



Photo: Carl Kostyál Gallery, London

THE GOOD LIFE

The works of the Hungarian painter travel the world with the gallery of Picasso's heirs



Kis Judit

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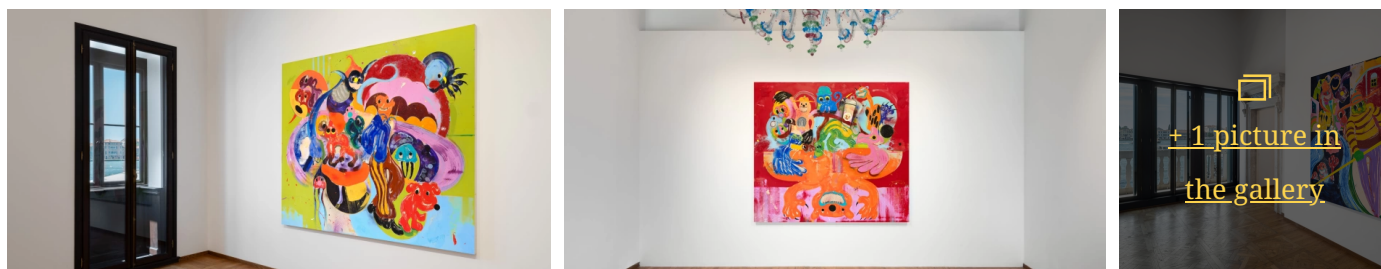
The Pécs-based artist Bozó Szabolcs, who lives in London, burst onto the auction market with his paintings towards the end of 2021, and last year he became the highest-selling Hungarian painter among living artists for the second time. Szabolcs, who used to work in a cafe in London, increasingly thinks of

painting as a long-term job, but perceives his successes quite modestly. This year, he undertook only one exhibition, but it was in New York. Interview.

Forbes.hu: We talked last January , when you burst onto the auction market. You had quite a busy year in 2023 as well, with several exhibitions.



Szabolcs Bozó: Well, my life is not that exciting. Paint. At the beginning of the year, I had a group exhibition in Gstaad, Switzerland. Then in April there was also an art fair in Marfa, Texas, where I went with four of my works. After that came my solo exhibition in Venice at the Palazzo Canavis, where my works were on display from mid-July to October.



Szabolcs' exhibition in Venice in 2023. Photos: Ugo Carmeni (4 pictures)

Do you always paint separately for these exhibitions, or do you assemble the presented material from existing works?

I always paint new pictures from exhibition to exhibition.

According to műtárgy.com, among living Hungarian artists, your pictures sold for the highest value again, this is the second year that this has been the case. To what extent do you follow which auctions your pictures are sold at?

They are usually sold at Phillips, Christie's, Sotheby's auction houses. And then there are the private secondary market sales. But to be honest, I don't focus so much on them, I have nothing to do with it financially.

	A művész neve	Teljes aukciós forgalom, millió forint
1	Bozó Szabolcs	453
2	Keserü Ilona	386
3	Maurer Dóra	278
4	Nádler István	161
5	Molnár Vera	130

*A Top 20 élő magyar művész rangsora a 2022-es és 2023 első félévi aukciós eredményeik alapján (részlet)
Forrás: műtárgy.com/A magyar művészek aukciós piaca kiadvány, 2023*

How frustrating is it that your pictures, which were sold for a fraction of those knock-off prices a few years ago, are now going for the price of a car around the world from Hong Kong to New York?

At first it was very frustrating, I felt taken advantage of, but I learned that this is part of the art world and somewhat accepted that this is the ecosystem.

And the peppery secondary market prices are needed in order for your current pictures to sell for orders of magnitude more than they did a few years ago.

Yes, it allows the gallery to sell my paintings for more money. But there's no telling how long that will last. There was an upswing, but living artists were basically not auctioned in such quantities as they were until recent years. Gallery sales are going well for the time being, but I hear that traffic on the secondary market is much weaker than it was three or four years ago. You can feel these two wars. People - even for pictures by artists bigger than me - prefer to wait

until they can buy the picture in the gallery, rather than pay multiples at auctions.

