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**MEDIEVALISM  
IN CONTEMPORARY HUNGARIAN ART (1990–2010)**

By

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## Abstract

The thesis discusses *medievalism*, the afterlife of medieval art in Hungary from 1990 to 2010. Through twelve case studies it elucidates how contemporary Hungarian artists dealt with their medieval heritage. The first chapter, *Colliding Timelines* is dedicated to the specific problems of monumental sculptures erected for public commission. The second, *Medieval Fantasies* discusses the antagonism of artistic fantasy and scientific accuracy; also the questions of education and entertainment. *Paraphrased Authorities* seeks answers why artists chose specific medieval works for paraphrase, while *Appropriation of the Medieval* shows an artistic attitude which selects only few elements of the medieval work, making it integral part of the new creation.

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## Introduction

According to the Merriam–Webster dictionary, the term *medievalism* originates from 1853 and describes (1) medieval quality, character, or state (2) devotion to the institutions, arts, and practices of the Middle Ages.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, the present choice of topic owes much to the author's own devotion towards medieval art. From this concern rose several questions. Are contemporary Hungarian artists interested in medieval art? If so, why do they look back for inspiration to such a distant age? And finally: how, in what ways do they deal with their medieval heritage?

In this thesis I will use *medievalism* as a term to designate any post-medieval work which makes reference to medieval art. Here the adjective *medieval* refers to works created in the medieval period and/or usually perceived as medieval. Accordingly, I include late gothic paintings which are often labelled northern renaissance<sup>2</sup>, while I will equally touch upon a product of nineteenth century medievalism, widely perceived as genuine medieval work of art.

Medievalism as an expression has its limitations. The word ends with the letters “ism”, yet the phenomenon is essentially different from artistic currents like impressionism or surrealism. Medievalism is not a movement; the works discussed in this thesis usually constitute only a layer in the artists' oeuvre. The second problem is that “ism” suggests a closed timeframe. Although nineteenth century medievalism might be different from contemporary examples, the process of turning towards medieval art is nonetheless similar, while future developments could equally produce comparable works. From a reversed, past-

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<sup>1</sup> "medievalism," *Merriam–Webster Online Dictionary*, 2010. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/medievalism> (retrieved: 7 June, 2010). The definition equals the one in Frederick C. Mish, ed., *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam–Webster Inc., 1987), 738.

<sup>2</sup> In these “northern renaissance” works gothic and renaissance features intermingle. Contrarily, for obvious reasons I did not include any work making reference to Italian renaissance art.

centred point of view *afterlife of medieval art* might describe the phenomenon even better.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, in two examples (2.c and 4.c) a complex process, the double afterlife of medieval art will be attested. In any case, both terms refer to a posterior interest in and artistic usage of medieval art. Since medievalism appears to be a common expression in English, I will retain its usage with the aforementioned delimitations.

The general timeframe of the thesis covers the last two decades (1990–2010), with one exception (3.a), where the analysis of a slightly earlier work is essential for the argument. If necessary, important antecedents in one's oeuvre are also explored before 1990, but instead of providing short monographs I concentrate on the role medievalism. The discussed works belong to Hungarian art, yet some of the parallels pertain to the international art scene. All the examples attest to the afterlife, survival and revival of medieval art: in these works medievalism reflects the importance and contemporary relevance of medieval images.

The present topic developed through the process of constant narrowing down of the subject. From the beginning it was obvious that nineteenth century medievalism is better researched, yet twentieth century Hungarian art offers a myriad of interesting examples, which have received less attention. Although works of the last century were analyzed from many interesting viewpoints (e.g. the connection of history and its images), the afterlife of medieval art has not been subject to a detailed analysis.<sup>4</sup> Due to the constraints of a thesis

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<sup>3</sup> The German term – *Nachleben* – appears to be more appropriate than the English version.

<sup>4</sup> The *History-Image* exhibition and catalogue in 2000 dealt with twentieth century works along with previous examples. The focus was on general connection between history and images. Árpád Mikó, and Katalin Sinkó eds., *Történelem-kép* (History-Image) (Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Galéria, 2000). For its part, the exhibition organized by the Galeria Centralis in 2006 had a focus similar to the thesis, although it dealt with the political and the cultural side of the phenomenon. (*Contagious Middle Ages in Post-Communist Central Europe*, curators: Gábor Klaniczay and Péter Tóth G.) Online catalogue: <http://www.osaarchivum.org/files/exhibitions/middleages/index.html> (retrieved: June 6, 2010). In 2004 the Hungarian University of Fine Arts organized a conference touching upon the related subject of copying and paraphrasing; unfortunately the presented papers were not published. *Imitáció és kreáció: Másolat, replika, parafrázis a képzőművészetben a középkortól napjainkig* (Imitation and Creation: Copy, Replica, Paraphrase in Fine Arts from the Middle Ages to Our Days) October 28–19, 2004. Conference program: <http://www.mke.hu/node/13363> (retrieved: June 6, 2010).



and to create a clear focus, I had to restrict the inquiry to the last twenty years, leaving many intriguing previous examples aside.

Since the topic is a *terra incognita* for the research, I first had to collect the corpus of works connected to medievalism from 1990 to 2010.<sup>5</sup> For this reason I examined the most important Hungarian periodicals such as *Artmagazin*, *Balkon*, *Magyar Iparművészet*, *Új Művészet*, *Műértő* and catalogues of the period, I equally received many interesting examples from friends and colleagues. After accumulating the works I consulted the pertaining literature; I had to realize that the majority of examples have never been discussed at length. For basic information about the works I turned to monographs and catalogues of the artists and to several articles, while also receiving information from the artists themselves.

For the thesis I had to select a limited number of works. I attempted to be inclusive: works originate from the fields of art, architecture and film. I tried not to differentiate between “high and low”; in order to show the multilevel usage of the same motif I discuss advertisements as well. The selection was not made exclusively along presumed quality either; the major criteria were to find interesting and representative examples. Unfortunately I had to discard the idea of including applied arts: due to the strange appearance and peculiar iconography of numerous examples, they would have formed an intriguing *Wunderkammer* within the thesis.

The following are case studies; as such they do not intend to cover the full corpus of medievalism. This thesis provides one possible narrative for a group of works created in the last two decades. I strongly believe that despite the differences, these works and their creators share a common interest in medieval art; this feature links them together. My present narrative is not intended to be exclusive: different, equally acceptable interpretations might be possible based on the same works.

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<sup>5</sup> On the international level the most important publications are the multidisciplinary volumes of *Studies in Medievalism*, although relatively few issues or studies are consecrated to medievalism in the arts. (1974–2009: Vols. I–XVIII; founded by Leslie J. Workman.)

The thesis contains four chapters and twelve case studies in order to illustrate the variety of solutions contemporary Hungarian artists provided using medieval art. The organization of the examples starts from formal resemblance, arriving to almost immaterial, intellectual connections at the end of the thesis. The first chapter, *Colliding Timelines* is dedicated to the specific problems of monumental sculptures executed for public commission. The second, *Medieval Fantasies* deals with opposing questions of artistic fantasy and scientific accuracy; also with education and entertainment. For its part, *Paraphrased Authorities* seeks answers why artists chose specific medieval works to paraphrase. Finally, *Appropriation of the Medieval* shows an artistic attitude which selects only a few elements of the medieval work and makes it an integral part of the new creation.

Why did these contemporary artists turn to medieval art for inspiration? Why are specific medieval works of art extremely popular among our contemporaries? Which are the most important medieval characteristics chosen by the artists? How were medieval models transformed? Are we able to name different trends according to the contemporary artists' responses? What is the connection between medievalism and paraphrasing in general? These are some of the questions this thesis attempts to find answers to.

## 1. Colliding Timelines

Imitation is a keyword for understanding the works discussed in this chapter. We will see that in several cases, connecting past and present proves to be a difficult task. A strong temporal consciousness is essential for the artist not to be absorbed by the medieval work of art that is supposed to provide him with inspiration. When a detached, critical point of view is missing, the collision of past and present becomes inevitable: imitation takes over the work. If the meaning of the paraphrased piece is not a subject to change, the contemporary creation provides solely the re-enactment of its medieval counterpart.

The mentioned problems appear ever more strongly in the genre of public art.<sup>6</sup> Due to the larger audience and the accentuated location of the works, there is a stronger pressure on the artist to create something impressive. From this perspective, medieval art serves as a synonym for greatness and monumentality, while the works in this spirit are truly of monumental size. Commissioned by the public, they represent an institution, a city or the state. The first chapter illustrates questions such as contradiction of imitation and originality, role of innovation and copying, also necessity and problems of reconstructions. Compared to their models, the works of Sándor Gyula Makoldi, Miklós Melocco and Zoltán Szabó can be characterized with a search for formal resemblance. Their attitude provides a basis of comparison for the formally less faithful examples discussed in the following chapters.

### a. Transposed Heads

According to an Indian legend, once two friends – misfortunate lovers of the same woman – cut their own heads. They were both resurrected by Goddess Kali, but she accidentally transposed their heads: the subsequent confusion of the three characters is understandable. Through Thomas Mann's novel – *The Transposed Heads* – this Indian story found its way to

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<sup>6</sup> Here I limit the discussion to outdoor sculptures (figural sculptures, memorials and monuments) commissioned by public authorities.

European culture.<sup>7</sup> As the following work of art indicates, not only legendary Indian figures, but Christian saints can also be subjects to unusual transposition of heads: a curious, yet interesting representation of holy figures forms the topic of the following analysis.

In Budapest, a few meters away from St. Stephen's Cathedral, where the reliquary of Hungary's first king (St. Stephen, 1000–1038) is preserved, another saint of the Árpád Dynasty can be spotted. Cast in bronze, St. Ladislaus looks down at us from a nearby wall (figs. 1 and 2). Or, to be precise, one should use plural, because *two* kings are watching the passers-by. Almost identical copies of the ruler's famous gothic head reliquary (fig. 3) constitute the faces of the two figures (fig. 4). In contrast to the striking similarity to the medieval metalwork, the caption reads: *Sts. Cosmas and Damian*. The confusion of the viewer might equal or even exceed the one attested in the Indian tale after the mix-up of the heads. The work of Sándor Gyula Makoldi<sup>8</sup> (1998) is a large, over life-size bronze sculpture inserted into the left facade of the local medical centre.<sup>9</sup> Sts. Cosmas and Damian were doctors, therefore as patron saints of medicine their representation on the walls of the clinic is wholly justified. We see two standing men, their upper bodies lean towards each other and away from the wall. The similarity of the two saints is not only compositional: it alludes to the fact that they were brothers. Each of them is holding a medical vessel, their usual

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Mann, *Die vertauschten Köpfe. Eine indische Legende*, 1940.

<sup>8</sup> The artist is not listed in *Kortárs magyar művészeti lexikon* (Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Hungarian Art) ed. Péter Fitz (Budapest: Enciklopédia Kiadó, 1999–2001). The sculptor was a student at the Hungarian University of Fine Arts, 1992–1997. [http://www.arts7.hu/about/hallgatoi\\_adatbazis.php?xname=M](http://www.arts7.hu/about/hallgatoi_adatbazis.php?xname=M) (retrieved: June 6, 2010.) The artist's homepage appears the best source of information (providing a biography): <http://www.makoldiszobor.hu/> (retrieved: June 6, 2010.) The artist's MA thesis: Sándor Gyula Makoldi, Lovas (Equestrian) (MA thesis, Magyar Képzőművészeti Főiskola, Szobrász Tanszék, 1997). It appears this *Equestrian* statue is the one installed in the lobby of the medical centre.

<sup>9</sup> The exact name of the institution: Belváros-Lipótváros Egészségügyi Szolgálat (Medical Centre of the Fifth District). The sculpture was executed the same time when the building was transformed to serve medical purposes. The statue of Sts. Cosma and Damian is not included in Ildikó Nagy ed., *Kortárs művészet: Szoborpályázatok 1950–2000* (Contemporary Art: Tenders for Sculpture 1950–2000) (Budapest: Képző- és Iparművészeti Lektorátus, 2006) (hereafter: Nagy, *Szoborpályázatok*), therefore it is clear that no tender was organized by the Lectorate for Fine and Applied Arts. The development itself was coordinated by the Vagyongazdálkodási Osztály (Property Management Office) of the Belváros-Lipótváros Önkormányzata (Local Government); today the successor of the dissolved office is the Belváros-Lipótváros Vagyonkezelő Zrt. I searched the latter's archive but from the pertaining box the documents about the project are missing. None of the other offices could provide any reliable information; it is plausible that no tender was organized for the sculpture.

attribute. The elongated bodies and their position above the eyesight might loosely recall the proportion of gothic column figures. Both saints have halos, yet a third, nimbus-like structure with four circular elements closes the top of the composition (fig. 5). The closest analogy of this peculiar object is to be found inside the building under the form of surgical lamps (fig. 6), although the pun inherent in the formal similarity is most likely unintended.

Curiosity might arise as to how the representation of St. Ladislaus ended up as the twin heads of Sts. Cosmas and Damian. Possibly, the sculptor was looking for an authentic model for the doctor saints. Yet from an anthropological perspective, for third century saints a fifteenth century depiction of an eleventh century historical figure provides no reliable basis. The motif of borrowed heads acquires a morbid connotation knowing that the two saints were eventually beheaded. The only real similarity between the three persons lies in their sanctity, while their origin, role, life and social position differs greatly. If we insist on searching for adequate parallels, St. Ladislaus as a knight and a holy ruler might have been a slightly more convincing model for military saints than for doctors.

An interesting coincidence characterizes the three faces. Compared to the artistic production of its age, the style of the head reliquary of St. Ladislaus is archaizing (fig. 3). On the other hand, the choice of Makoldi might have fallen on the gothic work of art exactly because he perceived it as something authentic, so to say ancient. At this point it is worth mentioning that only the form of the medieval work is copied here, not its technique: the precious, hammered metal mask is replaced with cast bronze covered with green patina. The static, hieratic features of the original head were paired with two dynamic figures. The setting also differs greatly: the medieval object was placed into the intimate liturgical space of a cathedral, while the copies serve as outdoor sculptures. The connotation is still religious, but the gothic reliquary of the holy king is turned into the visual representation of the clinic behind.

The overall appearance of Makoldi's work is organic, as are his ornamental motifs probably deriving from folklore: this seems to be the sculptor's own voice.<sup>10</sup> Yet in order to make his figures more archaic, he made use of a work of art which had already been archaizing in its own time. Accordingly, the medieval head placed on the contemporary body appears as proof of authenticity and spirituality, while it equally ties the work to the local tradition.<sup>11</sup>

What is the lesson of these transposed heads? The level of similarity between the gothic reliquary and Makoldi's work is so high that instead of medieval inspiration one might describe the heads as mere imitations of the model. Apparently, when his own organic style seemed inadequate to visualize the sanctity of Cosmas and Damian, the sculptor decided to copy the reliquary of St. Ladislaus in order to lend an air of authority for his figures. This fact attests to the power of the medieval image, equally it underlines the strength of local tradition. On the other hand, the assemblage of different elements and the mentioned problems of historicity might confuse the viewers. The discussed contradictions in style, technique, form, and function are consequences of an un-reflected usage of medieval material. This fusion of medieval and modern characteristics makes this work a good representative of ambiguous creatures, temporal chimeras of art history.

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<sup>10</sup> Further works shown on his homepage confirm this stylistic tendency.

<sup>11</sup> The work itself started a new tradition: in 2007 the local authorities founded a prize: Belváros Egészségügyért Díj (Fifth District's Medicare Award), which is a Sts. Cosmas and Damian plaque (based on the sculpture) by Sándor Gyula Makoldi. Resolution: *Belváros-Lipótváros Önkormányzata 19/2007. (V. 30.)*

## b. Monuments Displaced in Time

As the following sculptures by Miklós Melocco will show, antagonism could lie not only in the assemblage of medieval and modern features but also in the combination of different medieval elements.<sup>12</sup> Monuments and memorials are *per definitionem* linked to the past, as they commemorate historical events, therefore anachronism, the confusion of different time periods is an evident danger. On the other hand, while trying to evoke the past, a great number of works end up imitating it. Sometimes the models are from different medieval periods: in these cases the new mixture might prove to be confusing instead of authentic. These and some further questions pertaining to the genre of monumental sculpture will be explored in the following paragraphs.

Miklós Melocco's *Coronation of St. Stephen* (2001) is a gigantic work in Esztergom, erected for the jubilee of the king's investiture (fig. 7).<sup>13</sup> According to Ernő Marosi, the composition is reminiscent of the iconography of *Baptism of Vajk* [Stephen].<sup>14</sup> The most likely model was the well-known, large scale painting of Gyula Benczúr (fig. 8). On Melocco's sculpture gothic ribbed vaults lean above the archbishop and the kneeling figure of Stephen. The anachronism is obvious: an eleventh century scene is staged within a much later architectural setting.<sup>15</sup> The cross above the ribs creates an allusion to the Holy Crown,

<sup>12</sup> Biography: Anna Kopócsy. "Melocco Miklós," in *Kortárs magyar művészeti lexikon* (Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Hungarian Art) ed. Péter Fitz (Budapest: Enciklopédia Kiadó, 2000), vol. 2, 760–62. Monograph: Gabriella Kernács, *Melocco Miklós* (Budapest: Corvina Kiadó, 1985). Recent monograph: Tibor Wehner, *Melocco Miklós* (Budapest: Helikon Kiadó, 2005) (hereafter: Wehner, *Melocco Miklós*).

<sup>13</sup> St. Stephen was crowned at the end of year 1000 or the very beginning of 1001: the statue is erected thousand years later. The *Millenary Exhibition* of the Galeria Centralis lists the statue as a work receiving special financial support from the government.

<http://www.osaarchivum.org/galeria/katalogus/2001/millennium/virtual/> (retrieved: June 6, 2010.) Accordingly, the 1152/1998. (XII 1.) *Kormányhatározat a Magyar Millennium megünneplésének irányelveiről* (Government Resolution about the Celebration of the Hungarian Millennium) specifically mentions the celebration of St. Stephen. "1. c) a Millenniumnak ki kell fejeznie, és be kell mutatnia államiságunk ezer esztendejét, Szent István király emlékezetét, kultúránk értékeit." (The Millennium has to express and demonstrate the thousand years existence of the state, the memory of King St. Stephen, the values of our culture.) Melocco's gigantic sculpture was conceived along these ideas.

<sup>14</sup> Ernő Marosi, "Az égbetörő csúcsív közhelye," (The Cliché of the Pointed Arch) 2000. *Irodalmi és társadalmi havilap* 5 (2002): 69 (hereafter: Marosi, *Az égbetörő csúcsív*).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.



an object originating from yet another period of medieval art.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand – in a simplified form – it also evokes the processional cross in Benczúr’s painting, while the head of the bishop is reminiscent of the same source. Despite of the baroque line of the draperies, the “cliché”<sup>17</sup> of gothic ribs is supposed to invest the sculpture with authenticity and pseudo-medieval appearance.

