

ISTVÁN CSÁKÁNY

THE DREAM OF THE HAMMER

2021, installation / mixed media, dimensions variable

F: Miklós Surányi



As part of the cooperation between the Lower Saxony Foundation and the Kunstverein Hannover for the exhibition series Steps to Art, István Csákány will present an 16-meter-high sculptural installation in the stairwell in the east wing of the Künstlerhaus Hannover, which tells of the nomadic work of many artists and the struggle for grants, guest lectures and the constantly changing working and living conditions in the economy of contemporary artistic practice. The materials used are those of a Tiny House, i.e. the sustainable idea of a miniature version of a minimalist living space, which the artist will dismantle and rebuild again and again after the project and rebuild according to changing circumstances.

HOUSE WITHOUT ADDRESS

2024, temporary installation in Kunstverein Hannover

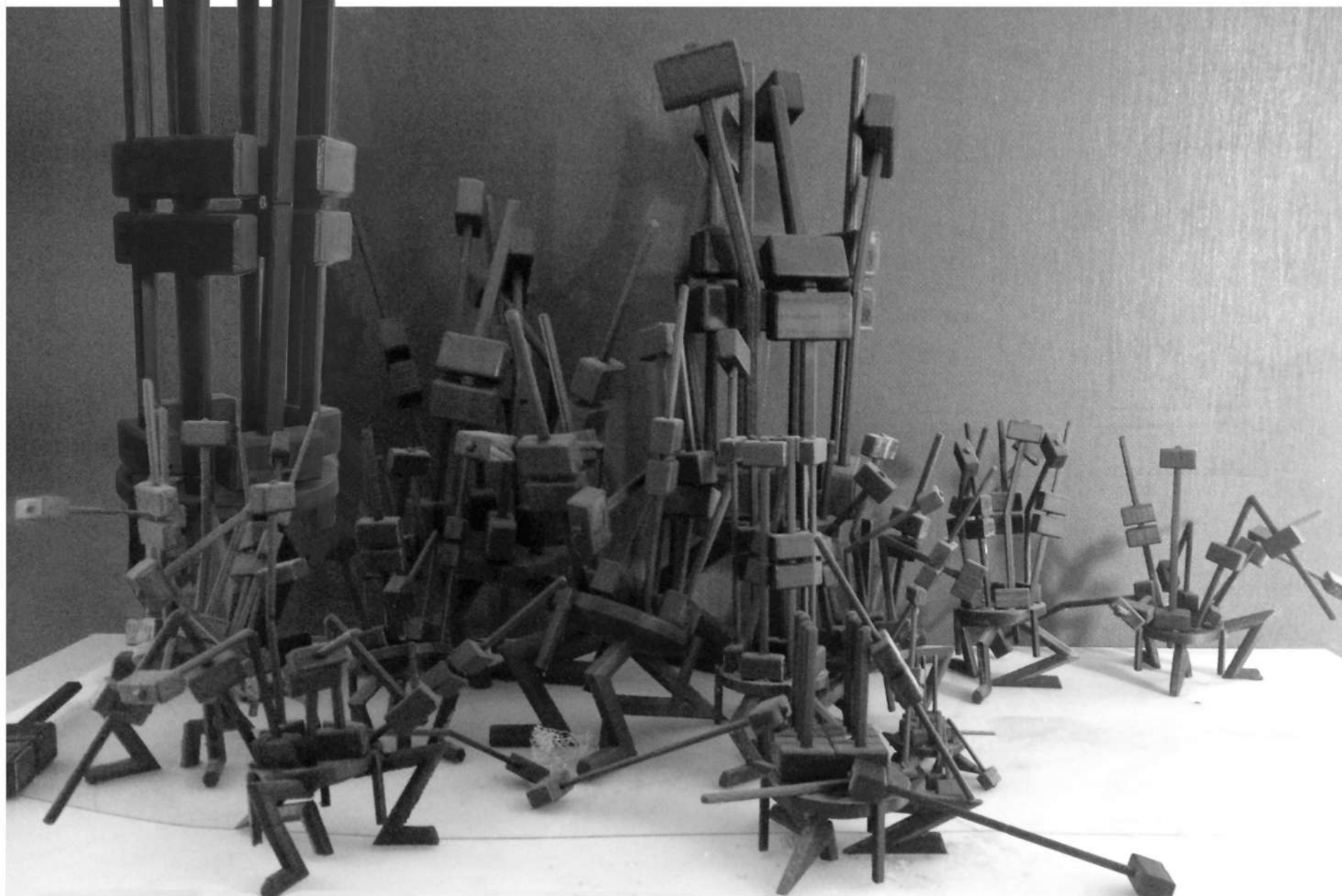
F: Andre Germar





MEMORY REARRANGEMENT

2024, sculpture plan
casted iron



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Several of István Csákány's works relate to phenomena that are characteristic of the East Central European region, such as the past historical period, the ideologies promoted by socialism, and their repercussions. His creations focus on the myth of the workman, the appreciation of work, the erection of monuments, or the ideal of heroism — ideas whose original substance has completely transformed, while the old associated mindsets continue to be around.

With great consistency, the artist keeps returning to the motifs and materials of his œuvre with ever new approaches. Sculptures created from several hammers, reminiscent of primitive totem poles, became the central elements of his recent solo exhibitions, still relating to the theme of work but opening the way towards a broader field of interpretations. The hammer may symbolize construction, work, the erection of monuments — as well as the opposite of all these: destruction, the removal of memorials. Often, constructing a new building means pulling down an old one, and when new values arise, old ones may fall into oblivion. The idea that ideologies change may be borne out by the fact that the statues are sometimes destroyed by the same people who took part in their erection. The dichotomy of construction and destruction can be observed in diverse fields of life, in architecture, culture and history. The human intentions that lead to the genesis of monuments and statues may become invalid, the ritual customs and cultic traditions that define their origin may wane over time, and the notions that concern their subsequent fate may gain further layers. Such is the case with objects from Africa, which were once used in tribal rituals, but now exist as works of art that are held in museum display cases. In the same manner, completely gone is the primary meaning of those monumental statues that once ornamented public spaces, and whose fragments may have survived in museum warehouses and abandoned cellars.

