

# GOETHE-MEDAL 2023

## ACCEPTANCE SPEECH BY OFF-BIENNALE BUDAPEST

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Almost 10 years ago, when many of us, cultural workers of public institutions, came to realize that these institutions had been turned to serve a cultural agenda we could not subscribe to; when the oxygen had been forcefully sucked out of demonstrations and other modes of resistance organized against the forming regime; at that time, the idea of starting a grass-roots biennale of contemporary art as a way to mobilize the apathetic/lethargic cultural scene, seemed, well, counterintuitive.

OFF, yet unnamed at this time, indeed followed a counter-logic that was not deducible from the current conditions; it was not only brave but even audacious - therein laid its stirring force, its momentum, its “against-all-odds” dynamism.

This performative biennale, as we later came to describe its “fake it till you make it” drive, was based on professional commitment, political energy, and some tenacity; and what cemented it and lent it credit was a long-term alliance we shall call friendship. Our small team was bound by friendship that newcomers joined, too; it was our golden reserve in times when we did not have much more. Friendship creates trust and trust creates resilience, a sense of security. Isn't this the backbone of all civil action that goes against the flow? And thus we experienced the power of friendship, we knew its rock-hard shield, its tender protection. Throughout the years we learnt to recognize it as our greatest common value and realized time and again that despite all the difficulties, stress, and failure, we still feel great in each others' company, that even though our friendship has been tested, it is still solid.

Today, these friendship-type alliances still have a vital role in preserving independent art initiatives amidst increasing struggles and precarity. Indeed, all long-term support based on commitment, honesty, and equal dialogue is vital, just like the alliance we have been lucky to nurture with the Goethe-Institut throughout the years.

Friendship allows for mutually open and attentive dialogues even about difficult issues pertaining to Europe and beyond. The difficulty of being honest with ourselves can only be matched by the challenge of adapting new viewpoints and perspectives. We would like to seize this opportunity / moment to celebrate this honesty, this openness, and vulnerability,

as with it comes empathy, trust, care, and indeed, friendship, a firm basis for hard-earned democracy.

We would like to thank the Goethe-Institut for this prestigious award and for their ongoing support; and we would like to thank everyone who has shared the ride until here: first and foremost, our curatorial team members Eszter Lázár, Eszter Szakács, Bori Szalai, and Kati Székely; our dear colleagues András Bognár, Dina Darabos, Rita Kálmán, and so many-many more in the past years; the artists, curators, and other contributors to the various projects and editions of OFF-Biennale; our partners in the fight, supporters and collaborators in the Hungarian independent art scene and internationally, or, as we like to call them, our lumbungs local, regional and interlocal. Thank you and hope to see you all in 2025 for the next OFF-Biennale.