

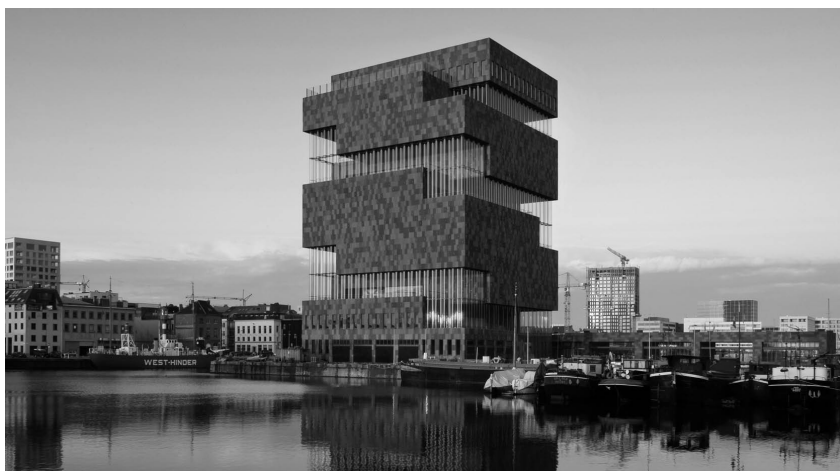
Contemporary City Shaman Jóska Soós Included in the New Antwerp MAS Museum.

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A New Museum, a New Vision of Shamanism

In May 2011, a new and prestigious museum was opened in Antwerp, one of the major cities in Flanders. The Museum aan de Stroom (Museum by the stream), or MAS, unites the collections of several former city museums: the Ethnographic Museum, the National Shipping Museum, and the Folklore Museum. Its collection focuses on different storylines in the history of Antwerp and reflects upon interculturality and its influences in the city.



The museum is located in a new landmark building designed by the Dutch architects Neutelings-Riedijk and has received nearly one million visitors in its first year. (Photo credit: Museum aan de Stroom)

The opening exhibition, *The World in Antwerp, Antwerp in the World*, includes a beautiful and elaborate theme presentation on rituals of life and death—including shamanism. In this presentation, the MAS

includes a unique tribute to Jóska Soós (1921-2008), who worked in the city for twenty years as an active urban shaman and artist. For the first time, Soós is not only considered as an artist, but also as a twentieth-century shaman working in the city of Antwerp. Moreover, in this particular museum context, urban shamanism—represented by Jóska Soós—is recognized as a contemporary form of shamanism in Belgium and Europe.

Although Soós was a well-known Belgian shamanic artist, there has not yet been much academic research on his shamanic and artistic production, apart from the research conducted by the author.¹ This is in contrast with the many non-academic—but in some cases illustrative—publications.² Therefore, this article will focus upon biographical information and the shamanic worldview of Jóska Soós, to better illustrate the museum presentation. All artworks and objects discussed are included in the exhibit.

As an art historian, I studied his production as a shamanic artist for many years. I was contacted by Chris De Lauwer, curator of the South Asia Department in the MAS who asked me to co-curate a presentation on Jóska Soós' life and works.

One of the major storylines in the MAS is named *Life and Death*. It spreads over different floors and focuses on the many different spiritual and religious ideas on life and death which were and still are present today in the city.

The theme presentation includes a small but significant presentation on shamanism, which highlights the shaman as a mediator between aspects of life and death. It confronts visitors with older and more recent objects from shamans in four continents: Asia, Africa, America, and Europe³. As such, viewers are able to explore shamanism as a worldwide phenomenon. Short videos of shamanic rituals document the way shamans used these objects in their séances. Nearby, visitors can consult information about shamanism and the worldwide ongoing dialogue on

1. Tamara Ingels. *Jóska Soós. Shaman and Artist* (Budapest: International Society for Shamanistic Research, 2001)

2. Examples of illustrative but non-academic publications are Robert Harzema. *Jóska Soós. Ik genees niet. Ik herstel de harmonie* (Amsterdam: Karnak, 1985); *Jóska Soós: Lessen van de sjamaan*, (Amsterdam: Karnak, 1998); and J. Collard, "Un cas singulier," *Fantasmagie: Bulletin trimestriel de centre international de l'actualité fantastique et magique*, 29 (1971): 8–9.

