

Title

Political games and artistic representation

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Abstract

Based on a case study of a work by Hungarian neo-avant-garde artists Gyula Pauer's *The Beauty of Hungary 1985-1996*, the article examines the relationship between art and gender politics in the period before the 1989 regime change in Hungary. The essay focuses on the question of the instrumentalised female body in the context of local politics and national art history. Examining the topic's relation to the present, Eperjesi presents her artistic research project *You Should Feel Honored* as a critique and performative artistic response to Gyula Pauer's sculpture. By visualizing the ethical dimension of Pauer's work and problematizing the responsibility of the artist, the project aims to rewrite local art history from the socially engaged feminist perspective.

Introduction

Through a case study of a work of art – Gyula Pauer's sculpture *The Beauty of Hungary 1985* – the aim of this paper is to examine the relationship between the instrumentalised female body and the framework of politics, the history of mentalities¹, and art history in the period before the 1989 regime-change in Hungary. In this paper I will first analyse the background and process of Pauer's artistic work, then survey the crucial elements - both external and internal ones - that play a pivotal role in this piece of work. Finally, I will introduce my motivations and artistic response to the case.²

On the background of Pauer's sculpture

The beauty pageant organised in 1985 attracted enormous attention, since no such event took place previously in socialist Hungary. It is no surprise that the appearance of young and beautiful, almost naked female bodies attracted attention. The news of the beauty pageant ignited the imagination of sculptor Gyula Pauer as well. By that time, he had already taken plaster casts of naked female bodies, which, as a stage production designer, he used in the production of stage sets³ from the 1970s. Pauer was a prominent member of the Hungarian neo-avant-garde art scene. One of his most notable works, *Demonstration-Sign Forest* (1978) consisted of 131 signs with slogans placed on a meadow and was destroyed by the authorities soon after its completion. Many of his works were informed by his concept of *Pseudo sculptures*⁴, where plasticity is camouflaged by way of illusionistic painting. Besides using objects, he applied the concept of

Pseudo to the female body.⁵ His instructions for making a pseudo-sculpture in 1975 involves a model – a characteristically a ‘beautiful’ woman - who not only needs to be ‘stripped’ naked, looked at, drawn and painted, but also be touched and patted by the sculptor.

Take a beautiful woman, strip her naked, put her on a pedestal [...] take the beautiful woman, position her upright, decorate her, cover her in a white silk veil, and smooth the silk over her body with clean wet hands ...⁶ What is said in this instruction (namely, that the ‘body’ refers exclusively to the female body, just as ‘model’ refers to naked, young, beautiful women) is as remarkable as the language used to say it. It is as if the model had already been transformed into a sculpture, a lifeless object that undergoes the entire process in a passive modality.

He started to make plaster casts⁷ of naked female bodies in 1985, and the pageant opened a new dimension for him. Pauer decided – to quote the art historian Annamária Szőke – ‘[...] to document the entire event with the tools of sculpture in the framework of a *Beauty Action*. His technique was plaster casting as a method of documenting reality.⁸

The plan that the artist would make sculptures of the winners was announced during the televised awards ceremony. It turned out only later that the sculptures were accurate representations of their nude figure, and the first step was to make plasters casts of their whole naked body. According to László Hartai, director of the documentary film named *Pretty Girls*⁹, the making of sculptures of the winners

‘was announced like a great honour. Obviously, no one knew anything about Pauer and the girls didn’t really know who he was or where they were. The award ceremony was held at the Congressional Centre, in front of a huge audience, they became famous, they were on TV; sorry, but this crudeness overruled everything else at the time. Whatever was said then and there at the finals, it was like scripture, a whole country witnessed it, and it was almost like a regulation: they were not thinking about whether they even want it all, since the whole country knew this was the prize. [...] Saying no was simply not an option’.¹⁰

Annamária Szőke¹¹ and Éva Körner¹² consider the announcement of the award as the first conscious use of the media in Hungarian visual art.¹³ However, they neglect to consider the position to which Pauer was elevated by the mass media: he appeared to be the official sculptor of the contest whose activity was legitimised by Hungarian Media, the organiser of the pageant. This semblance of official status had the practical advantage of saving him the trouble of convincing the contestants one by one to participate in his action. The contestants may well have seen him and his activity as part of the pageant - they needed to be available by default, no explicit agreement was asked of them. The finalists were trapped by the unilateral and disadvantageous contracts they made with Hungarian Media. The ‘opportunity’ to have a sculpture made of the winners also required them to put a brave face on the whole plaster casting situation, which only increased their vulnerability.

This vulnerability takes one to the fundamental questions of the artist-model relationship, a sensitive issue in the visual arts. Unequal nudity nearly always reflects a power dynamic, the power of the dressed over those stripped bare.

