

JEWISH IDENTITY AND THE RENAISSANCE OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF BUDAPEST

PROGRAM

3 PM - REGISTRATION

3.15 PM - OPENING REMARKS

Ferenc Kumin – Consul General of Hungary in New York

3.30 PM - PANEL I – JEWISH IDENTITY AND JEWISH REVIVAL IN HUNGARY

Moderator: András Ligeti – Program Manager for Jewish Life and Antisemitism, Tom Lantos Institute

- Rabbi Michael Paley – Scholar in Residence of UJA-Federation of New York
- Patricia Eszter Margit – Founder of Art Kibbutz, author
- Viktor Cseh – Jewish Cultural Historian

5 PM - COFFEE BREAK

5.30PM - PANEL II – DISCUSSION WITH THE ARTISTS AND CURATORS

Moderator: Zita Mara Vadász – Program curator at Balassi Institute, Hungarian Cultural Center in New York

- Andrea Ausztics – Co-Curator, Fulbright visiting scholar at the NYU and Media Artist
- Éva Szombat – Photographer
- Dániel Halász – Photographer, award-winning conceptual artist
- Sarah Gancher – Playwright

7 PM - WINE RECEPTION

We encourage an interactive dialogue between the panelists and the audience, therefore the floor will be open for Q&As. The bios of the panelists and the concept note of the discussion can be found in the following pages.

JEWISH IDENTITY AND THE RENAISSANCE OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF BUDAPEST

Jewish life in Hungary is often negatively portrayed by the international media, and therefore perceived, in terms of the challenges in combating antisemitism and the debates around Holocaust memorialisation. While these sensitive issues should not be overlooked and warrant adequate attention, the Hungarian Jewish communities' flourishing cultural and religious life in Budapest continues to go unnoticed. With the largest Jewish community in Central and Eastern Europe, Hungary has undergone a progressive transformation in the last 25 years. Jewish identity, which was a taboo topic in the public discourse before the regime change in 1989, has become much-discussed and debated, and can be viewed as a building block in the foundation of Hungarian society today. The exhibition, showcased by the Balassi Institute - Hungarian Cultural Center, New York, reveals snippets of the lives and liveliness of the Jewish Quarter of Budapest, tracing back the transformation of this district as far back as the beginning of the 20th century. The mixed media exhibition, entitled *585,000m²*, invites visitors to engage directly with the cultural and religious strands of life in the Jewish Quarter of Budapest.

The Tom Lantos Institute aims to relay the historical, political and cultural messages of these artistic works to the audience through a panel discussion about Jewish identity, its origin and evolution in the shaping of the communities around us, such as the Jewish Quarter in Budapest. The contemporary revival of the Jewish community in Budapest can of course be linked to historical events, trauma and renaissance which in turn has resulted in the development and uniqueness of the Jewish Quarter. The discussion will attempt to deconstruct these ideas in asking a series of important questions. Such as, how exactly historical events shaped the Jewish Quarter, and what triggered the revival of the community after half a century of hibernation? Regarding the third generation of Hungarian Jews, brought up in the 1990s, what has shaped their thinking on and perceptions of their own community and their respective place in Hungarian society? How has this generation influenced the traditional identity of the Jewish communities in Budapest and Hungary today? Finally, what *was* and *is* the role of the US Jewry in (re)building the community in Hungary and how did these relationships develop with Central-Eastern European communities over the last 30 years?

In addition to teasing out answers to these topical questions in the panel discussions, we hope to encourage the active participation of the audience in constructing new questions. The first panel will focus on the history, identity and activism of the Jewish revival. Following this, the second panel will discuss the art pieces exhibited, all reflecting to the Jewish Quarter along with discussions around the extent to which contemporary art reflects and embodies this district. It is important to discuss the relationships between and dynamics of, the American and the Hungarian Jewish communities. Panel members of both sessions are; American Jewish participants with expertise in the Hungarian Jewish revival; Budapest based experts, engaged in contemporary Jewish life in Hungary; Hungarian professionals who are now living in the US; and lastly artists and curators who have contributed greatly to the exhibition presented by Balassi Institute - Hungarian Cultural Center in New York and the WhiteBox.

We hope this discussion will help engage different segments of society in promoting constructive dialogue on the different forms of Jewish identity, through in-depth discussions on the Jewish revival and the transformation of the Jewish Quarter in Budapest spanning a whole century, and how this has enabled the evolution of Jewish identity.

