

Report: István Kemény

AIR – ARTIST IN RESIDENCE Niederösterreich

I am István Kemény, Hungarian writer. I write poems, prose and essays in Hungarian. As, alas, I am no graphic artist nor composer, I cannot enclose factual art or audio objects with this account, and it is not the easiest task for me to explain what I actually achieved here in Krems during the AIR – ARTIST IN RESIDENCE Niederösterreich Program.

I arrived in Krems with two works in progress: half a novel in prose, and half a novel in verse. My optimistic plan was to work on both, my less optimistic plan was to work on one of the two. The latter proceeded: I went ahead with the romance. In this the town of Krems played an important part. My romance-novel – in its core – is a 21. century Don Quijote story, and I couldn't have found a more suitable site for this – as I had the opportunity to reside in the midway between two late-medieval towns, in the AIR building. The architectural style of the two towns (Stein particularly) is a mixture of gothic and baroque, my residence, the AIR building with its peculiar history (it used to be a carpet factory) however is an impeccable representative of modernity's industrial era.

As I see it, this building reshaped for artistic purposes is in itself an artistic accomplishment: it supersedes and rethinks the centuries passed since the end of the Middle Ages. Moreover, it inspires the artists living and working in it to make good, strong and living art to fill this inevitably functional and sterile venue with, yes: AIR. Me, in my own way, with my romance in verse, was working on this here in Krems, in October of 2021.

The AIR - ARTIST IN RESIDENCE Niederösterreich Program provided me with every condition for effective work. And even more, since for me Krems and its surroundings, the Wachau, and the delightful grape harvest that went on during my whole stay meant refreshment in the most complete sense. I can't think of any lacks that could have bothered me during this residency. I had no Krems-based project of my own in this one month. I gave a bilingual lecture in the Collegium Hungaricum Wien.

The site of the event: <https://stayhappening.com/e/lesung-und-gespr%C3%A4ch-mit-istv%C3%A1n-kem%C3%A9ny-E2ISTYFNH30>

I came to regard the AIR – ARTIST IN RESIDENCE Niederösterreich Program as a unique opportunity for the contemporary artistic scene. Here remains nothing more than to thank it for existing and for letting me be a part of it!

Kemény István

Krems

23.10.2021.

For introduction, here is one of my short poems in English and German:

The bee-keeper

I have been a bee-keeper for six thousand years
And for the past hundred years an electrician.
Once I retire I shall keep bees again.
Something should hum for me, oh hum for me,
Hum and hum and hum
Just for me.

(Translated by George Gömöri, Richard Burns and David Hill)

Der Imker

Sechstausend Jahre bin ich Imker gewesen,
seit hundert Jahren Elektriker.
Geh ich in Rente, will ich wieder Imker werden.
Etwas soll mir summen, soll mir summen,
es soll mir summen, mir summen,
es summe mir.

(Aus dem Ungarischen von Orsolya Kalász und Monika Rinck)

And an excerpt from the romance-novel. (I only can show it in the original, since it is not yet translated.)

Aranykor

Megint egy város
megint egy piactér

megint sétálva tanító
filozófusok
szatyros nénik
zöldségesstandok
hentespultok
fröccsöző bácsik között
megint egy fennálló rend
megint egy egyensúly
megint egy aranykor
megint éppen bontják
a vesztőhelyet
most két nemzedékig
megint egy juharfa lesz a helyén
a pellengéroszlop elszállítás közben
éppen megint öt darabra törik
melósok káromkodnak megint -
Aki lábujjhegyen hátrafelé lopakodó
lovat szeretne látni
legalább egyszer életében
az most nézzen hátra gyorsan
ide erre a sarokra
ahol épp kifarolunk a piactérről
a lovam meg én
mert most itt csak zavarnánk.