

Andreas Fogarasi

La ciudad de color/ Vasarely Go Home

The exhibition's starting point and centerpiece is *Vasarely Go Home*, a documentary film about a double event that took place in Budapest on Saturday, October 18th, 1969. Opening that day, Victor Vasarely, an internationally renowned artist of Hungarian origin, had a large retrospective exhibition at the Műcsarnok gallery in Budapest. This was his largest exhibition yet and the first exhibition of abstract art of its size in Hungary. It was a time of slow political "normalization", and there was a cultural policy of actively re-establishing contacts with artists living abroad. While the show was an "import" of international art, it was at the same time a reclamation of Vasarely as a Hungarian, so that one can also speak of a cultural "export". While Hungarian avant-garde art (comprising abstract art) of that time was at best tolerated, Vasarely's exhibition was an immense public event attracting almost 90,000 visitors. The show was met with a good deal of expectation and criticism alike from the local artistic scene.

The second event taking place that evening during the exhibition opening at Műcsarnok was a one-person protest by artist János Major, who had a small sign in his pocket reading "Vasarely Go Home". This he showed only to friends and acquaintances when no one else was watching.

The process in the opposite direction, the “mission” of the West, is not always successful in its outcome in the East either. When Vasarely’s 1969 life-work exhibition opened, filling all the rooms of the Budapest Műcsarnok, and ministers and cultural politicians welcomed the pope of non-figurative art, János Major, one of the most talented (and most humble) members of the new avant-garde, appeared with a small “pocket-size portable sign”. Whenever he saw an acquaintance in the crowd, he took it out, cast a glance about to be sure the uninitiated were not watching, and held it up: “Vasarely Go Home!” Could a western artist understand how little this gesture had to do with envy, aggression or a thirst for professional success, that it was dictated rather by loyalty and self-irony?¹



Opening of
Victor Vasarely's
retrospective
at Műcsarnok
Budapest, 1969.
Photo: Demeter
Balla

The video *Vasarely Go Home* consists of interviews with artists and other participants of the cultural scene active at that time in Budapest. They talk about the importance of the exhibition and the work of Victor Vasarely for their

practice and the Hungarian art scene, as well as about János Major and his action. Some of them were witnesses to that very evening, but they also talk in more general terms about this import/export of a former avant-garde practice and its political background and relevance in 1969.

Complementing the video is a series of low two-winged walls. Made from the same white Macael marble that is used for the floor of the exhibition space (and throughout much of the Museo Reina Sofia), they are at once sculptures and display structures; somewhere between a folding screen, a corner of a building, a sign, an architectural mockup, a shield and an exhibition wall. A series of photographs is mounted on them. In the space adjacent to the projection of *Vasarely Go Home*, these photos are mostly archival images from the exhibition opening in 1969. They show the crowds of visitors curiously looking at the works and at each other, all dressed up – artists, politicians, socialists, socialites. A scenario of representation and control, where we can – as it is not documented in any form – only imagine János Major’s bold yet consciously discreet action.

1 Géza Perneckzy. *Hogy van Avantgarde, ha nincsen* (How is [there] Avant-garde, if there is not). Cologne, 1983 (self-published).



La ciudad de color
(The City of Color),
2011. Photograph
on marble (sketch)

La ciudad de color (The City of Color)

Other images show façade designs by Vasarely photographed from a book about his work. While Vasarely had carried out a large number of commissions for “architectural integrations”, these designs are decidedly more didactic. They are suggestions to add color to the grim uniformity of “banlieues” around the world, customizing the universalist modernist building blocks of the 1960s and 1970s. Images from folklore, flags and coats of arms are intended to create a sense of community and local identity.

The current nationalist backlash in Hungary is changing the political and cultural landscape and therefore representations of “Home”. One of its more prominent intellectual exponents

is architect Imre Makovecz, whose Hungarian pavilion for the 1992 Expo in Seville, an anthropomorphic structure crowned by seven church towers, still stands today. A decidedly anti-modernist movement, the Hungarian organic architecture of the 1970s and 80s had its peak moment immediately after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989. The return to traditional building techniques, local architectural archetypes and basic materials like clay and wood involved a reconsideration of local *art nouveau* tendencies while also making an important and internationally acknowledged contribution to postmodern architecture.

Further photographs show urban scenes from Madrid, Budapest and elsewhere, where the legacy of modernist design manifests itself in flower planters, street furniture or spectacular contemporary architecture. In line with Vasarely’s efforts towards a complete aestheticization of the human environment, today every detail of urban space is designed and controlled. A sculpture on a public square, an architectural model of a new museum in an art gallery, a monument for a composer and a hexagonal roof in a park face visitors along the ground floor hallway of the Reina Sofía Museum, next to the entrance and the “outside world”.

Circles and Squares

Another group of walls is placed on the roof terrace of the museum's Jean Nouvel building. Here, abstract shapes are cut out from the marble panels, constellations of circles and squares or variations of these basic forms. They are based on the logos of cultural institutions from different countries that promote their culture abroad – the Goethe Institut, the British Council, the Instituto Cervantes and others, all of which have chosen abstract modernist logotypes for their activity. The logos are usually to be seen separately: on posters, folders or door signs advertising language courses, concerts or exhibitions by artists from the respective countries. A good place to find them in large numbers is in the last pages of international Biennale catalogues.