The wider recognition of this unequal relation was gaining ground in art theory in the 1970s. Suffice it to mention John Berger's influential essay published in 1972¹⁴, interpreting a substantial part of traditional culture and European art as works meant to satisfy male desire for looking and possession. This recognition was not synchronous worldwide. In Hungary, Berger's book was published later, only in 1990. Before the regime change, there was no publicly and legally available feminist literature in Hungary. Sociologist Julia Acsády sheds light on the plight of feminist ideas in Hungary in the second half of the 1970s:

'Júlia Veres, Piroska Márkus and Zsuzsa Körösi were college students, Róza Hodosán was a bit younger, they belonged to the democratic opposition. They had women acquaintances in the West, and they had books on feminism. Juli thought a reader should be compiled from these feminist books. She put a manuscript together and submitted it to a publisher, but nothing came of it. A few years later a book is published by sociologist Miklós Hernádi: the title is *Nemek és igenek* (Nos and Yeses),¹⁵ and it includes more or less the same excerpts as the ones chosen by Júlia Veres. Except now it is published in this horrible book in this format: feminist author X is interpreted by Hernádi, and a paragraph quoted from the author is immediately debunked by Hernádi, who explains why this is untrue or stupid. [...] *Nos and Yeses* was the only source on feminism in Hungary for a long time to come, and the names in it did not appear elsewhere'.¹⁶

In other countries, some artists engaged with the theme of the problematic relationship between artist and model. However, as per my knowledge, the sole artist in Hungary at the time who undertook the female perspective was Orsolya Drozdik. Her performance, *The Nude/Model*, (1977), is an example of how she incorporated the topic into her artistic practice.¹⁷

Pauer himself felt there was something delicate about using the contestants as models. In the reportage published in 1987 by Sándor Friderikusz¹⁸ Pauer says: 'I pay my models one thousand forints with the proviso that no further demands can be made.' But the beauty contestants – civilians turned public figures – were not traditional models: they were people without any experience in modelling whose figures and names became known overnight and whose lifelike casts became recognisable throughout the country. Pauer states that he was embarrassed to give money to Csilla Molnár, the beauty queen, who was not yet 17 at the time. Instead, 'I promised to make her a portrait, which will eventually be worth ten or twenty times more.'¹⁹ Whether this gift ever reached the Molnár family is unclear; it is quite certain, however, that the promised increase in the value of the portrait was not something its model could ever enjoy - she committed suicide a few months later.

The critical texts on the sculpture did not reflect on any problems of sexualization or on the distinction between eroticism and sexism. Art critics reduced the problematic nature of the artist-model relationship in the context of the *Beauty Action* to the fact that the film *Pretty Girls* permits an unwanted glimpse to the uninitiated into the work occurring in the art studio, which creates erotic situations open to misinterpretation. Annamária Szőke dismissed the question with the remark '[...] Pauer was no stranger to eroticism'.²⁰ Éva Körner transformed eroticism into a moral issue and countered any potential critical voices by referring to prudish 'socialist ethics', claiming '[...] Eros, the life-giving and invigorating principle, got a particularly bad reputation in socialist realism²¹ and '[...] it turned out that actual Hungarian morals and lofty Socialist Morals couldn't abide each other. Thanks to Pauer, the conflict between real art and soc-art [sic!] erupted publicly'.²²

Pauer himself emphasised that eroticism had no place in the studio during the process: the model's body '[...] is a work object, and one looks at it accordingly'.²³ Art historian Emese Révész, who witnessed the casting as a high school student remembers differently:

'As a teenage girl, I hung out with Gyula Pauer's son without having any idea who Gyula Pauer was. I ended up in the studio in connection with some social event, and I heard the people there discussing the work in progress. It was men talking about women as sexual objects, which was far from unusual in that circle, and one only sees it as improper with the hindsight of an adult. It entailed the taking of body imprints, and they could touch these girls in places and ways virtually no one else could. Can one distinguish between a man's touch and an artist's? If that is the issue, this is what I heard there: these girls were not touched by artists, but by men, younger or older men. The discourse that I glimpsed – and I want to stress I glimpsed at it from outside the subculture of art – was men's talk about women, pretty hot women at that, to whom they had access in ways others didn't'.²⁴

For the assessment of Pauer's artistic role, the ten pages of erotic photos published in the January 1986 issue of the German edition of the erotic magazine named *Lui* are crucial. The photos were taken during the creation of the casts by Béla Bacsó and János Fenyő in Pauer's studio with his active help and support. These pictures use the tools of art making – the storage racks and canvases – as erotic accessories; in other words, they appropriate Pauer's entire project for a sex magazine with his willing support. In a radio programme, Annamária Szőke recalled that Pauer received money to let the photographers into his studio. According to János Rauschenberg, one of Pauer's permanent assistants, who was the other guest of the same radio programme: 'The money [50.000 HUF, which was nine times the average salary at that time – Á.E.] Pauer received from Fenyő was not given to him for the chance of taking photos. He got it to make the resin cast of Csilla Molnár [...] which they took the naked picture of. They couldn't take a naked picture of Csilla'.²⁵

One of the photos shows a contestant (Zita Kalmár²⁶) with glistening oily skin, while no less than

seven male hands are feeling her. Another shows the hands of two sculptor's assistants in action, massaging the required cream into the breasts of the reclining model. Page 77 of the magazine shows a scene in which the photographers lay Zita Kalmár next to Pauer's previously produced erotic plaster cast of another model and Zita 'playfully' adopts the pose of the of the cast. Page 78-79 shows two images of Csilla Molnár's resin sculpture. Pauer's earlier sculpture and Zita Kalmár's body were illuminated with orange-green light, while Csilla Molnár's resin sculpture was illuminated with red-blue light. In both cases, the strong coloured lights blur the distinction between the sculpture and the living body. It is not only the artist's studio and the location of an erotic photo shoot that overlap here; the sculpture and the eroticised photos taken of them are also moved to the same level. All of this is in accord with Péter György's definition of beauty, '[...] an encounter of kitsch and pornography on the dissecting table, that is in the exclusive public sphere of high culture.'²⁷ Although high art has always been used for erotic purposes, there had always been an attempt to carefully separate high art from the visual culture of mass media. The magazine's photos show the relationship between mass culture and high culture in an unprecedented way. What is extraordinary in this case is the explicit use of Pauer's studio, the environment of his art, in an erotic magazine. The use of a lifelike sculpture of a young woman of fame as substitution for her living body in an explicit men's magazine, and the fact that the artist himself volunteered to do it, make the case unprecedented. The case is further aggravated by the fact that Pauer is clearly a high-profile artist who deservedly has a place in the history of Hungarian neo-avant-garde art.

