‘56
Artists and the Hungarian Revolution of 1956
József Jakovits The Revolution Series 1956 - 1989
Sculptors 2006
Gyula Marosán Drawings 1957
We do not know how tall Stalin was. We know all too well how uneasy he felt about not being very tall - he was perhaps 5'4, maybe 5'3 or 5'5. Photos that revealed this fact were doctored or disposed of. Stalin quite obviously resented the discrepancy between his stature as leader of the Soviet Union and his stature as a human.

Statues of course represent a comfortable escape from such dilemmas of stature. Properly deployed and supported by the flying columns of print and audio-visual media, they come to replace the original and biologically credible representations in collective imaginaries, substituting for them the canonical depictions of the leader.

Small wonder, then, that a revolution must start by tearing down such a statue. As the moment when the participants dare to look outside of the cave draws near, learning to see (again) implies tearing down the statue - so as to break through the veil of representations the dictatorship casts over society. To reveal Stalin, Stalin’s statue must go, exposing the person and the machinery of propaganda in one stroke.

The artists that our curators selected for this show engage in the tearing down of Stalin’s statue with the help of radically different tools. The works from 1956 project the immediacy of the revolutionary act. They aspire to be part of the revolution-as-event, with Jakovits emulating in his series the struggle and the drift towards the fateful conflict between revolutionaries and the Soviet army reentering Hungary. Marosán inserts the image of the toppled statue among the multitude, members of which are nearly faceless and yet intent on reclaiming political agency in an act of self-liberation – the faceless masses are now suddenly more human, more of an agent than the all-powerful dictator, powerless and inert in the dust.

Contemporary reflections, on the other hand, mostly trade in irony. The statue is torn down, at least figuratively, by virtue of its being embedded into various unexpected contexts. The conceptual tools and the perspective may be different, but the end effect is the same, inasmuch as the canonical Stalin finds itself replaced by various fictitious, diminished Stalins.

Both halves of the exhibition open up spaces to reflect on the nature of dictatorship and the potential of people to claim political agency by taking on the representations of dictatorships. This symbolic violence serves as a reminder about our potential, something that the actual topplers of the statue were accomplishing, as well. The exhibition, in the end, is a reenactment of the original courageous deed, a demonstration or crash course on how to break the monopoly of power through art. Thanks are due first and foremost to the curatorial team, the wonderful András Böröcz and Zita Vadász, to Budapest-based 2B Gallery owner László Böröcz, Jakovits and Marosán collectors Miklós Müller and Olivér Botár, to Ágnes Berecz and Gary van Wyk for their perceptive and revealing commentaries, as well as to Anita Surányi, whose editing made this booklet possible. Finally, let us thank contributing artists and remember the multitude, who are, after all, not so different from each other: all of us have the potential for action and the capacity for political agency.

Gergely Romsics  
Director of the Hungarian Cultural Center in New York
In summer 2006, the Budapest-based 2B Gallery initiated an exhibition to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. 2B’s founders, András and László Böröcz invited contemporary artists to reflect on the toppling of the monumental Stalin sculpture, a work by Sándor Mikus, on October 23rd, 1956 in Budapest. After the Soviet invasion, those who participated in the removal of the statue were arrested, incarcerated, and referred to by their fellow prisoners as ‘sculptors.’ 2B Gallery’s initiative, appropriately titled *Sculptors*, asked the participating artists to use a small paper cutout of the Stalin monument to honor the anonymous people who tore it down and thus orchestrated one of the best known events of the 1956 revolution. Like 2B’s other memorial projects, dedicated to the trauma of the Holocaust, *Sculptors* is an ever expanding collection of works and an archive without boundaries - artists of all nationalities are still invited to contribute to its content and ponder how revolutions are made and remembered.

