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**“Le Surréalisme en 1947”: export and exchange of ideas in postwar
international Surrealism***

The International Surrealist Exhibition of 1947 entitled “Le Surréalisme en 1947”, organized at the Maeght gallery in Paris may be considered as a condensation point in the history of Surrealism that opened up (short-term) possibilities for new groups and generations desiring to join the movement, and at the same time represented the closing note for several small-scale Surrealist projects by individuals and groups. Under the pretext of the exhibition, young French and Belgian Surrealists turned against the group of artists gathered around Breton and initiated the establishment of the group of revolutionary Surrealists. Shortly afterwards, the relationship worsened between Breton and those members of the group that represented a personal continuity to the pre-World War Surrealist group, and new exclusions and exits took place as a result – not for the first or last time in the history of the movement. At the same time, one of the novelties of the exhibition, the relatively substantial presence of East and Central European artists and theoreticians, proved to be unrepeatable as a result of the consolidation of the Soviet-type cultural politics in Romania, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, where political power soon drastically restricted the possibilities of contacts with Paris, and stigmatized all sorts of avant-garde artistic activity in these countries.

Surrealism’s direction in the postwar period was outlined by André Breton’s works like *Mad love*, *Arcane 17* and *The Anthology of Black Humor*, works that insisted more and more on an inward journey, a sort of utopia or rather eupsychia that connected the changes in the external world to a change within the self. This new direction was connected to the surrealists’ conflictual experiences with the Communist party and also to the war. Breton found allies in developing the new theories of surrealism in authors like Pierre Mabille who published in 1940 a sort of anthology with comments, *Le miroir du merveilleux*, the term marvellous being important also in the early stages of surrealism but getting more and more importance during the 1940s. Authors like Victor Brauner and

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Jacques Hérold, Gherasim Luca and Árpád Mezei developed an increasingly strong and intense relation to Breton's theories during and immediately after the war.

As current research projects on Surrealism have already pointed out, the history of the current can be described as a space of constant and mutual exchange of ideas. Delia Ungureanu pointed out also that this exchange of ideas goes in fact far beyond the Surrealist groups themselves:

surrealism was a group practice that benefited from a great world network of agents and mediators even beyond what the surrealists themselves imagined. This history challenges traditional notions of direct influence and unidirectional transfer, including the portrayal of surrealism in terms of in-group dynamics [...]. Instead, we find networks of mutual exchange and transformation, which far exceed the confines of the organized surrealist groups, with their constant struggles over hierarchies, subordination, and authority.¹

It is important however to document the exchange of ideas in its in-group aspects in order to see how major events like an international surrealist exhibition trigger new ideas and new intellectual geographies. The 1947 exhibition is in many ways a milestone in the history of international Surrealism and an example of what Delia Ungureanu calls "challenges of unidirectional transfer". In my article I will examine, from the point of view of the authors participating at the exhibition, involved in the preparations and submitting writings for the catalogue, what sort of importance was attached to the participation itself, and how these authors positioned themselves relative to Surrealism before and after the event. My goal is also to outline the Surrealist network structure of which, due to the above mentioned cultural and political shifts, only the Western European nodes remained active by the end of the 40s.

1. The historical context and concept of organizing the exhibition

The exhibition of 1947 documented the reorganization of Surrealism and its newly accentuated presence in Paris after the years of the Second World War, during which André Breton first sought refuge in Marseille and then in North America. The

¹ Delia Ungureanu, *From Paris to Tlön: Surrealism as World Literature* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 3.

movement had to respond, on the one hand, to analyses inspired by Maurice Nadeau's *History of Surrealism*², which suggested that the movement – as well as the group – had ceased to exist. On the other hand, the movement had to find its place in the current intellectual milieu in France, dominated by the presence of Communists and Existentialists, as a kind of countermeasure to the country's presence in the war.

