



— Forbes story

## György Korda, a red phoenix and a bourbon scotch beer – the Budapest exhibition of auction record holder Bozó Szabolcs has opened



Judit Kis

2025. 5. 30. ⌚ 7 minutes

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Szabolcs Bozó worked in a London café for six years, and now his paintings – and even his drawings – sell for tens of thousands of dollars at the largest auction houses. His works have already toured the world with the gallery of Picasso's heirs, but he has not yet had a solo exhibition in Hungary. Until now ; from now until September 7, we can also see twenty of his paintings in the program of the Liget Budapest Project at the Millennium House, in the Neo Contemporary Art Space.

“Szabolcs, come on, put up the rest, this is your studio anyway,” says Zsolt Petrányi, head of the Contemporary Collection of the Hungarian National Gallery and curator of Szabolcs's exhibition in Budapest. We delve into the preparations for Szabolcs Bozó's first solo exhibition in Hungary, titled Soulmate ( [Forbes 30/30, 2023](#) ).

The main attractions, 20 large-scale, selected paintings from Szabolcs's work so far, are already waiting for visitors on the wall, but an important part of the exhibition is also to evoke the atmosphere of his London studio by putting dozens of his drawings, sketches, and ideas on the wall. Szabolcs has been living in London for thirteen years, his plane landed two hours ago, and he immediately rushed to the Neo with a folder full of sketches.

#### SÜSÜ, TAILCOAT, LITTLE MOLE

Szabolcs Bozó is 32 years old, born in Pécs. At the age of nineteen, he set off to try his luck in London – originally for a year to learn the language, but he has been living there ever since. He loved to draw even as a child, often recreating Süsü, Frakk or the Little Mole, and to this day his work is fueled by these memories and feelings.

“That’s why it means a lot to me that now, after many years in London, I can present myself in Hungary for the first time with a solo exhibition,” he says.

"I first picked up a brush more seriously in 2013, when I started trying larger canvases, but I always loved drawing, both my grandmothers painted," he [previously told Forbes.hu](#) . He also worked in bars, cafes, and restaurants in London, and painted smaller pictures as a hobby.

In 2018, his brother persuaded him to post his work on Instagram. At first, he only uploaded his drawings, but after six months, a private collector discovered his works, and later art dealers and galleries noticed him. His paintings soon found their way into prestigious exhibitions and collections in New York, Venice, Hong Kong, and other art centers.

Following the explosion in 2021, he was the highest-selling living Hungarian artist in 2022 and 2023.

Szabolcs currently lives and works in London, where he maintains a studio and works with renowned galleries such as one of the main partners of the Hungarian exhibition, the [Carl Kostyál Gallery](#) , which is also Hungarian-owned and has offices in London, Milan and Stockholm . Another gallery of his material is the workshop of the French Almine Rech. Almine's husband is Bernard Ruiz-Picasso, the grandson of Pablo Picasso, [and they take care of the entire Picasso legacy](#) .

## "They are better than I remembered"

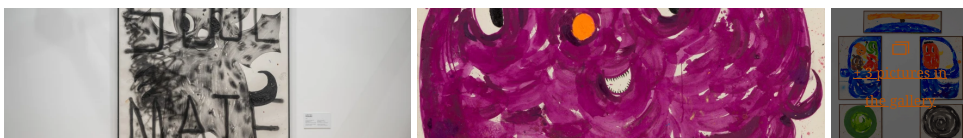
Paradoxically, he has never seen his own paintings, as they have been sold one after another through his galleries in recent years, and some have even changed hands several times at auctions by renowned auction houses, such as Sotheby's or Christie's.

"I haven't seen them since they were bought. I only have one, Purple Ball, that belongs to a friend of mine, and Red Phoenix is mine, I kept that." He was a little afraid beforehand of what it would be like to see his pictures together.

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**"I like them. They're better than I remembered. It's also interesting to see who got which one, because I didn't know about many of them either."**

The Bozó works were borrowed from European private collections for the Budapest exhibition: from London, Stockholm, Copenhagen, and Milan. Two works – Banana Tail and Trabant Copter – came from Budapest, from a Hungarian owner, Zsolt Petrányi tells Forbes.



Zsolt was approached with the idea of the exhibition last December by Péter Küllői (founder of Bátor Tábor, a well-known supporter of art and music , and head of the East-Central European acquisitions committee of the Tate Modern museum in London – ed.).

The location was quickly fixed, and the collection of the paintings began in January-February 2025, with Carl Kostyál, the head of one of Szabolcs's galleries, playing a major role in the logistics (our portrait article about the Hungarian-born gallerist can be read [here](#) ). Economy is an increasingly important aspect of contemporary international exhibitions, which was also reflected in the efforts to optimize the transport routes of the paintings, emphasizes Zsolt Petrányi.