Taking a closer look at Melocco’s oeuvre we find that the Esztergom sculpture was not his first commission to depict a medieval ruler, nor his only peculiar architectural setting. A decade before the *Coronation of St. Stephen* in 1990 he completed a monument honouring King Matthias (fig. 9).<sup>18</sup> There are several striking similarities between the two projects in terms of the depicted personalities, the dates of execution, the setting and the function of the works. First, both rulers were of great importance in Hungarian history, while today they are equally in the centre of popular imagination; Stephen as the founder of the state, while Matthias as the archetype of the good and righteous king.<sup>19</sup> Second, both works are strongly date-specific: one is celebrating the millennium of Stephen’s coronation (1000/1001–2001), the other commemorates Matthias’ demise (1490–1990). Third, the two sculptures are set in formerly significant royal cities. Esztergom has been royal capital and the seat of the archbishop for a long time, while in Székesfehérvár many Hungarian kings were crowned and buried throughout the Middle Ages. Furthermore, the two cities share a common fate as their importance has faded with the passing of time. Fourth, as a result of this negative change in their significance, the new monuments might be intended to evoke the ancient

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> The idea of the monument was conceived by art historian Péter Kovács; the winner of the subsequent tender (eight invited sculptors, seven received applications) was Miklós Melocco. The final location is different than the originally foreseen setting. Due to financial reasons only the main parts were finished in 1990, later additions date to 1992–1993. Nagy, *Szoborpályázatok*, 483–486. For a complete bibliography of the monument, see Wehner, *Melocco Miklós*, 282–83. For descriptions of the monument, see Imre Magony, *Székesfehérvár szobrai* (Sculptures in Székesfehérvár) (Székesfehérvár: Ma Kiadó – Vörösmarty Mihály Megyei Könyvtár: 1995), 29–31, 238; Imre Magony, *Székesfehérvár szobrai* 2nd rev. ed. (Sculptures in Székesfehérvár) (Székesfehérvár: Ma Kiadó, 2004), 33–35, 219.

<sup>19</sup> The *Corvin tükör: A kultusz évszázadai* exhibition (Corvinus Mirror: Centuries of the Cult, Budapest History Museum, 2008) gave a good overview of Matthias’ posterior iconography.



grandeur of these cities. Their monumental size and the allusion to the strong rulers not only reflect the importance of these kings but also testify to the compensatory ambition of the townships.

From this point of view, the main purpose of the borrowed medieval elements is to represent the glory and greatness of the past. On the other hand, this nostalgic feeling works against both archaeological accuracy and innovative, contemporary formulation of the memorials. The eyes of the public and the authorities are trained on local monuments, thus similar historicizing plans might be found more adequate to visualize a historical event or a personality than other formulations of the same topic.<sup>20</sup> In most of the works instead of stressing a present message of the medieval period, certain formal features of the previous works are copied, while these forms often contradict each other. It appears that the political representation of the cities usually prompts a didactic imitation instead of more subtle references such as allusion or quotation. Of course, the external factors can never be separated from the artist's own choices and preferences which might equally contribute to the historicizing appearance of the statues.

The work in Székesfehérvár has many interesting layers to offer from archaeological and architectural connotations to the role of ruin aesthetics and the question of imitation. The Matthias monument is situated on the blank sidewall of a building, facing a little square (fig. 9).<sup>21</sup> The left side is opened towards the street, to the right the facade of another house closes the composition. The wall is covered with gothic architectural elements, in the middle we find the statue of King Matthias (fig. 13).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Another participant in the tender, József Palotás anticipated an unusual, fragmented memorial. Nagy, *Szoborpályázatok*, 484.

<sup>21</sup> Later (1992–1993) further elements were added, a raven and representations of the liberal arts. In the analysis I concentrate on the major parts, which were ready for 1990. Géza Antal Entz, ed., *Székesfehérvár* (Budapest: Osiris, 2009), 206 (hereafter: Entz, *Székesfehérvár*).

<sup>22</sup> The original plan was to form the king's figure in round, not in relief. In the 2 October 1988 application Melocco writes: "The figure of Matthias is about 3 m tall, with a depth of one and a half metres. The two lions are also sculptures in the round, though their bodies will be executed like a bas-relief, but the plasticity and the perspective will conceal this benign deception." Wehner, *Melocco Miklós*, 62.

The first thing that strikes the viewer is the large size and complexity of the structure. In this respect Alajos Stróbl's *Matthias Fountain* (1898–1904) was suggested as a predecessor, but its subject matter and style bears no resemblance to Melocco's work.<sup>23</sup> On the left side of the little square we see three pillar bases, which might suggest a projecting nave. This ruin-like appearance makes the setting similar to a site of an archaeological excavation. Accordingly, the plausible ground plan of the building can be reconstructed from the remaining elements. This would suggest a central nave, while the projecting ribs on the sides refer to two additional aisles. It might not be coincidence that in the same city, in Székesfehérvár, the ruins of a three aisled basilica, Matthias' burial place were excavated. The fragmentary gothic ribbed vaulting placed next to the wall reinforces the impression of the ruined state. There is a raven with a ring in its beak on the top. As the heraldic animal of Matthias Corvinus, its accentuated position bears much resemblance to the cross in Esztergom, both elements reinforce the title of the works. "The arches are stopping in the air as they were partly fallen down"<sup>24</sup> – the artist's statement coincides with the previous argument that the work can be perceived as some sort of ruin.

Although buildings are often ruined with the passing of time, this case is special, because the structure was planned as a ruin. Historically, pre-manufactured ruin is not Melocco's invention as its origin goes back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to the idea of English gardens. As an immediate source I propose the artificial ruin of Tata, situated in the castle park dating back to the turn of the nineteenth century (fig. 19).<sup>25</sup> One might notice the anachronism in Melocco's excellent fulfilment of a long surpassed ideal. While the Tata artificial ruin had been up to date at the time of its creation, the Székesfehérvár ruin

<sup>23</sup> For the parallel see the opinion of Péter Kovács in the tender evaluations. Nagy, *Szobor pályázatok*, 484; accordingly: Márta Kovalovszky, "Mátyás király emlékművei," (Monuments to King Matthias) *Fejér Megyei Hírlap* 59 (1990): 7.

<sup>24</sup> Miklós Melocco, "Mátyás király emlékműve Székesfehérváron," (Monument to King Matthias in Székesfehérvár) *Hírlap* 7 (1990): 20 (hereafter: Melocco, *Mátyás király*).

<sup>25</sup> This is the most famous artificial ruin in Hungary; it is situated close to Zsámbék and Székesfehérvár.

appears to be late by almost two hundred years. Nevertheless, there is a major difference between the two works. In Tata, medieval carvings from Vértesszentkereszt were inserted into the new complex: thus original elements were staged according to the modern concept of artificial ruins. On the other hand, in Székesfehérvár we find a completely modern imitation of a building that never existed.<sup>26</sup>

If Tata is the intellectual predecessor, Zsámbék should be considered the formal model. Judging by the details and the artist's biography, it is more than plausible that the source of Melocco's structure was the ruined church of Zsámbék (fig. 10).<sup>27</sup> The sculptor lives in this settlement, while the similarity of the arches' deteriorated state is striking (figs. 9 and 10). Needless to say, the church bears no connection to the king, nor does the Bakócz chapel in Esztergom (fig. 16), a building posterior to Matthias' reign, which might be identified as the source of the lower, fireplace-like part of the structure (fig. 15).

In popular culture, Matthias is usually perceived as a renaissance ruler, even though gothic and renaissance art coexisted in his court.<sup>28</sup> Despite the inaccuracy of his definition, Melocco has a point when stating that "the renaissance of Matthias turned out to be somewhat gothic".<sup>29</sup> This double stylistic standard is attested in Melocco's sculpture, where the overall design is gothic, but the lower part of the composition is renaissance. A second remarkable feature of the work is its colour. The combination of red and white creates an allusion to a surviving medieval tradition in Hungarian architecture, according to which white stone and red marble are applied together.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Luckily enough today's monument preservation standards would not allow such reworking of medieval carvings as in the case of Tata.

<sup>27</sup> As first noticed by Ernő Marosi: Marosi, *Az égbetörő csúcsív*, 69. It is worth noting, that the distance between Zsámbék, Tata and Székesfehérvár is less than 70 kilometres.

<sup>28</sup> For this phenomenon, see: Péter Farbaky, Enikő Spekner, Katalin Szende, and András Végh eds., *Matthias Corvinus, the King: Tradition and Renewal in the Hungarian Royal Court, 1458–1490* (Budapest: Budapest History Museum, 2008).

<sup>29</sup> Melocco, *Mátyás király*, 20.

<sup>30</sup> See e.g. the *Porta Speciosa* of Esztergom and Pannonhalma. (In fact what is usually referred to as red marble is a dense red limestone.)

Despite the first impression, one might observe that Melocco's structure is not a real artificial ruin as it does not attempt to imitate the outlook of a devastated building. Taking a closer look at the details it becomes obvious that the ribs project from random places, while the clustered columns are condemned to pierce through the attic: the whole construction is essentially atectonic. This pseudo-gothic setting likens the structure to a stage design, where everything is for show but at the same time the audience knows that nothing is real. The great question is if the viewers really perceive the antagonism of the elements or whether they simply trust the authenticity of the structure. In my opinion, these are the characteristics of a post-modern game, while the logic of un-related architectural quotations might recall Charles Moore's *Piazza d'Italia* (fig. 20). Even if categorizing Melocco's work as post-modern, there is a remarkable delay of two decades compared to the New Orleans project, while there is a great functional difference between a public piazza and a memorial.

If the characterization of Melocco's monument as a stage is correct, the protagonist of the play is undoubtedly King Matthias. His figure and the origin of the representation are essential to understand the sculptor's creative process. In the following, I will argue that the sculpture was based on a gothic work of art, the *Matthias Monument of Bautzen*.<sup>31</sup> Executed in the 1480s, it is placed on the tower of the Ortenburg (fig. 11). Acknowledging the fact that Bautzen is far from Hungary, therefore the monument is not easily accessible, my further suggestion would be that the sculptor used a secondary model. In 1924 Kálmán Lux restored the tower of the former Dominican church in the castle district of Buda.<sup>32</sup> Several years later,

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<sup>31</sup> For a detailed analysis of the original, see: Szilárd Papp, *A királyi udvar építkezési Magyarországon 1480–1515* (Building Activity of the Royal Court in Hungary 1480–1515) (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2005), 111–125 (hereafter: Papp, *A királyi udvar*). Wehner in his Melocco-monograph mentions Bautzen, but only shortly, without enumerating the actual similarities: "However, Ferenc Szakály – who oddly enough failed to refer to Alajos Stróbl's *Matthias Fountain* in the Palace of Buda and the copy of the Matthias relief in (sic!) Bautzen on the tower of the Hilton Hotel as works closely related in concept and architectural quality to the planned work..." Wehner, *Melocco Miklós*, 64.

<sup>32</sup> Dezső Dercsényi, ed., *Budapest műemlékei* (Monuments of Budapest) (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1955), vol 1, 347–350.

in 1930, a copy of the Bautzen Matthias monument was placed on the western facade of the tower (fig. 12), this work might have been used by Melocco.<sup>33</sup>

If one compares the details, it becomes apparent that the Székesfehérvár statue is a derivative of Bautzen. The settings are similar as both works are inserted into a tripartite niche, which assumes the form of a winged altar.<sup>34</sup> Interestingly enough, Melocco's Matthias is placed in the pseudo-building exactly where the altar should be: the worldly ruler occupies a heavenly sphere.<sup>35</sup> On the original, the coats of arms of the king were placed on the sides, while in Melocco's version this heraldic function is invested in the raven on the top of the structure. The new figure of the ruler is not a servile copy of the model, therefore not only the similar parts but also the altered details are revealing about the sculptor's process.

In Bautzen the king is seated on a throne, resting his feet on a lion, in his left hand holding a globe (fig. 11, cf. figs. 12 and 14). He is wearing armour under his upper garment, reminding the citizens and all passers-by (it is placed on a gate-tower) of the authority of the ruler.<sup>36</sup> In Székesfehérvár the armour remained, but the representation of power gave way to the commemorative function (fig. 13).<sup>37</sup> Melocco's king is standing, his static pose is even more hieratic than his model.<sup>38</sup> He is equally holding a globe, but the light, natural gesture of Bautzen is lost as there is nothing left to support – as previously did the knees – the heavy object. The compositional change results in the disharmony of the figure.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. There is one further copy in a Szeged without the coat of arms.

<sup>34</sup> There is a violent rupture in the frame of the niche at the right hand of the king. First, I thought that this might be due to the correction of a measurement error during the installation. Reviewing the composition I noticed a fragment on the left lion, of similar shape like in the missing part. Most probably the sculptor intended to create the allusion of the stone king breaking out of his architectonic frame by tearing off a part of it with his right hand. Whichever is the case, the described detail is quite peculiar.

<sup>35</sup> In fact, this attitude is not uncharacteristic of Melocco. He created "altars" for major figures earlier: *Ady Altar* (1977), *József Attila Altar* (1982). Cf. Edit Sasvári, "Melocco Mátyás-émlékműve", *Fehérvári Hét* 15 (1990): 23.

<sup>36</sup> Papp, *A királyi udvar*, 116.

<sup>37</sup> This is a key feature in identifying Bautzen as the source. On other famous depictions the armour is missing, but other elements (e.g. the globe) are present. (See for instance the Brunn and Augsburg editions of the *Thüröczy Chronicle*.)

<sup>38</sup> Melocco's original plans anticipated a figure even closer to the one in Bautzen: "The figure of the king is seated, his feet on their [the lions'] paws." Wehner, *Melocco Miklós*, 62.

We should stop here for a while. In the first subchapter the role of local tradition and the strength of certain medieval images have already been stressed. Surprisingly, Matthias' armour supports this previous argument based on the reliquary of St. Ladislaus. Observing the details, we find that the rhombus pattern with four petal flowers on the armour (fig. 18) is reminiscent of the bust of St Ladislaus (fig. 17). Again, there is no better explanation for the reference to the gothic reliquary than the prevailing need for authenticity. Judging by the heterogeneity of his sources, it is clear that historic or stylistic accuracy was not the sculptor's primary objective. What he – and all the artists in this chapter – accomplished can be described as the creation of an imagined past.

Returning to the formal analysis, it is worth noting that although the form of the head is following Bautzen, the laurel on Matthias takes its origin from other, even more popular, humanistic representations of the king. The lion in Bautzen has – besides its symbolism – a physical function as well, as it supports the feet of the king. Since Melocco's figure is standing, this function is lost. Moreover, instead of one lion we find three anthropomorphic animals, whose liveliness is in sharp contrast with the king's rigid figure.

As it was already mentioned, the lower, red marble part of the structure – different from the rest not only in colour, but its renaissance style (fig. 15) – is in contrast with the predominant gothic characteristics of the work (fig. 9). In the middle, a white marble sarcophagus is inserted. The form goes back to the antique, house-shaped sarcophagi, even the imitation of the roof tiles are visible. At this stage of the analysis it might not be surprising that the actual form has nothing to do with the age of Matthias: it is another quotation from yet another period. The small tomb creates an allusion to the nearby basilica, where the king was buried. On the slab the caption reads: "Mathias Rex". The calligraphic letters suggest some sort of signature (maybe the sign of a renaissance individuum?), but its only function is to reaffirm the connection to Matthias. The previously mentioned

compensatory attitude works not only on the level of city representation; the imitation of the king's tomb compensates for the perishing of the original sepulchre. It attempts to keep the memory of the ruler alive, thus the symbolic tomb makes clear that the structure functions as a memorial.

In conclusion Melocco's two works can be characterised as late representatives of historicism. In both cases, medieval features were taken out of their original context in order to illustrate an imagined past. In Székesfehérvár, during the artistic process, the sculptor used the modern copy of a medieval monument as a source, transforming greatly its details. Yet the alterations were made without taking into account the original function and symbolism of the medieval work of art. This resulted in the creation of a multi-layered yet confusing collection of quotations, an art historical assemblage. The forms and ideas of Bautzen, the head reliquary, Tata, Zsámbék and Esztergom were mixed into a fabled, pseudo-architectural ensemble. Although the work was intended to evoke the golden age of King Matthias, it tells us even more about Melocco's concept of medieval art and about the turn of the nineties' Hungary.

### **c. The Building That Never Was**

Copy, imitation, reconstruction: these are the keywords of this chapter. Makoldi's heads of Sts. Cosmas and Damian were almost identical copies of St. Ladislaus' reliquary. Melocco went a step further when he imitated both specific works and general architectural forms, creating his own image of the past. They both used medieval models, but neither of them intended to physically alter the original work of art or to act as its omniscient interpreter. This fact sets apart their executed works and the anticipated reconstruction introduced in this part. There is also a difference in scale: the over life-size saints and the architectural environments are both overshadowed by the following, gigantic plan.



The scene is still the town of Székesfehérvár. The much debated question is the future of a ruin: the basilica once consecrated to the Holy Virgin.<sup>39</sup> The diverse backgrounds of the debate's participants resulted in the heterogeneity of opinions.<sup>40</sup> Different is the motivation of local politicians, architects, art historians, and monument protection specialists. There are three distinct needs. First, the monument itself requires physical protection, which would most likely mean the covering of the site. Second, a lapidarium is needed for the placement of the excavated carvings. Third, politicians and the local public seemingly want to have something new, monumental and commemorative built at the site. The first two arguments originate from the fields of monument protection and art history, while the third satisfies more popular needs of local representation. The financial urge behind the current plan is an already accepted EU tender for city development.<sup>41</sup> The terminology used concerning the ruins is revealing, as in the nineties the city introduced a new term: *emlékhely* (place of memory), coined as the mirror translation of Pierre Nora's *lieu de mémoire*.<sup>42</sup> The reason behind this step was to raise the ruin's over other, similar monuments' reputation and ultimately to acquire additional funding.

Historically, attributing exceptional role to the site is not without precedents. In 1938, commemorating the millennium of St. Stephen's death, a Mausoleum was built to the east side of the area by Géza Lux.<sup>43</sup> The building also served as lapidarium, the walls were decorated with historicizing wall paintings of Vilmos Aba-Novák, while the site was arranged to form a ruin garden open for the public. Simultaneously the whole complex served the visual representation of the state and the current political regime.

<sup>39</sup> For a short overview of the church's history, see: Entz, *Székesfehérvár*, 134–138.

<sup>40</sup> For a good collection of articles about the question, see the site of *Építészforum* (Architects' Forum): <http://epiteszforum.hu/taxonomy/term/3284> (retrieved: June 6, 2010).

<sup>41</sup> Eszter Ráday, "Árpád-házi királyok mint afféle középkori Hófehérke és a hét törpe. Marosi Ernő művészettörténésszel Rádai Eszter készített interjút" (Interview with Art Historian Ernő Marosi) *Élet és Irodalom* 12 (2008): 7 (hereafter: Ráday, *Marosi Ernő*).