The ten walls form an armada of shields facing the visitors upon entering the roof terrace, the cut-out logos allowing viewers to peek through them. The unpolished back of the panels is exposed, for this 2 cm thick material is usually used to cover façades, bathroom floors or kitchen counters. The walls with the logos, devoid of textual inscription, become dysfunctional monuments or gravestones, while at the same time appearing as fragile temporary structures recalling oddly enlarged greeting cards.

Vasarely Go Home,
2011. Video (Full
HD) stills: Ilona
Keserü; Gyula Pauer



While János Major was first and foremost a graphic artist, making elaborate pencil drawings and etchings dealing with history, sexuality and Jewish identity, he has also made a couple of important conceptual works, among which his action at the Vasarely opening arguably belongs. For many years, starting in the early 1960s, he has photographed gravestones in Budapest cemeteries, some of which have inspired him for more elaborate works, such as one showing the gravestone of a certain Lajos Kubista. Taking this as a starting point, Major claims that while Cubism was not born in Budapest, it came to die there, as Budapest is a “necropolis of ideas” and many important innovators were born in Hungary (notably Victor Vasarely) only to develop their work elsewhere – “Op Art was not born in Hungary”.





Circles and Squares.
2011. Marble
(sketch)

Biography

Andreas Fogarasi (Vienna, 1977) uses forms of display that are reminiscent of Minimalism and Conceptual art to explore questions of space and representation. Between a documentary and a sculptural practice, he critically analyses the aestheticization and

economization of urban space and the role of architecture and the cultural field in contemporary society. Incorporating video, sculpture and installation in wide-sweeping discursive webs, Fogarasi confronts the viewer with fault lines in historiography, imagineering, and the creation of cultural identities. Yet, as much as his works are referential and seemingly didactic, their momentum is developed precisely from their formal and aesthetic presence, as autonomous sculpture.

Recent solo exhibitions include *1998*, Ludwig Forum, Aachen; *Georgetown*, Georg Kargl Fine Arts, Vienna (2010); *2008*, MAK, Vienna; *Support Surface*, Galerie Cortex Athletico, Bordeaux; *Információ*, Ernst Museum, Budapest; *Fairview*, Lombard Freid-Projects, New York (2008). He participated in Manifesta 4, Frankfurt am Main (2002) and the 52nd. Biennale di Venezia (2007), where his exhibition *Kultur und Freizeit* at the Hungarian Pavilion was awarded the Golden Lion for best national participation. His work has been included in numerous group shows at institutions like Grazer Kunstverein, Graz; Mücsarnok, Budapest; Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf; MAK Center for Art and Architecture, Los Angeles; European Kunsthalle, Cologne; MSU, Zagreb; CAC, Vilnius; and Palais de Tokyo, Paris. His exhibition *Constructing / Dismantling* is currently at CAAC, Seville (Sept. 22, 2011 – Jan. 15, 2012).

**Museo Nacional
Centro de Arte Reina Sofía**

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Nouvel building

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Museum hours

Monday to Saturday

from 10:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Sundays

from 10:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Closed Tuesdays

Galleries close 15 minutes
prior to Museum closing

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La ciudad de color / Vasarely Go Home

14 September 2011 - 9 January 2012

Sabatini building, 1st floor: Espacio Uno /

corridor; 4th floor: gallery 411

Nouvel building, Terrace

Images

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Text

by Andreas Fogarasi

The video *Vasarely Go Home*

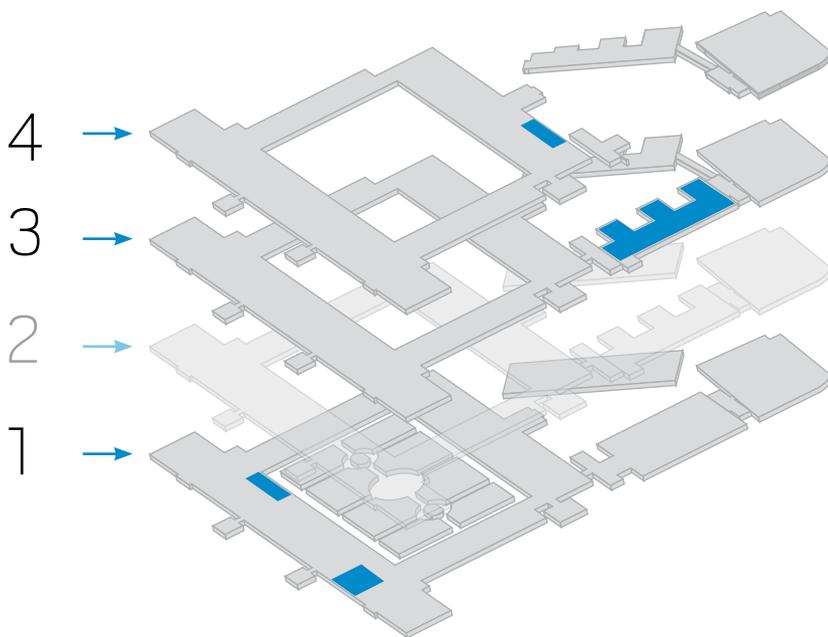
can be viewed on:

vasarelygohome.museoreinasofia.es

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