

Katalin Ladik

Art Basel in Basel 2023

acb

About Katalin Ladik

acb Gallery is delighted to present a selection of works by Katalin Ladik at this year's Art Basel in Basel, in the Feature sector.

The main focus of acb's presentation is the intermedial approach appearing in Katalin Ladik's visual, vocal and performative practice. Ladik has been a forerunner not only of intermedia art but also of performance, involving her body as well as sound and visual experiments, and introducing proto-feminist discourse in the politically and socially oppressive context of Eastern Europe. The exhibition presents Ladik's major performances and actions between the early 1970s and the mid-1980s in the form of photo series and a representative selection of the artist's visual poems presented together with their phonic interpretations illustrating how Ladik integrates poetry with sound and visuality.

The ongoing rediscovery of the oeuvre of Katalin Ladik (1942), a poet, performer and actress active in the former Yugoslavia as well as Hungary, is reflected in a number of current exhibitions and recognitions. A comprehensive survey exhibition just opened in March in the Haus der Kunst in Munich, travelling to Moderna Museet Stockholm and Vienna as well. Her works were recently featured at leading international curatorial exhibitions such as Manifesta in Pristina (2022) and documenta 14 in Kassel and Athens (2017). Her works were on display in the recent years in MAMCO - Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain Geneva (2021), Palais de Tokyo Paris (2019), at Shedhalle Zurich (2018), ZM Karlsruhe (2018) and at IVAM Valencia (2019) among others. A retrospective exhibition of Katalin Ladik was presented by the Museum of Contemporary Art in Vojvodina (Novi Sad, Serbia, 2011). The artist was awarded The LennonOno Grant for Peace in 2016. Beside the leading institutional art collections of the Central Eastern European region her works are included in the collection of MoMA, Tate Modern and MACBA-Museum of Contemporary Art in Barcelona et al.



Katalin Ladik at the opening of her solo exhibition, *Katalin Ladik. Oooooo0000-pus*, 2023, Haus der Kunst, Munich, photo: Julian Baumann, © Haus der Kunst

Body as a voice, image as a sound in Katalin Ladik's practice

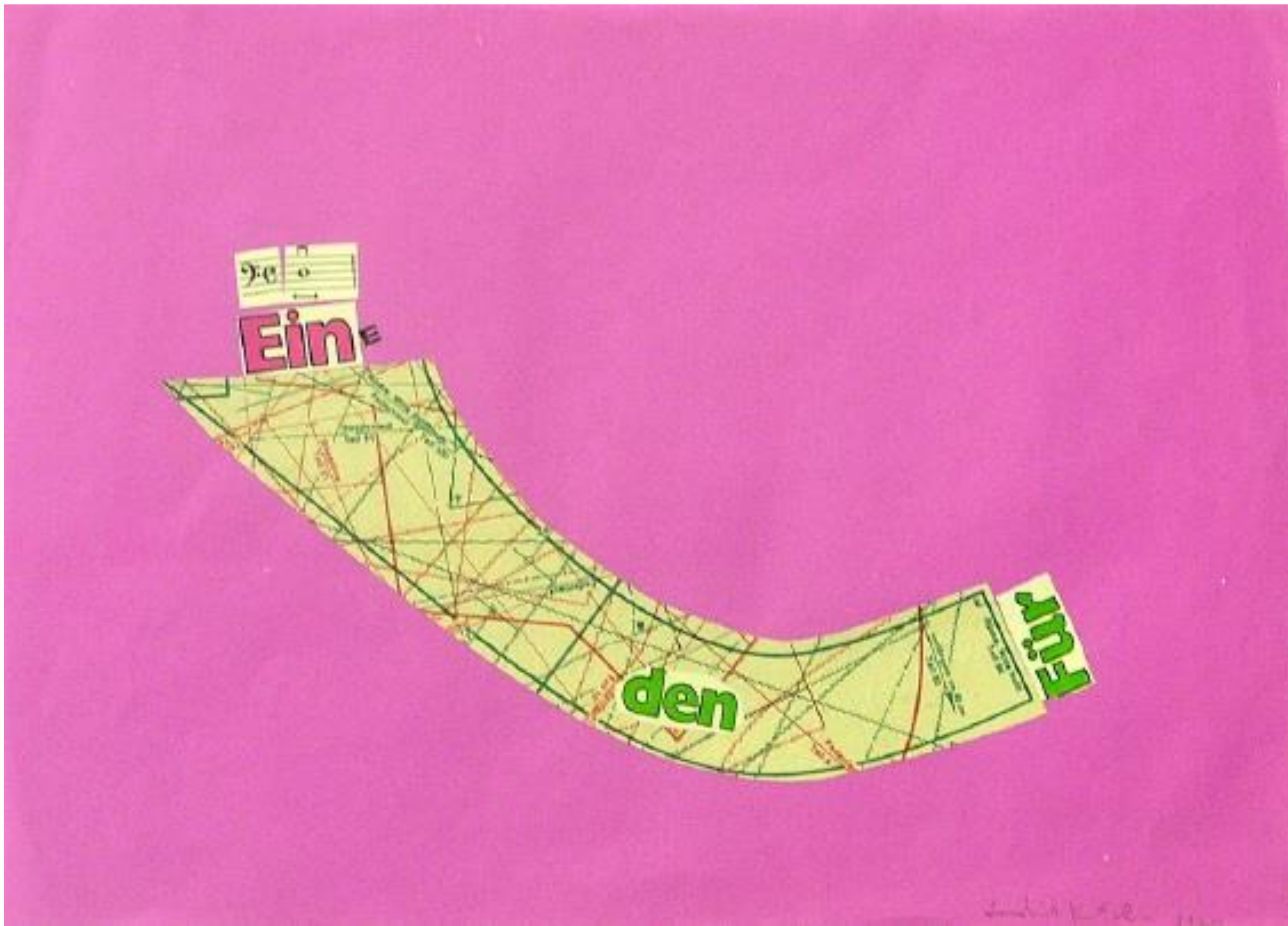
A radical woman performer active in the Yugoslav as well as the Hungarian Neo-avant-garde, Katalin Ladik's (1946, Novi Sad) work is perhaps the greatest rediscovery of recent years. Her visual and sound poetry, performances and body art are based on the intermediatic reinterpretation of body and language, sound and visibility. Her feminist approach enriched the avant-garde discourse with a radically new position not only in Yugoslavia, but in Hungary as well, expressing in her numerous performances and her participation in the unofficial international network of Neo-avant-garde art. Ladik's artistic practice shows a particular permeability between genres, articulating a strong female position in the male-dominated art scene of the Eastern Bloc through an extended concept of the medium of poetry. acb's selection focuses on this interaction of genres, with an emphasis on early collages, music scores and photo performances which are underlining the relevance of the use of voice and sound from the late 1960s and 1970s.



