

Ákos Ezer Ábstract Hungary 29 06 2019 — 05 09 2019

Press talk
28 06 2019, 10 a.m.

Opening
28 06 2019, 6 p.m.

In showing the work of Ákos Ezer, the Künstlerhaus as a venue for art and media (KM– Graz) is presenting a Hungarian artist of the younger generation who is thematically processing the present-day reality of his home country. The usual subjects of his paintings are human figures, frequently male, immersed in a precipitous state, either deliberately or in slapstick-like way. A new series of paintings shows gigantic portraits with oversized twisted necks. The fall and the bodily contortions become gestures of content in Ezer's works, which tend to overtake the protagonists in everyday situations. With these bodies, seemingly distorted by strange movements, the artist powerfully speaks of the foundering, the clumsiness, and the fallibility of the individual and of society as a whole. The gaily colored and figurative compositions tap into an abstract language of form, while a touch of humor hones the rendering of the stumbling blocks of both private and public life.

Ákos Ezer, with his work, is positioned in the artistic tradition of narrative, ironically twisted "social realist" painting that not only bespeaks the impact of outside conditions on the individual. Also, the protagonists with their stoic dynamism—who are bendable and resistant despite all tumbles, yet still astonishingly tranquil and, as such, seemingly "strong"—illustrate the (naïve or perhaps realistic after all?) hope of "advancing" in life. Noticeable here, besides the form-related qualities of composition, movement, and coloring, is the autonomy of painterly execution. The pictures are, plain and simple, "good"—and they fulfill, in their dandified stance, a masterly gaze sweeping painterly specialization. What is more, they do not deny knowledge of more recent art history, such as the moving history of the bracingly controversial concept of the "bad painting," which is reminiscent of "portraits" by Guston, Kippenberger or Koether. The figurative composition of the images conceptualizes its way out of the abstraction that, in terms of its rigor of composition, form, and color, conditions the background or the basis of activity and thus serves to stabilize the richly appropriated bodies. It is through the stringency of a societal analysis that Ezer arrives at an act of abstraction with admirable clarity.

Ezer himself emphasizes the timelessness of issues related to painting. He takes a quite critical stance toward an all too sociopolitical reading of his work, including the linking of image and reality: "Although these constructed figures in the exhibition do not presently exist in real space, I try to interpret them through social space, in addition to the aesthetic and psychological aspects."

Ezer trains his gaze on the "normal" people, their worries and travails, in order to accompany them through his paintings along a stretch of their everyday life and of their attempts to cope. Life in Hungary is not always easy, mostly due to the country's eventful history in more recent times: fast-paced political changes followed the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 and the end of the Warsaw Pact. This resulted in an extensive transformation of the economic system, moving away from centrally controlled economy and toward a capitalist market economy.

Hungary's membership in the European Union as of 2004 entailed not only political and thus democratic rapprochement; it also accelerated the pace of economic transformation, which was indeed economically successful despite widespread criticism. Alongside production-related know-how, an international financial power of unequal dimensions came face to face with an insufficiently competitive economic structure, which led to deep-seated change impacting all facets of society and cohabitation. As opposed to the communist doctrine of primacy of society over the individual which had prevailed for decades, now an emphasis was being placed on self-initiative and entrepreneurship, leading to a diametrical shift that further heightened pressure on the individual. Current developments, such as the establishment of an illiberal democracy, have started to curtail personal freedom once more.

The result of such slightly chaotic developments playing out on a continual basis vehemently impacts everyday life for the Hungarian population: in attempting to keep up with these events, an inordinate burden is placed on the individuals. Besides the many winners, there are also losers who tend to stagger through life rather than assuming an upright gait. But even for the "normal" citizens it is anything but easy to find one's own straight path. Tumbling, but then standing up again in the hope of doing better in the future: this exhaustingly strange game cannot repeat forever. In the near future, surely little will change in everyday life, and the paintings of Ákos Ezer will long remain an abstracted allegory for today's complex lifeworlds.

The seemingly timeless idea or "abstract" for a better future appears to be stronger than all hardship of the present and past. This propensity for abstracting complex social circumstances, the willingness to change, and a tenacity of analysis and representation distinguish the Hungarian art scene, especially its "abstract artists" from the 1960s to the present day. In 2017, the KM— showed appreciation for this scene by exhibiting 25 essential artistic positions in the cross-generational, dialogical exhibition *Abstract Hungary*. A publication that extends both projects of the same name even further offers an abstracted view of Hungary.

Ákos Ezer (*1989 Pécs, lives in Toalmás and Budapest) studied painting at the Hungarian University of Fine Arts and is represented by Galerie Art + Text in Budapest. His work has been shown in various exhibitions, such as at Kiscell Museum (2018) and Museum Ludwig in Budapest, at the New Budapest Gallery (2017), at Tanja Pol (2018) in Munich, and at Beers Gallery (2017) in London. In 2017, he was granted the Esterházy Art Award. *Abstract Hungary* is Ezer's first solo exhibition at an art institution.

curated by Sandro Droschl

Press download: <https://www.km-k.at/en/exhibition/akos-ezer/press/>

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Ákos Ezer
Inhale, 2019, oil on canvas



Ákos Ezer
To be late, 2019, oil on canvas



Ákos Ezer
Cloud breathing, 2019, oil on canvas



Ákos Ezer
Falling over III, 2019, oil on canvas