

Ephemer Sculpture
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Introduction

*"Time does not permit a large detour:
just pushes us from back to the front, through the slim chimney of the present
all over us in the future. Space, however is large,
full of opportunities, situations, intersections, passages
and one-way streets. "*
(Susan Sontag)
(Ford. Szentpáliné Újlaki Erika)

My doctoral programme, my artwork and my dissertation are closely linked together. Its main theme is the connection between the material, meaning and expression. The choice of topic is due to a conflict, quite important to me, between my thesis opponent, Péter Lengyel DLA, and István Bencsik. In 2005, during my doctoral school admission interview, István Bencsik criticised me and this momentum led me to be interested in the consistency of the artwork, and parallel to this I made art that were doomed to perish. Sculptor István Bencsik firmly questioned the future of my thesis work made of charamel, at the same time he insisted that the essence of art is eternal. Contrary to his opinion, Péter Lengyel DLA saw the intellectual content based on the unusual choice of material, justified. He saw the essence of artwork in it. Ephemer artworks have been present in mainstream art for a longer period of time, yet their ephemeral nature still divides artists. Since István Bencsik was not present at the defense of my thesis work, he could not see the irreversible process, when the caramel works were dripping and became puddles because of the heat and humidity, or they disappeared in the mouths of the masters and the students. The artwork, its ethos, and its impression did not remain in his memory. In other words he could not experience decay, the effect of time, its irreversible

nature; he only got the information about it in the form of documentation. I do not think that the lack of permanence is in fact absence. An artwork does not need the testimony of embalment. If the spirit of the artwork lies in change, and we want to experience this change, then we have to allow the artwork to not be a fixed object placed in a glass case. Art is not only art if it is not reproducible, eternal, unalterably fixed.

The basis of this thesis is complimented by my own creative work, experience and own thoughts gained through the research work. Its backbone lies in the philosophical proposition of the consistency of art, which has been in the focus of my thoughts till today. In addition, literature connected to the topic, philosophical, art historical, and art theoretical writings form the other important basis of the present work. In my thesis I do not intend to make final determinations about questions of time and transience, rather consider it as a question that requires a search for answers. I will not attempt to answer all questions that arise, but I consider mentioning them important, thus demonstrating how far-reaching the main problem is.

The first part of the dissertation contains both philosophical and art historical statements, thoughts, which examine artwork from the point of view of time. I contrast the two statements one stating that art is for eternity, the other not strictly requiring the stability of artwork. I will explain in detail the notion of time; I discuss historical, mythical, profane, sacral, psychological time, being out of time, and the beginning and end of time. Such variety of approaches towards time shows that mankind has been trying to solve this secret, and find the explanation, define the indefinable, explain the unexplainable. Many philosophers, historians and artists deal, dealt and will deal with time, which is the problem of the past, present and the future. In my dissertation I include these discussions as well, but since the material is so vast, I will only include those thinkers who are close to me. The message of the substance is present in every piece of art sometimes strongly; sometimes it is hardly perceptible; my research will show this factor as well.

The second part of the dissertation contains the description of my works; the ones produced during the doctoral years, the masterwork, and works produced for finel exam exhibitions, this will be supported by photo documentation, as these works changed or disappeared due to the weather conditions, sun, heat, humidity, chemical effects, and the passing of time, the change of the host or the co-author. These sculptures talk about time and represent change, decay, or destruction. If we stop in front of the sculptures we face a scary, quick, accelerated time. The aim is the

temporal compression in view of the material, which can be anything from cheese to chocolate. I have no intention to immortalize things or stop decay, I would not like to make myself immortal.

What is process sculpting?

Despite the fact that transient art has been present since the avant-garde (and it is possible that the issue is much older), the notion of process-sculpting is quite recent. It has no definition, but the answer lies in the concept itself. It is a collective name for those artifacts, that are not going to stay for “eternity”. (Even though, today, our view of History manifested in expanded time, would not allow us to believe that any man-made objects would be eternal.) Eternity of art may remain not only through information coded in the material, but by the image burnt into human memory. It is possible, that ephemeral artifacts were made thousands of years ago, but due to the transient nature of the material, we can not know them. Transience and permanence in the sculptural materials and its problem is not dichotomous, although it might yield further results.

Ever since humanity exists, it has been struggling for mere survival, and in the moment when it gained “knowledge”, that is, confronted with death and facing up to it as well. Humans did it with art, besieged the infinite time and limitless sky. Mankind made itself immortal in its visible, tactile and experienced artifacts, which are admired even today, thus set an eternal memorial for himself. Disputed with the forces of decay, and perhaps the lawsuit was won with art. „Our protest against decay is beautifully manifested in art. „ (Milán Füst: *Látomás és indulat a művészetben* [Vision and Passion in Art] Magvető Publishing House , Budapest, 1964, p. 109.) The mistake is that we judge based on the remnants of the past and we do not think about the role, importance of artifacts that did not remain. Today the boundaries of art have widened, information has picked up pace, and we are able to be informed about different artifacts – at any part of the world. Thus, it seems that art has become less valued, since we can not own the real value through documentation.