SPEAKER'S BIOS IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

Andrea Ausztrics primarily works as a creative producer but has also been creating concept videos and documentaries for few years now. Her main interest is how art reflects on contemporary society. Through art she engages with religion, gender and identity issues. She studied at Eötvös Loránd University's Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Departments and holds two master degrees in aesthetics and cultural anthropology. In all of the three faculties she dealt with visual communication, representations of cultural identity and memory. This year she is a Fulbright scholar at New York University and she is working on her PhD dissertation about in History about Jewish museums and novel modes of representation. She has worked in film, video, media art, commercials and music video since 2003. She is living in New York at the moment but is based in Budapest and has lived in Vienna, Tel Aviv, Tarragona and Barcelona for a while.

Viktor Cseh was born in Budapest, Hungary where he completed a degree in chemical engineering. Currently he is finishing his studies in art and history of the Jewish culture. Since 2008 he is a lecturer in the Hungarian Jewish Cultural Association (MAZSIKE). He also worked for MiNYanim – leadership program sponsored by Sochnut – for five years. He is a part of the Orthodox Jewish Community of Hungary (MAOIH) where he runs several programs just like Melamed (www.melamed.hu). He teaches traditions and costumes in Tikva Hungary – a modern orthodox kolel. His first book will be published in two languages in September 2016, his book covers the history of Hungarian countryside Jewry.

Sarah Gancher is a playwright who loves epic stories, big ideas, and deep comedy. Her most frequent subject is how history is reflected in individual lives—how places, communities, and debates evolve over time. Her plays have been produced or developed at London's National Theatre, Edinburgh's Traverse Theatre, Budapest's Quarter6Quarter7 Festival, Steppenwolf, PS122, Ars Nova, P73, New York Stage and Film, the Women's Project, NYC SummerStage, the Great Plains Theater Conference, and Telluride Theatre, among others. She has been a Time Warner Fellow at the Women's Project Playwrights Lab, a member of P73's writer's group Interstate 73, a Writing Fellow with The Playwrights' Realm, and a member of the Ars Nova Play Group.

Dániel Halász is a photographer and videographer who has traveled extensively around the world and is the recipient of numerous international prizes, such as the Google Saatchi Photography Prize and the Epson Art Photo Award. He was nominated as one of the best graduating young artists in Europe in 2011 and as a top emerging artist of PLATTFORM 10 at the Fotomuseum Winterthur in Switzerland. With a conceptualist approach, he tries to reimagine a wide scale of subjects in a multi-layered way and tell a story about the effects of global and local cultural, sociological and political interaction. His works directly respond to the surrounding environment and use everyday experiences as a starting point. Often these are framed instances that would go unnoticed in their original context. To quote Idris Khan: "Daniel's work has an atmosphere and a considered approach that looks at the overlooked."

Ferenc Kumin is an economist and political scientist. He holds two MAs from the Corvinus University of Budapest and from Central European University, and has earned his PhD degree at the former. His fields of interest have been political communication and campaigning, political effect on finances, e-governance and e-democracy, and functioning of the heads of states in parliamentary regimes. He started his career as a political analyst in 2002 with frequent appearances in various media. In the meantime he started his guest lecturing activity at Századveg Political School, Corvinus University of Budapest, and later at Budapest College of Communication and Business and Pázmány Péter Catholic University. In 2006 he became head of department at the Office of the President of the Republic responsible for the communication and strategic planning of the former head of state, László Sólyom. Before becoming in 2012 deputy state secretary at the Prime Minister's Office responsible for international communications, he worked for two years as senior analyst at a conservative think-tank, Századveg Foundation. In 2014 he assumed his post of Consul General of Hungary in New York.

Andras Ligeti is working at Tom Lantos Institute since June 2015 as the Programme Manager for Jewish Life and Antisemitism. He holds a Bachelor's degree earned in the Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy at the Interdisciplinary Center of Herzliya (IDC) in Israel. He specialized in International Affairs and carried out research on radicalism on the Internet. András was responsible for several projects including interfaith and intercultural dialogues. He co-founded Habonim Dror, a Jewish Youth Movement and later he became its educational leader. He was the leader of the Forum Against Antisemitism (FAE) where the main

activity included the monitoring, analyzing and researching antisemitic hate crime in Hungary. He was involved in several projects of the European Union of Jewish Students (EUJS), including the coordination of the annual Summer University. András was the chairperson of the Youth Council of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Hungary (MAZSIHISZ) and member of the US Embassy Youth Council in Budapest. Besides his experience in the public sector, András worked in the private sector for four years in the field of logistics and project management.

