







# Ilona Németh

## EASTERN SUGAR

13. 4. – 15. 7. 2018  
Kunsthalle Bratislava

The largest presentation of Ilona Németh's work to date explores transformative events critical to current socio-political debates. The exhibition takes its title from one of the many foreign investors to enter the Central European sugar industry in the early post-Communist years. The histories of Slovak sugar factories thus reflect the realities of this turbulent period of rapid change, characterized by cultural, as well as economic liberalization and globalization. The factories' gradual privatization and disappearance provides a framework within which Németh can critically reflect on the manifold challenges posed by the post-industrial condition.

The architectural site of Kunsthalle Bratislava serves as the first point of entry into the complexities of the *Eastern Sugar* project. Turning the museum's Central Hall into a manufacturing site for sugar loaves, Németh reconstructs the lost past as memory through the fundamental human activity of manual labour. At the same time, the artist provides a space for participation; the real collective work of manufacturing. The production of these cone-shaped sugar pyramids is carried out by former employees of the sugar factories, together with unemployed people. Visitors are also free to join in with this activity throughout the exhibition, which over time results in a collection of "artefacts".

An important part of the exhibition is the *Archive* – the artist's research into the Slovak sugar factories, gathered from interviews, along with drone shots and photographs. Németh arranges the materials and documentation collected according to a museum-type depot system, in order to enable constellational thinking. The

*Archive* maps past industrial times and captures the empty shells in their current pitiful state. Simultaneously however, it strives to offer an opportunity for the future, challenging us to develop a more sensitive awareness of what is at stake.

The focus on labour and its global distribution is further developed through works by the artists Jeremy Deller, Harun Farocki and Lonnie van Brummelen & Siebren de Haan, whose work is introduced to a Slovak audience for the first time. The German artist Farocki was deeply invested in sustaining temporal as well as spatial perspectives on labour, whereas Van Brummelen & de Haan's research brings forth the asymmetric aspects of production and distribution, inscribed within neo-colonial divisions of centre and periphery. The works by Deller relate to the uncanny gestures and alienated nature of contemporary labour conditions.

As part of her exhibition project, Ilona Németh has initiated the pilot presentation of a hitherto non-existent institution, the Museum of Sugar. The purpose here is to affirm the importance and value of collecting, storing, and thinking about the sources of memory for a once-prospering branch of industry.



Guests:

Jeremy Deller  
Harun Farocki  
Lonnie van Brummelen  
& Siebren de Haan

Invited project:

**Museum of Sugar**

Curator: Miroslav Eliáš

Curator: Nina Vrbanová

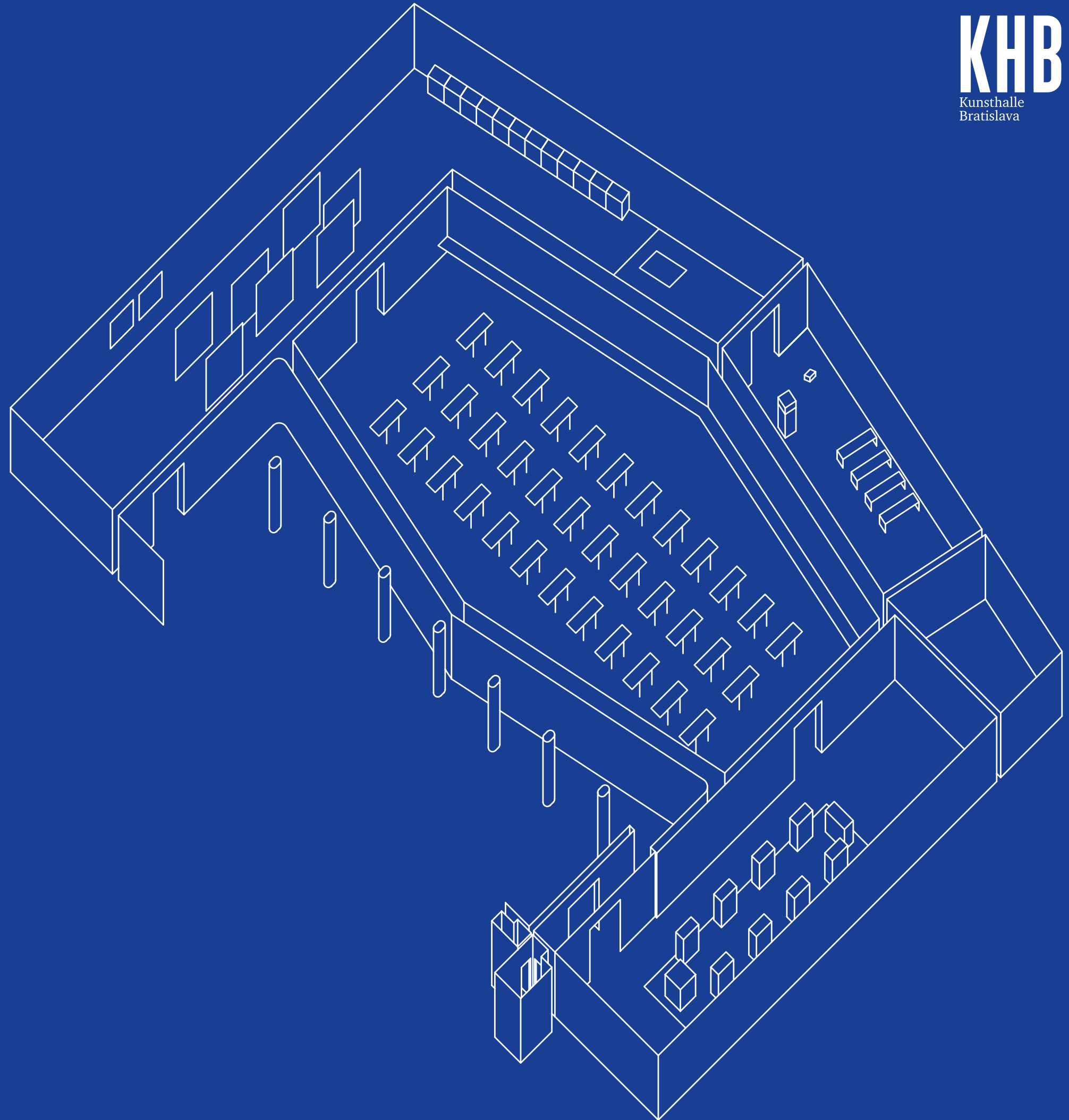
Assistent Curator: Krisztina Hunya

Essay: Maja & Reuben Fowkes

Photo-essay: Olja Triaška Stefanović

Architects: PLURAL, Marián Ravasz

Video: Cukru production



Ilona Németh: Eastern Sugar

Opening: April 12<sup>th</sup> 2018 from 6 until 8 p.m.

Duration: April 13<sup>th</sup> – July 15<sup>th</sup> 2018

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# Architecture of the Exhibition

Ilona Németh in collaboration with Marián Ravasz and PLURAL

Ilona Németh executed a series of significant architectural alterations to its interior spaces of Kunsthalle Bratislava in collaboration with Marián Ravasz and PLURAL Architects.

The architecture of the gallery space has been substantially adapted. Hence the original disposition of the gallery is reordered, and even then, its new perception is further re-evaluated. This is the first time ever that such a radical adaptation of the space has been undertaken in the interests of a unique, site-specific exhibition project, which thus becomes absolutely non-transferable. The architectural studio PLURAL made a considerable contribution to the artistic modification of the space.

MARIÁN RAVASZ (\*1963, Dunajská Streda, Slovak Republic) studied architecture at the Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava. In 1991, he founded his own architectural studio in Dunajská Streda and, concurrently worked in the architectural studio MAKONA in Budapest (1992). In 2012, he co-founded the Ravasz & Partners architectural company, where he works to this day. Since the 1990s, he has cooperated with artist Ilona Németh on several projects including *Invitation for a Visit* (Venice Biennale, 2001), *The IKEA Series* (Gallery SPA.C.E, 2013) and on public space installations such as the *Capsule*, *Mirror* and many more.

PLURAL produces architecture, exhibition design and speculations on the city with particular emphasis on its social and cultural relevance. The office was established by Martin Jančok (\*1978) in 2009, Michal Janák (\*1987) joined in 2013. PLURAL's major projects include the revitalization of the Neologic synagogue in Žilina and its transformation into a contemporary exhibition space – New synagogue. Other awarded built projects involve Alexis bookshop, the Summer Pavilion for the Slovak National Gallery and the recently completed House in a House. PLURAL also maintains a lasting academic involvement in theory and research at the Faculty of Architecture at the Slovak Technical University in Bratislava and conducts a self-initiated long term research/design project focusing on the contemporary central-european city – Projekt Bratislava.



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Ilona Németh  
**EASTERN SUGAR**







## Eastern Sugar:

# Reconstruction of Reality in Time

Nina Vrbanová

When we first began thinking about this exhibition and discussing it with the artist, a dilemma arose about how her most extensive and probably also most important art presentation should be constructed. A number of options presented themselves. There were models of exhibitions which would evaluate her visual career in the form of a retrospective and set her in a broader (Central) European artistic context. Alternatively, her exhibition might reflect the phenomena of art as it is currently, with an emphasis on its socio-political potential. In La Biennale di Venezia 2017, then in progress, the award for best national entry went to the German artist Anne Imhof for her radical redefinition of the architecture of the pavilion as a mental-performative space.

Another factor which determined the nature of the current exhibition was our awareness that a retrospective would have been premature for this artist. Furthermore, it would not have been altogether adequate in terms of the gallery space and its context. We were agreed in thinking that contemporary art and its institutions (especially in the state sector) are bearers of social responsibility. All the more so at the present time, when citizens in Slovakia and elsewhere are going out on the streets in recurrent mass protests, which are probably larger even than in 1989, fighting for the return of values to public life, for decency and uprightness, in the firm conviction that the state is not private property and that public affairs matter.

Needless to say, at that time we had no premonition of what was to happen in our society, politics and culture. But this public concern has been a long-term programme in the work of Ilona Németh – a lasting engagement, where the aim is to make society and culture reflect earnestly upon themselves. Practically throughout the entire breadth of her visual production, this artist has thought critically about current socio-cultural and socio-political phenomena which mirror society's values and at the same time those of the contemporary individual. Her works, exhibitions and projects typically carry a report and an appeal, about who we are, what we have been, what we could be, what forms us, how we ourselves form our environment and reflect on our own history.

Németh does not lay any general theses before us, though her works and exhibitions imply them. Her starting point is often particular, local and personal. However, she visualises personal space and history in a civic sense, as a component of the public territory or a base within it. These spheres are interconnected in her thought and art. The present exhibition *Eastern Sugar* is likewise based on her personal experience and knowledge, which forcefully resonates as an echo of our social situation: the "selling off" of our own values. She turns to the powerful but

somehow scarcely visible story of the sugar factories in Slovakia, originally state-owned and prospering, gradually privatised and tunnelled, today irrevocably destroyed.

*Eastern Sugar* was the name assigned to the largest Slovak sugar factory *Juhocukor* ("Southern Sugar"), situated in Dunajská Streda, following the accession of a foreign majority shareholder in 1993. Redesigned in this fashion (there were promises of investment, revitalisation, international connections and an overall flourishing of sugar production in Slovakia), the factory survived only until 2007. Then its definitive closure was announced, production ceased, and the need to compensate for lost supply with imports was acknowledged. This borrowing (matter-of-fact, somewhat laconic) of the name of a privatised firm with a revelatory end functions here as *pars pro toto*: the short-lived fate of the Dunajská Streda sugar factory after privatisation represents only one example of many.

The exhibition's name carries an apt, if partly ironic and critical, linguistic metaphor, in that "our – domestic – Slovak" was transformed by sale into "alien – external – foreign" and thus in actual fact expired, ceased to exist. The reference here is not only to the massive privatisation processes in the 1990s under Mečiar (Vladimír Mečiar, Ed.) and again in the early years of the new millennium, but also to a certain form of dispossession of the state vis-à-vis the citizens and society. *De facto* this resulted in a harsh confiscation of work, life-background, relationships, and the values associated with them, in the name of the financial profit of so-called investors. It speaks for itself that the Dunajská Streda sugar factory had been established in the 1960s, and many of the others in our country had been founded before World War I.

Németh's focus on the history and actuality of sugar factories in Slovakia is exceptionally humane and socially involved. The exhibition reconstructs memory through the fundamental human activity which is work. In the central hall of the gallery the artist evokes the manufacturing space itself. She builds a spacious installation in an austere food-processing design, which is intended not only for manual work but also for mental participation (layers of remembrance, empathy, identification, and so on). She draws in not only people who have this personal history and experience but ordinary viewers also, involving them in the manufacture of sugar loaves, which can be manufactured personally by hand and taken away as a kind of memorial object or "artefact". Furthermore, she makes contact with workers through the Employment Office and offers them contractual conditions, with a real opportunity for making their presence felt.

Manufacture, in the sense of "an open workshop", is conceived as a participative installation. It gives presence to the past and activates the manufacturing process and the work which thousands of employees of the defunct sugar factories have lost. To suit the functions and expressive construction of this segment of the exhibition, the architecture of the space has been substantially adapted. Hence the original disposition of the gallery is reordered, and even then, its new perception is further re-evaluated. This is the first time ever that such a radical adaptation of the space has been undertaken in the interests of a unique, site-specific exhibition project, which thus becomes absolutely non-transferable. The architectural studio PLURAL made a considerable contribution to the artistic modification of the space.

The central hall, representing the lost past, is factually and significantly opened up and expanded into the surrounding space of the gallery's walkway, which contrastingly offers a view of the present state of the sugar



Ilona Németh in collaboration with Cukru production: *Pohronský Ruskov*, 2018  
Single channel video, silent, 3:15 min.,  
courtesy of the artist

factories in various media. The artist grasps time in its present-ness and achieves this with an interactive adjustable archive of the museum type. In its layers, which may be symbolically "drawn from memory", she has installed contemporary photographic "portraits" of almost all of the factories in our country (or rather, their ruins). On this part of the exhibition Németh collaborated with Olja Triiška Stefanović, a visual artist and photographer of architecture whom she involved in the research on particular places, and also with the architect Marián Ravasz.

While the core of the exhibition activates history via temporary work and participation, the present situation and the sad state of the sugar factories today becomes a subject of research and archiving, hence paradoxically of methods for acquiring knowledge and preserving memory. Roles are reversed in the artist's reconstruction or renovation of reality in time. Apart from the archive, Németh also employs the tools of oral history and enriches the context with several video documentaries. Particularly important sources of information are the interviews with Dušan Janiček, director for external relations of the sugar factory in Sereď, one of the remaining two which are still operational to this day, and Christian Laur, a former member of the Managing board of Eastern Sugar Company. A suggestive visual essay introduces the video collection, using a drone to map the architecture and exterior of the sugar factory in Pohronský Ruskov. Martina Slováková and Cukru production collaborated on the creation of the videos.

In the wider context of her work the artist is undoubtedly interested in the original linoleum floor (as a readymade) of the entrance hall of the Juhocukor sugar

factory in Dunajská Streda. This found object formally connects with Németh's numerous series of floor works, and in the exhibition context it graduates the moment of identification and memorisation. Purely in itself, in its authentic form and structure, it functions as paradoxical archival records with all the sediment of the past. In the gallery space the linoleum object, which the viewer necessarily must traverse and leave his or her trace on, in an ideal fashion communicates with the 12-channel video installation by the German filmmaker Harun Farocki, *Workers Leaving the Factory in 11 Decades*, which focuses on the changing cinematographic appearance and perception of factory workers.

The exhibition also includes works by the British artist Jeremy Deller and the Dutch duo Lonnie van Brummelen & Siebren de Haan, who with their practices extend the field of reflection on the theme of work in contemporary art; there is particular reference to the postindustrial condition and to (neo-)colonial trade-relations between the EU and other parts of the world.

The art historian and curator Krisztina Hunya has made a valuable contribution by selecting them and connecting them with the exhibition concept, thus providing a comparison of the theme in different geopolitical frameworks. Apart from these guest exhibits, it is gratifying that Németh's exhibition as a whole is a new work, made to measure for the gallery, which is consciously omitting presentation of her older works.



The artist is partly taking on the role of curator, and within the frame of her own project she is initiating the pilot presentation of a currently non-existent institution, the Museum of Sugar. She has therefore invited the Šurany Municipal Museum, which specialises in the history of sugar processing in Slovakia, to take over part of the exhibition space and for the first time present its materials in the rounded form of a museum display. The Museum of Sugar thus represents a guest “project within a project” which extends opportunities for knowledge and thinking on the theme, with the expertise of museology and museum-style presentation.

This exhibition offers a complex, layered view of the fate of one segment of the food processing industry, spreading out to the wider contexts of the recent history of Europe. The story of the sugar factories is crucially linked with the phenomenon of work and the values which we lost when we sold out, literally. It is a critique of the social attitude to a certain thing and a pointer to the consequences of our decisions, which are suggestively present in the torsos of factories, those absurd relics of the “wild” times of capitalisation and privatisation lived in the spirit of the vacuous slogan “that’s life!”. Németh’s ambition is to offer authentic and critical knowledge, the only thing that may lead to a transformation of values and a willingness to learn from the errors we have committed.

From the artistic standpoint, the exhibition radically restructures the physical space of the gallery and together with that, the mental and memorial layers of the theme. In parallel, it offers viewers several tracks for critical reflection to serve as paths to knowledge, where work or manual activity, an apparently ordinary walkway or an informed awareness, mediated either in the form of oral history or of museum exhibits, may be instruments of empathy. Ultimately, the artist’s powerful social engagement is attested to not only by the participative dimension of the exhibition as such but even by its very method of preparation and realisation, an example of collective creative work only sporadically seen in our milieu.

Bratislava, March 2018

NINA VRBANOVÁ (\*1986, Bojnice, Slovak Republic) is a curator and contemporary art critic. She graduated from the Institute of Literary and Artistic Communication at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra and the Faculty of Philosophy of Charles University in Prague. Between 2009 and 2013, she worked as a project manager and curator for the Cyprián Majerník Gallery in Bratislava. Until 2014, she worked as editor of Rider Magazine – A Printout of a Bulletin Board on Contemporary Art. She is a member of the Slovak Section of the International Association of Critics AICA. Since 2014, she has worked in Kunsthalle Bratislava as curator, and currently as its appointed director / chief curator. Between 2010 and 2016, she completed her PhD in aesthetics at the Faculty of Philosophy at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra (the theme of her dissertation thesis was *Public Privacy. Semiotic of Visual Phenomena*). She is primarily engaged in developing concepts, in the implementation of curatorial exhibitions as well as in the critical reflection of current trends in visual arts (not only) in Slovakia. Occasionally she publishes in domestic and international professional periodicals and writes reviews on diploma and dissertation theses of artists.



Ilona Németh in collaboration with Cukru production: *Pohronský Ruskov*, 2018  
Single channel video, silent, 3:15 min.,  
courtesy of the artist, archive of the artist















## Interview with Dušan Janíček

Dušan Janíček – director of External Relations *Slovenské cukrovary, s.r.o., Sereď, AGRANA Group, 2017*

I started working in the sugar industry in 1977 after graduating from university. I graduated from the Faculty of Chemistry and Technology, Department of Chemistry and Technology of Carbohydrates and Food Products. It was my first job. I started working in the sugar factory in Sládkovičovo as a sugar factory technician. In 1989, I worked at the Faculty of Chemistry and Technology at STU in the Department of Chemistry and Technology of Carbohydrates as a university professor. In 1987, I left the sugar factory because I did not see any possibility there for my further development. So, I decided to go teach at the university. During the Velvet Revolution, I lectured at the university and I engaged in those events together with my students. The situation in Sládkovičovo was rather difficult, I mean, the old habits. They organised a meeting to explain the November events. The industry as such was rather consolidated. There were ten sugar factories in Slovakia, coordinated by the General Directorate for Sugar and Confectionery Products in Bratislava. Those ten sugar factories processed sugar beet from about 35–38 thousand hectares and produced around 180 thousand tons of sugar. In fact, those factories formed a kind of concern. They competed among themselves, which one is better than the other. Traditionally, the winner was Trenčianska Teplá and the worst results were achieved in Pohronský Ruskov, which was also the most problematic factory. In '89, there were meetings of workers and, of course, people protested. The former management of the sugar factory was recalled by the workers. And since I had earlier worked in the sugar factory, they called me back. The former Director General of the Sugar and Confectionery Concern, Mr. Kováč, later appointed me as Director of the Sládkovičovo sugar factory. I also remember the period of privatization. In '92, I and four colleagues of mine, privatised the sugar factory. In the end, it turned out to be the greatest mistake of my life. It was impossible to manage it as I had imagined. Later, since two our colleagues were collaborating with the regional branch of the Movement for Democratic Slovakia (HZDS), we were confronted with the situation that the sugar factory had to pay back all its debts and loans upon pressure from the bank. So, we were put in a situation where we either had to transfer the factory to another company, or we were going to have great problems. Thus, we transferred the sugar company to the Bavex company, just because the bank decided so. All that was arranged in this way. Those were difficult times. We did not have finances. It was rather difficult to pay the people, to make sure they got their salary. That's why I decided to leave the sugar factory. It was impossible to manage. Then I decided to go to Vienna and to take my



It was my first job.

