# Katalin Kortmann-Járay

Works and installations

2019-2023

# TO MARIANNE

Space specific exhibiton with Sári Gink and Karima Mendreczky

2019

Paper, polymer clay, glas, sand, ceramic, resin, pvc, wood, pflaster

Variable dimensions

"Marianne's memory book was a gift of Jenő Heltai, who began his entry on the first page thus: "Those who are loved by the gods / are forever left as children". These lines of the Heltai poem have appeared in countless cultural contexts ever since, from Judit Halász (singer of Hungarian children's music) to Hungarian rock-pop band Belga's song Ovi [nursery school]; the point of departure for the exhibition entitled Marianne's Memory Book, however, derives from its original layers of meaning. At the focus of the investigation of Sári Gink, Katalin Kortmann Járav and Karina Mendreczky stands one of the tokens of our human and social self-identity: our childhood memory, its forms of expression and its effects exercised upon the receiver. We are familiar with countless forms of memory; there is collective, social and historical memory, but among all of them it is personal memory that most determines our identity. Mnemonic activity can be automatic or spontaneous (implicit), and it can be conscious, intentional (explicit) inscribing, preservation and evocation. The implicit mode of evocation is primarily the nature of practised skills and episodic memory: it is here that we store our personal experiences and observations. The aim of the exhibition is for the elements arranged in the space to evoke implicit memories that relate to the childhood of the visitors. Fantasy and reality can often become confused in the mind of a child. The inextricable mixture of these frequently provides abundant fertile ground for the adult artist self to create memory-based work. The ensemble of objects in the PINCE (Cellar) exhibition space, comprised of many elements yet viewable as a single site-specific installation, reaches back to the childhood and schooldays of the artists, while also including details that will be familiar to the viewer. One of the central elements of the exhibition is the installation produced from several hundred school notebooks printed with the "little boat" emblem familiar to everyone (in Hungary). It is however less likely that the visitors will know that these blue (lined), red (graph), and green (blank) notebooks, known by the name Harmónia [Harmony], are the products of the Fűzfői Papírmanufaktúra [Willow Paper Factory], founded in 1928 and operating still today, which has provided writing materials to schoolchildren for generations. The artists ask that the visitors, for the period of the exhibition, step out from their passive position as viewers, and either with their names or without, write, or perhaps draw, their own memories that are recalled by the individual objects, or the totality of the exhibition...."



# **BODENFUND**

2020

Lightbox: Wood, glass, light, backlit print

120x50x75 cm

The work, 'Bodenfund, (The Collector)', deals with the connection of the child (in a broader sense, man) to objects. One of the significant forms of the child's worldview and connection to his environment is animism, that is, the consciousness characteristic of living things attributed to inanimate things. The basis of animism, which is also the basis of natural religions, is not, however, the same as faith. In the early stages of human individual development the phenomenon of animism is a natural and logical development.

In the middle we can see the child figure, surrounded by many collected, discovered and even preserved objects. The artist compiled these from a collection of her father's as well as from her own childhood. The arrangement, including the central location of the figure, refers to the egocentric starting point that is unique to each child (in a broader sense as a characteristic of human beings). At the same time, the figure places itself in the object environment, which it personifies to a certain degree — the light filtered through the objects is also meant to indicate the phenomenon of animism.

The collection includes quite banal objects such as a piece of gravel or a snail shell. The personal relevance associated with such ordinary treasures is a phenomenon known to all, yet their story remains hidden to the outsider. However, there are objects that reveal their story to most people through the collective memory that is deposited within them. One such object is the ammunition in the upper left corner, which was discovered and uncovered when working in the garden, and which also brings to life real historical events.

The glowing objects or the images of the objects are placed in a 'container' whose nature is difficult to determine. They do not appear in frames — a piece of furniture that 'protects' the objects, its physique -body- is considered symbolic from the point of view of the theme.





# **BODENFUND-PERMANENT RESIDUAL**

2021

Lightbox (BODENFUND): wood, light, backlit print, glass Clay, concrete, stone, polymer clay, soil, sand

Variable size

"But something will never be defeated, at least as long as humans will be born infants, infantes. Infantia is the guarantee that there remains an enigma in us, a not easily communicable opacity - that something is left that remains, and that we must bear witness to it."

(Jean-François Lyotard, "That Which Resists, After All" 1992)

It is a common perception that contemporary human existence strives towards some form of existence that is distanced from and transcends unity with nature. Hence, in more and more areas of life, there is a need for a kind of return, a resistance to the current systems, a need to establish relations that can be described as more just and natural. In the uncertainty of the present and the future, the past becomes the focus of study, and the various pasts become a study of speculative interpretation. Opposite - and illuminated by - the lightbox, which resembles a large display case, are pseudoobjects referring to the view of the world of early cultures/people. The "overlapping" positioning of the two units suggests a parallel between the animism assumed in the case of the child form of existence and the more strongly held representations of reality in the world concepts of different cultures, with both units expressing certain manifestations of beginning-initial states. Tale, fiction, the mythological way of thinking take on a new form in the search for the future based on the real or even assumed knowledge of the past in the hopeless visions of the present for the future. The double retrospection represented by the installation can be interpreted as a metaphor for the search for origins and a new beginning.





