

Opening Speech

Jonathan Glancey

I first met Imre Makovecz more than forty years ago here in Budapest in what we know as 'former times'. Before I was issued a visa I was interviewed by the Cultural Attache at the Hungarian Embassy in London. Why did I want to visit the architect Makovecz? The Cultural Attaché's colleagues in Budapest would be only too happy to introduce me to best contemporary architects in Hungary and to organise a tour of their works, and we might forget Makovecz.

But I had seen a black and white photograph – no bigger than a postage stamp – of Makovecz's Funerary Chapel at the beautifully named Wolf's Meadow cemetery. I had to see this building and meet its architect. The Cultural Attaché gave in.

When I met Imre, he worked in the Forestry department. He showed me, and drew, what he liked to call 'buildings beings', architecture as a part of Nature, an expression of a magical ancient Hungary reimagined and crafted for the late 20th Century.

He took me to see villages, struggling with the destruction of their way of life, their very existence, where with local people he was building low-cost community houses made from forest timbers of haunting beauty. I could see he was greatly respected and even loved by villagers.

Imre wasn't a Magyar Robin Hood, but he was for a spell the Architect of the Hungarian Forest, in thrall to Nature and working for the common good. As a young Assistant Editor of the Architectural Review magazine in London, I was excited to publish his work for the first time in English and on the other side of the Iron Curtain.

Imre loved trees and saw angels like the English artist William Blake whose visionary work you can see in an excellent exhibition across from us in Heroe's Square and who like Imre aimed to connect the physical and immaterial worlds, or Heaven and Earth. Angels and Architecture is the title we chose for this exhibition.

The then Prince of Wales, now King Charles, who met Imre in both England and Hungary, saw him as a light house, a beacon, yet I think of him more as a fierce, if loving, angel of a kind, the Archangel of Hungarian organic architecture.

Of course there are other ways of making architecture other than Imre's, yet he nurtured a vision of an organic architecture that more than practically or even aesthetically was spiritually rewarding.

To its credit, the Hungarian government has funded the renovation of Makovecz buildings – you can find them here in the exhibition. I hope as an Englishman with other eyes that you, Prime

Minister, and your fellow citizens will choose to build the proposed Church of the Resurrection, here before us, to shine like a lighthouse over Budapest. You may wish to commit to the project, but you needn't rush with its construction – as Antoni Gaudi said of the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona, 'My client is in no hurry'. Gaudi's client was God. But what a wonderful thing the Church of the Resurrection would be as future generations of buildings rose to greet it.

On behalf of all those who have worked hard to help create this exhibition, I would like to welcome you, and admirers of Imre Makovecz around the world, to Angels and Architecture.