3. The objects are all part of the former collection of the Antwerp Ethnographic Museum, which has now been included into the MAS. For South America, objects from the Kayapó are shown. African objects from the Glé cult of the Dan and the Wé are on display. The objects for Asia are more diverse, originating from Nepal, Siberia, and Korea.

shamanism in a specially designed digital platform with references to websites, digital documents, and the original films and videos used in the presentation.

What is new, however, is the inclusion of shamanism in Europe, with Jóska Soós as a representative example of a shaman-artist living and working in the urban context of Antwerp.⁴ Although the presentation is in fact just a small part of this vast museum, it includes a new way of – scientifically – looking at shamanism in our regions.

Jóska Soós, Shaman and Artist

Exhibiting a shaman's life and work in a museum after his death is never easy. Since the presentation on shamanism had to be rather compact, it was up to the curators of the presentation to select just a few representative works. The presentation was not meant to become a retrospective exhibition but an illustrative example of shamanism surviving in an urban context. This selection of objects and artworks of Jóska Soós also had to be fit for confrontation with objects from more traditional shamanic cultures from Asia, South America, and Africa which have been studied for many decades.

But why did the museum select works from the Hungarian/Belgian shaman and artist Jóska Soós? The first major element of selection was the fact that he lived and worked in the city for twenty years. In fact, Jóska Soós' life as a shaman and artist can be divided into four major periods – connected to four different regions – the first period whilst he was living in Hungary, and the other three periods whilst he was living in Belgium (in the cities of Charleroi, Brussels, and Antwerp).

Jóska Soós was born in 1921 in Hungary. At a very young age, he became an apprentice of a local practitioner, an old man named Tamas Bacsí. As his disciple, Jóska observed the shamanistic healing methods of his teacher, who initiated him into his traditional shamanistic knowledge. His extraordinary memories were later recorded in a book by Robert Hartzema.⁵

Due to the outbreak of World War II, he had to leave Hungary and was forced to work in Germany until the end of the war. In 1946, after living in the Netherlands for several months, he moved to Charleroi in Belgium. There, he worked in the coal-mines of Marcinelle for about five years and became a Belgian citizen. The darkness in the mines turned

4. A very short biography was also published in the chapter on shamanism of the visitor's guide of the museum: Leen Beyers et.al., *MAS gids* (Antwerpen: BAI/MAS, 2011), 166.

5. Hartzema, *Ik genees niet, ik herstel de harmonie*, 11–84.



Jóska Soós giving a workshop in his early years as a shaman. (Photo credit: Monique Franken).

out to be the perfect location for experiencing altered states of consciousness and quite soon, he started to reflect upon his shamanic journeys in his art. As such, this period can be considered as the starting point of his future work as a shamanic artist.

In 1965 he moved to Brussels, where he started his own studio and explored new techniques and styles. In the course of a severe marriage crisis in the course of 1975–1976, Jóska created and painted his personal shamanic drum. From 1976 onwards, he started to lead shamanic séances for whoever asked him for help. Shortly after, he also started giving lectures and workshops in which he explained his personal worldview from a shamanic and artistic angle. He also received media attention on Belgian and Dutch radio and television.⁶ Several works he created during his years in Brussels were acquired for the collection of the Belgian state.⁷

In 1988, he moved to Merksem, near Antwerp in Belgium. For around twenty years, he lived and worked as a shaman and artist in this urban context, leading séances in his house up until a few years before his death. His art works changed dramatically in these last twenty years,

6. On March 26, 1982, an interview, “Genezen met klank” (Healing with sound), was broadcast on Dutch Radio 4 (VPRO) by journalist Walter Slossen. It is available online at <http://walterslosse.wordpress.com/2011/09/13/s-van-sjamaan>. Twelve years earlier, the Belgian French-speaking television (RTBF) broadcast a television documentary titled “Peintre chamaniste,” 11 November 1970.