Time, that triggers change, that destroys the objectified reality, that we constantly measure, that we can not stop, sometimes it rushes, then it stops for a moment. Time is mystical for all of us, and as much as it is regular, it seems irregular

at the same time. Features of time are continuity, discontinuity, simultaneity and parallelism. Every moment exists in the past, present and in the future. Thus, due to the existence of time, change is inevitable. Change, and decay reaches everyone, - since we are talking about works of art - regardless of the material selected. Signs of change are detectable on artifacts made of different material. The only difference is the extent, speed or quality of change. Rain that is detectable on metal, the effect of various organic materials, moss, small surface defects, patina. Dirt sits in the cracks of stone, its shine fades. The sublime that lies in the maturity is a sign of transiency, there is no exception to that. The process of maturation at the surface of the sculpture combined with rapid change reminds us of the time supreme. The embodiment of the art form happens through various materials and techniques. Material is not only the embodiment of the form but it can be definitive, transforming it into the thinking about the material. Different manifestations of the material, its appearance, aroma, colour, light, texture, fracture and dynamic changes, may express various thoughts. The sculpture is life and thought turned into material. If the artist can not leave an object like this to the future, the opinions and values defined by the artifact are definitely transferable. This kind of art may be understood as good cuisine, the changing of the seasons, which we dearly need, but we still do not put them into our pockets. This is a semi-tangible reality, acceptable, but passing.

In the creation of my architectonic works I was preoccupied by architectural space, perspective, the narrow streets. I was putting the alleys of Naples and Andalusia into form. Later, skyscrapers appeared in my work, windows, lights, spaces and moods. Now we know that a town is a process, a place is a process, that is, they do not own one, unchangeable identity. Architecture is a mirror of an era, shows history, tells about religion, traditions, society. Architecture is a form of art, whose artifacts we can enter. The exterior and the interior of a building are two entirely different visual experience. That is, we see the same exact thing different. The two aspects can be sensed together only with the help of the memory. It unifies our memories, and that is why architecture is four-dimensional. Besides the three usual dimensions, there is the fourth, inside and outside, and the dimension of time connects to this. In order to be able to form a picture about the building, that is, to be able to reconstruct it in our memory, we have to go around it, and the picture has to be put together by our memory. According to Titus Burckhardt the secret of architecture lies in its ability “to turn the cosmic rhythm of time into a form in space.” (Titus Burckhardt: *A szakrális művészet lényegéről a világvallások*

tükrében [About the essence of sacral art in the view of world religions] Arcticus Publishing House, Budapest, 2000, p. 32.) My various works of ephemeral materials illustrate the unavailability of time by choosing ephemeral materials. For the understanding of these artifacts, personal participation is essential, and the use of the senses, and by that I do not only understand the eyes. The sweet smell permeates the surroundings of the plastic artifact, it is necessary to touch, taste or even impair them, and these changes belong to the life of the statue.

Summary

Modernity is unfinished. The new, modern world is different from the old in that it is open towards the future. At present we have to produce constant renewal. The party of modernity works out the norms connected to time, age or relative beauty as opposed to timeless, ageless, absolute beauty, thus they form the aesthetics of continuous creation. Modernity – the temporary, ephemeral, the accidental – forms one half of art, the other half is eternal and unchanged.

I find ephemeral plastics or process-sculpting very attractive, because it results in new spatial and time manifestations using the materials provided for sculpting. The use of sculpting materials nowadays has widened, the motifs previously considered side-problems by art have become central. The wish of presenting new artifacts is preferable when using quickly formed, big, ephemeral materials. The affection towards the everyday waste, ephemeral materials is not entirely new. In my opinion, these new possibilities offer the new representation of the world as we know it.

The transient can stay forever only in one place, in one's private photo album, memory. Perception, to begin with, already selects from the elements of reality, it takes certain things only, and then imagination selects from those images again, and this line is closed by memory. Memory, just as the human eye, has an optimal perspective, in which part of the things we have absorbed, perish. Memory selects according to its own rules. certain moments remain vividly, as there are others which disappear entirely. For every person eternity is measured against his own existence, which he lives, experiences and it is nothing but the past that is memory, the present is the existence, and the future is the

imagination. Here is the chance of preserving the transient artifact in memory, while the physical existence of durable materials is forgotten.

From the start it is a constant pursuit to show the infinite on things that are transient and to seize it in the infinite.