“It was a great experience to put together the exhibition along a logic that guides the viewer through several motifs. This helps visitors to better understand the art of Szabolcs Bozó.” According to Zsolt:

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**Szabolcs' works convey the message that art does not have to be overdramatized, but that it is possible to build a painting world from light motifs that simultaneously evokes positive feelings, while also telling stories about human relationships and characters through animal symbols.**



Szabolcs Bozó (from left) and Zsolt Petrányi, curator of the exhibition. Photo: László Sebestyén / Forbes

In addition to the single-figure paintings painted at the beginning of his career, the exhibition also presents Szabolcs's later, more complex works with multiple figures: it is easy for the visitor to find their soulmate in the lovely, fairy-tale-inspired, colorful figures.

The title work of the exhibition can be viewed in a separate room. This painting was created by Szabolcs in 2020 with British artist Richie Culver, who spray-painted the words "soulmate" onto the bat painted by Szabolcs.

## **"This usually happens to older people"**

According to Zsolt Petrányi, Szabolcs is a unique and instinctively creative artist who has found his own world, which stands on several legs. According to the curator, one of these is his childhood memories, the motifs of Hungarian animated films, and the other is the liberating power of the art of a German painter, Jonathan Meese. “The third is the context in which humor, caricature and the grotesque appear in contemporary art today. Szabolcs Bozó also plays a prominent role in this contemporary art context, and this is why so many foreign collectors and gallerists like him,” believes Zsolt.



"They are better than I remembered," he said of his own paintings, many of which he had not seen since they were bought out of his studio in recent years. Photo: László Sebestyén / Forbes

"This usually happens to older people, if I remember correctly," Szabolcs says modestly about his Budapest exhibition. It's incredible that "the people back home" trusted him so much that they organized such an exhibition, he adds.

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**This return home is important for him not only geographically, but also spiritually.**

He feels that the Hungarian retrospective exhibition also closes his first artistic period. For his New York exhibition last summer, he had already begun experimenting with different themes, using oil paint instead of acrylic, and with multi-layered works – one of the pieces from the New York exhibition, *Bad Driver*, is also on display at the Budapest exhibition.

The title of the New York exhibition organized by the Almine Rech gallery was "Tüke," referring to Szabolcs' origins in Pécs and Mecsek.

"I'm becoming more and more interested in human figures, so I might paint them in the future," he says, explaining that he'd like to experiment for a year or two. He says that after the brighter colors he's used so far, he's increasingly interested in more subdued colors on the palette, earth tones, browns, and creams.

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**"I've been thinking about using more subdued colors. I need to try to see if I can paint like that."**

He bought a house in Fulham, West London, last year and spends a lot of time browsing through the antique books at the local bookstore, Hurlingham Bookstore. "Since I moved there, my hobby has been to look at the books there. But I already have a serious collection at home, now I have time to look through the books and get inspired by them."

## Painting and parquet flooring

The creative process for his newer paintings is longer, and not just because the layers of oil paint dry more slowly than acrylic, which takes two days to complete. He says that sometimes it's good to set aside a piece for a few weeks if you don't know what the final composition will be.

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**In the future, he would like to keep more paintings for himself, if only so he can look back on them as a reference.**

The graphics pasted on the wall at the Budapest exhibition show how he has experimented and "drawn" each of his paintings on paper so far. The first versions of several of his paintings can also be found here, but the fact that he draws inspiration from many places is also shown by the fact that there are not only drawings and inscriptions.



"Scandinavian Nights", "Bourbon Scotch Beer" or the "Two Doses in One Place" known from the Charlie hit, but there is also a paper with György Korda written on it. Szabi says that he was inspired by the dance singer because his grandfather watched him a lot on TV as a child.



The exhibition also features several of Szabolcs' drawings and sketches. Photo: László Sebestyén / Forbes

This June, he will have another group exhibition organized by the Carl Kostyál Gallery in China, and in the fall, Almine Rech will take one of his paintings to a Korean fair, [Frieze Seoul](#). He also has two exhibition opportunities next year: one with Kostyál, a summer solo exhibition in China, and the other with Almine Rech in Malaga.

He doesn't know yet which one he will take on, because - since they wouldn't be retrospective exhibitions - he would have to paint several new pictures for them, and now he will have other things to do besides experimenting with painting.

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**"My dad and I played parquet, he was at my place for two weeks. It was really good, we got to know each other a little bit again"**

– he snaps when I ask him what project he's working on right now, thinking primarily of paintings.

His Fulham house is about to undergo a major renovation that will take three to four months. The upper floor will be expanded, so he will have space to draw, experiment, or create smaller paintings at home. Contrary to his original plans, he will not be doing his larger works – typically 1.90×2 meters – at home, but he doesn't mind.

Before the stressful renovation, he recently received some good news: after a process that took several months, he was granted British citizenship. The official notification came just as his father was out with him.

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