7. One painting is in the collection of the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Brussels (Marcinelle, Vue sur Châtelet, 1955, inv.nr. 8420), fourteen drawings are in the collection of the Royal Library of Belgium (inv.nrs. S.V. 85206 and 85207, S.V. 86075–86077, F. 12669–12675, S.V. 96830–96834).

since he started working with acrylic paint on canvas. He died at the age of 87 in a nursing home in Zoersel (Antwerp).

The fact that Soós worked as a shaman and artist in Antwerp was the first element to link him to the museum presentation on shamanism. His example illustrated perfectly that shamanism can in fact survive in an urban and multicultural context like Antwerp. Soós was also one of the leading shamans within the wider regions, and is considered by some as a pioneer for contemporary shamanism in Antwerp, Belgium and the Netherlands.⁸

Another element of selection in the museum presentation was the world view of Jóska Soós, which clearly illustrates the way even contemporary shaman is connected to more traditional forms of shamanism throughout the world. Soós defined four major pillars for his shamanic worldview, which defined both his rituals and his ritual objects.

In every workshop, interview or conversation on shamanism, Jóska Soós always referred to this personal shamanic world view. The four principles formed a special sentence—a sacred text—to him, which he consistently repeated at the start of every séance and in every lecture on shamanism. These principles defined him as a shaman-artist and had a deep influence on the ritual objects he chose for his séances⁹.

The first basic principle was described as: “sound, stemming from the fact that everything in the universe vibrates. The secret of all knowledge and the knowledge of all secrets is in us and available to us. To make the human divine, to make the mortal immortal and to spiritualize matter.”

The second principle consisted of seven shamanistic blessings: “peace, health, joy, light, serenity, contentment and love.” These blessings and the elements of the first principle were mentioned in the same way in every ritual, at the beginning and end of every séance he conducted. They mostly functioned as keywords for the shaman as well as the participant(s) of the séances.

The third pillar stated, “Never may the shaman rebel or revolt, but he must keep on searching for an alternative peaceful solution.” It referred

8. Just recently, Jeroen W. Boekhoven (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen) published his doctoral dissertation titled ‘Genealogies of Shamanism’. He mentions the role of certain contemporary shamans in the rise of shamanism in the Netherlands and tries to set out a ‘genealogy’ of pioneers for contemporary shamanism in the Netherlands. As the first and one of the most important figures and role-models for contemporary shamans, he mentions Jóska Soós. This is discussed in: Jeroen W. Boekhoven. *Genealogies of Shamanism. Struggles for power, charisma and authority*. (Barkhuis: Eelde, 2011), 260-261.

9 Tamara Ingels. *Jóska Soós (°1921): Kunstenaar en sjamaan* (MA thesis, Free University of Brussels, 1999), 22-36.

to the well-known, non-aggressive adaptability of shamanism and explained for the shaman—in accordance with the fourth pillar—the reason why shamanism is present all over the world.

The fourth and last pillar mentioned, “The shaman has to know that he can be lonely as a spiritual person, but that he is never abandoned. The shaman is connected with everything and everything is connected to him.” This last pillar refers not only to Soós’s idea that shamanism—at least for him—functioned as a root element for religiosity. Although the shaman-artist never confirmed the influence, his four pillars seem to be related to theosophical ideas. This aspect has not yet been subject for further research.

Ritual Objects

In all cultures where shamanism appears, shamans make use of several ritual and symbolic objects during their séances¹⁰. Jóska Soós used a drum, singing bowls (and other Tibetan Buddhist ritual objects) and a wide range of vocal tones and guttural song in his practice. All of the objects produced special sounds and vibrations (in accordance with his first principle, sound), which were used to enhance certain altered states of consciousness in himself and his visitors.