<sup>42</sup> Pierre Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire*, 1984.

<sup>43</sup> Entz, *Székesfehérvár*, 133.



To proceed with the question of preservation, it is an interesting detail that a protective roof has already been built above the site in 2000.<sup>44</sup> Not covering the whole area it proved to be dysfunctional, while the foundation damaged the ruins, but its demolition in 2004 was largely due to the dislike of the public, not the inadequacy of the construction.<sup>45</sup> The actual plan by Zoltán Szabó anticipates the covering of the ruins without solving the problem of the missing lapidarium. Putting such questions aside, from the point of view of medievalism I am interested in a different aspect here. According to the plan of Szabó, a full sized section of the basilica would be built above the former sepulchre of St. Stephen, the first king of Hungary (figs. 21 and 22).

What would be the purpose of this structure, what function would it serve? I will argue that it is a reconstruction. As such it is unnecessary, while it might deceive the public. Although the foreseen covering of the ruins must be seen as a positive step, the foundation of the gigantic superstructure would most likely pose a threat to the ruins: in my opinion nothing could justify the possible physical deterioration of a historical monument. Furthermore, there is no apparent scientific need for such a building fragment, while it equally lacks any liturgical function. It would rise above the former sepulchre of St. Stephen, therefore a commemorative function is anticipated, yet this could easily be performed without such a building.

In my opinion the major drive behind the plan is city representation coupled with a compensatory function already mentioned in the case of Melocco. Not satisfied with having a ruined monument, the city opted to build something monumental instead. The gigantic structure would rule over the landscape, shaping the image of the whole city. Again, medieval serves as a synonym for greatness and monumentality. Interestingly enough, the relationship between political representations and the past is quite similar to the case in

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<sup>44</sup> Ráday, *Marosi Ernő*, 7.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

1938. Seemingly important buildings always have the power to move the imagination of both the politicians and the public. Yet there is one major difference, because the attitude of the new plan is much more offensive than the arrangement before World War II. It tends to alter the image of the past by imagining a building that never existed. In order to observe how this process works, one should analyze the physical outlook of the planned structure.

The outward appearance of the building torso (figs. 21 and 22) is virtually identical with a section drawing taken from an architectural textbook. This fact suggests an educative function for the structure. Excluding the possibility that it is a church section *in abstracto* erected above an unrelated archaeological site, I must assume that it is intended as a reconstruction. If so the problem of credibility must be taken into consideration. Is the structure really similar to the one which stood at the site? I must confess that the phrasing of my question is erroneous. There is not one, but multiple buildings to talk about. Like every medieval building, the church had several building periods. Accordingly, it seems imprudent to suggest one single, unchanged structure. The plan might intend to educate, yet in this form it would more likely deceive the public. The reconstruction shows one period of the building, selecting one preferred era, neglecting posterior developments. This attitude is far from being novel, as it reflects the ground thoughts of nineteenth century purism. According to this long surpassed ideal, there are valuable and worthless parts of a historical building. In the past this approach usually resulted in the restoration of the buildings and their modification to achieve an ideal state, instead of focusing on their preservation.<sup>46</sup> While possibly damaging the ruins, the choice of Szabó to show a single building period of the church belongs exactly to the same type of value judgement.

Going one step further, accepting the period choice of the architect for the argument's sake, credibility still remains an important issue. The ground plan of the church is clear from

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<sup>46</sup> See e.g. Frigyes Schulek's reconstruction of the Church of Our Lady (also known as Matthias Church) in Buda.

the excavations, but Szabó plans to show a complete section instead, from the ground to the rooftop. The problem is that we simply do not know the height of the walls and the whole building. Furthermore, such details as the emporium above the side-naves or the ciborium-like structure placed over the tombs have no scientific basis.<sup>47</sup> They are most likely the products of the architect's imagination based on his general knowledge of architectural history.

The lack of convincing archaeological information results in the multiplicity of possible theories about the former appearance of the church. The danger is that if one architect's vision is poured into tons of concrete, from that moment on this reconstruction will be perceived as historical truth. Instead of creating a copy of a building that never existed, to communicate these ideas, the only good tools would be reconstruction drawings and scientific publications.

This case study showed the dangers inherent in medievalism. If supported by the political powers and receive enough funding, historicizing tendencies might physically endanger historical monuments. As it is attested in the case of Székesfehérvár, medieval architecture still moves the public imagination. Historicism is far from being dead, while from time to time old theories like purism are resurrected in order to provide a framework for representation. Besides the physical danger there is also a theoretical threat: the creation of an imagined past acquires strong authority if it is visualized on the original site. The reconstruction might even be taken for the original: instead of artistic creation the alteration of the past might take place.

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The three subchapters illustrated the problems of medievalism on a growing scale, concentrating specifically on public art, showing examples where past and present features

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<sup>47</sup> Side aisles with two levels were not built in Hungary. Ráday, *Marosi Ernő*, 8.

collide. These works attested that medieval art and architecture is still appealing to our contemporaries, artists and architects included. Certain masterpieces and sites are so strong that sometimes modern artists are almost trapped by their power. These cases showed the existence and relevance of copying and imitation, also the possible problems of a reconstruction. Attested by the sculptures and the reconstruction plan, historicism is far from being over. Sculptures imitated sculptures, a building imitated a building here, but the medium always remained the same as with the original work. As we will see, this is not the only artistic way to deal with medieval heritage: shifts in the medium will be attested in the following examples. Instead of imitation, artistic innovation will be the strongest feature of the works introduced in the next chapters.

## 2. Medieval Fantasies

The works presented in this chapter range widely from fine art to film and advertisement. The latter combined with other examples will show that in terms of appreciation for medieval art, "high and low", elite and popular cultures are not very much apart from each other. Medievalism finds its way not only to the academies but to the wider audiences as well. The great variety of techniques illustrates the different ways how artists have dealt with their medieval cultural heritage. The twin goals of education and entertainment will characterise the first two subchapters, while the last provides a case study on the two-fold afterlife of an already medievalising nineteenth century model.

None of these works intend to pose as medieval or to give an authoritative interpretation of the past. A clear distinction between past and present is also attested by the shift in the medium; this feature sets apart this chapter's works from the previous examples. Excavated sculptures are turned into photo based painted reconstructions, a gothic panel painting becomes animated, while a gothic revival sculpture acquires new meaning on the canvas or in an advertisement.

Besides the usage of medieval models, a second feature strongly ties these works together: they all underline the role of fantasy in the artistic process. In terms of form and technique, the examples of the first chapter were closer to their medieval counterparts. Here, the imagination of the artist assumes a larger role, while accordingly a more independent interpretation of the past becomes dominant.

In the case of János Major the eminence of fantasy is coupled with an educative function in order to create expressive reconstructions for archaeological findings. Similar is the direction of Gizella Neuberger's animation, which by the illusion of movement works towards the popularization of a gothic masterpiece. Personal imagery is crucial in Kinga

Hajdú's work, where the pseudo-medieval chimera becomes a personalized symbol. Finally, the appearance of the same chimerical figure in a Hungarian advertisement stands as a counterpoint to the French usage of the same model. The strength of this motif also testifies to the widespread popularity of fantastic medieval bestiaries.

### a. Science and Fiction

An excellent group of gothic sculptures were excavated in Buda by the archaeologist László Zolnay in 1974.<sup>48</sup> Although the findings were very fragmented, they attested the high standards of art production in the court of Sigismund of Luxemburg (king of Hungary, 1387–1437).<sup>49</sup> The puzzle-like work of putting the fragments together was assigned to the well-versed restorer Ernő Szakál, who accomplished the task in two years.<sup>50</sup> Later, in 1976 a graphic artist, János Major was invited to draw reconstructions.<sup>51</sup> It is worth mentioning that the idea of physical amendment did not emerge, therefore the originals were not threatened by any modern alteration.<sup>52</sup>

First, Zolnay asked Major to reconstitute the colours in aquarelle according to the pigments found on the surface.<sup>53</sup> After this commission the artist continued to work for the Budapest History Museum for three decades until his death in 2008. During this time he created reconstructions of colour and form not only for the gothic sculptures but for other objects as well using various techniques. At the end of the eighties, his oeuvre enriched with

<sup>48</sup> Cf. László Zolnay, and Ernő Marosi, *A budavári szoborlelet* (Gothic Sculptures Excavated at the Buda Castle) (Budapest: Corvina, 1989).

<sup>49</sup> For the period, see Imre Takács, ed., *Sigismundus Rex et Imperator. Művészet és kultúra Luxemburgi Zsigmond korában 1387–1437* (Sigismundus Rex et Imperator. Art and Culture 1387–1437) (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2006).

<sup>50</sup> Nándor Salamon, "Szakál Ernő," in *Kortárs magyar művészeti lexikon* (Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Hungarian Art) ed. Péter Fitz (Budapest: Enciklopédia Kiadó, 2001), vol. 3, 480–481.

<sup>51</sup> János Major (1934–2008): graphic artist, photographer, conceptual artist. For his oeuvre, see: Dániel Véri, "Major János" (MA thesis, Eötvös Loránd University, 2009); for the works commissioned by the museum: 26–28.

<sup>52</sup> The opposite was the case with the Székesfehérvár ruins discussed in the first chapter.

<sup>53</sup> László Zolnay, "A budai gótikus szoborgaléria színei," (Colours of the Buda Gothic Sculptures) *Művészet* 10 (1979): 24–25.

several pseudo-reconstructions (fig. 36). On these he presented his own motifs under the form of simulated reconstruction drawings made after medieval glazed tile fragments. Although these works are outside of the period chosen for the thesis, they certainly form a unique group of recent Hungarian medievalism.

The *Standing Knight* and the *Bishop* (both executed in the first half of the nineties) are members of a special group among Major's reconstructions for the Buda sculptures (figs. 24 and 26). In these works the virtues of scientific accuracy and artistic imagination are united in order to fulfil an educative function. Generally, the museological drive behind these visual reconstructions is to ease the understanding of the fragments for the public. In Major's case this tendency is attested by two facts: first, his works are currently presented at the permanent exhibition side by side with the Buda sculptures.<sup>54</sup> Second, his drawings were published in the museum's pertaining brochure.<sup>55</sup> These facts affirm their educative function as perceived by the curators of the museum.

From the educative function follows the question of scientific accuracy. Compared to the originals we find that only a few missing parts were reconstructed (cf. figs. 23–30). Besides smaller corrections, the artist added a base for each sculpture, imitating surviving fragments. To suggest a clergyman, he placed a mitre on the bishop's head (figs. 29 and 30). In the case of the knight he went even further: he added a globe, thus interpreting the figure as a king. He also reconstructed the head, but later he decided to erase it.<sup>56</sup> This episode clarifies that the artist struggled between two poles: facilitating the understanding of the fragments and retaining scientific credibility. The fact that – in contrast with dryer, commissioned works – the museum gave these two paintings back to the family suggests that they have been judged as too interpretative, too fantastic so to say.

<sup>54</sup> Budapest History Museum, side-room of the permanent exhibition on the ground floor.

<sup>55</sup> András Végh ed., *Gótikus szobrok a budai királyi palotából* (Gothic Sculptures from the Royal Palace of Buda) (Budapest: Budapesti Történeti Múzeum, 1992).

<sup>56</sup> There are photographs documenting the previous state. (Bequest of János Major.)

Contrary to this, one must acknowledge that although the new details in Major's works were due to his artistic imagination, they never lacked scientific basis. At first sight, the architectural setting seems completely imagined, both the ruins and the knight's fragmented figure suggest the aesthetisation of the ruined state. Reading the details closely it becomes obvious that the scene is the medieval part of Buda Castle. The pillars are modelled after the ones in the Knights' Hall, while the window's gothic tracery is reminiscent of the Chapel.<sup>57</sup> As the artist's archive photo confirms (fig. 23), the knight was formerly exhibited at the right side of the pillar in the Knights' Hall – exactly where Major depicted it. Clearly, scientific precision and artistic fantasy are united in the setting of this picture.

The technique also suggests fidelity to the originals. These reconstructions were based on large size reproductions of the sculptures. The additions were painted on, while a finishing layer unified the appearance of the image. The edge of the underlying photograph can be observed at the base of the sculptures or at the bishop's head (figs. 24 and 30). Although based on formal parallels, the reconstructions would not have been possible without Major's artistic imagination. On the other hand – as we have seen – the invented details were kept in line in order to preserve the credibility of the image. Even though some additions and the necessity of the background architecture might be debated, these reconstructions are nonetheless painted on paper without damaging the originals or intending to provide a definite solution.<sup>58</sup> Major has found an *aurea mediocritas*: in order to educate, he united two contrasting poles of science and fiction.

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<sup>57</sup> Eventually, both survived in fragments and their actual forms are reconstructions.

<sup>58</sup> This fact clarifies the difference between these reconstructions and the Székesfehérvár plans.



## b. Animating the Medieval

Gizella Neuberger's *Visitation* (2009)<sup>59</sup> is an animated short film (6'29) based on a late gothic panel painting (figs. 32, 33, 35).<sup>60</sup> The medieval masterpiece was painted by Master M S (fig. 31), with several other surviving panels it once formed part of a winged altarpiece in Selmezbánya.<sup>61</sup> The choice to animate a medieval work of art is not without precedents, as we are going to see at the end of this subchapter.<sup>62</sup>

If the animation itself is not a novelty, then a second logical question might arise: why this work? The narrator gives a personal answer: "as a poster it hung on my wall for several years...." The painting is an iconic piece of the Hungarian National Gallery and as such it is one of the most frequently reproduced works of the collection. After its restoration, in 1997 a special exhibition was dedicated to the panel which was accompanied with a lavishly illustrated, scientific catalogue.<sup>63</sup> In its current location the painting dominates the ante-room of the Gallery's astonishing collection of gothic winged altars. Being aware of the importance of this work, Neuberger's choice seems understandable.<sup>64</sup>

The title of this subchapter, "Animating the Medieval" suggests two things: first, the film is technically an animation. Second, it also animates medieval art by reviving it and bringing it closer to the public. This feature likens the animation to Major's reconstructions. In Neuberger's short film two goals – education and entertainment – are combined. The

<sup>59</sup> The official English title is *Visit*, yet the original Hungarian title is *Vizitáció*. Since the iconographic term translates correctly as *Visitation*, I will refer to the film as such.

<sup>60</sup> Director and storyboard: Gizella Neuberger; art historian expert: László Gyergyádesz Jr.; Cameramen: János Cseh, György Nagy; narrator: Ilona Bencze; music: Gergely Ittész; sound: András Nyerges; production manager: Veronika Vécsy; producer: Ferenc Mikulás. Production: Kecskemétfilm Kft., 2009. I am indebted to Ágnes Kovács, in whose seminar paper (*MS: Visitation*, 2009) I first read about the animation.

<sup>61</sup> The paintings are conserved in the Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest; the Christian Museum, Esztergom; while one panel in the Church of Hontszentantal (Svätý Anton, Slovakia).

<sup>62</sup> For the animation of an imagined medieval manuscript a film from 1975, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* provides an excellent example.

<sup>63</sup> Árpád Mikó, ed., "*Magnificat anima mea Dominum*": *MS Mester Vizitáció-képe és egykori selmezbányai főoltára. The Visitation by Master MS and his former high altar at Selmezbánya* (Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Galéria, 1997) (hereafter: Mikó, *Magnificat anima*).

<sup>64</sup> For the artistic usage of the *Crucifixion* panel of Master M S: György Reha: *Window* (1973). Illustrated in Tihamér Novotny ed., *A Szentendrei Vajda Lajos Stúdió 1972–2002 (The Lajos Vajda Studio in Szentendre 1972–2002)* (Szentendre: Vajda Lajos Stúdió Kulturális Egyesület, 2002), 263.

entertainment value of a colourful animation is evident, therefore in the following I will concentrate on the educative function.

The film shares much information with the viewer. We learn the name of the master (M S), also the date of the execution (1506), although the film does not reveal the fact that both the signature and the date are known from another pertaining panel, the *Resurrection*, now in the collection of the Christian Museum in Esztergom.<sup>65</sup> Mentioning technical features, the narrator also talks about the golden background and the underlying red bolus layer. The film reveals the biblical story of the encounter of the Virgin Mary and Elisabeth. The iconography of the painting is also discussed at length, especially the meaning of the depicted flowers (fig. 35). Seemingly the iconography of these flowers – peony, iris, wood strawberry, air roots of the iris – also the artistic parallels – Schongauer, Dürer – were taken from Gyöngyi Török's study and Gyöngyi Poszler's entry in the above mentioned M S catalogue.<sup>66</sup> Accordingly, Gyöngyi Poszler and Árpád Mikó (both art historians working at the Hungarian National Gallery) are listed at the end of the film, in the acknowledgements.

Different details of the landscape are also presented to the viewers. In the case of the flowers and other natural elements the featured details are usually enlightened, while the neighbouring parts are visualized on the screen subsequently. These characteristics together with the movement of the camera lend an air of dynamism to the technically static painting. A more fantastic feature of the film is that the figures are slightly animated as they move their heads, bodies, and hands.

Another scene, which concerns the draperies, testifies to the filmmaker's imaginative attitude. In its structure, the Virgin Mary's white head scarf bears a close similarity to Christ's white loin-cloth on the *Crucifixion* panel of Master M S (now in Esztergom).

<sup>65</sup> When showing – in a simplified form – the signature and the date, the *Resurrection* panel is in the background reproduced in black and white.

<sup>66</sup> Gyöngyi Török, "New Findings about the Flowers by Master M S in the Context of the General Workshop Practice in the Middle Ages," and Gyöngyi Poszler, "Selmecebánya and the High Altar of the Church of the Virgin Mary," in Mikó, *Magnificat anima*, 101–112, 123–132.

Interestingly enough, Neuberger had chosen a different parallel. In her version, Mary's head-scarf starts floating, while finally it transforms into Christ's loin-cloth taken from Rogier van der Weyden's Viennese *Crucifixion* (figs. 32 and 34).

After introducing the story, discussing the iconography, showing the landscape and the parallel structure of the white draperies, the film ends with the image of the two figures as the background is filled with colours behind them from the lower parts to the top of the painting (fig. 33). As we have seen, the filmmakers have used scientific knowledge about the painting in order to educate the viewers, but they equally put their fantasy to work while animating the figures and the draperies.

As I suggested at the beginning, animating medieval works of art is not without precedents. Although I am concentrating on Hungarian works, at least one international parallel should be mentioned. One of the most excellent "medieval animations" is David Newton's film, *The Bayeux Tapestry* created in 2009.<sup>67</sup> It is based on a medieval work now preserved in Bayeux (Centre Guillaume le Conquérant): an eleventh century tapestry depicting the conquest of England by William the Conqueror. Newton used simple effects: he slightly altered the poses of the figures, moving them against the unchanged background. He also added voices according to the various scenes while providing brief English descriptions above.

