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Living art at the B ans ghi Gallery

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Budapest's Castle District is not only a picturesque quarter of winding streets and public museums. It also offers a wealth of private art galleries, including some in which the curators are veritable works of art themselves.



Case in point are **Tibor B ans ghi** and his partner **Akiram** (Marika Schwarcz), whose **B ans ghi gallery and studio** has also been the couple's home for most of the last two decades. The intense range and depth of their artwork, and their no less engaging selves, will surely reward any visitor who strays along. I first met Tibor and Marika in early 2001, as friends of another Castle family whom I know. They invited me by their studio, and one day soon after I found myself buzzing their keypad and being ushered in through the heavy dark wooden door-within-a-door into their courtyard, a charming space alive with the offhand charm of potted plants in the slanting sunlight of an early afternoon. Since that day I have returned often, and I have seen this couple's art fabulate ever forward

unceasingly.

This is true of Tibor especially: he picks up a motif, theme or technique, plays with it a while until exhausting it of new growth, and then moves on to something quite different, so that every visit to the gallery is a new experience. Over the years, Tibor's art has emerged as an endless sequence of dazzling formal investigations, deeply informed by the classical avant-garde, by turns figurative or abstract, exploring all manner of relation between form and meaning. (One of his recent works is pictured right.) In gesture wrought into texture, in curve and angle, spiral and cross, in boiled-down colors, often earthy, and informed with a modulated chaos or an unearthed memory, Tibor tempts the viewer into a process of recreating reality in terms of concrete tensions brought into heightened relation, one into the next. And his works reflect his deep commitment to Eastern spirituality, and document on canvas what he apprehends on his spiritual path: "In the course of creation," he explains, "the transcendent values experienced during meditation gain their shape. The real source of art is located in the transcendence, the non-manifested area of pure consciousness that is not changing and eternally comprises all the opportunities."



Marika is also deeply spiritual, as is clear from her acrylic works, so bursting with life and joy that her canvases can barely contain them. Large sunbursts, fruits and flowers vie with more cosmic themes, expressing the all-in-all in paint with expansive lyric wonder. And when she talks, the sheer delight of existence present in her works comes totally to life, like an illuminated manuscript.

This too is part of the joy of coming to know their art, the chance to meet and interact with Tibor and Marika and let them direct you to what is most alive in what they have

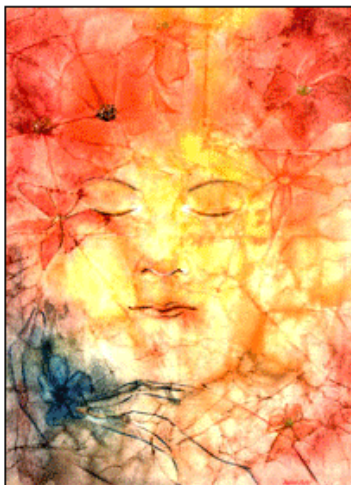


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Painted, as a spontaneous process of drawing out motifs as they draw you in. While Tibor is in part like a 21st century urban villager, with his dark beard, cutting peppers with a rough-handled knife, Marika works from the universal inward, pausing down to earth long enough to meet us along the way.

Marika had fled Hungary on a whim as a teenager in the late 1960s, when her then-husband violinist had a chance to escape to Australia. There began her first phase of artistic development, studying drawing, dancing and piano at a Sydney academy. Later in Brussels she had to give up dance after a pirouetting accident, and began work at an animation studio. A Portuguese filmmaker, then a Salazar dissident, took her on as an assistant, and the pair moved to Paris, where Marika worked as a first assistant animator at the Asterix film studio.



In 1982 she returned to Hungary. From the viewpoint of her later strong spirituality, she now understands this long journey away and back as the time needed for her to find that stable point within herself, from which she knew what she had to bring back and contribute to her world in Hungary. It took a little longer before the authorities could understand this too, as in those days, once you left Hungary, coming back was not really one of the choices. But she convinced them that she was free of political ideology, that this was her home and where she belonged, and she began working as a key artist at Pannonia Film Studio in Budapest. Under Tibor's urging she later turned to painting full-time. Tibor, meanwhile, came from a great family tradition of artists. His grandfather had also studied in Paris, and then returned to build a family *palota* in a

small village near Esztergom, in present-day Slovakia. Tibor's father became a painter too later in life, and their artisan clan now extends into the fourth generation.

Their gallery, originally opened as an open space to feature works from *Bánsághi père-et-fils*, became a shared space with Marika after the couple met in 1987. Now it is a working showcase for their ever-revitalizing happiness: returning month after month one can perceive the constant innovation which courses through these artists still, right alongside a traditional Hungarianness which grounds the cosmic impulse in a specific time and place, which we are fortunate to know as here and now. The couple also exhibits, both jointly and solo, several times each year in venues around Budapest, and internationally. Check out their websites not to see their artwork, which can only be appreciated in person, but to see when and where their next exhibit might be.

And life goes on: Tibor's daughter **Anna** has put the family gifts into a leatherworking business, and his heavy metal-loving son **Máté** markets medieval body armor, both online.

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