Pauer may not have realised this, but the distinction between art and sex, between the artist's model and the sex image model gets completely blurred in these photographs. Pauer did not find himself in this situation wholly innocently. The unproblematised blurring of power, the semblance of official status, and the imperative of art that I mentioned earlier in connection with the sculptural live casting, is repeated here in the case of consent to being photographed. As opposed to obtaining consent in a more official way, Pauer only asked the photographers, who allegedly appeared unexpectedly at his studio, to obtain the models' consent to be photographed. What could these young women say in such an ambush, when they had not been prepared for such a situation? It was presumably an important factor in the awkwardly automatic consent that the location was a sculptor's studio. This was a situation in which being a model for a sculpture and for erotic photos could not be separated. This, in turn, turned Pauer's studio, an art milieu, into a mere excuse, at least for the duration of the photo session in question.

The two photographers were employees of the Newspaper Publishing Company (Lapkiadó Vállalat), who took photos for the fashion magazine *This Is Fashion (Ez a divat)*, but they regularly worked for *Lui* as well. The winners of the contest had no idea about this. Moreover, they only found out about the publication of the photos after the fact. So, whatever they consented to was not publication in *Lui*; at most, it was to professional photographers documenting the artist's work.²⁸ This made the insult complete. The two photographers 'naturally' let Pauer in on their plans, kept secret from the contestants. 'A few weeks later,' Pauer told Sándor Friderikusz, '[...]

those photographers contacted me to ask for my consent to the publication of the photos in the soft porn magazine *Lui*.²⁹ He had no objections. The pictures in question are the ones taken by the two photographers of Csilla Molnár's sculpture in the sculptor's studio. Photos of the sculpture bathed in a bawdy blue-red light before a homogenous black backdrop. The sentences of László Szalma, director of the programming department of Hungarian Media show a dubious awareness of the issues of art and representation. In the documentary he says '[...] the most important issue is that the paper [*Lui* magazine – *ÁÉ*] did not publish any nude photos of the *Beauty of Hungary*. Since the only picture of Csilla Molnár was one of her sculpture, she did not disqualify herself from the European contest held in Malta.³⁰ In this way, Csilla Molnár could attend the European contest, and her naked body could still enter the erotic men's magazine through the loophole of art.

The political environment and visual representations of the bio-politics of the era

Hungarian culture and media politics in the seventies took giant leaps towards the objectification and commodification of the female body. Prior to the regime change, the Kádár regime was facing several socio-economic challenges. Increasing financial and economic difficulties strengthened the political will to make Hungary a regional centre of commerce. This meant making the country an attractive destination for Western investors and tourists alike. The political leadership wanted to demonstrate the openness and flexibility of the system and provided benefits to tourism. They wanted to oversee and control 'the ideological and economic foundations of the socialist system' while at the same time open up to the West to offset their financial vulnerability. Thus, two processes that were difficult to reconcile and which were also in conflict with each other, had to be managed by political and economic decision-makers. This manoeuvring was directed from above, i.e. from within the party, but supported from below by social demands. The political leadership began to develop a new framework, which required the broad cooperation of society.³¹

One of the first clear signs of openness was to put the photographic image of the naked female body into public use. Nude female images had been rationed under strict political-state control. According to the sociologist Judit Acsády, the public exploitation of the female body was a tool for consolidation during the Kádár era.³² The visual imagery that defined this new kind of exploitation of the female body was distributed mainly through messages wrapped in humour. This strategy created and gratified widespread social demand, and, by selling the products, also promised economic benefits. This direction was marked by the name of József Árkus, who worked as a political journalist, initially working for the MSzMP's (Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt / Hungarian Socialist Workers Party) daily newspaper, *Népszabadság*, between 1966 and 1975. The party leadership put him in charge of the entire humour product range. All these humorous press products were at the forefront of sexualising the female body, and two of them were established specifically to create the genre of the 'socialist erotic magazine'.

There is a contradiction inherent in this concept, as socialist ethics did not support the

representation of nudity, it was only allowed in the visual arts. Thus, erotic magazines were completely absent from the market in countries dependent on the Soviet Union. This contradiction was also intended to be resolved through humour. The satirical weekly *Ludas Matyi* published drawings (cartoons), the carnival erotic *Tollasbál* (*Hitting the Hay*) and its counterpart, the summer erotic *SzÚR* (*Színész Újságíró Rangadó, Title Bout of Actors and Journalists*), were full of colour-printed photographs. New Year's Eve offered special opportunities: the dailies of several state party organisations published a special New Year's Eve issue. All pictures were taken from foreign erotic or pornographic magazines. The special edition of the state party's daily *Népszabadság* was allowed to go the furthest in publishing pictures with a negative message for women – images that could not have appeared in other newspapers aimed at the general public.

