

Press release
Budapest, 22 October 2015

IMAGINED COMMUNITIES, PERSONAL IMAGINATIONS PRIVATE NATIONALISM BUDAPEST EXHIBITION

The exhibition showcases works by 39 socially committed contemporary Central and Eastern European artists who address questions of imaginations concerning the nation, phases in the formation of national identities and the issues raised by nationalism.

Imagined Communities, Personal Imaginations is the closing exhibition of a European Union project which has been realized as a collaborative effort among eight institutions from six countries and an international curatorial team. Following the previous exhibitions of the Private Nationalism Project (Prague, Košice, Pécs, Dresden, Cracow, Bratislava), the current exhibition, which is based on a comprehensive curatorial concept and which will include numerous new works of art, will be on view at two institutions in Óbuda: the Budapest Gallery and the Kiscell Museum – Municipal Gallery.

Several international stars who prior to this exhibition never exhibited in Hungary are also among the participants. Four of the works on display are currently on view at the 56th Venice Biennale. The Budapest exhibition is the first forum in which they have been presented to the public outside the Biennale.

The Post-Cold War world loved to indulge in the illusion that the system of nation states is declining and is no longer the major force in an era of globalization. Reality, however, has taken a different turn and nationalities have lost none of their significance. In the period since the end of World War II, nationalism has never before permeated our political and social environment, especially our daily lives, to the extent that it does today. The arresting combination of words in the term “private nationalism” is intended to call attention to this latter point: that nationalism is not something beyond private life, imposed on the citizenry by external forces, but very much defines our self-image, our thinking and our actions. From this perspective, the exhibition focuses on the incorporation of national sentiments into daily routines, on the ‘privatization’ of nationalism.

The title of the exhibition is borrowed from the influential book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, by political scientist and historian Benedict Anderson. In his book (which has been published in Hungarian as well), Anderson defines nationalism and nationality as cultural products of an imagined political community, the individual members of which, despite the absence of face-to-face relationships, share strong attitudes and beliefs about their own people and other peoples. According to Anderson, the diverse members of this virtual and imaginary kinship, a product of modern times, are cemented together by attributes, symbols and ceremonies. All countries have their own recipe for national revival, and both their national imaginations and their constructed enemies differ. Art and culture have always been part of the nation building process. Socially committed, reflective artists are confronting local nationalisms – all of them their own – on behalf of us.

The exhibition is first and foremost an examination of the subject and content of national imagination, and it assumes that nationalism in any form has a more visual nature than other political currents: nationalism presents itself in a plethora of vivid images, symbols and myths, to which dreams, fantasy and imagination also contribute. In the first part of the exhibition, the works on view at the Budapest Gallery address the various phases in the formation of the nation concept and present several manifestations of national imaginations, while the works displayed in the church space and oratory of the Kiscell Museum give visual expression to alternative concepts and imaginations of the nation. As critical citizens, the exhibiting artists are involved in the contestation of the meanings of the ‘imagined communities’. From within and from outside of the nation, they create a virtual space on the margins of the dominant culture and open critical avenues for the production of alternative visions and personal imaginations.

Curator: Edit András PhD

The exhibition will be open to the public, daily with the exception of Mondays until 13 December 2015 at the Kiscell Museum from 10 am to 6 pm and at the Budapest Gallery from 10 am to 6 pm.

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