

# Budapest – the Hungarian sister

**Budapest, the capital of Hungary, is situated in Europe, on the two sides of the River Danube.**

Coordinates: Northern latitude 47.5°; Eastern longitude 19°.

Height above sea level: 100-230 m in Pest, the highest point of Buda: 527 m.

Territory: 526.6 km<sup>2</sup>.

Population: 2,018,000 (1991)

In January 2005 there are nearly 1,100 works of fine arts on the public squares of Budapest. Of these works of arts, 75% are individual memorials, statues and decorative fountains, 25% (276) are embossed memorial plaques. The oldest one is a votive statue of Virgin Mary, which was established in 1692. The latest one is a composition of two figures under the title “Theatre”, inaugurated in December 2004.

**In Hungary the category of outdoor public art consists of statues on public squares, and embossed memorial plaques on buildings.**

Although some of the company signboards, portals, various notice boards and advertisements are thoroughly designed quality works of arts, they still do not classify as public outdoor arts.

In the recent years, various artistic associations began to organise **temporary exhibitions on public areas popularising contemporary fine arts with the support of Budapest Municipality**. In summer 2000, the boating lake of the City Park hosted the exhibition of 24 artists under the title of Art-herald of the New Millennium. In 2003 and 2004, travellers could see giant poster-size reproductions of graphic artists and painters in one of the big railway stations during the tourist season. In summer 2004, sculptors exhibited their non-figurative works in a recently built Downtown park, while in the autumn of 2004 interactive pieces of art were exhibited in public squares for the second time within the framework of Budapest Autumn Festival.

## **1. Outdoor representation of religion (1692-1867)**

The positioning of outdoor statues in the current territory of Budapest reflects the last 300 years of history of the country and the city. These days only remnants of buildings and archaeological excavations show the traces of the three cities, Buda, Óbuda and Pest, which were erected in the 11<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries on the two sides of the River Danube on the ruins of the former settlements of the Roman Empire. From the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Buda was the seat of the kings of Hungary for three hundred years. The period of glory of the city relates to the reign of Zsigmond Luxembourg king (1387-1437, and German emperor 1410-1437) as well as King Matthias (1458-1490), one of the most famous European kings of the time, well known for his rich library. In 1541, Buda and one third of Hungary were occupied by the Turks. During the next 150 years, some of the buildings were converted, gardens and baths were built according to the Islam taste. In 1686, mercenary troops, recruited from various countries of Europe drove the Turks out of Buda. The memory of the Turks is now kept by only a dervish tomb and baths, which are still in use. Later on Budapest was part of the Hapsburg Empire until 1918. The emperor was represented in Buda through the Palatine

and Council of the Governor General until 1867, when Franz Joseph Austrian emperor was crowned Hungarian king in Buda.

At the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the king settled Catholic immigrants of mainly German origin in Buda, Óbuda and Pest and, although one hundred years later all nations of Eastern, Central and Southern Europe were represented, at the beginning the image and life of the three towns by the River Danube were dominated by Catholic Germans.

This is the reason why **the earliest group of outdoor arts in Budapest consisted of votive columns, crosses, ecclesiastical statues and calvaries established in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, reflecting the beliefs and religious habits of mainly Catholic population.** Some of these public signs of personal devotion still contain a German text. With the development of the cities, they could only remain in the outskirts, while many of them were ruined in the centres when the structure of the towns was reshaped at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. **The majority of the remaining 60 religious statues have already lost their original function, but they still are protected as historic monuments together with 270 other statues situated in those parts of the town (the Danube banks in Buda and Pest, as well as the Andrásy út), which have been declared part of the world heritage.**

## **2. Era of national monuments (1867-1918)**

As a result of the efforts and fights for independence, the country became more and more independent and, opposite Buda, the royal seat, at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the town of Pest on the left bank of the River Danube began to develop rapidly. The national institutions of political, social, artistic and scientific life, as well as the related buildings were established in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The economic and commercial importance of the town is illustrated with the fact that in 1820 Pest was the most important market town on the River Danube after Vienna. At that time, **demand already existed for national monuments, but the citizens of Pest still did not have political opportunities of outdoor representation and they also lacked duly qualified Hungarian artists or concepts, worth pursuing.**

Budapest Capital City was established after the Compromise in 1867 and the merger of Pest, Buda and Óbuda in 1873. The new city developed into one of the most modern capital cities of Europe in twenty years, for example, the world's third cogwheel railway was opened in the hills of Buda in 1874. Following the pace of industrialisation, the number of population grew from 300,000 to 750,000 between 1873 and 1900, **bringing along a town structure in Budapest, consisting of boulevards and avenues as a result of a consistent urban development concept** based on the example of Paris, **which still determines the structure of the town.** The consistent education, health and social welfare system of the capital city, an up-to-date, duly automated utility system, i.e. mains water supply, sewage network, public lighting, transport and public hygiene institutions were also put in place during this period.