Katalin Ladik in the early 1970's

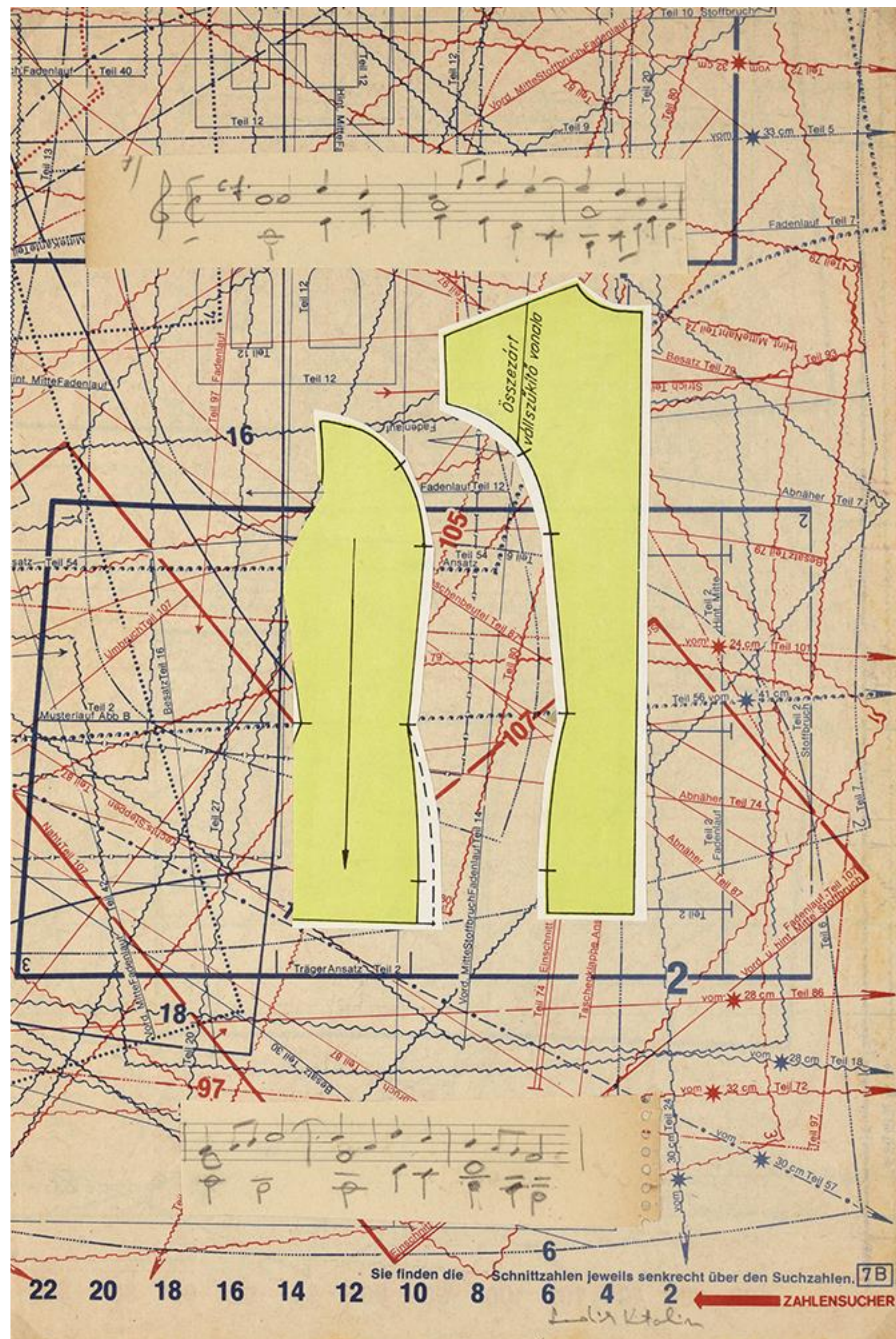


List of exhibited works

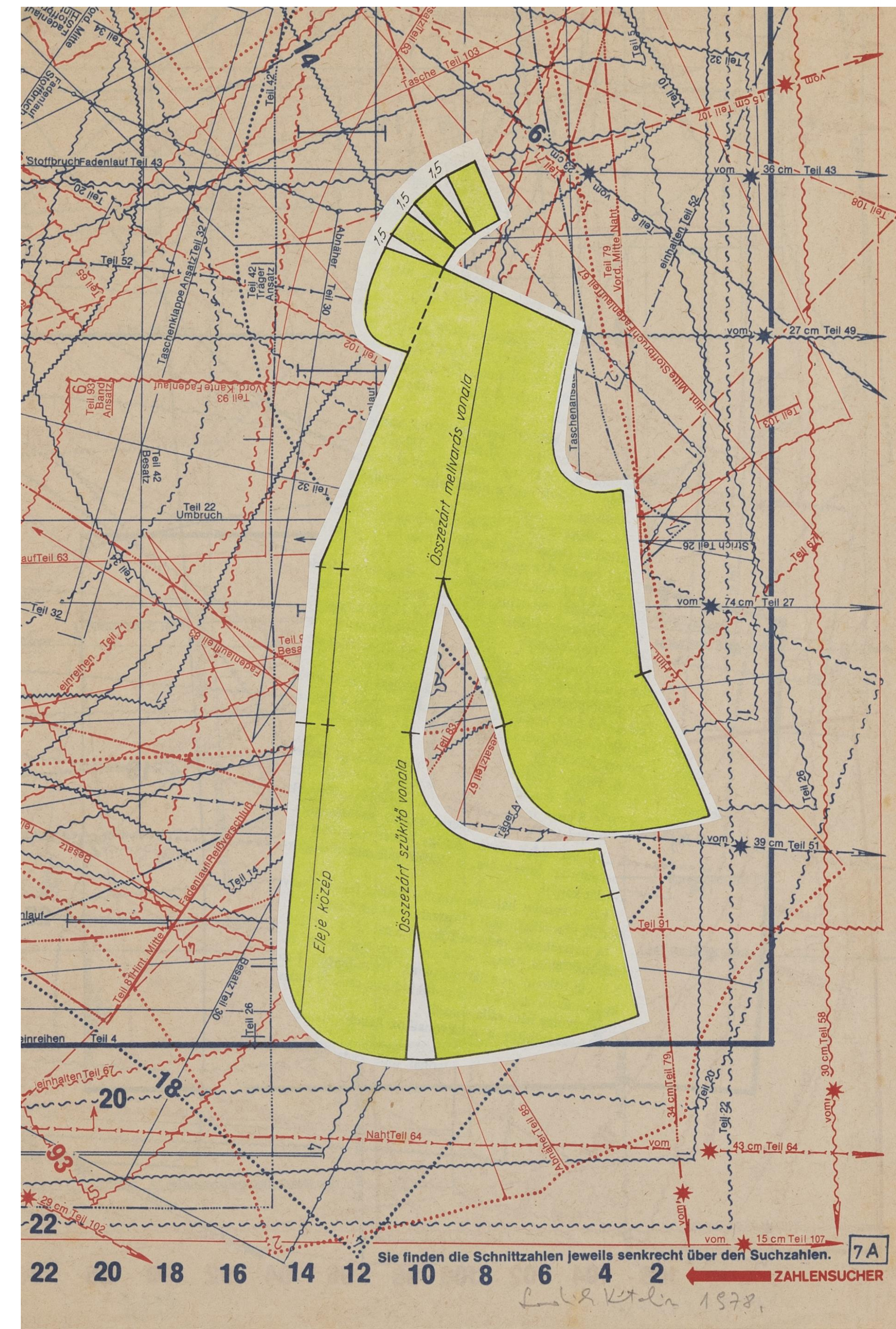


A major part of Ladik's artistic practice is associated with music that essentially addresses relations between sound and the woman's body. Scores and visual poems, sewing patterns cut out of women's fashion magazines appeared in her collages in the middle of the seventies. Works such as *Ein den für* (1974) or *Duet* (1979) created a feminist visual material that ironically addressed and challenged behavioural norms and limitations attributed to traditional gender roles, but also the prevailing, dominant visual language used by her male colleagues. Meant to be performed according to its text and shape but not being defined by norms of musical notation, each collage is both a visual poem and an improvisational phonic piece interpreted by the artist. Each collage is displayed with its respective, accompanying sound piece.

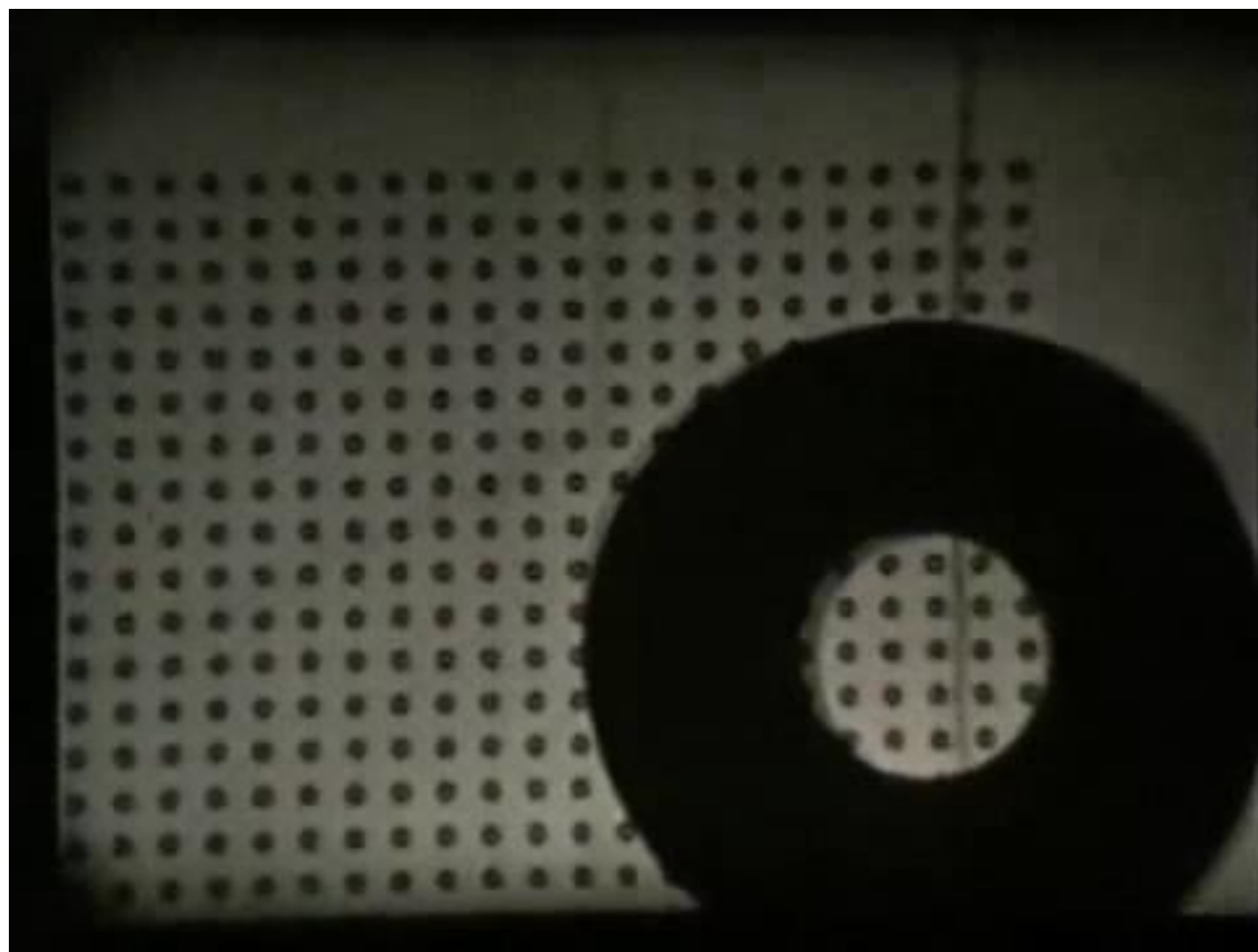
Ein den für, 1974
collage on paper, 33 × 45 cm



Estrangement, 1978
collage on paper, 30 × 20 cm



Desire, 1978
collage on paper, 30 × 20,5 cm



The eight sheet score, titled *O-pus* was composed by Katalin Ladik for the experimental short film of Attila Csernik. The collaboration of Attila Csernik and Katalin Ladik predates the time they both joined the Bosch+Bosch group in the early 70's. Their experimental film *O-pus* (1972) was shown in July 1973 in Balatonboglár, at the autonomous forum of the Hungarian neoavantgarde which would soon be closed down in a police action. The moving image version of Attila Csernik's sign explorations was accompanied by Ladik's phonic interpretation based on a score several pages long. Csernik printed various shapes of the letter 'O' on A4 size paper. He made a larger letter 'O' out of thicker paper which he positioned in different ways on the A4 sheet, and he also photographed the different situations of the 'O' applied to body parts and positioned in space. When the film was done, he asked Katalin Ladik to sing what she saw. Ladik's extreme articulation, broad vocal range, and the wide emotional continuum of sounds do not illustrate the pictures, evoking early avantgarde film, but move along them in a parallel autonomous sphere or, at times, go beyond the minimalism of what is seen.

