Magical Realism and Surrealism (Szolnok, 4-5 Dec 25)

Hungary, Szolnok, Dec 4–05, 2025
Deadline: Apr 30, 2025

Emese Révész, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Institute of Art History

Magical Realism and Surrealism in Central and Eastern European Graphic Art between 1945 and 1990.

During the decades of the socialist era (1945-1990), graphic art flourished in Central and Eastern European countries that were under Soviet influence. While reproduction techniques in art were supported by the cultural policy of the socialist state for ideological reasons, graphic art experienced a new renaissance globally. However, one underexplored aspect of this period's art history is the tendency in graphic art, which did not associate itself neither with the official state art nor fully embraced avant-garde formal experimentations. Instead, it represented an alternative modernism, reflecting a third way approach. It was an intellectual attitude often characterized by escapism, a deep engagement with the use of traditional graphic techniques and the alignment with the pictorial traditions of medieval graphics (for example, echoing Dürer). It emphasized the appreciation of craftsmanship, figurative, narrative and allegorical imagery, and the reinterpretation of Renaissance and Baroque iconographic types. An additional feature of this graphic art was the anachronistic incorporation of post-war scientific achievements and technical machinery related to space exploration and Cold War weaponry into a classicising, mythological milieu.

We invite papers addressing the following themes in relation to Central and Eastern European graphic art of the period 1945-1990:
- Surrealist and magic realist tendencies in graphic art of the period
- Modern reinterpretations of the classical and Christian mythology (for example, the temptation of St Anthony)
- Homage to the old masters such as Dürer, Bosch or Bruegel
- Visual traditions and worldviews of folklore as a source for alternative modernism
- Hybrid anachronisms: the integration of technical achievements and contemporary political references into traditional iconographic frameworks

The conference gives an occasion to present the outcomes of the research project, funded by the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund, which examines the oeuvre of three Hungarian graphic artists, Margit Ágotha (1938-2015), Mihály Gácsi (1926-1987) and Csaba Rékassy (1937-1989) and outlines their broader historical context. These artists, active primarily between 1960 and 1980 within the socialist art scene, worked extensively with graphic techniques. Rékassy was an exceptional master of engraving, while Margit Ágotha and Mihály Gácsi were experts in relief printing. All three of them were frequently engaged with biblical and mythological themes, often reinter-

preting them in contemporary contexts. Rékassy was particularly drawn to ancient mythology, illustrating Ovid's Metamorphosis, while also interested in space exploration and astronomy; Margit Ágotha created cosmological compositions in the manner of medieval popular engravings, and Gácsi reimagined biblical stories, often alluding to Cold War anxieties in his dystopian visions of the future. Members of our research team will present comparative studies of these artists at the conference.

The conference welcomes papers that contextualize these parallel artistic tendencies within the wider framework of Central and Eastern European graphic art. It is important to give a definite outline of those tendencies of the region that are closely related to surrealism and magic realism. Although these archaic, narrative or metaphorical representations have often been described in art history as apolitical, their esoteric or escapist vision and their frequently self-ironic or grotesque qualities can be interpreted as subtle critiques of their time.

Conference format: hybrid (in person or online)
Conference languages: Hungarian, English
Location: Szolnok, Damjanich János Museum, Hungary
Date: 4-5 December 2025.
Abstracts (max. 2,000 characters) for 20-minute presentations in Hungarian or English should be submitted to Nándor Szebenyi szebenyi@djm.hu by 30 April 2025.
Notifications of acceptance will be announced by 31 May 2025.
Accommodation in Szolnok will be provided for conference speakers.
We welcome both in person and online participations, please indicate your preference in the application.

Selected proceedings from the conference will be published in a digital format in 2026.

Reference:

CFP: Magical Realism and Surrealism (Szolnok, 4-5 Dec 25). In: ArtHist.net, Feb 9, 2025 (accessed Nov 4, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/43911>.