

**Mária Madár**

Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest

### **The Visual Reception of Cosmos/Space in the Hungarian Arts during the Cold War**

My dissertation examines how Hungarian artists and the Soviet type cultural institutional system reacted in Hungary to the giant leap of technical novelty of reaching space in the period from 1957 to the 1970s. Under Soviet influence, the propaganda machine during the Space Race focused on the cosmonauts and Soviet successes until 1969. Hungarian newspapers, educational and scientific magazines regularly focused on the subject, and there was also an increase in published sci-fi literature. Was there a technopositive mentality all over the Eastern European region, or was there not? Through case studies my aim is to examine how or how not the propaganda affected artists, was the cosmos a favourable topic among Hungarian artists or was it a choice of personal interest to react to the important events of the Space Race, and was there a Hungarian cultural institutional goal to promote the theme.

The conquest of outer space is a well-known global phenomenon of the American and Soviet cultural production in the 1960s, so the focus of my research also includes the possible cultural exchanges of that era, since the goal of the latter two was the power over people's minds. It is unusual that the research on this topic in the former Eastern European countries under the influence of the USSR tends to focus on how this theme emerged as a countercultural strategy (see Ilya Kabakov, Július Koller, Stano Filko), while there are cultural objects that cannot be easily understood through the Western conceptualisation of the East and the dichotomy of the Space Race.

My dissertation is structured around the following case studies: the reception of important events of the Space Race, Béla Kondor's oeuvre, György Korga's book covers for sci-fi literature and the 1973 *Exhibition in the memory of Copernicus from Hungarian artists works* organized by the Polish Institution in Hungary. My aim is to approach the cultural phenomenon of the Space Race from different perspectives, methods and problems. For example, the exhibition in 1973 is an event where the exposition itself can be problematised as a diplomatic tool of the Polish Institution in the Hungarian cultural context. Under the theme of Copernicus, several neoavantgarde artists were able show

their works among the ideologically accepted artists. György Korga's works can be problematised through the thin line between his popular designs and his paintings, which were theoretically divided into low and high art at the time, thus raising the question: what had greater impact on the visual imagination of the people? His method on the book covers was the same as in his paintings as a scientifically not accurate fantastic art or magical socialist realism.

My presentation will focus on Béla Kondor (painter, graphic artist, poet), who is one of the main figures of the 1960s in the Hungarian art history literature. However, anyone who does not read in Hungarian would not know this, because even until today it is really difficult to portray someone in the Eastern European region who, during his lifetime, went from a "rebellious avant-garde figure" to being an officially celebrated artist against his ideas. Is it really necessary to compare a unique oeuvre with a Western standard? Kondor's imagination is populated by the achievements of technical development, by airplanes, rockets and hybrid cosmonauts and spaceships with angelic or mechanical wings. The visual culture of Space Age may help us to understand his art in a global and regional perspective, but does it help us to understand how different fantastic space art was in Eastern Europe in the Hungarian cultural context? Or was Kondor also a magical socialist realist with a focus on how to create double meanings in a less technopositive way that would be preferred by ideology? Are there others in Eastern Europe with a surrealist and realist touch reflecting on the cosmos without being easily understood in a dichotomous political system?