The exhibition, *Artists and the Hungarian Revolution of 1956* features works from the *Sculptors* project along with the drawings of the Hungarian artists, József Jakovits (1909-1994) and Gyula Marosán (1915-2003) who witnessed the events of the 1956 uprising on the streets of Budapest. The small drawings and collages belonging to *Sculptors* suggest that all monuments are precarious and collective memories are always fragile. The works show the hero and dictator as a disposable and transient commodity by making Stalin appear with a bar code and a price tag, as an evil fantasy and a wizard gone awry. In Marosán’s ink-and-watercolor drawing, the toppled Stalin monument appears as a dead mass, dismantled and surrounded by anonymous crowds, while Jakovits’s pencil drawings, titled *Revolution I-X*, render the experience of political insurrection in the symbolic language of biomorphic abstraction.

Tracing the memory of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the exhibition reminds us that the tearing down of statues of religious idols and political heroes is a ritual of protest and resistance that has been long practiced and it is still with us today. By commemorating the mostly anonymous protesters who participated in the removal of the Stalin statue in Budapest, we are also prompted to remember the monuments of Napoleon, Lenin, and Saddam Hussein that were torn down in Paris, Kiev, and Baghdad. *Artists and the Hungarian Revolution of 1956* suggests that political uprisings are not merely reclaimations of city squares and destructions of symbols of power, but creative acts. In an age of pixelated revolutions, when political events and traumas are mediated on the screens of handheld devices, the exhibition invites us to remember how collected memories are shared, and why public spaces, monuments, and the artists who create and destroy them matter more than ever.

Ágnes Berecz
József Jakovits (1909-94) is little known even inside his native Hungary. He is recognized as the leading Surrealist sculptor in Hungary’s European School, which flourished from 1945 until Communists came to power in 1948, after which Jakovits and his avant-garde peers were suppressed and forced to labor in obscurity at whatever jobs they could find. They glimpsed freedom for a few euphoric days during the Hungarian Revolution of October 1956, but within days the chink in the Iron Curtain closed again.

What had begun as a student revolt on October 23, 1956 turned into a broad-based uprising against Soviet rule that toppled the Communist regime in Hungary. The rebels installed a new government under Imre Nagy that pledged free elections and signaled to Moscow its demand for the removal of Soviet troops. Imre Nagy also expressed the desire for Hungary’s withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact, and prematurely asked the United Nations to help Hungary become a neutral country. These actions apparently caused the Soviet leadership to reverse its consent to withdrawal and instead to invade Hungary, overthrow the new government, denounce the demonstrators as counter-revolutionaries, and set up a new Communist puppet government. Civilian casualties amounted to 2,700 dead and 20,000 wounded, while as many as 200,000 Hungarians fled the country. Twenty-six thousand prosecutions resulted in about 350 executions of Hungarian citizens, including many underage men. Prime Minister Imre Nagy was tried in secret, executed, and buried in an unmarked grave.

Hungary’s culture czar, György Aczél, who had made it clear to Jakovits that his art could never be publicly shown in Hungary, was nonetheless sympathetic enough to permit Jakovits to exit Hungary in 1965. Jakovits settled in New York City. He registered for social housing and assistance as a mentally challenged person, a false status that compelled him to remain inconspicuous in America. When Mikhail Gorbachev’s glasnost policies accelerated the softening of Soviet controls, Aczél again intervened in Jakovits’s fate, luring him to resettle in Budapest with the promise of a studio.

After Jakovits returned to Hungary in 1987, he decided to edition a portfolio of etchings derived from ten pencil drawings he had made during the fateful days of the uprising between October 23, 1956, and November 4, 1956, entitled Revolution Series I–X. This series was already acclaimed in Hungarian artistic circles, and chronicled a historical episode that was assuming increasing nationalistic importance as the Soviet satellites stretched their orbits. The timely edition of fifty was issued in 1988, not long before the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In the first few images of the Revolution Series, a unified biomorphic form coalesces but then fractures into an image of fratricide, *Brothers Fighting Brothers*. The identity of the opponents takes form in *Battle between the Devil and the Angel*. Poet Stefánia Mándy described the scene in *Before the Tanks* as a horned “hero,” or “totem,” representing the revolutionaries and “the universal power of the human spirit,” confronting rows of tanks. In *Soul of Heroes*, an ominous black force evolves as the dead revolutionaries vaporize. In *Last Breath*, the evil victor becomes a bird of prey, gets the upper hand, and imposes a rigid order. In the final print in the series, *Silence*, this bird is hieratic, its wings reduced to a closed circle, charged with zigzagging lines like an electrified circuit. Now, however, the bird appears to be possessed by one of the beings it has subsumed. Its panoptic eye, surveying all, is also the artist’s eye, a motif that recurs in Jakovits’s self-portraits. From the eye of this apparently electrocuted being emerges a tear so large that it reads like a tear in the paper.