Ilona Németh in collaboration with Cukru production: *Interview with Dušan Janíček – Director of External Relations Slovenské cukrovary, s.r.o. Sereď, AGRANA Group, 2017*  
Interview by Ilona Németh, János Vasik. Single channel video, colour, sound, 14:28 min., courtesy of the artist, archive of the artist

chance with the investors, who had already begun operating in Slovakia, namely Agrana. I went for a job interview in Vienna and, on the next day, the Board of Directors of Agrana decided to appoint me as the General Director of the Rimavská Sobota sugar factory. All sugar factories were transformed from national companies to so-called state enterprises and were offered for privatization. All state enterprises had the same management. The market was terribly fragmented. Large quantities of sugar were imported. Therefore, the Slovak Sugar Association tried to protect the market from excessive imports. Sugar was sold at dumping prices. We could not pay the growers, because the money from sugar sales did not cover the beet price. The prices were set by the Ministry of Agriculture at 1,000 crowns per ton, which was quite a decent price at that time. The sugar factories were under pressure and became more and more indebted. It was a very troublesome period. And very complicated. Everything depended on whether the growers would be able to withstand the economic situation and to support the factory. Although they received their money later, it was not according to the contracted terms of payment. From the technological point of view, the former Czechoslovakia was a sugar super-power, in particular the Czech Republic. Including the preparation of technical engineers at universities. However, we gradually started to lag-behind. Although it has to be said that the Hradec Králové Engineering Works (*ZVU Hradec*

*Králové*) was one of the major producers of sugar factory machinery. We had the industry as well as the related heavy industry producing machinery for the sugar industry. However, we gradually started to lose the edge and the ability to keep up with the development of technology. We were gradually overtaken especially by German engineering companies. We were gradually losing our know-how compared to Western countries. Although the ZVU Hradec Králové continued constructing complete sugar factories in Iran and other Arabic countries, regarding state-of-art technologies such as automatization, we were running out of steam. Foreign companies started to be interested in us around '95 – '96, when the first contacts were established. The Austrian sugar company Agrana was very proactive and invited all representatives and directors of sugar factories to Vienna. The original idea was that Agrana would take over all ten sugar factories in Slovakia. However, this plan was not implemented. Agrana had a rather well-developed policy concerning Dunajská Streda, since the local sugar factory was the largest and most advanced sugar factory in Slovakia. It used to process the most sugar beet – four thousand tons. We had a lot of weaknesses as well, especially in the field of environmental protection. It has to be admitted that the sugar factory in Sereď is, to this day, troubled by the environmental situation, as it was heated by the local nickel smelter. Sugar factories in Sládkovičovo, Trenčianska Teplá and Šurany also had problems with

waste water treatment plants, not even mentioning Pohronský Ruskov. When they started the campaign, all fish had died out in the area. The first investor entered the Dunajská Streda sugar factory. Agrana was the second. Dunajská Streda's investor was a British-French company Eastern Sugar. We considered that a first step leading to the further development of the Dunajská Streda sugar factory. Agrana initially also negotiated with Dunajská Streda, but shortly before signing the agreement it was decided that the plan would not go through. Agrana subsequently joined the Rimavská Sobota sugar factory, which they considered as a promising sugar factory and, also partly the sugar factory in Sereď. The German Nordzucker joined in the sugar factories in Trnava, Šurany and Trenčianska Teplá. These factories, so to say, survived. The other sugar factories like Pohronský Ruskov and Trebišov, which did not have an investor, and later also Nitra and Šurany, were gradually closed down. Since we had joined the European Union, we had to comply with the so-called sugar regime. The European Union had a common market organization for sugar and sugar beet based upon quotas. Slovakia joined the European Union with a quota of approx. 220 thousand tons. The European Union, pursuant to WTO negotiations, decided to reduce sugar production from 19 million tonnes to 14 million and to decrease the quotas allocated to individual member states. If any of the member states decided not to produce their sugar quota, they received compensation amounting to 730 Euro per ton of sugar. Eastern Sugar took advantage of this possibility and returned the quota of 70,133 tons allocated to the Dunajská Streda sugar factory to the European Union and collected 730 Euro per ton. It must be said that Eastern Sugar was more of a trading company than a production company. Agrana and the German Nordzucker are production companies with their own sugar factories. Eastern Sugar was more focused on trading in sugar. Although it had some sugar factories as production units, but its business philosophy was more about trading in sugar. It was a one-off compensation. In essence, the requirement of the European Union was to make sure that once the quota was returned, the given sugar factory would never be put in operation again. That means that it was supposed to be disposed of in such a manner that no one could ever restart its operation. The requirement of the European Union was such that the sugar company must be levelled to the ground. It must be said that our public authorities





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Therefore, the Slovak Sugar Association tried to protect the market from excessive imports.

On the previous and this page: Ilona Németh in collaboration with Cukru production: *Interview with Dušan Janiček – Director of External Relations Slovenské cukrovary, s.r.o. Sereď, AGRANA Group, 2017* Interview by Ilona Németh, János Vasik, single channel video, colour, sound, 14:28 min., courtesy of the artist, archive of the artist

were not at all prepared for the accession to the European Union, nor to the general situation. From discussions with my Austrian colleagues I know that Austrians had, for the five years prior to accession to the European Union, prepared very intensively. I remember that when the privatisation of state-owned enterprises started, there was an option for the growers to purchase 30% – or join in with 30% to their production companies. That would have given the growers some control over production and they could have purchased shares. That would have been a similar scheme like in Germany, where the growers own shares of their sugar factory. That was an excellent idea, but, in the end, it did not materialize. In the end, someone took it off the table and said that was not going to happen. We failed to gain experience from the West. We did not think about the future. We only thought about the present and cheered that new times were about to come. The investors, of course, considered purchasing sugar factories as a way to get market access. The investors entered the country, Slovakia

continued to produce and sell sugar, but now it was already sugar from a given concern. I remember that at the time when I was director of the state-owned company Cukrovar, there were 150 people working on a shift. During the peak season, as the sugar factory in Sládkovičovo also included a cannery, there were 700 people. At present, there are only about 400 people working in the two sugar factories. Now, after the market was liberalized on October 1, it is absolutely open to any imports and exports. That means that sugar factories can produce as much sugar as they want, without limitation. It is a kind of challenge for sugar factories. On the other hand, we can expect great volatility due to the fact that Western sugar super-powers have prepared for the increased sugar production. The shut-down of sugar factories did not only affect Slovakia. There were factory shut-downs also in Austria. They had seven sugar factories and only two of them remain in operation. The sugar factory in Hohenau, with a processing capacity of 10 thousand tons, was also shut-down. The fact is that there is

enormous pressure on efficiency and reduced production costs. In the sugar industry, it should be noted that the machines and equipment are operated only for about 100 – 110 days, and the rest of the time they are not used. Those facilities are very specific and cannot be used elsewhere. It must be said that if a sugar factory is not a member of a business group, which can accumulate enough funds to invest in development, such a sugar factory simply cannot survive.



Ilona Németh in collaboration with Cukru production:

## Interview with Christian Laur

Christian Laur – former member of the Managing board of Eastern Sugar 1993 – 2000, 2018

I have spent my whole life in the sugar business. First in France and afterwards, in the beginning of 1981, as a coincidence I started to work with a British company Tate & Lyle. Tate & Lyle was a large company producing sugar, starch and starch derivatives. At that time – wanted to expand its business in continental Europe. And this was my job. Interestingly enough, a few months later, as you all know of course, the Berlin wall fell. Two weeks later I received a call from my chairman, he was in London and I worked in Paris, asking me: “Christian, by the way, what do you know about the sugar industry in Central Europe?” And I said: “Nothing”. “Well, OK, that’s excellent! So, you are going to go there and see what we could do for the company.” In January 1990, so very short time after the Berlin wall fell, we started with Poland. It was very interesting to us, because, of course, we had absolutely no idea about the life before and the life at that time due to this big change. It was difficult, finally, to make business. We did, but not at the scale we would have wanted to do. And then we visited Hungary. And in Hungary, again, we toured the country, we looked at several sugar factories and, already at that time, we were not the only company being interested in trying to buy assets from the newly freed Central Europe countries. Then, in June 1990, we arrived in Czechoslovakia, which was still Czechoslovakia. We had a discussion and decided to visit some factories. The one that especially attracted my attention, was the one in Dunajská Streda. Again, I insist on the fact that we were not the only company doing that. Some other companies, very well-known companies like Agrana, the biggest sales company from France, were already touring Europe and also the Germans, naturally. In the case of Dunajská Streda it was particularly true, because the Austrians were, I would say, aggressive, yes, if I can say that. They wanted to get to this factory. And they finally almost succeeded, but for some unknown reason, at the last minute they pulled back. Why? I never knew why. But as the matter of fact they pulled back. And my general director was desperate, he contacted me again and the discussion went on. And finally, we signed the deal to privatise the sugar factory. In June 1993. It was a fascinating period and, I am really glad to be there at that time, because, of course, it happens once in my lifetime and it will not happen again. The idea was not simply buy an asset, it was more complex. We offered to buy shares in this sugar factory at a price which was I would say a good price. Not a very good price, but a good price, bearing in mind that there were a lot of problems to solve there and, we agreed to carry out an investment plan. And that was clever, because in fact, giving money

to the state was not finally such a good solution. The good solution was to inject money in the company to rejuvenate it, to modernise it and to work. The growers were in a specific situation, because before the revolution there were only huge coops and they were not accustomed to act as entrepreneurs. Finally, we had to lend money to the growers to be able to grow beets. We had to agree with the bank to pre-finance the growers, which was done and then we started to feed the full economic cycle. We were absolutely conscious, that we were foreigners coming in a country where people were not accustomed at all to this kind of operations. So, we had to be careful and I would say polite but, nevertheless we had to say that “some things that you do are good, some others are not good”. For instance, we had to decrease the workforce because there were too many persons operating the factory. And of course, everything was a bit difficult: we had a problem with the language, we had to explain, we had to build a management team from Slovaks and from foreigners – a very mixed team. In the meantime, the company changed a bit. It was called Eastern Sugar and it was a joint venture between a French company Generale Sucriere specialising in beet sugar and Tate & Lyle specialising in sugar, but mainly cane sugar and also starch. Years passed, and we worked. The results improved, the situation in Slovakia stabilised as well and we built this company covering four countries in Central Europe. And I think that at its peak, Eastern Sugar produced something like 350,000 tons of sugar in Central Europe. This was before 2000, because in 2000 I retired and I was proud of the results achieved. Tate & Lyle decided very quickly, after 1989, to investigate the possibilities in Central Europe. Tate & Lyle was a sugar company, but it mainly oriented to cane sugar. At that time, there was a meeting between the Chairman of Generale Sucriere and the Chairman of Tate & Lyle. The Chairman of Generale Sucriere stated that his company wanted to be associated with us, because he recognised the work achieved by Tate & Lyle in investigating the possibilities in Central Europe. In fact, it appeared quite naturally to create the joint venture 50-50. I think it was created probably in 1992 or beginning of 1993. Actually, the deal was signed by Eastern Sugar. Why Eastern Sugar? In a way, it was a simple coincidence. How can we call this company? The beet sugar company I mentioned to you which was in the US, is called Western Sugar. And somebody said: “Hey, we already have a Western Sugar, why wouldn’t we have Eastern Sugar?” “Well, that’s a very good idea!” And it was decided to name the company Eastern Sugar. What I know after 2000 is, of course indirectly, because I was not involved anymore in the sugar industry. What happened is that at that time, I could say, the sugar industry Europe-wide was in a golden time. There was a quota system. That means that there were different quantities of sugar allowed to each company which was sold at the guaranteed price. A price guaranteed by not the European Union but the European Community. And this allowed companies which wanted to develop, to have something strong to build on, and then develop their production and finally sold the surplus at the world market at the free price, world price, but nevertheless, the main profit came from the quotas which were given to the companies. Of course, not everybody was happy with this system. Especially India and Brazil protested for years saying that these people from Europe were rich people and were producing too much sugar, preventing them to produce their own sugar to export. It lasted years and years and years and finally the European Community lost, meaning that they had to reduce drastically



Ilona Németh in collaboration with Cukru production: *Interview with Christian Laur – former member of the Managing board of Eastern Sugar 1993 – 2000, 2018*  
Single channel video, colour, sound, 16:20 min., courtesy of the artist, archive of the artist

the production. Production at that time in Europe was round 19 million tons of sugar and it had to be decreased to 14 million tons of sugar. That means that all over Europe it was necessary to have plans to reduce the production. At that time Slovakia was, I would say, self-sufficient in sugar, probably slightly exporter. To solve the problem, the European Community offered the sugar companies to buy back a part of the total quota and give them money as a compensation, subject to the fact, that if it worked like that, the sugar factory had to be totally destroyed to make sure that there would not be a new production of sugar in the future. Talking about Eastern Sugar I remind you that this was a joint venture between the two companies Tate & Lyle and Generale Sucriere. But the story was developing and Generale Sucriere was, at that time, bought by Südzucker from Germany. Tate & Lyle had a different management. The strategy of the previous chairman was to develop the activities of Tate & Lyle Europe-wide. They were already present in the US and Australia, so that means that they wanted to have a world-wide company in sugar and in starch. But in fact, it appeared that in the development of this fable, starch was much more interesting than sugar. That means that the future of starch looked much more promising than the future of sugar. So, the new management of Tate & Lyle decided to switch dramatically and to get progressively out of

sugar and develop starch activities only. So that means that when the European Community proposed to buy back some quota, the proposal came to the table of joint venture and, as the two partners had diverging interests and that the sugar partner did not want to buy the part of Tate & Lyle, so there was no possibility of agreement, it was decided to agree with the proposal of Brussels. So, that is why it was decided to shut down Dunajská Streda. You can understand that this was a decision coming from, let’s say, the structure and the strategy of the shareholders of Eastern Sugar. It was not a really, I would say, economic decision, because if you look at the map of sugar factories in Slovakia, Dunajská Streda was certainly not the number one to be closed down. It was the biggest one, it was pretty promising, maybe not the best beet area, but Dunajská Streda was expanding, was modernized, was able to produce more and more sugar, so that means that it was certainly not the best candidate to be closed down. Bearing in mind the circumstances, the decision was taken: Dunajská Streda was closed down and destroyed, and when you go to the city, you will have difficulties to find some leftover of the sugar factory, except one building,



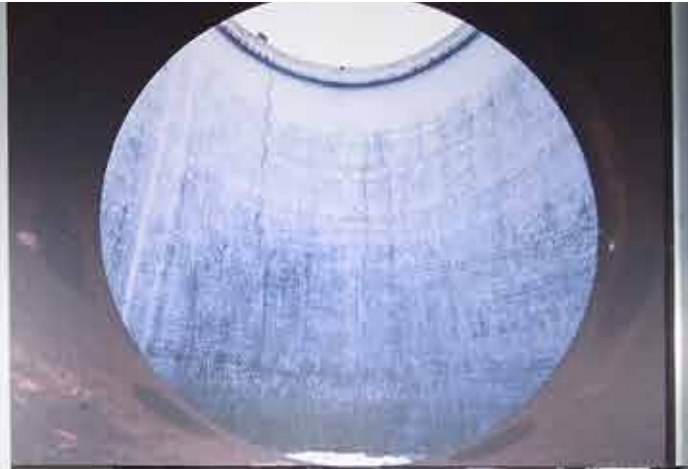
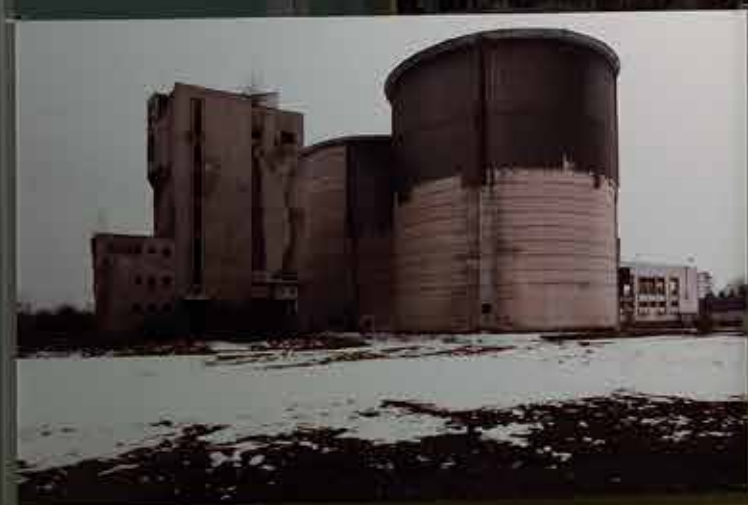


On the previous and this page: Ilona Németh in collaboration with Cukru production: *Interview with Christian Laur – former member of the Managing board of Eastern Sugar 1993 – 2000, 2018*  
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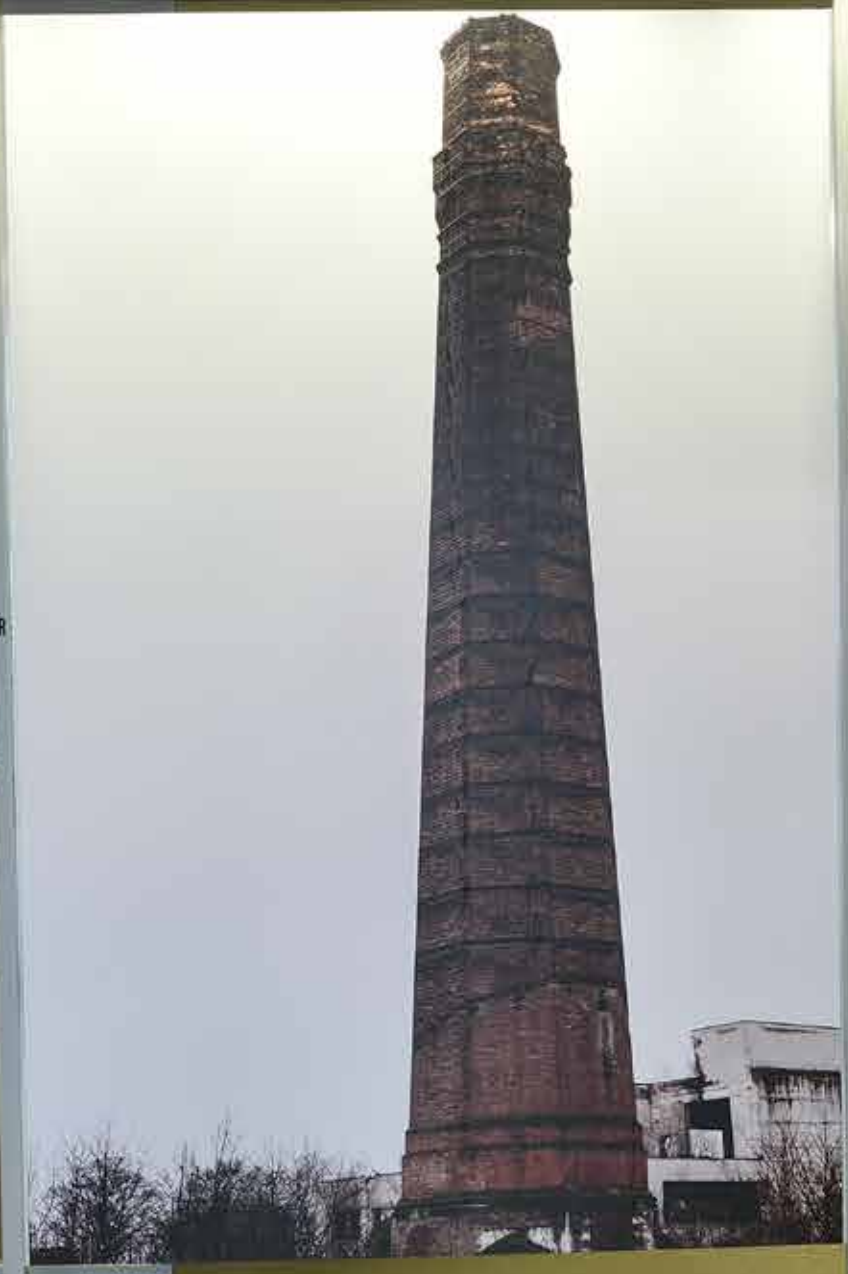
the administrative building, which is still there. But at the end of the day the company I was honoured to be responsible for, does not exist anymore. We were really a technical company producing sugar. Of course, we traded sugar, naturally, as any sugar factory does, but we cannot be classified as traders. First of all the general principle was that it was necessary to reduce sugar production all over Europe. That means that it was necessary to reduce the production also in the Slovak Republic. The location of Dunajská Streda was not ideal. The better areas are Sereď, but Sereď is not so far from Dunajská Streda, and Trenčianska Teplá. Those two factories are small ones and probably in the future, probably something will happen with those factories, because either you have to invest heavily to develop the factories, or you have to close them. Now, in several countries the real shareholders of these factories are growers. They would have to agree on a kind of redistribution of the assets, which they did not. This is a human story, because technique is one thing, economy is one thing, but the human reactions are another thing. And because these people invested in their own companies, even if they were not the things to do, they decided to stay with smaller factories and let the bigger one go. Another solution could have been, for instance that we close down Trenčianska Teplá and we close down Sereď, of course, for Slovakia, that would not have been better, and investing in Dunajská Streda, for instance. But that would not have been a good solution for the people of the other two factories, you know, there is no ideal solution. I talked about the quota system which was decreased and finally now there is no quota at all, so there is total freedom of production of sugar all over Europe. You have to bear in mind as well that the world popula-

tion is increasing dramatically. That means that now I think that there are again tensions between production and consumption. Nothing new. That means that now, after having closed factories, people are thinking: "Well, how can I increase the production of sugar?", which seems crazy, but it is not. Again that's a matter of cycle. The first point certainly is to be self-sufficient, because sugar is a heavy commodity, so transport costs are significant. First of all, you must rely on self-consumption, local consumption. I think that because of the closure of Dunajská Streda at that time, Slovakia became an importer of sugar. From the sugar point of view, I think that was a good decision at the time, because there were infrastructures in these countries and we had the knowledge to take advantage of those infrastructures by modernizing them and developing them. And one of the things which were also really important is that people were very properly trained, good technicians, good workers, but of course the problem of accountability and discussions about economy were more difficult. So, I think that this was not a mistake, it was a good idea. These countries joined the European Community so there are now integrated in the EU. It was a good opportunity. The history turned out differently, because the EU lost its case with the WTO, because the strategies of the company evolved. OK, this is history, every day you hear about companies which close and others which open. That's life. But again, very clearly, from my point of view it was not a mistake. Not at all.











Ilona Németh in  
collaboration with  
Olja Triaška Stefanović,  
Cukru production,  
and Marián Ravasz:  
**Archive**

2017–2018, videos, photographic archive, text,  
dimensions variable, courtesy of the artist

The *Archive* synthesises Ilona Németh's long-term research into the history and gradual disappearance of the Slovak sugar industry. Between September 9, 2017, and March 14, 2018, the artist, together with her collaborators, carefully mapped and 'archived' the sites and their individual narratives. This multi-part installation traces architectural remnants, from iconic views of factory towers, bleak fields and ruin-like structures, to the bourgeois homes echoing bygone times of entrepreneurial culture. It assembles accounts from key figures, outlining their individual roles during the latest transformation processes affecting the fundamentals of (sugar-) trade and production.





ILONA NÉMETH (\*1963, Dunajská Streda, Slovak Republic) is an artist, organizer and curator based in Slovakia. She exhibited widely both locally and internationally, including Karlín Studios, Prague (solo, 2017); Miloš Alexander Bazovský Gallery, Trenčín (solo, 2017); Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw (2016); Mestna galerija, Ljubljana (2015); Kunsthalle Bratislava (2016, 2014); Tranzit Gallery Bratislava (solo, 2014); Museum of Contemporary Art, Bucharest (2013); East Slovak Gallery, Košice (solo, 2012); The Brno House of Arts (solo, 2012); Ernst Museum, Budapest (solo, 2011), MUMOK, Vienna (2009); Prague Biennale (2005, 2007, 2011); as well as in the Pavilion of the Czech and Slovak Republic at the Venice Biennial (with Jiří Surůvka, 2001), among numerous others. She co-curated the exhibition series *Universal Hospitality* at the City Festival of Wiener Festwochen (2016); MeetFactory and FUTURA, Prague (2017); and *The Private Nationalism Project*, travelling to Budapest, Bratislava, Krakow, Dresden, Pécs, Košice and Prague (2015). She is a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava, leading Studio IN and an international education program Open Studio at the Department of Intermedia – AFAD Bratislava. Her works are represented in various collections including the Ludwig Museum Budapest, National Centre for Contemporary Art, Moscow; Linea Collection, Bratislava; The First Slovak Investment Group's Collection (PSIS); Bratislava City Gallery; Slovak National Gallery, Bratislava; among many others.

