

After World War II, Europe was divided into two parts in terms of politics: the Eastern bloc, located mainly in Eastern part of Europe, influenced by the communist Soviet regime and the Western bloc putting the values of the civil society in the centre. Under the soft dictatorship of Kádár in the 1960s, one of the most prominent figures in the country's cultural life was **György Aczél**. He was elected Secretary of the Central Committee of the Socialist Party (1967) and was entrusted to set a guideline for Hungary's culture. His cultural doctrine, referred to as **the 3Ts** (tolerate, prohibit and support, in English translation), became standard practice in the late 1960s and 1970s.

Western arts movements such as avantgarde, modernism or studio art infiltrated the Eastern bloc in the 1960s and made an impact not only on individual artists, but also on creative communities and the processes they traditionally followed. A major characteristic feature of the period was that artists both in the field of fine arts and applied arts attempted to create their independent professional forum that could provide new opportunities for presenting their art. (Contemporary glass art, Székesfehérvár, 1966; Metal sculpting, Ernst Museum 1967; 1st Biennial of Textile Arts, Szombathely 1970; 1st Ceramics Biennial, Pécs, 1970.)

**1959** Sankt Margarethen im Burgenland, Austria: Karl Prantl founded the first symposium for sculptors, which kickstarted the symposium movement in several countries across the globe.

**1963** In his summer art studio in Gmunden, Austria, Kurt Ohnsorg founded the world's first ceramics symposium.

**1966** Four ceramists – Lubor Těhniák, Pravoslav Rada, Jaroslav Pýcha, Václav Šerák as well as a theorist, Karel Hetteš – founded the world's second ceramics symposium in Bechyně, Czechoslovakia (now Czechia).

**1967** A young Hungarian ceramist, Imre Schrammel, was invited to attend the ceramics symposium in Gmunden. This was not so extraordinary considering that previously other ceramists had already attended the event including Ilona Benkő, Edit Kasza, Vera Székely or József Péri. But Schrammel had the opportunity to join an international community of great ceramists from a broad range of countries including Ghana, Argentina, Norway, Austria, the USA, Germany, Poland, Australia, Switzerland, Sweden, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Israel and Greece. The work of these artists was supported by the Österreichischen Sanitär-Keramik- und Porzellan-Industrie-Aktiengesellschaft (ÖSPAG) with raw material and technical equipment. All their wishes were granted so they could concentrate fully on their creative work.

As part of the programme, the attendees of the Gmunden Symposium paid a visit to Bechyně, where Schrammel made a decision: Hungary should have its own ceramics symposium to allow national ceramists to catch up with their Western colleagues in terms of technical skills, explore new paths in terms of form, material and technology, and to help them give new responses to the challenges posed in the field of ceramics and applied art.

**1967-1969** He followed in the footsteps of his foreign colleagues and asked Hungarian porcelain manufacturers for support, but instead of backing he was met with blank refusal: they said that the Hungarian "secret" was not to be given away to foreigners. He went on to ask the management of the College of Applied Arts for support who agreed with him at a professional level but, putting the blame on the Ministry, they did not provide any financial support. The way to the solution was paved by a young art historian with extraordinary talent and courage, Hedvig Dvorszky, who worked at the Lectorate of Fine and Applied Arts at the time and had a considerable insight into art in the rural areas of Hungary. She immediately saw the unique opportunity presenting itself in Baranya County, where the Zsolnay factory had been operating for a century, and she decided to organise the first Pécs Ceramics Biennial in 1968 along with the first Ceramics Symposium, with the hope of making the city the centre of Hungarian ceramic art. She shared her idea with Gyula Takács, the local politician responsible for culture, who also welcomed the opportunity and recommended Schrammel to have a look at some potential venues for the symposium in the nearby town, Siklós. There were two processes taking place simultaneously: the devising of the cultural development plan for Siklós and the creation of a symposium for sculptors in the vicinity, on an area between Villány and Nagyharsány in 1968.

The venue of the symposium was finally selected: they saw potential in the former Franciscan monastery and the adjacent garden despite its derelict condition.

**28 July - 20 August 1969** The participants of the symposium had been invited by the County Council – the local communist authority – but the ceramists’ “elite”, as the artists were named in the invitation, did not wish to attend the event. The situation was saved by Schrammel himself: he personally invited his students who turned out for the symposium and joined the few young artists who had accepted the invitation, and together they started working.

They tried to get hold of the raw materials from local resources; from the local agricultural shop, kindergarten, or collected waste from the Zsolnay plant; they even built their own furnaces while some of the pottery was finalised in the Zsolnay factory. The aim was no longer to catch up with art in the Western countries, but to create works of art with a new approach, which went back to the original, ancient nature of materials and how they were processed.

In January 1970, an exhibition of works from the first symposium was held in Siklós Castle, which had a profound effect on the profession, but the political leadership felt that Schrammel had „led the young artists astray”, and this opinion of theirs was clearly voiced. Nevertheless, Schrammel was given another chance.

**15 July– 22 August 1970** The second national and first international ceramics symposium opened in Hungary. The organisers drew on the experience of the first workshop and purchased the materials and tools. The operational rules of the symposium were set up, the invitation cards to the domestic and foreign participants sent, accommodation and catering facilities all arranged. Also, Imre Schrammel’s long-term thematic artistic concept was established. However, despite the success of the exhibition – opening on 16 and 20 August and involving 21 artists – the Baranya County town council declared Imre Schrammel persona non grata and denied him entry to the symposium.

This is how it all started.

The exhibition entitled **“Symposium ,69, ,70”** presents the works of the Hungarian artists who participated in the first two symposia, which transformed Hungarian ceramic art and the artistic theory of ceramics. The exhibition also pays tribute to Imre Schrammel’s work as an art organiser.

In line with the concept worked out by Imre Schrammel, the Ceramics Symposium was organized by the Baranyai Alkotótelepek until 1992 in Siklós. Imre Schrammel rejoined the Siklós Symposia in 1981.

**From 1993 to 2004**, the DeForma Group, the DeForma Foundation and the TERRA Group organised ceramics symposia in the former Franciscan monastery. The building functioned as a venue for creative art workshops until 2009, and since 2011 the building has been under the supervision of the County Coordination Department of the Baranya County Branch of the Directorate General for Social Affairs and Child Protection. They are to make sure that the building retains the character of the fascinating work that these artists carried out back then.