# A WHALE OF A BAD TIME/ AMONG STARS

Interactive installation

2020

Concrete, plexiglass, textile, paper, led light, printer

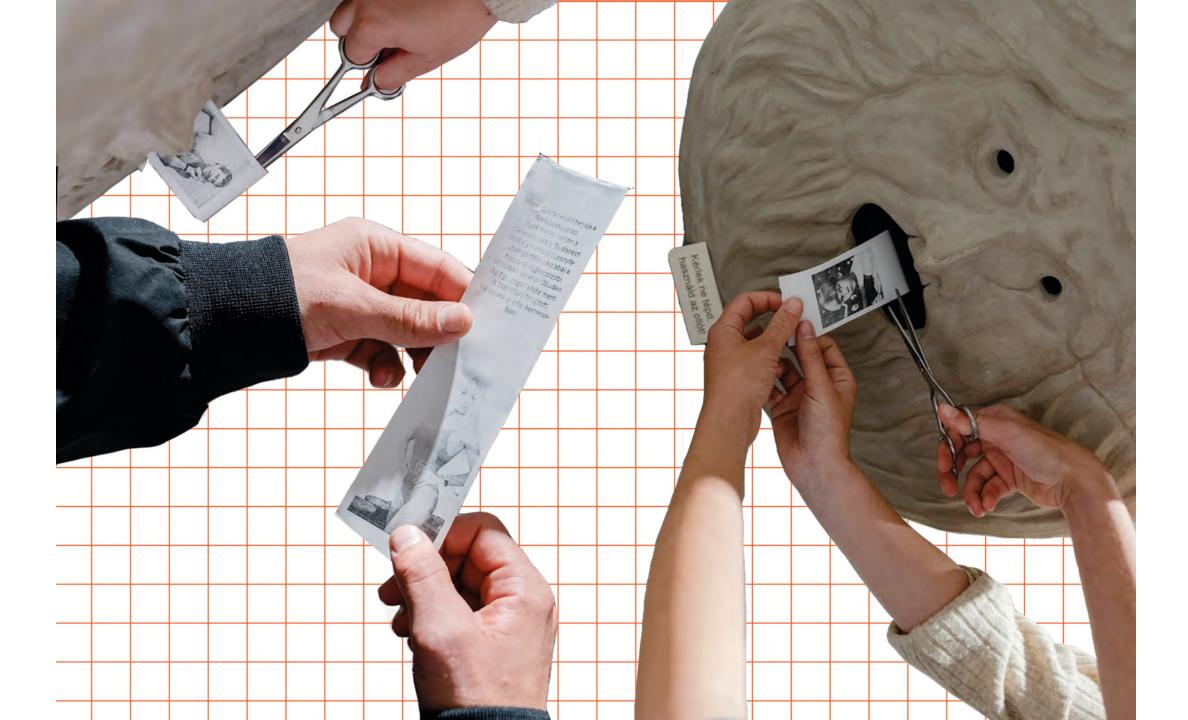
Variable Size

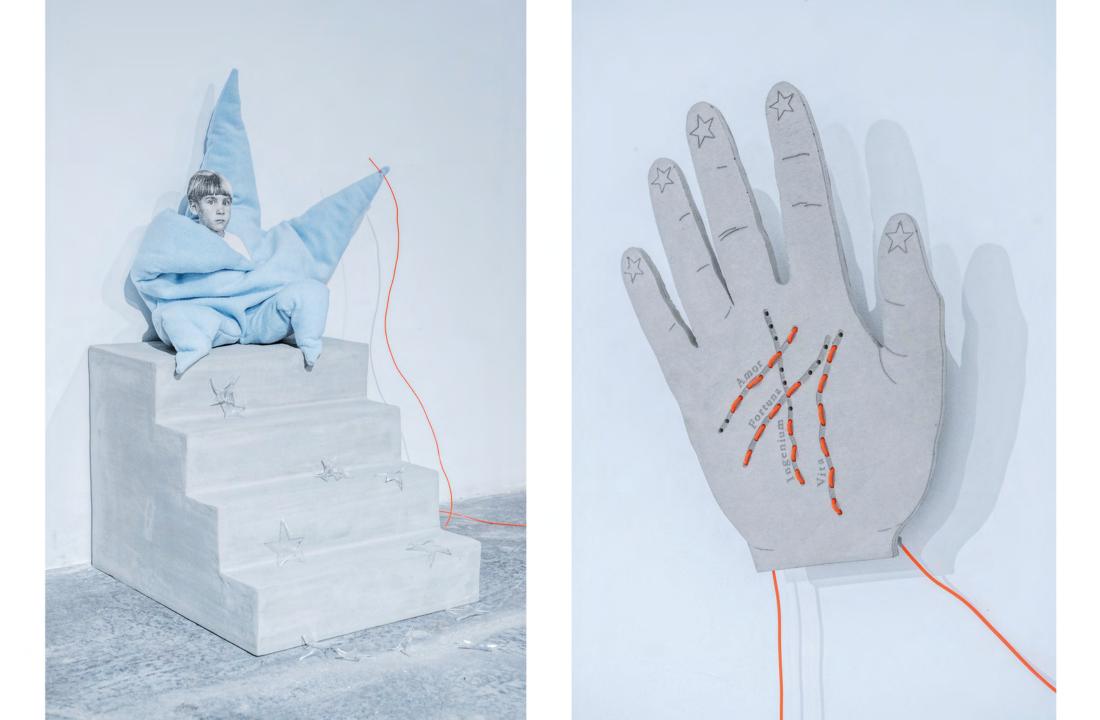
The topic of the exhibition evolves around the period of the late 80s, the 90s, and the beginning of the 2000s, and its perception and memory of this era through artistic practices and memories of the Y generation. The exhibiting artists are in and around their thirties so they have memories from this period as youngsters. Now they remember and research the connection between past and present. The title reflects on a so-called flashbulb memory, an infamous case in recent Hungarian history. On the 12th of December 1993 the television broadcast of the beloved cartoon DuckTales was interrupted when the public television announced the death of Hungarian Prime Minister József Antal.

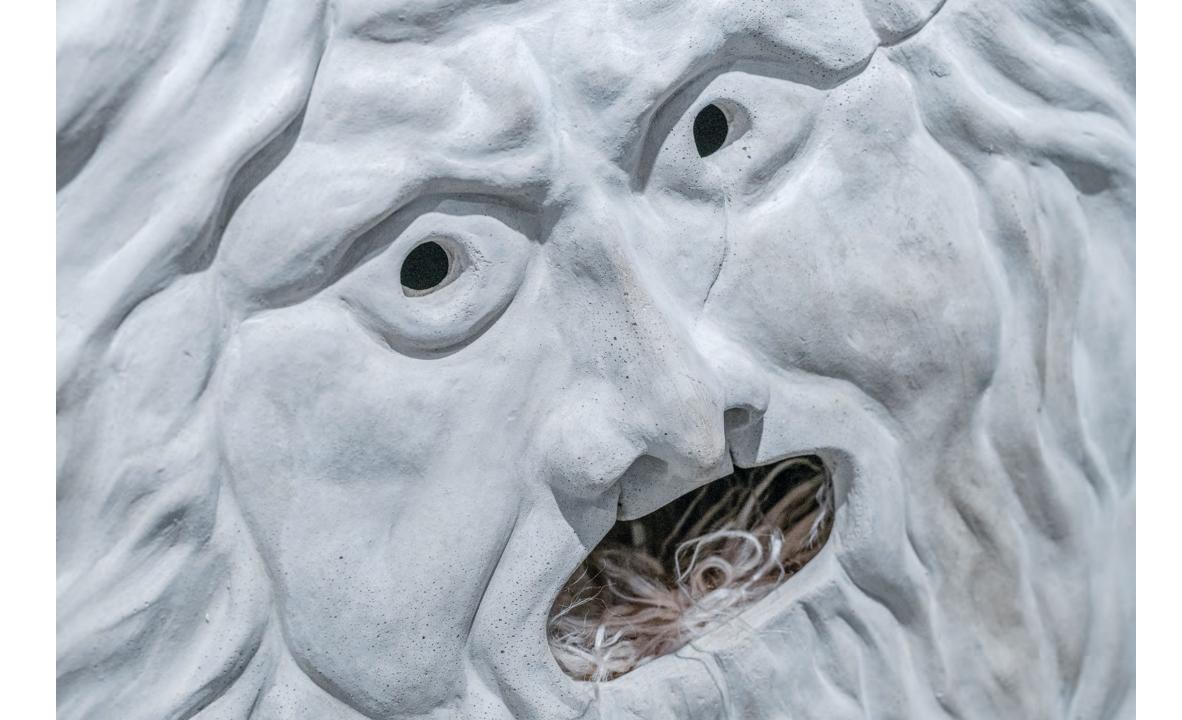
The concrete head is based on a fortune-telling machine called the "Mouth of Truth" widespread in the 1990s. According to the inscriptions on the original machine (more precisely, the original divination machine summoning the Roman Bocca della Verita), the 90' machine read his visions out of the wrinkles of one's hand and the position of the stars and planets. As a child, I dreaded The Mouth of Truth, I didn't dare to put my hand into the machine. I was afraid that out of something I would never be able to leave (like the wrinkles of my hand or the "position of the stars" at my birth), my future would be predestinated. The reinterpreted machine was created by using the memories of roughly 50 civilian participants: Instead of predictions, the double faced machine head shared his messages about Hungary in the 1990s by printing small notes from the stories of his database. He gave the visitor descriptions of memories and moments, as well as the details of everyday life (based on the participants' memories, collected previously). With an external QR code, visitors could use their mobile phones to expand the memory of the Word of Truth on site. Messages sent in this way were later stored in the machine's memory. For the Vienna version, an additional and translated collection of messages would be added to the head's database.

