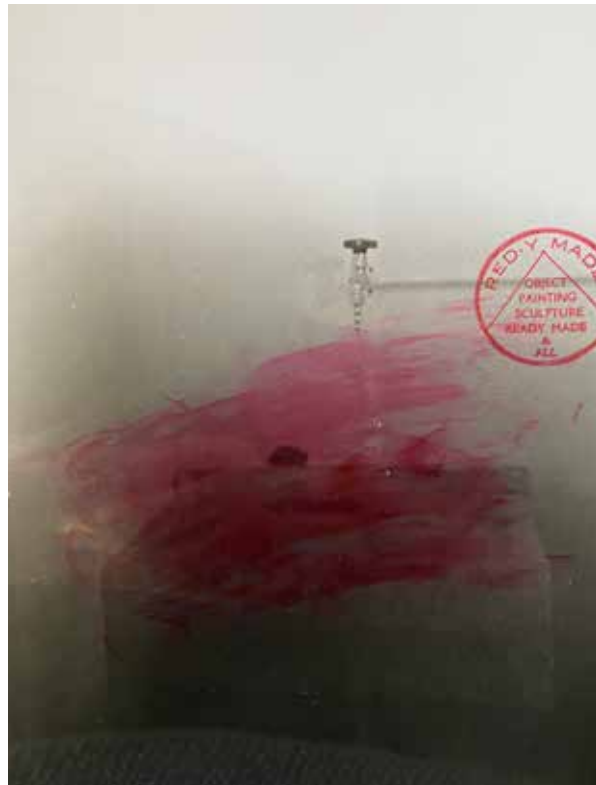
These two places were very rich sources. We got to know Nikolaus Urban, also Hungarian, in De Appel and he also showed in Lóa.

Do you remember of the show of Gábor Attalai? Did you like it?

We discovered Gábor's work through publications at Ulises's bookshop and we started to write to him. The whole thing developed through mail. We send him information about the space. He asked us for photos of the surroundings and asked us to do red-y-mades in the streets surrounding the gallery. We had some correspondence during and after the show. Later when I moved to Iceland for a winter, I painted some ice floes in Norðurá and sent him photos of it. I think we all liked the show of Gábor very much, also the exchanges by mail. It was a real communication project.



Gábor Attalai: *Red-y made became yellow-y made I-IV*, 1977
Courtesy of Vintage Galéria
Budapest



Above: Gábor Attalai: *Red-y made* series, 1977
Courtesy of Kees Visser

Gábor Attalai: *Red-y made* [Galerie Lóa, Harlem], 1976
Ludwig Museum - Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest

MEMORIES OF GALLERY SUÐURGATA 7

Eggert Pétursson
& Ingólfur Arnarsson

We were youngsters at the time of the SÚM Gallery. There was something new and captivating about the exhibitions there which we found surprising and interesting. Times were different in Iceland back then, with few restaurants, cafés, galleries, or concerts. The country was relatively isolated from the outside world, and when crumbs of international culture arrived here, they were welcomed with delight. Getting out of the country was a coveted experience.

In 1976, when we joined the group that founded Gallery Suðurgata 7, we were students at the Iceland College of Arts and Crafts (forerunner of the Iceland University of the Arts). The first year was spent on getting the old building ready for use, and we started exhibiting following year. The first show was a group exhibition, whose special guest artist was Magnús Pálsson, our tutor at the College of Arts and Crafts, and founder of the New Media department there. The group that established the gallery comprised mostly students and former students of the College of Arts and Crafts, along with students at the University of Iceland, who were mainly involved in the *Svart á hvítu* periodical published by Suðurgata 7. Others came and went and made their own contributions. It was a rather loose community of people who were culturally curious. The building belonged to the Hjaltested family; filmmaker Friðrik Þór Friðriksson and artist Bjarni H. Þórarinnsson, who were members of that family, were the main spokesmen for the group. Friðrik's brother, Þórleifur,

was a printer at the Oddi printing press, and that was an important factor in our printing of the periodical, as well as invitation cards. The first exhibitions were of various kinds. Artist Helgi Þorgils was an intermediary for some shows during the gallery's first summer – he was also connected with Galerie Lóa in Haarlem. During the period when the gallery was in operation, it provided a wide range of cultural mediation, which involved large numbers of people. It fell to us to curate exhibitions for a time.

Early in 1978 Robert Filliou came to Iceland to teach at the New Media department of the College of Arts and Crafts. One of our projects with him at the New Media department was to show a new version of his work *Poi-Poi Drome* at Suðurgata 7. Filliou gave Ingólfur and me the addresses of a huge number of artists who he thought would like to show their work at Suðurgata 7. We wrote letters to every artist on the list, and the response was good, leading to a large number of exhibitions. We were now part of the Network. Filliou's work *The Eternal Network* is the concept of a sort of network linking artists all around the world. At that time the phenomenon Mail Art enjoyed great popularity. It wasn't necessary to send valuable works of art to distant exhibitions: one could send instructions for works, which could be made on the artist's behalf; or the artist could travel to the location and make the pieces on-site.

Gábor Attalai and Endre Tót were among the artists who answered our letters. We had seen works by Attalai at the SÚM Gallery, and he had also shown his art at Galerie Lóa in Haarlem.



Invitation card of Gábor Attalai's solo show at Gallery Suðurgata 7, 1978
From the archive of the Living Art Museum

Gábor Attalai: *Red-y made series*
and *Red-y made series/569*,
Project for Painted Rocks, 1978

Museum of Fine Arts – Hungarian
National Gallery, Budapest

Tót received extensive coverage in art journals and exhibited his work widely. He was known for his *I am Glad...* works. The fact that works could be sent inexpensively by mail, and installed according to the artist's instructions, was important for artists in the Iron Curtain countries of Eastern Europe such as Attalai and Tót, who were not permitted to travel abroad.

