

REFORMATION 500 – THE BIBLE OF LAJOS SZALAY

MODEM Centre for Modern and Contemporary Arts, Debrecen

27 November 2016 – 19 February 2017

The Kovács Gábor Art Foundation, in conjunction with the Debrecen Reformed Theological University, commemorates the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in an ambitious series of exhibitions. The four exhibitions present works inspired by the Bible and which help us through crucial issues in life.

Hosted by the MODEM in Debrecen and opening on 27 November 2016, the first show in the series deals with the themes of Creation, Covenant, Grace, Temptation and Promise in the graphic works of Lajos Szalay.

Kossuth award-winning Hungarian graphic artist Lajos Szalay (1909–1995) was a reformer of 20th-century Hungarian drawing. In 1946 he travelled to Paris and for 40 years after that he lived and worked in Argentina and the United States. In 1988 he returned to Hungary. His art is recognised world wide, and legend has it that Pablo Picasso said, “If two graphic artists survive for posterity, the other one will be me; if only one, it will be Lajos Szalay.”

The Bible affords eternal and inescapable inspiration. One of the crucial sources in the creative work of Lajos Szalay was his relationship with the Holy Scripture and his meeting with the transcendental. Szalay’s first works, drawing on experiences connected to the Old and New Testaments, date from the early 1960s.

He considered the album *Genesis* (1973) to be the pinnacle of his art. It explores the most important events of the Old Testament. The pictures are, however, more than just Biblical illustrations; the first texts and drawings are interconnected, but later on Szalay highlights certain elements, varies the themes and ultimately creates a series of modern interpretations. The defining moments, which constitute the axis or essence of the Biblical stories, are transformed into dramatic events through the fastness and immediateness peculiar to drawing and Szalay’s ability to instantly react to the theme. He transformed his stories in readable, liveable experiences by means of his imagery.

Regarding the idea of the album he said, “The Boston millionaire Dorothy Wallace commissioned an album of thirty drawings on religious themes. I did the 30 drawings and then this idea began to follow its own course and develop. Eventually I grouped all of my solemn drawings in a unique concept, I threaded them on the string of the Bible, like beads, and that was how *Genesis* came about. [...] Taking every moment seriously: that is what, I believe, gives the solemnity of religious and non-religious drawings. The fact that you are in one way or another standing facing eternity, and are in the terrible and unavoidable condition of being personally called into account...”

Lajos Szalay often cited his religious upbringing as a motivation for his works. “I was given a religious upbringing. Which is why my drawings draw on religious beliefs. I seek to express my restlessness and my search for something larger than man. My own concept is that man cannot exist without the strict and disciplined relationship with God.”

The Kovács Gábor Art Foundation holds the largest collection of works by Lajos Szalay in Hungary. Specially selected for the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, this exhibition presents a comprehensive collection of Szalay's drawings inspired by stories in the Old and New Testaments. Primarily consisting of drawings, and to a lesser extent paintings and copper drypoint prints, the works span the artist's entire oeuvre.

The exhibition is hosted with support from the Ministry of Human Resources and is jointly organised by the Gábor Kovács Art Foundation and the Debrecen Reformed Theological University. It runs 19 February 2017.

The exhibition is curated by Richárd Kosinsky, art historian at the Kovács Gábor Art Foundation.

Commemorating the Reformation the Debrecen exhibition will be followed by two shows in the country and a closing exhibition in Budapest. The latter will open in the Guards' Palace of the Castle Garden Bazaar in October 2017. In terms of theme and spirit it will be a summary and culmination of the previous three exhibitions.

Visitor Information:

MODEM Centre for Modern and Contemporary Arts | H-4026 Debrecen, Baltazár Dezső tér 1.

Open: 10 am – 6 pm Tuesday to Sunday, 10 am – 8 pm Thursday

Photographs for downloading:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/bq73459vp5n5ey2/AAAYzxGbsi3oAiH7qRcUObpwa?dl=0>

Facebook page of exhibition series:

www.facebook.com/reformacio500kiallitas

KOGART website:

www.kogart.hu

Further information:

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