The goal of the two works is similar. They both bring medieval art closer to the contemporary public, facilitating its understanding. Animating the scenes, Newton gives a continuing narrative, while Neuberger stays closer to the norm of documentaries, explaining the origin and the meaning of the work. Besides their entertainment value, the relevance of these works lies in popularizing medieval masterpieces.

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<sup>67</sup> Animation and direction: David Newton; music and sound design: Marc Sylvan; studio: Potion Pictures Limited, 2009 (Previous version: 2007).

### c. Monsters of Post-Modernity

Two specimens of “medieval” bestiary will be introduced here. Both are from 2009, one of them is present in the painting of Kinga Hajdú (fig. 37), while the other appeared in the advertisement of the Szerencsejáték Zrt. (fig. 41).<sup>68</sup> I will argue that the painting is ultimately based on a nineteenth century model – which the advertisement reproduces – a chimera designed by the famous French architect and architectural historian, Eugène Viollet-le-Duc (fig. 39). This gothic revival statue placed on the Notre-Dame de Paris was already perceived as an original medieval sculpture shortly after its creation. It became a medieval symbol, although it was entirely a product of nineteenth century imagination.

In writing this subchapter I am greatly indebted to a recently published (2009) book by the late Michael Camille, *The Gargoyles of Notre-Dame. Medievalism and the Monsters of Modernity*.<sup>69</sup> The first part of this book concerns the mid-nineteenth century creation of the gargoyles and chimeras (*Restoration*), while the second part entitled *Reproduction* is dedicated to their afterlife. As Camille brilliantly pointed out, not only the actual stones, but the whole concept of the chimeras also belongs to modernity. The afterlife of these figures – which constitute the topic of my analysis – is already linked to another period. What follows is the result of a double survival, the afterlife of the afterlife of medieval art. For their part, these figures are the children of a new age: they are the monsters of post-modernity.

Kinga Hajdú’s small painting (fig. 37) from 2009 is entitled *Ruin (I Want Chocolate)*.<sup>70</sup> On the top of an uneven wall we see a brown figure, to the right the caption in a speech bubble reads: “...Csokit kérek...” (I want chocolate). The sky is greyish blue, it is snowing. According to the statement of the artist, a “medievalistic stone demon is sitting on

<sup>68</sup> The Hungarian Gambling Company, which has state monopoly for gambling.

<sup>69</sup> Michael Camille, *The Gargoyles of Notre-Dame. Medievalism and the Monsters of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), especially Chapter 1: “Monsters of Reason: The Gargoyles of Viollet-le-Duc”, 3–50 (hereafter: Camille, *The Gargoyles*).

<sup>70</sup> Biography: Helga László, and Erzsébet Tatai, “Hajdú Kinga,” in *Kortárs magyar művészeti lexikon* (Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Hungarian Art) ed. Péter Fitz (Budapest: Enciklopédia Kiadó, 2000), vol. 2, 51.

the ruins of the Dogs' Castle in Érd.”<sup>71</sup> The ruins in question really exist as the remains of a fifteenth century castle, which – according to the legend – was built for King Matthias, for his hunting dogs.<sup>72</sup> The presence of the ruins in the picture reinforces the medievalising tendency of the figure. Ruination and fragmentation are qualities usually attributed to medieval buildings and artefacts. This was attested in the case of Melocco's pre-manufactured ruins, in Szabó's church sections and in Major's reconstructive paintings as well. Yet this time ruins not only create medieval allusions: referring to the artist's hometown they also provide a *couleur locale* for the painting.

The models for Hajdú's demon are the nineteenth century chimeras from the Notre-Dame de Paris. This fact can be argued from two directions: first from the point of formal similarity, while it can equally be deducted from the non-existence of such medieval models. The main features of the figure, the wings and the horns are reminiscent of Viollet-le-Duc's pensive demon (fig. 39). Compared to this much reproduced creature, Hajdú's creation suggests readiness, and a more aggressive attitude. This might be reminiscent of the ape-satyr (fig. 38), and two other chimeras (figs. 43 and 44), while the sitting position of the figure might recall the squatting ape on the same balustrade (fig. 42).

On the other hand – as Camille pointed out – there were no such figures in medieval art without function or proper symbolic meaning. The pensive demon and his associates on the balustrade of the Notre-Dame are entirely offspring of the nineteenth century. Or, to be precise, they constitute an imagined medieval art of their age. Contemporary thoughts and contemporary problems are projected into these figures, yet this kind of process does not belong exclusively to the mentioned era. As the already discussed cases and further examples will show, our contemporaries also find their own medieval art, choosing the features they want to emphasize. In Hajdú's case, medieval is perceived as something old,

<sup>71</sup> E-mail from Kinga Hajdú. (April 15, 2010.)

<sup>72</sup> Dezső Dercsényi ed., *Pest megye műemlékei* (Monuments of Pest County) (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1958), vol. 1, 359.

dark and demonic – and also something interesting, mysterious. If one is looking for such qualities, one might find “gothic” in music and fashion, although this would mean the opening of a completely different analysis on popular culture.

One last playful detail should not be omitted: according to the inscription, the seemingly aggressive demon asks for sweets. Yet the ruins and the demon himself both appear to be made of chocolate. This pun softens the perceived tenseness of the painting. The same ironic tone, coupled with the usage of medieval elements will be attested in the next chapter, in the cases of the *Isenheim Altar* (Hejettes Szomlyazók) and the *VITA* (László László Révész).

In 2009, the same year when Kinga Hajdú painted her picture, Viollet-le-Duc’s pensive demon made another appearance in Hungary. His figure is printed on the back cover of *Artmagazin*’s issue 35 (fig. 41). He is advertising the Szerencsejáték Zrt., the state authorized gambling company. Above him a quotation about fortune can be read from François de la Rochefoucauld, while below the company’s slogan “We believe in luck” and its symbol, a four-leaf clover can be seen.

For the sake of comparison I borrowed Camille’s example, an advertisement of France Telecom, the French national telephone company from 2000.<sup>73</sup> This one also shows the pensive demon, holding a cell phone in his left hand while protecting his right ear from the noise of the city (fig. 40). At his side on the balustrade lies a branded shopping bag. As Camille observed, the background has been altered in order to show another Parisian icon, the Eiffel Tower.<sup>74</sup>

What makes the two advertisements different? They were both chosen to represent national companies, yet only the French one is topographically connected to the statue. In the Hungarian advertisement one cannot find the reason for using the pensive demon except the

<sup>73</sup> Camille, *The Gargoyles*, 361: fig. 322.

<sup>74</sup> Camille, *The Gargoyles*, 360–361.

quotation from a French author. The formal similarity of the demon to someone holding a mobile phone creates a clear visual pun, while the combination of two favourite Parisian icons alleviates the imprinting of the message for the local audience. On the other hand, in the Hungarian case, the connection between the applied elements is quite loose. They both try to exploit the advertisement value of the famous figure. France Telecom uses a rational perception of the demon, while the Szerencsejáték Zrt. builds upon the mysterious features of the figure, connecting it with the phenomenon of fortune. Nonetheless, all three examples introduced here show the persistence and popularity of a “medieval” icon created by Viollet-le-Duc in the nineteenth century.

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“Medieval fantasies” was the title of this chapter, yet in the light of the discussed works it becomes clear that all these examples were in fact modern and post-modern fantasies about medieval art. A change in the medium was attested in all of the works: this technical shift helped the artists to free their imagination from the formal constraints prevailing in the previous chapter. This section included a great variety of works in terms of origin, technique and artistic intention. After their analysis it appears as if medievalism would break through the rigid distinctions of “high and low”. I am convinced that further topical surveys – just like the second part of Camille’s book – would show the prevalence and strength of several medieval motifs, not only in fine arts but in popular culture as well.

In Major and Neuberger’s case two goals – education and entertainment – were united. Fantasy and scientific precision were the means to achieve such goals. In the third case, artistic imagination prevailed in the double afterlife of medieval art. All the works shared the feature that through their models they transmitted knowledge about medieval art. As the artists shared their devotion for the past with the public, their works achieved the popularization of medieval models.

But why did these artists turn to medieval art? There are different, yet interconnected answers to this question. For one part Major is a special case, because he worked for a museum, yet for the discussed works he did not have a commission. Hajdú's interest in the ruins of Érd is also autobiographical, while the introduction of Neuberger's film reveals her personal preference for the specific medieval painting. I suspect that general interest in medieval art, personal taste and opportunity together are responsible for the creation of these works.

The gothic sculptures excavated in Buda, the *Visitation* panel of Master M S and the pseudo-medieval demon of Viollet-le-Duc are all masterpieces of their kind. They are highly interesting for contemporary artists, respectively due to their iconic nature. Obviously, their usage is a result of an artistic selection between the remains of the past. As icons, these images are paraphrased because they preserved their importance to present day. For the most part, the medieval artist, the chosen work of art or the depicted person constitutes an authority of the past. These authorities will stand as the focus of the next chapter, where three different attitudes towards such authorities will be examined.



### 3. Paraphrased Authorities

Three works, three different attitudes towards medieval art will be analyzed in this chapter. The group Hejettes Szomlyazók created their variant of the *Isenheim Altar* after Matthias Grünewald's masterpiece, deconstructing the authority of the model by reducing it to insignificant iron elements (1987; figs. 45–46).<sup>75</sup> For her part, Judit Rabóczky formed a delicate group of statues honouring Giotto's frescos, thus acknowledging the greatness of her predecessor (2006; figs. 47–63). The third example is by László László Révész who transformed a trecento panel painting into a video work using an excellent sense of irony (2003; figs. 64–67). As we will see, different artistic attitudes are attested in these works, yet their targets are the same: authorities of the past. Paraphrasing is the tool that all of these artists used in order to deal with their medieval heritage, although they did this quite differently: by dismantling, celebrating or caricaturing their models.

#### a. Against the Authority

The group name – Hejettes Szomlyazók – deserves explanation.<sup>76</sup> It translates into English as Substitute Thirsters, yet the impact of the words is quite different in the two languages. Although the grammatically correct form would be “Helyettes Szomjazók”, two letters, “j” and “ly” were reversed, thus creating a blatantly erroneous combination. (The correct usage of “j” and “ly” is among the first things Hungarian children learn in primary school.) Confusing the public to a greater extent, the group used a myriad version of their name,

<sup>75</sup> Balázs Beöthy (former member of the group) confirmed that the work was executed in 1987 (e-mail from the artist on June 16, 2010). In the literature two dates can be found: 1988 is indicated in the 1989 catalogue, while 1987 in the 1990 catalogue. István Halas, ed., *Hejettes Szomjazók*. (Budapest: Stúdió Galéria, 1989) (hereafter: Halas, *Hejettes Szomjazók*); Péter Kovács ed., *A Helyettes Szomjazók szenvedélyes élete. The Passionate Life of Substitute Thirsters* (Székesfehérvár: István Király Múzeum, 1990) (hereafter: Kovács, *A Helyettes Szomjazók*), both without page numbers.

<sup>76</sup> Biography: Sándor Hornyik, “Hejettes Szomlyazók,” in *Kortárs magyar művészeti lexikon* (Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Hungarian Art) ed. Péter Fitz (Budapest: Enciklopédia Kiadó, 2000), vol. 2, 106 (hereafter: Hornyik, *Hejettes Szomlyazók*). Members: Beöthy Balázs, Dankó Attila, Elek István, Fekete Balázs, Kardos Péter, Nagy Attila, Várnagy Tibor, Vidákovich István.

writing for example “Hejettes Szomjazók” in a 1989 exhibition catalogue, then changing it for Helyettes Szomjazók in 1990.<sup>77</sup> I will use the first mentioned form as it seems to be the standard version in the literature.<sup>78</sup>

Not only against the authority of grammar did the group revolt. In their 1984 manifesto they anticipated a heterogeneous, inconsistent group, listing as their work plan “idea, spontaneity, ennui, idleness, contradiction, inconsistency, community, anti-communitarian spirit”, etc.<sup>79</sup> This quotation describes perfectly their attitude which could be characterized as neo-Dadaistic.<sup>80</sup> But as happened to the Dada, Hejettes Szomlyazók also found itself soon exhibited in museums. The anti-establishment air was lost, as they sadly concluded in their manifesto of 1989: they became institution-like and integrated into the artistic community.<sup>81</sup>

The masterpiece they have chosen to paraphrase deserves a short description. It was painted by Matthias Grünewald at the beginning of the sixteenth century, now it is preserved in the Musée d’Unterlinden of Colmar (fig. 46). As representative of northern renaissance art it combines gothic and renaissance elements. The overall design of the altar is late gothic with double wings enclosing an altar chest. The depicted architectural elements are also gothic, while the figures bear renaissance traits. The closed view of the altarpiece shows the *Crucifixion* with *St. Sebastian* and *St. Anthony* on the wings and the *Lamentation of Christ* on the predella. On the half-opened, second view from left to right we see the *Annunciation*, *Madonna with the Child* and the *Resurrection*. The fully opened altar reveals the central sculptures flanked by two wings depicting the *Meeting of St. Anthony and St. Paul the Hermit* and the *Temptation of St. Anthony*.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> László Beke in the 1989 catalogue: “in the beginning... Hejettes Szomlyazók. And I secretly continue to write it this way.” Cf. also the title of the encyclopaedia article.

<sup>79</sup> Halas, *Hejettes Szomjazók*, without page number.

<sup>80</sup> Hornyik, *Hejettes Szomlyazók*, 106.

<sup>81</sup> Kovács, *A Helyettes Szomjazók*, without page number.

The Hejettes Szomlyazók have chosen to paraphrase the closed view of Grünewald's altar (fig. 46). The group was invited to *Junge Künstler DDR-UVR*, a contemporary, Hungarian–German art exhibition organized in the Neue Berliner Galerie during the *Hungarian Days* in East-Berlin.<sup>82</sup> Their version of the altar was created in 1987, using painted and rusty metal, plastic, wood and spotlight (fig. 45).<sup>83</sup> Although the date of this work is earlier than the general timeframe of the thesis I included it because it appears to be a good prelude to the twenty years that followed. This work of art represents a vivid attitude towards medieval art which had no continuation in the nineties. I can only suspect that there must be a close correlation between the political environment and the group's Dadaistic position. (The group existed from 1984 to 1992, in the era of political changes.)<sup>84</sup> Whichever is the case, their disrespectful, anti-establishment attitude had strikingly no follow-up, at least not in the examples of medievalism.

As designated by the catalogue of 1989, the work is a “suspended sculpture and silhouette”.<sup>85</sup> This definition reflects its double nature, which is the consequence of the change in medium. The large size, heavy work is made almost exclusively of a rough material: metal. Yet the light doubles this image and creates a second, fragile version consisting purely of shadows. The three dimensional object might reflect the depth of space depicted on the altar, while the delicate tones from the spotlight could easily recall the lights and shadows of Grünewald. In contrast to this almost lyric feature, the paraphrase of the Hejettes Szomlyazók nonetheless reduces Grünewald's masterpiece to a collection of worthless materials.

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<sup>82</sup> Halas, *Hejettes Szomlyazók*, without page number. Kovács, *A Helyettes Szomlyazók*, without page number dates the exhibition to 1988, which is confirmed by the exhibition catalogue: Ute Hornbogen, ed., *Junge Künstler DDR-UVR: Malerei, Grafik, Plastik. Fiatal művészek: Festészet, grafika, plasztika*. (Budapest–Miskolc–Berlin: Ernst Múzeum, Miskolci Galéria, Neue Berliner Galerie, 1988, 34–35, without page number. (The catalogue bears no date, but events listed from 1988 constitute a *terminus post quem*.) The work was executed in 1987 in the garden of the Erdély family with the permission of György Erdély (avant-garde artist Miklós Erdély died in the previous year), because the group did not have a studio – e-mail from Balázs Beőthy, June 16, 2010.

<sup>83</sup> Halas, *Hejettes Szomlyazók*, without page number.

<sup>84</sup> Hornyik, *Hejettes Szomlyazók*, 106.

<sup>85</sup> Halas, *Hejettes Szomlyazók*, without page number.

As pointed out by Géza Boros, the group had a strong preference for reproductions.<sup>86</sup> Their enthusiasm towards duplicates is also attested in the *War of Paintings*, which they played in 1986 wearing art reproductions on their foreheads.<sup>87</sup> In 1987 they created hommages to Georges Braque, Henri Matisse, and Milan Grygar.<sup>88</sup> In 1986 they re-enacted the painting of Viktor Madarász, *Zrínyi and Frangepán in the Prison of Wiener Neustadt*, yet their closest paraphrase to the *Isenheim Altar* remains without a doubt the *Condemned Cell* after Mihály Munkácsy's painting.<sup>89</sup> The techniques are almost identical, the latter being an assemblage of painted and rusty metal, metal waste, terracotta and wire.<sup>90</sup> The dimensions are also similar: the *Altar* is roughly two by two meters large, while the Munkácsy-paraphrase is four meters long and three meters high.<sup>91</sup> In both cases the group have chosen well-known, iconic masterpieces of famous painters. The highly appreciated works were then turned into an assemblage of cheap materials.

From the great number of art historical allusions the Hejettes Szomlyazók used, it is clear that the work of Grünewald was only one of their many paraphrases. It appears as artistic recycling was a major tool for the group.<sup>92</sup> We can therefore conclude that not medieval art in particular was interesting for them but paraphrasing itself. The same feature will be attested in the case of György Jovánovics and Endre Tót, discussed in the next chapter. What remains special and extremely important about Hejettes Szomlyazók's relation to Grünewald's masterpiece is their genuinely anti-authoritarian behaviour. Nonetheless, while virtually dismantling the altar, their disrespectful attitude pointed out the strength and relevance of the medieval image for contemporary art.

<sup>86</sup> Géza Boros, "Hejettem Szomlyazók. Substitute Thisters," *Új Művészet* 1 (1990): 11–12, 16.

<sup>87</sup> A version for the children's game "war of numbers", where the enemy is "killed" when the number of one's on forehead is read aloud.

<sup>88</sup> Halas, *Hejettes Szomlyazók*, without page number.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. (According to Balázs Beöthy, the group learned to weld during the execution of the *Condemned Cell*; this is the reason for the technique – e-mail from the artist on June 16, 2010.)

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> As Sándor Hornyik pointed it out: „The made some sort of recycling art.” Hornyik, *Hejettes Szomlyazók*, 106.