Budapest launched the first underground railway of the continent in 1896, celebrating the 1000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the settlement of nomadic Hungarian tribes; in 1900, 500 coffee houses and in 1910 92 cinemas operated in Budapest.

The citizens of the town, proud of her performance, **decorated outdoor fountains with statues** in the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and then, after 1867, they expressed their gratitude to their predecessors fighting for national independence, i.e. mainly writers, actors and politicians, **by erecting historic monuments, full-length figures and busts on public areas. The most important memorial statues on the territory of the present Downtown area were established between 1882 and 1892 as a result of tenders and public donations.**

The construction of the first extensive historic monument financed by the state began in 1896. **This historic monument, depicting the leaders of settling Hungarian tribes and 14 Hungarian kings was the first monument established** at the end of an important avenue and **within the framework of a townscape concept.**

The emperor supported the grandiose plans of the city management by donating 10 statues to the town. As a result of donation of Franz Joseph I, Austrian emperor and Hungarian king, **statues of important personalities of the Hungarian history were erected at ten prime spots of the town between 1902 and 1917.**

### **3. Outdoor statues, as instruments of political agitation and utopianism (1920-)**

Following the peace treaties concluding the First World War, Budapest became the capital city of a country shrunk to one third of its previous size. Hungary's energy was used to eliminate the shortages caused by the loss of war, intensive social work, and the efforts of finding a place for and caring for Hungarians migrating from territories attached to neighbouring countries. Most immigrants settled down in the outskirts of Budapest and the agglomeration. In 1920, the population of the capital city and its agglomeration was 1,232,000.

The Hungarian nation, proud of its history, experienced the loss of the war and two thirds of the country as humiliation and therefore the political idea of revisionism was strongly supported by the society already during the first years of this period.

The public areas of Budapest became sites of political demonstrations, **while statues and historic monuments turned into instruments of political agitation and representation of power. Since those times even statues erected with intentions of decoration carry political motives.** There was no other year when so many genre statues were erected in Budapest as during the year of the world economic crisis. As a result of the purchases and orders of the capital city, 14 decoration statues were erected in public areas in 1929-1930. **The elite groups between the two world wars could generally be described with the renaissance of pre-modern ideas, and therefore outdoor sculpture also reflected national and religious themes and history making intentions. Since these times, statues have not been erected from public donations; the political monuments were ordered by members of the political elite, and genre statues were ordered by the city management, intending to satisfy public taste.** There was a well-founded social demand only for so-called war monuments commemorating the victims of the First World War. Such monuments were erected by various parts of the city, social organisations and bodies within their own competence.

**The Second World War did not represent a caesura in the concept of the use of public areas, the system of patronship or the genre or stylistic characteristics of statues.** The only difference was that after the start of the Communist period civil organisations were dissolved, and thus between 1950 and 1990 only the leading political bodies could take part in outdoor representation.

In 1950, part of the agglomeration, surrounding small towns and villages were attached to the capital city, and thus at the moment Budapest is the biggest city of the country with 23 independent administration units (districts). Every fifth citizen of the country lives in Budapest. In order to satisfy the mass housing demand, huge housing estates were built at several points of the city. **In order to ease the monotony of the aesthetically undemanding buildings, these parts of town were decorated with a large number of mainly figure statues. According to the instructions of the management of the city, 2% of the costs of**

**each construction project had to be used for “humanisation” of the environment, i.e. erection of statues. Between 1954 and 1990, housing estates were decorated with 167 statues, representing 20% of the total number of statues in the capital city.** The last public tender for decoration statues were issued by Budapest Council in 1987, as a result of which 10 statues were placed in various housing estates. Apart from a few exceptions, the mass statue production resulted in conventional, average-standard figural statues such as, for example, mother and child, fishing boy, donkey, camel, turtle, etc.

In 1990, Hungary broke away from the Soviet block and the third Republic of Hungary was established. As a result of parliamentary democracy and reorganisation of the civil society, **the outdoor areas were no longer used for the representation of one single political will.** Owing to the peaceful political transformation, the local governments of Budapest districts could freely decide on which statues should be demolished from those erected during the dictatorship. Accepting their requirement, Budapest Municipality decided **to collect the political monuments of the Communist era in a Statue Park**, which was a unique decision in Eastern Europe. In 1992, Budapest Gallery had to make arrangements for the removal of 42 monuments and embossed memorial plaques from public territories in Budapest and their transfer into the Statue Park, which was opened in 1993. The statues are still owned by the municipality, and the permanent exhibition is operated by an enterprise.

