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# COMMUNIQUÉ DE PRESSE

## ZOLTAN KEMENY

THE MADELEINE KEMENY DONATIONS  
TO THE MUSÉE NATIONAL D'ART MODERNE

**30 JUNE – 27 SEPTEMBER 2004**

MUSEUM GALLERY, LEVEL 4

**The Centre Pompidou is one of the few institutions to possess a substantial, varied collection of the works of Zoltan Kemeny, largely thanks to donations made by his wife Madeleine Kemeny. From 30 June to 27 September the Museum Gallery will be presenting for the first time all its paintings, sculptures, relief-collages and metal reliefs, together with studies on tracing and wrapping paper by this Swiss artist of Hungarian descent.**

**The exhibition also reveals a little-known facet of the Kemeny œuvre: the fashion drawings he did for the Zurich magazine *Annabelle* during the course of his career as an artist.**

Zoltan Kemeny was born on 21 March 1907 in Hungary. Painting quickly became part of his childhood world: he spent most of his time in the studio of a neighbour, a painter of war scenes, and when his schooling was interrupted by the War in 1917 he began investigating oil painting. Throughout his life he used the term "painting" for all his work, including his metal reliefs. In 1921, against the wishes of his parents, he left secondary school to become an apprentice carpenter; in 1924 he was admitted to the School of Art and Design in Budapest and three years later to the School of Fine Art there.

At the age of 23, Kemeny moved to Paris, where he had to give up painting to earn his living doing odd jobs. There he met a young Hungarian, Madeleine Szemere, also seeking a career as a painter, and they married on 25 March 1933. She found him work in the world of fashion and this would help them remain together and cope with the many difficult moments the future held.

In 1938 they were involved in the launching of the Zurich magazine *Annabelle*, Madeleine with designs based on Paris fashion and Zoltan with illustrations whose highly personal style quickly became the magazine's trademark. They worked together

commissaire :

Didier Schulmann,

conservateur, chef du service

de la Bibliothèque Kandinsky,

assisté de Sarah Aguilar

et Martine Briand,

documentaliste principale

at *Annabelle* until 1960, when international recognition meant Zoltan could make a living from his art. *Annabelle* had by then played a crucial part in their lives: of Hungarian Jewish extraction, the Kemenys had had to flee into France's unoccupied zone in 1940, and in October 1942, with the aid of *Annabelle*'s owners, they succeeded in entering Switzerland illegally. The following year the magazine obtained a work permit for Zoltan, while his wife had to remain in various work camps until the end of the war. Alone in Zurich, Zoltan returned to reading and, gradually, to the painting he had abandoned ten years before. Imbued with the stylistic freedom of the contemporary artists he had discovered in Paris, his work also bears the stamp of his early contact with decorative and popular art. Madeleine and Zoltan were finally united in 1945, but the long separation and the horror of the war years had left an indelible mark and they would henceforth conceal their Jewishness. The same year saw Zoltan's first public exhibition, at the Eaux-Vives gallery in Zurich; he also contributed to the group exhibition "Foreign Painters in Switzerland", organised by the Kunsthalle in Bern. In 1946 the Kemenys revisited Paris for the first time – for a showing of the paintings at the Galerie Kléber – and Zoltan was introduced to Jean Dubuffet.

Less than five years after the return to painting, Zoltan Kemeny's work underwent a major change of direction and style. *La Dame au Fauteuil* (1946) was marked by a new richness of texture and in the following year he began physically densifying his images with the addition of nails, beads, rope, sand, plaster and other materials. The paintings were thus transformed into relief-collages. In the series *Le Jardinier vu par ses amis*, begun in 1947, each inhabitant of a village makes a portrait of the gardener using the tools of his own trade: *Le jardinier et sa famille par le mercier* of 1948, for example, is made entirely of braid and buttons. At the same time Kemeny was experimenting with glass and transparency effects as a way of adding brilliance to his matt colours and generating contrast with the raw plaster background: the fragments of glass of *Horloger à 24 rubis* (1950) begin to gleam the moment light falls on the relief. The luminous *Pet noir* of 1951 is marked by this same urge to bring matter to life with light. As his way of working evolved, he abandoned junk materials for metal, the first experiment being *Foire d'Orient* (1948), which incorporates mortar, plaster, rusty iron, fabric and oil paint. The metal appears both in the raw state and in the form of prefabricated pieces "tweaked" by the artist.