"Memories of childhood and remembering childhood can help us complicate time, to rapture narratives of historical progress and to disrupt the present by reminding us of their unrealisable futures and highlight memory practices as tools for future-making (Shaw, 2013)." - from Zsuzsa Millei's description of the previous Exhibition at the ISBN Gallery, 2020











# **KINDERWURST**

2021

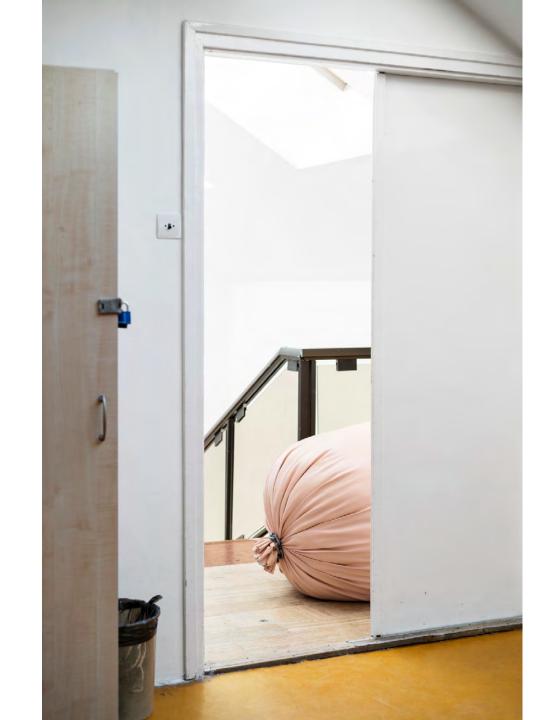
faux leather, sponge, polymer clay

90x90x120 cm and 90x90x3cm

According to a 2017-2019 study individual multinational companies deliver products with different ingredients to Central and Eastern European countries, and different things to their Western customers, often with the same packaging. This case, of course, provided a basis for many politicians to practice their nationalist rhetoric. According to official statements, there was no intention to discriminate against the society of the region. However, the differing taste experiences resulting from the other ingredients in many cases led to the assumption of poorer quality among the buyers in the countries concerned. In addition, many consumers perceived the case as a negative charge regarding their taste (Eastern Euro pean taste?).

" In the installation, it is not my intention to reveal the real or perceived reasons behind the case, it is not my goal to establish the truth. Based on the frustration that arose from the incident and based on the frustration affecting much of society anyway, a cut-out statue for children appears"

The central character of the installation, the "Kinderwurst", is a paradoxical phenomenon in itself anyway: its composition is almost always questionable, yet it is made specifically for children.









# **ARTEFACTS**

2019-2020

Transfer print, foil print, chinaware, dry flower, sand, lightbox, paper, Giclée print

Variable size

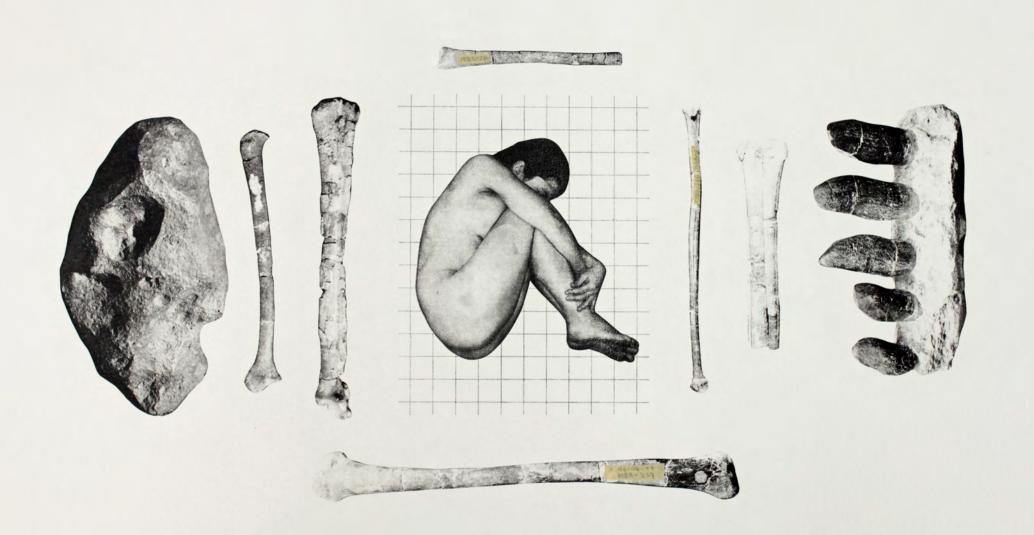
"Death has become a dreaded and unspeakable issue to be avoided by every means in our modern society. Other societies have learned to cope better with the reality of death than we seem to have done. There are others who successfully integrated the expectation of death into their understanding of life. Why is it so hard for us to do