OLJA TRIAŠKA STEFANOVIĆ (\*1978, Novi Sad, Serbia) was born in Yugoslavia but in 1997 due to political situation and breakup of the country she moved to Bratislava. In 2007 she graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts and Design at the Department of Photography and New Media in Bratislava, and in 2017 finished doctoral studies at Department of Intermedia at the same Academy. In 2010 was the Finalist, of Finalist Award 333 organised by National gallery in Prague and in 2015 she was announced as a photographer of the year in Slovakia. In 2017 for her project *New Bratislava* she was awarded by special Bratislava grant and prize by the Mayor of Bratislava, within the Slovak Press Photo award. She was presenting her work at many group and solo exhibitions in Slovakia and abroad. Her works are part of collection of City gallery in Nitra and for last 8 years she is lecturer at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava. Lives and work in Bratislava.

CUKRU PRODUCTION is a creative studio specializing in making videos. It collaborates with many local and multinational companies. In addition to working for commercial clients it also has rich experience with projects for the non-profit sector. Cukru production was founded in 2012 by Martina Slovákova, who completed her master's degree in intermedia in 2013 at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava in the studio of Anna Daučíková.











Ilona Németh in collaboration with Olja Triaška Stefanović (photo):  
Archive, 2017 – 2018, courtesy of the artist











**RS** Rimaszombat / Rimavská Sobota, 1965 – 2005

**SD** Diószeg / Sládkovičovo, 1867 – 1999

**SR** Szered / Sereď, 1907 – súčasnosť / now

**DS** Dunajská Streda / Dunaszerdahely, 1969 – 2007

**TT** Nagyszombat / Trnava, 1868 – 2004

**TV** Töketerebes / Trebišov, 1912 – 1997

**PR** Oroszka / Pohronský Ruskov, 1894 – 1992

**ŠU** Nagysurány / Šurany, 1852 – 2000



In 1989, there were 10 sugar factories operated in Slovakia – Dunajská Streda, Nitra, Pohronský Ruskov, Rimavská Sobota, Sered', Sládkovičovo, Šurany, Trebišov, Trenčianska Teplá and Trnava. They were all supervised by the General Directorate of the Sugar & Confectionery company located in Bratislava.

In the early 1990s, all sugar factories were transformed from national companies to state enterprises and were offered for privatisation.  
*(\*D. J., video, 2017)*

\*D. J. – Dušan Janíček

\*\*Ch. L. – Christian Laur

**RS** Rimaszobat / Rimavská Sobota, 1965 – 2005

We failed to gain experience from the West. We did not think about the future. We only thought about the present and cheered that new times were about to come. The investors, of course, considered purchasing sugar factories as a way to get market access.

*(\*D. J., video, 2017)*



## SD Diószeg / Sládkovičovo, 1867 – 1999

The sugar factory in Sládkovičovo was founded by the Kuffner and Guttmann families. In addition to modernising and expanding the sugar factory, they built a power plant, a cannery, railways, bridges, office buildings, residential houses, villas, a mansion with a collection of artwork, a family mausoleum, a casino and other structures. The architecture of their buildings was at the top European level of the time. In 1938, the Kuffner family emigrated to the US in order to escape the Fascist regime.

## SR Szered / Sered', 1907 – now



## DS Dunajská Streda / Dunaszerdahely, 1969 – 2007

The sugar factory in Dunajská Streda was the largest and most advanced sugar factory in Slovakia. It used to process the most sugar beet, four thousand tons per year. (*\*D. J., video, 2017*)

Eastern Sugar built a company covering four countries, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland, which, at its peak, produced something like 350,000 tons of sugar per year in Central Europe. (*\*\*Ch. L., video, 2018*)

The European Union, pursuant to WTO negotiations, decided to reduce sugar production from 19 million to 14 million tons per year and to decrease the quotas allocated to individual member states. If any of the member states decided not to produce their sugar quota, they received compensation amounting to 730 Euro per ton of sugar. Eastern Sugar took advantage of this possibility and returned the quota of 70,133 tons allocated to the Dunajská Streda sugar factory to the European Union and collected 730 Euro per ton. (*\*D. J., video, 2017*)

The requirement of the European Union was to make sure that once the quota was returned, the given sugar factory would never be put in operation again. That means that it was supposed to be disposed of in such a manner that it must be levelled to the ground, including the liquidation of the underground networks to a depth of 2.5 meters.

Especially India and Brazil protested for years saying that these people from Europe were rich people and were producing too much sugar, preventing them to produce their own sugar to export. It lasted many years and finally the European Community lost, meaning that they had to reduce drastically the production. Production at that time in Europe was round 19 million tons of sugar and it had to be decreased to 14 million tons of sugar. (*\*\*Ch. L., video, 2018*)



## II Nagyszombat / Trnava, 1868 – 2004

Without the entry of foreign investors, the sugar companies would have to be closed down.

We should keep in mind that Slovakia will, sooner or later, become member of the EU and, that one of the strictest regulations in the Union concerns sugar. They are based on quotas allocated on each Member State. If we want to create a good starting position for the determination of our production quota, we must reach and maintain a stable level of production for at least five years, which will be used as the basis for our quota.

This situation is not competitive, therefore it is necessary to take steps towards the concentration of our sugar industry so that the entire production would fall under two or three companies.

*(Trend magazine, 1998/50)*

## IV Töketerebes / Trebišov, 1912 – 1997

Despite the excellent conditions for growing sugar beets and sufficient labor force in Easter Slovakia, no investor has appeared yet in sugar industry. Quality transport infrastructure has not been built to this day.



The sugar factory in Pohronský Ruskov was closed among the first ones in Slovakia. Its architecturally significant buildings are currently in a poor state. After the site visit on January 19, 2018, the conservationists found that besides the chimney from 1896 (there are no more than five such chimneys preserved in Slovakia), nothing else can be saved.

I submit an initiative to the Monuments Board of the Slovak Republic to include this chimney to industrial sights.

We had a lot of weaknesses, especially in the field of environmental protection. It has to be admitted that the sugar factory in Sered' is, to this day, troubled by the environmental situation, as it was heated by the local nickel smelter. Sugar factories in Sládkovičovo, Trenčianska Teplá and Šurany also had problems with waste water treatment plants, not even mentioning Pohronský Ruskov. When they started the campaign, all fish had died out in the area.

(\*D. J., video, 2017)



On October 1, 2017, the production quotas were abolished.

In 2018, there are two sugar companies operating in Slovakia: the Austrian AGRANA Zucker GmbH owns Slovenské cukrovary a.s., Sered' and the German Nordzucker AG owns Považský cukor a.s., Trenčianska Teplá.





# I Told Mama Not To Watch Hungarian Television

Interview with Ilona Németh by Eva Andrejčáková

Opening her most extensive exhibition thus far, Ilona Németh addressed a broad theme which provoked many responses. In *Eastern Sugar*, her project at Bratislava's Kunsthalle, she focused on the fate of our sugar factories, inspired by one of them which had formerly stood in her native town in the south of Slovakia. Once again she was intervening in a public space subjected to the actions of power. Intuition told her that behind the movement of the economy and the disappearance of the sugar factories in Slovakia there was also a hatred of difference, which politicians always manage to utilise for their personal advantage.

*In Bratislava's Kunsthalle you unwrap the story of the sugar factories in Slovakia, with everything relevant to their functioning and their demise. How do the people in the business respond?*

Variouly. Some of them are pondering whether this is art; many had made up their minds about that before the exhibition was ready. Some art historians ask whether the exhibition has sufficiently transcribed the theme into artistic language. Even my mother used to ask me every day: what has a sugar factory got to do with art? There are also people who look at the exhibition from a gender perspective – that I'm a woman who has got such a large space for a solo exhibition. And there's also talk about whether an artist ought to invite other artists to her solo exhibition and give them the opportunity to exhibit.

*And what do you say to that?*

I think that when other artists are dealing with certain partial themes programmatically and on a deeper level than myself, it's important to invite them. They're quite simply better at those things, and overall they extend the exhibition's scope. I too as an artist can address the theme from their perspective, but it will never be authentic.

*On what basis did you choose them?*

The German artist Harun Farocki, who's no longer living, all through his life devoted his art to the theme of work in a variety of projects. A very well-known video installation of his is part of the exhibition, and incidentally it's being shown in Slovakia for the first time. Again, the Dutch exhibitors are able to contribute the viewpoint of artists coming from a country that had colonies and trades with Africa. And Jeremy Deller from England has something to say on the theme, as an artist who has concerned himself with the history of the industrial revolution and its impact on the fate of workers, the exploita-

tion of employees, and the various historical and economic consequences coming right down to the present day. For me it's entirely logical and I'm not afraid of my own authorship being lost.

*It's evident that what interests the ordinary visitors is above all the theme. Doesn't it give them too strong a feeling of frustration?*

When I come to check how the exhibition is going, I always meet someone who wants to talk about it. Older people especially come to talk to me. Many of them have a relationship, usually personal, with the sugar factories. They're familiar with the bitterness of their loss, because either they themselves lost work, or they participated in the industry in other ways. They tend to be nostalgic and indignant. For example, an old engineer told me his whole family had worked in the sugar factory, in various positions. He'd brought his granddaughter to the exhibition to show her a book that her great-granddad had written – it's in the museum section.

*In the enormous hall of the gallery you've set up an actual manufactory, where visitors manually produce sugar loaves and can take them home as souvenirs. How does that interaction work?*

It's not entirely a simple matter: there's a responsibility towards those who are working in the factory and towards the exhibition as a whole. For example, the initial estimate for the quantity of sugar which our co-workers and the visitors would turn into sugar loaves was two tons, and that quantity is already gone. So now we must work out how to make more sugar available, whether via a sugar factory, or to buy sugar at further expense. It's a specific situation, when during an exhibition that's already in progress you need further finance. There's no available form of financing for that apart from one's own investment.



Ilona Németh in collaboration with Olja Triaška Stefanović (photo): Archive, 2017 – 2018, courtesy of the artist





Ilona Németh in collaboration with Olja Triiška Stefanović (photo):  
Archive, 2017 – 2018, courtesy of the artist

*Can't those manufactured sugar loaves which the makers have not taken home be ground down again?*

They can't. And that wouldn't be fair to those who have done the work. We're still thinking about what to do with those loaves left over. For example, selling them could partly cover the pay of our co-workers. We're looking for the most advantageous solution.

*You're solving your own problems of sale, supply and demand. Were you expecting that?*

I will admit that some of the circumstances produced by the exhibition were unexpected. A theme which emerged was whether art can have an impact on the economy or can influence people who have a decisive say in it.

*Has this been evidenced in some way?*

The Sugar Manufacture Association, which has two members from the two functioning sugar factories in Sereď and Trenčianská Teplá, are considering a meeting with Minister Matečná (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic, Ed.), to talk about the state and the problems of their industry in Slovakia, right here on the exhibition premises. We're open to the idea, since they think that the exhibition setting can have a positive effect on talks and that it isn't useless to ask the minister to come here. The exhibition is displaying values and it can change something in a person's thinking.

*You're dealing with the history of sugar manufacture, but currently many people are saying that the product is white poison. Can you separate that from your vision of engagement?*

Yes, I've also heard criticism, about whether it is moral to concern oneself with sugar. Naturally, during the exhibition we can debate that. But when you open up any theme whatever, you cannot address it totally and exhaustively. If I were concerned with biology or the physiology of the human body, then considerations about the effect of sugar on the body would be justified. It is certain that we need sugar for life: the question is how much, and what kind? But I would find it very difficult to say anything about that, because there are experts who say, for example, that the brown sugar which we regard as the healthiest is in reality the dirtiest, the least refined, so there's an economic fraud here, because it's the most expensive and what sustains its profits is above all the aura that's created around it.

*To what extent can we regard the demise of the sugar factories in Slovakia as a natural development?*

Experts explain that the economy is changing, some areas are more successful, others less, and it's all balanced out on a global scale. But when we talk about responsible economics, everything should be done in combination with what the particular country needs and so that local businesses can be preserved, so that there is no massive loss of jobs and the state does not become entirely dependent on other states. So that we can be self-sufficient in basic commodities, for example sugar. Sometimes that is not worthwhile for the state, but it does have to take care to safeguard fundamental things. Naturally, in a liberal economy we don't talk in this connection about social feeling, the sense of soci-

"I will admit that some of the circumstances produced by the exhibition were unexpected."





Ilona Németh in collaboration with Olja Triaška Stefanović (photo):  
Archive, 2017 – 2018, courtesy of the artist

ety, but what is that in actual fact? Responsibility of an economic and entrepreneurial character?

*Or an expression of cultural maturity. How old must the economic transgressions of the past be in order to be excusable today?*

I think we cannot accept such an idea by any means. There were many mistakes made, and we must not underestimate the effects of wild privatisation, during which all possible things were flogged off and stolen. To this day the political elites bear an enormous responsibility for the 1990s. In the video which is part of the exhibition Mr. Dušan Janiček, who is working in sugar manufacturing to this day, speaks of how they originally privatised the sugar factory in Sládkovičovo and were not able to save it from the political pressure of the local HZDS. These domestic occurrences and economic decisions had consequences as least as serious as the global forces.

*How would you imagine the present-day map of the sugar factories, if our country had not suffered such a grave economic collapse after 1989?*

I don't know how many sugar factories would have naturally ceased to exist and how many would be functioning today in Slovakia, or in the Visegrad region. When you look at their historical map, it's clear that they were more or less situated in the southern territories of present-day Slovakia. At one time, needless to say, they all belonged to Austria-Hungary, but how is it possible that precisely in southern Slovakia, where conditions were so advantageous for the cultivation of sugar beet, the majority of sugar factories were ultimately liquidated? Apart from Sereď, Dunajská Streda could easily have functioned, and maybe Sládkovičovo also. And Trebišov in the east.

*Is there a nationalist aspect in what happened?*

Intuitively I feel that, and my view is that nationalist

thinking plays an essential role in the decisions of politicians to the present day.

*Can you expand on that?*

The liquidation of the sugar factories in Slovakia began after 1990, when the country was very powerfully marked by a wave of nationalism. And that precisely is one of the important reasons why society did not take more of a stand so as to save its values. Officially it is said that the sugar factory in Sereď continued to function because locally it had the best conditions for the cultivation of sugar beet. But that's only 45 kilometres distant from the extinct Dunajská Streda factory, in an equally good area, so what's the reason? Furthermore, under the old regime the sugar factory in Dunajská Streda was a means for the slovakisation of the region: in the past people from other parts used to move there, so that could have been a plus for it. Why are there still no properly built roads in the south of Slovakia? I've got nothing

against the upland territory, but in the last analysis wouldn't it be simpler to connect the south with a highway than to build viaducts and tunnels in the mountains? Good roads would have a positive influence on the overall economic development of the region; why don't we want that in the south?

*Could minority politics have had more of an influence on the situation? After all, it was quite strongly represented in the Slovak government during a certain period.*

In the 1990s and the zero years it was amateurish and naive about what had to be represented in the government. On the economic issues it didn't have experience, any more than the other parties, and the globalising pressure was too strong. There's a complex network of problems behind all that, but they





Ilona Németh in collaboration with Olja Triiška Stefanović (photo):  
Archive, 2017 – 2018, courtesy of the artist

formed a seedbed where nationalism worked and functioned precisely at the crucial points, where it was decided whether the minority would hold its ground, what power it had in the given period, and what negotiating position the minority parties had at home and abroad.

*You've worked with the theme of nationalism in previous projects also. How does it manage to conceal itself in people?*

I have a sense of something like unconscious nationalism, which was expressed, for example, in the Private Nationalism series of exhibitions, which I participated in as a curator. I perceive it as an expression of learned or inherited stereotypes and automatic reactions which are triggered unconsciously in a person at decisive moments – towards minorities, races, and otherness in general. Either the person works with him or herself and does not voice that question, “Are you a Jew, a Gypsy, a Hungarian, a Muslim?”, or else he or she succumbs to condemnation of persons on the grounds of their origins. The conscious employment of these forces is an instrument in the hands of politicians and power. Apart from that, there are powerfully rooted, firmly fixed and untreated historical problems which are not talked about or discussed.

*Why are we speaking of unconscious reactions?*

Because people do not know much about themselves. There are many who think that they're cosmopolitans, but then suddenly a specific situation crops up and they're shown in an opposite light. Private nationalism is about a human being's personal setting, and it can influence very fundamental decisions.

*In the meantime, the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is exploiting the situation in southern Slovakia. He builds stadia, gives financial support to schools, artists and entrepreneurs, and retains sympathies. How do you see this in terms of the minority's formation?*

I think he is not exploiting the situation, but he's helping to create it: there's quite a big difference. Yes, of course, he is marking out territory, and it's an absolute provocation against the consensus in which we are living as neighbouring countries. The minority is part of a nation that lives in another country, but it's also part of the domestic country and culture. It has at the very least a dual identity. On the other hand, the majority nation can respect foreign subventions to those of its people who are in the position of a national minority, and most countries naturally do that, and likewise Slovakia. So there wouldn't be anything wrong with Orbán's support if it wasn't that he focuses on artificially conserved folklore and small-town culture, and that he influences thinking by bringing up the Treaty of Trianon of however long ago.

*Isn't the minority itself programmed like that?*

In my opinion no, that idea is more politically inspired. Alas, there's an enduring idea of the national minorities which is very demeaning, and there are prejudices at work. When I exhibited in Transylvania I felt ashamed that I could have had doubts about the people who lived there. Yes, maybe they live in worse economic conditions than we do, but that doesn't mean they don't follow what's happening

in the world. Quite the contrary, they have a good scope of vision and are able to think freely. Except that they have just as distorted, as ignorant a view of our people.

*Why?*

Because for a long time the information that comes to us from the minority culture of neighbouring lands has been servile. I see that as the abuse of minorities for political ends. Despite that, today we can make the statement that although Slovakia's southern territories are under the influence of Hungarian politics, the majority of Hungarians living in Slovakia would not go to live in his country.

*If you were the mayor of Komárno or Dunajská Streda, how would you distinguish yourself from Orbán?*

That's a very difficult question. As an individual I can refuse his support and I do that, because in my position as an artist from a minority region I do not seek to benefit from state grants stemming from Hungary. If I was in the position of mayor and took up that position regarding some subvention of his and dissociated myself from his political influence or decisions, then it would be fairly clear that the region would receive no support from the Hungarian side. But my milieu would have to be prepared for that, because otherwise I could even inflame the national conflict.

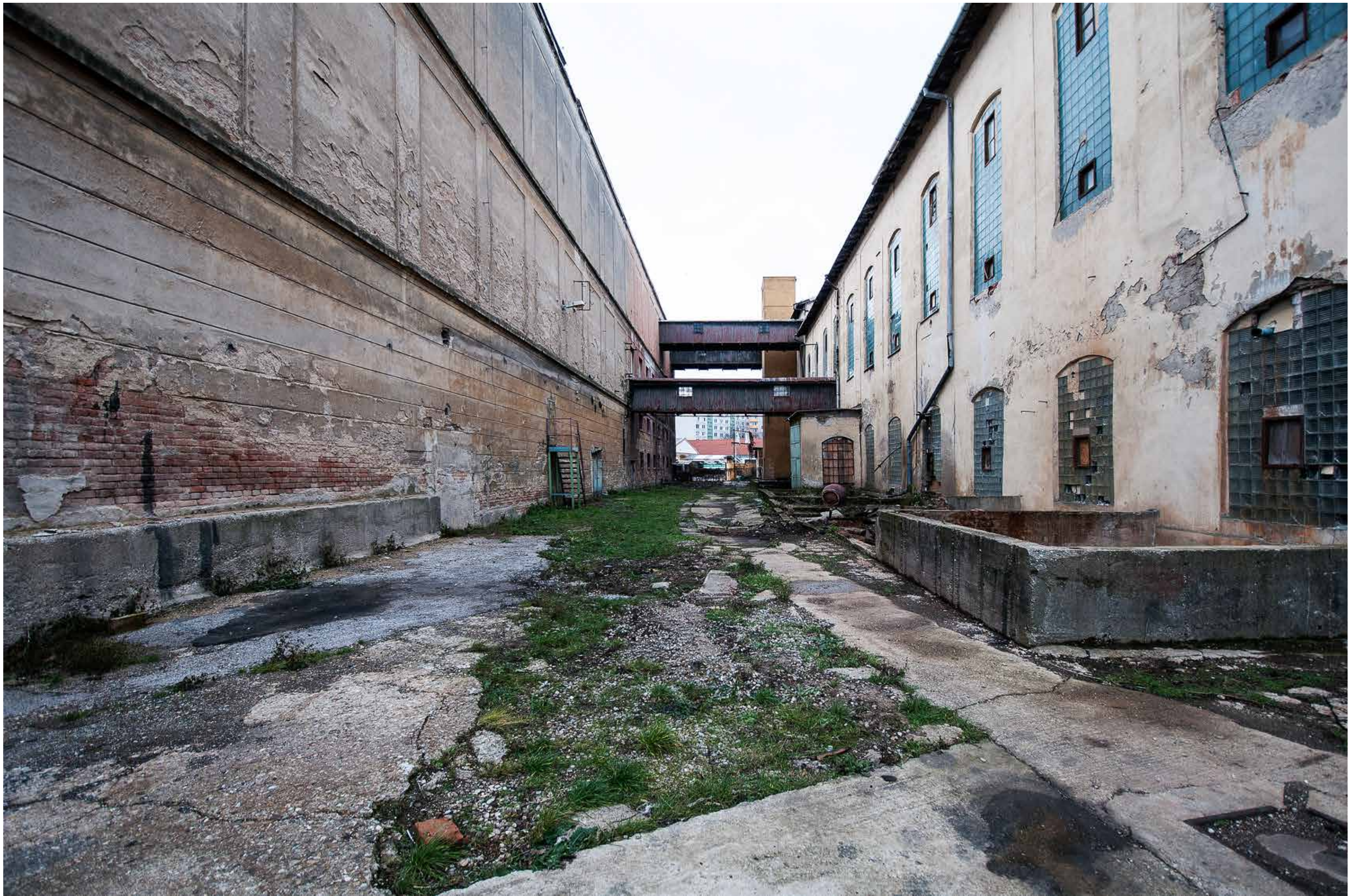
*How can the milieu be prepared for that?*

In the same way as you prepare people in Hungary to think Soros is a monster. By a massive long-continued campaign, including on the regional level. Today people in Hungary quake before Soros; in southern Slovakia too you can feel the campaign's influence, and so Orbán has achieved his goal. It is very hard to preserve good politics, and not just for the short term.

*How specifically is his influence shown in southern Slovakia?*

I'm aware of it in the Dunajská Streda region and round about. Most people follow Hungarian state television, and as we know, all media in Hungary are in thrall to Orbán: reports not only in state television but in all media today are manipulated. Five years ago you would not have heard anything about anti-semitism and anti-immigrant politics. Today these themes are directly part of the debates. Mostly I walk away from them, I cannot deal with people besotted by this ideology. They are manipulated via an essential human quality, which is fear. I told Mama not to watch Hungarian television.















# Jeremy Deller Harun Farocki Lonnie van Brummelen & Siebren de Haan

Exhibiting Guests

The art historian and curator Krisztina Hunya has made a valuable contribution by selecting four internationally known artists and connecting them with the exhibition concept, thus providing a comparison of the theme in different geopolitical frameworks.