At that time Attalai was working on a series he called *Red-y mades*: He painted objects and pictures red, then stamped them with appropriate stamps. He asked us to take photos in the gallery and outside in the street, and of landscapes around Reykjavík, which we sent to him in Hungary. We also had stamps made, which we sent to him. He then sent us works he had painted and stamped, together with the photos from the gallery, which he had painted to indicate where walls and sections of walls in the gallery were to be painted red, along with doorframes, steps, etc. He also proposed painting nearby buildings, but sadly we could not gain permission to do so. Rocks in the landscape were also to be painted during the show. Hannes Lárusson offered to take us out in his car on a Sunday drive on the Þingvellir "circle route" where the rocks were located. We set off with cans of red paint, paint rollers and a camera. We got on fine at the first three sites, but when we reached the fourth, at the foot of Mt. Ingólfssfjall, we were overwhelmed. The rock Attalai had painted in the photo was huge. We did not have enough paint, and we would have needed a ladder. In addition, we realised that we were vandalising the environment – as it would be



“ At that time the phenomenon Mail Art enjoyed great popularity. It wasn't necessary to send valuable works of art to distant exhibitions: one could send instructions for works, which could be made on the artist's behalf; or the artist could travel to the location and make the pieces on-site.”

TÓT ENDRE
 VERY SPECIAL RAIN-MAKER
 H-1035 BUDAPEST
 KERÉK U. 10
 TEL. 685-421

Don't know but in reality I don't know
 what they mean by it

2 May 1978

Dear Eggert and Angelfurt,

many thank for your nice letter. I was really glad about
 the "strange" Darkjaviik advertisement.
 Yesss, my project for your summer programme: rain.
 Here I send you 1 questionnaire and if you have any
 possibility, so please print it in ca. 250 copies.
 Then send them out all over the world.

/Dear, you type the name in/ plus distribute them
 between the visitors in the gallery too, OK?

I think you'll get enough answers to make a show
 from it. - Later you could make a publication / a small
 booklet/ from some selected answers. If this would
 be too expensive for you, I could find a publisher
 for it.

I choose this project cause I find it quite flexible
 and very new /1978/ and and

If you think, so I could send from my earlier rain-
 pieces, e.g. GLABBY would I type rain on Darkjaviik
 picture postcards. You'd send me ca. one dozen
 /with a large sky on it/

Or you could realize again the AUDIO-VISUAL RAIN
 /see enclosed/.... You'll see...

I type rains since 1971 and WORK with zero also
 since '71. And I AM GLAD IF since '71. Fucking
 activity.

So I'd be really glad if you could realize my questionnaire
 project.

Thank for Tóta for the answers and the many kisses and
 thank for your supermarket zero_poom too.

I wanted to ask MARK for a similar zero stuff, but
 they didn't give me any and it would be also
 impossible MARK to be glad like TARK in your newspaper....

You know how it is MARK, so I write you cause you
 are THERE and I'M MARK

Best of rains

Endre Tóta



SOME RAINY QUESTIONS FOR YOU

1. What is rain? What on earth is rain?

2. If rain is it's nothing and becomes nothing? — A nice question, isn't it?

3. What is it if it's not the natural rain and the unnatural rain mine?

4. When rain falls then rain falls, and when rain doesn't fall then of course rain doesn't fall. But it's not rain, is it?

5. Finally here is a TOTALLY soaking question:

signature

Dear
You know there is no rain without rain. But there is no
questionnaire without answers either. So please answer
these and I am waiting for them in my rain.
Best rains,

Endre Tót
c/o Galleri Suðurgata 7
Suðurgötu 7
101 Reykjavík
Iceland

Installation view of Endre Tót's exhibition *Rainy Questions* at Gallery Suðurgata 7, 1978

From the archive of the Living Art Museum



seen today. And so we learned that day that works should not be made in actual nature – it should remain untouched. Fortunately, the paint was water-based, so it soon washed away. And we were rained on that day.

We had been aware that Attalai's works were on a grand scale – we had heard as much from Galerie Lóa. The exhibition was expensive, but we were keen to do it properly, and the outcome was a beautiful show. Attalai probably never knew that we were just a group of penniless art students; most of the grant we had received from the City of Reykjavík went on this one show. We continued to correspond with him for some time after the exhibition ended, and we remember getting hold of jazz records for him, which he could not buy in Hungary. Some of our friends later visited him in Budapest.



Postcards from West Berlin from Endre Tót to Eggert Pétursson, 1978. From the archives of the Living Art Museum