In June 1947, the group also composed a manifesto entitled "*Rupture inaugurale*", in which it tried to clarify its approach to politics, and at the same time to respond to contemporary criticism regarding the activity of the group. The primary message of the manifesto signed by fifty authors is the announcement of abstention from party politics, while the group continues to regard the revolutionary activity of the working class as close to its program. One of the fundamental questions of the manifesto is of moral character: it starts from the premise that the capitalist state system must cease as a result of historical necessity and targeted political activity; for this reason, the proletarian revolution is a desirable turn, but not the goal itself.³

An important part of the manifesto is the argument for the need to create a new myth – a doctrine that can replace Christianity and, in a moral sense, provide a more progressive foundation for the new society. The reason for this is that the signatories of the manifesto did not believe that the transformation of the social/economical system would automatically result in a moral and intellectual transformation as well. The above make it clear where Surrealism tried to position itself in the postwar situation: it saw itself as a leftist, revolutionary movement willing to co-operate with various parties (the anarchists, Trotskyists are specifically mentioned in the manifesto), but only on a voluntary and sovereign basis, and firmly rejecting Stalinism. Surrealism would have played a role in transforming mentality and morality; the last part of the manifesto refers back to those conceptual factors that André Breton made part of Surrealist myths in his various works – a desire for the myth, black humour, objective chance and the like, according to the signatories' belief, may be the components of opening towards a new

² Maurice Nadeau, *Histoire du surréalisme*, Paris: Seuil, 1945.

³ „Inaugural rupture,” in *Surrealism Against the Current. Tracts and declarations*, Michael Richardson – Krzysztof Fijalkowski (eds) (London – Sterling: Pluto Press, 2001), 44.

psychological dimension, the essence of which is to overthrow the previously seemingly insoluble opposition of desire and necessity.⁴

Therefore the option suggested by Breton, also reflected in the design of the 1947 exhibition, was the demonstration of a belief in the positive, healing character of myth and the principle of Eros, and the exploration of this principle after the group had refused direct participation in politics. By this time, Surrealists had very concrete experiences of the limited possibilities of arts defined by party politics, and they had rejected the concept of party art in the name of spiritual freedom.

The 1947 exhibition followed the script of an initiation ritual. Breton had prepared a detailed preliminary plan, which was sent to the group members and the international network of sympathizers. One of the most important authors of the exhibition was Jacques Hérold, born in Romania and living in Paris from 1930, who displayed the myth of the Great Transparents in his memorable creation. Apart from Hérold, his compatriot Victor Brauner also fit well into the system of views that had taken shape as a result of the magical turn of Surrealism.

The reaction of the audience was controversial. Although the success was unquestionable, the echoes in many cases pushed Surrealism toward the past: it was regarded as something that was undoubtedly a great product of French culture, but seemed more acceptable out of habit rather than because of its values.

According to the summary written by Sarane Alexandrian, then a member of the group, the stake of the exhibition was the creation of a collective myth. The planning of movement through the exhibition area was planned in such a way that the visitors became participants in the myth by their progress: ascending movements, delusions, tentative movements appealing to visceral anxiety reactions were all written into the exhibition space. The exhibition presented works by eighty-seven artists representing twenty-four countries. Among these, there were many young artists at the beginning of their career who at that time were approaching the system of views of Surrealism, according to Alexandrian.⁵ Béla Bán and Endre Bálint, the two Hungarian participants in the exhibition probably were considered to be among these.

⁴ „Inaugural rupture,” 46.

⁵ Sarane Alexandrian, *Surrealist Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1970), 190–194.

Marcel Jean, a veteran member of the group at the time of the event, reports separately on the concept and preparation of the exhibition and its catalogue. He connects the basic idea of the exhibition to Breton's earlier trip to Haiti, and regards the predominance of the mythical and magical themes as a result of this experience. Jean also gives a detailed account of the moments of spiritual progression/initiation, and also mentions some anecdotal episodes that arise from the perspective of the eyewitness and insider, such is the unrealized plan of the "Surrealist kitchen" or the collection of painters "Surrealists against their will", which at the end was not exhibited either. Jean writes about the billiard table set up in accordance with Duchamp's idea, from the top of which the billiard balls soon disappeared and wandered into the visitors' pockets as souvenirs.⁶

Alexandrian's and Jean's reports on the exhibition are ultimately defined by the writers' insider status, as well as by the fact that both of them would soon enter into a conflict with Breton and leave the Surrealist group. The narrative that the exhibition fits into becomes part of a story of decline, not because of the concept and the partial success of the exhibition but as a result of the ensuing debates. Although the Surrealist group remained active, published works and organized exhibitions, its members significantly changed after the Second World War.