Kemeny's last period was a continuation of the preceding one and represents the culmination of his œuvre. In 1961 he rented a more spacious studio so that he and his assistants could work on a larger scale; this exhibition presents seven of the imposing metal reliefs that resulted, including *Pensée traitée en forme* (1962), *Métallo-magie* (1963) and *Pacifique* (1963), together with numerous preparatory items. Before working directly on the metal, Kemeny set out to organise the internal arrangement of each relief in a series of drawings on tracing and wrapping paper that can be read as plans: meticulous studies of the materials, their shapes and the quantity needed for the final work. Weighing anything from thirty to eighty kilograms, the finished reliefs use scrap metal that has been heated, bent, cut and soldered, together with nuts and screws; the process, from initial sketches through to completion, demanded long months of work. Using the same raw material Kemeny succeeded in achieving very varied visual effects and the group of metal reliefs on show is extremely diverse. Some of them make use of uncompromisingly straight lines reminiscent of aerial views of big modern cities, while others apply curves in a distinctly organic way. In 1963 he tested the frontier between art and architecture with a monumental sculpture for the foyer of the Municipal Theatre in Frankfurt and a relief mural on the stairs of the University of Saint-Gall, in Switzerland.

In 1964, when Robert Rauschenberg took out the Grand Prix for painting at the Venice Biennale, Kemeny, representing Switzerland with Bernhard Luginbühl, won the same award for sculpture.

Between Zoltan's death in 1965 and her own in 1993, Madeleine Kemeny actively contributed to establishing an international audience for her husband's œuvre via gifts to many institutions, among them the Centre Pompidou. She played a vital part in creating an enduring reputation for the work of an artist whose premature demise prevented him from enjoying the success that was to come.

curator:  
Didier Schulmann  
director of the Kandinsky Library  
at the Centre Pompidou,

assisted by  
Sarah Aguilar  
and  
Martine Briand  
chief archivist

## BIOGRAPHY

**21 March 1907:** Birth of Zoltan Kemeny in Banica, Hungary

**1924:** Enters the School of Art and Design in Budapest

**1927:** Student and assistant at the School of Fine Art in Budapest

### **1930: Moves to Paris**

**25 March 1933:** Marries Madeleine Szemere at the Town Hall of the 6th Arrondissement, Place St Sulpice, Paris

**1938:** The couple are involved in the launching of the Zurich magazine *Annabelle*

**1940:** The Kemenys move to France's unoccupied zone

### **1942: They cross the border into Switzerland**

**1943:** The editors of *Annabelle* obtain a work permit for Zoltan, who moves to Zurich

### **He returns to painting**

**1945:** Madeleine joins her husband in Zurich

### **Zoltan Kemeny's first public exhibition at the Eaux-Vives gallery in Zurich**

#### **(9 June – 5 July)**

Group exhibition "Foreign Painters in Switzerland", Kunsthalle, Bern (14 July – 15 August)

### **1946: First exhibition in Paris, at the Galerie Kléber (15 November – 6 December).**

Meets Jean Dubuffet

**1947:** Exhibition at the Eaux-Vives gallery, Zurich (10 May – 6 June)

### **Kemeny works with a mixed range of materials. Begins his relief-collages**

**1949:** Exhibition of the *Jardiniers* series in his studio at 28 Englischviertelstrasse in Zurich (15 February – 15 March)

International Exhibition of Experimental Art (COBRA), Stedelijk, Amsterdam (3 – 28 November)

**1950:** Exhibition at the Galerie Mai, Paris (23 May – 13 June)

**1951:** Exhibition at Galerie 16, Zurich (11 May – 1 June)

**1952:** Joins the editorial board at *Annabelle*

**1954:** Exhibition at the Baldwin Kingrey Gallery, Chicago (1 September – 1 October)

### **Henceforth he works only with metal. First metal reliefs**

**1955:** Exhibition at the Galerie Paul Facchetti, Paris

Exhibition at the Il Milione gallery, Milan (1 – 31 October)

**1956:** Exhibition at the Springer gallery, Berlin (20 October – 15 November)

**1958:** Exhibition at the One Gallery, London

**1959:** Exhibitions: Kunsthalle, Zurich (18 April – 18 May), Hanover Gallery, London (9 July – 11 September)

Documenta II, Kassel (11 July – 11 October)

Zoltan Kemeny learns that he has cancer

**1960:** First monograph on Kemeny, by Michel Ragon, Éditions du Griffon, Neufchâtel.

Exhibition at the Sidney Janis Gallery, New York (22 May – 11 June)

**1962:** Exhibition at the Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf (9 November – 9 December)

**1963:** Creates a sculpture for the foyer of the Municipal Theatre in Frankfurt and a relief mural for a staircase at the University of Saint-Gall

**1964:** Expo 64, Lausanne (April)

Documenta III, Kassel (27 June – 5 October)

**XXXIle Venice Biennale (20 June – 18 October). He wins the Grand Prix for sculpture**

**14 June 1965:** Death of Zoltan Kemeny

**1966: Exhibitions at the Musée national d'art moderne, Paris and the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Brussels**

## **EXHIBITION CATALOGUE**

### **ZOLTAN KEMENY**

Editions du Centre Pompidou

Coll. du Centre Pompidou / Musée national d'art moderne. June 2004

160 pages. 22 x 28 cm. 160 colour and 100 black and white illustrations. 32.90 euros

Edited by Didier Schulmann.