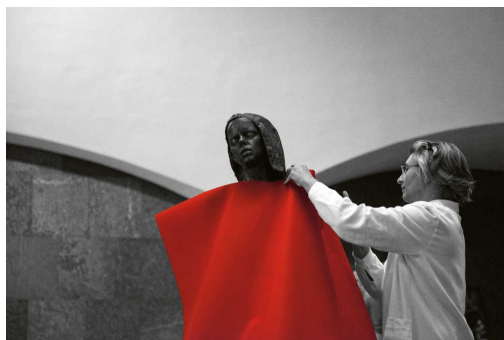
The liberalisation of the production of nude female images was the result of a written regulation. According to a 1972 resolution of the Ministry of Internal Trade, '[...] artistic nude photographs [...] may be used for the purpose of advertising goods only if they can be associated with the nature, purpose or manner of use of the goods'³³. In practice, this pseudo-regulation cleared the way for both production and distribution of images of naked bodies, providing possibilities for the use of the female body in mass culture and advertising.

The political orientation of the pseudo-regulation can be reconstructed from an interview published in the 1984 issue of *Tollasbál*. István Barnai, Lieutenant Colonel of the National Command of the Customs and Financial Police, Head of the Traveller and Gift Customs Department, commented on the rules for importing erotic magazines.³⁴ All foreign products had to be cleared through customs at the border, and Barnai said that his staff would decide which press products would be returned to the original owner or destroyed after customs clearance, based on visual inspection. However, he emphasised that press products containing only nude photographs could be imported into the country without any further restrictions. The visual examples accompanying the interview illustrate the nature of the customs' unspoken rule: only naked bodies of women were allowed to be featured, it was not 'appropriate' to have any men in the picture, nor was it appropriate for the models in the picture to be shown to interact with each other: they should appeal solely to the viewer. I have analysed the strategy and images of the *Tollasbál* in more detail in a previous study.³⁵

When Kádár-era Hungary gradually started to ease legal restrictions on body representation in the 1970s, a central institution, the Publishing House of the Fine Arts Fund, played a major role in spreading the sexualisation of the female body through artistic representation. They published nude calendars of various sizes, e.g. backpocket-sized nude photos as well. This intimate size was popular among amateur photographers too, who took reproductions of pictures published in magazines unavailable in the country and enlarged (in fact, reduced) under unprofessional conditions, but in great quantity. The exact mode of their circulation is obscured by its informality, but one murky example includes tobacco stores, where they were sold under the counter. The elastic concept of the 'artistic nude photograph' became a free pass not only for official

publications and advertisements, but for amateurs and non-professional photo-clubs as well.

The mass cultural deficit economy of socialist Hungary gave space to ‘artistic nude photography’ in line with political goals, filling a real market void.



Agnes Eperjesi, *You Should Feel Honoured*, 2018, performance at the Hungarian National Gallery, Courtesy of acb Gallery

The contemporary reception of Pauer’s work

The contemporary public reception of Pauer’s work differs considerably depending on its platform. The mass circulation press was overwhelmingly critical of the process and circumstances of cast-making because of the vulnerability and exploitation of the young women who got involved against their will. The journalist of the magazine named *Hungarian Youth* described the modelling in a tone of disapproval and displeasure:

‘[...] is on the rotating table again, now with her panties off. I see Jancsó’s films, groups of naked girls with no protection. Here, hairless, they are even more vulnerable among a group of men. [...] The ‘field table’ with the girl’s body is rotating. The Master is now conducting from below, lifting her breasts, adjusting her hips, moving her hands. The final pose seems difficult to find. The assistants are also getting involved, ‘experts’ are left and right, measuring the forms, studying where the body bends. [...] ‘Relax, give yourself over to the kneading hands,’ Master encourages the girl. Four boys rub her thoroughly, her skin flushes, the cream runs off, they work a shimmering layer over her body. The kneaders are tireless, the girl’s hard flesh is almost sizzling. [...]’³⁶

In a film magazine article on the documentary *Pretty Girls*, Zoltán Ardai devotes a paragraph to Pauer’s role and work:

‘[...] even an outstanding contemporary Hungarian sculptor was mesmerized by the ballyhoo surrounding the contest. The master attempted artistic victory over the provocative spectacle [...]. Fussing around the winners’ bodies (and allowing not only a video camera, but also photographers into his studio), he became embroiled in processes he could hardly have grasped. The punishment for such unawareness: this time it was life that grabbed art by the throat and very nearly wrung its neck.’³⁷

The reception within the art scene is best represented by Éva Körner, who wrote in favour of Pauer's project in several texts during this period. In the same issue of the aforementioned film magazine, on the same page as the previously quoted passage, a tribute to the statue of the beauty queen was published. Strangely enough, she did not mention the movie at all, nor the critical reflection on Pauer it contained, so it was unclear what her article was doing there, but it was obviously intended to counter the previous passage just quoted.