Attila Csernik, Katalin Ladik, Imre Póth: *O-pus*, 1972
experimental film, 8'14"

I STAV O-PUS 1972 OBJAŠNJEŃE ZNAKOVA

UVULARNA TREMLJACIJA VISOKI REGISTAR
 VOKAL „O“ OŠTRO NAZALNO
 „O“ OŠTRO - LABIJUM
 „O“ MEKANO, VAZDUŠASTO
 „O“ TIHO, EHO

UVULARNA TREMLJACIJA NIŽI REGISTAR
 VOKAL „O“ OŠTRO, EHO, GLASNO, DUBOKO.
 KONSONANT „C“ TIHO, EHO
 TREMLJALO GLASNIH ŽICA BEZ ZVUKA UZ RIČANJE LABIJUM

TIHO, POJAČATI, UTIŠATI
 FORTE, POSTEPENO UTIŠATI,
 TIHO POČETI, POJAČATI U FORTE

II STAV OBJAŠNJEŃE ZNAKOVA 5.

VAZDUŠASTO RITMIČNO „O“ UZ FORHIRANJE LABIJUM
 RITMIČNO, VAZDUŠASTO, „HO“
 RITMIČNO DISANTJE
 RITMIČNO ISPREKIDANO DISANTJE
 VELIKI UZDAH SA EHOJ
 SNAŽNO ISPREKIDANO IZDISANJE
 SNAŽNO UZDISANJE UZ ZVUK I KRATKO SNAŽNO IZDISANJE
 GLAS O UDARANJE RUKOM NA GRKJAN

LEVI SREDINA DESNI

28.	1"		
29.	1"		
30.	3"	4"	
31.	1"	3"	
32.	1"	1"	
33.	1"	4"	
34.	1"	4"	1"
35.	1"	4"	1"
36.	2"	4"	1"
37.	1"	1"	1"
38.	0,30"	0,30"	0,30"
39.	0,30"	0,30"	0,30"
40.	0,30"	0,30"	0,30"
41.	0,30"	0,30"	0,30"
42.	0,30"	0,30"	0,30"
43.	2"	2"	2"
44.	2"	2"	2"

LEVI SREDINA DESNI

55.	2,30	FORTE 2,30	
56.	2,30	FORTE 2,30	
57.	2,30	2,30	
58.		5"	
59.	2,30	00 2,30	
60.			
61.			
62.			
63.		5"	5"
64.			2"
65.	2"	2"	
66.	2"		
67.	2"	2"	
68.		5"	
69.		2"	
70.	2"	2"	2"

LS LEVI ZVUČNIK SREDINA M DESNI ZVUČNIK

1.	7"	7"	
2.	5"		FORTE 5"
3.	5"		Piano 5"
4.	5"		FORTE 5"
5.	5"		FORTE 5"
7.		3"	
8.		3"	
9.		8"	
10.		5"	
11.		10"	
12.			
13.			
14.		1"	

LS LEVI M SREDINA RS DESNI

15.		3"	
16.			
17.	3"		3"
18.	1"		1"
19.	1"	1"	
20.	2"		
21.			1,30"
22.		3"	
23.		2"	
24.		2"	
25.		2"	
26.	1,30" FORTE	1,30"	
27.		5"	

II STAV LS M RS

71.	30"	30"	
72.	30"		
73.		30"	
74.		6"	
75.		6"	
76.		6"	6"
77.			6"
78.			
79.		10"	10"
80.	8"		8"
81.			12"
82.	6"		
83.		18"	
84.			
85.			
86.	10"	5"	
87.		20"	
88.			
89.			
90.			

LS M RS

91.	13"		13"
92.	23"		23"
93.		10"	
94.			
95.	30"		
96.			
97.		10"	
98.			5"
99.	16"	16"	16"
100.			
101.			20" PIANO

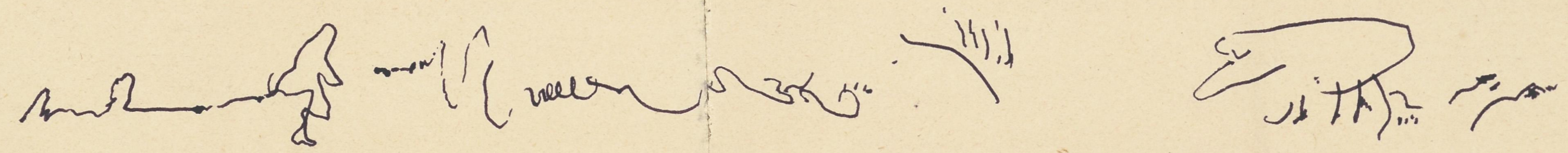
O-pus, 1972
 graphite, ink on paper, 21 × 19,7 cm and 20,4 × 27,8 cm each

Next page:
 Four-dimensional Poems Nr. 1: First Love, 1969
 Felt-tip pen on paper, 6 × 61 cm

Ladik Katalin:
NÉGYDIMENZIÓS
VERSEK

N^o 1.
1969. II. 22.

Elő-
szó



Shaman Poem (1969-1970) was the most emblematic early phonic performance of Katalin Ladik. It synthesized the characteristics of her unique artistic practice, such as poetry, phonic action and performative presence in the context of the underrepresented and isolated local feminist discourse at the time. On 16 June 1970 László Lakner, an important figure of Hungarian progressive painting, wrote an ecstatic letter about Katalin Ladik's first performance in Budapest:

„.....She is from Novi Sad. I am head over heels in love with this woman, at first sight, which was only intensified by the fact that she recited – sang, zithered – her final poem naked! Despite her actress airs, subtly mannered diction, accelerations and decelerations, staccatos, artificial crying and laughter (have I listed enough faults yet?) – she can still be found wonderful, she is called KATALIN LADIK, because she is also mother wolf and siren, and she knows what makes people tick, and she came up with being a shaman, with a fur gown kacagány in a part of the world where no one ever sees a naked woman except in the movies. And this Katalin is beautiful to boot, she is like Walt Disney's Snow White, as black as ebony, hard, and slim, and her myopic grey eyes mesmerize you. And she rattles and yells and gurgles and fusses so gently and terribly subtly, when necessary – that's the problem. Her voice is accompanied by electronic music from a tape recorder, her own voice in a completely different position, the rhythmic rumbling of a sheet of aluminium with a rope tied around it, and the sounds of a shaman drum, and a real goatskin bagpipe hanging from her shoulder. At times she would recite something while leaving the room and when she is already gone, the speakers still carry her voice...”