During the course of his life, Soós incorporated many different spiritual elements and objects in his work as a shaman and shamanic artist. He took his inspiration from local folk culture in Euro-Asiatic Hungary, runic symbols, and spiritual heritage of ancient Egyptian priests, Celtic druids, Manchu priests, and Indian Brahmins. However, the ritual objects and meditative recitations of Tibetan Buddhism came to appeal to him the most.¹¹ Although the different influences have been defined, further research is needed to document the influence of these spiritual aspects on Soós’ shamanism.

In 1995, during a visit to Soós’ home, the Hungarian anthropologist and filmmaker Mihály Hoppál made a documentary on his life and work as a shaman and artist. This film, *The Shamanic Painter*, is one of the few in which the shaman not only vividly demonstrates, but also

10. Mihály Hoppál. “Shamanism: Universal Structures and Regional Symbols,” in Mihály Hoppál and Keith Howard, eds., *Shamans and Cultures*, (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1993), 181–192.

11. Tamara Ingels, “A Tribute to Jóska Soós,” in *Shamanhood and its Art, The 10th Conference of the International Society for Shamanistic Research, 5-9 October 2011, Abstracts*. (Warsaw: The State Ethnographic Museum of Warsaw, The Institute of Eastern Studies of the University of Poznań, Polish Institute of World Art Studies, 2011) 32–33.

explains his worldview, the form of his rituals, and the different uses of his ritual objects.¹² They discussed the objects and the composition of the shaman's altar in Hungarian, the native language of both men. Although Jóska Soós also spoke Dutch, French, and German, he expressed himself most vividly in Hungarian.

In order to demonstrate the his séances, the museum presentation also includes significant fragments of this beautiful documentary. It is a very good source to illustrate the vivid séances to the visitors. One can see and hear Jóska reciting principles of his worldview at the start of his séance, playing his drum rhythmically, but also playing his singing bowls, blowing his conch shell and using other ritual objects.

A Primary Instrument: The Shaman's Drum

During conversations with the shaman and by studying several videotapes made during some of his séances, it became clear that the drum was the most vital instrument in the séances of Jóska Soós.

Apart from the four pillars described in his world view, Soós also documented another aspect of his world view in the painting on his drum. He divided the painting into three horizontal parts (or layers) – which he described as the underworld, the middle world, and the upper world – interconnected with a central axis. Examples of similar ideas and images of three layered world view were already described by Eliade.¹³ Janckovics also describes depictions of similar three-layered world views in Siberian shaman drums, which can also be connected to diverse creation myths.¹⁴ Hoppál also described several examples of shaman drums with similar depictions.¹⁵

The vertical lines also symbolically divide the realms into dualistic parts, represented by e.g. stylized signs for the male and female (in the middle) and the sun and the moon (in the upper part). These large signs in each of the created zones refer to elements characteristic of the three worlds, the upper zone is also enriched by a stylized sign symbolizing the polar star.¹⁶

12. *The Shamanic Painter*, directed by Mihály Hoppál (Budapest: Shaman ISSR Production, 1995) 36 min.

13. Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 259.

14. M. Jankovics. "Cosmic Models and Siberian Shaman Drums," in *Shamanism in Eurasia, Part I*, ed. Mihály Hoppál (Göttingen: Herodot, 1984), 15.

15. Mihály Hoppál. *Schamanen und Schamanismus* (Augsburg: Pattloch, 1994), 129, 137, 147.

16. In several interviews, I discussed the function and symbolism of the drum with Jóska Soós. See: Ingels. *Kunstenaar en sjamaan*, 29–33; Ingels. *Shaman and Artist*, 24–29;



A still from the documentary in the MAS display. Jóska is drumming intensely and singing closely to the drum skin. He is in a meditative seating position and in front of him are the singing bowls he played.