'The female body made motionless in Pauer's casts is staged, and thereby dramatically elevated. It is a shocking experience that destabilizes clichéd looking and displaces a voyeuristic view of the female body with a heroism that can only be expressed by a body magically captured as motionless. The poster girls as a spectacle and the entertainment-seeking public as viewers were transformed into something qualitatively different in the plastic work process, as a long-forgotten relationship lurking in the depths of mentality arose from the ephemeral and consumable. The living form becomes ennobled in the plastic work. [...] One of the crucial factors of his work is its processual character. This is how he forces himself and his spectator to reflect intellectually.'³⁸

In another text, Körner writes that 'Pauer was also denounced by the community of sculptors, saying that he had abandoned his avant-garde attitude and returned to academic sculpture' by forming a traditional nude'.³⁹ In the book published for the occasion of the 2005 retrospective exhibition of Pauer, the editor of the volume confirms Körner's claim that the 'profession' (quotation marks in the original) considered the sculpture of the beauty queen unsuccessful at the time. Unfortunately, she does not give any examples, and I have not found any evidence of its existence in the published materials. This may be explained this way: although several people have criticised Pauer's work informally in private conversations – as Körner and Szőke attests –, no one has publicly voiced this criticism. In this sense, the art scene closed ranks behind Pauer precisely by remaining silent.

Earlier, I discussed the creation of the first sculpture of the beauty queen made of white resin to replace the body of the winner in the photos for *Lui* magazine. Based on the initial imprint, Pauer made a bronze version later, which became part of the public collection of the Hungarian National Gallery. There are philological uncertainties about the date and circumstances of this event. According to the museum card, it was donated by Pauer to the public collection of the Hungarian National Gallery in 1996. In the oeuvre catalogue of Pauer, Annamária Szőke states that the bronze sculpture was purchased by the Gallery in 1988.

Art criticism around the millennium emphasised the supposedly critical aspects of Pauer's concept.⁴⁰ When discussing the sculpture, authors interpreting Pauer's work nearly always emphasised the artist's trademark invention of the concept of *Pseudo*, which invokes the tension between reality and the illusionary nature of representation. Reference to a conceptual 'shell' is applied routinely to the bronze sculpture, as the two halves of the imprints are not seamlessly

joined. However, it in itself cannot guarantee a meaningful difference from a traditional lifelike cast, as is evidenced by the published photos of the statue. Annamária Szőke also stressed the sociological dimension of the project⁴¹, but did not address how one should understand the notion of Pauer taking a sociological imprint of society. No one asked whether the chosen medium was capable of documenting social and sociological phenomena or what the imprint of the winners' bodies actually exposed. Of course, it can be said very generally that the body of the winner of a beauty pageant does represent social expectations about the then prevailing ideal body image and concept of beauty; yet, the lifelike sculpture of the body attached to an individual's name actually conceals the social processes that constitute that system of expectations and fails to take into account the political nature of the social attention to women's appearance. In the analyses, the authors slide back and forth between talking about the sculpture of the winning figure and talking about the installations made from the imprints of *Szépségminták*. The writings attempt to explain the original, sociologically charged concept from the installations, and in doing so, try to project a progressive content onto the bronze sculpture.⁴²

In a long essay about Pauer's retrospective exhibition in a prestigious journal, leading art critic Géza Pernecky praises the bronze sculpture as an outstanding artistic product, the most beautiful work of his old friend, 'a visual legend.'⁴³ But his words of praise seems to me completely misguided: '[...] instead of aestheticizing, Gyula instantly reached into the proliferating cancerous tissues of contemporary phenomena like a surgeon.'⁴⁴ A decade later, learning about the artistic problems of the sculpture and the anomalies surrounding its creation, it became clear to me that Pauer's practice in this case was not the cure but the symptom of the whole fabric of the ill-fated beauty pageant with its complex social and artistic contexts.



Agnés Eperjesi, *You Should Feel Honoured*, 2019, exhibition interior at Fészek Gallery, Courtesy of acb Gallery

Response to the case: the project *You Should Feel Honoured*

In writing this text and illuminating the critical deficit surrounding Pauer's sculpture, I have found Annamária Szőke's study written for Pauer's oeuvre catalogue immensely helpful, as the data published there can offer starting points for the critical assessment of Pauer's sculpture, even if the author emphasised other lines of inquiry. In private conversations with numerous art professionals and those with close ties to art, I have encountered reservations about Pauer's work and, at times, quite negative attitudes to it. But similarly to the situation around 1990, I found virtually no trace of this perspective in the recent scholarly literature, except for a few sentences of Sándor Hornyik's

2011 online review of Pauer's exhibition at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA). He expresses critical attitude, saying that Pauer's *Pseudo* programme becomes schizophrenic when it involves human subjects in the game.⁴⁵

There are two curatorial works that previously hinted at the hidden relationship between pornography, exploitation, and abuse, and Pauer's piece in the framework of exhibitions. I am unaware, however, of any interpretive texts by the curators accompanying these gestures. In 2009, the work was included in the *Gender Check* exhibition at the MUMOK in Vienna, which was the first time it was presented – as proposed by Edit András – along with the documentary film in the context of an exhibition. This added more nuance to the previously homogenous art historical assessment of the sculpture. Yet, the two works – the bronze sculpture and the 90-minute documentary film – were not connected for the viewers. In her excellent study included in the exhibition catalogue, András did not mention the significance of this juxtaposition, so the critical linking of Pauer's work and the film remained tacit.

Kata Oltai, curator of the exhibition *Second Skin* in 2014, presented the documentary film, but rather than displaying it alongside the sculpture, juxtaposed it with the pages of the January 1986 issue of *Lui* magazine.