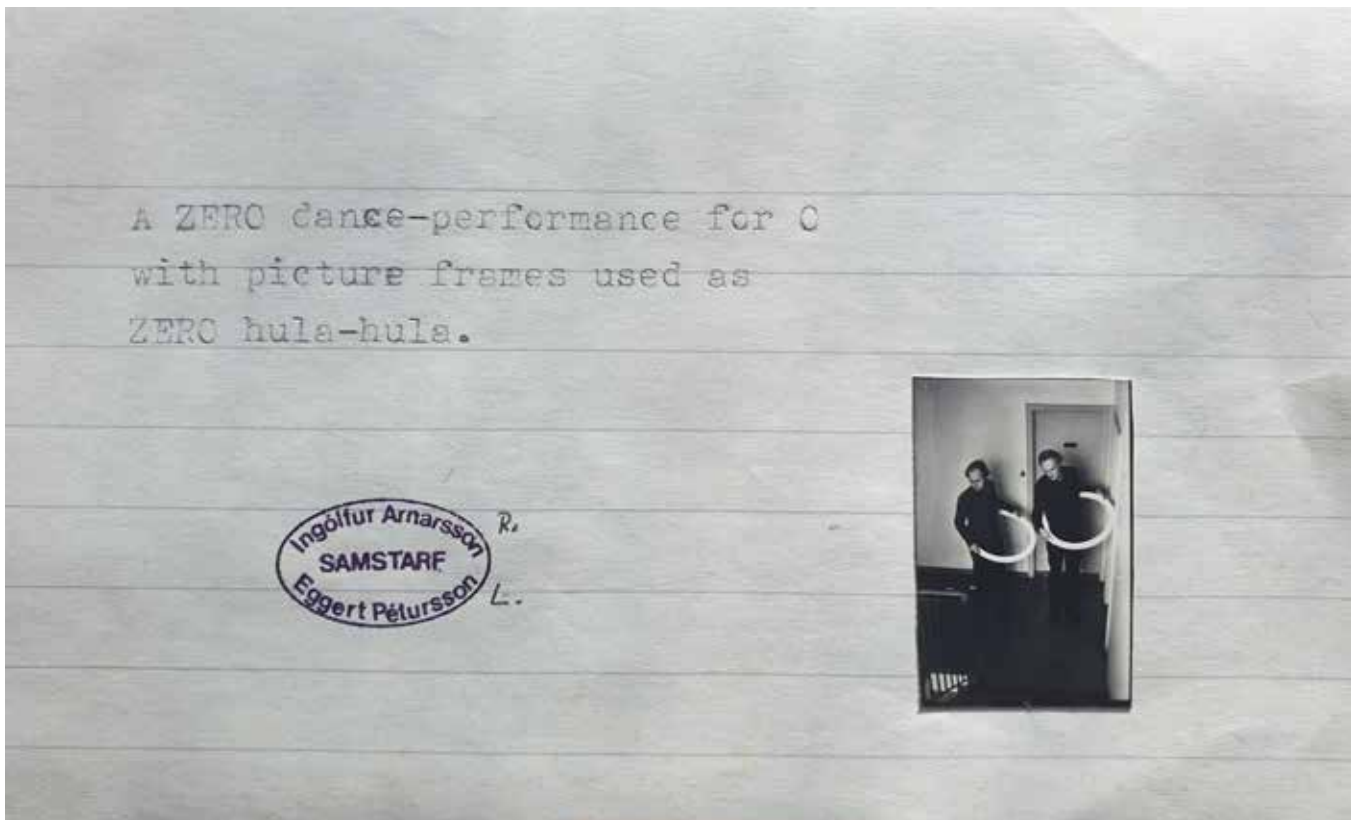
Endre Tót's exhibition was entirely different. It was held in the late autumn of 1978. By that time, he was in West Berlin, west of the Iron Curtain, and could not return to his own country. His show was a Mail Art exhibition: questionnaires about rain which many people had filled out and sent to the gallery. A cassette tape recorder played the sound of oblique/forward slashes being typed, which sounded like rainfall: Tót's rain. In our correspondence we had been messing with him a little – and Steingrímur Eyfjörð, we made Tóta, an invented female character and called him Tóti as a pun. It was mostly slightly drunken joking around; we didn't take ourselves very seriously.

That exhibition was the last we curated for the gallery for the time being, and we gave up Suðurgata 7. We had had enough of showing (and making) other people's art, and we wanted to display our own works. And we still hadn't graduated from our art studies. The programme at Suðurgata 7 was not confined to art shows: improv concerts were held, and we published the quality periodical *Svart á hvítu*. Attalai and Tót contributed pages to it, with images of their art. Our work at Suðurgata was like what so many people were doing in Iceland at that time – a way to break out of the island's isolation. It was highly successful, and an important step in bringing the outside world closer to us. The isolation experienced by the Hungarian artists was quite different in nature: they were not allowed to travel, and so it made perfect sense to use available means to eliminate national borders and assist them in their artistic practice.



Installation views of Gábor Attalai's exhibition *Red-y and Post red-y* made at Gallery Suðurgata 7, 1978
From the archive of the Living Art Museum

“ Our work at Suðurgata was like what so many people were doing in Iceland at that time – a way to break out of the island’s isolation.”



Correspondence between Eggert Pétursson, Ingólfur Arnarsson and Endre Tót, 1978
Central European Research Institute for Art History (KEMKI) – Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

VERK Á SÝNINGUNNI LIST OF EXHIBITED WORKS

Ingólfur Arnarsson
[1956, Reykjavík]

Untitled 6, 2018
pencil on paper
paper: 27 x 22 cm, framed: 37.5 x 32.5 cm
Courtesy of the artist and i8 Gallery, Reykjavík

Untitled 11, 2018
pencil on paper
paper: 27 x 22 cm, framed: 37.5 x 32.5 cm
Courtesy of the artist and i8 Gallery, Reykjavík

Gábor Attalai
[1934, Budapest - 2011, Budapest]

Transfer of Japan, 1971
Collage; 500 x 500 mm
Vintage Galéria Budapest

Untitled, 1973
Body print and photo on pink silk paper;
675 x 565 mm
The Living Art Museum, Inv. Nr. N-690
[möppu 8/8]

RED-Y MADE I-III, 1976
C-print on paper; 325 x 335 mm
Vintage Galéria Budapest

RED-Y MADE No 447, 475, 489, 1976
Enamel paint, silver print on paper;
325 x 335 mm
Vintage Galéria Budapest

RED-Y MADE No 320, 1976-1977
enamel paint, silver print on paper;
325 x 335 mm
Courtesy of Laszlo Vago

RED-Y MADE No 474, 1976
enamel paint, silver print on paper;
325 x 335 mm
Private collection, Budapest

RED-Y MADE I-IX (Galerie Lóá, Harlem),
1976/2022
luster RC print (exhibition copy);
292 x 300 mm
Ludwig Museum - Museum of Contemporary
Art, Budapest

RED-Y MADE 525 I-V, ca 1977
enamel paint on paper; 420 x 300 mm
The Living Art Museum, Inv. Nr. N-690
[möppu 1/8]

**RED-Y MADE CAN BECOME YELLOW-Y MADE
I-IX**, ca 1977
enamel paint on paper; 315 x 340 mm
The Living Art Museum, Inv. Nr. N-690
[möppu 7/8]

**RED-Y MADE CAN BECOME YELLOW-Y MADE
I-III (man w glasses)**, ca 1977
enamel paint, silver print on paper; 70 x 100 cm
The Living Art Museum, Inv. Nr. N-690
[möppu 8/8]