Jóska usually drummed whilst in a seated position, enabling him to sing guttural sounds to his drum, caress it with his fingers, and use it as a shield to protect himself or others. In the ceremony, the drum represented the four directions of the wind and the four elements (earth, wind, fire and water) and the duality of everything around us (male and female, good and evil, etc.). Playing the drum rhythmically not only enhanced an altered state of consciousness in both the shaman and his participant(s) in the séance, drumming also connected to the shaman's first principle of sound and vibration. The drum was the leading instrument in the séance, while the other instruments, such as the sound bowls, gong, rattles, flutes, etc. were used to reinforce the ritual. In a way, drumming and playing his other instruments was also a kind of sound therapy.¹⁷

Tamara Ingels, "Jóska Soós. A Shaman as Artist," in *Shamanism in the Interdisciplinary Context. Papers from the 6th Conference of the International Society for Shamanistic Research, Viljandi, Estonia, August 2001*, ed. Paul Firnhaber and Art Leete (Boca Raton: BrownWalker Press, 2004), 149-169

17. J.C. Fächner describes the use of drums, monotonous repetitive sounds, and

As mentioned above, a crisis in his personal life triggered the need to create a shamanic drum of his own. He initiated and painted his first drum with very personal signs and symbols, which document his own world view as a kind of symbolic map, a tradition known to many shamans throughout the world.¹⁸ At the end of the 1970s, he started to lead his first public séances by using this drum. In 1980,



his drum was seriously damaged during a séance. *The first drum skin, 1976. (Photo credit: Private collection, used with permission.)*

The skin broke, but the painting remained intact. This event forced him to stretch a new skin on the drum and paint it with similar (but more elaborated) symbols and signs. Although there are slight stylistic differences between the skins, they look very much alike.

The drum—in fact the broken skin of Jóska Soós' first drum—is positioned as the central piece of the museum presentation. It functions as a contemporary example of a painted shaman's drum. The drum also forms a representative example of the many signs and symbols the artist incorporated in all of his works.

Other Ritual Instruments

The second most important set of ritual objects in the séances of Jóska Soós were the singing bowls (fig.9). He became acquainted with their sound and function during several visits he made to Tibetan monks living in London in 1988. In his personal séances, the bowls represent the

sound bowls as instruments in music therapy in "Time is the Key: Music and Altered States of Consciousness," in *Altering Consciousness: Multidisciplinary Perspectives: Volume 1: History, Culture and the Humanities*, ed. Etzel Cardeña and Michael Winkelman (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011), 359–60.

18. Beautiful examples were recorded in Siberia, see e.g. M. Jankovics, "Cosmic Models and Siberian Shaman Drums," in *Shamanism in Eurasia: Part I*, ed. Mihály Hoppál (Göttingen, Herodot, 1984), 149–163. The iconography of the spirit figures shows many similarities with the figures in the works of Jóska Soós.

element sound, in accordance with the first principle mentioned above ("the main issue is sound").

Next to this symbolic function they also had several practical uses. He often used them to evoke an altered state of consciousness, but thanks to the strong vibrations these bowls produce when played, he often used them to give a kind of "sound massage" during or after his séances. The order in which the bowls were arranged was vital to him, and a specific sound pattern was often noticed although he seemed to play them randomly. This pattern was a result of the way the bowls were arranged in front of the seated shaman, starting with the largest bowls on the left, to the smallest bowls on his right. He played the bowls with several kinds of sticks, producing soft or sharp tones, and would place water or stones in them to change their sounds. He often used his lip and mouth to alter their sound and vibration.

Apart from this important set of ritual objects, Soós also used several other instruments to enrich his rituals with different kinds of sounds. Most of these objects originated from Buddhist and Tibetan Buddhist traditions. Some objects were used in specific types of rituals, others would be used as part of every ritual. Blowing a big conch shell (fig. 4) was regarded by the shaman as a reproduction of the "human sound" or the "primal sound,"¹⁹ and he used the deep sound as a shamanistic salute at the beginning and ending of every ritual.

He also made use of several types of bells, cymbals and flutes, which represented the element air. Most of these objects originated from the Himalayan mountain region and India.

Several shakers referred to the element of water, like rain and water flowing in rivers and streams. Rattles were used to reproduce the sound of crackling fire.