Shaman Poem, Novi Sad, 1970
gelatin silver print, 18 × 13 cm

Ladik's performance pushed the Hungarian underground community out of their macho comfort zone by offering the unfamiliar experience of a female position and aiming to construct the female version of the performative subject. In her action in 1970 she interrogated certain taboos of the politics of the female body in a direct unmediated way through her personal presence. The recuperation of the erotic and the female body was not the sole aim of Ladik's action, which also aspired to a performative extension of poetry. The performance was constructed as a critique of two-dimensional poetry, by deconstructing the distinction between words and acts through the performative interpretations of textual and auditive components.



Folksong, 1973
gelatin silver print, 18 × 24 cm
photo: Domonkos Moldován

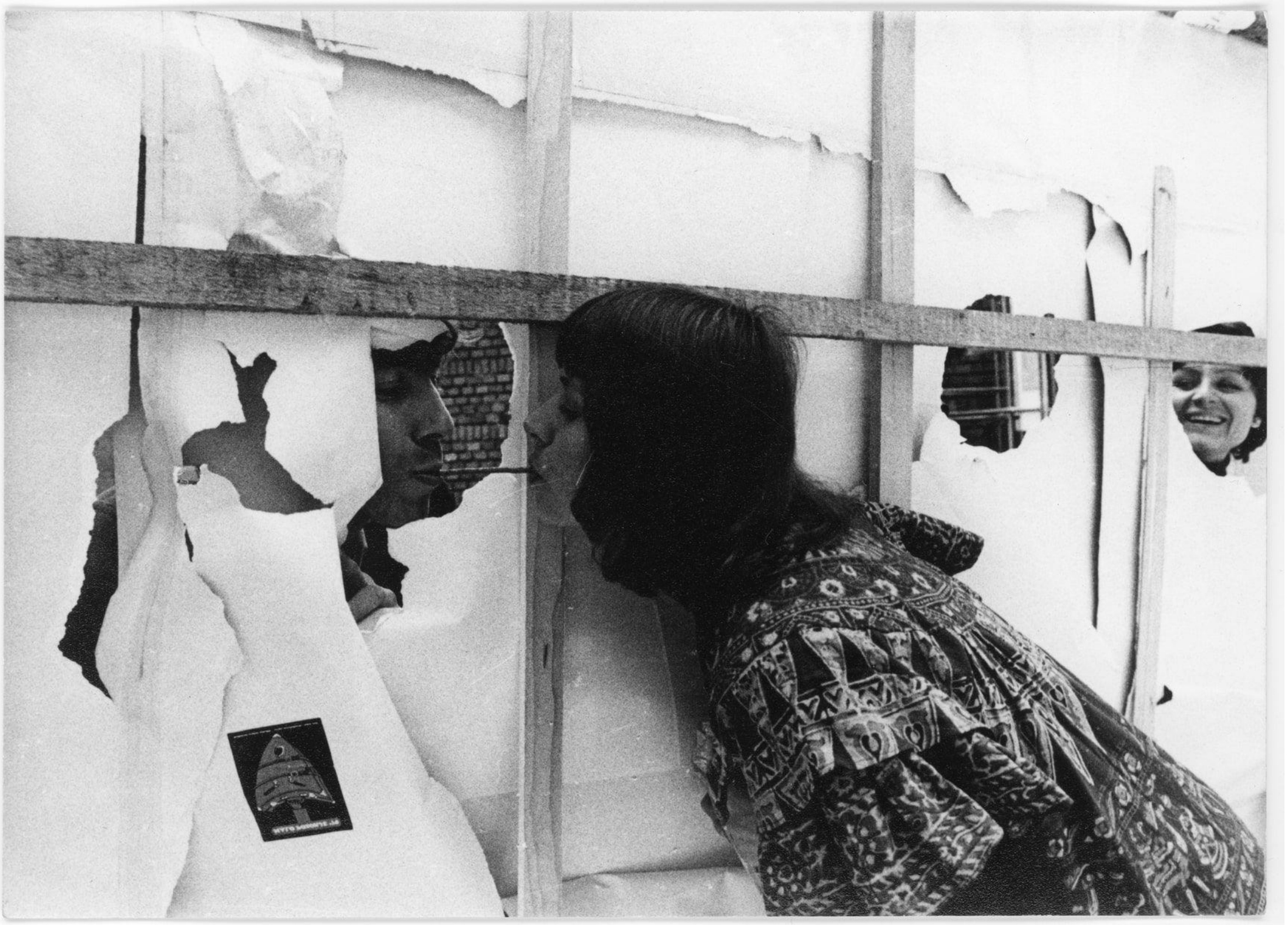


Ladik became engaged with the region's folk music while she was accompanying the composer Ernő Király (her husband then) on his folksong-collecting tours in the Balkans and in Hungary in the mid-1960s. She was impressed by the archaic and ritual elements of Balkan folk music, that resulted in a new approach in her written poetry that time. The transforming poetic tools and folkloristic methods of Ladik's poetry gradually deconstructed the traditional semantic layers of written poetry to create a radically new performative form through the language of body art and the processual incorporation of musical elements. From 1970 on she also used typical Hungarian and Balkan folk instruments in alternative ways in her performances.

Shaman Drum, 1972
gelatin silver print, 12 × 18 cm each
2 pieces (see the second photograph next page),
photo: Ana Lazukic



The performance entitled *Screaming Hole* (1979) featured radical presentation of the visibility of the woman and her identity against the cultural clichés and patterns of self-perception, of showing to and being seen by others, as well as of verbal/bodily communication with the other(s). Clichés surrounding women’s eroticism, conceived as the spectacle of a woman-object fetishized by the male gaze, are deconstructed in the form of a simulated, inverse (anti)striptease and the para-rituals associated with undressing. But the hole present in the open-air structure allows the artist to turn the voyeuristic situation around and see, but also perform verbal and sound-based communication with the audience.