The focus on labour and its global distribution is further developed through works by the artists Jeremy Deller, Harun Farocki and Lonnie van Brummelen & Siebren de Haan, whose work is introduced to a Slovak audience for the first time. The German artist Farocki was deeply invested in sustaining temporal as well as spatial perspectives on labour, whereas Van Brummelen & de Haan's research brings forth the asymmetric aspects of production and distribution, inscribed within neo-colonial divisions of centre and periphery. The works by Deller relate to the uncanny gestures and alienated nature of contemporary labour conditions.

KRISZTINA HUNYA (\*1988, Budapest, Hungary) is freelance curator and project manager. She is curator of the symposium at f/stop Festival, Leipzig and Assistant Curator of the exhibition Ilona Németh: *Eastern Sugar* at Kunsthalle Bratislava (both 2018). Her recent curatorial projects include the programming of the project space Zónotéka in Berlin (2014–2016), exhibitions *Performing Relationships* at KV – Verein für zeitgenössische Kunst Leipzig (2017), *Pack up Everything...* with Ilona Németh at SODA Gallery Bratislava and Knoll Gallery Budapest & Wien, as well as *ProjectZone* in the framework of OFF Biennale Budapest (2015). She has been Assistant Curator of *Riots: Slow Cancellation of the Future*, ifa-Galerie Berlin and Stuttgart (2018) and *Contour Biennale 8 Polyphonic Worlds: Justice as Medium* (2017), curated by Natasha Ginwala, with whom she worked on several projects since 2015. She is Project Manager of the Curators Workshop of the 10<sup>th</sup> and previously 9<sup>th</sup> Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art.









# Harun Farocki: *Workers Leaving the Factory in Eleven Decades*

2006, 12-channel video installation, 36 min. (loop),  
video b/w & color, sound, Ed. 5/5, courtesy of  
Harun Farocki Filmproduktion

## Selected scenes by monitors:

- 1 Auguste and Louis Lumière: *La Sortie de l'usine Lumière à Lyon*, 1895, silent
- 2 Gabriel Veyre: *Sortie de la Briquetterie Meffre et Bourgoin à Hanoi*, 1899, silent
- 3 From the Moscow National Film Archive: Author unknown, probably filmed in Moscow, 1912, silent
- 4 David Wark Griffith: *Intolerance*, 1916, silent
- 5 Fritz Lang: *Metropolis*, 1926, silent
- 6 Charles Spencer Chaplin: *Modern Times*, 1926, silent
- 7 Slátan Dudow: *Frauenschicksale*, 1952, German
- 8 Michelangelo Antonioni: *Il Deserto Rosso*, 1964, Italian
- 9 Jacques Willemont: *La Reprise du travail aux usines Wonder*, 1968, French
- 10 Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet: *Trop tôt, trop tard*, 1981, French
- 11 Elkosta: *Durchfahrtssperre DSP*, 1987, German
- 12 Lars von Trier: *Dancer in the Dark*, 2000, English

**Harun Farocki** has been one of the most persistent analysers of work and labour, in both its conception and perception and across its multiple global extensions. With the 12-channel video installation *Workers Leaving the Factory in Eleven Decades*, the artist invites us on a journey through film history by highlighting its initial motive, the very first film by the Lumière brothers, *La sortie des usines Lumière*. While the sequence captures factory workers being released into the joys of leisure time, several decades later the factory has simply vanished from the canvas. In Farocki's words "When it comes to social conflict, the showplace "in front of a factory", is very significant; when it comes to the private life of a film's character, which really only begins after work, the factory is relegated to the background. [...] Factories – and the whole subject of labour – are at the fringes of film history." (Farocki, 2006) Passing by different chapters of cinematography, one may adapt to a panoramic view of decade-long developments, eventually leading to the disappearance of industrial labour.

HARUN FAROCKI (\*1944, Novy Jicin, Czech Republic – †2014, near Berlin, Germany) was a ground breaking German filmmaker, video artist and lecturer, who developed a significant oeuvre of novel cinematographic and documentary strategies. His productions, which range from experimental documentaries to essay films and children's TV features, expose the hidden values of imagery. Characteristics of Farocki's work include minimalistic gestures lead by meticulous observations of ubiquitous social rituals. Farocki started making films at the newly established Berlin Film Academy, DFFB 1966 to 1968. He was author and editor of the magazine *Filmkritik*, Munich (1974–1984), visiting professor at the University of California (1993–1999) and later professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna (2006–2011). In 2011, he started his long term project *Labour in a Single Shot*, together with Antje Ehmman. Together they curated various exhibitions and film screenings at major institutions across Germany and in the US. Since the mid 1990s, his work began extending from the projection screen into the art space context. His video installations were shown in various solo- and group exhibitions, notably at: documenta 12; Tel Aviv Museum of Art; MoMA, New York; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Tate Modern in London; Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin and Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, among numerous other institutions. His work is represented in major art collections, such as those at the Tate Modern, Museum of Modern Art, New York and the Ludwig Museum in Cologne.





Hello,  
today you  
have  
day off.









**Jeremy Deller:**  
*Motorola WT4000*  
*Wearable Terminal*

2013, plastic and electronics, 10 x 64 x 14 cm, courtesy of the artist and The Modern Institute Glasgow

**Jeremy Deller:**  
*Hello, today you have day off (wording of text message sent to a worker on a zero hour contract informing him his labour would not be required that day)*

2013, fabric banner made by Ed Hall, 240 x 180 cm, courtesy of the artist and The Modern Institute Glasgow

**Jeremy Deller's** exploration into Britain's industrial heritage juxtaposes controversial aspects of contemporary labour conditions with the ambivalent legacy of 19<sup>th</sup> century factory work. A large black banner hung from the ceiling insultingly compares calling off work to having a day off; cancelling a job is reframed as receiving additional free time. A mannequin arm wears a Motorola WT 4000 tracking device, one of the gadgets used at Amazon warehouses to monitor the speed and efficiency of employees. By evoking both trade union banners as well as evidence of increasing automation and surveillance, Deller connects two distinct transformative periods in labour history. While the ongoing casualization and globalisation of labour brings with it new challenges, the struggle against exploitative methods continues.

JEREMY DELLER (\*1966, London, United Kingdom) creates open-ended projects and events that engage with collaboration as a creative force. The artist offers poignant commentary on cultural heritage, folk art traditions, and unresolved chapters of recent history through a blending of popular culture with politics and social history. His collaborative engagements have resulted in large-scale re-enactments, 24-hour screenings, curated exhibitions, and interactive public art pieces. In 2004, he won the Turner Prize for his work *Memory Bucket* and represented Britain in the 55 Venice Biennale in 2013. Selected significant works include: *Open Bedroom* (1993), a secretly staged exhibition in Deller's family home while his parents were on holiday; *Acid Brass* (1997), a collection of acid house anthems transposed and played by the Williams Fairey Brass Band (1997); *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001), a re-enactment which brought together around 1000 veteran miners and members of historical societies to restage the 1984 clash between miners and police at Orgreave, Yorkshire; *It Is What It Is* (2009), a road trip across the US from New York to Los Angeles along with an Iraqi citizen and a US war veteran, towing a car destroyed in a bomb attack in Baghdad; and *Sacrilege* (2012), a life-size inflatable version of Stonehenge (2012).



photo: A.A.CS.



**Hello,  
today you  
have  
day off.**









Juhocukor





# Ilona Németh: *Juhocukor*

2018, original piece of flooring from Juhocukor  
(later: Eastern Sugar) factory, Dunajská Streda, 1990s,  
installation, linoleum, courtesy of the artist



photo: A.A.C.S.



photo: A.A.C.S.



## Lonnie van Brummelen & Siebren de Haan: *Monument of Sugar – how to use artistic means to elude trade barriers*

2007, 16 mm film-essay, 67 min., colour and b/w, silent,  
1 sugar cube approx., courtesy of the artists

Lonnie van Brummelen & Siebren de Haan's research project follows the idea of investigating and ultimately overcoming the European subsidised sugar trade by also revealing its colonial implications. In 2007 the European trade barrier on sugar imports was still in place, protecting local producers from incoming cheaper products. Purchasing a large amount of sugar in Nigeria, the artists decided to create an in situ monument, which being classified under the Uniform Commercial Code Law 9703 as an original artwork or monument, was able to circumvent trade restrictions and enter the EU. The material results of the research were 304 sugar blocks, half of which originated from Nigeria, while another half was produced in France. On display at Kunsthalle Bratislava is one sugar cube from Nigeria, which demonstrates the dissolving nature and material vulnerability of this *Monument of Sugar*. The 16mm film-essay depicts the artists' obstacles as well as observations made during the field trip.

Since 2002, Dutch artist duo LONNIE VAN BRUMMELEN & SIEBREN DE HAAN have been collaboratively exploring the winding trails of artistic research, exposing the intrinsic contradictions and ambivalences within our socio-economic realities. Their long-term projects are made manifest in 16 or 35 mm film projections, video installations, sculptures, and collages that often relate to the act of 'smuggling', both physically and symbolically. They provide a record of the transformative nature of culture heritage, expose resources within global production and trade circuits, and scan the cultural and geopolitical landscapes of Europe's borders. The essayistic, personal tone of their endeavours and direct engagement with their subject matter are attempts to reconnect global movements with individual subjects and objects.





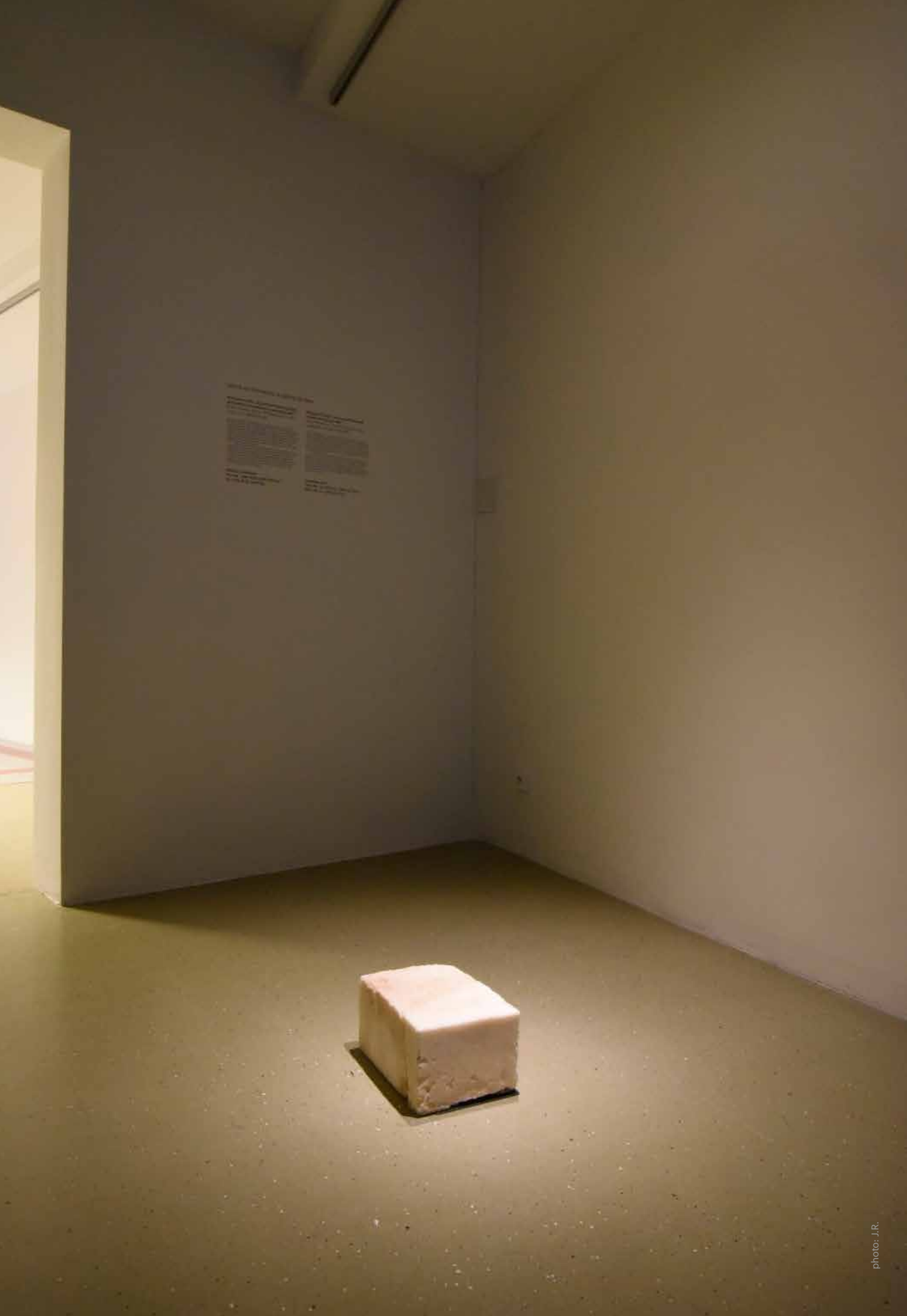


photo: J.R.



photo: J.R.





Lonnie van Brummelen & Siebren de Haan: *Monument of Sugar – how to use artistic means to elude trade barriers*, 2007  
16 mm film-essay, 67 min., colour and b/w, silent, 1 sugar cube approx., courtesy of the artists



# Assembling Bittersweet Testimonies for Posterity

Essay by Maja and Reuben Fowkes

Back then, in the warm afterglow of the revolutions of 1989, the divisive histories of the twentieth century seemed to have come to a definitive end. The prospects of pluralistic democracy and the rebirth of civil society gave a tailwind to the forces of cultural and economic globalisation that would soon transform the world even more fundamentally than the long decades of the Cold War. The upward trajectory reached new heights with the ostensibly amicable expansion of the European Union to the East, setting a course of economic integration, convergence of living standards and consolidation of democratic norms. Today this optimistic vision has however been replaced by a more dystopian outlook marked by increasing rates of emigration, the revival of historic hostilities and an alarming wave of populism, illiberalism and xenophobia. With the exhibition *Eastern Sugar* Ilona Németh investigates the pathologies of transition, uncovering their roots in the flawed mechanism of privatisation mired by asset-stripping and systemic nepotism during the headlong rush from the dissipation of late socialism to the unruliness of feral capitalism.

Along with the exhortations to embrace free trade and open markets came practices of protectionism, tariffs and trade blocs that distorted the level playing field idealised by neo-liberal globalisation. The recent history of the Slovak sugar industry, as this exhibition makes clear, was entangled in these contradictory processes. It was not just inherited technological and financial disadvantages but exclusion from the common market that bankrupted local sugar production in the 1990s, with communist-era refineries snapped up by savvy Western investors for a song. After 2004 when the situation was reversed, the foreign owned sugar beet industry in Slovakia was eligible for European subsidies and protected by tariffs from the competition of sugarcane from the Global South. In another twist, tens of millions of Euros of compensation were paid to multinational consortiums as a reward for discontinuing sugar manufacture at their Slovak refineries, leading to the physical dismantling of only recently modernised sugar factories. This followed reforms to the European sugar industry designed to reduce over-production in response to a decision by the World Trade Organisation that the system of EU quotas and import barriers unfairly restricted global free trade. It is the bittersweet emotional, social and material residues left by cold financial calculations made on distant spreadsheets to which Németh gives tangible form in this show.

The choice of sugar as the prism through which to examine the multiple upheavals of the last three decades brings with it deeper historical associations that go to the heart of the project of modernity. It was indeed through a sugar trade based on the enslavement of more than 12 million Africans from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century that much of the Western capital was accumulated to drive the industrial revolution and the forging of na-

tion-states. As cultural anthropologist Walter D. Mignolo has underlined, there was a 'darker side to Western modernity' based on imperial injustices and exploitation, with colonial power underpinning even enlightened visions of the modern world. An apt metaphor for the entanglement of colonial legacies with modern culture could be found in the fact that London's Tate Gallery was established with a financial donation and art collection of a sugar baron. It was also the same Tate & Lyle that was co-owner of the Eastern Sugar company in Slovakia, posing a question about the neo-colonialist dimension of the takeover of ex-socialist industries. Németh's project is however not aligned with the populist programme of anti-globalisation that has swept the political systems of Eastern Europe in recent times. It rather takes a critical stance towards the fact that the economic transition was managed and carried out in the interests of elites and not for the benefit of ordinary citizens.

Singular artistic approaches, as evident in this show, can act as a vehicle to pierce the economic abstractions of financial engineering to illuminate the effects such transformations have on individual experiences and the life of communities. In equal measure, by conducting interviews with managers and executives Németh draws attention to the role of actual persons rather than generic institutions in making crucial decisions with enduring consequences for the social issue. In difference to socialist nostalgia, which is coloured by longing for the security and bygone certainties of the old regime, the term nostalgia originally stood for homesickness, or the psychological distress caused by uprooting and displacement. The communities affected by the closure of the sugar refineries were afflicted by a similar sense of loss caused by the erasure and derelict state of the industrial landscape that once formed familiar vistas. The anxiety caused by the disappearance of a tactile mode of labour-intensive agriculture that entailed physical contact with soil and plants was further accompanied by missing the sounds and smells of the factory and noting the absence of the rhythms of seasonal labour that were once punctuated by moments of rest and celebration.

The antidote to the social effects of deindustrialisation and deprivation from the rewards of manual labour is provided in this exhibition context by the opportunity to take part in the making of traditional sugar loaves. Transforming the central gallery space into dedicated manufacturing and packaging stations, the artist provides visitors with the rare chance to experience forming conical towers of sweetness, sharing in the satisfaction of starting and finishing a simple manual task. This workshop activity also has a direct social impact in giving a temporary respite and paid work to individuals suffering from chronic unemployment as a consequence of the same economic processes. It also offers a means to work through feelings of anomie in a complex technological world ruled by automation and the rise of artificial intelligence. The exhibition indeed stands as a warning about future encroachments on working lives heralded by technological advances that are on course to further side line the human element in production processes. In another gesture of inclusiveness, Ilona Németh opens up a space in her exhibition for comparative insights by her fellow artists, Jeremy Deller, Harun Farocki, Lonnie van Brummelen and Siebren de Haan, who thematise issues of factory rituals, the transformation of labour and the widespread effects of the manipulation of globalised trade.

An alternative entry point to the show leads through a self-contained Museum of Sugar which gathers material residues of the rich social and technologi-

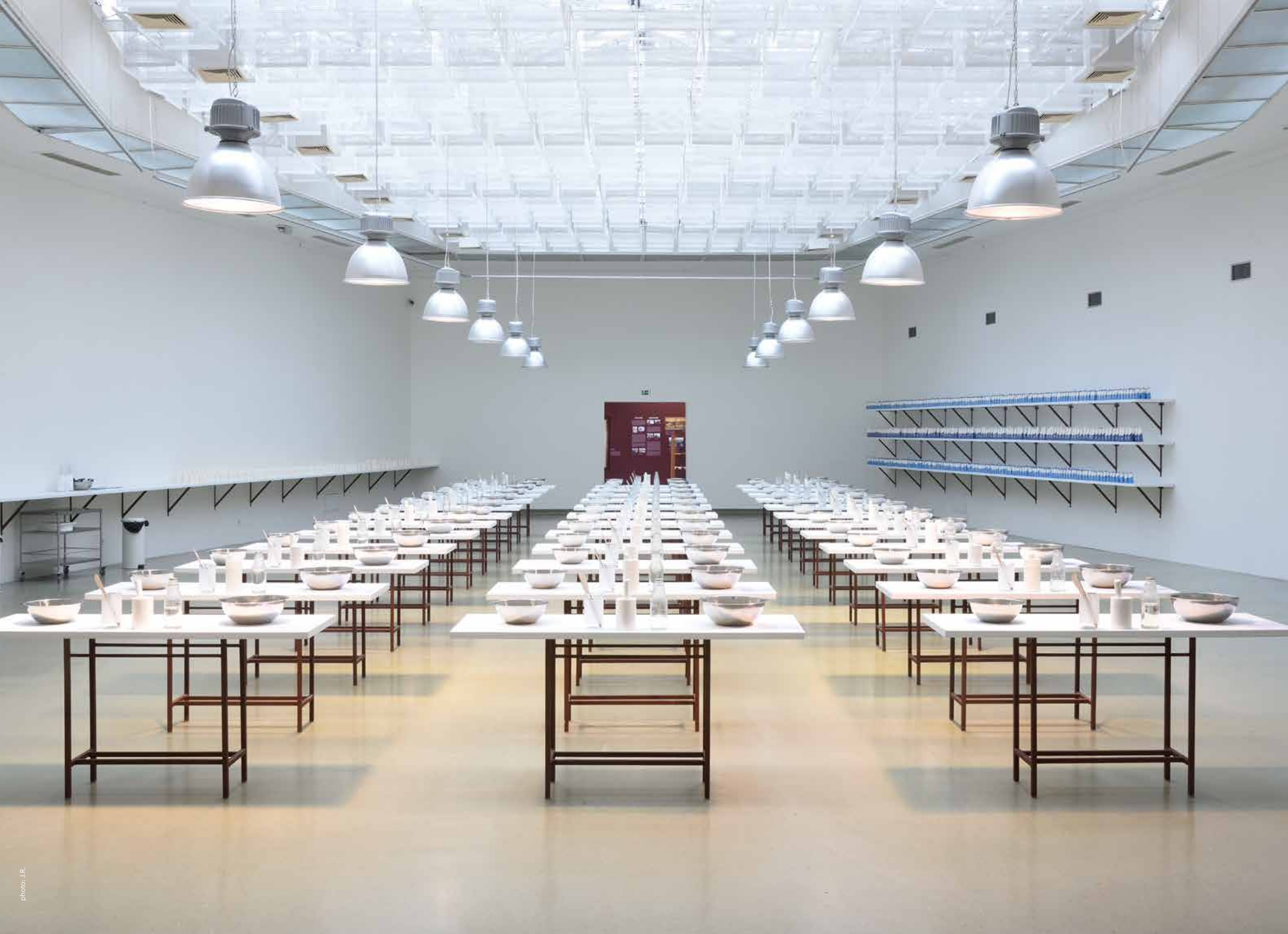
cal history of a now closed chapter in Slovakia's industrial past. While in the early 1990s a sense of jubilation accompanied the opening of the first McDonald's restaurants and branches of IKEA across Eastern Europe as symbols of the capitalist future, today the legacy of the transition is more accurately captured by abandoned factories and destitute provincial towns. In that regard, Németh's take on the historicisation of the post-communist transformation takes the form of an anti-monument that can be grasped through architectural fragments of derelict factories or the remnants of lino flooring from the reception building of the former sugar refinery in her home town of Dunajská Streda. Furthermore, these material remains are activated in the exhibition through conversations, shared memories and collective work that help articulate the contested heritage of Eastern Sugar. Shining a light on the social consequences of political and financial decisions inevitably leads to the question of responsibility, and while it establishes a compelling diagnosis of the roots of the present crisis, this project is also directed towards exploring possibilities for the prevention of such procedures in the future.