Alyce Mahon's counter-narrative, which greatly appreciates the performance of the Surrealists after 1938 in the spirit of politics of Eros, marks the 1968 Parisian student riots as the end of the story and as a moment of realization of a Surrealistic utopia of a kind.⁷ During the Paris riots, Surrealist slogans and sentences indeed appeared in the demonstrations, and several Surrealist artists joined the demonstrations as well. A specific addition to this interpretation is Marcel Jean's short and succinct response to a survey questioning the validity and presence of Surrealism in 1971 that says "May 1968".⁸

II. The preparations: surveys and letters

⁶ Marcel Jean, *Histoire de la peinture surréaliste*, in cooperation with Árpád Mezei (Paris: Seuil, 1959), 336–344.

⁷ Alyce Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968*, New York: Thames & Hudson, 2005.

⁸ Arnost Budik, "Enquête sur le surréalisme d'aujourd'hui," *Gradiva*, no. 1 (1971), 34.

Surrealists enjoyed taking surveys. At the end of June 1947, that is, in the days preceding the opening of the international exhibition, the international sympathizers of Surrealism received a questionnaire on letterhead paper containing eight questions posed by the Cause Surrealist “secretariat” comprising of three members, whose names were displayed on the header: Sarane Alexandrian, Georges Henein and Henri Pastoureau. The questions are related to the present and possible tasks of Surrealism. Árpád Mezei received the questionnaire from Georges Henein. His answer to the letter is unknown at present, but on the 10th of July he reports on this development to Claude Serbanne, a mutual acquaintance: “Henein replied. He also seems to exist in two copies, and one of these is the official secretary of the Surrealist movement. He even sent a questionnaire of eight questions. If I were serious about answering the questions, I would need about 2000 pages.”⁹

Alexandrian connects the event of contacting Gherasim Luca to the same questionnaire. In a letter dated 29 June 1947, Luca writes a detailed response to Alexandrian on his position, including many references to his works published at that time and to the activities of the Surrealist group in Bucharest. Although he considers the survey necessary, he calls for a quick step forward from the “where we stand” static/statistical mapping to the concrete and pragmatic steps of “what to do”¹⁰.

If we are looking for the motivations behind the establishment of Cause, we may assume that Breton's overworking was undoubtedly the trigger: at this time, after having returned home to France, Breton was assaulted by his “fans” and by many young men belonging to the contemporary bohemian society, whose main interest was not necessarily the essential program of Surrealism.¹¹ Based on their participation in the exhibition catalogue, we may assume that creators such as Mezei or the Bucharest Surrealists eventually passed through the filter that brought forth some sort of clearing of the 1947 turmoil, as well as the exit of many older and newer group members.

Breton transferred a fragment of the text entitled “*Le sable nocturne*” written by the Bucharest group directly into his introduction to the 1947 exhibition catalogue, as a

⁹ Letter from Árpád Mezei to Claude Serbanne, 10 July 1947. Árpád Mezei's estate, OSZK Manuscript Archive, Budapest. (Own translation, IJB)

¹⁰ The complete letter was published by Sarane Alexandrian in his volume *L'évolution de Gherasim Luca à Paris* (Bucharest: Vinea-ICARE, 2006), 9–12.