Dr. Gary van Wyk  
Executive Director, Alma on Dobbin

József Jakovits
The Revolution Series I-X, 1956-89, etching, 9x13 inch, 12/50
2B Gallery’s Call for Artists

Sculptors

An invitation to participate in the exhibition commemorating the Hungarian Uprising of 1956.

The world learned about the events of the 1956 Hungarian Uprising from the photos taken by international photographers stationed in Budapest, and published in magazines and newspapers abroad. An article in the November 10, 1956 issue of Paris-Match listed the following photographers: Melcher-Berrety, Franz Goezs, Erich Lessing, Paul Matthias, Jean-Pierre Pedrazzini*, John Sadovy, Jean-Francois Tourtet, and Vick Vance.

Many of these now-famous photographs documented the spontaneous destruction of the symbols of dictatorship. These included images of the red star being removed from buildings and the demolition of the statue of Stalin on Felvonulási Square on the night of October 23rd, when the uprising broke out. Pictures informed the world that the „body parts” of the statue-idol were dragged to various parts of the city and broken into tiny pieces with persistent effort as part of happening-like events that lasted for days. In addition to people’s memories and photographs, several of these „sculptural details” have been preserved as artifacts from the revolution.

The destroyers of the statues who were shown in the photos paid a price after the thwarted revolution. The police force of the reinstated dictatorship often identified and arrested the participants of the events based on these same images. With a special sense of humor, inmates in the prisons gave these newcomers nicknames: the destroyers of the red stars were named „Astronomers” and the demolishers of the Stalin statue were called „Sculptors”.

The destruction of the statue-idol of Stalin was one of the most emblematic events of the Hungarian Uprising which, in addition to its historic significance, raises several questions for posterity: Why and how does one create an idol? What is an idol? How does the meaning of a monument change? Who is an artist - is the destruction of idols an artistic act? You are welcome to pose further questions and answers with your work.

In November 2006, the 2B Gallery (Budapest) and Alma on Dobbin (New York) will organize an international exhibition by the title Sculptors to commemorate the event of the ’56 Uprising. Please use the die-cut photograph of the statue of Stalin in some way in your artwork and mail your contribution for this exhibition to the 2B Gallery by October 10, 2006.

*Jean-Pierre Pedrazzini was severely injured on Oct. 30, 1956 in Budapest during the revolution. He was transported to Paris, where he died on November 7.
László FeLugossy
Stalin, 2006, paper, mixed media, 11.81x8.26 inch

Péter Mátrai
Stalin, 2006, paper, mixed media, 11.81x8.26 inch

Geoffrey Hendricks (USA)
Stalin, 2006, paper, mixed media, 11.81x8.26 inch
Sándor Pinczeheleyi
Stalin, 2006, paper, mixed media, 11.81x8.26 inch

Peter Riek (G)
Stalin, 2006, paper, mixed media, 11.81x8.26 inch

Eszter Ágnes Szabó
Stalin, 2006, paper, mixed media, 11.81x8.26 inch
So you go out for a pack of cigarettes and when you come back your wife is at the door, there is a sheet. She says, "What did you say?" I say, "I told her you'd just gone out for a pack of cigarettes and you'd be right back." "What did you say?" "The usual thing." "She said there was a monster in the bathroom." So you all come over to the phone and you wait for an hour. You find out the phone cord doesn't reach into the bathroom but you living it at close range. After a few minutes you find out maybe you can go out for a week. After a few weeks you can even spend a few hours without smelling it. Stalin's going to call while you're out.