This phenomenon is part of the cycle of history, in which different values arise, flourish, expire, lose their function, or merge with other values and start a new life. On this analogy, the two new and one old installations that are presented in Szentendre, and form a narrative panorama, relate a process with scenes that unfold over time. The hero of the shadow plays is the hammer-sculpture that is set off against its environment, and the background of a desolate landscape, standing on its own, without anything to connect to; if it ever had the function of a monument, it has become completely meaningless, as it is unknown who commemorated what with it. A few objects or their remnants can still be identified in the deserted landscapes or the dusty room that once may have been a home. Yet they frustrate any attempts at confronting the past through them, because every memory has lost its original meaning, the remains of the past have become part of a fictional notion.

The shadow plays and the supplementary elements arranged around them like a collage describe an invented story, in which the temporally transient nature of an object, a concept, a worldview or a work of art is revealed with special visuals and sound effects. The final narrative is fashioned by the person who is simultaneously a participant, observer and chronicler of this process.

Emőke Bodonyi





DESERT

2017, installation/environment two rooms made of
wood, 350 x 445 x 950 cm
F: Miklós Surányi

SHADOW PLAY

beamer, stand, metal frame, screen,
various materials
350 x 180 x 4 cm









The present exhibition of István Csákány is a factory of endless allegories, which we can approach from several directions. We can see it as one mirrored unit or we can think of it as separate pieces. We can see it from the perspective of a monument, the labor or the science-fiction, the work or group of works will remain uniformly open. If it is from the point of view of the monument the projection that occupies the center it can be associated with one of Reg Butler's 1953 artwork called The Unknown Political Prisoner which was destroyed by a Hungarian immigrant in the Tate Gallery in London. Many people considered this work proposal, which should come to existence thanks to the first big international competition after the war (one of the locations was a hilltop in Berlin), in that time already as the symbol of the impossibility to erect monuments. And today it would be impossible too to erect a monument. The projection onto the screen reveals a dreary landscape which is dominated by a rotating statue and looks like a camera obscura. Stripped of any connection somewhere on a highland as a memento of human activity. As if it was a message from an age long gone when people still believed in symbols. The statue is made up of hammers, organized in an anthropomorphic silhouette, which is actually made of concrete, impossible to lift. The piece built out of hammers is a testament to working, Csákány's first big creation made entirely from concrete.

Although the entire installation is nothing but a strange epic poem about the labour. Balzacian story about an artist who feels that he can carve, engrave, hammer, abrade the world into life. Csákány's creation is similarly about the work that is invested in bending the world to us, how everything can be copied that we see, how you can the tree, once full of life, carve a dead plant out, how you can in the everyday meaning of the word, domesticate the home in an unusable way, how we can form the world not to our image but for our glory.