Your material gallery is the workshop of the French Almine Rech , and you also work with the Carl Kostyál gallery in London .

Almine's husband is Bernard Ruiz-Picasso, grandson of Pablo Picasso. They look after the entire Picasso legacy. How did he find your pictures?

Yes, my work is entrusted to the Almine Rech gallery, they organize my exhibitions. In 2020, I had an exhibition in Mallorca, where one of Almine's gallery directors liked my work and bought one or two of my paintings from there. About six months later, they wrote to me asking if I would participate in a group exhibition in Shanghai. This was at the end of 2021.

Ki ez a 30 éves magyar művész, akinek képregényszerű festményeiért egy Rolls-Royce árát is kifizetik?



Repülőrajtot vett tavaly az aukciós piacon Bozó Szabolcs, a mindössze 30 éves pécsi, de jelenleg Londonban élő magyar festőművész. Képei közül volt, amelyért több mint 50 millió forintot adtak, de a Sotheby's és a Christie's tavalyi hongkongi aukcióin sem sokkal kevesebért ütötték le képregényszerű festményeit.



Are you looking for other galleries?

Yes, quite a few. Asian and American galleries too. But at the moment I am happy with Almine, the joint work is going well, they work well, the pictures are sold to good places.

How is the material of an exhibition formed?

I always try to improve myself in order to always take better pictures. This is the goal, and how to achieve it is another question.

“ *There are many times when I cut the pictures apart. I also painted one now, cut it apart, didn't like it. There are times*

when you have to start four or five times. This is difficult because there is a deadline.

Now I have an exhibition in New York in June, the next six months are very busy.

Is it a sign of time, or what will the new images look like?

There is a lot of pressure to make the picture better than the last one. Many people think that the life of an artist is completely stress-free, I just paint and make money. That's not what it's about for me. There are moments when I think back to how much freer I was when I was just making coffees. I didn't even know what stress was.

“ *My biggest problem was that someone had to wait a bit for the coffee. It's not that big of a deal though.*

Being an artist is a 24-hour thing, I think the boundaries between work and private life are blurred, and it's not like you take off your apron and go home.

Yes, when I'm not painting, I think all day, thinking about what to paint. I hope my mind will get more used to it with time. I realized that this is a long-term career, I'm not a gymnast, that I can only do this until I'm in my twenties. Ideas must be shared: even though I have a very good idea, it is not certain that it needs to be painted right away. Maybe ten years from now. It's better to follow my own pace than someone else's. I am now buying a house in London, where I will even be able to sleep in the studio. I don't know how good this will be for me (*laughs*).

“ *I never thought this would be possible. That I will have my own studio and I will be able to create without thinking about having to pay rent for the studio.*



Szabolcs in front of his painting *Uninvited Guests*, 2023. © Szabolcs Bozó – Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech. Photo: Aggie Cherie

Will it be a solo or group exhibition in New York?

Individual; this will be my first gallery solo exhibition in America, at Almine's gallery in New York. So far I've only been to art fairs in the

US.

What is your agreement? Can you exhibit "only" in Almin's gallery, and only they can sell your pictures? Or, regardless of the exhibition, can you sell it yourself to, say, a private individual?

I do not sell pictures directly from the studio. Only through the gallery.

How many pictures do you paint in a year?

Fifteen or sixteen, that's all I'm fine with. Let's say ten or twelve paintings go to an exhibition and four or five others go to art fairs. So far, this quantity and handout have worked for me.

Have you ever caught yourself painting for time, and it showed in the picture?