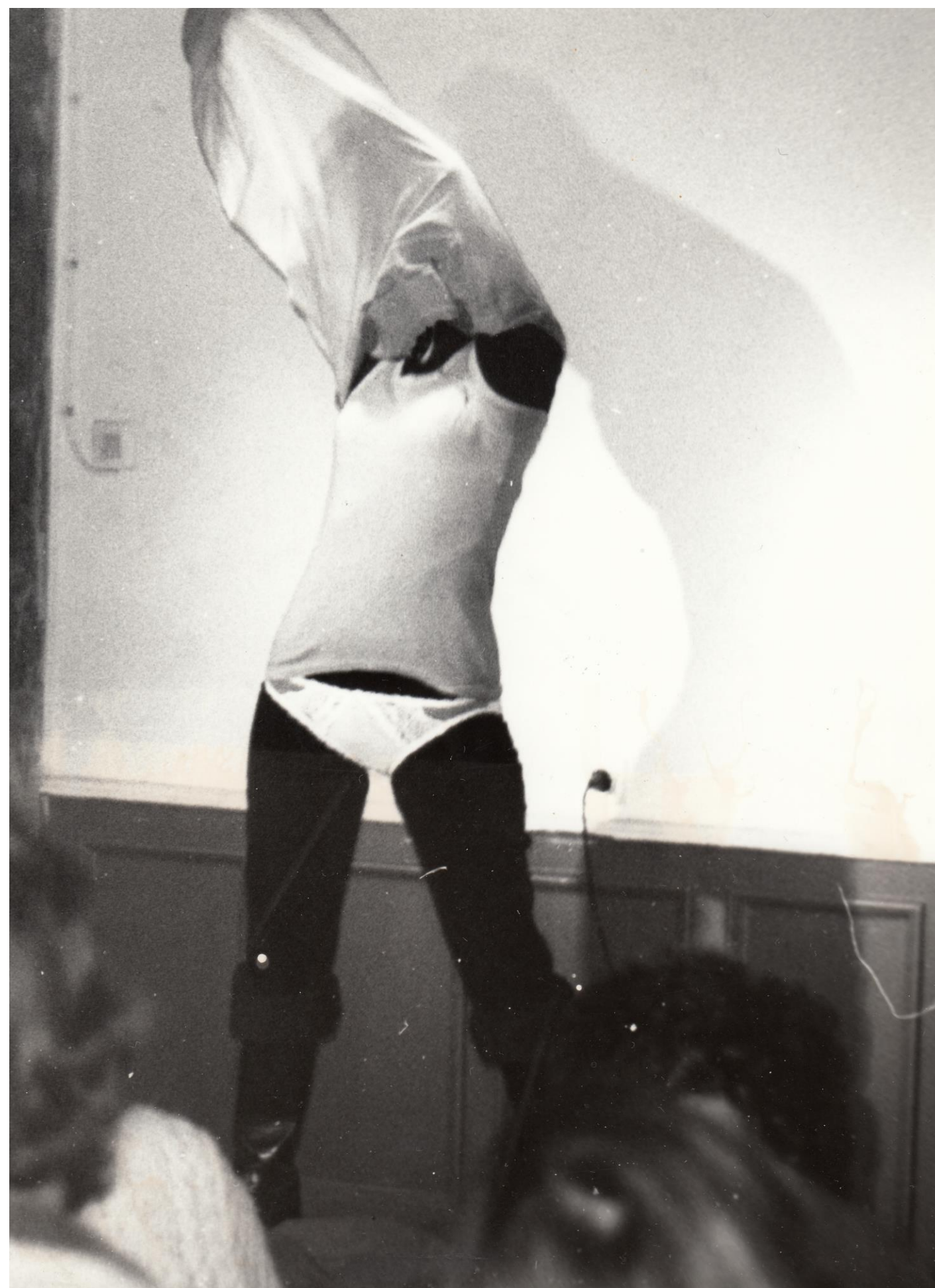


Screaming Hole, 1979/2019
gelatin silver print, 13 × 18 cm each
ed.1/3 + 1 AP, photo: Gábor Ifjú



The performance entitled *Blackshave Poem* (1978) featured radical presentation of the visibility of the woman and her identity against the cultural clichés and patterns of self-perception, of showing to and being seen by others. Clichés surrounding women's eroticism, conceived as the spectacle of a woman-object fetishized by the male gaze, are deconstructed in the form of a simulated, inverse (anti)striptease. *Blackshave Poem* is a series of black and white photographs, in each photograph, the artist is shown either removing a piece of clothing or applying shaving and simulating the act of shaving. Underneath her underwear, the artist wears a long-sleeved black polo-neck, black trousers and black boots which remain on her body throughout the performance, mimicking black skin as indicated in the work's title.

Blackshave Poem, 1979
gelatin silver print, 15 × 10 cm each



Blackshave Poem (detail), 1979
gelatin silver print, 15 × 10 cm each



In her performances, the artist has been using her body as a tool to voice social expectations, beauty standards, the condition of the artist as a woman in a highly patriarchal system and therefore, the high degree of politicisation of the female body as a biological, social entity (and national property). The performance *Poemim* (1978) was held on several times on various locations in Yugoslavia and Hungary; referring to the extended poetic context in the title, it is founded on the visuality of the ritualistic deformation of the face. In the emblematic photo series of *Poemim*, Ladik intentionally distorts her own traits and figure against a sheet of glass to confront the aesthetical and social imperative to smile, be beautiful and stay silent, while in the eponymous video (1980), she further engages in looking, acting, but also sounding “inappropriate” by combining gestures and movements of her face with sound poetry, therefore also thematising the urge to re-appropriate one’s body – and voice. Preconceptions and psychic burdens related to the aesthetics of the body and physical appearance determined not only the early phase of Ladik’s oeuvre, but her entire East-Central European creative path. Later on, *Poemim* came to serve as a sequential prelude to other performances, e.g. like *Poemask* (1982).

Poemim, 1978/2016
gelatin silver print, 40 × 30 cm each,
ed. 2/5 + 1 AP, photo: Imre Póth

Poemim (contact copy), 1978
felt-tip pen, gelatin silver print, 7,5 × 7 cm







Poemim, 1980
video, 14'00", ed. 3/10+1AP
video: Bogdanka Poznanović

„I have been obsessed for a long time with the myth of the androgynous, Greek mythological creatures of two sexes, and many of my poems bear this mark. I have often regretted for being born a woman, and not androgynous or male. Perhaps this comes from dissatisfaction with the distasteful and subordinated role of the woman in the society. Of course, I had no choice. Although vulnerable, I accepted a woman's fate: in my struggle for survival, for my own 'place under the sun', I took advantage of all the opportunities my female sensibility granted. While exploiting this biologically assigned sensibility, I discovered new, inconceivable possibilities of poetry and expression in general. I used my experiences of maternity, even my body for the sacred act of universal insemination of all organic and mineral things, of soil with the waters. Only fertility, the power of reproduction, sustains the being against the nothingness. This is not merely about the fear of death. Here I sense the key for unlocking the gate of Nothingness.”