MAJA AND REUBEN FOWKES are art historians, curators and co-directors of the Translocal Institute for Contemporary Art, an independent research centre focussing on the art history of Central Europe and contemporary ecological practices. Their curatorial projects include the *Anthropocene Experimental Reading Room*, the *Danube River School*, the conference on *Vegetal Mediations*, as well as the exhibition *Walking without Footprints*. Recent and forthcoming publications include Maja Fowkes's *The Green Bloc: Neo-Avant-Garde and Ecology under Socialism*, a book on Central and Eastern European Art Since 1950, as well as numerous chapters and journal articles on topics such as performative re-enactments, de-schooling the art curriculum and the ecological entanglements of deviant democracy. Reuben Fowkes is an editor of *Third Text* and they are regular contributors to magazines and artist publications. They have given numerous guest lectures and conference papers and are founding members of the Environmental Arts and Humanities Initiative at Central European University.















# Ilona Németh in collaboration with Marián Ravasz: **Sugarloaf Manufacture**

2017 – 2018, manufacture with 36 working stations,  
sugarloaf forms and utensils, packaging material, back  
space for the workers, courtesy of the artist

Working hours:  
Mon, Wed – Fri: 12 – 7 p.m.

Visitors were invited to produce sugar loafs on site.  
They could take home half the amount of packed  
sugar loafs they produced.









# Sugar as a Case Study

Interview with Ilona Németh by Eva Čobejová and Elena Akácsová

Ilona Németh is a conceptual artist, a professor, and one of the most prominent figures on the Slovak art scene. In recent years, however, she has been exploring something peculiar: sugar manufacturing in Slovakia. The first result is her exhibition in the Kunsthalle Bratislava entitled *Eastern Sugar*.

*Isn't it strange that a conceptual artist should create an exhibition devoted to a single branch of industry? Previously you were addressing the theme of nationalism, and now suddenly sugar manufacturing. Why?*

Since 2010 I'd been dealing with nationalism. That emerged from the second half of the 1990s, when relations at the political level between Hungary and Slovakia were at their worst. At first I tried to keep a distance from these affairs, because of all the peoples in the vicinity, I think Slovaks and Hungarians possibly have most in common. But here there were various power plays and political games in which we were exploited. In 2010 I came to feel that as a Hungarian living in Slovakia I must speak out about that – both as an artist and as a citizen. And when I was invited to be co-curator of an international exhibition cycle *Private Nationalism*, I said yes, and that went on for seven years including the *Universal Hospitality* exhibitions in Vienna and Prague. At the beginning of 2017 Nina Vrbanová invited me to Bratislava's Kunsthalle, at a time when I was feeling that I now needed to move away from the theme of nationalism and try to think about the reasons for those changes which happened in society over the past decade. I was pondering what was behind the growing nationalism and populism.

*What conclusion did you come to?*

My conclusion was that after the political and economic changes which occurred in society from the 1990s on, "gaps and fissures" emerged with the loss of work opportunities, and the simplest way of filling those holes was with ideology. For example, with nationalism and spreading rumours about enemies, and this is also fostered by the language of populism, which has been cultivated in politics in recent years. It's always easier to feed the most basic human instincts than to face up to real problems and seek solutions. But for that it would also be necessary to analyse the causes and name them.

*And how did the thought of the sugar factories strike you?*  
I'm from Dunajská Streda. And in 2007 the sugar factory there was liquidated. Nearly every day for

ten years I've been passing the place where it stood on my way to Bratislava, and it always troubles me. And when something has been troubling you for ten years, you'll begin to make something of it professionally as well.

*You were passing by that sugar factory and the idea came?*

It occurred to me that through the story of *Eastern Sugar* I could examine the wider connections; I could take it as a case study, to enable me to add something to the discourse, about a common reflection on the current state of our society and culture, something on general tendencies, using the language of art. That sugar factory, I think, can be a convenient starting point. It was about 500 metres from our home, although no one from my family worked there. It had been part of the silhouette, the profile of the town, with its chimney, its factory building, but nothing remained of it. Really and truly, nothing. Based on a treaty with the European Union (or based on an argument between the EU and Brazil and India about division of the sugar market) it was levelled to the ground, in fact a further 2.5 metres underneath, so that production could never be renewed. Today it's an empty space. I spent a year engaged in research; I found out how many sugar factories there had been in Slovakia and I visited them all with the photographer Olja Triaška Štefanič and got to know people who had worked there. On that basis I continued my research.

*What did you discover in the course of that year?*

Various things. For example, that there isn't just one culprit. It would be very simple to say that the fault lies in Slovakia's unpreparedness to enter the global economy, or in socialism, or in capitalism.

*Or in the European Union.*

Or. I came to the conclusion that one has to assemble a mosaic of reasons for the current condition of things, look at it from various standpoints, and build this knowledge and experience into future decisions. I had my prejudices: I thought it was just

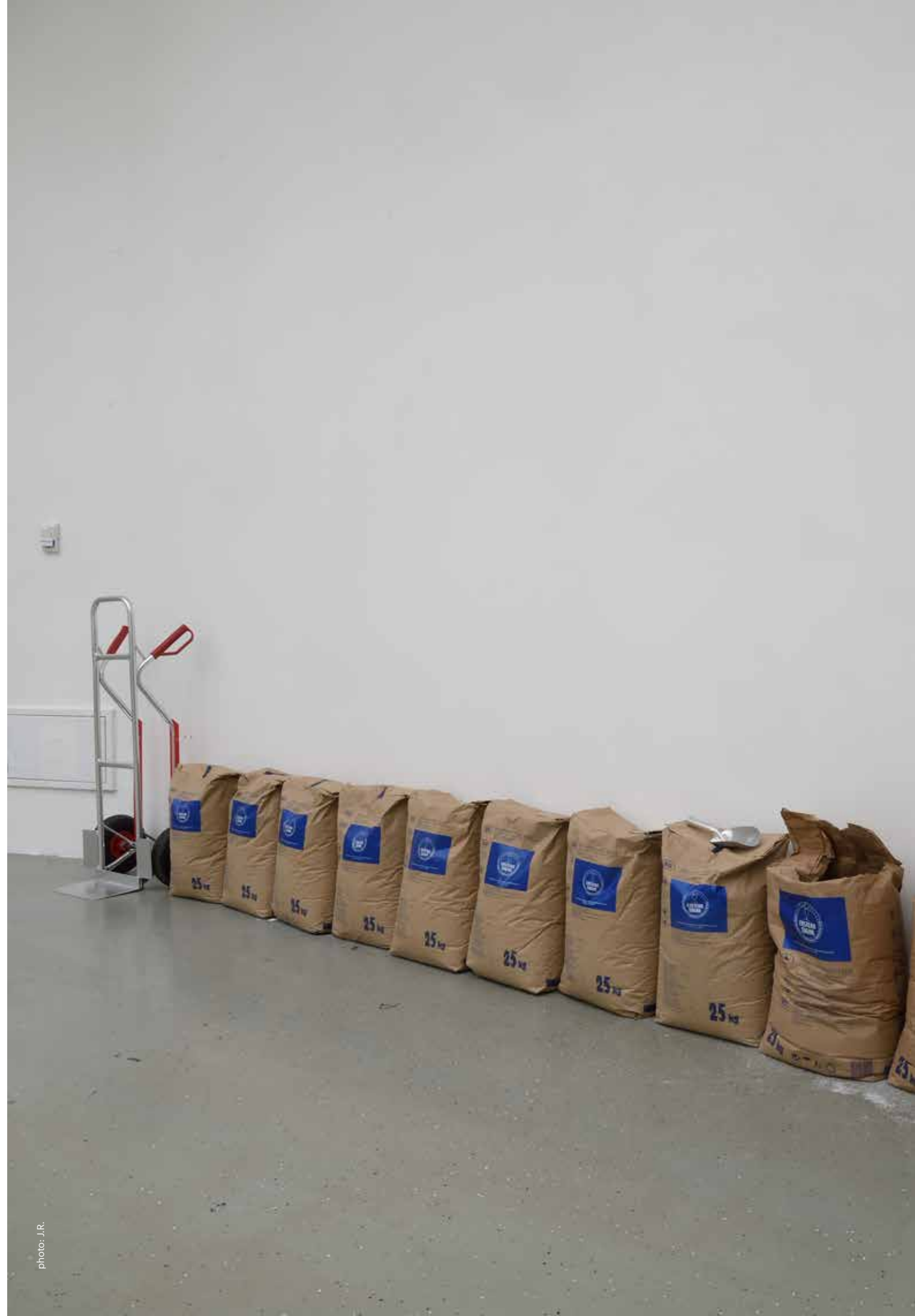


photo: J.R.



“It would be very simple to say that the fault lies in Slovakia’s unpreparedness to enter the global economy, or in socialism, or in capitalism.”

ourselves who had messed things up, or that it was exploitation from the other side, that foreign investors came and wanted to make fools of us.

*Wasn't it that we were naive and they exploited our naivety?*

It isn't that simple. We were not prepared for dialogue with them. Maybe some investors came with evil intentions, but if we leave that aside, they were coming with entirely different experience, which we had lagged behind over the previous fifty years. They might have thought they were going to have a relationship of equals with us. But it wasn't equal and it couldn't have been. They expected us to stand up for our interests, that we would try to preserve our industry and our values, and we were seeing them as rescuers, saviours, quite literally. That unequal relationship has had profound consequences, to say nothing of Mečiarism, which pillaged our country.

*Shortly after the fall of communism there were ten sugar factories in operation in Slovakia. Two survived.*

Yes, and currently they are not even one per cent in Slovak ownership, which is rather important. Investors came in the 1990s, when wild privatisation began. There were several players, the strongest being World and Eastern Sugar: those gradually scooped up the sugar factories and afterwards sold them. Eastern Sugar, an Anglo-French firm, came to Dunajská Streda in 1993 and gradually acquired hundred percent ownership.

*Is that bad or good?*

Maybe that's not even important. Maybe what's important is to reflect on all that happened, and how we can be better prepared for the things that are happening now. And to see all that through the story of our sugar manufacturing. That is why I've also recorded what was said by a French expert working in Eastern Sugar, who talked about the global circumstances. He spoke about a court case taken by India and Brazil against Europe for sugar quotas. It puts the whole story in a totally different context, and in that context our losses also, which we perceive personally or regionally, appear in a different light.

*Is it a bad thing that we have only two sugar factories here?*

In my opinion, it's bad. Because we don't have the influence to be able to make decisions for ourselves.

We are not self-sufficient virtually in anything at all, including sugar manufacturing.

*But it isn't primarily sugar or our self-sufficiency in sugar that interests you. You're not an economist or an analyst. You're an artist. What's your explanation of what occurred?*

The two sides had entirely different expectations. We entered the capitalist world as a world of finance and commerce and we didn't have any experience of it, so they could do what they wanted with us. Not that we weren't competitive, because in certain branches of industry we could have been, but we simply didn't know how to uphold our interests. And that happened with everything. On our side there was naivety. We weren't prepared for the “normal outside” world. That can be seen vividly in sugar manufacturing, but it happened in various branches. And therefore I think that the theme of this exhibition is not sugar manufacturing at all, that is only symbolic. I see this as a case study.

*However, we also did have the era of Mečiarism, when some people were prepared to stand up for their interests.*

Yes. I don't know how I should define such people. There were power groups here that knew how to pursue their goals, even in that general unpreparedness. They were selfish and they followed their interest. And the people, in Sládkovičovo for example, who privatised a sugar factory with the intention of maintaining production, were compelled by various means to abandon their enterprise.

*Is this a normal approach for a conceptual artist, to study some particular branch of industry, why it collapsed?*

I don't know if it's normal. Artistic creation doesn't always require such a lengthy process as in this case, but maybe it was imposed also by this region, where a theme of this kind can be thoroughly scrutinised. One can travel all round, make acquaintance with people who know something about the subject, and afterwards one can consider everything. The research is not completed yet. I regard the exhibition as a milestone: we're showing something now of what we have, but I intend to continue working on it. As an artist I can collaborate with experts in economy, sociology, politology; together with them I can reason about the things that happened.

*What result will there be?*

I am still studying how it happened, what it was that happened, and how things can be done differently.



photo: A.ACS.

I am considering the entire history from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when entrepreneurs from Bohemia or of German or Jewish origins came to do business on our territory, such as it was then, and during the interwar period they reached world-class levels in various things. Not only in the mode of production but also in the entire culture of responsible enterprise, with care for their employees. They continued their enterprise during the 20<sup>th</sup> century; some of them, for example the Kuffner family, who founded the sugar factory in Sládkovičov, managed to emigrate shortly before fascism, others were murdered. After the war came nationalisation, the harsh years of the 1950s. And even in the 1990s we ruined lots of things here. Not long ago one visitor to the exhibition said that capitalism had destroyed the sugar factories.

*Is that true?*

I would say that capitalism built those sugar factories. The entire twentieth century has left its marks, along with our own story of capitalism, fascism, socialism, and then capitalism again. Currently we are destroying many things by our own bad decisions. I believe that when we understand something, we

have an opportunity to protect ourselves by different means in the future. So that history will not be repeated. In that respect, this exhibition is positive.

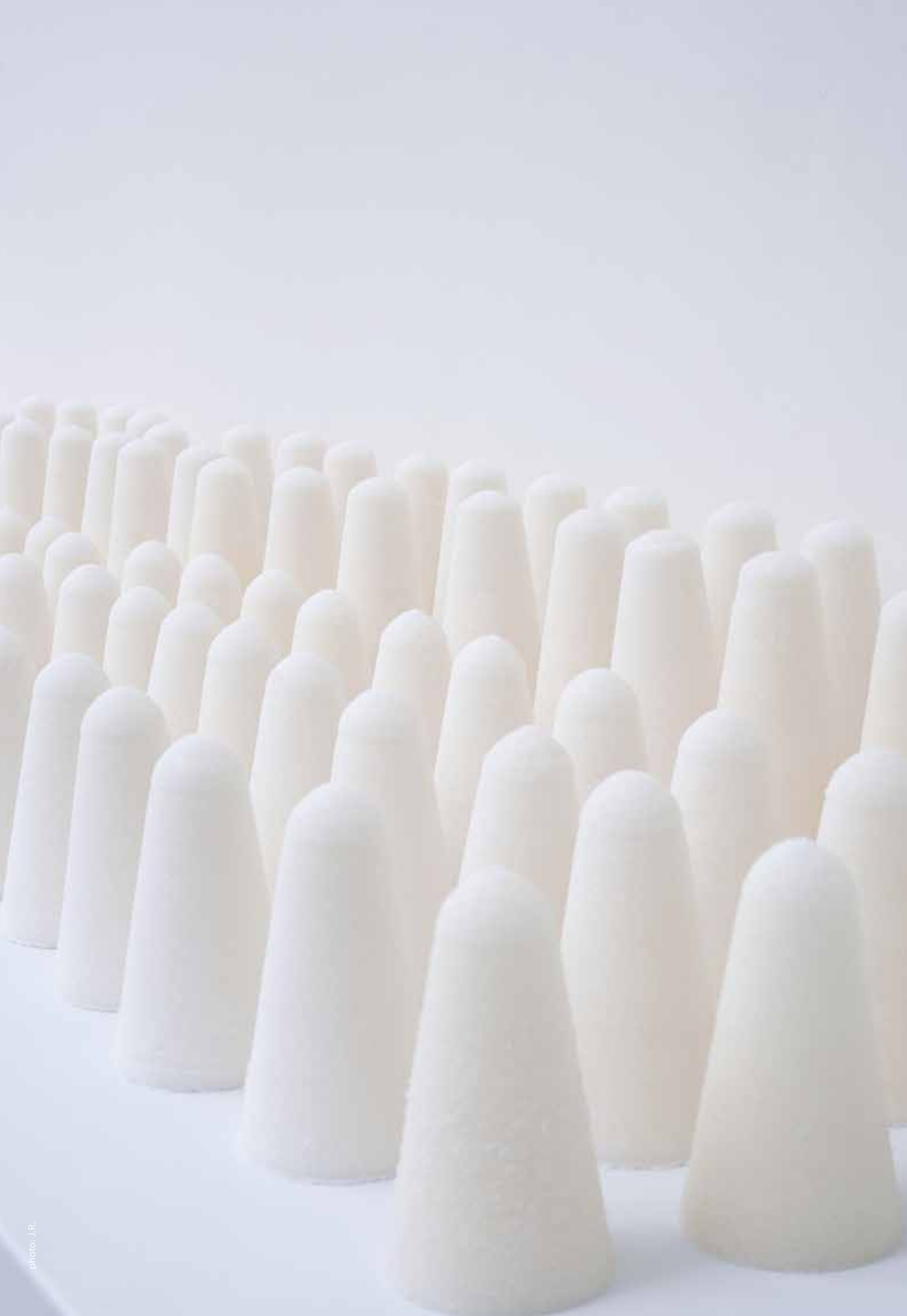
*We are more accustomed to journalists, historians, economists addressing these themes in a book or an article. What results from an artist's work?*

Art has the potential to communicate contents in a different manner from the written work or the lecture. I try to get under people's skins using a different language. I think art can change people's thinking. Because by now we're pretty well saturated by rational thought, we need a different language of communication. I think if someone comes to this exhibition, something of it will get through to him or her, some change in thinking may occur. That is a possible result.

*The exhibition has rather a depressing effect. If we go away angry, is that the right response?*

Most people go with a positive feeling, but that's





“It isn’t a matter of nostalgia, but suddenly you have a feeling that things ought to take a different course.”

because of the factory that we have here for the work itself: producing sugar loaves. Here, on the one hand, you can regress to childhood and experience something that may be familiar to you, and by manually making that sugar loaf you gain a certain feeling of satisfaction. At the same time, I wanted to direct attention to the issue of work as such and that of the working human being. Hence there are also foreign artists here who programmatically address or have addressed the phenomenon of work. I think that the work he or she performs for others is essential to every human being. We will find it hard to function without that.

*In the exhibition you also show the state of industrial memorials in Slovakia. It would seem to be a very strong theme in society now. We see it everywhere around us, we see it in the activities of young people, that they take an interest in memorials and the conservation of the cultural heritage, and especially of old factories. Why do young people relate to this so much?*

Maybe they’re looking for the foundations of their history; maybe they are seeking the proven values that used to function: historically we know something about them, and now we see physically that they are falling to pieces. And maybe these young people (and this is something I see in my students) are seeking some secured points that they can set out from. They are looking for something proven, something that isn’t fake.

*Your exhibition also has an old painting of the sugar factory in Pohronský Ruskov. That factory in the painting is reminiscent rather of a mansion in the middle of a park. Today it’s a ruin. What effect did it have on you?*

That ruin affected me very powerfully. I was thinking of the values that were there, apart from the manufacturing opportunities with good-quality living accommodation. I also thought, for example, of the fact that beside the sugar factory they built a sporting pitch for the locals and a park, which people in the vicinity called Abbazia (the Abbey) – a park for relaxation. Today we see that the majority of firms try to get rich as quickly as possible, but for me the entire culture of enterprise is a value: the responsibility of entrepreneurs, who not only give work to their employees but also educate them and create a cultural space for them, so as to develop them, to

cultivate them. When I was in Sládkovičovo, where the premises of the sugar factory also have a high architectural value, I sat in a park, I saw fountains, old chestnut trees, a mausoleum (of the Kuffner family, Ed.), and saw what a high level it was on, that entire environment. I sat there and tried to breathe in that atmosphere. It isn’t a matter of nostalgia, but suddenly you have a feeling that things ought to take a different course. We should get to the stage where we will cultivate such values again.

*The workplace, then, shouldn’t just be a place where we earn our living.*

We’re talking about a loss of culture, of a general quality of cultivation. I hope that at this exhibition people will also feel angry, when that mosaic is assembled in their heads, and maybe it will encourage people to action, to do things differently.

*You are a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design. What is there that annoys you about your students?*

Most of all, maybe, when they don’t put enough energy into what they’re doing. When you don’t feel that they really want it. When they don’t give attention to detail, they’re lackadaisical, they don’t even respect their own ideas. I had a residency once at the University of Art in Oslo, and over there a young person who is studying art knows exactly how much energy has to be invested so that one can exhibit, so that one can function as an artist. It was evident that even for a three-day exhibition the student would commit everything, not just money but energy and a demanding attitude towards oneself and the work. Why is it that our students think it will be enough to give 50 percent of their energy?

*And what answer have you found to that?*

I derive it from the overall level of culture and cultivation in society. There’s nothing else I can see behind it. Maybe it’s connected also with expectations. The young person feels that with half his or her energy it’ll be good enough, it’ll suffice. But I don’t want to generalise.



*Quite some time ago we heard you complain that students weren't interested in what was happening in society, they didn't want to get involved. Is that still true?*

Probably at that time I had a tutorial contact with students which wasn't ideal. I must say that in recent times most of our students have become activated. Our students too were out in the squares.

*You've always been an artist who saw what was going on around her, in society, and you had a need not just to reflect on it but to exert influence also. Are you exceptional in that regard?*

When I took up teaching 14 years ago I had a very sharply-honed opinion and I thought that all artists must be responsible for what is happening round us and we must also get actively involved in it. But when you've taught and got to know hundreds of students, you see that it's also determined by the person's character and family upbringing. You can't put pressure on them to be engaged in their art, if that doesn't proceed from their character. There are also other and fully as high-quality artistic programmes which have other roots. Previously I had not fully appreciated that, or I hadn't had enough patience to understand that entirely different positions exist. And that art which does not have an engaged character may exist, and that it may be equally important.

*Where did you get that from, the need which you've always had to have something other than a pure artistic programme?*

Presumably from my family background. In our family politics was always "on the agenda". That was my experience, and it influenced me.

*Your father was a deputy minister, your uncle was vice-president of parliament in 1968, and today your son is government plenipotentiary for the Roma communities. That's some political tradition in your family! You have it coded in the genes.*

Yes. (laughs)

*Doesn't it disturb some of the students that you have these expectations of them?*

It does disturb them. But I try to push all that somewhere into the background. It doesn't mean that we don't talk together about what's going on. But I've separated it more – the artistic process from the conscious citizen. However, I still insist that people who regard themselves as intelligent aware persons, so then persons studying at university, must take an interest in politics and society. They can't just say, "I don't enjoy it, I don't find it interesting". As citizens they cannot afford not to notice where they're living and how they're living. And what they're responsible for. They must be part of society and influence it also. They must be active, but that doesn't necessarily mean being active also in art. That can be separated.

*We have experienced the murder of a journalist and of his partner. Dreadful things have been revealed, about the functioning of this state. How have you seen this, and has it also influenced your artistic programme?*

I responded as a person, as a citizen. I think it's very difficult to respond immediately with artistic actions to events such as these. Maybe somebody can, but I can't. I need time. But this time what happened



*"However, I still insist that people who regard themselves as intelligent aware persons, so then persons studying at university, must take an interest in politics and society."*



truly was serious and we all experienced it together as something in the highest degree unacceptable.

*What do you think of the new minister of culture?*

I think that premature elections could have been a solution. So now it's of less interest to me, who is currently the minister of culture. I think the present minister is not suitable for such a function, but I'm not concerned about her, I'm thinking more of the future of the country. From the beginning I was in favour of premature elections, though I know that the results might be even worse for society, but sometimes one has to take the risk. We see in other countries that it doesn't necessarily turn out well and bad decisions can be taken. For example, what's happening now after the elections in Italy is very dangerous. But I don't know how things can be solved otherwise: the citizens are responsible for who they vote for. Slovakia has shown several times that it's able to vote responsibly. I hope that will happen again.

