

The practice of indulgence – once a terrible, terrible magic

The artist, András Markós in Lazar Castle, Lazarea, Romania, 18. April 2008
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Abstract: *Beyond ideology and the term's theological significance, the author points out how indulgence in a modern context becomes ferment for visionary synergies of art and theology as witnessed in the "Indulgencia" art performance of András Markós. Two perspectives arise: either to "fearlessly sin", along the lines of Martin Luther, "...that you no longer need indulgences", or the life swinging Theologumenon (theological pronouncement) that "everything can, nothing must!"*

With great pleasure I've accepted this invitation to take part in an interchange of ideas on the exhibition, and performance, Indulgencia by internationally recognized artist, András Markós. I appreciate the opportunity to point out some key relationships of art, theology and politics emerging from this most interesting display of resourcefulness.

Needless to say, the whole exhibition concept is jam-packed with multiple levels of information, and its tie-in to the indulgence design compounds the theme all the more. Markós' exhibition tour, from Bucharest to Cluj and then to Lazarea has largely eyeballed chronology, definition and ideology of the indulgence mechanism. Therefore, I am restricting my input to its modern application as ferment for visionary synergies among culture, politics and theology. His performance draws artistic life in the coupling of these societal forms. Any significant outcome should then reaffirm art's infamously proclaimed freedom of expression, the artist's free will and self-responsibility of anyone in a conscious act of observation.

The indulgence mechanism essentially forgoes penalties for prior actions (sins), decidedly negative on the scale of moral value, and in exchange for abiding services – be they monetary in nature or of services equivalent in value. A related procedure is commonplace among i.e., German doctors. They are charged a wholesome fee in accordance with the ISO 9004 norm to be able to practice medicine, thereby averting any retribution or admittance penalties. Such a mechanism can be discovered in areas of politics and banking too. Now the same mechanism has swerved to art. Markós has imaginatively anchored it in his exhibition medium, for one, by involving the observer in the indulgent practice in the art purchase, therefore incorporating him or her in the same art system.

Now I'd like to direct the listener's attention to a cultural event that took place here in Lazarea on July 14th, 2000 in the BPM Gallery. At that time, I opened an exhibition of locally created art works under the identical title of Indulgencia. Mr. Ferencz Béla otherwise known as Padre Ervin-OFM of the Franciscan Monastery in Lazarea, as well as András Markós unveiled the event on a personal note, to introduce both my work and personality to the communities of Harghita County.

In this remote, idyllic, Carpathian Mountain settlement of Lazarea, with its renown Renaissance Castle and Franciscan Monastery, Markós has now taken the indulgence idea a step further, and I dare say, back in 2000 it would never have been possible to indulge in such a complexity involving multiple levels of society, and with the philosophical magnitude as this forum has thus demonstrated. This is an admirable sign of how the Lazarea community has advanced culturally and in such a short time period – an example for other Romanian communities.

To be sure, any number of synergies evolved by culture, theology, politics and society help propagate new understanding for art creativity and creative freedom. In this case they advance at least two relevant perspectives. On the one hand one might recall the Lutheran premise of *pecca fortiter*, to "sin fearlessly, so that one no longer requires an indulgence". But it also provokes the life swinging Theologumenon (theological pronouncement) that "everything can, nothing must". In terms of economics and art both proposals make redundant the need of outside art agents for quality control, especially in regards in deciding good or bad taste. All told the observer observes and is renewed in his or her own awakening process: That's art.

Illuminating the middle-aged practice of the indulgence should then result in strewing fears of hell, and showing how Godly redemption is given to all mankind – at the same time propagating self-responsibility and ethos of human respect. On a creative scale this implies sensing out one's own (im-) possibilities to excel beyond one's momentary scope of understanding. The artist, Josef Beuys must have certainly come to this realization when he pronounced that every person was an artist. In other words, everyone has the potential of finding one's self in the realm of his or her creative activity – once the psychological i.e., mental barriers are over-

come. This idea also gives rise to the notion of slacking the monopolized control of art agents (galleries, museums, so-called art critics) over designations of what art is in respect to the market.

Making sense in or out of art, or having it make a serious implication is, as might be expected, usually independent of cash flow. On the other hand, an artist's existence can be partially, if not wholly dependent of the sale of that art work. Indulgencia incorporates both aspects: Purchase a work of Markós, confront its possibilities, and you are redeemed through the very act of buying, most of all by the personal realization of what his art content goes on to relate. The art collector i.e., consumer also becomes redeemed by the act of observing i.e., researching the sense of an art work without the dependency of outside agents. Indulgencia is, in fact, a kind of conception art, where sense is made through observed differences, such as can be with the system of money and art.

More concrete, in the exhibition the Indulgencia performance adjoins itself to the system of politics, close to the juggler vein of a young, post-communist society. Those designated politicians, presently members of the Romanian senate, have had their photo printed on each of the exposed drawings – inducted into art by “General Markós” so to speak. Throughout the exhibition each has always had the opportunity to monetarily acquire his or her piece. Imagine – someone might bite the hook and just realize that the buying is a part of the art game in the life of the indulgence mechanism: Bingo! They recognize the scope of their actions in the context of the seven deadly sins and become redeemed, and perhaps have saved an artist from his extinction in the process.

The whimsical, somewhat Dadaistic work of Markós shown in Lazar Castle is far from beautiful, and is in fact very provocative. The monitored politicians portrayed in each of the circa 400 pieces would have to overcome a lot of pride and prejudice (of the seven deadly sins) about their notion of art in order to see “beyond” – a wonderful metaphor implying the limitations of the human scope in general. Here again is brought to mind the mechanism of the original theological framework of doing indulgence.

Even the revered and at times media tarnished office of Christian theology is redeemed in the artist's medium, and is free to pursue its designated role as a vehicle of redemption and self-recognition by the power of a God given grace. A novel thing has occurred: This performance i.e., its medium has become interrelated in the greater theological picture as a sacrament of forgiveness and sanctification (to recognize and become cleansed). It does this primarily by allowing a premise for responsible observation of a publicly exposed art work. We simply become aware. For example, in one special case we are reminded that the artist had to flee his Romanian homeland in 1982 under extremely painful conditions. On a personal level the act of Indulgencia is therefore the artist reckoning with that experience. His art is of personal offering and of tribute: It is to cry out and then to forgive, to perhaps find peace in reconciling with life's whip: Indulgencia.

Across the massive oak table benching our forum, personalities of church, state, and culture¹ have introduced unique observations in the focus of Indulgencia. I might add that we have certainly become enriched with a surplus of new possibilities – new recognitions exceeding the limits of any knowledge we might have introduced to Markós' art system in the first place². It happens, e.g., when we dare to share a new recognition and introduce it again into the system of communication. In such a way art celebrates its greatest moment.

All in all, Márkos' visionary faculty and system of art have never aspired to replace God's divinity, but such artistic foresight embedded in the Indulgencia performance does offer us a system of self-reflection, perhaps even God inspired, whose encounter enriches us more than we had ever bargained for. Of course, increasing options also multiplies the number of choices, but where would art be, or its observers be without risk?

As we go our separate ways, I wish you all *pecca fortitir* for continued development – notwithstanding, in an otherwise creative, freedom-loving sense.

¹ Among other, Andras Markós (artist), Frederick D. Bunsen (artist), Attila Korodi (politician). Ioan Talpas (politician), Péter Kassay (culture manager), Padre Ervin-OFM (priest), Florian Sandor (politician)

² See: Art sense according to the late systems theoretic, Niklas Luhmann, can be seen as an information surplus emerging from a difference of forms in a work of art (Verweisungsüberschuß).