It is like Csákány take the concept of terraforming and would apply it to his own earthly environment and would unstoppably proceed.

When in 2010 he was completing Bernsteinzimmer, based on his father's shed, elements of science-fiction were already present. The terrestrial living space of the Solaris astronaut was able to manifest itself in a world shaped by human patterns. Although the new space is closer to Stalker's Zone. Emotions and desires are mixed with reality; the weary requisites of the upper-middle class way of life are standing in opposition to the shadow play of the fictional world.

All of this is over watched by a duchampian Oculist Witness, a tree-like mirror-construction. If it was a guard of this collection of weird objects. In the gaze of the person watching we can notice a Wunderkammer's classical elements: an automaton in perpetual motion, objects carved out with exceptional care, statues with colorful shadows, nature's beauty captured in wood, rare books. If we are not looking from the side of the mirror, the sight is a collection of ordinary items, dead atmosphere, and grandiose stage for a non-existent play. There are no people in it, only the visitor, who, as stalked witness, imagines what had happened there, in those seemingly abandoned rooms, what different items remind them of, what forgotten culture these furniture can summon. Imagine if there is anyone or will be anyone who is able to live in this scene.

József Mélyi





THE GUARD

2014, metal, mirror 140x140x100 cm.
F: Miklós Surányi



ORIGIN UNKNOWN

2016, concrete, metal, 150x55x55 cm.

F: Miklós Sulyok

CONCRETE WREATH

2014, concrete, metal, 140x140x100 cm.

F: Miklós Sulyok





GROUND BREAKING

2013, concrete, 15 x 140 x 20 cm.

F: Miklós Sulyok



LES STATUTES MEURENT AUSSI

in collaboration with Hajnalka Somogyi

2014, mixed media

F: Bonnefantenmuseum



István Csákány was invited by the Bonnefanten-museum to come up with a new work to accompany his exhibition with the Ghost Keeping, which presents a rather ambiguous endgame for late industrial modernity. So in July 2013 István and I set out on a research trip to Maastricht. Our intention was to find traces of the city's industrial past, traces of the industrial workers who for more than a century swarmed in and out of the immense 'Céramique' factory complex, on the exact site where the museum and the surrounding apartment and office buildings stand today. Instead, we found that the transformation of the area in the last decade of the 20th century was so thorough that the memory of this industrial past had been more or less wiped off the face of earth in the process. From where we were coming from, it all seemed way too polished.

Intriguingly, however, we did find an amazing private archive in a filmmaker's home on the Belgian side of the border. Max van Even and his father worked for local television, and shot hundreds of hours of raw material of the old factory complex, mostly out of operation since 1968, upon its demolition in 1988, as well as on the construction of the museum and the new neighbourhood on the same site. Watching the silent footage of huge abandoned halls, of light creeping in through dirty, fragmented windows, and of various banal objects and an unbelievable mass of ceramics cluttered up on shelves and on the floor, all covered in dust, since who knows when, we were wondering what can have come over the people who left this all behind in what seemed like the space of five minutes. It seemed to be a finding like Pompeii. And then, shot on the 'open day' when developers presented the reconstruction plan for the citizens of Maastricht on

a site wiped clean of the factories save one building and a wing of another, images of people rummaging in the demolition debris put in large crates for this purpose, picking out shreds of porcelain, perhaps with a sense of belated affection. (Fig. 18) Memorials of the industrial past are surely to be found in the drawers of Maastrichteners.

During the same research trip, we had the chance to visit the exhibition *Il faut que le masque ait dansé* ('The mask needs to have danced') in Marres House for Contemporary Culture in Maastricht. Besides breath-taking African masks from the Tony Jorissen collection, as well as contemporary art works, it featured the 1953 essay film *Les statues meurent aussi* by Chris Marker and Alain Resnais. The film, which was partly censored in France until 1968, is a deeply critical statement on the effect of colonialism on African cultures, on the profound misunderstanding of masks and their status as ritual fetishes, manifest in the way they were handled and interpreted by European colonizers who approached these objects and their complex cultural context with an arrogant ignorance. Statues can also die if they are uprooted from the culture that brought them to life or if this culture ceases to exist. Paradoxically, the masks in the film seem to possess a liveliness as confident and assertive as that of the museum-goers featured staring back at them.

