

## Press release

3 November 2020

### Akademie der Künste acquires Péter Esterházy's archive

The Akademie der Künste has received the literary estate of Péter Esterházy (1950-2016) from his family. The Hungarian writer had been a member of the community of artists since 1998. As a European intellectual, Esterházy sought dialogue with cultural practitioners from a huge range of fields throughout his life. Both he himself and his work received numerous honours, including the Kossuth Prize (1996), the Austrian State Prize for European Literature (1999) and the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade (2004). Esterházy would have been 70 years old this year.

Following his debut with *Fancsikó and Pinta* in 1976, the graduate mathematician **Péter Esterházy** wrote in numerous genres, from short prose to large-scale family novels, from texts for film and stage as well as essayistic and daily journalism. With his ironic social satire *Ein Produktionsroman* (1979), the author advanced in his early years to become Hungary's "political conscience" and the "the nation's literary voice" (Zsuzsanna Gahse). His *Einführung in die schöne Literatur* (1986) afforded insight into his original style of novel writing encompassing reflections, drawings and pictures and into his so characteristic 'guest texts'. While artfully and playfully tracing the narrative thread through five centuries of the eventful European history of his eminent family in his opus magnum *Harmonia Caelestis* (2000), he committed himself in his *Verbesserte Ausgabe* (2002) to earnestness in painfully documenting his father's newly disclosed history as an informer for the Hungarian state police. A virtuoso master of language and an incorruptible intellectual, Esterházy left behind an extensive and polyphonic oeuvre of European standing, whose claim to freedom not only defies a linear narrative, but also resists simple truths and any instrumentalisation.

Marking the handover of the archive, writer colleague and Akademie member **Ingo Schulze** writes: "We've never had anyone like him among German writers. It is inconceivable what would have been different had there been an East German Esterházy. You can't even imagine that he could have existed. He would have changed the whole country – at least for many people. This freedom and elegance, this independence and this seemingly self-forgetting rejection of yes-no constellations."

The **Péter Esterházy Archive** contains handwritten material from almost fifty working years (1968-2016), including the manuscripts of all his works with drafts and preliminary stages. An extensive collection of work notes and research material provides detailed insight into the author's working methods and the

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genesis of the literary art that he formulated in his early years. Literary excerpts, structural diagrams and word lists demonstrate the experimental treatment of Hungarian vocabulary and reveal postmodern intertextuality and complex text universes. Numerous caricatures and self-portraits in his notebooks form a graphic subtext and underline the unique value of the items. His extensive correspondence of several thousand letters and postcards with well-known personalities of the Hungarian and European political, cultural and scientific scene – among them Péter Nádas, Imre Kertész, Miklós Mészöly, Ágnes Nemes Nagy, László Krasznahorkai, Danilo Kiš, Peter Handke, Ingo Schulze, Ilma Rakusa, Péter Balassa, László F. Földényi, Michael Krüger, Michael Naumann and Norbert Lammert – testifies to his intellectual dialogue beyond linguistic and cultural boundaries. The archive also extends to documents from his life, photographs, a collection of his journalistic work and major awards.

This acquisition further sharpens the European profile of the Akademie der Künste and establishes close ties with numerous archives already accommodated at the Akademie, and especially those of Georg Tabori, Ivan Nagel, György Konrád and Imre Kertész.

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