During his séances Jóska Soós never wore a special costume, apart from amulets around his neck made from metal, bone, or other organic materials. Some of them can be seen in figs. 4 and 10.

All ritual objects were demonstrated by the shaman in the film *The Shamanic Painter*. The film clips in the presentation give an insight in the different stages of the séance and the use of the different ritual objects. Since the shaman also played the different instruments, visitors can experience the strange sounds these objects produced during the séance. The film also gives an insight in the construction of the shaman's altar and the way he used his drum.

19. Hartzema, *Jóska Soós. Ik genees niet*, 122.



Jóska Soós playing a singing bowl and capturing the sound with his mouth. By changing the position of his lips, he influenced the sound waves of the bowls. (Photo credit: Monique Franken)

A Ritual Form of Art.

Apart from the ritual objects, Soós also left a huge production of art works. During his entire life, right up until the last few months, he was actively drawing and painting.

For the shaman-artist, the works consistently related to his shamanic experiences. The titles, as well as the images and symbols, referred in the first place to his experiences and encounters during his séances. Through his art work, he transferred—even translated—parts of his visionary world. The artist himself constantly referred to the fact that he had truly ‘lived’ his works and it is in this context that they could also be seen as ritual objects:

The art on its own is a ritual to me. I experience my works on a higher level than just seeing what is represented by it, I experience them on the three levels that I have already experienced myself: the physical, psychological and spiritual level. I mostly use anatomically recognizable things: the representation of human beings, animals and even plants, but to me

they all have a strong symbolic value. The paintings connect me with the light, sound and colour I experience during the ritual.²⁰

Several works remained on the walls of his house for years, whereas others were quickly stored away. Those remaining longest in view were the ones which helped him most to come in contact with the shamanic realms. He often donated small drawings to séance participants, as a kind of remembrance to the event.

Soós' oeuvre is mostly figurative. The human figure is often represented as a simplified bust. In spite of a strict stylization, basic features like head, eyes, mouth and the upper part of the torso remain recognizable. Head, shoulders and chest are often surrounded by some kind of light radiation, filled with various colors and motives. In the titles of the works, words like *fetich* (mascot), *esprit* (spirit), and *totem* appear frequently. These words may be considered as defining key-words in the oeuvre, relating to the shaman's observations and experiences. As such, the radiant figures in the center of most works reflect his own visionary images of totems and ancestors: it is especially their power, radiation, and naivety which are of the utmost importance.

Through the years, the artist developed a stylistic pluralism, which was strengthened by using various working methods and techniques. Some works show strictly geometric forms, whilst other works exist of more organic and spontaneous forms.

Most figures in the works are accompanied by strange and unreadable signs. The artist always referred to them as "magic signs," He started using them in his earliest drawings in 1945 as a kind of automatic drawing; later he incorporated them into his shamanic practice and the painting on his drum. In some works the signs became recognizable symbols (e.g., sun and moon); in other works the signs remained unreadable. In his later years, he elaborated the signs into more complex structures of lines and circles. An example of this elaboration can be seen when one compares the drum paintings from 1976 and 1980 (figs 5–6).

Making the signs was linked to a memory in his youth, in which he saw his teacher draw magical signs during séances. For him, the unreadable signs also functioned as a translation of the sounds he experienced during his séances – and as such these signs were connected to his first principle of sound. The artist often stated that reading the signs was not important; it was up to the viewer to interpret them into a personal message. In their automatic character, the signs may also hold a reference to the idea of automatism used by the surrealists.

In many works one can find traces of special numbers. The artist often

20. Ingels, *Shaman and Artist*, 35.

played with numerological references and connected several meanings to them, often from several religious and spiritual ideas, like Tibetan Buddhism, Christianity and Hinduism. As such, he often wanted to explain the interconnectedness of cultures and religions, but also the connection of the shaman with everything around him (his fourth pillar). An example can be found in his drum, where the four colors on the sides refers to the four elements as well as the four directions of the wind. For example, number seven, started with his seven blessings during séances and includes seven rays which were often depicted around the heads of anthropomorphic figures, etc. One could presume a possible theosophical influence, although this has not yet been examined fully, nor in academic literature, nor in the museum presentation. However, this could definitely give new insights into the life and work of the shaman-artist and can be considered as a possible research theme for future research and exhibitions.