The first substantial book on this atypical oeuvre, the catalogue marks the exhibition of the donations made to the Centre Pompidou by Madeleine Kemeny.

An English translation of the texts is available on the CD that accompanies the catalogue.

### CONTENTS

#### **Didier Schulmann**

Zoltan, Z. (Zoltan ? Zadig ? Zelig ?)

#### **Béatrice Langraf**

The Zoltan Kemeny estate: caught between museums, collectors and the art market

#### **Dieter Schwarz**

Kemeny's painting-sculptures

#### **Matthias Frehner**

"Cutting clouds in the atmosphere": Kemeny and Swiss metal sculpture

#### **Sarah Aguilar**

Zoltan Kemeny and Annabelle

#### **Caroline Kesser**

Kemeny and Switzerland / History of a welcome

#### **Sarah Aguilar et Marylène Malbert**

Venice 1964: Artistic acclaim, critical squabbling

#### **Sarah Aguilar**

Biography of the artist

The catalogue raisonné of the works in the Kemeny collection at the Musée national d'art moderne

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**01. *Dame au fauteuil***

1946, painting, oil on canvas, 99 x 83 cm

Photo Philippe Migeat

**02. *Foire d'Orient***

1948, relief-collage, mortar, oil, plaster, metal, fabric, on wood

81 x 59 cm

Photo Adam Rzepka

**03. *Métallo-magie***

1963, sculpture, bronze

137 x 95 x 25 cm

Photo Philippe Migeat

**04. *Pacifique***

1963, sculpture, bronze

164 x 242 cm

Photo Philippe Migeat

**05. *Pensée traitée en forme***

1962, sculpture, copper

90 x 120 x 31 cm

Photo Philippe Migeat

**06. *Etude pour Tronc***

1964, drawing, coloured pencils on squared paper

55.2 x 75.2 cm

Photo Philippe Migeat

**07. *Etude pour Deux temps***

1956, drawing, charcoal on tracing paper

88 x 110 cm

Photo Philippe Migeat

**08. *Etude pour Courant et contre-courant***

1957, drawing, charcoal on tracing paper

109.2 x 82 cm

Photo Philippe Migeat

**09. *Annabelle*, cover**

July 1947, no. 77

published in Lausanne

**10. *Annabelle*, cover**

October 1951, no. 164

published in Zurich

**11. *Annabelle*, cover**

July 1952, no. 173

published in Zurich

**12. Preliminary sketch for a cover for *Annabelle***

gouache on paper

Photo Georges Mergueditchian

**13. Zoltan Kemeny**

Portrait

© Kunstmuseum Saint-Gall

**14. The Kemenys, Piazza San Marco, Venice, during the 1964 Biennale**

© Kunstmuseum Saint-Gall

## **USEFUL INFORMATION**

The exhibition "Zoltan Kemeny" is presented between 30 June – 27 September 2004, at the Centre Pompidou, Museum Gallery, Level 4

Exhibition open daily, except Tuesdays, 11:00 – 21:00

Admission

**"A Day at the Pompidou" pass** 10 euros, concessions 8 euros

One-day pass valid for the Musée national d'art moderne and all the exhibitions

**Exhibition admission** 7 euros, concessions 5 euros

Ticket covers the Musée national d'art moderne, the Museum Gallery, the Graphic Arts Gallery, the Brancusi Studio and Espace 315.

**Admission free** for holders of the Centre Pompidou annual pass.

For information concerning the pass, telephone 01 44 78 14 63

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Further information

[www.centrepompidou.fr](http://www.centrepompidou.fr)

## **ALSO SHOWING AT THE CENTRE POMPIDOU...**

### **ALECHINSKY – DRAWINGS OF FIVE DECADES**

30 JUNE – 27 SEPTEMBER 2004

GRAPHIC ARTS GALLERY – LEVEL 4

Press officer: Emilia Stocchi (01 44 78 42 00)

### **AURELIE NEMOURS**

9 JUNE - 27 SEPTEMBER 2004

GALLERY 2 – LEVEL 6

Press officer: Anne-Marie Pereira (01 44 78 40 69)

### **MAGNUS VON PLESSEN / KRISTIN BAKER**

ESPACE 315, LEVEL 1

9 JUNE – 16 AUGUST 2004

Press officer: Aurélie Gevrey (01 44 78 49 87)

### **GIUSEPPE PENONE**

21 APRIL - 23 AUGUST 2004

SOUTH GALLERY, LEVEL 1

Press officer: Nicole Karoubi (01 44 78 49 88)