And so, back in Budapest, the following idea emerged: just as sites and spaces of industrial production were transformed into places of art in the early nineties, often with nothing to allude to their previous use, why not imagine an era in which the capitalist service industry, and the cultural consensus that it supports and that supports it,

is replaced by something profoundly different? A hypothetical paradigm shift that will also swipe away our current understanding of art, and its institutions. No, we would not invent the era, no complex sci-fi vision of some future use of a place like, say, a museum: we simply cannot know what this future paradigm would entail.

Rather, a vista of a transitory moment started to emerge, another endpoint of late modernity, as so often in István Csákány's work. A moment in which the expert curators, the trustees of the preservation and interpretation of cultural heritage, are gone, just like their policies, and the art objects are left behind, pretty much like the ceramics and tools in the abandoned factories, as if in a limbo: losing their aura, collecting dust, and, perhaps, taking on a life of their own.

Certainly, there are historical examples of such paradigm shifts, most prominently the one that Hans Belting describes as the transition, during the Renaissance and Reformation, from the 'era of images' to the 'era of art'. Moreover, history presents us with moments in which a radical break with the past, with the status quo, was at least demanded, attempted or temporarily achieved, like when the Futurists proclaimed the destruction of museums, or when, in 1919, Kazimir Malevich wrote about why these institutions of the past should not be defended from the ravages of the Civil War.¹ And by then the ravages had just begun: during the looting of World War II, many treasures were forced into an incognito existence and, while hidden underground, experienced conditions dramatically different from those in museums (e.g. Rembrandt's *Night Watch* was rolled up in a mineshaft in Sint Pietersberg,

near Maastricht, for six years.)

Without much destruction and violence, and with roots in the early avant-garde, Minimal and Conceptual Art also attempted to bring about a similar paradigm shift in what art and the artist is and could be in society. Even if mostly not in favour of closing down or destroying museums, artists since the sixties have again critiqued the power relations and the value-establishing mechanisms at play in these institutions. Nonetheless, if approved by this (constantly changing) value system, these radical experiments, the artworks, projects or their documentation, the objects, whether found, industrially produced or ephemeral, have ended up in museums. They also feature in prominent works in the BonnefantenCollection. However, what these artists achieved is that, very often, the only thing that identifies their works as art is the context of their creation and their treatment as such in an art collection.

And so we set out to imagine the last exhibition in the Bonnefantenmuseum – a selection of artworks from the Contemporary Collection, carefully displayed in the galleries. What happens if, under circumstances that are presently unforeseeable and inexplicable, the museum closes and the staff leave for good? Other people move in and, to kick things off, open the sealed-off windows, and casually shove the works to one side, or gather them in a corner in what could be described as a barbarian move, in the most neutral sense of the word – these descendants being neither savage nor primitive, but simply from a different civilization, unbound by policies sanctioned by our current cultural consensus.

We were aware that creating such a scenario in an active institution entailed a huge paradox. The museum's consensual role is to guarantee that a work's presentation align with its author's intention, as long as this align with the museum's other role of preserving this work for posterity. This double task necessitates a complex protocol that benefits pieces of observation; at the same time, other works that were meant to be humble documents, triggers for action, tools in live situations (or artefacts of old times and other cultures) can become alienated from their original context under the do not touch sign. Can this protocol be put in parentheses, even if only partially, as an illusion, for the time of a single project? Just to have a glimpse of how contemporary pieces would live without their authors and guards? Time ran fast, the road proved rocky, and the answer appeared to be that, at least for this occasion, the museum cannot orchestrate its own funeral.