RED-Y MADE (object by rúri and gabor), 1978
C-print on paper, 307 x 300 cm
The Living Art Museum, Inv. Nr. N-690
[möppu 7/8]

RED-Y MADE (portraits of Rúri) I-VII, 1978
C-print on paper; 240 x 180 cm
The Living Art Museum, Inv. Nr. N-690
[möppu 1/8]

RED-Y MADE I-X, 1978
Watercolour, ink on paper; 295 x 225 mm
The Living Art Museum, Inv. Nr. N-690
[möppu 1/8]

RED-Y MADE (stamps in two pieces), 1978
rubber on wood, 12 x 3 and 7,5 x 3 cm
The Living Art Museum, Inv. Nr. N-690
[möppu 2/8]

**RED-Y MADE No 485-486 (Suðurgata /
Project for red-y made 'fresh window')**,
1978
enamel paint, silver print on paper;
325 x 335 mm
Vintage Galéria Budapest

**RED-Y MADE BECAME BLACK-Y MADE No 500-
501**, 1978
C-print on paper; 325 x 335 mm
Vintage Galéria Budapest

RED-Y MADE No 481, 1978
enamel paint, silver print on paper;
325 x 335 mm
Private collection, Paris

RED-Y MADE BECAME WHITE-Y MADE I-II,
1978
C-print on paper; 325 x 335 mm
Vintage Galéria Budapest

RED-Y MADE I-IV, 1978
C-print on paper; 325 x 335 mm
Vintage Galéria Budapest

RED-Y MADE book, 1978
artist' book, A3
National Gallery of Iceland, Inv. Nr.: 4135

Kristján Guðmundsson
[1941, Snæfellsnes Peninsula]

A Piece for Soft and Hard Blowing, 1971
A: Blowing a soap bubble
B: Blowing a whistle
Courtesy of the artist and i8 Gallery, Reykjavík

Drawing, 1972
pencil on paper; 769 x 769 mm
Courtesy of the artist and i8 Gallery, Reykjavík

Grey and Grey Poem, 2005
Modulex letter board, paint, plexiglass;
17 x 200 cm
Courtesy of the artist and i8 Gallery

Red or Red Poem, 2005
Modulex letter board, paint, plexiglass;
17 x 200 cm
Courtesy of the artist and i8 Gallery, Reykjavík

Sigurður Guðmundsson
[1942, Reykjavík]

**Icelandic Carpenters and Deceased
Philosophers**, 2007
C-print on paper; 97.5 x 137.5 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Five Males and an Egg, 2007
C-print on paper; 144 x 136 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Géza Perneckzy
[1936, Keszthely, Hungary]
Art Bubble (1-2-3), 1972/2022
luster RC print (exhibition copy);
16.5 x 21.5 cm
Ludwig Museum - Museum of Contemporary
Art, Budapest

Navigation Exercises, Köln 1972
artist' book [ed. of the author]; 29.6 x 21 cm
Courtesy of Géza Perneckzy

Identification - program, 1971
artist' book; 21 x 29.5 cm
The Living Art Museum, Inv. Nr. N 3375

Yes - No Strategy, 1972/2014
lambda print on paper; 26 x 20 cm / each
[series of 16]
Courtesy of Géza Perneckzy

Mirrors (Modulated Person), 1972/2007
lambda print on paper; 40 x 28,2 cm, ed. 6/6
[series of 8]
Courtesy of Géza Perneckzy

Stork, 2018
rubber stamps on paper; A4, ed. AP 4/5
Courtesy of Géza Perneckzy

VERK Á SÝNINGUNNI LIST OF EXHIBITED WORKS

Eggert Pétursson
[1956, Reykjavík]

Untitled, 2015
oil on canvas; 150 x 120 cm
Courtesy of Rannveig Eir Einarisdóttir / Hilmar Þór Kristinsson

Untitled I-II, 2015-2017
oil on canvas; 30 x 30 cm
Private collection

Rúri
[1951, Reykjavík]

Balance-VIII, 2016
green (hammerite) kitchen scale with four alarm clocks; 19 x 30 x 26 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Balance-XVI, 2016
Table scale with water bottles and plastic hand grenades; 32.5 x 52 x 23 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Balance-XII, 2016
Brass pharmacy scale with glass hour and globe; 50 x 60 x 18.5 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Endre Tót
[1937, Sümeg, Hungary]

Dirty Rains, Edition Sellem, 1977
artist's book, 21 x 14.5 cm
The Living Art Museum, Inv. Nr. N-3370

Gladness Writings (1973-1976),
Yellow Now 1977
artist's book; 29 x 20.5
The Living Art Museum, Inv. Nr. N-3319

Rainy questions (questionnaires for Gallery Suðurgata 7), 1977
Paper; A4 [14 museum copies, 4 xerox]
Courtesy of acb Gallery, Budapest

½ Dozen Berliner Gladness Postcards (1973-1978), EDITION HERTA, Berlin, 1979
6 postcards; 15 x 11 cm
The Living Art Museum, Inv. Nr. N-1841

Ich freue mich, wenn ich auf Plakaten werben kann, 1979
Poster, 85 x 60 cm
Courtesy of acb Gallery, Budapest

Kees Visser
[1948, the Netherlands]

16 Shades of Blue [Y Series], 2016
Acrylic on Awagami (90 grs.);
54.5 x 39.3 cm / 16 pieces
Courtesy of the artist and BERG Contemporary

Sal 3 endurtökum við valdar sýningar sem urðu til á áttunda áratugnum í samvinnu íslenskra og ungverskra listamanna. Unversku listamennirnir gátu ekki verið viðstaddir sýningarnar vegna ástandsins austantjalds í pólitík með ferðatakmörkunum og fjárhagslegra takmarkanna. Aðeins Géza Perneczky gat komið á sýningu sína í Amsterdam vegna þess að hann bjó þá í Vestur-Þýskalandi.