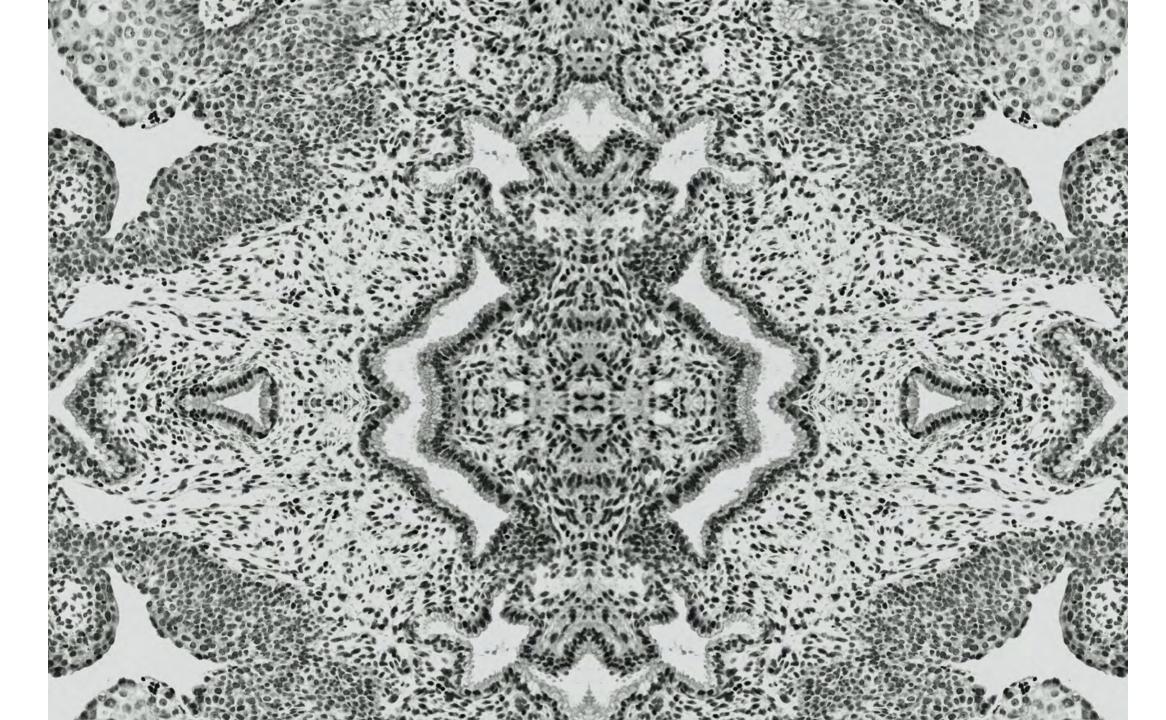
this?"\* - Elisabeth Kübler-Ross

In the work 'Artefacts', the perception of death and its related bio-physical and psycho-cultural phenomena and its beliefs are in represented in pairs. Regarding the dualist approach of the body and soul, the right and the left side of the installation depicts two different but coherent aspects of the topic. The lightbox on the left and the porcelain object below illustrate different, but inherently similar perceptions of the soul in all cultures – the spirit – as a shape leaving the body, or as a luminous phenomenon appearing in the sky. The set of objects on the right seek to portray a materialistic conception, in a compilation of museum collections - transformation from one form/material to another, becoming one, and embedding in another matter – a piece of amber lined with dry flowers, as a sarcophagus, a symbol of burial. Beneath it a body between bones, stones, and another remnant can be seen. The right side reflects the physical nature of the passing, but at the same time still retains the mythical attitudes of perception. Behind these pictures a wallpaper print is stretched onto the wall – an area composed of cellular histological patterns – a depiction of a biological factor. The pathologist reads from the drawing of such sections the presence or absence of the pathological lesion.

We can think of passing in many ways, just as the course of death and the related emotions can differ significantly. The science of thanatology takes into account this diversity in the care of the dying, as well as in the care of the secondary individual(s) suffering — the relative. The ensemble avoids the rough, drastic grouting of the death. Just as the thanatologist turns to half of his patients, so does the installation turn to the viewer — with the demand of reassurance and acceptance.