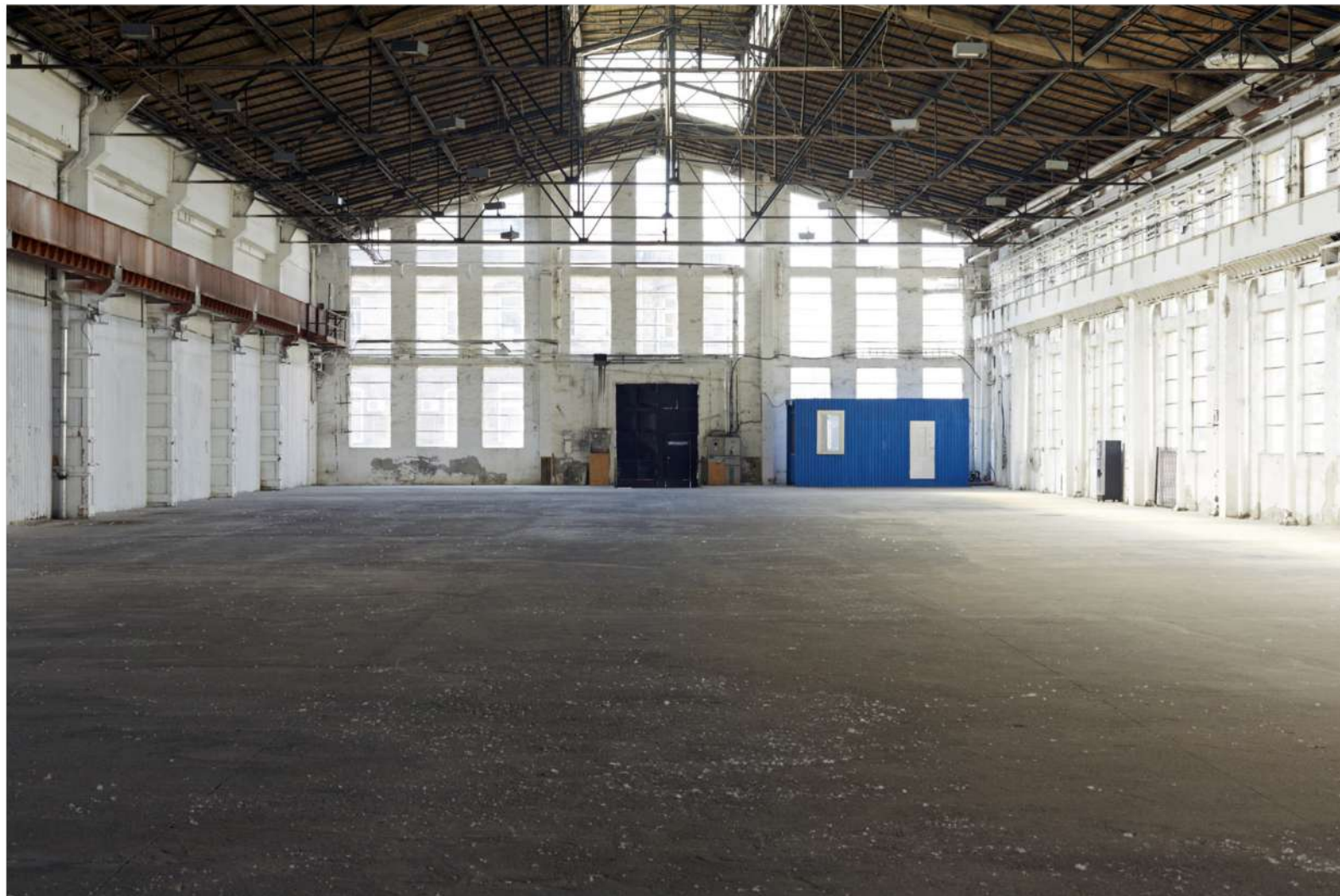
For the time being, a fragmentation of such order or a collage-like treatment of works can only be imagined or modeled. Therefore, this vision of the future is presently placed within a multi-part, allegorical frame, which emanates an air of nostalgia; however, in this case, nostalgia, an attitude that originates in the institution itself, is not so much directed toward the past as toward our 'endangered present'.