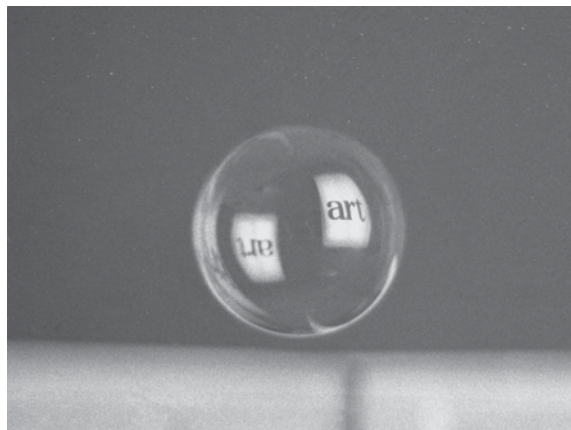
Vegna ástandsins sendu listamennirnir listaverk og leiðbeiningar í pósti svo að hægt væri að framkvæma tilskipanirnar vestan megin við járntjaldið. Þeir sendu listaverk og leiðbeiningar í pósti og þannig var hægt að framkvæma verkefnin með miklum vilja listamannanna austan megin.

Þetta nær til ársins 1972 þegar að listamenn úr Austurblokkinni sendu verk á pappír á alþjóðlega sýningu SÚM á Listahátíð í Reykjavík. Skipuleggjendur sýningarinnar Hreinn Friðfinnsson, Jón Gunnar Árnason, Magnús Pálsson, Douwe Jan Bakker, Kristján og Sigurður Guðmundssynir gáfu út sýningarskrá og eru öll verkin í stærð A4 varðveitt í skjalasafni Nýlistasafnsins í Reykjavík.

Árið 1973 var ungverska listamanninum og gagnrýnandanum Géza Perneczky boðið í listamannarekna galleríð In-Out Center í Amsterdam, þar sem hann sýndi seríuna *Art Bubbles*, *Yes-No Strategy* og *Mirror Dance*. Í Hollandi árið 1977, buðu Kees Visser, Rúrí og Helgi Þorgils Friðjónsson Ungverjanum Gábor Attalai að sýna í nýstofnuðu Galerie Lóa í Harlem. Gábor Attalai setti þá upp sýninguna *Red-y made*.

Eggert Pétursson og Ingólfur Arnarsson settu svo upp sýninguna í Gallerí Suðurgötu 7 árið 1978. Aðeins nokkrum mánuðum síðar sýndi Endre Tót sýninguna *Rainy questions [Regn-votar spurningar]*, einnig í Gallerí Suðurgötu 7.

Til að láta þessa sýningu verða að veruleika fengum við lánuð listaverk, ljósmyndir og skjöl frá Nýlistasafninu, Listasafni Íslands, Ludwig Museum Budapest, Vintage Galéria og abc Gallery Budapest sem og frá einkasöfnurum í Búdapest, París, Amsterdam og Reykjavík.



Géza Perneczky: *Art Bubbles (2)*, 1972, Ludwig Museum - Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest

Géza Perneczky: *Art Bubbles (2)*, 1972, Ludwig Museum - Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest

In the historic section of the exhibition, we re-enact selected shows that were first realized as a cooperation between Icelandic and Hungarian artists in the 1970s. The Hungarian artists (with the exception of Géza Perneczky, who already lived in West Germany and went to his Amsterdam show) could not be present at their exhibitions due to travel restrictions, political and financial issues. Consequently, they sent artworks and instructions via post, and the projects were realized with major efforts by artists on the other side of the Iron Curtain.

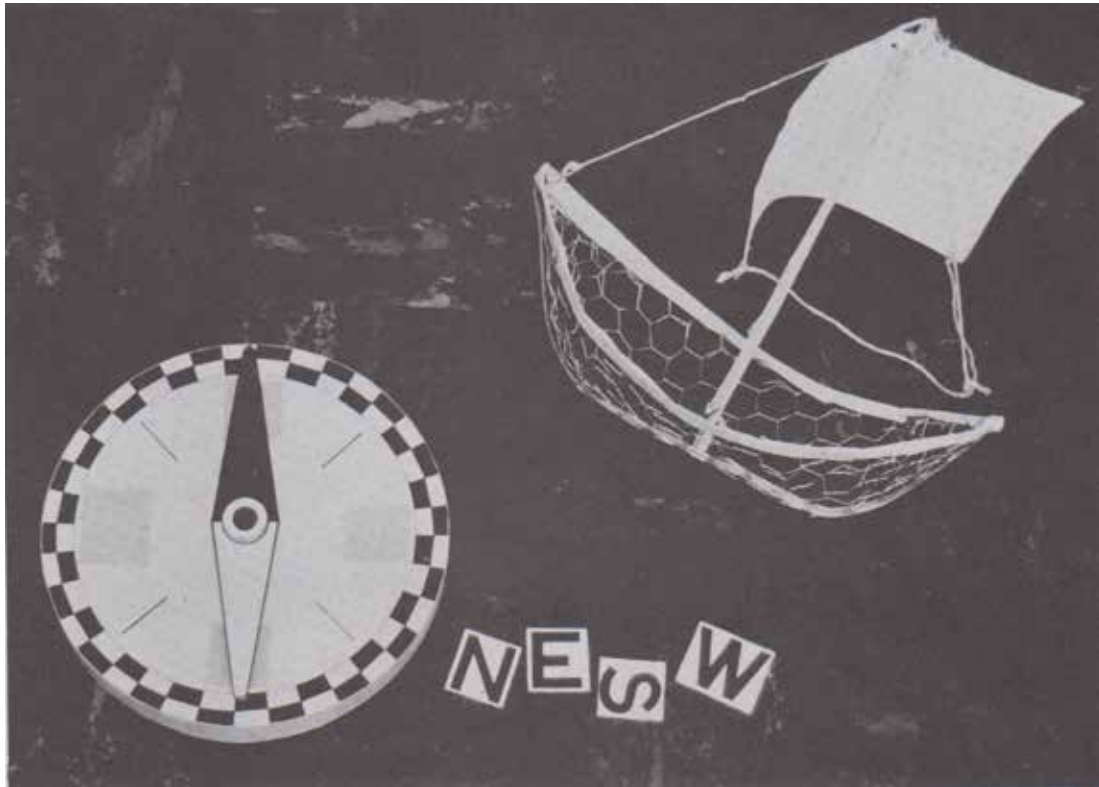
The first traces of these shows go back to 1972, when artists from the Eastern Bloc sent works on paper to the international exhibition of SÚM at the Reykjavík Art Festival. The organizers (Hreinn Friðfinnsson, Jón Gunnar Árnason, Magnús Pálsson, Kristján and Sigurður Guðmundsson, and Douwe Jan Bakker) published an exhibition catalog and all the works in A4 format are kept in the archives of the Living Art Museum in Reykjavík.