Agnes Eperjesi, *You Should Feel Honoured*, 2019, performance documentation, exhibition interior at Fészek Gallery, Courtesy of acb Gallery

I myself participated in both of these group exhibitions and during the latter one in 2014, I had a chance to rewatch the 1987 documentary film *Szépleányok (Pretty Girls)*. The disturbing plaster cast scene in the film and the sex magazine pages next to it on the same wall were for me the clearest and most accurate illustration of John Berger's thesis: the nude systematically objectified women in Western art, and this tradition of fine art has continued much more broadly in popular visual culture. As visual cultural aspects have always been left out of media approaches, it was clear that the artistic response is the only way to explore the subject.

In addition to all this, important social issues also helped me to develop this idea. I am referring to the sexual harassment cases that made a big splash in the media in 2015-16 and my experiences at the Hungarian University of Fine Arts, where I was teaching at the time. As a teacher of photography, I was concerned with contemporary trends in visual representation with a focus on ethical issues, which we discussed with students in class. Some of them participated in developing this project, namely Dávid Demeter, who had the idea of hacking the sculpture, and Marianna Bódi, who created the 3D model of the head. Ági Arató helped in finding the title of the project.

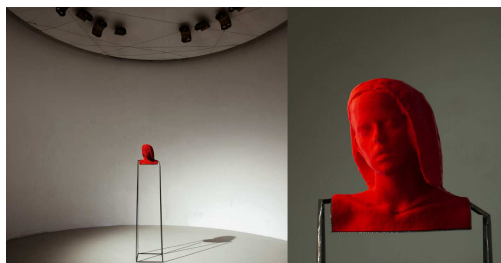


Agnés Eperjesi, *You Should Feel Honoured*, 2018, performance at the Hungarian National Gallery, Courtesy of acb Gallery

In the end, the real catalyst was the #MeToo movement, which focused primarily on the film and theatre industry, while the visual arts remained untouched. Together with Kata Oltai, I submitted a plan to the Hungarian National Gallery, centred around Pauer's bronze statue *The Beauty of Hungary 1985*, which was part of the museum's public collection. Our proposal submitted to the Gallery stated:

'We would like to cover the sculpture of the beauty queen. Not with clothes, but in a robe made out of the fabric of the red carpet runway. The red carpet is an important symbol of both the beauty, advertising and fashion industries, and of political and power representation. [...] We will cover the naked body in a way that will also make it the support of the carpet: it is the body that upholds and sustains the symbol of stardom. The long red drape evokes the festive mantle or train befitting a queen, yet it is also a constraining, paralysing burden. [...] The work entitled *Catwalk* is a red carpet approximately 10-15 meters in length. The work is surrounded by documents illuminating the context of the creation of Pauer's sculpture, which enable viewers to form their own interpretations'.

The sculpture has been standing in a semi-public place, a corridor connecting two wings of the building, for some years now. On 11th October 2018, however, it was moved from the corridor and exhibited in the Cupola Hall on the occasion of a programme, presented as part of a guided tour. This presented an opportunity for an unexpected performance, though one ultimately approved by the Gallery. The sculpture eventually bore a thinner and therefore more easily manageable fabric on its shoulders than originally planned. During the guide's presentation, retreated into the background, I cut out the letters YOU SHOULD FEEL HONOURED from a pale textile, and after most of the guests had moved on with the guided tour, I stitched the letters of the text on the red fabric one by one. Finally, I attached the approximately 15-meter-long fabric to the wall of the Cupola Hall.



Agnes Eperjesi, *Pathos and Critique*, 2019, 3D print, PLA filament and iron scaffolding, Courtesy of acb Gallery

The exhibition *You Should Feel Honoured* took place in 2019 in Fészek Art Club. Using both of the building's exhibition spaces that were separated by two floors, I presented the documentation of the performance in the lower space, accompanied by the research results: publications from that time; the museum index card of Pauer's bronze sculpture and other artworks of mine related to Pauer's sculpture and its story, like the *Catwalk* series and the photographic work called *Tobacco Store Pictures*, which reflects the contradictory situation of visual representation and its re-traumatizing potential. The circular space of the upper room is reminiscent of the Gallery's Dome Hall, and the staircase that leads to it is lined with male portraits. I placed here a new corrective monument that stood alone. This sculpture is entitled *Pathos and Critique*.⁴⁶ A replica of the head of Csilla Molnár's bronze statue was modelled in 3D using photographs without touching the original statue and printed out in red PLA filament. The bust rests on an airy metal scaffolding that does not represent the body in any way, but merely evokes the movement originally set in contrapposto through the asymmetry of the shoulders.

The book, the third part of my project was published in 2021 with contributions from almost a dozen art historians and social scientists.⁴⁷ As the concluding piece of the project, it is intended to be a source of insight and contextualisation. The book focuses on the vulnerability of the female body from an artistic perspective, in which the traditional artistic representations of women play a major role. The story presented in the book begins at the local level and expands into a global issue, revealing the complexity of the period of regime change in Hungary. Their critical approach is part of a wider process of rethinking women and the female body in art and society. The book is proposing a critical engagement not only with the past, but also with the present. Ágnes Berecz's essay refers to some current political issues both in Hungary and worldwide.⁴⁸