¹¹ Alexandrian, *L'évolution de Gherasim Luca*, 8

thought coinciding with the central question of the exhibition: “According to the lucky wording by our friends in Bucharest, »knowing through unknowing« [connaissance par la méconnaissance] remains an important Surrealist slogan.”¹²

On the basis of several reports on the preparations for the exhibition, we know about the feverish efforts and constant gatherings of the last few weeks. As an additional detail, some creators including Victor Brauner and the Bucharest Surrealist group, had had a relatively clear concept of and information on the planned exhibition a year earlier, in the summer of 1946. As early as August 1946, Luca and Gellu Naum exchanged letters about the plan to be drafted; according to Luca's summary, Brauner speaks about the overall image of the exhibition as a church of freedom/heresy and expects collective/anonymous works from his friends in Bucharest.¹³ In a letter written to Brauner on 12 March 1947, Luca still complains that the official invitation from Breton has not arrived. The plan, however, with which the group would participate at the exhibition, is now in place.¹⁴ In a single week the events would accelerate, and on the 20th of March Luca writes that they have sent their collective text "*Le sable nocturne*" for the exhibition catalogue by air mail.¹⁵ Thus, the text sent had preserved the anonymous, collective nature called for in the original plan.

In the case of the “nocturnal sand”¹⁶ experiment, the insertion of the objective chance into the plan, or the radicality of the endeavour beside which the text serves solely as a kind of documentation, obviously gained Breton's appreciation. However, a direct continuation was not possible: Luca and Trost, after having not received a passport from the Romanian authorities, attempted to cross the border illegally at the end of 1947 without success. It was only in 1950 that they could once again write detailed, sincere, uncensored letters from Israel to Paris and to try to reconnect lost connections, but by this time the circumstances were different from those in 1947. Luca writes to Brauner from

¹² André Breton, „Devant le rideau,” *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, in André Breton – Marcel Duchamp (eds), Paris: Maeght Éditeur, 1947. (Own translation, IJB.)

¹³ Letter from Gherasim Luca to Gellu Naum, August 1946, *Athamor: Caietele Fundației Gellu Naum*, no. 2 (2008), 26–27.

¹⁴ Letter from Gherasim Luca to Victor Brauner, 12 March 1947, in Victor Brauner, *Écrits et correspondances 1938–1948* (Paris: Centre Pompidou – INHA, 2005), 226–227

¹⁵ Letter from Gherasim Luca to Victor Brauner, 20 March 1947, in Victor Brauner, *Écrits...*, 227. The authors of "Le sable nocturne": Gherasim Luca, Gellu Naum, Paul Păun, Virgil Teodorescu, Trost.

¹⁶ See the interpretative description in Sarane Alexandrian, *Le surréalisme et le rêve* (Paris, Gallimard, 1974), 225.

Tel Aviv in a letter dated 30 October 1950 that he really trusts Breton's ideological “purity” and regrets Brauner and Breton’s divergence, as their friendship seemed to be at its peak at the time of the 1947 exhibition.¹⁷ 1947, Maeght Gallery: the last virtual meeting point for the entire company.

III. The threads converging at Árpád Mezei in Budapest

A letter written by Árpád Mezei dated February 6, 1947 was preserved in the Breton archives.¹⁸ In this letter he mentions the invitation received via Marcel Jean, and tries to respond to it by presenting a study plan which, in his view, is both a reconsideration of the system of sciences and a theory of Surrealism. As a result of this letter, Mezei’s “*Liberté du langage*” was published in the exhibition catalogue.

Breton could feel at least in three respects that Mezei's contribution at that time was of major importance to the movement: 1. Mezei’s theoretical inclination, which, in its sympathies, showed a similar direction to Breton’s; 2. His interest in and vast knowledge of hermetic sciences, as manifested in his works created in collaboration with Marcel Jean; 3. His being a *Maldoror* expert: Mezei and Jean’s volume entitled *Maldoror* was finalized and published in Paris in the year of the exhibition¹⁹, and a part of the volume, namely the analysis of the sixth book, was published in the exhibition catalogue – therefore, Mezei is one of the exceptional authors who had not one, but two writings included in the publication. In his study, Mezei projects onto Surrealism the analogy of natural science, according to which light behaves as a wave and a particle at the same time. In Mezei's thought experiment, this principle is extended to meanings as well, expressing an equivalence relation according to a dialectic logic of some sort. Mezei considers Surrealism suitable to evidence the so-called vision according to the principle of equivalence, and also to suggest the dual nature of reality by a synthesis of conscious and unconscious spheres. According to Mezei, both words and reality are multi-dimensional – and they are in an analogous relation with each other according to the way

¹⁷ Letter from Gherasim Luca to Victor Brauner, 30 October 1950. Bibliothèque Kandinsky, inv. 8818-763.