## b. Now it's Giotto has the Cry

„In painting Cimabue thought he held the field / but now it's Giotto has the cry, / so that the other's fame is dimmed.”<sup>93</sup> Dante's *terzina* from the *Divine Comedy* is a *locus classicus* describing the fame of the artists (Purgatory XI, lines 94–96). As a group of sculptures by Judit Rabóczky will show, Giotto's fame in contemporary Hungarian art is far from being dimmed. Before presenting her work in detail, one question should be answered: why Giotto? Maybe another classic, Giorgio Vasari can provide us with an answer. According to him, Giotto “brought back to life the true art of painting, introducing the drawing from nature of living persons, which had not been practised for two hundred years”.<sup>94</sup> The highly appreciative lines of Dante and Vasari establish Giotto as a figure of unquestionable authority. Not surprisingly his prestigious art inspired many followers.<sup>95</sup> Still, one might argue that there is a contradiction since in Rabóczky's case not a fellow painter but a sculptor has chosen Giotto as a model. Indeed the latter is famous for his frescos and panel paintings, yet his figures are round, plastic, almost sculptoreshque.<sup>96</sup> These are the characteristics usually referred to as *giottesque*. Acknowledging this, Rabóczky's choice needs no further explanation.<sup>97</sup>

*Giotto's Angels* is the diploma work of the artist (2006).<sup>98</sup> It consists of seven sculptures based on Giotto's *Crucifixion* and *Lamentation of Christ* in the Scrovegni Chapel,

<sup>93</sup> „Credette Cimabue ne la pittura / tener lo campo, e ora ha Giotto il grido, / sì che la fama di colui è scura.” Purgatorio XI, lines 94–96. *Princeton Dante Project*, transl. by Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander, <http://etcweb.princeton.edu/dante/pdp/> (retrieved: June 6, 2010).

<sup>94</sup> Chapter I: “Cimabue and Giotto” in Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, sel., transl. E.L. Seeley, intr. Alfred Werner (New York: The Noonday Press, 1961), 7 (hereafter: Vasari, *Lives*).

<sup>95</sup> For Giotto paraphrases of Vincent Barré (1988), see Karen Wilkin, and Christophe Cousin, *Vincent Barré, Le chemin de ronde 1982-1992* (Turin: Musées d'Art et d'Histoire de Belfort, 1992), 16–17; while a recent Hungarian example is by Zsófia Oravecz: *Barbie-Giotto*, 2007. I would like to express my gratitude for the first example to Veronika Pócs, for the second to Júlia Oravecz.

<sup>96</sup> This feature was emphasized by the sculptor. (Conversation on April 18, 2010.)

<sup>97</sup> The possibilities of painting and sculpture are contrasted in this *paragone* (literally: comparison) where by the shift of medium Rabóczky appears to argue for the primacy of sculpture.

<sup>98</sup> Zoltán Karmó, and Katalin Csányi eds., *Diplomakatalógus 2007: Magyar Képzőművészeti Egyetem, Szobrász Tanszék. M.A. Catalogue 2007: The Hungarian University of Fine Arts, Department of Sculpture* (Budapest: Magyar Képzőművészeti Egyetem, 2007), 24–25. One short paragraph on the *Angels*: Gabriella Uhl, “Véletlen találkozások az Egreskertben. Szobrász diploma 2007,” (Encounters by Chance. Sculptor

in Padua, which the artist visited in 2005 (sculptures and models: figs. 47–62).<sup>99</sup> Ten mourning angels are depicted on each of the frescos in various positions (figs. 47 and 48). The sculptor selected seven of these twenty figures to form a new composition.<sup>100</sup> The angels – bearing originally a secondary position compared to the fresco’s main figures – become the protagonists of Rabóczy’s work. Due to the change of setting the angels’ grief lacks direct cause, yet their mourning gestures are intensified by the three dimensional representation. Rabóczy uses two methods to distance her work from the model: selection and shifting. She selected the paraphrased elements from two different, although very much connected frescos, yet she did more than a compilation: by shifting the medium from painting to sculpture she created an entirely different context for her figures. Although each sculpture can be appreciated independently, the seven angels were conceived as a group (fig. 50). By entering their space, the viewer can participate in the drama: the work is very much building upon this emotional response.

The double – human and celestial – nature of the angels is attested in Rabóczy’s choice of materials.<sup>101</sup> The earthly body is formed of fireclay (pyrogranite – hard, burnt earth clay), while the heavenly wings are made of metal. These welded iron wings are in sharp contrast with the bodies, visualizing the transcendent nature of the figures. The usage of fireclay unifies the overall appearance of the angels, which on Giotto’s frescos are wearing garments of different colours. The bodies of Giotto’s angels are not entirely visible as most of them are depicted in movement, emerging from the blue sky. This illusionistic feature is

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Diploma 2007) *Új Művészet* 9 (2007): 12. An essay-like writing: Gábor Szerényi, “Zsilip a misztikumba. Rabóczy Judit szobrairól,” (Sluice-Gate to Mysticity. About the sculptures of Judit Rabóczy) *Premier* 66 (2008): 118–20. For further works, see Judit Rita Rabóczy, *Rabóczy Judit Rita Szobrász – Sculptor*. (Budapest: Monterosa, 2009).

<sup>99</sup> Conversation with the artist on April 18, 2010.

<sup>100</sup> Although seven might be considered a mystical number, here the reasons are compositional. (Conversation with the Artist on April 18, 2010.) See also: Judit Rabóczy, “Angyalok,” (Angels) (MA thesis, Hungarian University of Fine Arts, 2007), 6.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Judit Rabóczy, “Angyalok,” (Angels) (MA thesis, Hungarian University of Fine Arts, 2007), 7.

translated into sculpture by the fragmentation of the material. Accordingly, the lower body of Rabóczy's angels is not sculpted, they thus seem to be floating in the air.

The doleful expressions of the painted angels are intensified by the change of medium. Although it is a hard material, the appearance of fireclay suggests the fragile nature of the angels. Due to the texture of the surface it appears as if they could fall apart at any moment. This feature makes the angels almost human, evoking compassion from the viewers' side. The figures represent different classical formulations of sorrow: one is cracking its hands (figs. 53 and 54), one pulling its hair (figs. 61 and 62), yet another is tearing its clothes apart (figs. 55 and 56). Maybe the most horrifying of all is the silently crying angel (figs. 59 and 60), while another angel is drying its eyes (figs. 51 and 52), representing a more subtle, lyrical expression of grief. Playing different roles, all of the angels take part in the drama, their shared emotion of sorrow unifies the group.

Compared to Giotto's version, the fragmentation of the sculptures brings completely new qualities to light, attesting the autonomy of Rabóczy's creation. Not surprisingly, her work is in many ways linked to the sculptural tradition. First, the usage of roughly moulded fireclay ages the appearance of the statues. The prefiguration of an artificial aging process can already be found in Michelangelo's machinations to produce "antique" sculptures.<sup>102</sup> On the other hand, the aesthetic appreciation of the torso-angels ties Rabóczy's attitude to Rodin's principles, creating a second link to the sculptural tradition.

If one compares the way the angels and the gothic sculptures of Buda (figs. 23 and 25) are exhibited, the similarity becomes striking. The simple metal support of Rabóczy's sculptures is very much reminiscent of the presentation method seen in the Budapest History Museum. The uneven surface, the fragility of the texture and the torso-like appearance all tie the two groups strongly together. What in Buda is the consequence of necessity

<sup>102</sup> The parallel has been brought up by the Artist. (Conversation on April 18, 2010.) Cf. Chapter XXVI "Michael Angelo" in Vasari, *Lives*, 289.



(conservation), becomes an artistic strategy with Rabóczy. By likening her sculptures to archaeological findings, the sculptor is acting similarly to Major in the case of his pseudo-reconstructions. Putting on the mask of a scientist, Rabóczy introduces museological features into the artistic process.

After the completion of the discussed work the same subject did not cease to interest Rabóczy: in 2007 she created another piece based on Giotto's frescos. The *Angel* is a life-size torso made of coloured, welded iron (fig. 63). At a previous stage the *Angel* had hands and a head: its subsequent decapitation appears to be symbolic. Leaving her beloved model behind, the sculptor took the next step towards the appropriation of the motif. Starting from Giotto she attempted to formulate a contemporary message instead of insisting on formal resemblance. By deliberately mutilating her work she – at least partly – cut the umbilical cord to her predecessor. In fact, the usage of rough materials and seeing destruction as a form of creation is attested in Rabóczy's other works as well.<sup>103</sup> By reducing the angel to an empty shell, she filled the figure with new meanings. From pointing out formal similarities she came to reveal an autonomous, contemporary message.

### c. Authority of Knowledge

Previously Grünewald and Giotto were introduced as representatives of artistic authority. Their prestige was either attacked (Hejtes Szomlyazók) or applauded (Judit Rabóczy) by contemporary artists. The *VITA* (2003) by László László Révész stands for a different quality (fig. 65).<sup>104</sup> Although the subject of the paraphrase is a trecento panel painting, not the artist, but the depicted person acquires greater importance. As a church doctor, the central figure,

<sup>103</sup> E.g. *Aquariums* (2004), *Spring – The Cats of Epreskert* (Strawberry Garden, 2007), *Masks and Heads* (2008) etc.

<sup>104</sup> Biography: "Révész László László", in *Kortárs magyar művészeti lexikon* (Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Hungarian Art) ed. Péter Fitz (Budapest: Enciklopédia Kiadó, 2001), vol. 3, 260–61. For a short description of the work (with illustration), see: Anna Bálványos, "Digitális klasszikus," (Digital Classic) *Artmagazin* 1 (2004): 70.



St. Thomas Aquinas represents the authority of knowledge. This high status comes to be questioned by Révész's ironic tone.

The model is *The Triumph of St. Thomas Aquinas*, a panel painting in the church of Santa Caterina in Pisa (figs. 64 and 66).<sup>105</sup> Révész saw the panel in Pisa, where he lived close to the church.<sup>106</sup> The *Doctor Angelicus*, dressed in Dominican habit is seated in the middle in a mandorla, holding up a book with an inscription from *Proverbs* 8:7. At his sides Aristotle and Plato are standing. Below them the reclining figure of Averroes is flanked by two groups of Benedictine, Franciscan and Dominican monks. Above St. Thomas is the figure of Christ in a mandorla, at his sides are St. Paul, Moses and the four Evangelists with their symbols. All the figures except the monks are holding books, while the different groups are connected by rays of light: the complex imagery visualises the origin of knowledge. For better understanding the names of the figures are inscribed, as are the books which they hold. The letters of Paul, the Ten Commandments at Moses and the Gospels of the four Evangelists are all linked to Christ. For their part, Aristotle and Plato are connected to St. Thomas Aquinas since the latter introduced Greek philosophy to Christian theology. Averroes, the twelfth century Arabic commentator of Aristotle is at the bottom of the painting, overcome by the knowledge of St. Thomas.

The organization of theological knowledge, the system of scholasticism is visualised on the painting, centring St. Thomas Aquinas as an unquestionable authority. The importance of this image is testified by later works belonging to the same iconographical

<sup>105</sup> The second, archival image shows the shape of the panel before the restoration. For a detailed description, see: *Princeton Index of Christian Art*, <http://ica.princeton.edu/> (retrieved June 6, 2010.) Further literature: Millard Meiss, "The Problem of Francesco Traini" *The Art Bulletin* 2 (1933): 97–173; Michael Mallory, "Thoughts Concerning the 'Master of the Glorification of Saint Thomas'" *The Art Bulletin* 1 (1975): 9–20; Joseph Polzer, "The 'Triumph of Thomas' panel in Santa Caterina, Pisa. Meaning and Date" *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 1 (1993): 29–70; Serena Romano, "Il Trionfo di S. Tommaso in S. Caterina a Pisa," in *Arte d'Occidente: temi e metodi; studi in onore di Angiola Maria Romanini*, ed. Antonio Cadei (Roma: Edizioni Sintesi Informazione, 1999), 901–11.

<sup>106</sup> E-mail from the artist on June 13, 2010.

type.<sup>107</sup> For his part, leaving the religious connotations behind, Révész concentrates on the role of knowledge in contemporary society. In his version the primacy of scholastic knowledge is replaced with secular erudition. Instead of the interpreters of the word of God rises a new authority, which takes into account the acts of men: Révész replaces the church figures with fifteen Hungarian historians (figs. 65 and 67).<sup>108</sup>

The background of the work is worth explaining. It has been made for an exhibition organized by Nikolett Eröss and Miklós Peternák in 2003, *Aura – After the Age of Technical Reproduction*.<sup>109</sup> The starting point was the aura-term defined by Walter Benjamin as “the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be”.<sup>110</sup> Classical and technical media were contrasted by the curators, because “while the former exists somewhere as an original, works created through new media can have multiple identical versions; they have no original in the traditional sense.”<sup>111</sup> The work of Révész is a video installation mixing real footage with animation: the technique confirms the curators’ concept with the multiplicability of the DVD.

The artist retained the major geometrical forms of the original panel (but smaller details e.g. Christ’s mandorla is missing). Equally he kept the colours of the background in a simplified version. All the main figures are present, only the groups of monks in the lower section are decreased in number. Although St. Thomas Aquinas is without doubt the accentuated, central figure of the painting, he is represented in a web of important

<sup>107</sup> Trecento examples: Frescos of Andrea di Bonaiuto (Andrea da Firenze) in the Spanish Chapel of Santa Maria Novella in Florence; frescos of the Visconti Chapel in Milan, Sant’Eustorgio. Quattrocento examples: Benozzo Gozzoli’s panel (1470–75) in the Louvre; Filippino Lippi’s frescos in the Carafa Chapel in Santa Maria sopra Minerva, Rome.

<sup>108</sup> László Borhi, Pál Fodor, István Janek, Péter E. Kovács, Miklós Laczkó, György Litván, Árpád Nógrádi, Imre Ress, Péter Sipos, Balázs Sudár, Dániel Szabó, Zoltán Szász, István György Tóth, István Tringli, Attila Zsoldos (see fig. 67). The artist knew many of these scholars; they were easily convinced to pose for the video. There is no theoretical connection between the specific medieval figures and the historians, only formal similarities, e.g. in the case of Averroes. (E-mail from the artist on June 13, 2010.)

<sup>109</sup> Exhibition catalogue: Miklós Peternák and Nikolett Eröss, eds., *Aura: a technikai reprodukálhatóság korszaka után. Aura: after the age of technical reproduction* (Budapest: C3 Alapítvány – Millenáris Kht., 2003).

<sup>110</sup> Id., without page number.

<sup>111</sup> Id., without page number.

personalities. The rays originating from Christ and Thomas interconnect the whole group. This notion of a common, shared knowledge is translated by Révész with the presentation of historians. As researchers, they also form a group as they are members of the Institute of History at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.<sup>112</sup> This highly appreciated corporation forms the secular counterpart of St. Thomas' scholastic order. The title of the work, *VITA* does not only reflect on the genuinely different *lives* of medieval and modern scholars: the Hungarian word “vita” translates to English as “dispute”, thus reinforcing the perceived conflict between religious and secular knowledge.<sup>113</sup>

Putting aside the question of knowledge, the panel in Santa Caterina is nonetheless an altarpiece. What Révész does is by updating the topic he desacralizes the original subject. One cannot miss the irony in putting scientists on the screen to be venerated by the visitors to the exhibition. He not only secularizes the model but he changes the external context as well. This equally reflects on the usual fate of medieval panel paintings, as most of them are by now appreciated not in the centre of a cult, but as artefacts. By displaying the paraphrase of an altarpiece at an exhibition, Révész also imitates the aforementioned process of museologization.

Révész made use of yet another tradition in his work. With his video he created an updated, twenty-first century version of *tableaux vivants*. In fact, living paintings are not unprecedented in Hungary.<sup>114</sup> Interestingly enough a year before the *Aura*, in 2002, the Viennese Kunsthalle organized an exhibition concerning the same topic.<sup>115</sup> The video of Révész shows the historians in a loop, thus small movements can be observed.<sup>116</sup> The temporal presentation of a traditional *tableau* on the theatre stage is overcome here: Révész

<sup>112</sup> Cf. the homepage of the Institute of History at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences: [http://www.tti.hu/hu\\_munkatarsak.html](http://www.tti.hu/hu_munkatarsak.html) (retrieved June 6, 2010).

<sup>113</sup> This *double entendre* of the title is intentional. (E-mail from the artist on June 13, 2010.)

<sup>114</sup> See for example an illustration from 1899–1900 in *Balkon* 12 (1994), 41.

<sup>115</sup> Sabine Folie, ed., *Tableaux vivants* (Vienna: Kunsthalle Wien, 2002).

<sup>116</sup> The shots were taken in the courtyard of the Institute of History, in front of a blue box. (E-mail from the artist on June 13, 2010.)

creates a work which is moving yet unchanged for eternity. Instead of the original topic, the *Triumph of St. Thomas Aquinas*, he shows the everlasting triumph of knowledge. Yet from behind the harsh colours of the video and the unnatural gestures of the figures, the artist winks at the audience. With ironic tone he warns us that although the authority of religious knowledge is replaced with historical erudition, we should not take the latter's authority for granted.

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This chapter questioned why contemporary artists paraphrase specific medieval works of art. One possible answer is they not only deal with medieval heritage in a general sense, but they select their models along specific criteria. The analysis of these works showed that one of the strongest drives is the authority of the medieval work of art. This authority can equally lie in the iconicity of the image, the fame of the artist who created it and the importance of the depicted figures. This medieval authority is dealt with in many ways: it is attacked, embraced or ironically questioned by contemporary artists. The different attitudes of the artists show the variety of contemporary answers and equally sheds light on the versatility of paraphrasing as a tool. The next chapter attempts to illustrate a slightly different attitude, where the connection to the medieval work is more distant, while the model or its several features become more and more appropriated by the contemporary artist.

#### 4. Appropriation of the Medieval

The works presented in the previous chapters attempted to copy, imitate, reconstruct, mediate or paraphrase medieval works of art. In any case, the reference remained visually clear and most of the times easily recognisable. The examples of this chapter represent a different attitude: the connection between medieval and contemporary works becomes more and more theoretical, while the role of formal similarity declines accordingly. Contemporary artists make use of only a few, carefully selected features of their models. One might even consider talking of inspiration instead of a model to underline the difference. These artists appropriate medieval art, not by recycling a complete work but by turning a specific feature into an integral part of their own creation. While most of the previously discussed examples were unique cases in one's artistic production, here the appropriation of different models is the result of an inner development of the oeuvre. In this chapter works of György Jovánovics, Endre Tót and Balázs Kicsiny will be discussed: the main characteristics of the following examples can be described as evocation, contextualization, site specificity and personal mythology.

##### a. The Great Parallels

The afterlife of medieval art attests to the fact that by passage of time the meaning of artworks is always a subject to change. There are no fixed messages, interpretation depends not only on the period but also the interpreter: different are the ways how artists and public perceive a work. Two sculptures by György Jovánovics will be discussed here, in both cases medieval art constitutes a major intellectual parallel for the artist.<sup>117</sup> The first work shows how important the artist's statement can be to fully understand a work (fig. 68). The second

<sup>117</sup> Short biography: Péter Fitz, "Jovánovics György," in *Kortárs magyar művészeti lexikon* (Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Hungarian Art), ed. Péter Fitz (Budapest: Enciklopédia Kiadó, 2000), vol. 2, 234–237; Extensive collection of works: Zoltán Hafner, ed, *Jovánovics* (Budapest: Corvina, 2004).

stands as an example for the development of secondary meanings in the case of a posterior contextualization done by artist and curator together (fig. 70).