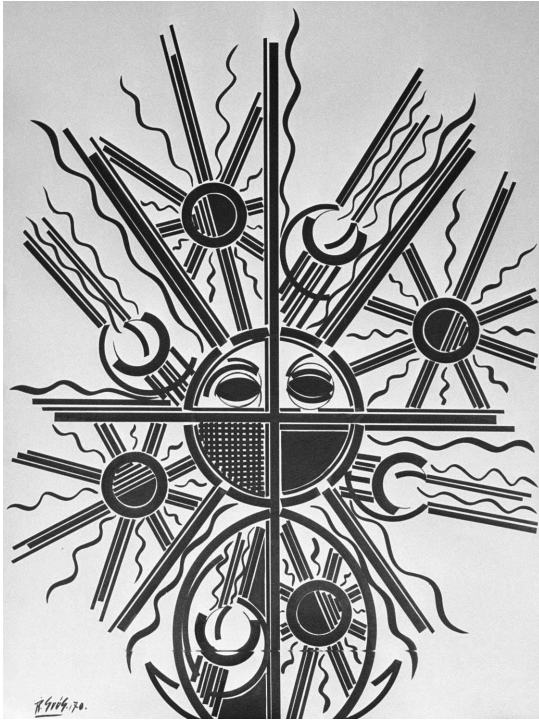
Since the museum presentation was not meant to become a retrospective exhibition, but as an example of contemporary shamanism and shamanic art in an urban context, only a few artworks could be chosen. Although Soós' entire oeuvre was an illustration of his shamanic experiences, the emphasis was placed on representative art works which clearly translate the key elements as stated above. Eventually, only three art works could be chosen, representing both earlier work and later works, made whilst he was living in Antwerp. The works clearly show the stylistic changes in his oeuvre, starting from simple drawings with Chinese ink through more complex and colorful paintings with acrylic paint on canvas.

The drawing titled "*Esprit de l'arbre androgyne*" (1970) is his oldest work in the museum exhibit. It typifies his style from the 1950s onward, up until the late 1970s. Its title refers to the central "spirit" figure, a typical stylized anthropomorphic figure, depicted from head to shoulders. The figure is surrounded with complex patterns of straight and wavy lines, accompanied by symbols of the sun and the moon, which he used as archetypal representations of both male and female qualities of the androgynous figure.

Other aspects of the figure, for example, the large eyes, also refer to its dualism – a quality many of his figures had in this period. He often connected these to looking inward (introspection) and looking outside, into the world(s) beyond.²¹ In the MAS display, two works painted in acrylic on canvas typify the period he was living and working in Antwerp.²²

21 Ibid., 41.

22 The works "*Entité lumineuse sonore*" (1988) and "*Chamanesse transfigurée*"



Esprit de l'arbre Androgyne, 1970, Chinese ink on paper, 81 x 60 cm., in private collection

"Entité lumineuse sonore," the older one, was created in 1988. The second one dates from 1995. Both works show anthropomorphic figures, which are even more stylized than the figures in previous periods. The black lines he used in his earlier drawings are now replaced by radiant white and colorful lines, as if the figures were emerging from the light. Although the composition of the figures can be compared with figures in earlier works, the use of acrylic paint and stencils changed his style in a dramatic way from 1988 onwards.

He often called the figures "creatures of light" or "light-beings," referring to the visionary inspired images and strong effects of light, color and radiation in the works. To the shaman-artist, these works also had a much deeper meaning: "The figure consists of lines of power and radiation. These works are not just light, they combine light and sound. I think of music when I see these works, and one could say that the beings of light are also beings of sound"²³. The effects of light and sound can remind one of the effects of ecstasy, hallucinations, entopic phenomena and perceptual distortions described in several research cases on altered states of consciousness²⁴.

sonore (prima-vera)" are changed from time to time: they alternate in periods of six months up to one year.