Hajnalka Somogyi



COAT STAND

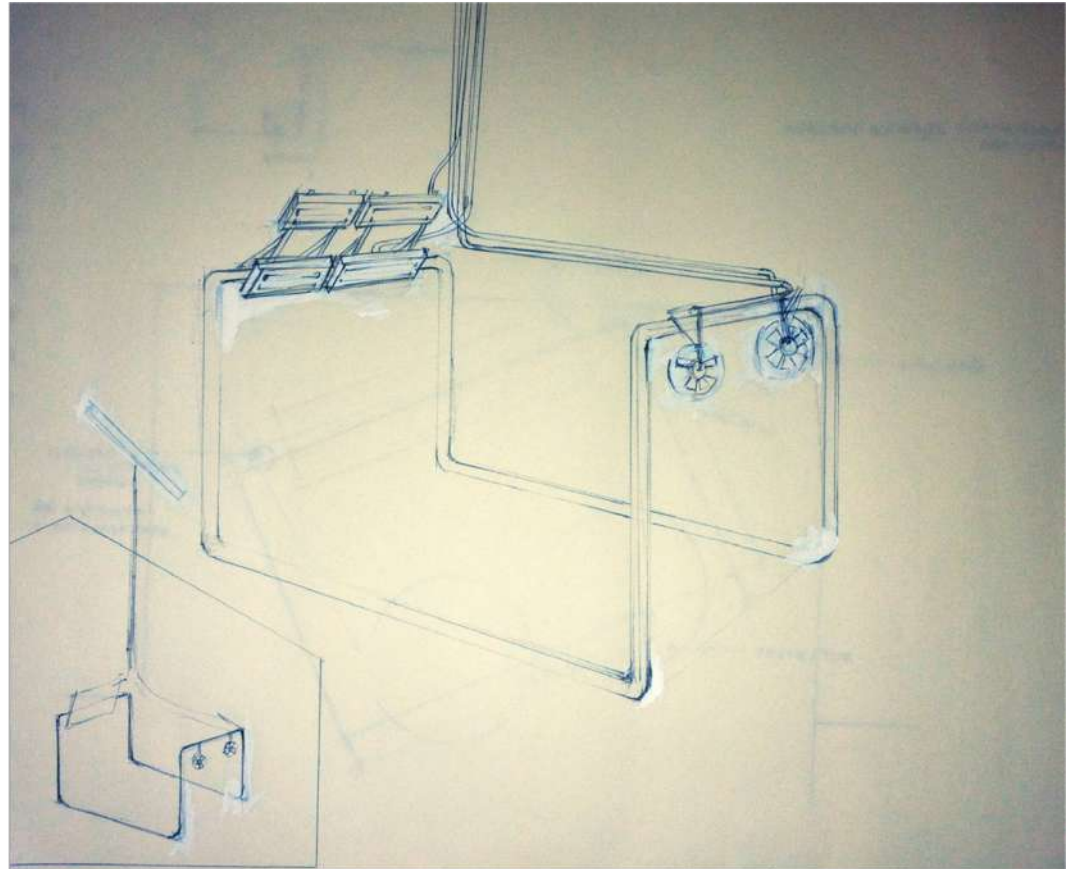
2013, installation, wood, dimensions variable
F: Miklós Surány





WORK STATION

2012, 350 x 250 x 350 cm, mixed media



The installation *Work Station* (2012) is made of a double gate-forming structure of iron tubes with non-stick tarnish. The structure holds a ventilator and neon lamps, which are powered by solar panels placed outside the fair tent. *Work Station* is based on an image showing an industrial loom in a weaving mill factory. Csákány rebuilt the machine at life size, but the central element, the loom – that can be understood as emblem for industrialization – is missing, with only the supplementary construction retained, deprived of its ordinary function. With the supply of solar energy the 'relict' or 'ruin' of a working station can function as a self-supporting system. As in several pieces in Csákány's oeuvre, this piece represents work, the product of work and, in this context, its absence.





SUDDEN GUST OF MOTIVATION

2012, painted fiberglass, h. 70x165x 135 cm

The piece is a realistic sculpture based on a snapshot, that shows the artist in the very moment when a garden chair collapsed under him and he finds himself surprisingly half sitting and half laying on the floor. The sculpture freezes the moment where his body still hasn't adapt to the new situation and because of this still remained in the sitting position. The piece singles out the moment after loosing the ground or more general after a radical change and shows how difficult it is for our body and mind to adopt to the new situation, and points out to what kind of bizarre positions our attempt to adopt leads to.

