The View From Budapest

Katalin Néray
Director
Ludwig Museum Budapest – Museum of Contemporary Art

Some people say that Central Europe reaches as far as the custom of serving coffee with whipped cream. Of course, there are many more serious and academic explanations, as well as critical voices on this topic. Some opinions state that the concept only exists in the utopian dreams of the countries that preceded the late Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. In any case, in the struggle between East and West, Central Europe was politically eliminated from the map of Europe. The "Sleeping Beauty" of so many decades finally awoke from her dream in the early 1980s when eminent intellectuals of the region—György Konrád, Milan Kundera, and Czesław Milosz, to name a few—were obsessed with the idea of the 'dream of Central Europe' and began to fight for its repositioning on the spiritual map of Europe.

In recent years, a few exhibitions have been organized to examine the post-war and even post-Communist art of the region, attempting to break away from the still existing prejudices and stereotypes of Central Europe as isolated and parochial. Although this utopia may now be over, the common and cultural history of the region still provides a solid basis of common identity, succinctly referred to in this exhibition as "a view from here."

The View From Here is the third in a series of exhibitions presented at the Ludwig Museum including *Illusions of Eden: Visions of the American Heartland* and *Aspects/Positions: Fifty Years of Art in Central Europe*. Following their successful showings, Robert Stearns and Arts Midwest approached me with an idea that appealed immediately to me: a joint exhibition of art from Central Europe *and* the American Midwest. My main motivation was that it coincides with the most important mission of our museum: to put Hungarian art and art of the region in an international context.

At the same time, it is important for us in Central Europe to work *for* and *with* the local context. In his bitter theatre play, *The Ordinance*, Vaclav Havel concocted a common Eastern European language for the players to speak called *ptidepe*. This hybridized language suited nothing and no one and, thus, dashed all possibility of mutual understanding. In contrast, I do hope that our common *visual* language—photography—is better able to connect us to each other as well as us to our American partners.

Let me add my thanks and appreciation to all participating artists, curatorial colleagues, institutions and individuals for helping us in this process.