In 1973, Hungarian conceptual artist and art critic Géza Perneczky was invited to the artist-run gallery In-Out Center in Amsterdam, where he showed his conceptual series *Art Bubbles*, *Yes-No Strategy* and *Mirror Dance*. Also in the Netherlands, in Haarlem, Kees Visser, Rúrí, and Helgi Þorgils Friðjónsson invited the Hungarian Gábor Attalai in 1977 for a *Red-y made* show in their newly founded Galerie Lóa. Eggert Pétursson and Ingólfur Arnarsson realized *Red-y and Post Red-y made*s by Attalai in a similar way in Gallery Suðurgata 7 in Reykjavík in 1978. Only a few months later, Endre Tót had a mail-art exhibition *Rainy questions* also in Gallery Suðurgata 7.

To evoke these historical shows, we borrowed works of art, photographs, and documents from the Living Art Museum, Reykjavík, National Gallery of Iceland, Ludwig Museum Budapest, Vintage Galéria and abc Gallery Budapest, and private collectors from Budapest, Paris, Amsterdam, and Reykjavík.

ÆFINGAR Í SIGLINGUM - þar sem hægt er að skipta út, eða sleppa, höfuðáttunum í áttavitanum, (Köln 1972).
Í boði Géza Perneckzy

NAVIGATION EXERCISES with the compass having exchangeable and leaveable cardinal points, (Köln 1972).
Courtesy of Géza Perneckzy



GÉZA PERNECZKY



Mirror Dance [Modulated Person], myndasería, 1973.
Birt með leyfi Géza Perneckzy.

Mirror Dance [Modulated Person], detail from the photo series, 1973. Courtesy of Géza Perneckzy.

GÁBOR ATTALAI



RED-Y-MADE No. 481, 1978. Í einkaeign, París.

RED-Y-MADE No. 481, 1978. Private collection, París.



Regnvotar spurningar, 1978.
Birt með leyfi acb Gallery, Búdapest
Rainy questions, 1978
Courtesy of acb Gallery, Budapest

ENDRE TÓT



Evergreen idea by Endre Tót, 1971.
Úr safneign Nýlistasafnsins
Evergreen idea by Endre Tót, 1971.
From the collection of the Living Art Museum

Í sal 1 sýnum við verk listamannanna eins og þeir starfa í dag og það er áhugavert að sjá hvernig þau hafa þróast sem listamenn.

Listamennirnir sex voru á mismunandi stigum ferla sinna á þessum tíma. Árið 1973 höfðu Kristján Guðmundsson (f. 1941 á Snæfelssnesi) og Sigurður Guðmundsson (f. 1942 í Reykjavík) þegar haldið nokkrar einkasýningar á Íslandi, Þýskalandi og Hollandi og stofnað og rekið Gallerí SÚM í Reykjavík, Galerie Signal og In-Out Center í Amsterdam.

Kees Visser (f. 1948, Holland) settist að á Íslandi eftir að hafa stýrt Galerie Lóa í Haarlem með Rúrí (f. 1951, Reykjavík) sem hélt svo áfram námi í Hollandi. Eggert Pétursson (1956, Reykjavík) og Ingólfur Arnarsson (1956, Reykjavík) voru listnemar í Reykjavík þegar þeir unnu við sýningarnar í Gallerí Suðurgötu 7. Listamennirnir sem sýna á þessari sýningu hófu feril sinn á sjöunda og áttunda áratug síðustu aldar og eru á meðal virtustu og þekktustu listamanna Íslands í dag.

Við viljum þakka listamönnunum, BERG Contemporary, i8 og þeim sem lánuðu úr einkasöfnum.

In Gallery 1, we present the current art practices of the artists that initiated the exhibitions in the 1970s. It is of great interest to see how their artistic paths diverged.

The six artists were at different stages of their career at that time. By 1973, Kristján Guðmundsson (b. 1941, Snæfellsnes Peninsula) and Sigurður Guðmundsson (b. 1942, Reykjavík) had already had several solo exhibitions in Iceland, Germany and the Netherlands, founded and run the galleries SÚM in Reykjavík, Galerie Signal and In-Out Center in Amsterdam. Kees Visser (b. 1948, the Netherlands) settled down in Iceland for a few years after running Galerie Lóa in Haarlem with Rúrí (b. 1951, Reykjavík) who went to the Netherlands to continue her studies. Eggert Pétursson (1956, Reykjavík) and Ingólfur Arnarsson (1956, Reykjavík) were art students in Reykjavík when they were working at the exhibitions in Gallery Suðurgata 7.

Starting their career in the sixties and seventies, the artists represented in this show are among the most well-established figures of Icelandic art scene today. For their loans of artworks, our thanks go to the artists, BERG Contemporary, i8, and private collectors from Reykjavík.