¹⁸ Arpad Mezei, *Plan d'un article*, 6 February 1947. Fonds André Breton 10592, Boîte de la vente, <http://www.andrebretton.fr/fr/item/?GCOI=56600100591490>, last downloaded: 26 February 2019.

¹⁹ Marcel Jean et Arpad Mezei, *Maldoror: Essai sur Lautréamont et son œuvre*, Paris: Pavois, 1947.

described above: in Mezei's opinion, hermetic theory based on the above principle can contribute to deepening this recognition. It is clear that Mezei's presence in the catalogue, as well as Béla Bán's and Endre Bálint's participation in the exhibition was mediated by Marcel Jean; however, another piece of the preliminary history of their participation is that Jean did not know the two young painters from Budapest where he lived between 1938 and 1945 – and up until leaving Budapest he had considered that abstraction in Hungarian paintings was more defining, at the expense of Surrealism. It may be supposed that his position somewhat changed in the summer of 1947, but in April 1947 he still writes to Mezei that he considers him, Mezei, the only Hungarian Surrealist.²⁰ One month later, as per Mezei's notice, he expected Bálint and Bán to arrive in Paris – some of the aspects of the meetings are later reported by Bán in his letters sent to Budapest. From these letters, we learn that Bán and his group initiated contact with both abstract and Surrealist galleries in Paris, which caused some technical difficulties, as many wanted to see their pictures at the same time because of the planned exhibitions. In May, Jean is looking forward to meet the young painters, whom he does not know yet, but trusts them as members of the European School:

As about the painters you have mentioned – I am looking forward to their visit. [...] Otherwise, I think that historically Hungarians have been more prominent in poetry and philosophy than in fine arts; of course this does not mean that there are no good Hungarian painters at present, but I do not know enough about the ones you wrote about. As far as Rozsda and Barta are concerned, back then it seemed to me that they were far from Surrealism, but that does not mean that they could not have moved in that direction??²¹

As we know, Bán and Bálint finally did participate in the international Surrealist exhibition, and their perspective can be outlined on the basis of their reports on the exhibition.

IV. The reports of Béla Bán and Endre Bálint

In a letter to Imre Pán dated 3 June 1947, Endre Bálint indicates that the preparations for the exhibition are under way, and he proudly writes that Breton has

²⁰ Letter from Marcel Jean to Árpád Mezei, 11 April 1947, Árpád Mezei estate, OSZK Manuscript Archive

²¹ Letter from Marcel Jean to Árpád Mezei, 12 May [1947], Árpád Mezei estate, OSZK Manuscript Archive. (Own translation, IJB)

chosen one of his pictures to be included in the material of the exhibition.²² In the same letter he also indicates that he is planning to write about the exhibition for a Hungarian newspaper. The young painter indeed wrote about his impressions of the exhibition, and in 1972 he also included the text in his volume entitled *“Hazugságok naplójából”* (“From the Diary of Lies”).²³

In his report, Endre Bálint jots down his personal experiences first, exemplifying the reality and physical experience of anxiety, and relating the effect the Surrealist exhibition had on him to the experience of a visit to an old city park panoptic.²⁴ Physical existence, as Bálint points out, moves out of its usual proportions in the context of war, and seeks a new equilibrium; this is also one of the important directions of Surrealism when experimenting with the sensation of space: “the illusion of infinite space and microscopic »objectivity« of the representation of objects, this great contradiction that can only be explained by a proportional shift: the over-dimensional character of fear of death is a constant acknowledgment of the nearness of death.”²⁵

