



**The right way to drive** A sign by MKKP on Király utca



**Brightening up the street** Fish pools on the pavement, above; Franz for prez, below



If you find yourself performing a double-take at a curious street sign, a doctored election poster, or a spray-painted pavement in Budapest, then you have probably just encountered the comic genius of the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (Magyar Kétfarkú Kutya Part, or MKKP).

Gergely Kovács is 'one-and-a-half tails' of the MKKP, a self-effacing 30-year-old who has become an accidental cult hero by poking righteous fun at Hungary's political and social absurdities since founding his party in 2006.

Kovács and his occasional collaborators are quietly filling the streets of Budapest, and other towns across the country, with wacky signage and graffiti displaying a distinctly Hungarian sense of humour. Sometimes there's a message behind the mischief, but his party's main agenda seems to be having a laugh. And they're working hard at it.

# Signs of the times

The Two-Tailed Dog Party, consisting of street artist Gergely Kovács and his collaborators, spread their humour all over Budapest. **Dan Nolan** gets in on the joke.



**'One-and-a-half tails'** Street artist Gergely Kovács



**Dragon trolley** An MKKP sign blends in with a Budapest streetscape

The most ubiquitous MKKP paintings in Budapest are the little fish ponds dotted around the city's pavements. 'There must be around 50 of them. People don't seem to mind, some of the streets are in a bad way here and the fish ponds brighten them up a little,' say Kovács, who adds that the fish are his favourite works. 'Many of our things are not political; they are often against firms, or stupidity, or just a simple joke.'

The nature of graffiti is that it can disappear at any time, but some of the MKKP's art is seemingly here to stay. The traffic sign on VII. Király utca, which tells the true story of Budapest's driving habits, also subtly incorporates a local, folksy twist. 'If you look closely you can see a bird in the bottom left of the sign. This was the bird that drew the folk patterns in the titles of the television programme Magyar Népmesék (Hungarian Folk Tales), which we all watched when we were kids,' says Kovács.

On VIII. Práter utca, a fantastically surreal billboard advertises an Austro-Hungarian monarchy-era internet café, which proclaims a speed of three bits per minute and 'coverage across the whole empire'. Kovács explains: 'we chose to put it up here because it was a very run-down street. We used a real photograph, which is a scene featuring famous Hungarian writers, and just added a couple of laptops and a sign. The older it gets the more at home it will look, because the street has seen better days too. We actually aged it by putting tobacco into the glue, to give it a faded yellow colour.'

MKKP is choosy about where they strike. 'I use dirty walls and spray on to walls that already have tags on them. It is illegal but you can do it, I think,' Kovács says. 'We can open those city light poster boxes, so we have been able to change election posters.

For example we changed the head of Otto Habsburg to his great grand uncle Emperor Franz Jozsef.'

In a recent 'city light' prank, a set of fangs were added to the model's face on the many 'give blood' posters around the city, lending a comic-horror edge.

*If you print posters, and do it well, lots of people will see them, and will understand it too'*

Other playful MKKP subversions visible in the capital include dragons and centaurs added to signs at Budapest's tram and trolley stops. It's a magical-realist twist that is somehow so Hungarian.

And though Kovács says 'its not really saying anything meaningful', his work about a pedestrian making off with part of the no-parking sign, or a warning that there are people 'working' (drinking) on a nearby roof, show a comic yet deep and intuitive understanding of the national psyche.

Despite a slew of offers to exhibit in the city's galleries, Kovács knows his art works best outside the gallery system, where it can retain the element of surprise.

'I had a real exhibition once: we made a maquette of a part of a city and put out stickers, posters and signs on it, but it wasn't right for us,' he says. 'Street art doesn't always have meaning, but it can. The art world has this problem that it has had it for 50 years. They always wanted to reinvent art, and it has gone as far from the people as it has ever been.'

Kovács says his earlier works, such as his 'Campaign for a Smaller Hungary' car



**Fun crossing** One sign steals part of another

stickers, were in part the product of the laid back university town atmosphere of his former city of residence. 'Szeged was very good for this because it is a university city; about 20,000 people study there and they have about 25 free hours a day. In Budapest, everybody is in a hurry so you have to make much bigger things,' he says. 'Still, if you print posters, and do it well, lots of people will see them, and will understand it too.'

As for influences, Kovács inevitably namechecks Banksy – 'he does very good looking and meaningful stuff'. Like that famous UK street artist, Kovács always uses stencils: 'I am not a real graffiti artist, but with the stencils you can't go wrong.'

The MKKP is not solely a graffiti-related enterprise: over the last four years, the party has stood in a general election, held an exhibition of knowingly awful art at one of the city's trendiest galleries and organised a fake demonstration that poked fun at the unfocused absurdity of the anti-government campaigns of recent years.

'There aren't too many people in Hungary doing anything like this well,' Kovács says. He mentions comedy hip-hop artists Belgä and Sickratman as well as indie rockers Kispál és a Borz as happy exceptions, but wishes that others would be inspired by local talent. 'In Hungary everybody looks to Monty Python, not to each other,' Kovács complains.

He says Hungarians may have something to show the world about graffiti, which was popularised in New York City. 'Sociologists can talk about the parallels with (graffiti) and what had happened to the black people of New York, and how that informed graffiti. But here I know a lot of people from the (upmarket) Districts II or XII and they do graffiti too. So like hip hop moved to the UK and became trip hop, graffiti has become something different too.'

Whatever direction graffiti is going in Hungary, Kovács and his MKKP are currently leading the way.