Patricia Eszter Margit is a cultural manager, writer, journalist, PR expert and community organizer originally from Hungary, currently living in New York City. She is currently working at the 92Y cultural and community center in Manhattan. Her writings have appeared at *JTA*, *Jerusalem Report*, *Nepszabadsag* (Hungarian daily), *Szombat*, *EJewishPhilanthropy*, *Marie Claire*, *ELLE* magazines and edited the *Budapest Times*. She worked for the national radio as well as a pirate station, sang in a feminist punk rock band and a classical choir, advised women's NGOs on media advocacy and is a founding board member of the Hungarian National Committee for UN Women and Art Kibbutz, international Jewish artist colony. She played leadership roles at outstanding social justice and spiritual organizations, such as the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, the Carlebach Shul and Romemu. Eszter acquired her Jewish studies background in pluralistic institutions such as Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies, Yeshivat Simchat Shlomo and the Conservative Yeshiva as a Legacy Heritage Fellow. Recently she has worked with Storahtelling, Jewish Art Now, and the Carlebach Shul as advisor. She has an MPA from Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs and had been a Woolrich fellow at Columbia University's Writing Department. Her first novel, *The Jewish Bride*, was published in 2009 in Hungarian and sold out in three months. It was well received at the Hungarian National Book Fair and got significant attention in the Hungarian media, it was widely recommended in the Jewish community, but other publications also felt that it spoke to their readers. Eszter moved to New York, where she became a Jewish bride herself. She is currently working on the English translation of her book, looking for a copy-editor and a publisher.

Rabbi Michael Paley is the scholar in residence and director of the Jewish Resource Center of the UJA-Federation of New York. He is an adjunct professor at the Columbia School of Journalism. Prior to his arrival at UJA, he was a professor of Jewish Studies and dean at Bard College and the vice president of the Wexner Heritage Foundation, where he remains a member of the permanent faculty. For many years, Rabbi Paley served as the university chaplain at Columbia University. Rabbi Paley was the founder and first director of the Edgar M. Bronfman Youth Fellowships in Israel, a program that brings together outstanding students from diverse Jewish backgrounds. He also served as the Jewish chaplain at Dartmouth College. Rabbi Paley earned his bachelor's degree at Brandeis and graduate degrees in Jewish and Islamic Philosophy and Science at Temple University.

Éva Szombat was born in 1987, Kaposvár. She works as a photographer in Budapest, Hungary and holds a master's degree in Photography from Moholy-Nagy University (2012). During her university years, she also studied in Paris at the ESAG Penninghen (2009) with a European student mobility grant. The notoriously bizarre details of Éva Szombat's images represent the unusual aspects of both the human condition and the grotesque traces of wild nature which inhabits our lives. Being entertaining and thrilling is always the main focus for Éva. She is a noted member of a new generation of visual artists in Hungary who are willing to make fun of themselves by admitting to being born into a digitized and perhaps disenchanted world which yields an ironic but deep down deeply reverential approach to art as a form of action. Her works were featured on sites including VICE, IGNANT, Feature Shoot, Fotografia Magazine and Huffington Post.

Zita Mara Vadasz is currently the program curator at the Hungarian Cultural Center. She studied at the Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest and holds an MA in Political Science. Specializing in cultural policy, she started working with a policy think tank before joining Balassi Institute in 2010. There she acted as liaison officer for Hungarian cultural centers abroad and worked on programs ranging from photo exhibitions to fashion shows in Hungary and neighboring countries. Since November 2011, she has been overseeing cultural programming at the Center. In the past years she worked on and launched various cultural and creative projects in New York City and the US. In 2013 she was involved in the Smithsonian Folklife Festival's Hungarian Heritage program as a special event coordinator and member of the communication team. Together with Grammy Award winner Frank London she curated the Glass House Project (currently active as the Glass House Orchestra), a musical experiment that brought together 8 contemporary musicians who revisited and reimagined Hungarian Jewish musical traditions. Since its launch in 2014 the project became an orchestra, touring around the world. In 2015

she was co-curating Pop Up Budapest, a series of events that unfolded in over two weeks mostly in NYC, showcasing what Budapest as a cultural metropolis and hub has to offer and why and how the city has an important role in global cultural exchanges today.