*The Big Prism* (1995) is a large work of plaster, created for the *XLVI Venice Biennale*, where Jovánovics represented Hungary (fig. 68).<sup>118</sup> It is a white, rectangular cuboid standing on the smaller rectangle of its longer side. On the right top is a small, lectern-like structure, while the sides of the prism are covered with reliefs of different form and depth. According to the artist, *The Big Prism* gives reference to three different works. It was conceived as the counterpart of an earlier piece equally exhibited in Venice, the *Reclining Figure* (original title: *Trouble*, 1969).<sup>119</sup> Accordingly, the described basic form of the work recalls the volume of a bed turned on its side.<sup>120</sup> The second parallel is the artist's old favourite from Paris, the city where he studied.<sup>121</sup> The *Sarcophagus of the Spouses* (fig. 71), an Etruscan work from the Louvre bears similar shape to the *Prism*, while the latter's upper structure appears to be reminiscent of the cushion under the couple.

The third, most intriguing model of the sculptor was the *Holy Sepulchre from Garamszentbenedek* (fig. 69).<sup>122</sup> This *Sepulchrum Domini* is a late gothic sarcophagus dating back to the end of the fifteenth century. It had once been used in Easter Passion plays, while today it is conserved in the Christian Museum of Esztergom.<sup>123</sup> The similarity of mass, volume and extent of the two works is evident, yet this similitude does not expand to the details. The non-figurative reliefs are in sharp contrast with the Christological narrative depicted on the side of the *Holy Sepulchre*, although the rhythm of the panels might be

<sup>118</sup> Catalogue of the exhibition: György Jovánovics, *György Jovánovics: XLVI Biennale di Venezia 1995. Ungheria* (Székesfehérvár: Szent István Király Múzeum, 1995) (hereafter: Jovánovics: *XLVI Biennale*).

<sup>119</sup> Id. cat.10.

<sup>120</sup> Letter of György Jovánovics to Hans Belting. Péter Fitz, ed., *Jovánovics György: "Ut manifestius atque apertius dicam"* (Budapest: Fővárosi Képtár – Kiscelli Múzeum, 1996), 12 (hereafter: Fitz, *Ut manifestius*).

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. The connection of the bed as a place of rest and the sarcophagus as a final resting place seems equally interesting.

<sup>123</sup> For further information on the medieval work, see Mária Prokopp, *A garamszentbenedeki úrkoporsó az esztergomi Keresztény Múzeumban* (The Holy Sepulchre from Garamszentbenedek in the Christian Museum of Esztergom) (Budapest: Corvina, 1982).

compared. For his part, Jovánovics identified the lectern-like upper detail with “a gable, a half-tympanum“, providing a further reference to gothic art.<sup>124</sup> By showing an illustration in the catalogue, the work became equally linked to a local, Venetian building, the gothic-renaissance Palazzo Dario.<sup>125</sup>

As a visual reference, the *Holy Sepulchre from Garamszentbenedek* is also illustrated in the same catalogue.<sup>126</sup> In the next year Jovánovics made an even stronger allusion to the gothic sepulchre, when he exhibited the material of the Venice Biennale in the Kiscelli Museum in Budapest (1996).<sup>127</sup> For this occasion the artist reworked the *Detail of the Big Tempesta*, his paraphrase of Giorgione’s *The Tempest*. He added a video projection – *The Dialogue – The Tempest* (1996) – in which the conversation of a knight and a mother – both figures present on Giorgione’s painting – can be heard. The man on the video explicitly compares *The Big Prism* (exhibited in the adjoining room) to the *Holy Sepulchre of Garamszentbenedek*, thus making the visible parallel also audible.<sup>128</sup>

One further, museological feature of the Kiscelli exhibition appears to be highly important. The sarcophagus, a medieval object created for liturgical usage is exhibited in a museum today, thus deprived of its original function. On the contrary – taking the former as a model – *The Big Prism* of Jovánovics has been installed in the splendid space of a former church in Kiscell. One might argue that through its modern reincarnation, *The Holy Sepulchre of Garamszentbenedek* has temporarily regained its appropriate place. Although in a formal sense the allusion of Jovánovics is subtle, knowing the artist’s statement and the explanatory work (*The Dialogue*), the resemblance becomes apparent. *The Big Prism* attests the role of inspiration, which *per definitionem* precedes the creation.

<sup>124</sup> Letter of György Jovánovics to Hans Belting. Fitz, *Ut manifestus*, 12.

<sup>125</sup> Jovánovics, *XLVI Biennale*, 4.

<sup>126</sup> Id. 17.

<sup>127</sup> Exhibition catalogue: Fitz, *Ut manifestus*.

<sup>128</sup> Id. 18.



The next work is connected to an entirely different process, being the example of posterior, medieval contextualization. In 2009 the Museum of Fine Arts of Budapest organized a special exhibition, featuring only two works: *The Prayer of St. Thomas Aquinas*, a panel painting by Sassetta (Stefano di Giovanni)<sup>129</sup> and the *Relief 08.01.17* of György Jovánovics (figs. 72 and 70).<sup>130</sup> It is important to know that this has only been the first exhibition in a series, where contemporary pieces are to be coupled with works taken from the permanent collection.<sup>131</sup> The relief at hand is the variation of a previous theme. The original, 1999 version belongs to the Ludwig Museum (Budapest), while the slightly different new one (2008) was executed upon the request of the Museum of Fine Arts.<sup>132</sup> According to the curator of the exhibition, Judit Geskó, the artist himself selected Sassetta's panel as a counterpart, because "he thinks that both of them are impartial researchers of spatial depth and the existence of objects in space."<sup>133</sup>

Compared to previously discussed works, there is an immense difference. Originally neither the 1999 version nor the one from 2008 had medieval connotations, but as Hans Belting wrote in the exhibition catalogue: "in our imagination images are conversing with images."<sup>134</sup> According to Belting, the abstract reliefs of Jovánovics represent a perspective posterior to modern perspective.<sup>135</sup> On the other hand, the Sienese painter is contemporary with the birth of this modern perspective, yet unaware of it, using multiplicity of views instead of a one-point perspective. As Belting concludes, besides the parallels in *perspective before perspective* and *perspective after perspective*, none of the works can be perceived by

<sup>129</sup> See Mária Prokopp, *Sassetta: A budapesti képe elemzése* (Sassetta: Analysis of the Budapest Panel) (Budapest: Holnap Kiadó, 1997).

<sup>130</sup> Exhibition catalogue: Judit Geskó, ed., *Hommage à Jovánovics* (Budapest: Szépművészeti Múzeum, 2009).

<sup>131</sup> Id. 6. In 2010 a similar exhibition took place featuring Vera Molnar and Paul Cézanne (curators: Judit Geskó, Mónika Kumin).

<sup>132</sup> Id. 12. Hans Belting: *Hommage à Jovánovics György 2009. április 3.* (hereafter: Belting, *Hommage*).

<sup>133</sup> Id. 6. Foreword of Judit Geskó.

<sup>134</sup> Id. 10. Belting, *Hommage*.

<sup>135</sup> Id. 22–24. Belting, *Hommage*.



itself. Sassetta's painting is part of the *Arte della Lana Altarpiece*'s predella, while the relief should be seen in connection to the oeuvre of Jovánovics.

I would like to provide one additional, interesting detail: the *Town above the Sea*, a trecento painting by Sienese Ambrogio Lorenzetti was reproduced in the 1995 Venice catalogue (fig. 73). The structural similarity of certain Jovánovics-reliefs and Lorenzetti's cityscape is intriguing. This similitude is partly due to the fact that many reliefs are like ground plans, or Google Earth photos<sup>136</sup>, while Lorenzetti's town is viewed partly from above. In the light of this illustration one might argue that the parallel between multiple-point perspective and the reliefs already emerged prior to the creation of *Relief 08.01.17* and the Sassetta–Jovánovics exhibition.

In any case, drawing parallels between medieval and modern art is characteristic of Jovánovics. As he said in 1993: "In my opinion, the architect of Abbot Suger or the constructors of great cathedrals had done the same as Schwitters or Kandinsky did when completing a task."<sup>137</sup> Yet, he was not inspired by medieval art exclusively. He not only paraphrased Giorgione; in another famous work, *Detail from the Great Gilles* (1967) he made reference to Antoine Watteau's painting (*Gilles*).<sup>138</sup> Besides paraphrasing, he created several hommages. It suffices here to mention the ones honouring his abstract predecessors: Lajos Kassák, László Moholy-Nagy and László Péri.<sup>139</sup>

The multiplicity of sources show that although medieval art bears a special importance for the artist, visual and theoretical references are part of his artistic method in general. In the discussed cases the level of visual resemblance to the model is lower than in any previous example discussed in the thesis. Instead of attempting to follow the model, the artist draws inspiration from it. He appropriates a few, important features, making them

<sup>136</sup> Id. 22. Belting, *Hommage*.

<sup>137</sup> Jovánovics, *XLVI Biennale*, 3.

<sup>138</sup> Id. cat. 8.

<sup>139</sup> Zoltán Hafner, ed., *Jovánovics* (Budapest: Corvina, 2004), cat. 176–191.

integral part of his own creation. As we have seen, even the parallel for the posterior contextualization has partly been conceived previously.

## **b. The End of Medievalism**

The following works of Endre Tót constitute a special group as they represent an endpoint, a distant edge of medievalism.<sup>140</sup> The process of the artist is radical: he eliminates almost all the features of the medieval work he attempts to evoke. The uniqueness of his solution is almost patent-like, this makes it impossible to be followed: any similar work could be considered mere imitation. As an artist, Tót was raised in the tradition of conceptual art, accordingly in his paintings he materializes a theoretical approach: his canvases are not pictorial in a traditional sense. Although Tót's oeuvre is very rich, for this thesis only medieval allusions can be taken into consideration. The omission of later models might be excused, if one considers Alfred M. Fischer's lines in the 1999 Cologne catalogue: "Tót revealed his particular interest in medieval art in his preoccupation with the subject of absence."<sup>141</sup> This interest will be attested in the following examples. Contrary to restricting the analysis to works connected to medieval models and the strictness of the time-frame, for the better understanding we have to follow the origin of his nineties' works back to the seventies.

First, two works from 1971 should be mentioned: *My Unpainted Canvases* (1971) is a self-edited artist book.<sup>142</sup> There are various black contoured rectangles on every page, both

<sup>140</sup> Biography: Andrea Bordács, "Tót Endre," in *Kortárs magyar művészeti lexikon* (Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Hungarian Art) ed. Péter Fitz (Budapest: Enciklopédia Kiadó, 2001), vol. 3, 709–12.

<sup>141</sup> Alfred M. Fischer, "Absent and Still Present. An Introduction to the Work of Endre Tót," in *Endre Tót: Who's Afraid of Nothing? Absent Pictures*, ed. Alfred M. Fischer (Cologne: Museum Ludwig Köln, 1999), 20 (hereafter: Fischer, *Absent and Still Present*). Unfortunately the author does not develop on this idea, only mentions one example – Lochner – which I will also cover among other works. Some further examples: from the "Rain" series: *Absent Rain – Present Rain*, 1994 (typing "rain" on the reproduction of a medieval panel painting); also: *Zero-Banner* (project for the Cologne Cathedral), both works reproduced in: Endre Tót, *Semmi sem semmi: retrospektív 1965–1995. Nothing Ain't Nothing: Retrospective 1965–1995* (Budapest: Műcsarnok, 1995), 116, 145 (hereafter: Tót, *Semmi sem semmi*).

<sup>142</sup> Tót, *Semmi sem semmi*, 183.

their inner side and the background is kept blank, only the size of the works is given below. The contradiction is obvious: unpainted, therefore non-existent canvases are represented in the book. Only one specification is provided: the exact size likens these images to unexecuted plans. A sense of playfulness characterizes this work as it shows several, almost five meters long, monumental canvases: the book appears to be an economic yet ironic communication of an un-executable idea.

In contrast to these contemporary “works”, *The Most Wonderful Paintings in the World* (1971) – created for Klaus Groh’s *Aktuelle Kunst in Osteuropa*, a collection published in 1972 – guides us closer to medieval art.<sup>143</sup> On black background there are six white rectangles, the upper four standing, two below in landscape-format.<sup>144</sup> Inside each of them the catalogue data (painter, title, size, location) is inscribed. All the legends are in German, the title is written in the middle ground. The “depicted” works originate from various periods from fifteenth to seventeenth centuries. The locations (New York, London, Paris, Venice) represent the greatest art collections of the world, while the selection itself suggests a personal choice. The data of the work is not at the side of the picture as in a museum: it does not explain the image but replaces it.<sup>145</sup> Tót radicalizes the role of illustration. Although the latter can never replace the original, a photograph might provide a good overview in the absence of the model. According to Tót’s work not the image but the mentioned data describes the work better. Moreover, the inscribed size and the proportion of the rectangles do not correspond: the paintings are reduced to two simple formats. This unifies the composition, yet erases the last physical link to the paintings. The data remains, and the data only.

<sup>143</sup> Klaus Groh, *Aktuelle Kunst in Osteuropa* (Cologne: Verlag M. Dumont Schauberg, 1972).

<sup>144</sup> In smaller standing rectangles: Jan van Eyck, Francois Clouet, Giorgione, Vermeer; in landscape-format: Sassetta, Uccello.

<sup>145</sup> Accordingly: Ulrike Lehmann, “The Zero, the Nothing and the Void,” in *Endre Tót: Who’s Afraid of Nothing? Absent Pictures*, ed. Alfred M. Fischer (Cologne: Museum Ludwig Köln, 1999), 28 (hereafter: Lehmann, *The Zero*).

In the subsequent *A Visit to the Museum (Blackout Paintings Cabinet)* in 1972 Tót shows a photo of political functionaries visiting the Budapest Museum of Fine Arts, but he covers the paintings in black, creating a *Blackout Paintings Cabinet*.<sup>146</sup> A related work, the *Night Visit to the National Gallery* (1974) builds upon the same effect. Using a guide to the London National Gallery the artist “blacks out” the images leaving the captions intact. Following the book he introduces the collection in a room-by-room order.

Despite the similarities, there is a difference between the four introduced works. The first two attest a positive attitude, evoking ironically never-existed works (*My Unpainted Canvases*) or giving reference to real works of art (*The Most Wonderful Paintings in the World*). On the other hand, the last two examples deny specific images with a negative overtone.<sup>147</sup> Notwithstanding the result is the same: Tót creates real or imagined references, placing himself in the course of art history.

These were the ideas the artist revisited in the nineties. The *Italian Gothic. The Wilton Diptych* (1992) is a large painting (240x140 centimetres, in two parts), representing three medieval works (fig. 74). The shapes of the paintings are depicted with black contours, the legend is written on the right side. Tót’s solution is quite similar to the information sheets of a museum: these explanatory tables show the walls of the room signalling the shape of the paintings, giving the captions below. Interestingly enough, this time the location of the works is not indicated on the canvas. In fact, Lorenzo Monaco’s *Coronation of the Virgin with Adoring Saints*, a panel from Sassetta’s *San Sepolcro Altarpiece* and the *Wilton Diptych* are all masterpieces of the National Gallery in London (figs. 75–77). This feature strongly connects the painting to Tót’s previous work, the *Night Visit to the National Gallery*. Compared to other works, the omission of the place appears to be deliberate, yet this is not the only – supposedly intentional – inconsistency in the work. The representation of the

<sup>146</sup> Fischer, *Absent and Still Present*, 19; ill.: 85.

<sup>147</sup> For a common negative parallel – modifying an original work of art – Robert Rauschenberg’s: *Erased de Kooning Drawing* (1953), see: Lehmann, *The Zero*, 31.

paintings is disproportionate: it might not be a coincidence that the size is also omitted from the caption. Tót's painting is dominated by the originally tiny *Wilton Diptych*, while the larger Sassetta panel is dwarfed by its side. For its part, Lorenzo Monaco's great altar receives the same dimension as the wing of the small diptych. Only one part of the *Wilton Diptych* is "depicted": one cannot miss the irony in designating one of the two identical halves as the right wing in the caption. Compared to previous, rectangular paraphrases the form of the paintings is revealing. Being well-known, easily recognisable works, the silhouettes of the Lorenzo Monaco-altar and the Sassetta-panel might give away their model even before reading the legend (cf. figs. 75 and 77). In my opinion, the mentioned inconsistencies in location and proportion attest to the playful attitude of the artist. Providing the design and data of the depicted works, he informs the viewer, but at the same time he attempts to create confusion.

Not only these works connected to the National Gallery are site-specific. The *Madonna in the Rose Garden* by Stefan Lochner (fig. 79) has also been subject to a similar paraphrase in 1998 (fig. 78), yet this time the legend discloses all the information about the work. The model is kept in the Wallraf-Richartz Museum of Cologne, where the artist lived since 1980.<sup>148</sup> Tót painted his paraphrase a year before his exhibition – *Who's Afraid of Nothing? Absent Pictures* (1999) – organized in the Ludwig Museum of the same city.<sup>149</sup> As Fischer noted in the catalogue, it was a great occasion since in this period the two museums were located in the same building thus the visitors had the opportunity to compare Lochner's fifteenth century painting to Tót's version.<sup>150</sup> When the exhibition travelled to the Budapest

<sup>148</sup> Alfred M. Fisher, ed., *Endre Tót: Who's Afraid of Nothing? Absent Pictures* (Cologne: Museum Ludwig Köln, 1999), 162.

<sup>149</sup> Cf. the exhibition catalogue in the previous footnote.

<sup>150</sup> Fischer, *Absent and Still Present*. 20.

Ludwig Museum the artist exhibited similar, “local” paraphrases – this time of modern paintings.<sup>151</sup>

The previously discussed absent pictures attested to the artist’s apparent interest in medieval art. Compared to the works of the seventies it is clear that the artist made use of his models according to a general, constantly evolving artistic process. He selected a few features of the originals to create his absent paraphrases. He also built in several inconsistencies and site-specific allusions, which made the simple model-paraphrase relationship more complex. The artist builds upon the viewer’s knowledge and imagination which evokes the absent originals yet with the intricate details he also alerts the viewer to be attentive.

Using their contours and catalogue data Tót appropriates these paintings, exhibiting the “duplicates” as his own creations, although he gives credit to his medieval counterparts on the canvas. The next logical step Tót made was the overall appropriation of the model. The *Annunciation and Madonna with the Child* (1997) are cut-outs made from the same paper, both imitating standard forms of gothic panels (fig. 80). If possible, these images are even more absent than the previous, black contoured ones as they are entirely made of space, the void in the paper. The altered relation of support and image is analogous with the change from positive picture to a negative one. Below the empty forms the titles are given together with the artist’s name: Endre Tót. Compared to other absent paintings, by writing his own name, the artist appropriates entirely the evidently gothic forms. In the case of the *Madonna with Child and Saints* he uses the same cut-out technique (fig. 81). Although there is a change in the iconography, the “painting’s” complex form coincides with Lorenzo Monaco’s altar, *The Coronation of the Virgin with Adoring Saints* (fig. 77) as reproduced on the *Italian Gothic. The Wilton Diptych* (fig. 74).

