

# BRIDGETTE **MAYER** GALLERY

## **Philadelphia**

### **"Old World/New World: Common Ground"**

#### **Nexus Gallery**

We say we live in a "Global Village," yet in the year 2001 it is still difficult for Americans to get a sense of the art being produced in other parts of the world. The contemporary sculpture of Eastern Europe remains almost as unfamiliar to us as that from more distant lands, so this exhibition of recent work by 17 Hungarian sculptors, plus an equal number of artists from the U.S., is especially welcome.

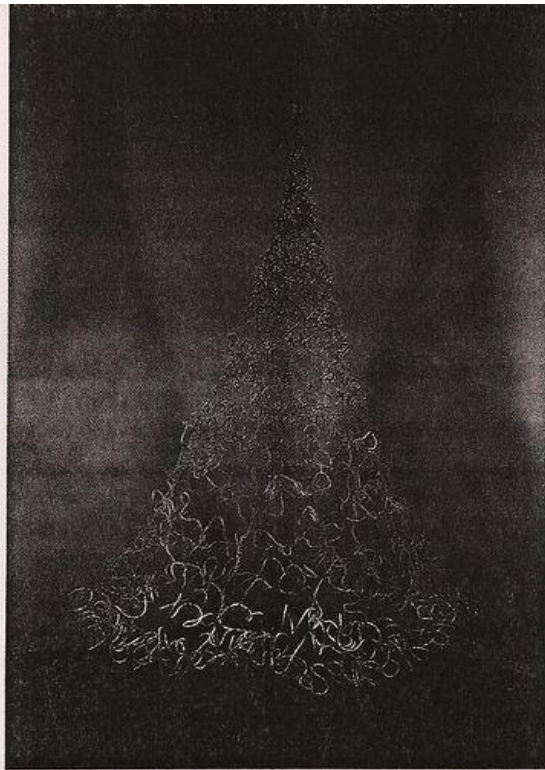
"Old World/New World: Common Ground" was a joint venture by members of the Hungarian Sculpture Association and Philadelphia Sculptors, who held their first combined exhibition in Budapest during the summer of 1999. The two groups are currently planning a second round of shows, first in Hungary and subsequently in Philadelphia. The exhibition of 34 works, crowded into Nexus's modest space, included a broad range of materials, subjects, and styles, but

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it clearly demonstrated the shared interests of the sculptors from both countries.

The Hungarians and the Americans represented here favor either references to the human body or pure abstraction, in roughly equal proportions. There were also several intriguing three-dimensional still lifes (such as Dina Wind's *Still Life with Pitcher No. 2*) and landscapes (including Ildikó Zsemlye's graceful, delicate *Forest XV*), plus works such as Elsa Johnson Tarantal's untitled, lyrical porcelain reliefs, which seem to evoke the sea. Despite its diminutive size, one of the most striking sculptures was Tamás Körösenyi's *Voices of the Land*, an acid-green, curving form made from paper. The abstract series of calligraphic shapes appears to fly through space, only momentarily suspended by one narrow edge on a small square of wood. Barry Parker's ominous, erotically charged *Osiris Seed* dominated one section of the room, its visible welds adding to the menacing quality that radiates from its rounded base to its bristling tip. Considerably larger, but with almost no physical substance, *My Heart Beating*, by Yukie Kobayashi, is a lacy, openwork, conical form that hung from the ceiling, its colors gradually changing from deep red to pale pink.

Humor is not especially common in sculpture, but this exhibition contained several examples—most notably the dynamic, stylized surfer dude (entitled *X*) fashioned by Joe Mooney out of flat, brightly colored pieces of steel that look for all the world like bits of torn paper. Equally effective, though considerably more complex in both aesthetic and conceptual terms, is Ann Chahbandour's *In Concert*. Here, the artist combines religious satire with kitsch, creating an extraordinarily detailed, miniature scene of a satyr—complete with cloven hoofs, horns, and curly tail—playing the violin, while following



Left: Yukie Kobayashi, *My Heart Beating*, 2000. Paper and wire, 5 x 5 x 9 ft. Below: Tamás Körösenyi, *Voices of the Land*, 2000. Paper, wood, and iron, 44 x 32 x 18 cm. Both works shown in "Old World/New World: Common Ground."

a conductor whose baton-wielding hand unexpectedly metamorphoses into the body of a serpent, which in turn has a sinister, humanoid head at the other end. The whole ensemble is fashioned from bronze, with an appropriately poisonous-looking green patina, parts of which—in a final, exuberant gesture—have been dusted with green glitter. *Garden View*, a far more restrained—though still wry—silvery, tin "bucket" by Tamás Gaál, was suspended on its side so that viewers could look through its open bottom and appreciate the compositional interest added by the two curved, metallic fragments attached to the interior surface.

One of the most intriguing aspects of "Old World/New World" was the fact that simply by looking at the sculptures, it was impossible to tell which works were created by Hungarians, and which by Americans. This is unexpected, given the different backgrounds of these mid-career artists, half of whom live in a country that was under Communist rule until 1989.

Given the many challenges involved with putting together any international sculpture show, the sizes of the Hungarian works, in particular, had to be limited. But the handsome, architectonic pieces made by Agnes Péter—known for creating monumental, indoor and outdoor installations in her own country—are less effective when seen on the scale of her Aztec-inspired, bronze *Tower*. It would be wonderful, in future "exchanges," to be able to display some larger works by both local and visiting sculptors—ideally in a venue that provided some outdoor space.

—Nancy G. Heller