# Transitional Objects, Transitional Landscapes 2022

Curator: Ajna Maj

Obejcts from the Installative exhibiton

"...The exhibition attempts to explore this complex set of relationships. Environmental psychological and philosophical approaches to the theme are addressed by incorporating visual elements related to spiritism, magic and animism. The exhibited works approach the theme from different angles mother, child, woman - and, mostly drawing on personal stories and experiences, make the feelings of nostalgia, topophilia (attachment to places of refuge and shelter) and insideness (Gaston Bachelard) collectively experienceable through intuitive perception. One of the basic principles of environmental psychology is that man and his environment are in constant interaction and transaction, and that their dynamics fundamentally determine the quality of human life. Hence the role of the home, which is psychologically the most privileged place for man, is of particular importance. In the case of the home, we can speak of both a profane space, which satisfies a primary need, and a sacred space, as a form of self-expression. In the process of furnishing, inhabiting and coexistence, objects, like space, play an important role in defining personal and social identity. And just as with places, we can develop an emotional attachment to our material objects, based on experiencing them as part of ourselves. In the gallery space, transformed into an apartment, everyday objects - telephone set, curtains, seats - seem grotesquely removed from reality: Katalin Kortmann Járay's meticulously sculpted objects made of reinforced concrete or clay appear as mystical, fairytale-like anthropomorphic creatures, which are both familiar and alienating. Through playing with dimensions, enlarging and shrinking, distorting, abstracting and transforming, the objects and natural creatures (moth, cobweb, mould) retain only their main character traits. Psychology refers to objects that continue to provide a sense of security for children in the process of separation from their mothers as transitional objects. Dulling the sense of insecurity and vulnerability associated with the traumas of our times (awareness of illness, war, climate anxiety, energy crisis) through nostalgia or an alternative/online reality that is supposedly predictable and controllable can be seen as a coping strategy. However, these emotionally distanced perceptions of reality can lead to the fragmentation of the psyche and, thus, to the erosion of inner landscapes..."

(Ajna Maj)









BACKLAND-Istók

2023

Rosted iron, UV Prints on aluminum, paper, preinted textil

The work was a part of the exhibition "Mondva Csinált Dolgok".

"Mondva Csinált Dolgok,, is a series of groups of exhibitions held at four different locations, created jointly by the students of the HUFA Doctoral School. The main title that unites each exhibition refers to the most basic dilemma that arises in connection with doctoral training: To the seemingly irresolvable contradiction between the scientific and the artistic approach, to the problem of the relationship between linguistic (textual) and pictorial (visual) presentation. In order to examine the concept more thoroughly and process it with artistic tools, four types of ideas were created, which will be presented in different spaces at different times. The different units were organized along the parallels found in the creative practice of the artists belonging to the given group, as well as the connections of the topics they examined. The narrative of the present exhibition is built from a combination of photos that obscure their motives, hard-to-define objects, collage-like surfaces, images, and videos depicting mysterious happenings or non-happenings. The works presented in the spaces of the Glassyard Gallery are organically connected to the doctoral research of the given creator, however, taken out of their "original" context, they are supplemented with different additional ways of reading due to their openness to interpretation. The works focus on social and environmental phenomena in a self-reflective way, in a sensitive, personal, and humorous approach. Despite their formal constraints, the works of art carry within themselves the possibility of free association, thus evoking the performative, open nature of live speech.









Istók Hany is the Hungarian Mowali, Tarzan, an orphan, a lost child found in the Hanság moorland. Since his discovery in 1749, many legends have circulated around his identity. From the few authentic surviving data, it appears that the naked child, who could not speak, survived in the water like an animal. He could swim like a fish ( or at least very well) and ate only grass, hay, and other plants. According to some sources, the fishermen who found him first wanted to release him back into nature. but then later they changed their mind and took him to Kapuvár Castle, where Godfearing people immediately baptized the uncivilized little man, who was around 8 years old. They dressed Istók up and tried to teach him to speak. According to some sources, this attempt succeeded to some extent, while according to other sources, the civilizing attempt was a complete failure. The circumstances of his disappearance remain as unclear as his origin. According to the most common record, escaping from his "caregivers", he jumped into the water and swam away, back to nature where he came from and where he belonged. Over time, more and more vaque personal descriptions were created and his figure went through a typical transformation: the fish man, the frog boy, the amphibian child who is half animal and whose body is covered with scales, and many other versions were born.

"The story of Istók Hany can also be read as a story of failed socialization ... it is a variant of the topos back to the roots, back to ancient nature, the Hanság becomes a new Eden, an eternal paradise, a symbolic place of found happiness in this profane salvation story, where Istók Hany will be rewarded. Thus the structure of the tale is circular, the hero returns to the same place from which he started, and the story and the protagonist of the story return to himself. For by shedding his clothes in the forest, he is transformed back into what he originally is, regaining his lost identity."