*You have Hungarian nationality. How do you regard what's going on in Hungary now?*

It's catastrophic. I'd never have been able to imagine how that system could hold onto power even after further elections. We can follow a live re-run of the entire history of Hungary. Why is it that Hungarians often stood on the side of evil? Why have they often made bad decisions, which brought them nothing but bad results? And now once again we see this in live action, and it's bad also for the other countries around Hungary, maybe even for the whole of Europe. Maybe this also is an opportunity to begin to think differently. For example, I found it a very powerful moment when former premier Fico uttered the name of Soros at a press conference and the Slovak journalists began to laugh. For me it was a catharsis. Because I'd been hearing that in Hungarian news broadcasts for three years, how people were gradually manipulated by massive political communication, including in the media. It was and it is so well-established that by now even children think Soros is the devil, the greatest threat to Hungary, which he wants to destroy. And here our premier, who's now out of the game, in a final spasm tries to hold on to power by playing the most vulgar cards and talking about Soros. He used a method that has had proven success in Hungary, but here in Slovakia the journalists began to laugh.

*How is it possible that the Soros scare worked with the Hungarians and in Slovakia it provoked laughter?*

In Hungary the strategy for holding on to power was worked out very deliberately and thoroughly. And people were given a thorough preparation for consuming those news reports. Therefore I think it's very important to preserve the free media, their independence from power. This control is immensely important.

*Why have most Hungarian citizens not seen through that legend about Soros?*

When they cut off your hand bit by bit, at first you don't even notice it, but after some time you're without a hand. You notice it too late: that's what happened in Hungary and we need to take care that it doesn't happen in Slovakia. That we don't turn out similarly.

*Do you get invitations to exhibit in Hungary?*

In recent times I have exhibited very little in Hungary and I don't even try very hard, because many of the cultural institutions there have been ruined and few such bodies have retained their independence. Also, the financing of culture is explicitly in political hands. I don't want to be part of that.

*What's happening there does not inspire you as an artist?*

No, historical experience is repeating itself. For me Hungary is a sad story. Nonetheless, one thinks about how bad decisions could be avoided, but we see in live action that it can't be changed. Thanks to that we can understand, for example, how Germany was not able to avoid Nazism. The people who lived under that regime weren't able to do much about it. That's a depressing fact of experience.

*Your exhibition, about how Slovak manufacturing developed post-1989, ends in mid-June. Will you develop this project further?*

This exhibition came into being thanks to the cooperation of several subjects. We tried to assemble a mosaic of the various points of view, and therefore I think it would be good to continue and to exhibit in those countries from which the investors came. I wanted to find out whether artists from those countries were interested in how their countries had entered our region, or whether they think about that at all, possibly in some other mode. I also wanted to cooperate with experts who have economic, historical or political knowledge about this theme. At the moment that's what interests me most.

*What's next for you now?*

I want to do a publication on this theme. And I hope that we'll have a new industrial memorial – a chimney from Pohronský Ruskov and a museum of sugar manufacturing, in cooperation with Šurany Urban Museum and with the support of the currently functional sugar factories.









# Interviews with the manufacture employees

Ilona Németh in cooperation with Katarína Karafová

## Mr Štefan Nagy

*Why did you accept the offer of three months' work in Kunsthalle Bratislava?*

I had worked in agriculture, and as a former agricultural worker I am familiar with the cultivation of sugar beet. Apart from that I'm interested in art, so I decided I would try this and work for Ilona Németh.

*Have you, your family or your acquaintances had any experience of sugar factories?*

None of my relatives or family members ever worked in a sugar factory, but I come from Dunajská Streda, where there was a sugar factory, and people I knew were working there.

*What do you feel about the closure of the sugar factory in your locality?*

For agriculture, I think, it wasn't the best, because the cultivation of sugar beet contributed something, it brought some benefit even directly to the cooperatives: the sugar factory trimmings, for example, were used in livestock production. From that point of view I think it was a great pity. But I'm not able to judge from an economic or some other standpoint. Probably those who took the decision (I don't know what their standpoint was) – they would have had some reason for taking that decision, and that's how it goes.

*Can you describe your experience working in the factory here?*

In the factory here I got to know lots of people, young and old. There were even some who had once been directly engaged in sugar manufacturing. So they advised us or, for example, they put questions to us. The young ones too, who'd never yet encountered the production of sugar loaves, so it was interesting for them. And generally the people who came here were very pleasant and the experience with them was good.

*Would you come again in the future?*

Personally, yes, of course I'd come, I liked it. And those three months went by very quickly. It was very pleasant; there were very pleasant experiences.

*What could this exhibition give its visitors, in your opinion?*

Well, for visitors it was mainly the fact that they got to know, for example, how crystal sugar is manufactured, or some of them, young people needless to say, didn't even know that crystal sugar is produced directly from sugar beet. So for them it was certainly interesting. And then, when they'd got to know how it functioned here in Slovakia – how an industry like sugar manufacture once actually functioned, I think that too was interesting for them.

*What was your most interesting experience with those visiting the exhibition?*

For me the most interesting experience was the fact that some people thought the production of sugar loaves was a very complicated business, and when we showed them how simply it can be done and what it looks like at the end, when it's wrapped, they were pleasantly surprised and they liked it a lot.

“Those three months went by very quickly!”



photo: J.R.





Mrs Štefánia Janíčková

“Many of the visitors went away surprised that such a thing had existed in Slovakia.”

*Why did you accept the offer of three months' work in Kunsthalle Bratislava?*

This theme involving the sugar factories is a very close concern of mine. Partly for rather nostalgic reasons. Basically, because I completed a specialised field of study explicitly for the sugar factories and so when I graduated I went to a sugar factory to work. And this theme was very close to me. So when I discovered by chance that Ms Ilona was looking for workers for her factory, I took the option.

*Have you, your family or your acquaintances had any experience of sugar factories?*

As I've said, I personally worked in a sugar factory, roughly for 15 years. My husband too, who's a graduate in the same specialised field. So as a newly-married couple we went to work in a sugar factory. We got an apartment in the sugar factory's grounds. Our children were born there, and the factory grounds was where they were raised. So we had a very close relationship to the sugar factory.

*What do you feel about the closure of the sugar factory in your locality?*

Now, that's a very difficult question, because I perceive it on two planes. One is emotional, the other is rational. On the emotional plane, as I've said, my life and my youth are bound up with the sugar factory, and the life of our family. As regards the rational aspect, it's not easy to speak of it, but I think it would have been difficult to put in place the economic conditions and technical progress so that those sugar factories would have survived. I'll give one example: currently, of the ten sugar factories in Slovakia only two have remained. And those two factories manage to produce basically as much sugar as the ten factories did previously, so in that there's a rational justification. But as I say, I regret it, because the sugar factories were our life, that's right.

*Can you describe your experience working in the factory here?*

My experience in this factory has been very good, because I met many people here – many visitors who were interested in the manufacture of sugar loaves. And they were also interested in the history of sugar manufacturing. Many of them went away surprised that such a thing had existed in Slovakia. Also surprised about why it had all come to an end. And it was a pleasure, a delight to see people like that trying to make themselves sugar loaves and carry off a kind of, let's say, souvenir.

*Would you come again in the future?*

If it was for an exhibition, certainly, but probably not on a permanent contract. (laughs)

*What could this exhibition give its visitors, in your opinion?*

As I've mentioned, a kind of general survey of the sugar factories, of sugar. Today there's a lot of talk about sugar being poison, but that's not entirely true. And I think this exhibition also contributed to the visitors possibly changing their minds somewhat about that.

*What was your most interesting experience with those visiting the exhibition?*

The most interesting experience? Probably the joy with which they were trying to make those sugar loaves. And then there were visitors who like me had worked in one of the sugar factories: those were mainly interested in the museum section. But I had pleasant meetings with former colleagues. And I was very surprised that there were a great many visitors who didn't speak Slovak. It intrigued me that even tourists were very interested in this exhibition. The children were delightful, they really enjoyed being able to make the sugar loaves. And I think the interpretation interested them too, judging by what I heard. When the mediators explained certain things, I think the children got a great deal from that. And finally, children of today often don't know what sugar is produced from, or what bread is produced from, and here they certainly widened their horizons.



## Mrs Eva Sido

*Why did you accept the offer of three months' work in Kunsthalle Bratislava?*

It seemed an exciting prospect and I like challenges. The idea appealed to me, to revive the tradition of making sugar loaves, which used to be made in seasonal campaigns in the sugar factories in Slovakia.

*Have you, your family or your acquaintances had any experience of sugar factories?*

We had a sugar factory in the town, in Dunajská Streda, so during the season we'd be aware of the aroma. Apart from that, my brother spent some time working there in his youth – less than a year, I'd say. But otherwise, no.

*What do you feel about the closure of the sugar factory in your locality?*

It had an effect on many families – financially, when their jobs were lost. And so overall too, financially there was an effect on the life of the entire town. And it didn't just involve production in the factory itself: those distinctive tractors that transported the sugar beet also vanished from the roads – and they too had been part of the everyday life of Dunajská Streda. Anyone who arrived, from Bratislava especially, would immediately notice the towers and the chimneys that were there. When all that was demolished, the town simply lost certain characteristic features, and we miss them.

*Can you describe your experience working in the factory here?*

Well, it was totally exciting and incredibly good, because this place has a very positive atmosphere. Even in spite of the fact that when people enter this hall, the first thing they notice is the colour: it's like a hospital. But then, when they come in and start reading and taking in the whole environment, straight away the atmosphere changes to something positive, it's as if the setting had come to life. Then our mediators come on the scene and they help the visitors, or we help them, with the production of sugar loaves, and then they follow how the product has to be wrapped and they observe all that has to be seen to here – everything that's going on. And we also can sense the fact that people have a good feeling here; we see their joy when they manage to turn out a sugar loaf, and it's good enough and it's going to be wrapped. They can take away one product from whoever, I can't say who produced it or how many months previously, some time after April: they don't know who the maker was. And everything is hand-made, and those people see that, and that has an interactive effect on us and on them. We're standing here with

our backs to the visitors, as soon as we've got completed sugar loaves that our guests have produced which we're able to wrap: at that point we no longer need to produce. And even though we're standing with our backs turned, we simply feel that, the joy, and we are witnesses to how enthusiastic they are about being able to be part of this process. It's very positive. Everyone who comes here goes away with a smile.

*What could this exhibition give its visitors, in your opinion?*

That they begin to take an interest in things which they've paid no heed to – where those sugar factories were, why they were closed down, how that affects the environment of those towns where the factories were, how all of that hangs together. And the practical side, which we've been noticing here every day: I'm not thinking now of the exhibition, but the production and packaging – just simply the enthusiasm and positive energy, we're feeling that.

*What was your most interesting experience with those visiting the exhibition?*

Maybe not the children, because that would have been no surprise to me. The children behave very naturally, they observe how the work has to be done and when you show them, they'll take it from there. But the adults – how they make contact with that childhood experience, as if they were playing on a sandpit! They cry out, "Oh, I managed it!" and they're delighted. So then, I don't have one single example, but overall I can say that we see this joy in everyone when they're leaving here, delighted that they can be part of this great game.

*"Everyone who comes here goes away with a smile."*



photo: J.R.





Mrs Katarína Senková

“It’s something I always wanted to try; for a chemistry teacher it’s natural, when you’re just in a laboratory for three years.”

*Why did you accept the offer of three months’ work in Kunsthalle Bratislava?*

It came quite unexpectedly, like a bolt from the blue, and I was very glad, because Ms Ilona Németh found me right at the employment office, where I had come on totally different business. But when I heard what was involved I was determined to accept it. Simply for this reason, that I’d heard stories about sugar factories, or more precisely how a sugar factory functions, because my father was working there while I was still in primary school.

*Have you, your family or your acquaintances had any experience of sugar factories?*

Oh, so much experience that my father used to tell me jokingly when I was a little child, “Katka, imagine this, they’re so anxious to see me in the job that they say, ‘Gejza, when you’re here everything’s dead quiet, all goes well, but when you’re not here it’s unbearable’ ”.

*What do you feel about the closure of the sugar factory in your locality?*

I thank God that I wasn’t directly involved in the process when it closed down, because just listening to the stories or seeing that video – how they talked about it, that was enough. It had so much resonance that now there’s an exhibition about it in Bratislava, there was one in Prague and there’s one in preparation for Vienna. And my father was no longer working there when it happened, because by then he was working for the Ministry of the Environment. So we were observing it – those events, or more exactly we were hearing what was going on. At first we didn’t want to believe it, but when we saw that the sugar factory actually disappeared, we knew something irrevocable had happened.

*Can you describe your experience working in the factory here?*

Well, that’s a jollier theme. But of course, I mean that in a good way. It’s something I always wanted to try; for a chemistry teacher it’s natural, when you’re just in a laboratory for three years. I studied in Hungary in Eger. And I was able to experience everything only theoretically and on a small scale – how something functions; de facto you do have practicals when you’re studying, we went on excursions, but it’s something altogether different when you’re directly in the process and you have, as it were, an imitation of manufacture.

*Would you come again in the future?*

If I had the opportunity, certainly I’d come.

*What could this exhibition give its visitors, in your opinion?*

There are lots of visitors moving about here – from children to adults, from old to young and from young to old. And quite simply, this exhibition is unique, in that it connects with us all. I mentioned that I’m a teacher, of mathematics and principally of chemistry. And last year I had a very interesting experience teaching chemistry in Dunajská Streda, though I was born in Bratislava. It was a short-term experience, but I know that a whole coachful of children came here from Dunajská Streda, and it was unforgettable for them. Those are the children. But certainly it was unforgettable also for the adults, because one of the largest sugar factories was in Dunajská Streda. And for anyone who had some connection to it (like my father in my own case), then when you go a bit deeper into that theme, it cannot be something you don’t care about.

*What was your most interesting experience with those visiting the exhibition?*

From September I’ll have to return to the school system, this time to teach mathematics, so willy-nilly I’m observing people, mainly children. One thing that I’ve realised is that children are very open and they can be formed just like this sugar loaf. That means that if you lovingly show a child something very interesting and you explain the essentials – even if you’re in a mathematics class – the child will come away with a lesson that will never be forgotten as long as he or she lives. Like when I heard from my father about how a sugar factory functions. I’d never have thought that one day I’d be part of this exhibition.



## Making of a sugarloaf



We transfer crystal sugar from a sack into a dish (for the small sugar loaf we need circa 3 scoop of sugar, for the large sugar loaf we need c. 4 scoop of sugar) and mix in a little syrup prepared in a bottle. The consistency of the mass must not be too dry (in which case the sugar loaves will crumble). The sugar must be uniformly damp, but not wet (otherwise the loaves dry badly). We can test the consistency by hand. The sugar mass, thus prepared, is put into the mould on spoons and continually pressed with a pestle. When the mould is filled to the edge, we even out the mass with the flat side of the pestle. Square white trays are prepared on the shelves where the sugar loaves dry out. We place a tray on top of the mould and turn the mould over. The mould is lifted slowly, because the loaf should not crumble. Afterwards we let the sugar loaf dry in the air for approximately 24 hours.





# Packaging of a sugarloaf

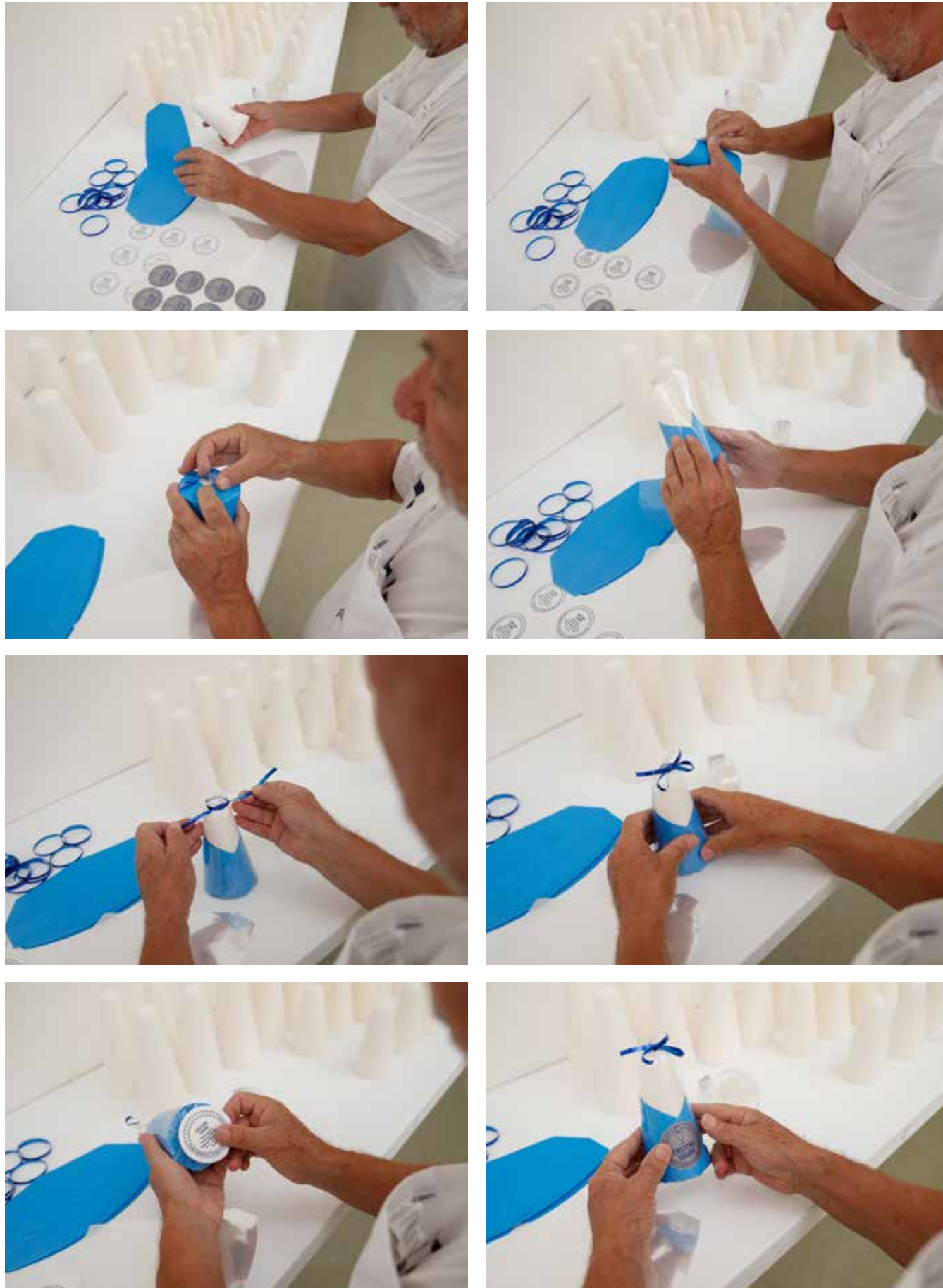


photo: A.ACS.



# On Additives and Alterations: a Review of Ilona Németh's *Eastern Sugar*

Emily Verla Bovino

Seen in the shape of its mountains and the growth patterns of its aging population, the conical sugarloaf is often used to describe forms in Slovakia's physical and social landscape.<sup>1</sup> As a "body" with "weight... we can neither see nor touch," the sugarloaf is also the object that Karl Marx used to illustrate how relative value works among commodities.<sup>2</sup>

In Marx's analogy, just as the coat represents value in relation to linen, the sugarloaf had to be put in "weight-relation" with pieces of iron to represent value.<sup>3</sup> In *Eastern Sugar*, Ilona Németh's most recent exhibition at the Kunsthalle Bratislava, the sugarloaf finally stands in relation to itself. Visitors invited to make sugarloaves at various "manufacturing" stations within the exhibition were made to feel its weight as they carried a loaf away as a souvenir. However, the sugarloaf in *Eastern Sugar* is a body whose value is not only symbolic, economic and geopolitical, but also relational and affective. As such, *Eastern Sugar* was a complex, multilayered performance of a new kind of discursive "specific object," a postminimalist combination of industrial materials, installation, choreography, architecture, historical research, narrative, and political geography.<sup>4</sup>

The sugarloaf, once a popular commodity object for sugar consumption in Central Europe, was the result of a long procedure.<sup>5</sup> Remelting, filtration, and graining. Casting, purging and curing. Centrifuging, heating, lathe turning, and, finally, wrapping. In Németh's *Eastern Sugar*, visitors used a more minimal gesture to memorialize this process, gently grinding and pounding sugar granules with pestle and mortar. Wearing white aprons pulled from a wall rack in the Kunsthalle's first-floor main hall, visitors followed instructions posted at one of thirty-six stations to make their own sugarloaves. With pestles in grip, hands felt the abrasion of grain against the resin belly of the mortar as they pressed loaves into shape. This play with "sugar castles"—portable, unlike their sandy equivalents—was simultaneously ennobling and reductive for both laborer and loaf. The amount of work and equipment involved in the original process of refining and packing was, of course, lost in this melancholic resuscitation of the sugarloaf. In *Eastern Sugar*, the return of the sugarloaf stands for what is now seen as just another castle-in-the-air of post-communism in Central Europe: the fair and equitable privatization of nationally-protected, state-owned industries that would benefit the region's citizens.

Scores of loaves made not only by visitors, but also by hired exhibition workers and the artist herself, lined shelves on one side of the Kunsthalle's main monumental space. After being sheathed in plastic and sealed with an "Eastern Sugar" medallion designed by Németh, the white cones stood glittering at attention, awaiting presentation. Indeed, in the nineteenth century, the task of wrapping loaves required paper forms that were specially patented for the purpose.<sup>6</sup> Visitors to Németh's exhibition contributed to a production cycle and were presented with half the amount of packed sugarloaves they produced: a gift for participation that did not pretend to be compensation for work. Loaves could be acquired without labor for a symbolic cost (1 EUR for a small loaf; 2 EUR for a large loaf), but as the artist explained: "We prefer to involve [visitors] in production."<sup>7</sup> This simplified replication of the stages of factory refining, packing, and labor relations is an almost sardonic take on relational aesthetics and contemporary neo-Marxist approaches to making art about labor conditions in late capitalism.

This important mid-career exhibition of one of Slovakia's most respected artists exemplified the agility of a politically engaged art practice that avoids didacticism with an acute sensitivity to the power of objects and the life of materials. The exhibition takes its title from the name of the Franco-British enterprise Eastern Sugar. The company was created by Générale Sucrière and Tate & Lyle, the latter founded by Henry Tate who ironically used its profits to develop London's first Tate Gallery for art.<sup>8</sup> As is typical of Németh's practice, the exhibition is told through a polyphony of voices, human and non-human, biotic and abiotic. Sugar is given its voice through the sugarloaf via an object-oriented approach that Németh has used before. For example, in *The Harpoon Project* (2013–2014), she covered the floor of the University of



Massachusetts Dartmouth Art Gallery, in New Bedford, with clay toggle irons inspired by harpoons used in the city's whaling industry. The project—a collaboration with university students, city residents, and gallery director Viera Levitt—based its clay iterations on a specific harpoon design that was the invention of Lewis Temple, an African-American abolitionist, blacksmith, and former slave, who had resettled in New Bedford from Florida.<sup>9</sup> Throughout her works, Németh has consistently explored repetition, replication, and the use of readymade or refabricated reference objects, from the 110 railroad crossties salvaged and installed from a deactivated railway line believed to have carried Jewish residents of Slovak-Hungarian bordertowns to concentration camps (*The Way*, 1996), to conventional bleacher seating used to create a stageless arena where spectators have only each other to watch (*Auditorium/Hladisko*, 2012).