After 35 years of professional silence, the art-critical analysis of *Beauty Action* has now begun. There is no question that neither I, nor the nearly dozen art historians and social scientists who contributed to the book reporting on the project, consider Gyula Pauer's art as a whole to be the target of criticism. This critical approach is part of a wider process of rethinking women's presence in society. I feel it is time this case was put in a new light. As Edit András put it during the 2019 talk at Fészek Gallery: 'how is it possible that we are discussing this case now, in 2019? This is the tough question. The much tougher one, I think. There are not simply brakes in Hungary, there are really committed gatekeepers on the scene.'⁴⁹



Agnes Eperjesi, *You Should Feel Honoured*, 2021, book and cover, Courtesy of acb
Gallery

1. By history of mentalities, I mean the behavioral strategies that the leaders of socialist countries used to align the expectations of the Soviet system with their own goals, and whose patterns played a significant role in shaping society. This is among the reasons for the differences between the countries of the region. ↵
2. This text is an augmented and revised version of an essay published in 2021 in the book *You Should Feel Honoured*. Ágnes Eperjesi, 'On the Contexts of Gyula Pauer's sculpture *The Beauty of Hungary 1985*', in: *You Should Feel Honoured*, András Beck ed., Budapest: acb, Neowatt, 2021, 89-98. Translated by Katalin Orbán. ↵
3. Gyula Pauer, 'Kariatídák', 1985, for the stage of Imre Kálmán's musical 'Csárdáskirálynő' at Margitsziget Open-Air Stage. ↵
4. Gyula Pauer, 'I. Pseudo Manifest', 1970. ↵
5. Gyula Pauer, 'Pszeudo búcsú a terheességtől' (body painting, performance) 1970; Gyula Pauer, 'Maya' (wood sculpture with painted textile), 1978. ↵
6. Gyula Pauer, 'Receptleírás figurális selyembevonatú tölgyfa-pszeudoszobor készítéséhez,' 1975, in: *Pauer*, Annamária Szőke ed., Budapest: MTA Művészettörténeti Kutatóintézet, 2005, 161. ↵
7. From the model's point of view, making her full body cast requires mental and physical preparation and endurance. ↵
8. Annamária Szőke, 'Szépségminták, héjplasztikák és fotósobrok, 1985-1995,' in: *Pauer*, 235. ↵
9. *Szépleányok (Pretty Girls)*, dir. by András Dér and László Hartai (BBS, 1987). <<https://filmarchiv.hu/hu/alapfilmek/film/szepleanyok>> [accessed 10 December 2020]. ↵
10. László Hartai interviewed by Ágnes Eperjesi and Kata Oltai. Ágnes Eperjesi, Kata Oltai, "Nem végezte el a magára mért feladatot". (2018). <<https://artportal.hu/magazin/nem-vegezt-e-el-a-magara-mert-feladatot/>> (accessed: 10th December 2020). ↵
11. Annamária Szőke was the main researcher of Gyula Pauer's work. In 1986 she wrote her thesis on him at the Department of Art History. ↵
12. Éva Körner was an art historian, an outstanding critic and analyst of her time. ↵
13. Annamária Szőke, 'Szépségminták, héjplasztikák és fotósobrok, 1985-1995,' in: *Pauer*, 236.

- Éva Körner, 'An Abstract and Concrete Sculptor: Gyula Pauer', *Filmvilág* 5, (1987), 25. ↵
14. John Berger, *Ways of seeing*, London: BBC and Penguin, 1972, 45-64. ↵
15. Miklós Hernádi, *Nemek és igenek. A feminizmus vitaanyagából*, Budapest: Minerva, 1988. The title is a pun literally meaning 'Nos and Yeses', but *nem* also means 'sex/gender' in Hungarian. ↵
16. 'The Body Politics of the Neo-avant-garde. Judit Acsády, Zsófia Bán, Zsolt K. Horváth, Emese Kürti, Kata Oltai, and Miklós Erhardt in Conversation', in: *You Should Feel Honoured*, 79-80'. ↵
17. Dóra Hegyi and Zsuzsa László, *Nude/Model – exhibition and performance by Orsolya Drozdik*. <<http://tranzit.org/exhibitionarchive/tag/drozdik-orsolya/>> (accessed: 10th December 2020) ↵
18. Sándor Friderikusz, *Isten óvd a királynőt!* (Self-published, 1987). ↵
19. Ibid., 168. ↵
20. Annamária Szőke, 241. ↵
21. Éva Körner, 'Emlékmű az állhatatlan eszménynek', *Jelenkor*, (1992), 533. ↵
22. Ibid., 532 ↵
23. Sándor Friderikusz, *Isten óvd a királynőt!* (Self-published, 1987), 159. ↵
24. Art historian Emese Révész interviewed by Ágnes Eperjesi (2018 August), in: *You Should Feel Honoured*, 93. ↵
25. *Alkotás útja*, Tilos Radio, 20 June 2019. Guests: Annamária Szőke and János Rauschenberger, <<https://archive.tilos.hu/cache/tilos-20190620-210000-223000.mp3>> at 1:00:08, [accessed 10 December 2022]. ↵
26. Zita Kalmár was the sole contestant who didn't sign the contract with Hungarian Media. An important additional detail about the maneuvering behind the scenes (managed by comrade István Fodros, director of Magyar Média) is that at the time, Zita was a professional model, so she should't have been a contestant in the first place. She was nearly disqualified several times due to the lack of a contract, but they somehow always managed to get her into the next round. The Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party disapproved of István Fodros's activities and he was expelled from the party soon after this case. ↵
27. Péter György, 'A cinizmus kritikája,' in: *Művészet és média találkozása a boncasztalon*, Budapest: Kulturtrade, 1995, 155. ↵
28. Béla Bacsó's photos were published in Pauer's oeuvre catalogue, but they did not become part of the Pauer archive. ↵
29. Friderikusz, 161. ↵
30. *Szépleányok (Pretty Girls)*, dir. by András Dér and László Hartai (BBS, 1987). ↵
31. Melinda Kalmár, *Történelmi galaxisok vonzásában - Magyarország és a szovjetrendszer 1945-1990*, Budapest: Osiris, 2014, 511. ↵
32. 'The Body Politics of the Neo-avant-garde'. Judit Acsády, Zsófia Bán, Zsolt K. Horváth, Emese Kürti, Kata Oltai, and Miklós Erhardt in conversation. 12. June 2019. ↵
33. Boldizsár Vörös, '„Néhányan kifogásolták fürdőruhám fazonját” Vélemények a meztelenség