# (Péter Gerencsér)

Passing through the print that was exhibited as a curtain, we first see Kinga Enzsöly's video installation "Vanitas".

"We, pious souls"
Fot the exhibition Mediating Time and Charme

2023

Mixed media installation (details)

Variable size

"For her artistic reflections, Katalin Kortmann Járay chose two historical objects from the Kunst- und Wunderkammer of the Forchenstein Castle, dating from the first half of the 17th century. One of the objects selected is a gilded iron key made in 1618, which, according to its coat of arms, was once the key to the imperial chamberlain, Count Nikolaus Esterházy. The other object is the Historia antipodum, printed in Frankfurt am Main in 1631: a bibliographic curiosity associated with two "authors".

The starting point for Kortmann's reflections on the historical objects was a study by the Dutch historian, Professor Michiel van Groesen, who worked on the history of the printing and content of the Historia antipodum. According to the study, the volume was first published in German in 1638, and its contents were based on a twenty-seven-volume opus originally owned by the De Bry family, a series of roughly fifty etchings of travelogues of Europeans visiting the world outside Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries. The series was so influential that the depictions of the overseas world in this collection of texts and images influenced the European view of other cultures until the 18th century. Johann Ludwig Gottfried (1584-1633) and Matthäus Merian (1593–1650), who republished the volumes, divided the collection into two equal parts, one for the India Orientalis series and the other for the volumes on the Western Hemisphere. The most significant addition to the original series was the German volume Historia Antipodum oder Newe Welt, published in 1638. This voluminous, folio format opus of over 600 pages became arguably one of the most monumental publications of early modern Europe, published as an abridged version of the fourteen-part series on America that formed part of the De Bry travelogue collection. The introduction to the German edition, jointly annotated by Gottfried and Merian, emphasised the idea that the (natural) world is God's creation and that man's faith in God's omnipotence is strengthened by learning more about the concept and history of the world. In the new volume, the travelogues no longer follow each other in sequence, but all the available information is summarised in three long chapters on the history of the New World, with illustrations placed within the texts. Some images were entirely new in that they were deliberately created for the abridged volume. These illustrations allow us to assess the intentions with which Merian and Gottfried might have prepared the Historia Antipodum. One of the most striking new images depicts how the devil tormented and tortured the Indians at Tupinam in Brazil, as told by Jean de Lérv..."



"...According to Léry, the devil's punishment of the Tupi, just as they were discussing their pagan beliefs with Protestant visitors from France, was carried out by various animals and birds that only the natives could see. During the punishment, the Tupis promised the Huguenots to convert to Christianity, but as soon as Satan leaves, they conveniently forget their vows. The new volume's illustrations follow the previous editions' representational strategies, with spectacular and — at least in the eyes of contemporary readers — horrific practices such as cannibalism, nudity and devil worship featuring more prominently. This careful editorial strategy allowed the travel collection's target audience to be both Protestant and Catholic, as the message of 'otherness' in the New World became acceptable to all European consumers, regardless of religion. The New World was made even less recognisable and attractive to the Old-World audience through conscious and selective editing. With the new illustrations, the editors sought to make the world of the "primitive people" even more exotic than before.

Based on the theses of the study, Katalin Kortmann created a Wunderkammer-like set in the exhibition space along with the text and illustrations of the publication. The central element of her installation is a 200 × 140 cm temple-shaped chariot cage, which gives the impression of a circus cage, in which a collage of frozen graphics is displayed. The collage depicts an imagined demonic figure, similar to how the indigenous people of the New World and/or the demons that possessed them were described and depicted in the travelogues published in the volume. The smallscale polymer sculptures around the cage give the impression of a nightmarish putto, a dragon-like snake and a human-faced caterpillar. The demonic vision enacted in the installation essentially evokes the spectacle of how the territories, natural beliefs and cultures of the New World have been attempted to be portrayed over the centuries from the perspective of European Christian supremacy. The stereotyped portrayal of black Africans, Indians and other "exotic" ethnic peoples of pagan faiths was not only discouraging but also led to the intensification of superiority. Colonialism, the slave trade and the Christian conversion of indigenous peoples who practised a fundamentally animistic religion further exacerbated this. The installation also includes a key-shaped ceramic sculpture that symbolically 'opens up' the world Kortmann has created."