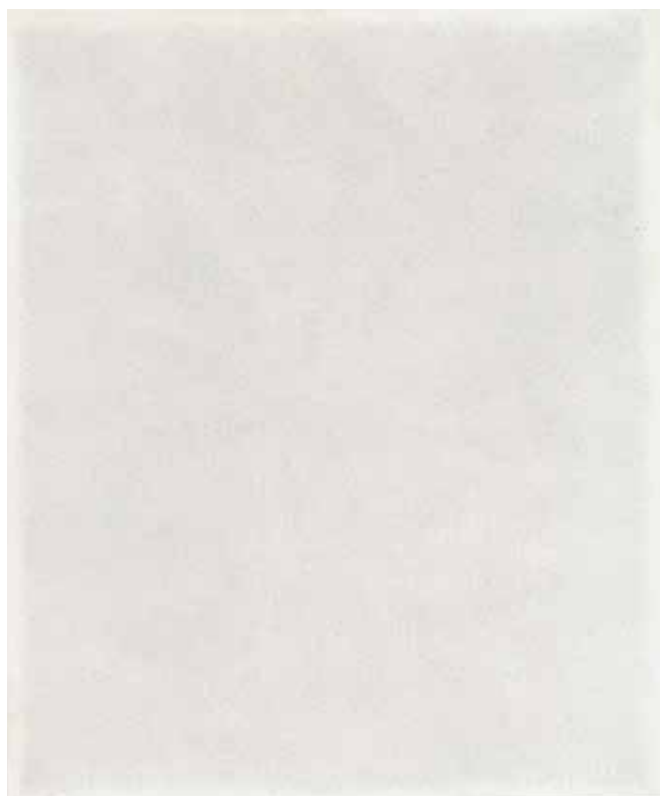
Eggert Pétursson

Án titils, 2015

Með leyfi: Rannveig Eir Einarisdóttir / Hilmar Þór Kristinsson

Untitled, 2015

Courtesy of Rannveig Eir Einarisdóttir / Hilmar Þór Kristinsson



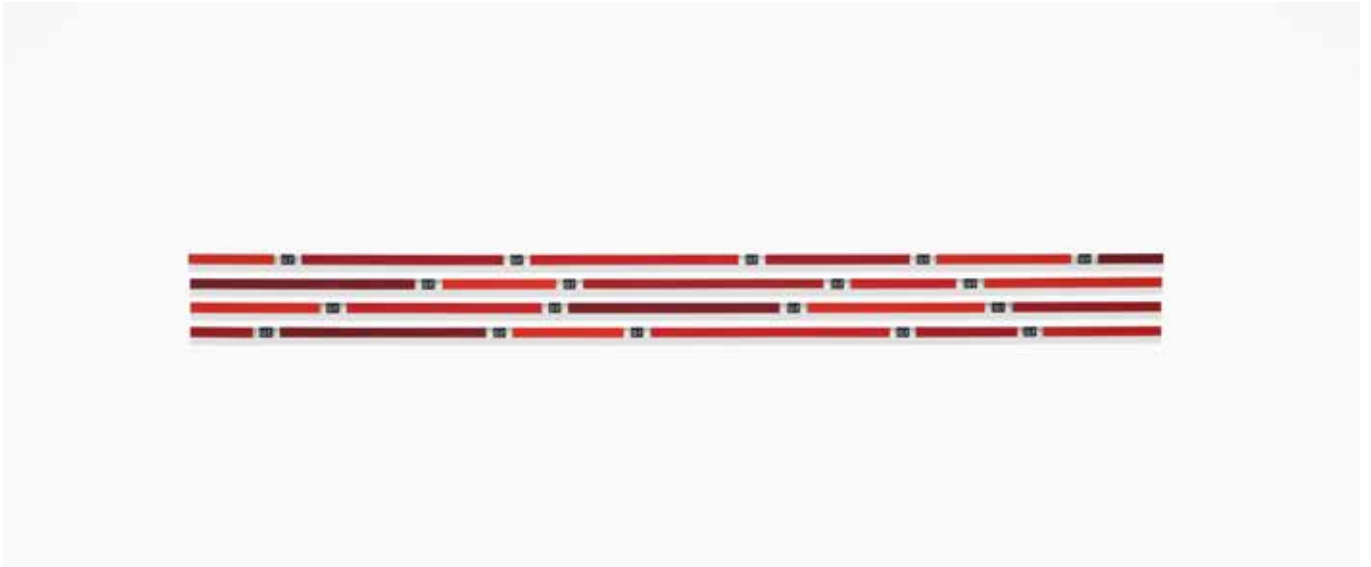
Ingólfur Arnarsson

Án titils 6, 2018

Með leyfi listamannsins
og i8 gallerí, Reykjavík

Untitled 6, 2018

Courtesy of the artist
and i8 Gallery, Reykjavík

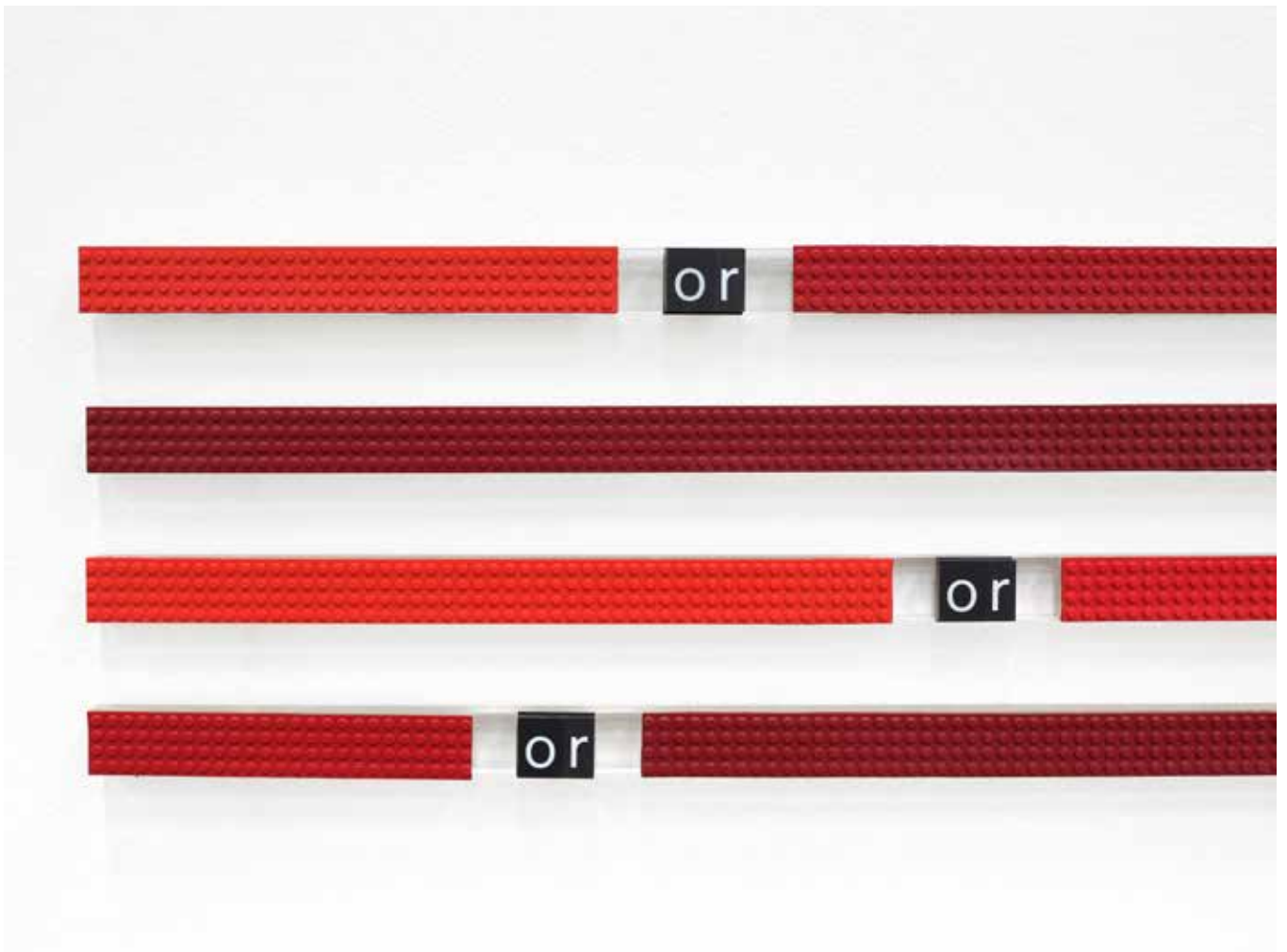


Kristján Guðmundsson

Red or Red Poem, 2005

Með leyfi listamannsins og i8 gallerí, Reykjavík

Courtesy of the artist and i8 Gallery, Reykjavík





Kees Visser