- felhasználásáról a magyarországi reklámokban az 1970–1980-as évek fordulóján’, in: Emese Gyimesi, András Lénárt, Erzsébet Takács eds., *A test a társadalomban*, Budapest: Hajnal István Kör Társadalomtörténeti Egyesület, 2015, 254. ↵
34. T.G., Hol a határ? *Tollasbál*, 1984, 11. ↵
35. Ágnes Eperjesi, ‘Magánérdek és közkinccs. A női test közhasznúsítása’, in: Magdolna Jákfalvi, Árpád Kékesi Kun, Gabriella Kiss, and Orsolya Ring eds., *Újjáépítés és államosítás. Tanulmánykötet a kultúra államosításának kezdeti éveiről*, Budapest: Arktisz and TMA, 2020, 189-200. ↵
36. Zoltán Zétényi, ‘Szép lány a gipszben’, *Magyar Ifjúság* [Hungarian Youth], 52/29 (1985), 13. ↵
37. Zoltán Arday, ‘The Apple of Ugly Paris’, *Filmvilág* 5, May 1987, 23–25. ↵
38. Éva Körner, ‘An Abstract and Concrete Sculptor: Gyula Pauer’, *Filmvilág* 5, May 1987, 25. in: *You Should Feel Honoured*. ↵
39. Éva Körner: ‘Emlékmű az állhatatlan eszménynek’, *Jelenkor*, 35/6 (1992),. Quoted by Szőke, in: *Pauer*, 238. ↵
40. Szőke 239. Éva Körner, ‘Az absztrakt és konkrét szobrász: Pauer Gyula’, *Filmvilág* 5, (May 1987), 25, Éva Körner, ‘Pseudo’, *Új Művészet*, (1991, 2/9), 17-20, Éva Körner: ‘Emlékmű az állhatatlan eszménynek’, *Jelenkor*, (1992, 35/6), 532-534, in: Katalin Aknai, Sándor Hornyik eds., *Avantgárd – Izmusokkal és izmusok nélkül*, Budapest: MTA Művészettörténeti Kutatóintézet, 2005. ↵
41. Szőke 235 ↵
42. Klára Hudra, ‘Szépségek levetett burkai’, *Új Tükör*, 22 (1987), in: *Pauer* 253-254, György Kozma, ‘Testfelszín korrekt másolatban’, *Élet és Irodalom*, 4 November 1988, 12, in: *Pauer* 255, Éva Körner, ‘Emlékmű az állhatatlan eszménynek’, *Jelenkor*, (1992, 35/6), 532-534, in: *Pauer* 257-258. ↵
43. Géza Pernecky, ‘Héj és lepel,’ *Holmi*, (2006 July), 968. Éva Körner, ‘Pseudo’ (1991), Szőke 236. ↵
44. Géza Pernecky, ‘Püthia Budapesten. Jegyzetek Körner Éva művészeti írásairól’, in: Éva Körner, *Avantgárd – izmusokkal és izmusok nélkül*, Budapest: MTA Művészettörténeti Kutatóintézet, 2005, 55. ↵
45. Sándor Hornyik, *Pátosz és illúzió. A Pseudo az MTA Képtárában*, <http://tranzitblog.hu/patosz_es_illuzio_a_pszeudo_az_mta_keptaraban/> (2011). (accessed: 10th December 2022). ↵
46. The title of Sándor Hornyik’s text ‘Pathos and Illusion’ inspired the title of the new bust called *Pathos and Critic*. ↵
47. Essays by Ágnes Berecz and Péter György, interview with Sándor Hornyik, round-table talk participants Judit Acsády, Edit András, Zsófia Bán, Miklós Erhardt, Zsolt K. Horváth, Emese Kürti, Kata Oltai, and introduction by András Beck. ↵
48. Ágnes Berecz, ‘Calling the Dead in Budapest, in: *You Should Feel Honoured*, 31-40. First published in *ArtMargins* (2020 March) < <https://artmargins.com/calling-the-dead-in-budapest->

agnes-eperjesi/> ↩

49. Ágnes Eperjesi, 'The Body Politics of the Neo-avant-garde', in: *You Should Feel Honoured*, 84. ↩

Ágnes Eperjesi

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for 10 years. Recently she has been an associate professor at the Budapest Metropolitan University (METU). Eperjesi initiated her career with a solo show in 1989 and has been exhibiting regularly since then, both in Hungary and in the international art scene.

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