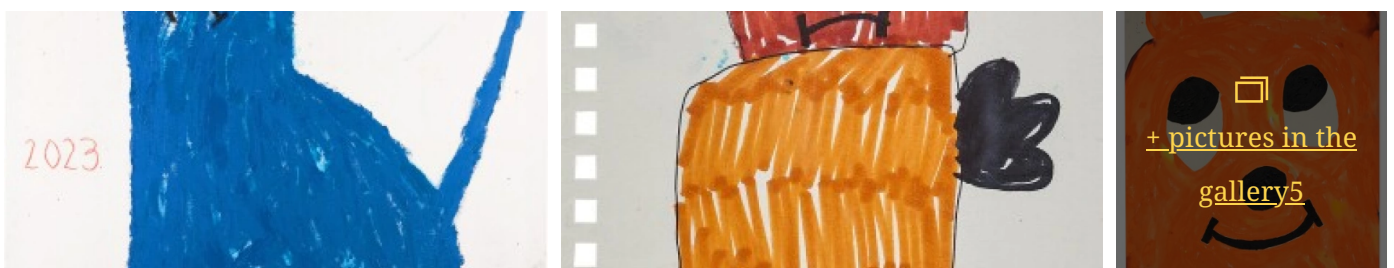
I have a couple of older pictures when I only painted one figure in a composition. At that time, there were times when I still wanted to work on the particular picture, but it had to be put on display. Now I don't make this mistake anymore: in the last year or two, I don't release work from the studio that isn't really ready, just to make the gallery happy.

How much does a Bozó Szabolcs painting sell for now?

Now I paint twice in a two-meter format, these pictures cost an average of 50,000 dollars (about 18 million forints), the smaller ones around 35,000 dollars (about 12 million forints).

How much do you get from this?

I don't want to say that, just that not nearly all of it. But in this world, that's how it is, that's what you have to accept.



Some Bozó paintings that were sold at auctions last year (8 pictures)

Although you are still only 31 years old, can you distinguish eras in your career so far, do you paint different pictures now than at the beginning?

I try more and more to place them in the environment, I paint more figures on each picture, and I also get more and more inspiration from photos, even from my own photos. I feel that my paintings are coming to life more and more and the creation is more spontaneous. Of course, it would be boring to always paint the same thing. Not only for me, but also for the viewers.

The main focus remains colorful, fairy-tale figures and creatures. And it seems that there is still a demand for them, just not by any means.

Yes, these figures remain. But I didn't start painting primarily because of the demand. If I get really bored, I'll start painting something else. Now, for the New York exhibition, for example, I have been experimenting with oil paint for several months. So far I have used acrylic, now I am trying to change the medium itself. Oil paint flows completely differently than acrylic, right? So these new pictures will be painted in oil. It has to be used differently, the drying time is much longer and several layers have to be painted. I like this because it gives me extra time to think about the work in question. To leave the picture alone for a while and think about it. It slowed down the creation.

According to them, this is the best fit for you.

Yes. Apart from the New York exhibition, I have not undertaken any other for 2024. I paint 10-12 pictures here. This is the first time that I have had so much time to prepare for an exhibition. So hopefully they'll be good. Or not. We'll see. I just tried a couple of paintings, I cut them apart. The concept hasn't come together yet. It is difficult to enter an empty studio to create. But I'll find the rhythm, and once I have a good picture, it's easier to paint the rest.

When you paint, is there timelessness?

I am lucky to be able to paint. Every day, when I go into the studio, I realize how special it is that I can paint there alone and that I still enjoy it. So I try to keep that feeling. Of course, I don't ignore the

outside world either, but in the studio I only focus on painting and appreciate the time I spend there.

Do you know anything about who buys your pictures, whether they include celebrities, for example?

Yes, after the exhibitions I get a summary of the buyers. It was funny, for example, that the main actor of American Pie, Jason Biggs, bought one of my pictures from the Venice exhibition. He was a very good head, we made a special hat for the exhibition, he also walked around in it.

“ *He also wrote to me on Instagram. I didn't even know what to answer, you know... I used to watch American Pie as a kid too. He said that he would also come to the New York exhibition opening.*

Are you really embarrassed about this?

To be honest, I'm not very good at small talk with strangers, I feel uncomfortable most of the time. Pictures are important to me. It's not important to me that people know who I am. The point is that they talk about my pictures, not about how cute or cool I am.

Are you planning an independent exhibition at home? The Hungarian public has not yet been able to see your pictures live, apart from the Ludwig Museum's temporary exhibition.

Not this year, but I still want to have an exhibition in Budapest. If there is a chance, I would really like a homecoming. Let's say in 2025.

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