



OSTAPENKO, SHOULD IT STAY OR SHOULD IT GO?

The Politics of Removing Monuments
from Public Spaces Between 1990 and
1993

Budapest History Museum – Castle Museum,
Baroque Hall
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A VÁROS, AMELY EGYESÍT

According to municipal statute LXV of 1990 (Chapter VII, Section 68/D), the Municipality of Budapest sent letters to the local governments of 22 districts to solicit their demands for the demolition of "artworks in public spaces which carry political content" erected between 1945 and 1989. In addition to monuments dedicated to the heroic acts of the Soviet Union, statues of Soviet soldiers, and monuments of liberation, initiations to remove statues could also be applied to all monuments, portraits, reliefs, or inscribed plaques that alluded to the propagation of the ideology or the interpretation of history representative of the era.

by following in the footsteps of the spontaneous and organised demolitions of sculptures between 1989 and October of 1991 and also by relying on the opinions of parties participating in the regime change and taking the expectations and demands of civil organisations into consideration. It acknowledged that political monuments that had been temporarily removed either for the purpose of restoration or because they signified an obstacle to construction work should not be returned, and it also recognized the necessity of ensuring the professional removal and storage of all demolished monuments. Consequently, it devised the unprecedented solution of establishing



In view of the requests received, on 5 December 1991, the General Assembly of Budapest passed a resolution on the fate of political monuments within the boundaries of the capital. The resolution shows that, in addition to the proposals made by the local governments, the representative body of the municipality, when formulating its conception with regards to memorials and monuments in public spaces, sought to maintain societal stability in part

a sculpture park where these monuments could be stored. For this purpose, the local government of District XXII offered an area on the Tétényi plateau, along highway 7 (Balatoni Road-Szabadkai St.). A call for tenders was announced in December 1991, and on 27 June 1993, a memorial site in the form of a sculpture park called Memento Park was opened to the public. The memory of the Soviet soldiers exhumed from the sites marked with monuments



dedicated to Soviet heroism and reburied in the New Public Cemetery is marked by the obelisk of the Soviet Pilots removed from Vigadó Square and the female figure of the former Heroic Monument in Pesterzsébet. Tasks related to the elimination of the Soviet heroic monuments were overseen by the Budapest Funeral Institute. Artefacts which were taken down but were deemed unfit for display and constitute the property of the Municipality of Budapest are stored by the Budapest History Museum.

In the public spaces of Budapest, there are still 16 works which preserve the orientation of the memory politics of the period. The decision to keep these works in public spaces was motivated partly by concerns regarding historical documentation, partly by reverence for elements of the past and moral considerations, and partly for the preservation of social stability.