

Dávid FEHÉR
ÁDÁM ALBERT
 BETWEEN FRAMES

MZS *I feel like I am sort of deceived here. Somehow, when I look at your paintings, I have the feeling that I must always be on guard...*

GE You do have to be on guard, but I would not call that deception. On the contrary, I am trying to call attention to an aspect of the world that is usually hardly visible. These almost invisible or indiscernible features appear in my pictures as metaphors.

MZS *Please describe the internal events of your “marginal” paintings!*

GE There are all sorts of re-evaluations taking place in each and every one of my pictures. You could say that the places and colours are changing, they turn outside in and inside out. In case of these pictures that focus on the margins, one quickly faces a dilemma. One has to decide whether a colour pattern at the margins of the picture’s body belongs to the picture’s side or to the area of the body of the picture that is parallel to the wall when seen from a frontal perspective. When I think about this margin of indefinable identity, it seems infinitely simple, yet unusual. In these pictures I can see a whole storehouse of considerations and metaphors: transition, things in and out of proportion, icon and negative icon, the need to belong, the question of independence, relation to a community, infinite condensation, formulations of situations before or after contraction...

MZS *On the main surfaces of the pictures the grey colours are very elaborate. Why are these important, if this is not what one has to pay attention to?*

GE This is a kind of tribute to the medium, to material existence and the object itself, if I may say so. The greys represent muddy earth and the way it pulls you down, while the strands of colours stand for worldly homelessness. The different kinds of greys of the individual pictures were made from the leftovers of previous colourful picture-edges. In a way, one picture gives life to the next...

MZS *Which moments do you regard to be the most outstanding ones of your oeuvre?*

GE If I answered this question, I would betray my other works.

↳ **Gábor ERDÉLYI** was born in 1970 in Budapest. He lives and works there.

Drawings of drawing tools, enamel plates displayed in streets, twisted emblems and subverted museum spaces. Conceptual essays on art theory and the archaeology of images, argued with incisive professionalism.

Entering the studio of Ádám Albert, I first come across a monumental drawing: an urban landscape, drawn with the precision of an engineer, the houses foreshortened in perspective, their outlines razor-sharp. It looks like a Renaissance drawing of an ideal town, combined with the gaunt formal qualities of architectural designs, the peculiar sterility of computer-made vector drawings, and the digital Eden of cold-hard cyberspace. The captions – the word “eye” spelled with the fonts popular in the Third Reich, and the word “protection” written with Futura fonts familiar from the Bauhaus – take the spectator on a trip from the field of picture theory to the questions of political design and cultural memory. Of course all this is related to the most prominent motif of the work, a renovated bunker where Ádám Albert used to work during his scholarship in Germany. As he explains, “this building was erected in the eastern harbour at Frankfurt Osthafen in 1940, during the great building boom of the time. It carries the burden of history. I modeled the entire surrounding marina world, I photographed the landscape, then I made vector graphics of it.” The work is the first piece in a planned series of drawings that would summarize and further elaborate on the previous pieces of his oeuvre in a unique way: Albert is simultaneously interested in the public stories that may unfold from the texture of the city upon close inspection, and the issues of visual culture and media archaeology. His carefully-crafted works are based on thorough research, the theoretical formulation of personal experiences, and systematic accumulative work. I spent a long time in front of the drawing, conversing with Ádám Albert. It did not take too long for me to realize how precisely he reflects on his own activity, how consciously he builds up, shapes and widens the intellectual framework of his oeuvre.