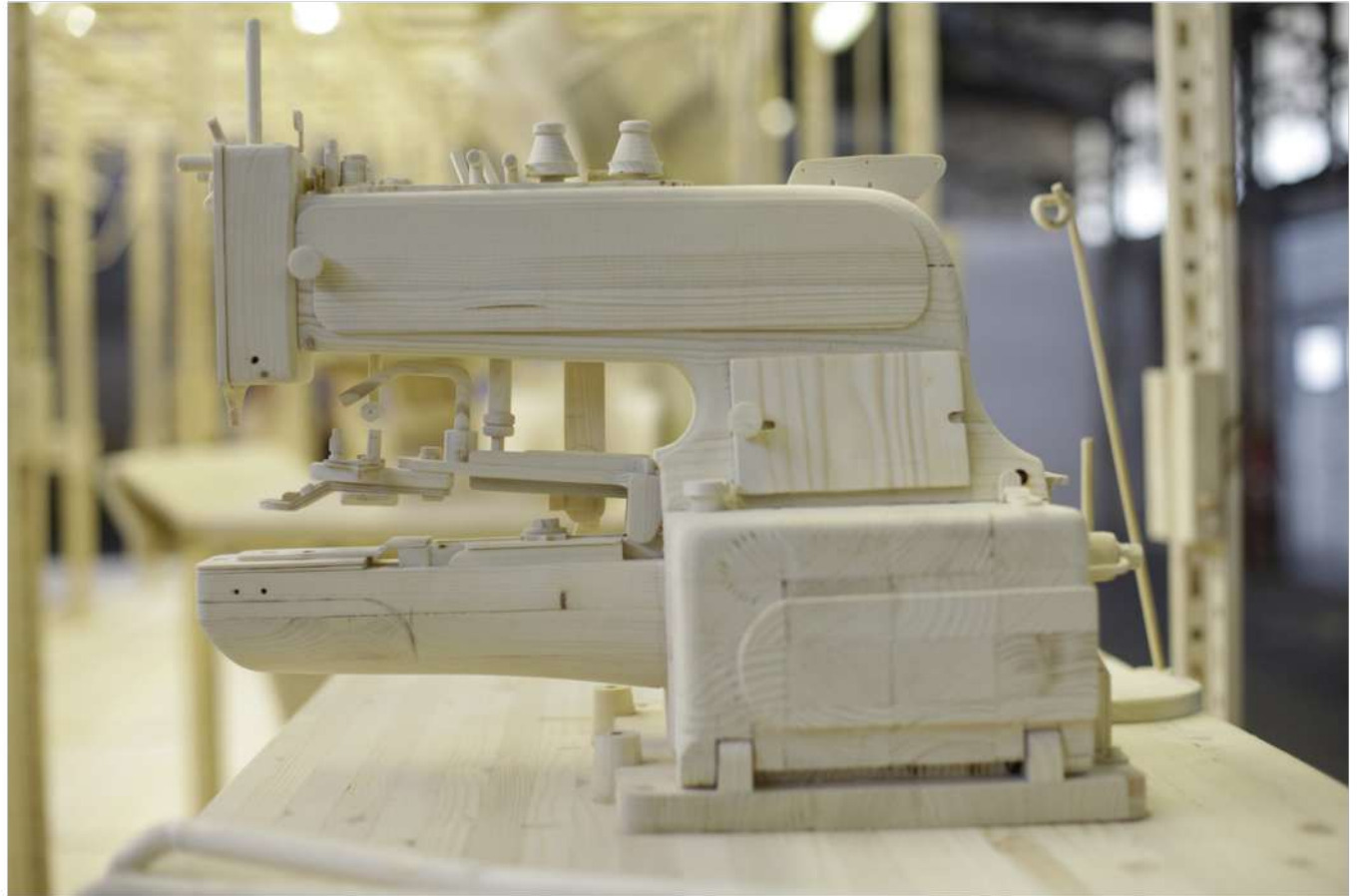




GHOST KEEPING

2012, mixed media, dimensions variable
Photo: Miklós Surányi





This installation consists of two separate parts. One is an exact replica of a typical sewing workshop, disposed on a raised-up floor. Slightly larger than life-size, the sewing and ironing machines are aligned in two rows with a corridor between them, and everything: machines, furniture, cables, neon lamps and other fixtures are elaborately carved from wood. The other is eight mannequins in groups of two or three, frozen into poses of sitting, standing and walking on a long catwalk-like platform that runs along the workshop space. The figures – men and women, based on their proportions – wear elegant dark-blue pinstripe suits of a rather unconventional cut, and have no heads or hands, as if they were invisible under their clothes. (Hajnalka Somogyi)

SUSPENDED



SUSPENDED

2010, image pair (wood cut: 1260 x 1750 mm, paper/acryl: 1260 x 1750 mm)
Photo: Simon Liddiment

The woodcut is based upon an archive image that shows workers removing a sculpture titled the Snake Killer by the Hungarian sculptor Pál Pátzay. In April 1949, a few hours before its official erection ceremony, the sculpture has been removed by the city government and was hidden for several years. It shows a man fighting with a snake, and was meant to be a memorial for Raul Wallenberg, a Swedish diplomat who worked in Budapest during World War II and rescued lot of Jewish people from the Holocaust. In 1952, the sculpture was re-erected without any dedication to R. Wallenberg in the city of Debrecen, in front of a pharmaceutical fabric. Then in 1999, a copy was erected at its original location at the Szent István Park in Budapest.





