

Tribute to the elderly artists: a brief presentation of the work of the Hungarian FIDEM members over the age of 80

Virág Szabo

I would like to present you the medal works of six elderly Hungarian artists, who have all turned 80 years old. This occasion is a tribute to their medal art. I chose artists who were members and regular exhibitors of FIDEM for decades.

Unfortunately, one of them, László Kutas, died in September 2023. The others, Márta Csikai, Enikő Szöllőssy and Gábor Szabó are still working, while Gábor Gáti and Edit Rácz are no longer creating new works.

All of them were born between 1936–1940, and they attended at about the same time the sculpture department of the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts, which they completed at the 1960s.

They all belong to the generation of sculptors who revived medal art. This was the time when the medal broke away

from its previous ties, so it didn't remain exclusively a commission and commemorative genre, but became a genre suitable for the expression of independent sculptural ideas.

Márta Csikai

Márta Csikai is a sculptor who created relatively few medals. Rather, her medals were created only during breaks from large projects and public sculptures. She used this form mostly for her own pleasure and to record her personal experiences.

On these medals, the main character is the landscape, the water, the Tisza river (fig. 1). Man is present in the landscape. It is typical that she often chooses a point of view where 'heaven touches the earth' and the horizons are great (fig. 2).



Fig 1. *At the Tisza river I*, 2002
Márta Csikai
Bronze, 120 mm
Private collection
Photo: Márta Csikai



Fig 2. *At the Tisza river V*, 2002
Márta Csikai
Bronze, 105 mm
Private collection
Photo: Márta Csikai



FFig 3. *Mirror image in water IV*, 2004
Márta Csikai
Bronze, 220 x 220 mm
Private collection
Photo: Márta Csikai

For the artist, born in Nagykovács, the proximity of the Tisza and her experiences there are decisive. The waves and ripples of the water, the play of reflections by the light, the mobility and static of the surfaces all enchant her.

She is not concerned with the naturalistic representation of the landscape, but rather a kind of sensual transcription. Csikai was captivated by the world of the Nyíregyháza-Sóstó Art Camp and the *cire perdue* technique. The fine relief technique and the details that easily extend into the space, suggesting the possibility of a breakthrough, captivated her as well (fig. 3). In 2003, she won the Ferenczy Béni Grand Prize in Sopron. In a more classical way, she also produced minted coins for the Hungarian National Bank. For example: *500th anniversary of birth of János Kálvin*, 2009, or *Fiumei Úti cemetery* in *National Monument* series 2018.

Gábor Gáti

This is how he formulated his principles: 'I have decided that I will not develop my own style. The whole history of art is my heritage. I don't follow trends, I don't follow any, but I pay attention to everything. I always wanted to do something new. I was never interested in variations, I was always interested in the new. Actually, I liked inventing, not doing!'

His medal titled *The little Hungarian peeler* is emblematic. The edge of the bronze disc is peeled off with a knife, just like we used to peel an apple. Symbolically, the inside and essence of the medal is revealed (fig. 4).

The dominant material of his creations is bronze, he used especially the *cire perdue* technique.

In his series entitled *Shepherd of loving moons* (1989), the emphatic sculpture is placed in the center of the medal, and the motifs are placed around it. But not with a single



Fig 4. *The little Hungarian peeler*, 1998
Gábor Gáti
Bronze, mixed media, 110 x 120 mm
Private collection
Photo: Gábor Gáti

horizon, as the composition can be looked around and rotated. He said: 'I like to make medals that have high plasticity and shadows.' This question also preoccupied him in his other works. This series of medals was made by folding and embossing copper sheet.

In addition, the letter is also an important element for him and has the same plastic significance as other motifs. In his series *Oblivion*, he depicts a process where he plays with the letters of the word 'never'. In the versions of *The red colour*, it creates a contradiction by colouring the written word. He was also interested in the attempt to create a 'medal poem' based on the picture poem.

Since the nineties, several of his works have been characterized by incorporating found objects into his compositions. This also carries the hallmark of unrepeatability (fig. 5).

Medal compositions based on puns form a completely separate group of playful works. Literal interpretations are transformed into a visual spectacle. Thus, it is impossible



Fig 5. *Virtues - Sharp vision, acumen*, 2012-2014
Gábor Gáti
Bronze, mixed medium, 110 x 157 mm
Private collection
Photo: Gábor Gáti



Fig 6. *A quarter hour in the Villa quarter*, 1998
Gábor Gáti
Bronze, applicated found objects, 145 x 115 x 115 mm
Private collection
Photo: Gábor Gáti

to translate the titles of the works into a foreign language, I'm really sorry: *A quarter hour in the Villa quarter* (fig. 6), *Three sisters at the waterfall*, *Triangles*, *Three half-hearted right angles greet the dawn*.

