

Catches the very fine displacements

András Szöllősi-Nagy — collectionneur — 2021 · texte en anglais

“My grandfather was a painter of the Stalinist genre” – said a young Hungarian photographer in the kitchen of our old stone house in Saint-Maur-des-Fossés not far from Paris. “So what?” – I reacted. “Well, I am just telling you.”

In those days a fairly active life happened in the old house thanks to Hungarians visiting Paris and to those who lived there for decades and had roots already in France. We became though part of the Paris based Hungarian art community much earlier. The circular dinner parties provided opportunities to build relations and friendships that are still working today after so many years. A generation gap certainly existed in our case, as most of the artists were older than us by a few decades. That gap grew into a two generations difference for Illés. Gabor Czitrom, the husband of a wonderful Hungarian-French painter, Anna Mark, was a civil engineer like myself. He worked for the French catastrophe mitigation organization so we happily discussed disaster management, particularly the prediction of the catastrophic events, during those dinners. That was, however, a tall order to follow for the artists around the table, therefore, they shut us up in no time arguing that we are fairly disastrous ourselves so it is enough of the shop talk. From then on the dinner parties were called disaster dinners although it had nothing to do with the equality of food on the table. Illés was already staying with us when we hosted one of those catastrophe dinners. Vera Molnar, Lucien and Judit Hervé, François Fejtő, tout le monde of the Paris based Hungarian art community. In his subdued and low key but thoroughly persistent style Illés was shooting around with his camera to catch the finest displacements. An example to this is his video about Hervé when he put himself into a horizontal position after a catastrophe dinner. He did not move at all, except his chest was moving up and down in a hardly perceptible manner – but he was there under the blanket. What happens after small displacements and the evolution of sequential changes interested Illés a great deal.

These relations gradually deepened into long standing friendships that in turn led to the artist portraits, some of which are displayed at the exhibition. All are characteristic on their own merit as visual entities yet they reflect the personalities of the artists photographed, even their relation with their own works of art. Portraits of Marta Pan, Vera Molnar, Janos Ber, Tibor Csernus and many others bear witness to this. Illés often recognizes surprisingly shocking details that became important elements of the compositions. For instance, the portrait of Csernus, the painter, and the gun hanging on the gallery of his atelier pointed at him. A whole human history is there. When Illés did the portrait Csernus was already in deep crisis as his gallerist, out of sheer business considerations, dropped him. No more exhibition opportunities. From a successful star all of a sudden Csernus became a pariah and died not long after.

Illés did not like to work in broad daylight. One day he was wobbled down the staircase at the wee hours of 9 AM when he saw me standing in front of a mirror working on fixing my necktie. He was presumably shocked by that as he never saw me in a formal outfit so he grabbed his camera and made a shot. Exactly when I was pulling the longer part of the necktie through the knot. I look like on that photo as if I was being hanged. “That’s the best shot of you” noted sardonically some of my dear friends not hiding their wishes.

Illés is always thinking in images, no matter what whether they are still or moving. It is indifferent for him. The image is important. Is it perhaps a genetic code arching over the painter grandpa and the cameraman father?

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