The enameled iron plate, an emblematic – and for a long time even dominant – medium of Albert’s work, appeared in his early creative

period. As a neutral, white surface, it may serve as a substitute for paper, simultaneously evoking the visual characteristics of street signs and design objects. Later, the Foucauldian concept of discipline and the issues concerning surveillance and digital data acquisition also became recurrent motifs of his street-sign pictures (2006–2007). His stylized, pure works, which nevertheless include unreadable sign-systems, function as fake street signs, and often appear in public spaces as hiding objects, disturbing the routines of reading signs as “objectified spam.” “The original images make human traffic easier, both literally and metaphorically” – says Albert, who has walked the streets of several cities, mostly Berlin and Budapest, as a flaneur, smuggling his signs into all sorts of everyday environments. Albert does not construct direct narratives, but rather evokes and reinterprets the visual commonplaces of the recent past and the present. He collects enameled pot lids at garbage clearances, which he turns into miniature Tondos like enamel plates (since 2004): these objects convey figurative and abstract motifs (sometimes “ready-made,” sometimes elaborated) that refer to the visual language of recent times. The contours of Stalin’s figure and other more- or less- well-known figures mix with the modernist motifs of cold war era sci-fi, the topoi of kinetic art, and the pictograms of digital image culture. It was during a walk in a botanical garden that Albert noticed that the signs describing the taxonomy of plants share some of the formal characteristics of his enamel works. He placed his own signs in the garden, and later built a whole forest or jungle of signs (2007), which describes the intricacies of signification as a pseudo-system of signs.

The media-theoretical and market-oriented context of coding and decoding became a particularly vital issue in the 2008 series entitled *Decoder*. This time, the enamel plates were replaced by acrylic paintings on canvas: first, Albert transported his familiar motifs into colour paintings, later he started painting text-works with fonts of his own design. These fonts evoke the wall inscriptions of Battista “Pinin” Farina, the formal commonplaces of 60s’ design culture, quoted equally in the East and West, and the modernist logos of refrigerators and cars. The ironic inscriptions on the pictures, however, remind one of the sys-

↓ **ALBERT Ádám Decoder II.**, 2008,
installation, MDF, iron, wood
installáció, MDF, vas, fa,
37 × 50 × 20 cm
© Courtesy of the artist / a művész engedélyével



tem messages of computer culture. More generally, they may also refer to the characteristic features of conceptual art (see for example “high concept – low resolution”). These pictures do not stand alone, however - accompanying them are enamel plates and white wooden objects with the laser-cut logo “decoder” as a sort of pseudo-brand name written on them in the well-known font. Similarly to the fireplace covers, these objects are also peculiar, dysfunctional hybrid objects evocative of everyday routines and experiences. The one reminiscent of a “radio device” of 1960s or 70s design may be an apt example. This black, white and grey total installation may be regarded as an enigmatic stage referring to everything that Albert addressed in his oeuvre so far: the issues of imaging and making sense, reception and interpretation, the social and anthropological contexts of design and object-usage.

In 2011, in his total installation entitled *Never Take a Trip Alone*, Albert put his previous work in a broad context of cultural history. This was by far his most complex work, which reconstructed the studies of Goethe and Humboldt. Here he simultaneously presents the rooms in the form of copper engravings - as an illusionistic perspective cabinet reminiscent of the 17th century Hoogstraten, and as a computer generated film. He explores questions of art history and cultural history at the same time.

Ádám and I were still standing in his studio, inspecting the objects in his storage space. This time, we were not trying to reconstruct Humboldt’s journey, but rather his own. Pieces were scattered on the floor in preparation for his next large installation. These globes, glass jars, convex lenses, zograscopes, and index cards indicate that Ádám Albert seeks to continue elaborating on the issues raised by his previous installation. “I would like to create a system of classification” – he says, maybe a quasi-laboratory or a quasi chemical-storage room, one also reminiscent of the world of botanic “taxonomic plates.” Ádám Albert is currently working on his immediate surroundings, the place he lives, Klauzál Square in the Jewish district of Budapest. It is through the stories of his micro-surroundings that he wishes to illuminate correlations of broader kinds. As his drawings of the German bunker also clearly revealed, his personal archaeology is associated with collective traumas.

↪ **Ádám ALBERT** artist, was born in 1975 in Veszprém.
He lives and works in Budapest.

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