<sup>151</sup> The Budapest Ludwig Museum has no medieval collection. At the time it was located in a wing connected to the Hungarian National Gallery: from the latter’s collection Tót exhibited for example Pál Szinyei Merse’s *Woman in Lilac* side by side with his version. Exhibition catalogue: Tót, *Semmi sem semmi*.

As we have seen, the presented works and the artistic process are deeply rooted in Tót's oeuvre. The artist closes a full circle: starting from his *Unpainted Canvases* through virtual reproductions of different absent works of art he arrives to fully appropriate his models. Instead of alluding to a medieval work he uses the form of a specific panel to create his own absent medieval painting.

### c. Site Specific Mythologies

Balázs Kicsiny is the last artist to be discussed in this thesis.<sup>152</sup> Formally, his work represents an outermost edge of medievalism: it bears no physical resemblance at all to any medieval object. Nonetheless, the case is quite similar to the chimeras of the Notre-Dame discussed previously. Here the afterlife of a medieval building became important for the artist to such extent that he included it into his personal narrative. Moreover, by placing an installation to the actual church he created an interaction between the medieval and the contemporary work. In the following I will argue, that Balázs Kicsiny's installation, the *Work in Progress I.* (2002) bears inseparably strong ties to its place of origin, accordingly, it is primarily site specific, while its deep symbolism is inherent not only in the site, but also in the artist's personal mythology.

Many churches, among them many medieval ones are used today as temporary or permanent exhibition spaces.<sup>153</sup> Nationalized or simply abandoned, the church loses its liturgical role, while the integrity of the building is secured through its new function – as an exhibit hall.<sup>154</sup> Exhibitions in these transformed spaces have usually few or no connection at all to the actual topography. Balázs Kicsiny's installation is a work of a different kind.

<sup>152</sup> Biography: Ágnes Berecz, "Kicsiny Balázs," in *Kortárs magyar művészeti lexikon* (Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Hungarian Art), ed. Péter Fitz (Budapest: Enciklopédia Kiadó, 2000), vol. 2, 370–71.

<sup>153</sup> For example, the early gothic Saint-Martin-des-Champs in Paris houses cars, planes, and other technical instruments as today it forms part of the *Musée des arts et métiers*.

<sup>154</sup> There are a good number of former synagogues in Hungary housing exhibitions, while in the Balatonboglár Chapel György Galántai organized exhibitions in the seventies.



Although when transposed to other spaces his ensemble still constitutes a strong, impressive work of art, it rests primarily linked to a medieval building, the Winchester Cathedral.

The genesis of the work is quite complex, as it connects three distinct periods: medieval, modern and post-modern.<sup>155</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century the foundations of the Winchester Cathedral had weakened so heavily due to ground water flows that the building was threatening to collapse. From 1905 to 1912 William Walker, an expert diver worked day by day in cold deep water to shore up the walls of the Cathedral. Due to his heroic work, the church was saved from collapsing.<sup>156</sup> In the following work the early twentieth century afterlife of an important medieval building is narrated by a contemporary artist, while the product of this act of appropriation is placed back to the Cathedral itself.

The described extraordinary story constitutes the basis of Balázs Kicsiny's installation entitled *Work in Progress I*. (figs. 82–86). In its original setting, it stood in the northern transept of the Winchester Cathedral in 2002. We see five men in various positions with diverse tools, depicted in different stages of the work. These statue-like figures with diving helmets on their heads form a strikingly impossible composition. Although the actual work has been done under the original walls of the Cathedral, these men are working above the ground, on the floor of the transept. In addition to this peculiar detail, they all wear black reverends. Several questions might arise here: why do the divers need helmets above the ground? Or, if they are below, how can they work without diving suits? One can also interpret the scene as if we, the viewers, were underwater watching the work of the divers.<sup>157</sup> Still, this interpretation does not solve the tensions inherent in the setting. These contradictions are the results of Kicsiny's conscious choice. The work's complexity is

<sup>155</sup> In this sense, due to the double transmission, it is similar to the case presented at the *Monsters of Post-Modernity* subchapter. (Afterlife of the afterlife of medieval art.)

<sup>156</sup> A short description of the story: Mark Bills, "Historical Icons and English Narratives: The Work of Balázs Kicsiny in England," in *Balázs Kicsiny: An Experiment in Navigation. Esperimenti di navigazione. Navigációs kísérlet*, ed. Péter Fitz (Budapest: Műcsarnok, 2005), 188–190 (hereafter: Bills, *Historical Icons*).

<sup>157</sup> Kicsiny: "...the artwork interprets us. You may thus come up with the conclusion that we are under the water." in Kata Krasznahorkai, ed., *Kicsiny Balázs: Munkavégzés folyamatban. Work in Progress*. (Budapest: Ludwig Múzeum Budapest – Kortárs Művészeti Múzeum, 2002), 37.



intentional, the multiplicity of interpretations is expected from the beginning.<sup>158</sup> Shedding light to the installation's different layers of meaning, I will attempt to illustrate the complexity of the possible narratives.

Here and in other works as well, Kicsiny is using a deep symbolism built up from very simple elements. These attributes are often contradicting each other, while the anxiety caused by the twinning of non-belonging objects keeps the viewer attached to the work. The intriguing nonsense, the impossibility of the vision involves the viewer, provoking different thoughts, personal interpretations.

The spatial composition of the figures is a really delicate one. They stand on the floor in our space, the distance between them allows the viewer to enter the group and walk among them.<sup>159</sup> Despite the uniformity of the figures, they seem to be lonely, separated, none of them is looking at the other: they work alone, in solemn solitude.<sup>160</sup> The figures represent five different stages of the work. Most of them are carrying something: two bricks, a bag of cement or a bucket (fig. 84). One is lifting a wheelbarrow, while another is kneeling down to work with two square trowels (fig. 83). Although there is no direct communication among them, they seem to be aware of each other; it is almost as they were one mind, divided into five bodies. The uniformity of the figures serves to reassure this impression.

The multiplication of the divers reflects the almost superhuman nature of their task. In Kicsiny's version five men, five identical William Walkers are working side by side, in order to save the Cathedral. The task itself appears to be more important than the identity of the divers. Accordingly, it would be difficult to identify the divers. No personal traits are visible, their bodies are fully covered with shoes, the reverend and the helmet. From this

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<sup>158</sup> Kicsiny: "I place in my artwork an interpretational trap that leads to a variety of interpretations." Id. 42.

<sup>159</sup> Kicsiny: "The figures are positioned so that the viewers can relate to them, by walking around them and looking straight into their lampshade 'faces'. The figures tell us that there is no difference between us and them. This is essential." Id. 37.

<sup>160</sup> Kicsiny: "five persons do not constitute a group yet, but are no longer individuals either; people without a team spirit." Id. 38.

perspective, their gauntlets protect less their hands and more their anonymity. The lack of personalization works against the danger of becoming something like a wax museum.<sup>161</sup> Contrary to the similarities, nothing can be more distant from the divers than a wax puppet. A Madame Tussaud's figure is a simple, honest imitation of a natural person, a copy. On the other hand, Kicsiny's work exists on a completely different level: by hiding the human body, he distances the viewer and draws attention to the importance of the supernatural.

The installation is inserted into a functioning cathedral, accordingly it is teeming with religious motifs. The static, almost hieratic pose of the divers likens them to some sort of anonym worker's saints, identifiable only by their attributes. Their black reverends can equally be an allusion to priests and monks. In fact, before the dissolution of the monastic orders, the Benedictines were the users of the building. Their motto – *Ora et labora* – is consonant with the spiritual connotations of the church's re-founding.<sup>162</sup> Bright light shines through the openings of the divers' helmets, from which electric cords reach towards the ceiling of the transept. Earthly and heavenly spheres are connected here with an industrial umbilical cord.<sup>163</sup> The physical link symbolizes a mental connection; the heavenly energy enlightens the divers, animating their figures. Two different qualities, profane electricity and spiritual light intermingle. The ceremonial gesture of the divers constitutes another religious connotation. Standing in a liturgical space, they perform a liturgy of work which leads towards the salvation, not of mankind but of the church itself.<sup>164</sup> What we see here is the sacralisation of a non-sacral, historical event.

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<sup>161</sup> Kicsiny: "And nothing is further from my mind than creating wax-works-like pieces. I would consider it as a dead end." Id. 43.

<sup>162</sup> I encountered the allusion to the motto on the homepage of the exhibition (the author of the short presentation is not indicated): <http://www.ludwigmuseum.hu/site.php?inc=mutargy&muId=606&menuId=39> (retrieved 6 June 2010).

<sup>163</sup> Mark Bills, accordingly: „the long electric cord that feed their light and air, reach up into the heights of the building and offer a direct spiritual connection.” Bills, *Historical Icons*, 190.

<sup>164</sup> As Mark Bills put it: "They themselves have adopted a ritual position, stations of the work that they must assume to save the Cathedral. This was the devotional and spiritual work for the divers." Ibid.

But do these divers really follow the rule of *labora*? The figures seem to be static and extremely calm. Although the title describes a *Work in Progress*, the lack of expressive movements suggests the stoppage of time. The loss of temporality, the motionless, life-size figures create an air of monumentality. And a monument this is, but not to a person, not specifically to William Walker: this memorial serves as a representation of an abstract idea, the re-founding of the cathedral.

As we have seen, this installation is a complex work of art with several layers of meaning. Yet, it does not stand alone in Kicsiny's oeuvre. First, there is an intrinsic logic behind the choice of locations. Second, since the artist uses a limited iconography, there are a number of recurring motifs. These features place the *Work in Progress* in the web of the artist's other installations and connect specific elements in the artist's personal mythology. In general, it is not uncommon for Kicsiny to use medieval buildings as a setting for his works. In 2000 he installed the *Compass* (anchors piercing through a table and chairs) among the ruins of the Abbey of Beaulieu.<sup>165</sup> On the other hand, *The Flying Dutchman* (sailors with anchors in the place of their heads and limbs) was exhibited in the gothic choir of Hooglandse Kerk, Leiden in 2004. To these, a third example should be added, *St. Clement's Day*, created for Saint Clement's Church, Bournemouth in 2000. Although the latter building is in gothic revival style, we see the same logic of site-specific installation as in the case of the *Work in Progress*. The previously conceived anchor-headed sailor takes up the identity of the titular saint, St. Clement, whose attribute happens to be the anchor. In this case the church serves not only as an exhibition space: the installation acquires a genuine local quality.

Many of the symbols attached to the divers are traceable through prior works or subsequent installations of the artist. Taking a closer look at the divers' helmets, they turn

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<sup>165</sup> All the following examples are lavishly illustrated in the Venice catalogue: *Balázs Kicsiny: An Experiment in Navigation. Esperimenti di navigazione. Navigációs kísérlet*, ed. Péter Fitz (Budapest: Műcsarnok, 2005).

out to be painted lamp shells. The origin of the motif is Kicsiny's *Fourteen* (1995), where the stations of the cross are numbered on the lamps above. Light has an important role in almost every work of the artist, while the motif of luminous heads makes a comeback at the *Winterreise* (2005), where bright light shines through the figures' fencing masks. The double, profane-spiritual essence of this light is also reminiscent from the *Work in Progress*. In the case of the new work, electricity equally originates from the upper regions through the yellow current collectors of a trolley bus. Furthermore, the black reverend reappears in this different context. Two natural elements dominate the *Work in Progress*: earth and water. In the case of *Waiting for Fire* (2003) a third element is introduced into Kicsiny's mythology. Water becomes again essential in the *Pump Room* (2005), where the same divers' helmets gain a new meaning. In this very installation the same dense but highly separated composition of the figures can be observed.

These examples make it clear that Kicsiny is continuously building a unique web of references, where simple motifs are used and reused again, gaining new, more and more complex meaning in every occasion. The telling attributes, the highly intimate iconography of the artist make his works fascinating in their simplicity.<sup>166</sup>

Throughout the analysis I stressed the importance of the local element, the Winchester Cathedral. We have excellent photographic material to prove the preliminary thesis of site specificity, because the work has been reinstalled several times. The *Work in Progress II* was exhibited at the Museum Gallery, Pécs (fig. 89). The group had been drastically divided, each figure received a separate, adjoining room. This version showed

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<sup>166</sup> It might be surprising at first, but on these grounds, I detect a close similarity between Balázs Kicsiny's installations and Noémi Fereczy's carpets. A great temporal and technical distance separates them, yet the ontology and inner logic of the works bear strong resemblance, as much as their impact mechanism. Since a comparative analysis would exceed the limits of this text, I can only enumerate some of the parallels shortly. Life-size figures, static movements, depiction of different activities (e.g. work), powerful images, film still-like settings, atemporality (figures frozen in time), use of medieval elements and/or profanized Christian symbols, multiple layers of meaning, overall solemn appearance of the works. Finally, due to the mentioned characteristics, both Fereczy's and Kicsiny's works can somehow be considered "classical", borrowing Winckelmann's words: they both bear "noble simplicity and calm grandeur".

didactically the inherent separation of the divers discussed previously. The third version was not less shocking either. Although the roofed, red marble *cortile* of the Ludwig Museum furnished in the Socialist era remarkably strengthened the “workers’ memorial” message of the work with an ironic tone, the new setting nonetheless deprived the ensemble of many delicate layers (fig. 87). On the other hand, the cold white cube at the Ludwig Museum’s new location created a claustrophobic setting, destroying the splendid spatiality of work’s first version (fig. 88).

The comparison of the photos taken at the different locations appears to be convincing (figs. 86–89). Relocation of the work was possible, but always came with a cost. This proves that the medieval building is important not only as the background, but as the substantial element of the work, therefore this contemporary representation of the church’s modern history rests essentially attached to the medieval Winchester Cathedral.

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Jovánovics, Tót and Kicsiny represent a special segment of medievalism. Through their works these artists tried to build an intellectual connection to the past. All of them were inspired by medieval art yet they dealt with their heritage quite differently. They selected a limited number of characteristics of the medieval work and incorporated them into a new creation, attempting to express the contemporary message of their models.

Jovánovics selected volume and perspective, Tót the work’s data and contour, while Kicsiny the afterlife of the building as main source of inspiration. For his part, György Jovánovics located his art against an elaborate intellectual background. Although sometimes it might be difficult to recognize his models or the intended context, the artist is always ready to give hints in order to facilitate the reading of his works. In the case of Endre Tót the models disappear almost entirely, only the silhouette and the data of the absent picture remain to evoke the medieval work in the viewers’ mind. In more personal works Tót

completely appropriates the model, creating his own, contemporary gothic art. At last, by introducing a story, Kicsiny contextualizes his work within a prestigious building, while the elements of the iconography become part of his personal mythology. As the relocations of the installation show, the medieval cathedral forms an integral, essential part of his contemporary work.

The three artists' work can be perceived as an interesting experiment. The results prove that formal similarity is far from being the only way to deal with medieval art. Subtle allusions are also possible, while medieval art can equally form an intellectual background or frame of reference for contemporary artists. Despite the formal distance between medieval sources and the works of Jovánovics, Tót and Kicsiny, they all attest to the remarkable inspirative power of medieval art.

## Conclusion

In the light of detailed case studies, it should be possible to answer several questions raised in the introduction. The first and most important conclusion is that medievalism appears to be a relevant term to describe a good number of works created in Hungary in the last two decades. Although this thesis could not attempt to review the full corpus, the discussed examples testify *pars pro toto* the importance of the phenomenon.

The analyses clarified that the artists' interest in medieval art can be attributed to multiple, interrelated causes. We have seen cases where strong preference for medieval art is evident in the artist's personal taste (Jovánovics, Tót), while commissioned works can equally have a strong effect on one's oeuvre (Major). Autobiographical aspects, such as ruins in the hometown (Hajdú) or time spent in a foreign country (Rabóczky, Révész, Kicsiny) cannot be overlooked either. Duality of interest and opportunity – thus we can characterize the discussed artists' medieval choices.

Why specific medieval works were used is a complex question. One should not disregard the importance of local tradition (*Reliquary of St. Ladislaus*, M S: *Visitation*, *Holy Sepulchre from Garamszentbenedek*), but it is also true that many artist simply makes use of iconic images (*Visitation*) or motifs (*Chimeras*). Some of the models are famous predecessors (Giotto, Grünewald), in other cases the depicted personality acquires greater importance (St. Thomas Aquinas). Monumental sculpture provides examples for the representation of historical or religious figures (St. Stephen, Matthias, Sts. Cosmas and Damian): in these cases the model is presumed to lend authority to the new creation. Other, more innovative works underline the importance of denial (Hejettes Szomlyázók) and support (Rabóczky) of artistic authority. As we have seen, knowledge-based prestige can equally be questioned with the tool of irony (Révész).

Artists made use of different characteristics of their models. The solutions ranged wide from almost recycling an entire work (*Head Reliquary of St. Ladislaus, Bautzen Monument*) to subtle allusions (*The Big Prism*). Sometimes the iconography (*Triumph of St. Thomas Aquinas*), in other cases the volume (Jovánovics), the silhouette (Tót) or the story (Kicsiny) of the medieval work was used. Several artists utilized paraphrasing as a general tool (Hejettes Szomlyazók, Jovánovics, Tót), while with others it appears to be an occasional choice (Rabóczky, Révész). A number of contemporary works are strongly site-specific; linked physically to a city (Székesfehérvár: *Section plan for the Basilica, Monument to King Matthias*) or intellectually to a building (Winchester Cathedral: *Work in Progress*). Whichever the case, most of the discussed examples attest a shift in the medium: the works from the first chapter show how retaining the same technique can be an obstacle to the innovative usage of the models.

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In the introduction I had warned the reader that the following narrative would only be one of the possible solutions, while others might describe the selected group of works equally well. Accordingly, I would like to make several suggestions for the future directions of the research.

First of all, applied arts should not be disregarded, as it offers many interesting aspects; the examples might form a *Kunst-* and also a *Wunderkammer* of medievalism. During the research I have found many intriguing paraphrases of Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini Portrait*: the international and Hungarian examples are worth exploring. Equally, the afterlife of specific medieval motifs and works (or pseudo-medieval ones – as in Michael Camille's book) might be good candidates for a topical survey.

The thesis provided numerous depictions of kings, saints, and holy rulers: personal iconography could also be a relevant research direction. A further question is the problem of



reconstructions. The thesis presented two solutions (Buda sculptures, Székesfehérvár ruins), but the topic could be explored even further. Although I attempted to draw international parallels, the thesis was dedicated to Hungarian art, therefore a comparative study of medievalism in Central Europe might bring interesting results.

As the multiplicity of research directions shows, all the questions could not be answered through the limited number of case studies; some of the ideas developed here should be tested in a wider context. Studies in medievalism might shed light not only on contemporary works of art, but might also reflect upon our own, constantly changing notion of medieval art. My hope is that the current research can be accounted as a step towards these goals.