Objects tell a chapter of the story relayed in Németh's recent exhibition, while architecture and people tell another. The history of the Eastern Sugar company is recounted in interviews with former sugar industry operators, conducted by the artist and shown in a video installation. After the fall of communism, Eastern Sugar privatized several formerly state-owned sugar factories in four Central European countries—Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia. Due to shifts in the geopolitics of sugar, the company had to close several of the factories it had acquired after investing in equipment updates and running production for a number of years. It subsequently refocused its attentions away from producing and refining Central European sugar to trade in Western European sugar from Germany and Austria.<sup>10</sup> The dismantling of the Slovak sugar industry became a metonym for the neoliberalization of the region as the European Union (EU) submitted to the free-market fundamentalism being implemented by the World Trade Organization (WTO).

The narrative about the Slovak sugar industry that Németh presents in her exhibition is at once wistful and subtly ironic. Irony can be sensed in the deliberate way Németh replays Eastern Sugar's takeover of the Slovak factories: she plays the part of the Franco-British conglomerate with her use of embossed and embroidered branding, her management of the exhibition space, and her issuance of temporary labor contracts to exhibition workers. Thus, she "privatizes" memory of an economic event by personalizing it. Although a sense of longing is not always explicit, it is nonetheless present. For example, the thirty-six tables that serve as stations for the fabrication of sugarloaves are designed after the greenhouse table the artist remembers her father, Jenő Németh, working at when she was a child. A leading representative of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, Jenő Németh lived with his family in Dunajská Streda, a bordertown between Slovakia and Hungary where his artist-daughter—an ethnic Hungarian of Slovak nationality—still lives. From Németh's video interviews, visitors learn that Dunajská Streda was also home to the largest and most productive of Slovakia's ten sugar factories, a facility that processed approximately 4,000 tons of sugar beet.<sup>11</sup> Despite its good numbers, the factory was shut down and demolished when, under pressure from the EU to reduce sugar production in response to WTO negotiations with India and Brazil, the Eastern Sugar conglomerate decided to accept compensation in exchange for not producing the factory's sugar quota.<sup>12</sup>

Once a company received quota compensation for a factory, the EU's "sugar regime" required the factory be demolished so it could never produce sugar again.<sup>13</sup>

Németh's planning of the Kunsthalle exhibition took place over years of driving to Bratislava past the Dunajská Streda factory's administrative office, the only building left standing after the demolition of the factory itself. Németh arranged to remove the office's linoleum floor, fearing it would also come under bulldozers, and reinstalled it in the back gallery of the Kunsthalle. Emblazoned with the factory logo—Juhocukor (Southern Sugar)—it also holds the ghostly outline of the base of a reception desk and a punch-card station.

After falling into disuse in the twentieth century as Europe's preferred form for packaged sugar, the sugarloaf became a symbolic object that the Slovak industry used to inaugurate its annual production cycle, the *campan*.<sup>14</sup> The cycle lasts three to four months and involves the processing of the sugar beet and the production of sugar.<sup>15</sup> Németh's exhibition gives new value to the rounded cones once proudly displayed in the parlors of Czechoslovak, and later Slovak, households. At the same time, it uses this revalorization of an object of both material and culinary culture to mourn the loss of the manufacturing sector in a country where the service industry now employs most workers, and youth unemployment is relatively high.<sup>16</sup> The exhibition workers hired by Németh through an employment agency sustained steady production of sugarloaves at the Kunsthalle under the monumental glazed roof of its main hall. Their presence reminds visitors of the livelihoods lost with the decline of the industrial economy.

Németh's exhibition left visitors with the feeling that any angst over the privatization of the Slovak sugar industry actually mourns the loss of hope and promise more than the actual industry itself. For example, the two interviews presented in the *Eastern Sugar* video installation show the artist engaging two responses to privatization: in one video, edited with footage of factory machines and operations, a director of the Sereď factory (still functional under Austrian ownership) asserts privatization was the "biggest mistake;" in the other, interspersed with shots of factory architecture, a former board member of Eastern Sugar insists there was "no good solution" to downsizing sugar production in EU member states, but claims privatization was not to blame.<sup>17</sup>

The social history of the sugar industry presented by Németh is complemented by a kind of critical formalism. The serial repetition of sugarloaves in the main hall of the exhibition, brings attention to the sugarloaf's quasi Cubist or Suprematist reduction of the sugar-beet's fleshy taproot into a geometric shape: the loaf purifies the irregular bulbous body of the beet into a rigorous cone. This attention to the beet's geometric "refinement" is representative of the artist's attention to structure and construction in the exhibition. To revitalize visitors' experience of Bratislava's Kunsthalle—a space notorious among local artists for being difficult to negotiate—Németh executed a series of significant architectural alterations to its interior spaces in collaboration with Marián Ravasz and Plural Architects.<sup>18</sup> She redesigned the Kunsthalle's first-floor layout, sealing the double entryway that usually welcomes guests into the luminous central hall. Instead of finding their way directly into the hall from an impressive marble foyer



"This attention to the beet's geometric "refinement" is representative of the artist's attention to structure and construction in the exhibition."







“Németh lowered the hall’s large aluminum lamps on chains, using the industrial appearance of the fixtures to trigger recall of the spectacular roof of the defunct factory at Pohronský Ruskov.”

flanked by grand staircases, visitors could only access the hall after passing through two side galleries. Lateral passageways thus replaced a pair of central doorways, introducing visitors to the main hall through two distinct trajectories, compelling them to make a choice. Visitors who entered the exhibition on the right came upon the main hall and its sugarloaves after passing through the prototype of a museum dedicated to the history of Slovak sugar. Entitled the Museum of Sugar, it was created by museologist Miroslav Eliáš at Németh’s invitation. The trajectory through Eliáš’s gallery confronted visitors with Socialist Realist landscape paintings commissioned to portray sugar factories, copies of portraits painted to exalt factory directors, and museological models built by Eliáš to help visitors better conceptualize the now decayed shells of former factory architecture.

Meanwhile, the passageway to the left led through Németh’s video installations and displays of photographs on hanging mobile screens (*Archive*, 2017-2018), both of which acted to place visitors inside the cathedral-like spaces of factories that Eliáš’s museum represented as objects to be analyzed. After marveling at Németh’s dramatic drone footage of the Pohronský Ruskov factory—a bare skeleton of a structure with broad timber beams like whale ribs and a majestic octagonal chimney—visitors found themselves led by the artist’s design into the first floor’s main hall under an impressive wrought-iron skylight over her thirty-six sugarloaf stations. Németh lowered the hall’s large aluminum lamps on chains, using the industrial appearance of the fixtures to trigger recall of the spectacular roof of the defunct factory at Pohronský Ruskov.

Yet Németh, who has defined herself as a “site-specific art artist,” moves beyond site specificity with *Eastern Sugar*.<sup>19</sup> While being specific in its interest to a particular site, it plays more with the way focused attention on one site can transform other sites through synecdochic dislocation and deterritorialization of its parts. This is the “central focus point” that Robert Smithson drew attention to with his use of the term “non-site.”<sup>20</sup> “The site is the unfocused fringe where your mind loses its boundaries,” Smithson explained. It “is a place where a piece should be but isn’t. The piece that should be there is now somewhere else, usually in a room. Actually, everything that’s of any importance takes place outside the room. But the room reminds us of the limitations of our conditions.”<sup>21</sup> The “rooms” Németh creates at the Kunsthalle Bratislava to “remind us of the limitations of our conditions,” transpose the Dunajská Streda office and various Slovak factory sites into the Kunsthalle in such a way as to both probe the decimation of the Slovak sugar industry and deconstruct the very site of the Kunsthalle Bratislava itself.

This is not the first time Németh has made a statement with her subtle yet provocative alterations to an important art space. In 2011, she cordoned off the second floor of the Ernst Museum in Budapest for the exhibition *Dilemma* (2011–2012), signaling another loss: the absence of the artist’s originally planned exhibition that, for political reasons, had become impossible to stage without completely distorting its aesthetic and conceptual stance.<sup>22</sup> The complex of exhibitions organized for the Višegrad cities of Trnava, Budapest, Brno, and Poznań was supposed to center around a video interview with Ágnes Heller (*Zsófia Meller*, 2012) in which the Hungarian-Jewish philosopher recounted her grandmother’s experience being forced to sit behind a screen to attend lectures as among the first women to attend the University of Vienna. However, a media spectacle involving Heller threatened to shift the focus of this plan. After being criticized for his tyrannical concentration of power, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán announced he would launch an investigation into the sources of grants received by Heller and four other Hungarian philosophers. Németh’s cordon at the Ernst Museum amplified the silence of artistic expression foreclosed in the face of a political circus that made the issues of exclusion she had wanted to explore with the Heller interview impossible to engage. Thus the artist used the cordon to evoke the “screen” Heller described and withdrew the video interview that would have made Heller, and Orbán’s attacks, the focus of the exhibition. In place of the Heller interview, Németh turned the gaze of visitors upon her own quandary: the first-floor of the Ernst Museum featured new video interviews in which Németh herself laid bare her concerns about the impossible position the institution had asked her to take.

In *Eastern Sugar*, Németh’s alterations are more architectural, but play with the same dialectic between the additive and subtractive as the cordon. The changes the artist made to the first-floor hall of Slovak architect Miloš Chorvát’s 1957 Národné Osvetové Centrum (the National Cultural Center transformed in 2014 into the Kunsthalle Bratislava and later the Slovak National Gallery) similarly animate an obdurate situation, in this case a difficult space. Indeed, Chorvát’s building—constructed under Communist rule when industrial growth in Czechoslovakia was at its height—feels as if it had realized the full potential of both its historic and contemporary aims. Németh’s exhibition succeeds at being both educational and aesthetic, recalling the mission of the Communist National Cultural Center as it was originally conceived by its Czechoslovak founders.



Németh’s architectural tactics and display strategies transform Eastern Sugar into what feminist architectural historian Jane Rendell calls “site-writing.”<sup>23</sup> Site-writing, as Rendell describes it, is “what happens when discussions concerning site-specificity extend to involve criticism:” it is the “spatialization of criticism” in which “criticism operates as a form of practice.”<sup>24</sup> Németh’s use of Chorvát’s space to explore the Slovak sugar industry in its socioeconomic, architectural, and aesthetic guises reflected back on the site it occupies, posing indirect questions about the culture industry and the role of contemporary art in neoliberal Slovakia. As extract pulled from the sugar beet through slicing, boiling, diffusing, and pressing, the Slovak beet sugar demanded an equally complex processing of spatial framing for the presentation of its story.

The back hall that connected the lateral galleries found the artist confidently curating other responses to the postindustrial condition alongside the linoleum floor she transplanted from the factory office at Dunajská Streda. The five works shown—three sculptures, a video installation, and a 16mm film essay—are by four international artists from different generations: Harun Farocki, Jeremy Deller, and the collaborative duo Lonnie Van Brummelen and Siebren de Haan. Farocki’s twelve-channel video installation explores representations of factory life in the history of cinema, while Deller’s objects and Brummelen and de Haan’s silent 16mm film address exploitation and absurdity in both new labor practices and neocolonial trade relations. Meanwhile, in the pamphlet-map that visitors used to navigate Németh’s alterations to Bratislava’s Kunsthalle, curator Nina Vrbanová compared Németh’s architectural interventions to emerging German artist Anne Imhof’s praised architectural reworking of Germany’s Nazi-era Venice Biennale pavilion for her Black bloc iteration of *Faust* (2017), presented in anti-fascist militant guise. Imhof and Németh, Vrbanová argued, took a similar approach to site-responsiveness in their “redefinition of (...) architecture (...) as a mental-performative space.”<sup>25</sup>

With its alterations to entrances, its ninety-three-centimeter-high glass floor, and surrounding glass walls guarded by living Dobermans, Imhof’s pavilion, despite its anarchist appeal, came across as a nihilist submission to totalitarian aesthetics that wryly subverted liberal values, seducing audiences with its images of reactionary passivity. Németh’s manipulation of space is, instead, unabashedly activist, seeking impact beyond the exhibition itself: she hopes the Eastern Sugar exhibition will result in both the preservation of the octagonal chimney tower at the factory site in Pohronský Ruskov, and in a permanent location for Eliáš’s Slovak Museum of Sugar.<sup>26</sup>

Like two sides of a Möbius strip, however, the opposing approaches of Imhof and Németh meet. The interactivity staged in Németh’s exhibition—the fabrication of sugarloaves—feels designed to be slightly infantilizing, intentionally disempowering. Németh is an artist who always aims to occupy a position of inbetweenness; indeed, the visitor to *Eastern Sugar* who makes a sugarloaf should feel the tug of nostalgia for a lost opportunity, but must also leave the gallery with a sense of alienation rather than satiation. Indeed, *Eastern Sugar* deftly cycles the sugarloaf in and out of reification. At moments, it feels as though the miniature sugar towers govern visitor activity, instrumentalizing viewer participation for their replication as though they were inde-

pendent creatures of a thing-world. At the same time, the loaves pull visitors into the experience of a social universe of human relations from which Németh shows them to be inseparable.

In 2011, Sweden’s Moderna Museet hosted a three-day symposium by the KTH School of Architecture to pose the question, “How does architecture as a discipline think about alteration? Is our theory and method for confronting the existing sufficient?”<sup>27</sup> In *Eastern Sugar*, an exhibition that takes a taste-altering food commodity as its subject, alteration as a critical tactic in art and architectural practice is foregrounded. Sealing doorways, lowering lamps, mounting walls, opening passageways, and even transforming a mop closet into a fully functional “back space for workers” (closed to exhibition visitors but included in the exhibition map), the artist creates a spatial double for the sugar factories whose loss her exhibition critically laments. Németh manipulates kinesthetic sensation, manifesting the physical sense of a lost space rather than pointing to it. In doing so, she makes *Eastern Sugar* more than just a seminal show in her individual career.

While Németh was mounting *Eastern Sugar*, Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico resigned in response to street protests in Bratislava that demanded justice for murdered journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová. The resulting “reshuffle” that saw the former premier from Smer-SD (Direction-Social Democracy) replaced by a senior member of the party was met with further protest.<sup>28</sup> In 2011, Németh collaborated with a film industry expert to create a “tornado-like object” (*Fog*, 2011) for Bratislava’s Námestie Slobody (Freedom Square). Using specially designed tools adapted from helicopter engines, the work generated analog “storm” effects in Slovakia’s representative public plaza.<sup>29</sup> Németh has described the work as creating an “environment for reconstruction through a process of destruction,” a commentary on the square as a site where “politics turned itself into rituals and falsely declared a vision of better tomorrows.”<sup>(30)</sup> In the present climate of exasperation, Németh’s *Eastern Sugar* was another proposition for a tactics of alteration, a subtle though sharp mode of critical institutional infiltration fit for a moment of democracy in despair.

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**MÚZEUM CUKRU /  
MUSEUM OF SUGAR**





# Museum of Sugar

Curator: Miroslav Eliáš



Ilona Németh within the frame of the exhibition Eastern Sugar is initiating the pilot presentation of a currently non-existent institution, the Museum of Sugar. She has invited the Šurany Municipal Museum, which specialises in the history of sugar processing in Slovakia, to take over part of the exhibition space and for the first time present its materials in the rounded form of a museum display.

For more than eight years the Šurany Municipal Museum has been gathering and documenting collection objects relating to the former local sugar factory, which was one of the most renowned in Slovakia. This work has produced a rich stock of acquisitions and a book, a monograph published in 2012. Since 2014 the museum has followed up on previous scholarly research and begun to focus on the documentation of sugar processing in Slovakia.

This specialisation of the museum, designated as *Documentation of the History of Slovak Sugar Manufacturing*, was incorporated in the museum's statute in 2015. The project stood on three historic foundations: the Šurany sugar factory was the longest-functioning sugar factory in the history of Slovakia; the first sugar refinery in the kingdom of Hungary was established here; so also was a prototype factory apprentices' school, which trained specialist employees for all Slovak sugar factories.





SUGAR FACTORIES  
IN SLOVAKIA



SLUŽBY  
CUKROVÁRSKI  
VO SVETE

SLUŽBY  
CUKROVÁRSKI  
V SVETE







photo: J.R.



photo: J.R.

The primary role of the museum is acquisition in the given field of interest and stocking the collection, photo documentation, archival research, and gathering testimony from the oldest people and from former representatives of these enterprises. The goal is to process the material thus acquired for exhibitions and publications, making it available to the broader public. Bringing this to fruition depends, however, on financial resources for the museum's exhibition of the history of Slovak sugar manufacture.

The Šurany Municipal Museum possesses extensive photo documentation of the objects of the following former sugar factories: Topoľčany – Tovarníky, Nitra, Pohronský Ruskov, Trnava, Sládkovičovo, Vlčkovce, Rimavská Sobota and Trebišov, and has also acquired valuable archival materials and more than 250 collection objects: seals, wrapping material, laboratory aids, period sugar factory products, and so on.

The museum's pilot exhibition, with the concise working title Museum of Sugar, now has its premiere, in conjunction with Ilona Németh's exhibition *Eastern Sugar*. At a seminar on *The Sweet Heritage of Trnava Region*, held in September 2017 in Sered', the Šurany Municipal Museum received an invitation from Ilona Németh to present a selection from its collection focusing on the history of sugar manufacture in Slovakia.

MIROSLAV ELIÁŠ (\*1982, Šurany, Slovak Republic) is a museum manager, historian and writer. He was born and works in the town of Šurany. Having studied museology at the Department of Ecomuseology – Faculty of Natural Sciences in Matej Bel University in Banská Štiavnica (2006), he subsequently defended a thesis on the theme of Environmental Management of Museum Systems (2009). He worked as a cultural executive in the Urban Cultural Centre in Šurany. From 2007 he has been administrator of the Šurany Municipal Museum, which he co-founded. Apart from that, he has been a participant in the founding of the Forgáč Family Museum in Jelenec Mansion near Nitra, where he is both author and guarantor of the permanent exhibition.



SUGAR  
RE

Historical text panels on the left wall, including a photo of a group of people.

POČETI  
GLAVAROVANJA  
NA SLOVENSKO

THE BEGINS OF  
SUGAR MANUFACTURE  
IN SLOVENIA







...the process by which the raw sugar is refined into white sugar. The first stage is to wash the sugar with water to remove any molasses. This is followed by a series of chemical treatments to remove any remaining impurities. The final stage is to dry the sugar and pack it into bags for transport.

...the process of refining sugar. The first stage is to wash the sugar with water to remove any molasses. This is followed by a series of chemical treatments to remove any remaining impurities. The final stage is to dry the sugar and pack it into bags for transport.



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### POČIATKY CUKROVARNÍCTVA NA SLOVENSKU

Na území Slovenska, ako aj v celom Uhorsku, bol najvýznamnejším priemyslom výroba cukru. Jeho prvými výrobcami boli bratia Gertinger (1794 - 1822) a v rokoch 1824 - 1831. Slovenská výroba cukru začala v roku 1831, keď bratia Gertingerovci založili cukrovar v Bratislave. Prvý cukrovar na Slovensku bol založený v Bratislave v roku 1831. Jeho prvými výrobcami boli bratia Gertingerovci. Prvý cukrovar na Slovensku bol založený v Bratislave v roku 1831. Jeho prvými výrobcami boli bratia Gertingerovci.

...the process of refining sugar. The first stage is to wash the sugar with water to remove any molasses. This is followed by a series of chemical treatments to remove any remaining impurities. The final stage is to dry the sugar and pack it into bags for transport.



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### THE INITIAL STAGES OF SUGAR MANUFACTURE IN SLOVAKIA

In Slovakia and the entire kingdom of Hungary, the most important industry in the 18th and 19th centuries was sugar. The first sugar factory in Slovakia was founded in Bratislava in 1831 by the Gertinger brothers. The first sugar factory in Slovakia was founded in Bratislava in 1831 by the Gertinger brothers.



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photo: J.R.



photo: J.R.





**POČETEK  
CERKVENIČNEGA  
IN KLEČARNEGA**

Textual information in Slovenian describing the early history of the factory.

**THE METAL ERASER  
SICCAH MANUFACTURE  
IN SLOVENIA**

Textual information in English describing the metal eraser factory.



Additional text on the wall to the right of the large painting, providing further context.



# It's a Bitter Story about Slovak Sugar

Jana Németh

Ilona Németh spent a year researching the history of sugar factories in Slovakia. In Bratislava's Kunsthalle she is opening a large exhibition entitled *Eastern Sugar*.

Everything might have been different. Everything might have been different if behind her home there had not been a sugar factory but, for example, a textile plant. Everything might have been different, but ultimately perhaps it would not have been, because the story of what happened to the sugar factories in Slovakia is similar to many other stories. Stories of factories that from one day to the next were closed down and not a trace of them remained.

"The largest of the sugar factories was located behind our house. From childhood I remember that stink, the 'aroma' of sugar, and the roads full of lorries with sugar beet. Suddenly that disappeared, completely. All that remained was the entrance reception, everything else was levelled to the ground," says the artist Ilona Németh.

Every day she used to pass near the one-time Juhocukor, renamed Eastern Sugar in the 1990s by foreign investors, and it angered her. Not from nostalgia. Simply that for years she had been posing a question to which no one in the town was able to give a precise answer: why had that happened and who was responsible?

And so she began to ask more and to travel more. She spent a year in intensive research, travelling to all the former sugar factories together with the photographer Olja Triaška Stefanović. In the Bratislava's Kunsthalle she is now opening an exhibition of a kind that Slovakia truly doesn't see many of, if any at all, in a normal year. It is a search for answers to questions which for the most part do not have simple answers and which lead to further questions. For example, to the question of whether "nothing" will always be filled by something eventually, and whether that something isn't especially populism and nationalist ideology.

## It Began Behind My Home

"It was the best decision I could have made," Ilona Németh says in the section of the exhibition which she calls the *Archive*. What it contains is mainly videos of interviews and photographs, from which each viewer can assemble his/her own "picture" of the sugar factories in

Slovakia. That can literally be done physically, using an adjustment system.

Once we had ten, today there are two still in operation: in Trenčianska Teplá and Sered', both of which are owned by foreign firms (from Germany and Austria). Together with Olja Triaška Stefanović, Németh visited all of them and spoke to many people whom the history of the sugar factories affected professionally and also personally. "Every single journey therefore had its importance, as did every single meeting. I always understood something more and I gained further information about what had happened," Ilona Németh says.

Slovakia today de facto does not own even a single gram of sugar, though there was a long tradition here of its manufacture. "My research and my exhibition, however, is in no way a struggle against foreign investors, against globalisation or against capitalism, not at all," Németh says in one breath.

