

## WORKS, 1962-1967

- Csaba Koncz -

Art+Text Budapest is delighted to present a retrospective exhibition of Csaba Koncz, which gives the most complete cross-sectional overview of the artist's oeuvre created in half a decade only, between 1962 and 1967.

The photographic work of Csaba Koncz occupies a special place in the history of Hungarian progressive photography. The world-traveller hippie Koncz was as interested in film, music, poetry and Eastern philosophy as he was in photography. Decidedly small in terms of quantity, Koncz's oeuvre represents a uniquely high quality, linked simultaneously to a nonfigurative approach and the aesthetics of Arte Povera.

Koncz began his academic studies at the Hungarian University of Technology and Economics in 1957, but he never graduated; instead, he and a few others founded the avant-garde intellectual circle of the legendary Muskátli presszó in Váci street.

The nonconformist Koncz (*"I was born a hippie"* - he says about himself) defected in 1967 and went on to spend decades as a wandering hippie musician in different Western European and Asian countries. After the change of the regime in Hungary he returned home. He has been living in Balatonhenye since 1992. Although he was never an active member of professional public circles, two of the most important theorists of progressive photography in the 1960s, the elderly Iván Hevesy and the young Géza Perneczky, understood his aspirations perfectly, and so did photographer colleagues Zoltán Nagy or György Lőrinczy. In a late interview Nagy said the following about their common driving force: *'All three of us thought that socialist realism's false rhetoric and pathos bathing in potent back-lights was ridiculous and kitschy, and we were seeking something simple, honest, and elementary, a new departure in photography.'* (Fotóművészet, 2005/3-4.) The professional scene, on the other hand, received them with rejective incomprehension. Since much of the competent photographic community defected - just like Koncz did - for him real redemption came when, in his seminal work published in 2007 (Neo-avant-garde Trends in Hungarian Art Photography, 1965-1984) Sándor Szilágyi dedicated an entire chapter to the unique work of Koncz.

*"I wasn't looking for a motif, I kept going, and the image found me"* - he held about the profound method he employed when searching for a theme, which was combined with his wanderings.

Koncz started to take photographs in 1962. His first photos were taken in Bőszénfa's Roma slum (letting the play of light and shadow occasionally overwrite the documentary character of the theme).

Because of the tightly cropped composition, the photographic elements repeated in interesting rhythms - strange things in the snow, bullet holes from 1956 in old buildings of Pest - appear as abstract motifs in his photos.

Sensitive to black-and-white contrasts, Koncz's mode of seeing came under the influence of Op Art, and in order to enhance the graphical effect, he then started to photograph whimsically twisting wire nets, specially emphasizing the graphical playfulness originating from the blurred focus of the photos, which was considered a mistake by contemporary professional circles. By employing this selective focus, Koncz let the wire nets fade into nothing in the distance, thereby opening the space of the image to philosophy and metaphysics.

The most mature works from his oeuvre are those „late“ photos from 1967, which summarise, technically as well as intellectually, everything that he had done for abstraction before. It was in those works that his approach employing minimalist reduction and non-figuration got intertwined once and for all with the poor materials of Arte Povera. He avoided the self-serving bravura of crowded, rich views; instead he photographed pieces of iron placed in the snow or in front of the blue sky. One type of the late “iron pictures” experimented with the calligraphic forms of the sometimes out of focus edges of wide metal strips, while representatives of another type of these pictures look as if they were pictograms of small anthropomorphic creatures put together from springs, hoops, screws and nails.

The exhibition at Art+Text Budapest introduces a complete cross-section of Koncz's oeuvre by presenting vintage photographs from the early Gypsy portrait through the minimalist landscapes and the close-up photographs with their abstract effect, all the way to the Arte Povera-like wire shots, Op Art compositions, and “iron pictures”.

The show constitutes part of the gallery's photographic program titled Mutineers which aims to present outstanding oeuvres from Hungarian progressive photography based on Sándor Szilágyi's pioneering book titled Neo-avant-garde Trends in Hungarian Art Photography, 1965-1984.

On view: 31 January - 1 March 2019