Public images were regularly used as an anniversary for a ruler; the idea seems to have emerged with deaf papers, but by the nineteenth century, sculptures that resembled the ruler from the Roman Empires. The image not only served as the ruler, but also as a monument to the presence of the ruler. Like the statue of the Commoner St. George, the two were honored in Hungary's people's home, even if they were not found to be significantly better than their image. If anyone had been a comfort knowing that no matter where you went, Stalin could always reach you when he felt like it.

Uncertain of course we don't have statues of our leaders on every street corner. We don't have him we have conversations.
Gyula Marosán
Revolutionary Fight at the Parliament, 1957, mixed media, 12.2x18.89 inch

Gyula Marosán
Stalin’s Sculpture Being Cut into Pieces, 1957, ink, 12.2x18.89 inch
Artists

Ingo Abeska (A)
István Antal
Uri Asaf
Ildikó Bálint
János Bátki
Péter Belecz
Balázs Beóthy
Bálint Borí
András Böröcz
Máté Csató
Mária Czakó
Imre Drégely
Béla DrMáriás
Károly Elekes
István efZámbó
László FeLugossy
András Forgách
Péter Forgács
Áron Gábor
László Garaczi
István Gellér B.
Daniel Georges (USA)
Nóra Gergely
Luca Gőbölyös
Regina Granne (USA)
Sándor Győrfy
Zsolt Hamarits
Péter Hecker
Geoffrey Hendricks (USA)
Zoltán Hermann
ILA (A)
Gyula Július
István Madácsy
István Mátrai
Louise McCagg
Gábor Mezei
Nikolaus Mohr (G)
Carole Naggar (USA)
Sylvia Netzer (USA)
János Kalmár
Balázs Kicsiny
Andrea Kirkovits
Szabolcs KissPál
Károly Klimó
Hilda Kozári
Endre Kukorelly
Martin Krusche (A)
Ian Laughlin (USA)
Endre Lábass
Zsuzsa Lóránt
Endre Lukoviczky

Christina Ohlmer (G)
Lajos Parti Nagy
Gyula Pauer
Miklós Peternák
Beatrix Piesh (USA)
Sándor Pinczehelyi
Sándor Rácmolnár
Martin Rasp (G)
László László Révész
Peter Riek (G)
John Risseeuw (USA)
Márton Romvári
John Roach (USA)
Robbin Ami Silverberg (USA)
Tatiana Simonova (USA)
Bálint Solymosi - Hanga Máthé
Eszter Ágnes Szaboló
Pál Szacsavy
György Szegő
Sám Szembek (G)
Károly Szikszai
Mónika Sziládi
Lenke Szilágyi
János Szirtes
Bálint Szombathy
Miklós Szüts
Dezső Tandori
Gábor Andor Tooth
Zsóka Tomka
Eszter Tóth
Romiko Tsuda (USA)
Gyula Vármai
Tibor Várnagy
Antal Vásárhelyi
Zsolt Vásárhelyi
Ákos Wechter
Paul Werner (USA)
Contributors

Authors
Ágnes Berecz
Gergely Romsics (Hungarian Cultural Center, New York)
Gary van Wyck (Alma on Dobbin, New York)

Curators
András Böröcz (Alma on Dobbin, New York)
László Böröcz (2B Gallery Budapest)
Zita Vadász (Hungarian Cultural Center, New York)

Images of Works by
László FeLugossy
Gyula Marósán
Péter Mátrai
Geoffrey Hendricks (USA)
József Jakovits
Sándor Pinczeheleyi
Peter Riek (G)
Eszter Ágnes Szabó
Bálint Szombathy
Ákos Wechter
Paul Werner (USA)

Design
Andrea Ausztrics
Anita Surányi

Printing
Master Printing USA, Inc

Publisher
Balassi Institute