(Mónika Zsikla)



















Katalin Kortmann Járay

1986, Budapest,

Lives and works in Budapest, Berlin, Vienna

#### Studies

2019 -

Doctoral Studies, Hungarian University of Fine Arts, Budapest

2006 - 2012

Hungarian University of Fine Arts, Budapest

04. 2011-08. 2011

Akademie der Bildenden Künste München, Germany

#### Selected Duo Exhibitions with Karina Mendreczky

#### 2023

Installation for the Esterházy Art Award exhibition, curated by Vitus Weh, Ludwig Museum, Budapest, HU Oasis, Q21 Salon, Duo exhibition, with Karina Mendreczky, Curated by Verena Kaspar-Eisert, Vienna, AT

#### 2022

Buzz, Duo exhibition with Karina Mendreczky, Studio Gallery/SYAA, Budapest, HU

"People Look Like Flowers at Last", Duo exhibition with Karina Mendreczky, Parallel Vienna 2022, Vienna, AT

#### Selected Group Exhibitions, Biennials, Triennials and Fairs

#### 2023

ETERNIT, outdoor exhibition, Project833, curated by: Anna Zsoldos and Anna Seress

"The eco-theatrical shape-shifter - landscape as a political agitator", curated by Like a little disaster, Museum of Contemporary Art Pino Pascali, Polignano a Mare, IT

Mediating Time and Charme, curated by Mónika Zsikla, Q Contemporary, Budapest, HU

Mondva Csinált Dolgok, curated by Ajna Maj, Gallery Glassyard, Budapest, HU

Parallel Edition, with Galerie Rudolf Leeb, Vienna, AT

An ideal meal, curated by Henriette and Viktor Seibert, Studio Hannibal, Berlin Germany

Transitional objects, transitional landscapes, Curated by Ajna Maj, Deák Erika Gallery, Budapest, HU

#### 2022

"Maradjon köztünk" – Hungarian University of Fine Arts, Curated by Julia Salamon and Marta Czene

Regresso, CHB, Curated by Zsuzska Petró, Orsolya Lia Vető, Patrick Nicholas Tayler

Fair For Art Vienna 2021 with Galerie Rudolf Leeb, Vienna, AT

The man who stepped in paint, MKE Profil, Curated by Kitti Klaudia Harmati, Budapest, Hungary

#### 2021

A Better Time, They Say, 1111 Gallery, Budapest, HU

A Whale of a Bad Time/Spinning the Sticky Threads of Childhood Memories: From Cold War to Anthropoce conference, Gábor Sillye Cultur House, Hajdúböszörmény, HU

Walter Koschatzky Preis 21 (nominated), Vienna, AT

FIREWORKS, Curated by Eva Bubla, Placcc Festival 2021, Budapest

Permanent residual, Curated by Ajna Maj, SYAA, Budapest, HU

#### 2020

A Whale of a Bad Time, Curated by Zsófia Kókai, ISBN books and gallery, Budapest, HU

#### 2019

"Oft die Zukunfz ist schon da, ehe wir ihr gewachsen sind" Internationales Willi Münzenberg Forum, Berlin, Germany Marianne Emlékkönyvébe, curated by Bea Istvánkó, PINCE, Budapest, Hungary

#### 2018

Art Spring Berlin, 2018, Studio, Exhibition, Berlin, Germany Toky International Mini-Print Triennial, Tama Art University, Tokyo, Japan Heise Kunstpreis Dessau, Autohaus Heise, Dessau, Germany The 5th International Graphic Art Biennial of Szeklerland, Romania

#### 2017

Opdagelser 2017, Gallery Heike Arndt Dk, Kettinge, Denmark "Magic mirror in my hand...", Outdoor installation with EÖS project, Wien, Austria Fresh Legs, Gallery Heike Arndt Dk, Berlin, Germany.

#### 2016

Heartfield und Grosz, Montage\_16, FMP1, Berlin, Germany Fundamental, The 5. Mediations Biennale, CK Zamek, Poznan, Poland Art Lab Kettinge, Gallery Heike Arndt DK, Kettinge, Denmark "In Vielfalt", Prize and Exhibiton, Eggenstein-Leopoldhafen, Germany

#### 2015

"Unsere Leben wären alle ganz anders verlaufen...", Gallery2, Auguststrasse, Berlin, Germany

#### 2013

18 qm, Berlin, Art residency-collaboration, Berlin, Germany Soundscape Festival, Cres, Landart Week, Osor, Croatia. EatLandManArt, Landart Week, Boxtel, Landart Week, Boxtel, Netherlands

#### 2012

Best of Diploma, The Hungarian University of Fine Arts, Budapest, Hungary

#### Memberships

2019- Studio of Young Artists' s Association, Budapest

#### **Awards and Grants**

2024, Visegrad Scholarship Program, Sopa Gallery, Košice, Slovakia

2023, Esterházy Art Award, winner with Karina Mendreczky

2023, Gallery Budapest Artist Exchange Program, Budapest, Hungary

2023, LUDWIG Scholarship

2021, Gallery Budapest Artist Exchange Program, Budapest, Hungary

2019, Award of the International Willi Münzenberg Forum, Berlin, Germany

# Works in public collections:

Graphic collection of the Tama Art University, Tokyo, Japan