**There has also been a fundamental change in statue erectors.** Between 1945 and 1990, only public institutions and Budapest Council could establish monuments or statues on public areas in Budapest. **Of the 249 new works of arts placed on public areas after 1990, 20 were financed by public institutions, 27 by Budapest Municipality, 107 by district governments, 87 by NGO-s, foundations and enterprises, and 9 by private individuals.** Budapest municipality supports district governments in their public outdoor projects in an application system.

**In general it can be concluded that a public outdoor memorial has been the most effective and accepted way of the successors’ respect and representation in the way of thinking of Hungarians for about one hundred and fifty years. The unaffected survival of this gesture explains the relatively high number of memorials in the public territory of Budapest.**

In the recent past, there were only isolated actions of individual artists, usually recognised only by art theory experts, which drew attention to the presence of another way of thinking, different from the general traditions of erecting statues on outdoor areas within the Hungarian society.

Naturally, the **distribution of outdoor statues and plaques** is uneven within the city. Most public outdoor pieces of art, 30% of the statues of Budapest, are situated in four districts, i.e. the historic parts of the town and large parks.

**According to the intentions of establishment,** the public outdoor pieces of art can be divided into two large categories: memorials and decorative statues.

The biggest thematic group of public outdoor statues in Budapest – involving nearly 700 statues – include memorials, portrait statues and embossed plaques dedicated to historical events and prominent personalities of public life and culture. The majority of them are figural statues, still made with an art of sculpturing reflecting the academic traditions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The few non-figural exceptions do not even represent 1%.

The pieces of art established for decoration contain the sculptures erected in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century decorating the first public fountains, the decorative fountains built as part of civil

representation and the various figural pieces intended to humanise the housing estates between 1954 and 1990.

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Budapest Municipality supports arts by operating cultural, art, public education and entertaining institutions and financing programmes. In addition to the theatres and other cultural institutions owned by the city, the municipality also maintains historic and art collections. **Support of contemporary fine arts and in general patronage of fine arts is realised through the operation of Budapest Gallery.**

Budapest Municipality has founded and operates Budapest Gallery, while the institution is supervised by the General Assembly of Budapest Municipality.

The two main organisational units of **Budapest Gallery** are the Exhibition Department and Public Outdoor Fine Arts Department. The Exhibition Department operates with two art historian curators and one organizer **and organises yearly on average 25-30 exhibitions of contemporary fine arts, photography, design and architecture**, including experimental and inter-medial shows with the participation of Hungarian and foreign artists. Budapest Gallery was the first institution in Hungary organising exhibitions for Dali, Beuys and Kantor.

Temporary exhibitions are held in an exhibition hall in Downtown and in a two-floor exhibition house.

The independent exhibition house of Imre Varga, the doyen of Hungarian sculptors, is operated by Budapest Gallery, using the resources of the municipality.

The **art exchange programme**, implemented in co-operation between Budapest and nine European cities, is also run by Budapest Gallery. Within the framework of this programme, the municipality hosts 16 European artists in three downtown flats with studios, and organises the study trip of the same number of Hungarian artists abroad each year.

The exhibitions and the art exchange programme are based on applications.

The **Public Outdoor Fine Arts Department of Budapest Gallery** establishes and maintains the works of public outdoor arts in Budapest with its three members of staff – an architect, an art historian and a documentator.

The **procedures of erecting statues on public outdoor areas and their maintenance** are regulated in Section 109 of Act XX of 1991 on local governments. “(1) The establishment, transfer and demolition of works of arts on outdoor areas and buildings owned by local governments shall be decided by the council of the local government of the settlement, the General Assembly of Budapest Municipality in Budapest, and the same bodies shall also be responsible for their maintenance and reconstruction. (2) An expert opinion shall be obtained about the artistic value of the work of art for decision-making. The consent of the district local government concerned shall be required for the establishment, transfer or demolition of any statue or memorial within Budapest. (3) The council of the local government concerned shall be obliged to obtain an expert opinion and protect works of arts, situated on buildings not owned by the local government, and in the case of new items, it shall have the right of forming an opinion.”