'Objects and forms can be combined as long as it all happens along one thought. After all, the creation only makes sense if it communicates something. Be it serious or playful content.' He was also able to make his commission's portrait medals in such a way that he found joy in them.

The minted coin is a strict genre, but he was able to create something unique here as well. His commemorative coins



Fig 7. *1100th anniversary of Conquest*, 1996
Gábor Gáti
Struck silver coin, 38.67 mm
Minted by The Hungarian National Mint
Photo: Mint

were also awarded at international competitions. For example: *1100th anniversary of Conquest* (1996) (fig. 7), *Őrségi National Park* (2010), *Tokaj Historic Wine Region* (2008).

In 1989 at the VII Hungarian Medal Biennale in Sopron he received the Grand Prize.

He can speak in many tones. Sometimes lyrical, sometimes philosophical, sometimes ironic, sometimes constructive, sometimes playful. He thinks that an artistic work does not become significant just because it is professionally correct and flawless. Its expressive power and surprise make it significant. 'I consider the work to be excellent, which has an original thought, a unique idea or formal innovation, in addition to being professionally correct.'

László Kutas

Sculptor László Kutas died in September 2023, at the age of 87. He continued to create until the end of his life. It is typical that he was also working on a life-sized statue before his death. In spring, he received the Kossuth Prize, which is one of the most prestigious awards in the field of art. He created a lot of public and small sculptures.

He worked in a classical way and his works are figurative. His small sculptures mostly depict female figures and children. The characters of the small sculptures also appeared on his medals. He gladly made business-card medals (fig. 8). His favourite one was the piece depicting Mary Poppins.

László also found great joy in making medals, as he said, this is where he achieved real success.

In 1987, in Florence, at the competition announced for the 400th anniversary of Giorgio Vasari's death, he won the main prize which he was very proud of. His medals



Fig 8. Name card medal – *László Kutas*, 1995
László Kutas
Bronze, 42 mm
Private collection
Photo: László Kutas



Fig 9. *Chimney roofs in Sopron III*, 2007
László Kutas
Bronze, 83 mm
Private collection
Photo: László Kutas

were also awarded at the Dante Biennale in Ravenna. As a result of that he was invited to be a member of the international jury of the exhibition for a longer period of time.

Among his works, the portrait medals are typical. He usually worked with low plasticity. The people depicted in the public square are often reflected on medals as well. In addition to the international successes, his medals were also awarded several times at the Hungarian National Medal Biennale in Sopron. The city had particular importance to him. He spent most of his childhood here. 50 of his public works can be seen in Sopron, which is a truly extraordinary number (fig. 9).

In addition to his medals, he also produced minted coins for the Hungarian National Bank. Allow me to introduce a few of them: the *200th anniversary of birth of Sándor Kőrösi Csoma* (1984), and the *100th anniversary of birth of the composer Béla Bartók* (1981).

László's works have sensitive patterning, a good sense of form and witty composition. His working method was characterized by the fact that he drew on memories and experiences. He did not work after a model, but paid attention to the moments of life. He had a positive outlook on life and an incredible work ethic and a sparkling humour radiated through his works.

Edít Rác

Edít Rác named her own artistic language 'organic abstract'. Her works are largely non-figurative. She considers nature to be her most important master. She thinks in symbols.

Her working method was characterized by the use of imprinted representation (pressing the real object into clay, plasticine, wax).



Fig 10. *The nature of water – Drop*, 2005
Edít Rác
Bronze, glass, 150 mm
Private collection
Photo: Edít Rác

The seed, the germ from which life springs, is a frequently recurring motif in her works. She loves water. She can see the Danube from the windows of her apartment. Such proximity to water was decisive for the artist. Growing up next to the Danube, water meant endless freedom for her. She felt that glass was the most suitable material for this expression. In 1969, she visited the glass factory in Orosháza, where the sight of waste bottles (huta bottles) was of crucial importance to her (fig. 10).



Fig 11. *Elemental moments – Water*, 2013
Edít Rác
Bronze, glass, 98 mm
Private collection
Photo: Edít Rác



Fig 12. *Jugs – Homage to Mórícz Gábor*, 2020
Gábor Szabó
Bronze, 92 mm
Private collection
Photo: Gábor Szabó

She says: ‘I use found objects. I have to “talk” with them for a long time until the things hidden in the glass are revealed to me. Insight into found objects is my approach. When I look at an object, I give it a different function.’

Edit combined glass and bronze in her medals. Its purpose is the presentation of the phenomena and beauties of nature. She intended to express the joy of existence with organic forms. The pursuit of harmony is important to her. Always pay attention to the colours (fig. 11). Many times, the light mediated by the glass plays the main role. Her medals really come to life when the viewer can get hold of them in hand and turn them towards the light. She most often uses the *cire perdue* technique.