16 tónum af bláum (Y röð), 2016
Með leyfi listamannsins og BERG
Contemporary, Reykjavík

16 Shades of Blue (Y Series), 2016
Courtesy of the artist and BERG
Contemporary, Reykjavík



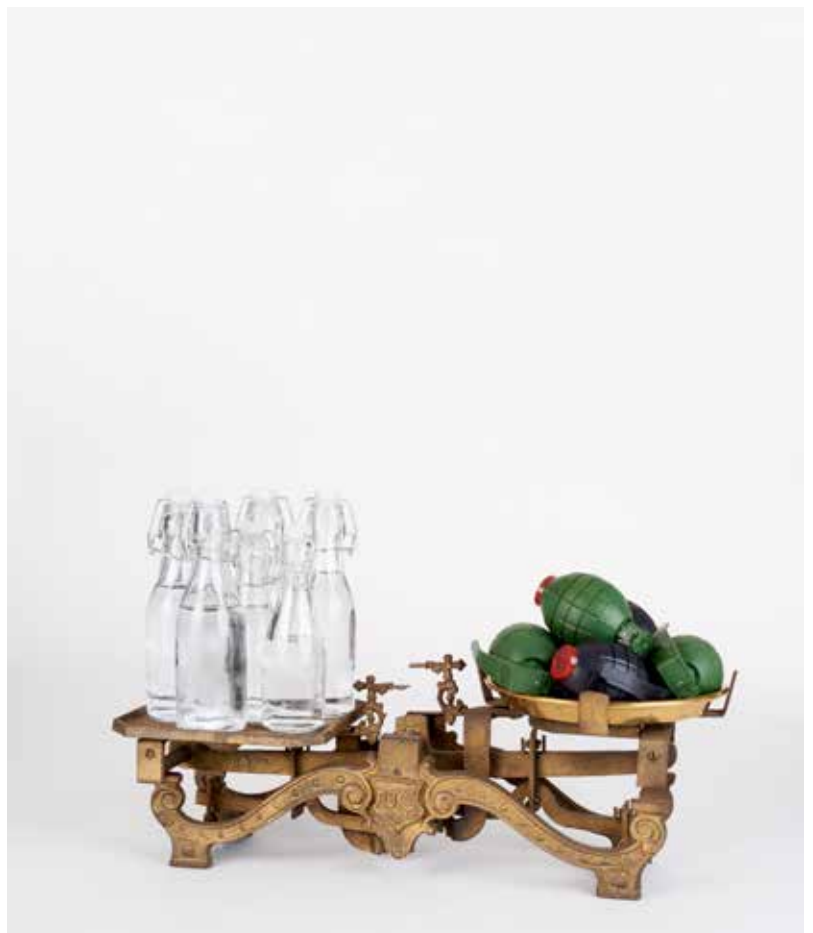
Rúri

Balance-XII, 2016

Balance-XVI, 2016

Með leyfi listamannsins

Courtesy of the artist





Sigurður Guðmundsson

Come Back Muse, 2013

Með leyfi listamannsins

Courtesy of the artist

Are You Glad If You Can Ask Something?

CURATOR

Zsóka Leposa

CO-CURATOR

László Százados

ARTISTS

Eggert Pétursson

Endre Tót

Gábor Attalai

Géza Perneczky

Ingólfur Arnarsson

Kristján Guðmundsson

Kees Visser

Rúrí

Sigurður Guðmundsson