Tiepolo's sawn apart

József Mélyi talks to László László Révész

L.L.R.: Why don't you start asking questions, and then I'll start answering.

J.M.: *How many people do you think know about the origins of your name? I've read about it some time ago in a catalogue of yours, but as far as I know, you haven't really talked about it much.*

L.L.R.: What was in the catalogue?

J.M.: *Nevermind, tell me your version.*

L.L.R.: I used to paint pictures of spiritist seances, and I changed my name inspired by a medium called László László. Sometime around '86, I had to change my name.

J.M.: *Why?*

L.L.R.: Back then I used to work in movies, and there were two people with similar names in the industry; so it was largely a necessity. This medium, László László, worked with goosefat, producing echtoplasm at seances. He dipped cuetips into goosefat, stuck it up next to his cheekbone, blowing it out in the end. In this echtoplasm was the Spirit supposed to appear. I loved the double symmetry of his name, and the ties to the seances and Transylvania. I liked the name, that's it. And back then I didn't even know that Miklós Erdélyi used to take photos at seances in the 70's, which I didn't see, but I also knew that his mother was a medium too. And then, around '91, I heard that there was a painter called László László.

J.M.: *Did that catalogue tell this story?*

L.L.R.: Yes.

J.M.: *Do you still think about where your name is coming from?*

L.L.R.: Now only in a mystical way. I've always been interested in spiritual things, continuity, historical relations, because, honestly, I don't believe in changes in the paradigm. Or, rather, I do believe in them, but I see things as much more continuous.

J.M.: *I find this a bit strange, especially since it was you who said in an interview in '94 that there is a paradigm change due in art.*

L.L.R.: Jesus Christ. I can't recall that. There was a paradigm change though, so I was right. Wel, seriously: you can see this in a number of ways. The way I imagine this, change is not like deleting the hard disk, reformatting it, and then there's a whole new era right away; I think there are always elements that are present all throughout paradigm changes but looking at it, these are the ones we can't see. But I am interested in these – as János Sugár put it – blind spots, the less visible trends. What we can't see there and then, that's interesting to me: what we don't see might easily be what becomes much more influential in just maybe half a year than it is at the time of the observation.

J.M.: *Magic appears differently in your work, I think less so in your paintings than in your computer work.*

L.L.R.: All of us have a sensitivity like that. We don't have one overriding world view, and we tend to focus on one given approach. This is a sort of a „firefighter world", where we only think in short-term world pictures, me as much as others. Technology is a much more efficient tool in this world. With a painting, you live together with, even if it's not yours, whereas most art forms using technology have to be very effective. You don't really return to a work of tech-art, which, moreover, is about a certain age, into which it will freeze afterwards. Photoshop 5.5 means the year 1999, but in two years we'l have a better version, and that can also be said in general, about video technology, for instance, which was very different from 1985 than what it was in 1999. This of course has to do with the timeliness of tech art forms. They have a very strange aspect, in that you can watch events that happened tagain and again. It is bizarre to see how a cloud zips by above you, and if you record that, then you can repeat that stretch fifteen times if you want, or you put it in loop, project it over something, and you can watch it as many times as you wish. This alone is magic. Not in the primary meaning of the word, but it really is. It is frozen into a specific time slot, but it is extremely intense within there. Theoretically, tech art forms consist of zero's and ones, strings and soldering-iron, and they are highly characterised by the firefighter thinking, in that you solve problems one by one, and then you take off. And I try to perhaps counterbalance those awful lot of screws and gizmos with a loud *om mani padme hum.*

J.M.: *Do you solve problems one by one on paintings too?*

L.L.R.: Yeah, there is a continual existance like that, there is always a new experience, one problem leads to another, there is no end or beginning, and it it very difficult to set the limits. This is why there has been a neverending frame on my pictures lately: I can't see the unity. What Perneczky says is true: this is a revolving world. We're going from one era to another, and we keep meeting culture on the way. This of course is only the aspect of the recipients of the culture, and in fact our problems are a whole lot different, and so are our solutions to them, embedded in very quick, subsequent systems. I am interested in quick shifts, in representing the switches back and forth. For instance, if you're organizing something, then, say, you call someone, you make an appointment, yet you call each other afterwards, too, like 85 times. This is a typical way of communication, that things happen continuously, organized felxibly; which in the end has its effects on the way we view the world. There is a connection like that, a quick interchange, between the primary and the secondary realities as well. Recently the canon itself has been the secondary realty, the primary one being the media's reality, though it not easy to justify like that.

J.M.: *You said that these pictures, your paintings flow into one another. How much do you weave your everydays, your surroundings into them?*

L.L.R.: This whole things originates in a stupid element of the history of art. There is a painting by Tiepolo, which was sawn into two pieces, because certain features were too far apart on it. I loved this idea, and I love Tiepolo's work altogether, I've observed them a lot. One of his methods of organization are by the compass, something goes south, another thing goes north. His Würzburg frescoes, you can never see them in one, asa whole, its views are such that you can only observe them from a distance, or using tricks, compiling the parts with a camera. Yet the pictures are there for you to sense, to understand, and they don't have much to do with imitation. I realy liked this principle of accidental, gambling organization. I followed it for a longer period of time, working along these guidelines on all my series, even on ones consisting on multiple pictures. I don't have the chance to paint huge frescoes, ones you can see in one enormous piece, but I'd really love to do stuff like that. This is how my display panel pitures were born: I was walking around, and I painted what I saw. This is how the display panel series was done. I took a camera, put it down, and took pictures all around a spot. Based on the panoramic view, the understanding of it is photograph-like, somewhat like when there was a wide horizon pu together from small photographs of Jan Dibbets. I organized my pictures based on simple correlations like that.

In the display panel series, I use a seemingly central perspective. In fact… and this is another one of those art history glitches. Bellini's Saint Jerome, in New Yorkis characterized by an arab-like togetherness, a fractioned spatial structure; the whole of the picture is a mere series of spaces put next to each other. The space depicted is thus constructed of small, independent, correlated spaces. The perception and the time of space is segmented. Small spaces are somewhat central in their perspectives: in this case the display panel as an object emphasizes segmentation. In the case of the pictures with the holes in them it isd a very strong feeling that the small details – each based on central perpective – can break perception if put together. The picture is an object, too, something in front of the wall. Not only an associative sign, but a catalyst of a projection by the viewer. From correlated perceptions you can put together pictures that are not actually present on the picture itself.

These are not mere panoramic pictures, they are not based on the principle of imitation, they are not nice, they just stretch over some space, one after another. In the case of these, I don't have to deal with content, I don't have to pretend I'm a narrative painter. Though narration itself is interesting to me, I'm interested in the scenes and the pictures from which the scenes are composed, but the actual story itself is not interesting.

J.M.: *So there is no problem-solving picture by picture, a task you have to overcome on a picture, a goal that you set?*

L.L.R.: I narrow that down from time to time, but that is my guiding principle. It as been like this since I tried to give a new meaning to the method of listing which Tiepolo's pictures suggested, in which there are scenes that are not composed in a way that sets what is up, down, left or right, things are simply put there. Of course, I'm thinking especially about the horizontal Tiepolo's not the vertical ones, because there you have to compose the scene. Sometimes he couldn't keep to this frame. And then someone came and gave it an interpretation and sawed them in half.

J.M.: *Eso you're painting pre-halved Tiepolo's?*

L.L.R.: Yeah, I saw them up in advance, so others don't have to bother with that later.