— Katalin Ladik

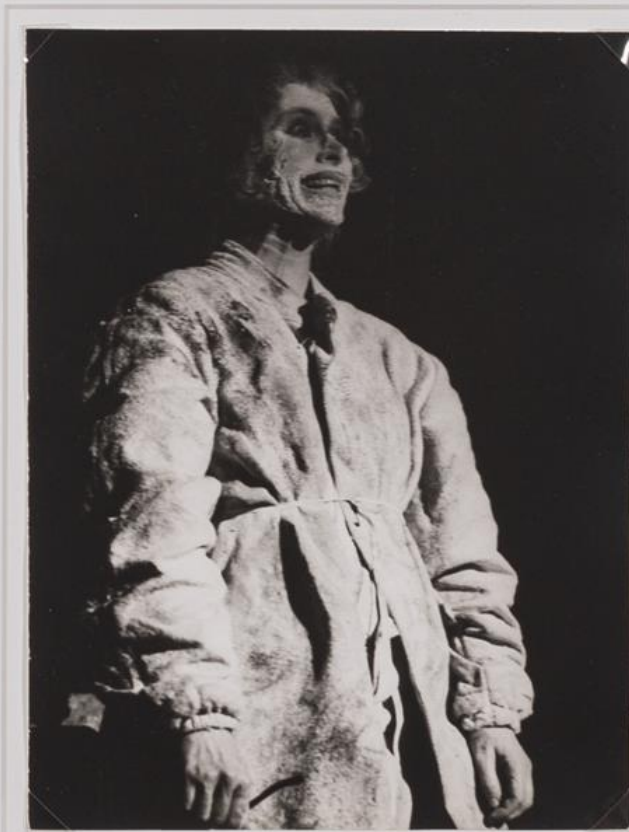
Androgyny was crucial for Ladik as a metaphor of an ungendered ideal state and appeared as a projection of her contextual feminism in several works in the 1970s-80s. Based on her prose poem - published in the early sixties – titled *Androgynous*, the concept of androgyny was defining for the artist from the beginning of her artistic career. Beside her poems the idea of androgyny has also visually manifested in Ladik's several performances and photographic works, like the three-part series of *Androgin 1-3*. (1978).

Katalin Ladik. *Oooooooooo-pus*, 2023,
exhibition view, Haus der Kunst, Munich
photo: Milena Wojhan. ©Haus der Kunst



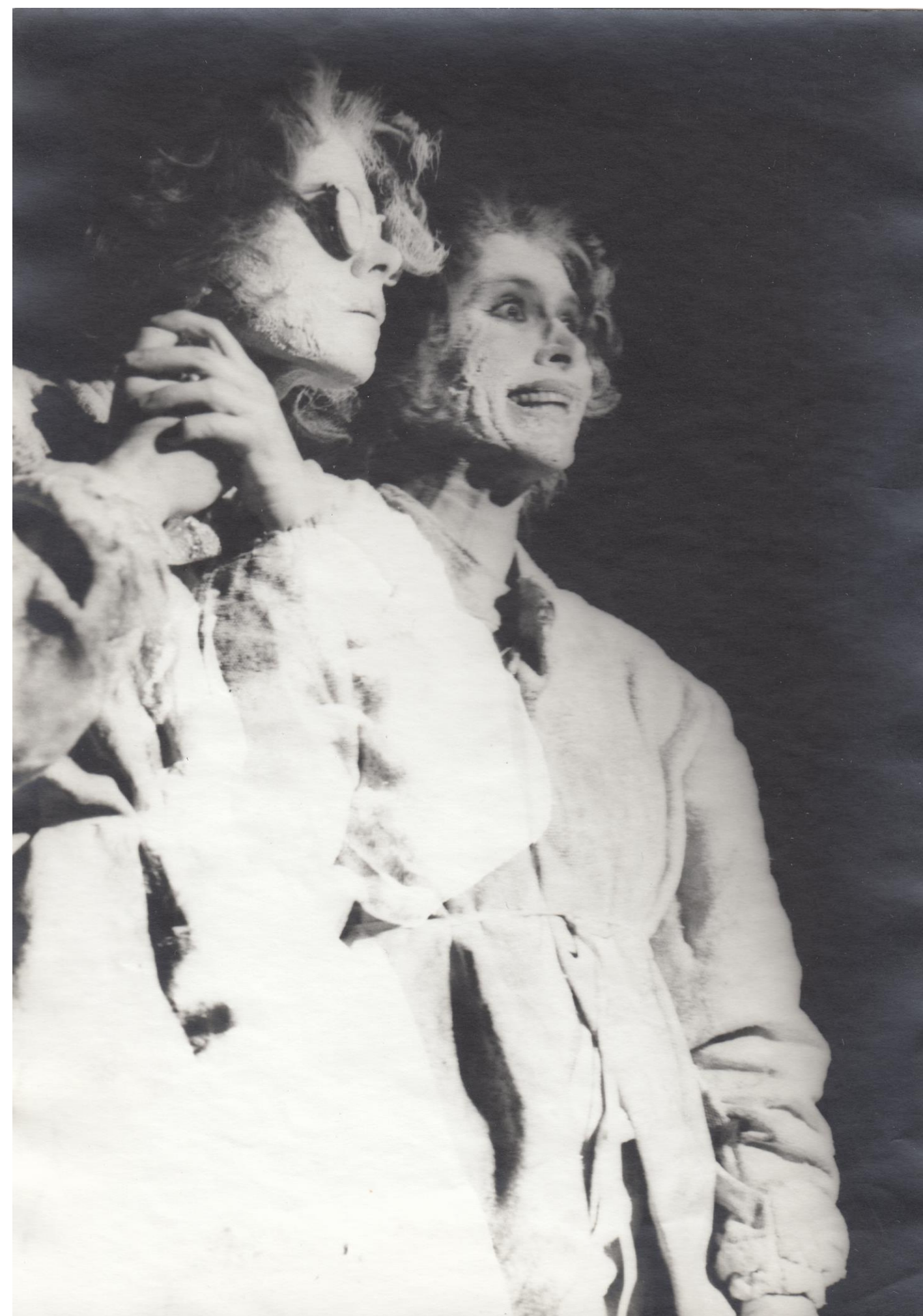


Androgin 1, 2, 3., 1978
gelatin silver print, 29,5 × 20 cm each



The new generation of women opposing traditional male narratives, language and the oppressive mechanisms of everyday life feared nothing as much as being identified with the notion of the female, that is of marginality. Like other contemporaries – for example Marina Abramović in her joint performances with Ulay – Katalin Ladik found the solution in the concept of androgyny that dissolves gender hierarchy, which often appears in her poems and actions. In the piece entitled *Mandora*, performed between 1982 and 1985, the artist departs from her cycle of poems *Homo Galacticus* to explore androgyny as a two-faced creature defying gender-normative standards, and to reveal her ambiguous approach to feminism as both an emancipatory affiliation and radical detachment. Whereas in the 1960s and 1970s her performances inclined to the ‘first person speech’ and all the more literal bodily or behavioral expression, in her postmodern performances introspections or confessions transformed into allegories reconstructing the visible and audible subject of human auto- reflection. This autoreflection lead to comprehension and experience of ‘sexuality’ no longer blatantly exposed, but rendered and transmitted through cultural symbols in a scenic atmosphere.