Thus, war experience is an important element in Bálint's interpretation of the exhibition: he identifies war as a spirit of the age of a sort, or at least as a common experience, whose dark reality legitimizes the disturbing, sometimes grim colours of the Surrealist exhibition. Besides the Czech Toyen who, according to him, provides the base note of the exhibition by representing the “average”, Bálint mentions the names of four more artists among the Surrealists: Joan Miró (“who knows that behind the surface there lurks a world of ancient cultures, still alive, and therefore possible to portrayed – and this is why his mythical figures are so convincing”); Hans Arp, who is mentioned as an example of reconciling the spirit of abstraction and Surrealism (from the perspective of contemporary Hungarian art, this is a key issue that caused many ruptures); Salvador Dalí, the great absent; and Max Ernst, whom Bálint calls “the most significant among

²² Letter from Endre Bálint to Imre Pán, in Péter György – Gábor Pataki, *Az Európai Iskola és az Elvont Művészek csoportja* (Budapest: Corvina, 1990), 132.

²³ Endre Bálint, *Hazugságok naplójából*, Budapest: Magvető, 1972.

²⁴ Endre Bálint: „Exposition internationale du surréalisme Paris, Galerie Maeght”, in Bálint, *Hazugságok naplójából*, 69.

²⁵ Bálint, „Exposition internationale...”, 70.

Surrealists“, but whose two works included in the exhibition are not among the most successful.²⁶

However, the anecdotal aspects of the exhibition are rich in detail. The billiard table, also mentioned by Jean and Alexandrian, appears here as being used – the inclusion of such effects seem frivolous to the young Hungarian painter – we should remember, however, that in his opinion the most important factor contributing to the overall effect is the presence of experience of constant nearness to death.

Béla Bán, who participates in the exhibition as Endre Bálint’s fellow scholarship student, also writes a description that remained in manuscript and was published only in 1984 by Gábor Pataki and Péter György in the periodical *Ars Hungarica*.²⁷ This writing is somewhat more objective than Bálint’s, and it was most certainly written with the intention to be published in a newspaper. Bán's stance is the same as Bálint's in that he also seeks the essence of Surrealism beyond the games and anecdotal elements, as if separated from these, and he regards the organizers’ "tricks" as a means to attract the audience. In this regard, he considers the experiment successful – as he remarks, despite the high entry fees the exhibition is constantly crowded by visitors.

Bán writes about some of the exhibited works in more detail than Bálint, combining technical descriptions and interpretations to characterize works by Yves Tanguy, Max Ernst, Joan Miró, Picasso and Marcel Duchamp. In addition to these, he reflects positively on his encounter with the excellent works of the following authors: Arp, Matta, Toyen, Stirsky, Brauner, Gorky, Man Ray, Baskine – in their case, he specifically praises their qualities as painters, and the conceptual framing is suggested to be secondary to these qualities: "in our opinion, these are the artists among the many who represent Surrealism with art and free of literature-like nuances".²⁸

Bán also lists by name all Hungarian participants in the exhibition, as artists who ensure the Hungarian presence with "honesty and painter’s qualities" – besides Endre Bálint and himself, he mentions the Parisian-Hungarian Ervin Marton, who is indeed referred to as coming from "Hongrie" in the exhibition catalogue, as well as Henri

²⁶ Bálint, "Exposition internationale...", 71.

²⁷ Béla Bán: "A nemzetközi szürrealista kiállítás Párisban," *Ars Hungarica*, no. 2 (1984), 289–290.

²⁸ Bán, *idem*.

Nouveau (Henrik Neugeboren), born in Braşov and former resident of Budapest, who, according to the catalogue, represents France.²⁹

In his writing, Bán summarizes the contemporary goals of Surrealism, but envisions the emergence of his own art and "the art of the future" as heading towards another, synthetic direction, perhaps being influenced by the developments in Hungary as well as the discussions and events taking place in Paris.³⁰ In a letter written in Paris dated September 1947, Bán calls himself a Communist, and this – in the context of the “Rupture inaugurale” manifesto – also indicates one of the reasons why Bán considered it justified to keep himself at an arms’ length from the Surrealist group of Paris.³¹

