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### **Cross-Cultural and Interfaith Dialogue in the Works of Hungarian Israeli Artists**

#### 1. Subject and main questions of the PhD project

The principal subject of my PhD research is the exploration of the life and creative work of two lesser-known Hungarian Israeli artists, Hédi Tarján (Budapest, 1932–Jerusalem, 2008) and her student, Uri Asaf (Haifa, born 1942). Their *œuvre* and life stories are used as case studies to illuminate transforming political, sociological and cultural circumstances in East Central Europe and Israel between 1948 and 2008. The research is part of the reevaluation and reintegration process of marginalized dissident Hungarian artists into Hungarian cultural scene started after the political change of 1989.

The main questions of my research are how did the artists confront the Holocaust, communism and immigration to Israel, how could they reconcile their different identities in their art, what was the role of community and interdisciplinarity in their career strategies and what is their place in the contemporary East Central European and Israeli art milieu.

#### 2. Methodological and analytical approach

Being in the second year of the PhD program, I have already gathered documentation of the artists' works and made the first part of the interviews and field work documenting Tarján's public tapestries.

In contrast to the extant research and publications, I concentrate on the life and art of two artists by examining their art in depth from a critical perspective. Aside from formal, iconographic and stylistic analyses of their works, I treat their biographies as a micro-history of an era. By combining various scientific methodologies, such as ethnic, memory, gender and women studies, this interdisciplinary research maps their and other East Central European Jewish artists' complex identities. I use an iconographic approach to understand and source the symbolic content of certain recurrent motifs in their works, such as mask, mouse and penguin. By the means of comparison, formal analysis helps to find parallels of Tarján's avant-garde weaving style, post-impressionistic painting style and Asaf's abstract-expressionist solutions in visual art. Psychoanalytic theory can be used to point out possible archetypes of the collective unconscious in the artists' works, while the semiotic perspective can contribute to identify their connoted meanings. Feminist criticism assists to examine Tarján's interaction with art as a female artist, group leader and art model. In order to obtain information from different angles, I apply oral history and interviews focusing on specific subjects (e.g. communism, *ars poetica*, identities). The role and the reaction of the changing viewers and collectors are emphasized too.

### 3. Problems and questions to be addressed

My presentation will focus on the conceptual and methodological problems of the interdisciplinary research through the comparative case study of Tarján's *Homage to Fra Angelico* series and Asaf's *Botanical gardens* paintings. The non-traditional variant of the Annunciation story can be used to reflect on the questions related to the combination of literary sources (Hebrew Bible, Jewish tradition, Christian hagiography), conversion studies, iconography and feminist point of view. On the other hand, Asaf's images provide an opportunity to compare the different methods of Diaspora research, memory studies and at the same time to analyze the intersection of visual arts and literature. Through the garden and angel motifs, which are recurrent in both Tarján's and Asaf's works, I will link the two artists' *œuvre* and place them in a broader context of global art history.

With the help of the presentation at the Forum, I would like to show the relevance of this still under-researched topic of immigrant Hungarian Israeli artists for scholars dealing with East European art history.