Edit Rácz searches for the transcendental experience in the world of yoga and meditation, which is an essential part of her creative process:

When the stars come up in the evening, just look up, we will soon realize how tiny we are and that we are not that important . . . A good artist is able to give the ‘Creative Force’ an opportunity to manifest itself. What does it take? Refined attention and devotion to work. Man can only ask ‘human’ questions to the world, but the world is much more than that. There is a huge creative force that is in everything. If a person meditates, he can sometimes give up his own subjective ego and then he can meet this creative force for a moment. Talent is actually refined attention when we can use this creative power.

Gábor Szabó

I had the possibility to visit his studio, where a lot of medals were spread out on a table, or as he says, ‘cookies’. This is how his foreign friends named his medals and himself a metal confectioner. There were over 300 medals.



Fig 13. *Three celebrities on the stage I*, 2017
Gábor Szabó
Bronze, 114 mm
Private collection
Photo: Gábor Szabó

Gábor grew up in a family of artists. His grandfather, Mórícz Gábor was a painter – about whom the medal now exhibited. By the way, as a child, Gábor wanted to be a painter. His father, Iván Szabó, was a sculptor. He also taught at the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts.

His works have classical sculptural themes. The still life medals were inspired by the paintings of his grandfather (fig. 12). Horses play an important role in his life and art. The staircase is also a recurring motif (fig. 13).

The other thematic circle is the depiction and exploration of the secrets of the female soul. Storytelling on the medal is important to him. What can be behind a window or behind a walled door? He is concerned with the relationship between the figures and the background on the medal. The contrast and unity of calm and moving surfaces, organic and geometric forms. He says:

My perception of medals is not so broad, but I do not consider myself conservative. I can accept that everything can be an artistic expression, but for me the medal still has fixed rules. One is its size. It should not be bigger than you can hold in your hand, so it should be the size of your palm. The other is that the medal is not a small plastic, not a round plastic, so it should not have a shape that stands in space. The medal is spatially limited. This doesn’t mean that it has no spatiality, but not in such a way that it comes out into space, but only creates the illusion of spatiality on the plane. Keep the medal flat. The medal is not a game of form.

Part of Gábor’s personality is that he is a very good organizer and a very good teacher. He created artist communities and played a decisive role in the Százados artist colony. He speaks foreign languages as well, especially Bulgarian and English. He has several Bulgarian friends and a good



Fig 14. *Trouble and oblivion 3*, 2007
Enikő Szöllőssy
Bronze, 140 x 120 mm
Private collection
Photo: Enikő Szöllőssy

friendship with Bogomil Nikolov, for whom he made a medal. At art camps they worked together a lot.

He mainly makes small sculptures, portraits and medals. He is still working today. He believes that it is not the awards, but the work that qualifies a person. His works are characterized by fine workmanship and balanced compositions.

He is a lyrical realist medallist.

Enikő Szöllőssy

Among the artists presented here, most of you may know her, because Enikő was the Hungarian delegate of FIDEM between 1983–2012. During this time she created many medals. Lately, her interest has turned more towards photography and digital graphics.

Her works were recognized at international and domestic forums. In 1983 in Ravenna she became the gold medallist of the 6th International Dante Biennale. She received the Ferenczy Béni Grand Prize at the 8th Hungarian Medal Biennale in 1991 in Sopron.

In her works, we find references to both built urban and organic natural elements especially in her series *Italian travels*. In addition to her philosophical, unique works, she regularly creates commemorative coins for the Hungarian National Bank. In addition, she has been working on the jury for several years now. For example: *Imre Madách: The tragedy of Man* (2012), *100th anniversary of death of Béla Spányi* (2014).

Enikő is able to express ethereal contents with the material of bronze. She sees space as an opportunity for holiness. In the gates that open to the sky, the earthly and the unearthly are present at the same time (fig. 14). She keeps



Fig 15. *In motion 3*, 2007
Enikő Szöllőssy
Bronze, 120 x 100 mm
Private collection
Photo: Enikő Szöllőssy

the whimsical metal stubs left after casting and doesn't remove them. They bring a message from the inner layers of the meeting of material and technique.

Typical motifs in her works are gates and gate frames, ladders running into space, and airy, fragile structures. Fragmentation, the connection between what is and what is not determines her compositions. She is characterized by the varied use of materials, and her concept of perception of medals is wide (fig. 15). The hand-warm movement of the forms is preserved by the trace of the modelling. Enikő can display faith and sacredness in her art in such a way that it affects the spiritual development of many.