BERNSTEINZIMMER

2010, wood, bulb. h. 400x400x570 cm

Photo: Miklós Surányi





„István Csákány has created a huge, site-specific installation for this exhibition: a 1:1 all-wooden replica of the private workshop of a jack-of-all-trades: the well-known messy sanctuary of (usually) men where complex, creative and down-to-earth manual work can be exercised for one's own contentment. This type of activity having been relegated to the realm of free time in the age of almighty machines, the private workshop, especially when roughly carved in wood and set in an uncanny blue room, appears as a time capsule of a terminated past.” (Hajnal Somogyi - curator of the exhibition)





IT WAS AN EXPERIENCE TO BE HERE!

site-specific installation, 2009

Photo: Miklós Surányi

The It Was An Experience To Be Here! installation has been realized during a 3 month residency in Prague at a cultural institute called Meetfactory. For the installation, Csákány painted the working- and living-space (all furniture, walls, lights etc.), everything he found there when he came, with pink paint. Only his private objects (and the plants) stayed without paint. The pink color reflected the light differently from the previously white walls and dull items, it completely transformed not only the room and the furniture, but also the experience of being in the very same room. This work reflects on the special status of an artist in residency, who finds himself in situation where he is forced to build up his own private sphere in the given temporary space. He used the pink color to build - with a bit of irony - a contrast between the rough surrounding of my living, a grim, deserted factory district very close to a cargo handling station, and his private living room. After the open studio event, he continued living in the pink space until the end of his stay.





THE WORKER OF TOMORROW

service-uniform, 2009, concrete, 78x130x114 cm

Photo: Miklós Surányi

„The pedestal of the worker's statue is empty - only the absence can be incarnated. Chair, coat, pants, boots - this ensemble forms a figure in (..) sculpture. A figure that is perhaps just slightly bigger than life-size - as expected from the ideal type of the worker - but who is definitely not present. It might appear that the act of raising a statue is an outdated phenomenon, when it is difficult enough to formulate statements about the worker. The absence, heavy as concrete, not only bears the weight of the present, but that of the next moment as well. For the statue refers to a real situation: it is based on a press photograph depicting firefighting gear, workwear in other words, readied for emergency. This standby state is preserved in concrete, pointing out the fact that perhaps the imperative of continuous alertness and standby binds us in a similar way. We are always ready for work. If there is work, because its certainty is dubious, and if there is none, because its uncertainty is doubtless. The workwear awaits the worker, the artistic rendering of the circumstances awaits its centre. ”

Nikolett Eröss



ERECTING

Wood cut, 2008, 100x157 cm
Photo: György Orbán

This woodcut shows the efforts of a group of people to raise the huge sculpture of a human. The visual language of this work is a reminiscence of the woodcut, a medium highly popular in the socialist times. The situation is based on the preparations of the erection of the artist's piece Monument for a Monument.





MONUMENT FOR A MONUMENT

2008, street light, fiber glass, metal construction, solar panel, akkumlator, 22.87 x 1.25 x 0.70 m

(...) They artist place a sculpture on the top of one street light in the middle of a roundabout in Zilina. The sculpture shows a 1/2 times bigger than lifesize realistic portrait of an average man - the artist himself. The figure holds in his two hands covered by working gloves a solar panel above his head. This panel collects during baytime the energy to light via the lights fixed to the bottom of the panel the figure by night. More information: www.csakanyistvan.hu





THE CHOREOGRAPHY OF THE MOUNTAIN

2008, slat, 3,90x5,30x7,80 m

Photo: Miklós Surányi





THE PROGNOSIS OF THE 25TH OF MARCH 2004,
2004, wood frame, roof slates, hinge, 650x800x380 cm

'The Prognosis of the 25th of March 2004' consists of elements that can be easily constructed and deconstructed. I used the same raw material as used in 'The Reconstruction of the Lomnic Peak' in the exhibition 'The robbery of Europe at Millenáris Park'. Contrastingly in this piece, I formed another version of the Lomnic Mountain, which can be seen on the Slovakian 20 koruna coin. The Prognosis of the 25th of March 2004 is more related to the visualizations of data, e.g. Diagrams.