Mandora, 1985
gelatin silver print, 20 × 15 cm each
photo: Dragutin Nisic



Mandora, Belgrade (detail), 1985
gelatin silver print, 20 × 15 cm each
Photo: Dragutin Nisic

acb editions

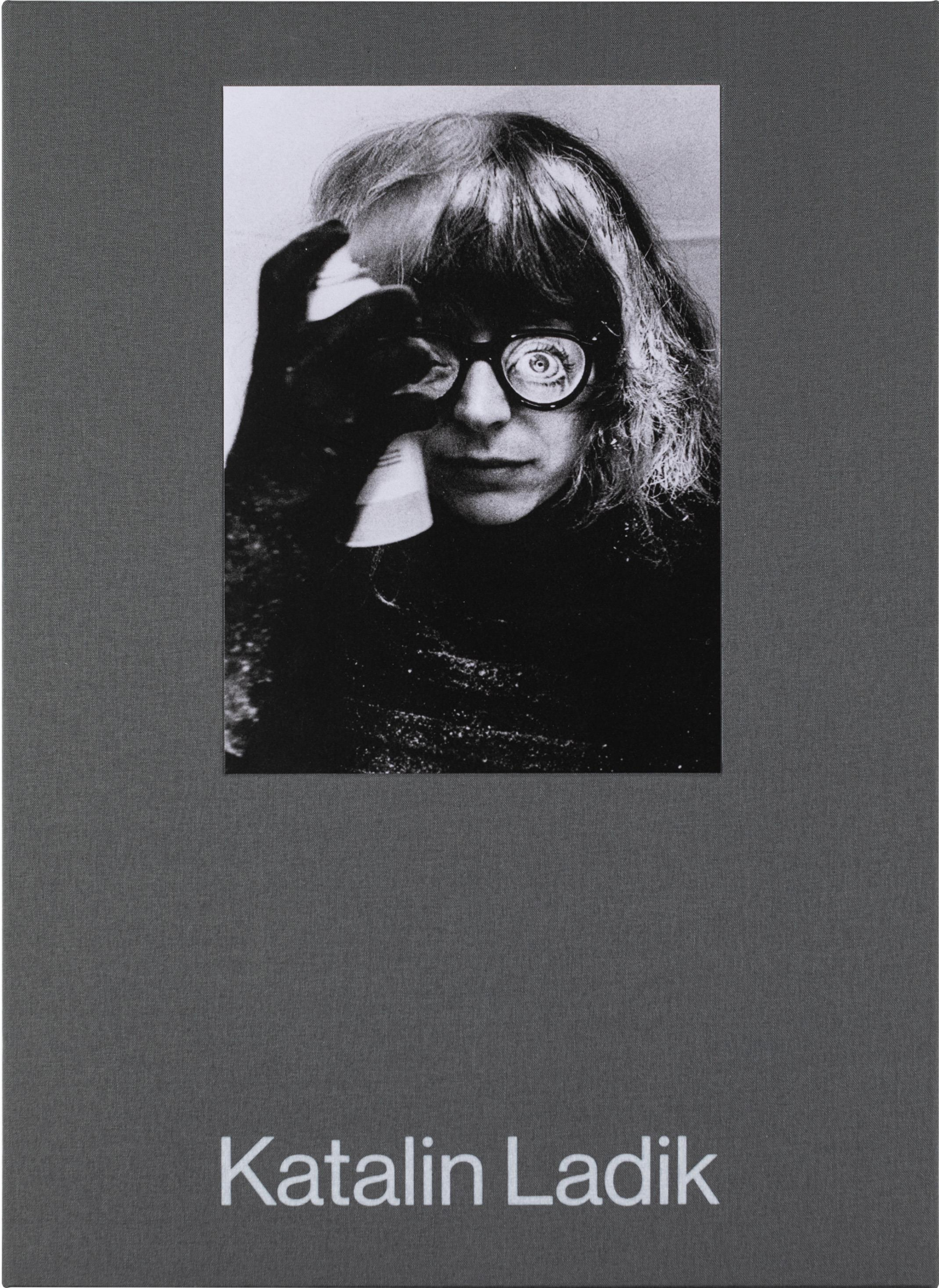


Photo Box Set (8 sheets), 2023, giclée print, 48 x 35 x 4 cm, ed. 30 + 5 AP



LP Box Set (2 vinyl), 2023, vinyl LP, giclée print, 32,5 x 33 x 3 cm, ed. 30 + 5 AP

Biography

Katalin Ladik (Novi Sad, 1942)

Katalin Ladik was born in Vojvodina, an area of the former Yugoslavia inhabited by Hungarians. She began her career as a poet, publishing primarily in the Novi Sad Hungarian avant-garde periodical *Új Symposion* [New Symposium]. From the outset, an essential aspect of her verses was that they were to be sung; while the sheet for her sound poetry pieces are at the same time autonomous visual artworks. In the 1960s and 1970s, Ladik began to use elements of happening, body art and performance in her verse recitals, which also evoke ancient, shamanistic rituals. In 1973 she became a member of the Bosch+Bosch group in Subotica, although she also worked with numerous other artists and artists' groups, such as the Zagreb music ensemble, Acezantez, or members of the Hungarian art scene, for instance Miklós Erdély and Tamás Szentjóby. After taking part in the 10th International Festival of Sound Poetry in Amsterdam in 1977, Ladik became an important figure in the scene of European sound poetry. A major aspect of her work is feminism: from her earliest performances she used her own body as a medium, creating multi-identities of different sexes and personalities on stage. The use of clothing patterns on her collage-verses also critically highlight the traditional women's roles. Ladik made her photographic and video performances in front of the camera, occasionally without an audience. Besides her performances and visual works, Ladik's production in radio, theatre and performance has been extensive, as have her recordings of music and sound poetry. In 1992 she moved to Budapest where she has lived ever since.



Katalin Ladik in the early 1970's
photo: Ana Lazukić

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