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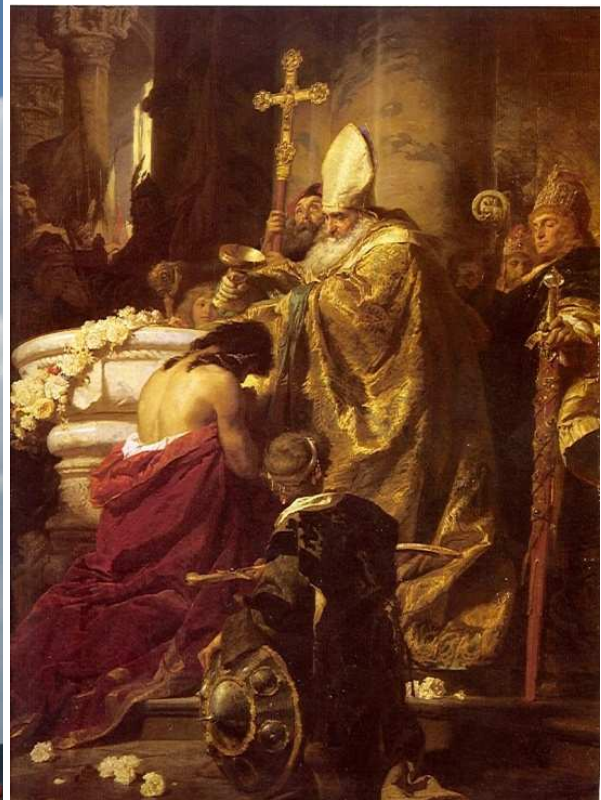


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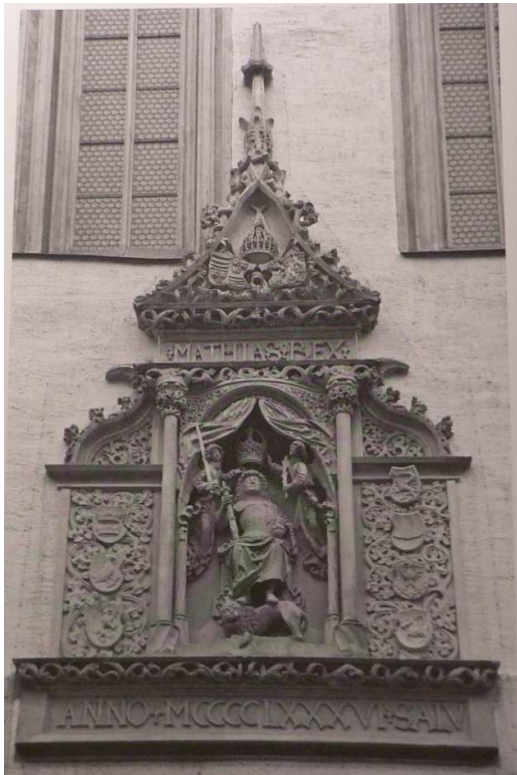




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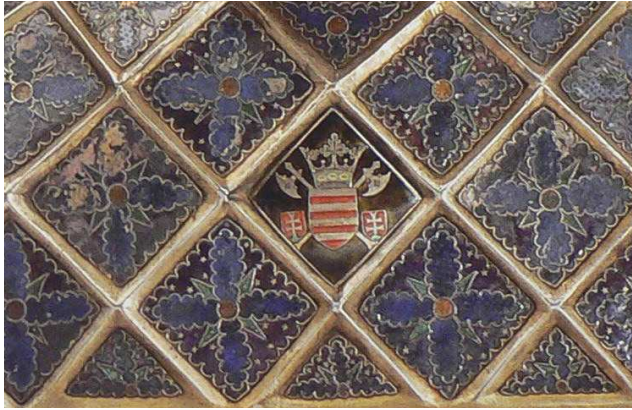


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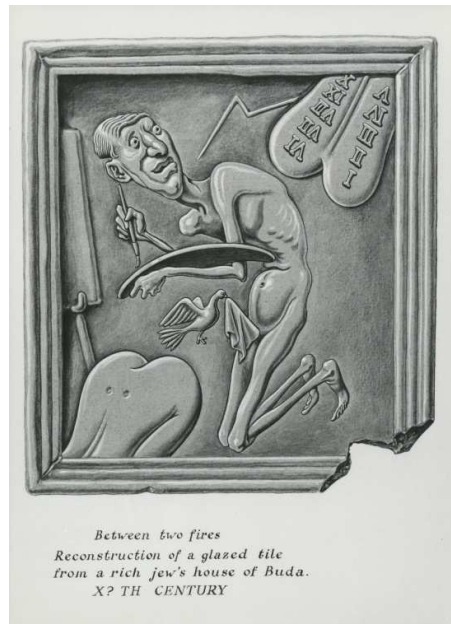
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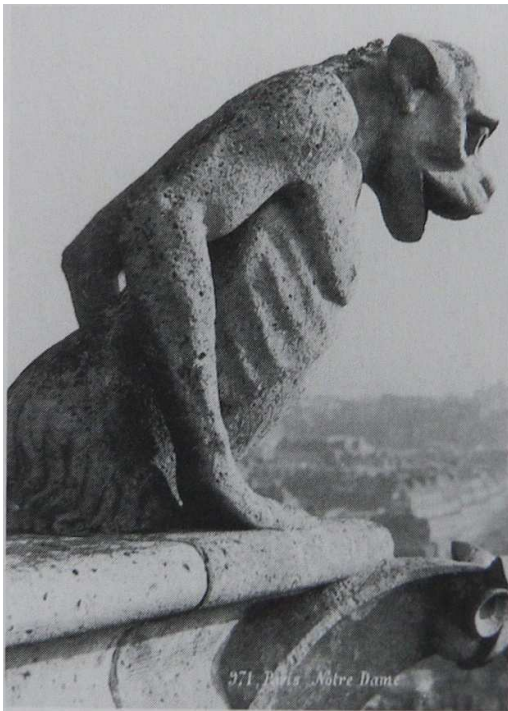
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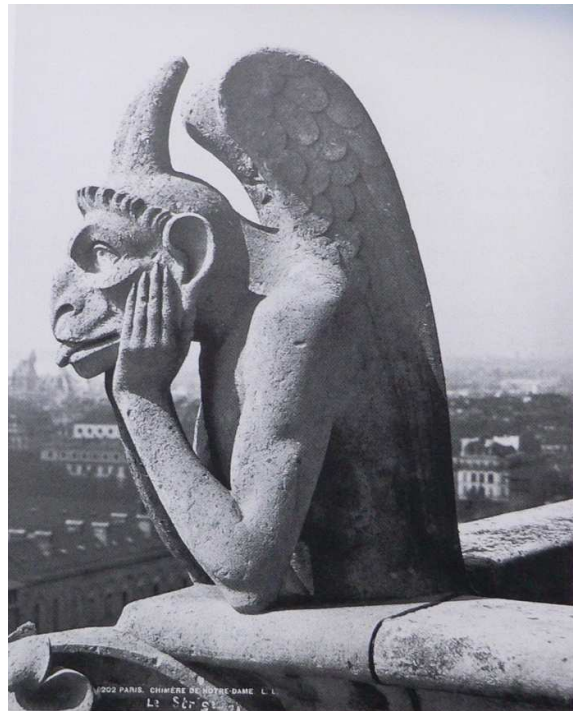
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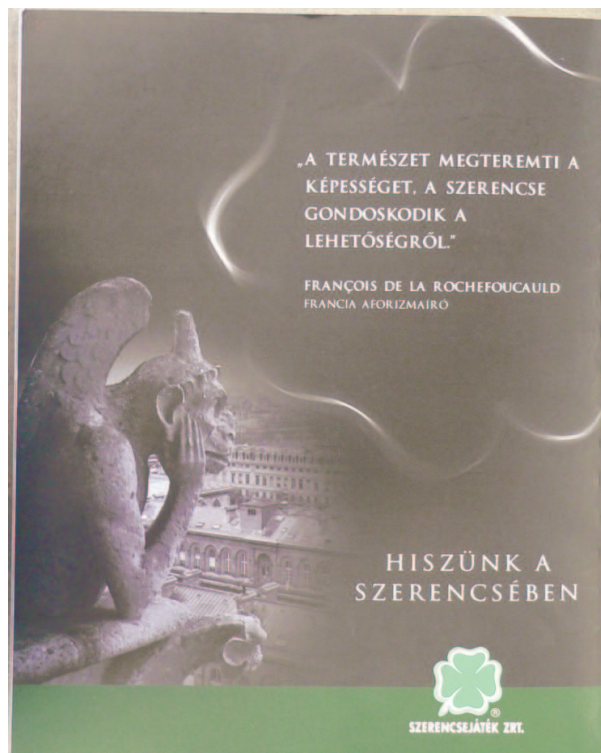


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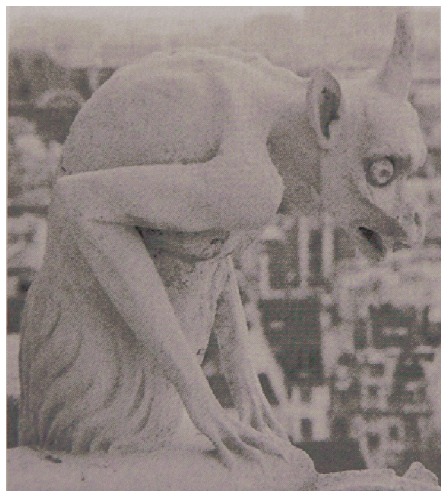
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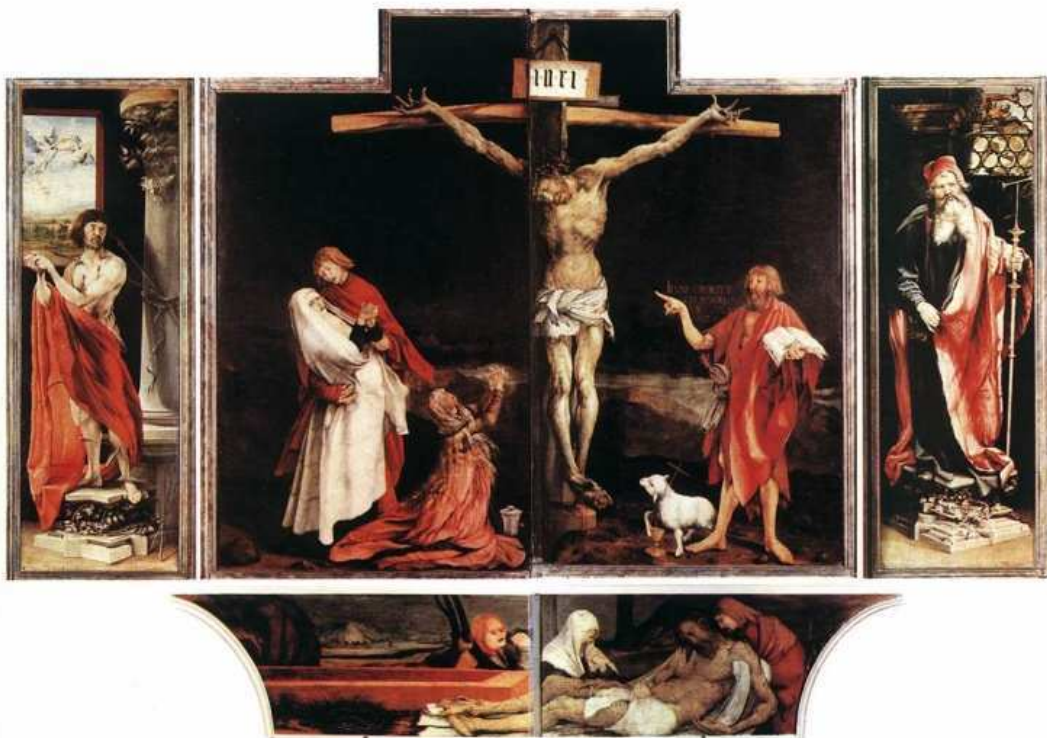
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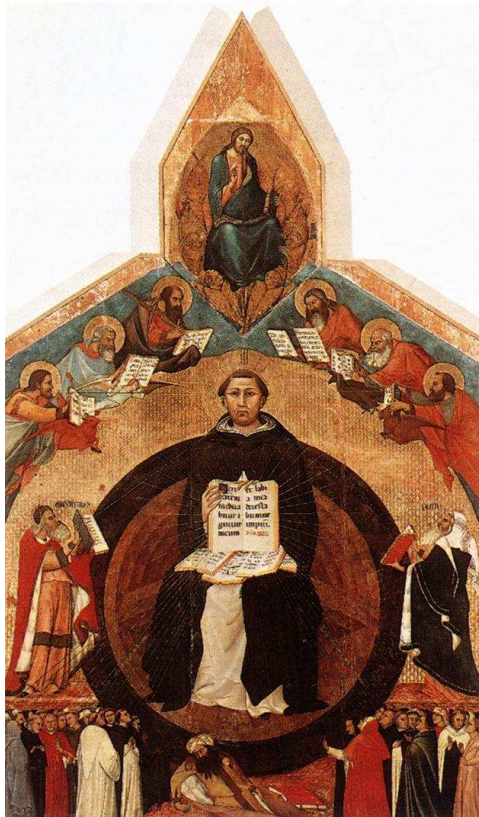


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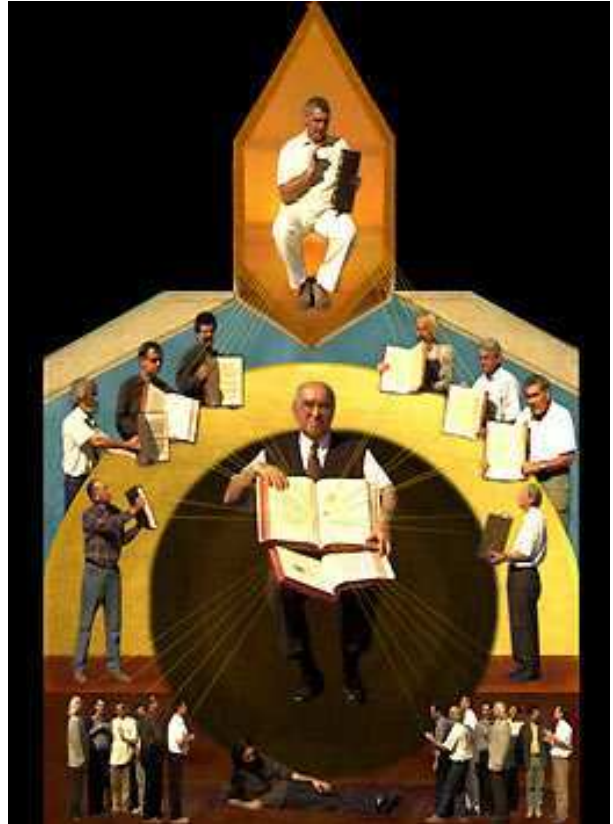


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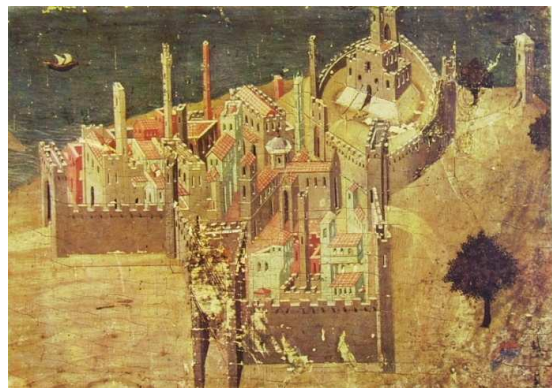
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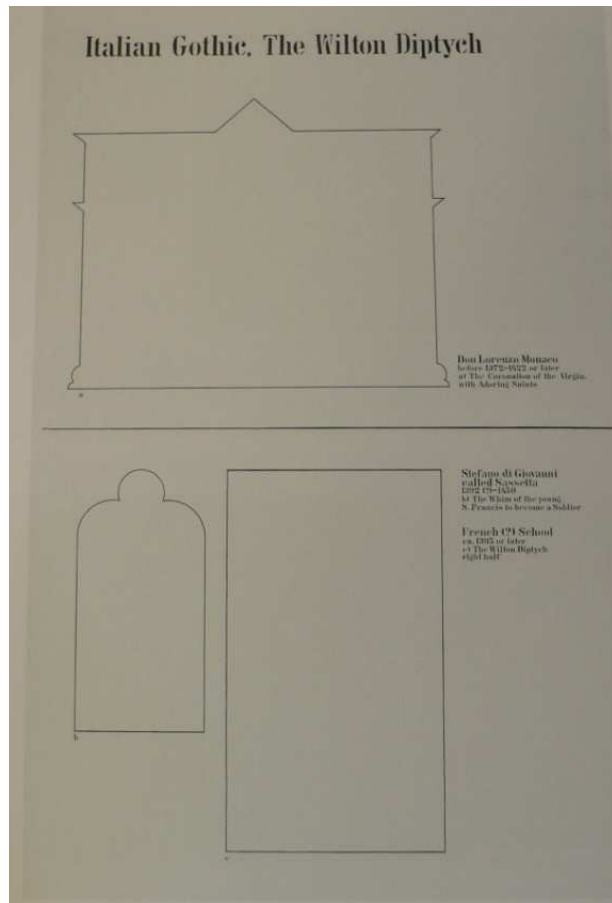
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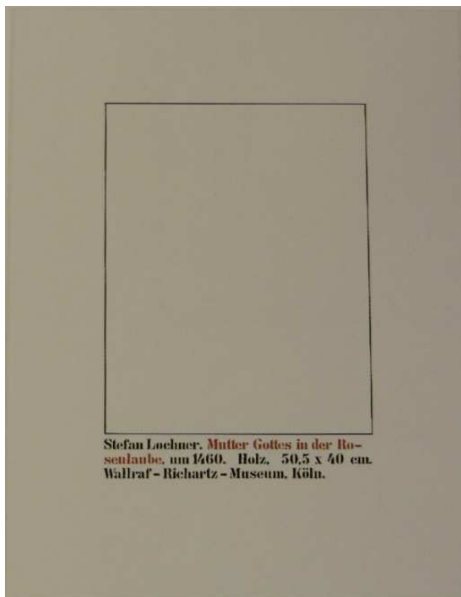


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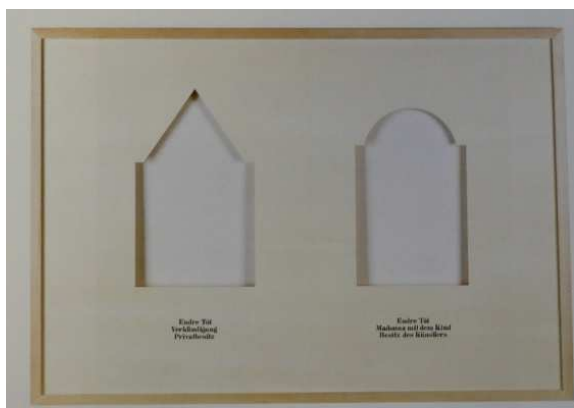
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