One of the basic components of the story of the Slovak sugar factories is therefore the foreign investors who came in the 1990s but left after a few years, leaving the factories closed behind them. Even without foreign investors, however, the fate of other factories is similar: with the aftertaste from privatisation, tunnelling and the influence of the political bigwigs of the time, headed by Mečiar's HZDS.

## Us and the Others

The conflict between us and the others, the foreigners, is represented in interviews with direct participants from the Dunajská Streda factory. Ilona Németh talks about what happened and what might have been different with Dušan Janiček, who worked all his life in the sugar factories and was also part of the critical events. A view from the other side is provided by Christian Laur, a former member of the administrative council of Eastern Sugar.

"What they had to say was extraordinarily important for me. Each naturally speaks from his own standpoint. Laur makes reference principally to global determinants, but



photo: J.R.

also to banal factors like, for example, a change of directors in the mother firms, with the new people simply having interests different from those of their predecessors. Dušan Janiček says that we, as Czechoslovakia or Central Europe, were not prepared to receive the investors who came to us shortly after the revolution. He speaks also of the overall development in the 1990s, of privatisation and the influence of the local HZDS (Slovak political party – Hnutie za demokratickú stranu, Ed.). What is typical of almost everyone we spoke to, however, is the fact that few people take responsibility for what happened, with the exception of Mr. Janiček, who is critical towards himself and other colleagues," Ilona Németh says.

On her journeys round the former sugar factories she noticed, apart from the varying stories of their downfall, one thing that unites them. The final result. "I knew what the closure of the sugar factory meant for my town, and how that had totally changed its life. But when I travelled I discovered that it was the same everywhere. It wasn't just the production plant, an entire gamut of further professions connected with it was affected, and so in the final analysis it affected a much larger group of people. And only rarely did any new factory come to replace the one that was closed."

## When only nothing remains

During her travels and research work Ilona Németh regularly returned to the Kunsthalle. From the outset she knew that she had to change it, because spatially it did not suit her. That should not be, however, an end in itself. "I didn't just want to revamp the space and then deposit an exhibition in it. I was thinking about a means of fusing those two things together," she says.

Decisive in these considerations was the key theme of the closed sugar factories, which is work. Ilona Németh therefore situated work in the central hall. Entrance to the hall is not, however, from the front, as previously. This appears to be a banal alteration, but the relocation of the entrance door makes an enormous difference in practice. That is to say, suddenly what we have here is not an independent hall disconnected from all the remaining space. It is still, however, sufficiently distinct and striking for a seemingly independent part of the exhibition to be conducted there.



“Factories came to an end, work came to an end, and nothing came to replace it. Only ideology.”

Vessels are laid out on thirty six tables, as in a laboratory. Anyone at all may set to work, following simple instructions. For four people, however, this will be their normal daily employment from the opening of the exhibition until its closing. They will manufacture sugar loaves. This is a traditional form of sugar, compacted in the form of cones. At one time sugar was delivered in this form to the shops, where the sales staff “carved” from it as required. Today the manufacture of sugar loaves is still well-known in the localities of the sugar factories: it is above all a symbol for the unleashing of production and for a new campaign.

The people who will work here making sugar loaves were selected by Ilona Németh in cooperation with the Employment Office, through advertisement. She conducted more than forty interviews. She wanted to select future employees, so that they would have their own story, and that actually happened.

“The longer I’ve devoted myself to this theme, the more I’ve become aware that work is what is right at the centre, and especially its loss. For six years I’d been working with the theme of nationalism; I knew how closely it was linked with populism, but I couldn’t get beyond that. To understand why it was happening. And now it seems to me that I’ve got to that point: this was the step backward I had to take, so as to see more clearly,” Németh says.

It would be an oversimplification to call it “economic factors”. She has a much more comprehensible explanation. “I saw it in Dunajská Streda, and the same thing happened elsewhere, and not only in the case of the sugar factories. Factories came to an end, work came to an end, and nothing came to replace it. Only ideology. From my point of view, to a certain extent this is precisely the answer to the question of why nationalism is growing and populism is effective,” she says.

### Industry and culture

The loss of work is measurable by economic factors and in numerical tables. According to Németh, however, the disappearance of factories has one further effect which is not in any way measurable, though it is entirely evident, for example, in the photographs by Olja Triaška Stefanović. Apart from the semi-derelict halls and factory grounds, they show a beautiful high-ceilinged lighted canteen for employees, with interesting lights, from Rimavská Sobota of the 1960s, and the interior of a house built by the Kuffner family, founders of the sugar factory in Sládkovičovo.

“In terms of design and architecture, those interiors were on a world-class level at that time, and they speak of what one might call the culture of enterprise. Of the responsibility of entrepreneurs towards themselves and the enterprise, and towards the employees and the town

where they were active. Many of them built new districts and established schools. So they made a striking contribution to education and to the formation of culture,” Németh says.

One such family was the above-mentioned Kuffners in Sládkovičovo, who were Jews and had to leave in 1938. They survived, but today there are steel doors on their mausoleum, because someone looted the tombs and used a skull as a football in the local English park with exotic plants. “I sat for two hours in that park and thought about what had happened, all that the 20th century had done to us, and why it couldn’t have been different. It’s not about nostalgia. We lost a part of culture, and without culture the human being only has enemies.”

For that reason also, the artist believes, it is essential to assemble a complete mosaic of testimonies, and not only in the case of the sugar factories: to comprehend global circumstances but also to see our own faults and manage to take responsibility for them. “Only in that way can we instruct ourselves for the future, when we understand what happened and do not see things in black and white,” Németh says.

Works by invited artists enrich the exhibition with other points of view. For the British artist Jeremy Deller, the Dutch duo Lonnie van Brummelen & Siebren de Haan, and the German filmmaker Harun Farocki, this is a premiere in Slovakia. A further component is the not-yet-existent Museum of Sugar. Behind this is Miroslav Eliáš of Šurany Municipal Museum, who has had a long-term involvement with the history of sugar manufacture. Ilona Németh met him at a conference and persuaded him to present his collection in a complete form, making the idea of the Museum of Sugar a more real ambition. The name of this institution has almost an innocent sound; the story, however, is rather a bitter one.



photo: J.R.



photo: A.A. OS.



# Back space for the workers

Ilona Németh in collaboration with Marián Ravasz





# Accompanying Events

Accompanying events make contemporary visual art approachable through several educational formats including expert lectures, authorial presentations, public debates, screenings, etc. Furthermore, they include a wide range of activities that take place in the exhibition venues – particularly exhibition guided tours led by curators, gallery pedagogues, or artists themselves with the intention to actively expand and enrich the context of exhibitions, focusing on different target groups.

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April 12 / Thursday / 6.00 p.m.  
KHB 1<sup>st</sup> floor / *Opening of the Exhibition*

**ILONA NÉMETH: Eastern Sugar**  
Duration: April 13 – July 15, 2018  
Curator: Nina Vrbanová  
Assistant curator: Krisztina Hunya  
The starting points of Ilona Németh's artworks are often specific, local and personal. Likewise, her *Eastern Sugar* exhibition was also conceived based on her own experience and knowledge. She dealt with the story of Slovak sugar factories, which were originally state-run and prosperous enterprises, but gradually privatized, asset-stripped and irreversibly destroyed.

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April 20 / Friday / 6.00 p.m.  
Kunsthalle KLUB  
*Lecture in English organised in cooperation with tranzit.sk and Atelier IN within the framework of the Open Studio programme*

**Alexandra Pirici**  
***Workers are leaving the factory, the bodies become the bonds***  
Romanian choreographer Alexandra Pirici works with various forms of media from performance through visual art to music. Her lecture focused on the body as a material or a tool for storage and imagination. At the same time, she pointed out, using an example of her own performative practice, the relationship to art as a possible mediator of a deeper understanding of mass-production and the probability of this issue becoming even more complicated in the future.

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May 9 / Wednesday / 6.00 p.m.  
Kunsthalle KLUB / *Lecture*

**Sugar Barons and their Message**  
Lecture on the history and development of the sugar industry in Slovakia. From the 19<sup>th</sup> century, sugar factories as one of the symbols of the industrial revolution, along with their product referred to as "white gold", represented the foundation of the wealth of the bourgeoisie and nobility. Miroslav Eliáš – curator of the non-existing institution of the Museum of Sugar, talks about the past functioning of sugar factories as well as about their cultural heritage and the role they played in the development of society.

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May 18 / Friday / 5.00 p.m.  
Goethe Institute Bratislava / *Discussion*

**Theatrum Mundi Oeconomicum**  
***Policy of Treuhand as an Economic Paradigm***  
The starting point of the discussion of philosopher Fedor Blaščák and German visual artist Andreas Siekmann was the installation *Pawns, Trustees and the Invisible Hand* (2005 – 2008) reflecting on the privatisation of Eastern German enterprises after 1989 by the state organisation called Treuhand. Considering that this organisation was conceived as a model for the future and considered a predecessor of privatisation processes across Eastern Europe, reconsideration of these processes under the current economic conditions is still highly topical.

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May 19 / Saturday / 9.00 p.m.  
KHB 1<sup>st</sup> floor / *Night of Museums and Galleries 2018 / Tour*

**Guided tour of the Eastern Sugar exhibition**  
The exhibition tour was guided by curator Nina Vrbanová and artist Ilona Németh.

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May 28 / Monday / 5.00 p.m.  
KHB 1<sup>st</sup> floor / *Tour*

**Guided tour of the guest project of the Sugar Museum to the Eastern Sugar exhibition**  
Guided by curator of the Museum of Sugar and museologist Miroslav Eliáš.

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June 4 / Monday / 5.00 p.m.  
KHB 1<sup>st</sup> floor / *Tour*

**Guided tour of the Eastern Sugar exhibition**  
The exhibition tour was guided by curator Nina Vrbanová and artist Ilona Németh.

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June 11 / Monday / 5.00 p.m.  
KHB 1<sup>st</sup> floor / *Tour*

**Guided tour of the guest project of the Museum of Sugar to the Eastern Sugar exhibition**  
Guided by curator of the Museum of Sugar and museologist Miroslav Eliáš.

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June 25 / Monday / 5.00 p.m.  
KHB 1<sup>st</sup> floor / *Tour*

**Artist's guided tour of the Eastern Sugar exhibition**  
The exhibition tour was guided by artist Ilona Németh.

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June 27 / Wednesday / 6.00 p.m.  
Kunsthalle KLUB / *Lecture*

**The Present-day Slovak Sugar Industry**  
The production of sugar has had a long tradition in Slovakia. In the post-war period, there were ten sugar factories in the country. After joining the European Union, their number gradually decreased and now there are only two of them in operation. Both sugar factories have foreign owners and, during sugar campaigns they produce around 170-200 thousand tons of sugar. This lecture by Dušan Janiček, Manager for External Relations in the Sered' Sugar Factory, gave audiences insight into the current state of the Slovak sugar industry.

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July 11 / Wednesday / 6.00 p.m.  
Kunsthalle KLUB / *Moderated discussion*

**Necessary (?) presence of the viewers in Ilona Németh's art**  
Since the early 1990s, we can follow a growing emphasis on participatory tendencies and collective forms of artistic practice in contemporary art. The oeuvre of Slovak intermedia artist Ilona Németh, whose installations from the late 1990s count on the participation and emotion of the viewer, was discussed by journalist Jana Németh and art theorists Katarína Rusnáková and Gábor Hushegyi.

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July 15 / Sunday / 4.00 p.m.  
KHB 1<sup>st</sup> floor / *Finissage*

**Last commented tour of the Eastern Sugar exhibition**  
The exhibition tour was guided by curator Nina Vrbanová and artist Ilona Németh.



## Alexandra Pirici: *Workers are leaving the factory, the bodies become the bonds*

April 20 / Friday / 6.00 p.m. / Kunsthalle KLUB

Lecture organised in cooperation with tranzit.sk and Atelier IN within the framework of the Open Studio programme

The lecture looks at the body as material, medium and technology for remembering, imagining, labouring, transforming and informing socio-economic landscapes. It also references the artist's own performative practice in relation to situated, embodied histories, the intermingling of the local and the global, art both as possibility for insight and mass industry and ways to complicate its future.

ALEXANDRA PIRICI (\*1982, Bucharest, Romania) is an artist with a background in choreography that works undisciplined, across different mediums, from performance to visual arts and music. She recently opened a large-scale solo presentation at the New Museum in New York (2018). Her works have been exhibited within the decennial art exhibition Skulptur Projekte Münster (2017), the 55<sup>th</sup> edition of the Venice Biennale – Romanian Pavilion, Tate Modern, London; Tate Liverpool, the 9<sup>th</sup> Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art; Manifesta 10; Centre Pompidou, Paris; New Museum, New York; Museum Ludwig Cologne; the 12<sup>th</sup> Swiss Sculpture Exhibition; the Van Abbemuseum, Hebbel am Ufer Berlin; Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw; among many others. In 2015 she received the Excellency Award from the National Dance Center, Bucharest.

## Andreas Siekmann: *Theatrum mundi oeconomicum – Policy of Treuhand as an Economic Paradigm*

May 18 / Friday / 5.00 p.m. / Goethe Institute Bratislava

Artist talk with Andreas Siekmann, moderated by Fedor Blaščák

Raising awareness for transformative events within contemporary society, artist Andreas Siekmann has focused on the intrinsic understanding of privatization processes, influences of globalisation, and the displacement of economic responsibility. The artist talk will take as its point of departure the multi-part installation *Pawns, Trusties and the Invisible hand* (2005 – 2008), which reflects on the privatization of Eastern German factories through the so-called Treuhand institution after 1989. Conceived as a model for the future and regarded as a fore-runner of privatization processes throughout Eastern Europe, revisiting these developments under current economic conditions remains highly relevant. Siekmann's 'theatrum mundi oeconomicum' attempts to grasp all the world as a stage for economics. Informed by avant-garde movements of the 1920s, the artist has developed a method to transmute his analyses and research into a pictorial language, exploring the potentials of art as tool for political education.

ANDREAS SIEKMANN (\*1961, Hamm, Germany) has gained wide attention for his work through his participation at documenta 11 and 12, Skulptur Projekte Münster (2007). His most recent solo exhibitions were on view at LWL Museum Münster (2016), BAK – basis voor actuele kunst (2014), and Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach (2010). He frequently collaborates with Alice Creischer and together they hold a professorship at Kunsthochschule Berlin Weißensee.









# Educational Programmes

Educational programmes accompanying the exhibitions in Kunsthalle Bratislava open a remarkable world of art to various groups of children (Kunsthalle KIDS) and adult visitors (Experiment Art). Their aim is to make them think together about selected topics and exhibited works of art and to creatively interpret them, enabling each visitor to develop a personal attitude and experience. The programmes are open to families, all types of schools, young people, adults and seniors, to whom Kunsthalle Bratislava offers different types of programmes, lectures, discussions, guided tours and workshops.

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*Programs for Schools*

## **Sugar in a Gallery?**

Sugar is a processed material and, also part of our history. The exhibition of Ilona Németh presented the history of the sugar industry in Slovakia also incorporating the Museum of Sugar and “manufactory”, where even the employees, producing sugar loafs, became visitors for a while. Sugar is associated with different areas of life. How do we use it? What does it symbolize? And what is its potential in art? Those were the questions we tried to answer with those who attended the educational programmes aimed at schools. The programmes were organised based on orders and, for the duration of the exhibition, 59 groups of children and young people participated in them.

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April 23 / Monday / 5:00 p.m.  
*Workshop for Adults*

## **Experiment Art**

The cycle of workshops for adults takes the form of creative activities, discussions and talks about art. The gathering at the exhibition of Ilona Németh was specifically dedicated to the theme of the sugar industry including the related socio-economic changes. We explored the possibilities of producing sugar loafs, the Museum of Sugar and experimented with sugar as a sculpture material.

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April 25 / Wednesday /  
9:00 a.m. – 5.00 p.m. / *Conference*

## **Conference Open Gallery**

The conference on gallery pedagogy was held in cooperation with the Slovak National Gallery. Galleries as art centres are nowadays also community centres of education, leisure time and the development of creative thinking. They consider the audience as an equal partner and facilitate a dialogue (not only) on art. The conference, the practical part of which took place at the exhibition of Ilona Németh, enabled the sharing of experience with the practice of gallery pedagogy in Slovakia and in the Czech Republic, and attempted to define the current state and visions of gallery pedagogy.

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April 28 / 10.00 a.m.  
*Family Program*

## **I want to be a sugar producer!**

Do you know the story of sugar before it gets into your cup of tea? What kinds of sugar are there? How is sugar made and where is it used? And how did it get to the gallery? The attendees of the family program examined the relationship between sugar and art and created their own installations from this daily-consumed substance.

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May 19 / Saturday / 3.00 p.m.  
*Program for the Public / Night of Museums and Galleries 2018*

## **Child Mediator**

The adult visitors and children were guided through Ilona Németh’s exhibition by child mediators of art who have attended the program of the same name in Kunsthalle Bratislava. The child mediators offered their own points of view on the world of art.

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May 19 / Saturday / 3.30 p.m.  
*Family Program / Night of Museums and Galleries 2018*

## **Cube of Sugar**

How and where was the sugar cube created? What is sugar made of and what is it used for? In addition to answers to these questions, the attendees of the program had the opportunity to create their own sugar brand and could take home sugar “in their own packaging”.

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June 1 / Friday / 4.00 p.m.  
*Family Program*

## **Cotton Candy in the Gallery**

This family workshop was held on International Children’s Day and was accompanied with the production of cotton candy. The programme included a tour of the exhibition by Ilona Németh, where children and their parents tried their hand at making sugar loafs and learned a bit about the history of the sugar industry in the Museum of Sugar’s exhibition.

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June 10 / Sunday / 3.00 p.m.  
*Family Program*

## **Grandpa Pulled the Beet**

Who does not know this popular fairy tale? In cooperation with Barbora Jurinová and the Association of EDUdrama, the attendees of the programme were able to see and experience it in an unconventional and interactive manner: through their own motion and creative activities.

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July 9. – 13.  
*Daily Camp*

## **Artist as a Beat**

This daily camp for children from 6 to 10 years was conducted in cooperation with the City Gallery Bratislava. The creative expedition sought answers to questions such as: Where can we find art? What’s hidden in the artist’s head? How to understand the language of art? Is art a game or a serious thing? or Is there a bit of artist in all of us?







Rádio Devín / Ranné ladenie / 11. 4. 2018  
**Ilona Németh a Nina Vrbánová  
o výstave Eastern Sugar**

Webnoviny / 11. 4. 2018  
**Eastern Sugar**

Denník N / 4/71 / Jana Németh /  
12. 4. 2018  
**Je to trpký príbeh o slovenskom  
cukre**

e-artnow.org / 12. 4. 2018  
**Ilona Németh: Eastern Sugar**

hlavne.sk / 14. 4. 2018  
**Kunsthalle Bratislava odhaľuje  
ako zmiznutím cukrovarov zmizla  
aj práca**

Učiteľské noviny / www.ucn.sk /  
Helena Rusnáková / 22. 4. 2018  
**Nielen pre dospelých...**

ÚjSzó / Béla Tallósi / 25. 4. 2018  
**Eastern Sugar a Kunsthalléban**

Artmagazin / 2018/4 / Léopold Zsanett  
**Keleti Cukorsüveg – Németh Ilona  
kiállítása a pozsonyi Kunsthalléban**

TA3 / Štúdio kultúra / 8. 5. 2018  
**Osudy slovenských cukrovarov**

Sme / Eva Andrejčáková / 16. 5. 2018  
**Mali sme svetový unikát, predali  
sme ho za kocku cukru**

artalk.cz / Damas Gruska / 8. 6. 2018  
**Cukor zabíja**

.týždeň / 24/2018 / Eva Čobejová,  
Elena Akácsová / 9. 6. 2018  
**Cukor ako prípadová štúdia**

Sme / Eva Andrejčáková / 20. 6. 2018  
**Ilona Németh: Mame som zakázala  
pozerat maďarskú televíziu**

Teraz.sk / 23. 6. 2018  
**Na výstave Ilona Németh povie,  
prečo dokumentuje likvidáciu  
cukrovarov**

Műértő / June / 2018 / Tímar Katalin  
**A cukorhegyen túl**

The Budapestter / June / 2018 /  
Martina Bachler  
**Zucker und Petsche**

Artmargins / Emily Verla Bovino /  
1. 10. 2018 /  
**On Additives And Alternations:  
A Review of Ilona Németh's Easter  
Sugar**



**Ilona Németh in collaboration with Olja Triaška Stefanović, Cukru production, and Marián Ravasz: *Archive*, 2017 – 2018**  
Videos, photographic archive, text, dimensions variable, courtesy of the artist

**Ilona Németh in collaboration with Olja Triaška Stefanović and Marián Ravasz: *Archive*, 2017 – 2018**  
38 C-prints on aluminium panels various dimensions, interactive installation, text, 12 m x 2,60 m x 2,60 m, courtesy of the artist

**Ilona Németh in collaboration with Cukru production: *Interview with Christian Laur – former member of the Managing board of Eastern Sugar 1993 – 2000*, 2018**  
Single channel video, colour, sound, 16:20 min., courtesy of the artist

**Ilona Németh in collaboration with Cukru production: *Interview with Dušan Janiček – Director of External Relations Slovenské cukrovary, s.r.o. Sered', AGRANA Group*, 2017**  
Interview by Ilona Németh, János Vasik, single channel video, colour, sound, 14:28 min., courtesy of the artist

**Ilona Németh in collaboration with Cukru production: *Pohronský Ruskov*, 2018**  
Single channel video, silent, 3:15 min., courtesy of the artist

**Jeremy Deller: *Motorola WT4000 Wearable Terminal*, 2013**  
Plastic and electronics, 10 x 64 x 14 cm, courtesy of the artist and The Modern Institute Glasgow

**Jeremy Deller: *Hello, today you have day off (wording of text message sent to a worker on a zero hour contract informing him his labour would not be required that day)*, 2013**  
Fabric banner made by Ed Hall, 240 x 180 cm, courtesy of the artist and The Modern Institute Glasgow

**Harun Farocki: *Workers Leaving the Factory in Eleven Decades*, 2006**  
12-channel video installation, 36 min. (loop), video b/w & color, sound, Ed. 5/5, courtesy of Harun Farocki Filmproduktion

**Ilona Németh: *Juhocukor*, 2018**  
Original piece of flooring from Juhocukor (later: Eastern Sugar) factory, Dunajská Streda, 1990s, installation, linoleum, courtesy of the artist

**Lonnie van Brummelen & Siebren de Haan: *Monument of Sugar – how to use artistic means to elude trade barriers*, 2007**  
16 mm film-essay, 67 min., colour and b/w, silent, 1 sugar cube approx., courtesy of the artists

**Ilona Németh: *Sugarloaf Manufacture*, 2017 – 2018**  
Manufacture with 36 working stations, sugarloaf forms and utensils, packaging material, back space for the workers\*, courtesy of the artist

\* back space for the workers

storage

**Museum of Sugar**  
curator: Miroslav Eliáš



ILONA NÉMETH: EASTERN SUGAR

Opening: April 12<sup>th</sup> 2018  
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