²³ Ingels. *Kunstenaar en sjamaan*, 37.

²⁴ Ronald Siegel and Louis J. West collected research and descriptions of forms, color, movement and imagery of hallucinatory phenomena; see their edited collection *Hallucinations. Behavior, Experience and Theory*. (New York: John Wiley, 1975), 141–45. Recently, new research contributions on drug-induced and non-drug induced altered

The figure in "Chamaneesse transfigurée sonore (prima-vera)" (1995) is enriched with radiating structures of circles and curved lines that spread out from the head. The artist gave a symbolic meaning to this work: "The 'prima-vera' represents spring and the feminine light being. That's why I've painted it on a green background. The rays of light consist of a combination of yellow, pink and white, creating a blaze of light."²⁵ The central figure still refers to



the figures appearing in earlier works, 80 cm., in private collection e.g. "Esprit de l'arbre androgyne."

Although some of Jóska Soós' works are held in a large number of private collections and some museum collections, there never was a full focus on both his shamanic and artistic activities. Exhibitions on shamanism are quite rare in Belgium and the Netherlands, and mentioning urban shamanism in a museum context is even more rare.²⁶ As such, we

states of consciousness were collected in Etzel Cardéña and Michael Winkelman, eds., *Altering Consciousness: Multidisciplinary Perspective*. (Santa Barbara: Praeger), 2011.

25. Ingels, *Shaman and Artist*, 59..

26. In 1997, a content study was made in preparation for the exhibition "Van Siberië tot Cyberspace" (Tropenmuseum Amsterdam, 1997-1998) by Fred Gales and Tjebbe van Tijen. In this document, Jóska Soós was also mentioned as "one of the most important teachers of Dutch neoshamans." See: Fred Gales and Tjebbe van Tijen, *Nedersjamanen in neoland, rapport in opdracht van het Tropenmuseum voor de komende tentoonstelling Van Siberië tot Cyberspace* (Amsterdam: Imaginary Museum Projects, 1997), 21-22. (<http://imaginarymuseum.org/KIT1/KITsjam.html>, 10/01/2012.

may conclude Jóska is the first urban shaman in Belgium included in a presentation on shamanism within a major museum with a focus on both art and anthropology.

Since much more and interdisciplinary academic research is needed to document Soós' life and his contribution to contemporary shamanism, this presentation can be seen as a new opening towards more research. New research has already been initiated, based upon the letters, writings, and documents he left behind in his extensive archive. The results will be included in a future retrospective exhibition, which will go deeper into the shamanic message within the art works and the growth of the oeuvre throughout his life. However, in order to document and understand Soós' shamanism even further, it will be necessary to explore his insights on shamanism and his art works from many more different and interdisciplinary points of view.

Conclusion

The exhibition *The World in Antwerp, Antwerp in the World* in the MAS includes a theme presentation on shamanism. The exhibition focuses on the history of the city, and Jóska Soós is used as an example of a contemporary shaman living and working in an urban context. Although some of his works are present in a large number of private collections and some museum collections, there never was a full focus in a museum presentation on both his shamanic and artistic activities.

Consequently, the MAS is the first museum to consider both aspects of his life and work and to openly include a contemporary and Western European form of shamanism within a museum presentation on the presence shamanism throughout the world. The objects chosen in the presentation all refer to his personal world view, the content and course of his personal shamanic rituals and the interrelation shamanism and his art works. These give us an insight in how shamanism is capable to survive – even in an urban context.

Although his oeuvre has been studied and documented for many years, the museum presentation is a much needed stimulus for new and interdisciplinary research and future museum exhibitions upon the influences in his shamanic approach and his artworks.

However, the exhibition and its catalogue only slightly discussed contemporary forms of shamans and clearly avoided naming shamans in the Netherlands and Belgium. Alexandra Rosenbohm, et.al. *Wat bezielt de sjamaan. Genezing-Extase-Kunst* (Amsterdam: Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen), 1997.

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