**Since 1990, Budapest Gallery has been authorised to issue an expert opinion of the artistic value of public outdoor works of arts to be established in Budapest. In this work Budapest Gallery relies on experts too.** The latest list of experts appointed for the

assessment of works of arts was published by the Ministry of National Cultural Heritage in 1999 in the Cultural Gazette (Volume XLIII, Issue No. 7). **Between 1990 and 2005 in total 96 expert opinions were issued for the restoration of existing pieces of art, reconstruction of ruined or damaged statues, as well as re-establishment of statues demolished for political considerations after 1949, while 249 expert opinions were issued in relation to new works of arts.**

### **Procedures for the establishment of public outdoor works of arts**

1. The party proposing a statue must notify Budapest Gallery in a letter describing the concept of the establishment of the statue, the financing method, the estimated site for the statue and the ideas of implementation.

In the case of considerable works of arts or unclear details, Budapest Gallery helps, upon request, in the issue of a public or restricted tender, selection of the right location, and informs the party proposing the statue about the methods of ordering and obtaining the required documents (the text to be put on the statue, the site plan, an architectural and environmental plan, owner's approval, construction permit, etc.) and the estimated costs of implementation.

2. After the completion of a design reflecting the nature of the envisaged statue, prepared in an assessable size, Budapest Gallery calls an evaluation committee in the studio of the assigned artist or the location of the collection of bids. The evaluation committee consists of sculptors, architects, art historians and, whenever necessary, historian experts, expressing their opinion about the design(s).

If the bid is successful, the winning artist enters into a contract with the proposing party for the completion of the 1:1 design and the implementation of the statue.

3. On the basis of the opinion of the experts of the evaluation committee, Budapest Gallery issues a statement. If this statement contains a positive opinion, the proposing party shall attach it to its application submitted to the Cultural Committee of Budapest Municipality.

4. A permission of the Cultural Committee of Budapest Municipality and Townscape Protection Committee of Budapest Municipality is required for the implementation of the public outdoor work of arts. In the case of significant monuments or sculptures affecting the townscape, as well as in the case of any dispute, the General Assembly of Budapest Municipality shall decide on the feasibility of the project.

5. After all the necessary permits and licences are available, a 1:1 size interim design can be prepared or the sculpture completed in the meantime may be erected on the public territory.

If a public outdoor work of art is financed by Budapest Municipality, the issued licence document contains the investment intentions of Budapest Municipality based on an approving resolution of its General Assembly. In such a case, Budapest Gallery shall be responsible for the preparatory works outlined above (tender, evaluation of bids, evaluation statement) and control of implementation (obtaining licences, tender for the artists, supervision of construction, etc.).

## **Procedures for restoration and reconstruction of public outdoor works of arts**

Budapest Municipality sets an expectation for Budapest Gallery to have an up-to-date knowledge of the conditions of the public outdoor statues, worth HUF 16.5 billion (USD 330 million, EUR 66 million).

The reconstruction plans, using the annual available budget, are prepared on the basis of this information. The extensive monument reconstruction activities, implemented from a separate budget, sometimes with government support, are independent from these data.

Most of the statues situated on public territories in Budapest are made of bronze or limestone. Theoretically these materials last for a long time, but repeated interventions are still necessary due to the local conditions. Most of the damages have resulted from weather conditions or effects of the war. The annual, sometimes 140 frost cycles, and a certain level of industrialisation, involving air pollution and acidic rain, damage the surfaces aggressively. This is why some statues made of marble and loose structure stones must be covered during the winter months. The revolutions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the siege of Budapest which went on for months in the winter of 1944-1945, the events of the 1956 revolution did not only damage these statues, but also affected them beyond preparation. All these effects, together with the various, often hasty repairs, completed at the technical standards of a particular time, deliberate damages of the recent years since the political transformation, as well as spreading graffiti call for even more urgent interventions quite frequently.

The last two decades have introduced an absolutely new approach in restoration. A restorer-conservator trade, relying on the latest results of natural sciences has appeared, together with damage-free diagnostic methods and a modern laboratory support. As we joined the EUREKA programme of the European Community in 1995, we can also rely on an extensive information system.

In addition to technical knowledge, the references of the members of the Hungarian Chamber of Restorers also need to be kept in mind in order to make sure that the best results are achieved from the competition of the best experts, specialised in certain specific tasks.

Contracts can be awarded on the basis of the evaluation of a preliminary restoration plan and budget, based on bids.

All restoration activities are regularly supervised by experts of Budapest Gallery, and the acceptance of the completed work is also subject to an experts' inspection.

The senior restorer describes the result in a report, documenting all work phases with photos, video records and sketches when required.