Béla Bán's oeuvre, as noted by Gábor Pataki and Péter György, had developed in the spirit of a sincere endeavour to create “liberal” socialist art until 1949; afterwards, however, as a result of his dogmatic socialist realism period, he wrote himself out of the history of fine art, writing himself in among the privileged of power relations.³² Later, moreover, he was also affected by the news embargo imposed on the emigrants of 1956.³³ As opposed to Bán, Endre Bálint became part of another alternative story – (also) in line with the Hungarian counter-culture narratives of the 1960s and 1970s. Besides some other painters and art historians, Bálint is among those who represent the link between the Hungarian avant-garde and neo-avant-garde generations.³⁴

V. Concluding remarks

The 1947 Surrealist exhibition and preparations represented one of the last possibilities for “free” manifestations for Central and Eastern European artists before the establishment of the Stalinist cultural politics. For example, the text “*Le sable nocturne*”

²⁹ The list of Hungarian-related works in the catalog: Bán: *L’homme errant*; Balint: *Solitude*; Marton: *Nu assis*; Nouveau: *Joséphine, Le roi de Thulé*. See also 1947. Exposition internationale du Surréalisme, Fiches intérieures du catalogue, <http://www.andrebretton.fr/fr/item/?GCOI=56600100506400#>, last downloaded: 26 February 2019.

³⁰ Bán, „A nemzetközi szürrealista kiállítás Párisban”, 290.

³¹ Letter from Béla Bán to Imre Pán, 10 September 1947, *Ars Hungarica*, no. 2 (1984), 291.

³² Péter György – Gábor Pataki, „Dokumentumok Béla Bán hagyatékából”, *Ars Hungarica*, no. 2 (1984), 283.

³³ György Várkonyi, *Egy életmű újrafelfedezése*, http://www.virtuarnet.hu/frontend_dev.php/szerzo/ban-bela/eletrajz, last downloaded: 26 February 2019.

³⁴ Péter György, *Az elsüllyedt sziget* (Budapest: Képzőművészeti Kiadó, 1992), 24.

written by the Romanian Surrealist group and published in the exhibition catalogue is the last publication next to the multi-authored “*Éloge de Malombra*”, signed by all members of the group. In Budapest, the European School would cease its activity shortly afterwards. The study of the history and the echo of the exhibition provides guidance on how the history of Hungarian fine art and literature would have evolved after a period of relative freedom between 1945 and 1947 without the intervention of the aggressive, monopolizing cultural politics. Undoubtedly, the unique combination and coalition of abstraction and Surrealism promoted by Ernő Kállai and the European School would have remained an important tendency of Hungarian art. At the same time, it is also likely that the leftist artists in Hungary would still have had to face the dilemma of direct political action versus artistic autonomy, given that this dilemma led to sharp debates even in the politically freer postwar circumstances in France. In Hungary, however, such debate was out of question after 1948 – the question was decided by the dominant power for the ensuing years and decades.

As the examples cited above show, the 1947 exhibition may serve as a model of describing mutual exchanges of ideas – an exchange process that occurred within a network of artists who communicated with each other directly, but also through network nodes situated in France. We can see how the radical ideas of the Bucharest Surrealists, including the anonymous character of their contribution resonated with Breton’s ideas about the exhibition – and also how Árpád Mezei’s theoretical inclinations became important for highlighting the initiatory aspects of the event. The accounts of young Central-European painters about the exhibited works reveal also the dilemmas that were encoded into the differences in the intellectual and political background of the participants and that soon led to divergences and conflicts within the Surrealist movement.

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Abstract

Postwar Surrealism was often considered by the contemporaries no more than an appendix to the current's glorious interwar period. However, the international dimension and impact of Surrealism was acknowledged largely after the Second World War. The article identifies the 1947 International Surrealist Exhibition as a site and model of mutual intellectual exchange, and examines, from the point of view of the authors participating at the exhibition, what sort of importance was attached to the participation itself, and how these authors positioned themselves relative to Surrealism before and after the event. Through these contributions and their preparation documented in exchanges of letters, a postwar Surrealist network structure is outlined.

Keywords: Surrealism, network, mutual exchange, exhibition, Le Surréalisme en 1947, Bucharest Surrealist group, European School, postwar period