The Art of Hungary
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Hungarian Art: A Century of Rebellion and Revival

Hungarian Photography

Sylvia Plachy: The Hungarian Connection

Szilárd Cseke: Gone Too Far

October 18, 2016 – January 8, 2017
Boca Raton Museum of Art
Introduction

The Boca Raton Museum of Art presents a suite of four exhibitions celebrating the art of Hungary from the turn of the century to the present. Together these exhibitions celebrate the unique character of Hungarian art and provide a fascinating visual journey through the turbulent decades of the twentieth century leading up to the 1956 Revolution and the sixty years of repression, reform, and renewal that have since passed.

The artwork presented in Hungarian Art: A Century of Rebellion and Revival is generously on loan from the renowned collection of Nancy G. Brinker, former U.S. Ambassador to Hungary. She began her collection of Hungarian art during her tenure from 2001 to 2003, and it is now one of the most important of its kind in private hands. The exhibition also includes loans from an anonymous Hungarian private collection, Dr. Richard Merkin, and Peter Kulloi. József Rippl-Rónai, Béla Uitz, Sándor Bortnyik, István Farkas, István Nádler, and László Fehér are just a few of the artists represented in the more than 70 works, dating from the early to late 20th century, forming this unprecedented exhibition. A Century of Rebellion and Revival is guest curated by Eva Forgacs, PhD, Art Center College of Design, Pasadena. The work is further contextualized in the accompanying essay by Dr. Steven Mansbach, Distinguished University Professor and Professor of the History of Twentieth-Century Art at the University of Maryland.

In partnership with the Hungarian Museum of Photography, an international repository of over one million objects, we are also able to present an historical sweep of the history of photography in Hungary spanning the twentieth century. Péter Baki, director of this prominent museum, has curated an exhibition of more than thirty works including photographs by André Kertész, László Moholy-Nagy, Brassai, Robert Capa, Gábor Kerekes, and Márton Munkácsi, offering a close look at those who remained in Hungary for their careers and those who traveled through Europe and the US offering distinct approaches to the medium and representing key moments in modern art.

Sylvia Plachy: The Hungarian Connection features an overview of Plachy’s career thus far. She was born in Budapest in 1943, but she and her parents were forced to flee to Austria after the 1956 Hungarian Revolution was crushed. Two years later they immigrated to New York where she still resides. In 1964 when Plachy finally became a US citizen she was able to return to Hungary for the first time in search of the ghosts of her childhood. Plachy subsequently became staff photographer for the Village Voice, has published many books and her work has appeared in the New York Times, The New Yorker, Fortune and other publications. Her fellow Hungarian, the legendary photographer André Kertész, was a friend and mentor and Plachy is often credited as his artistic heir for her poetic street photography.

As a coda to the suite of exhibitions, the Museum presents Szilárd Cseke: Gone Too Far. Cseke lives and works in Budapest and is one of the most important figures in Hungarian and European contemporary art. He represented Hungary in the 2015 Venice Biennale and won the Munkácsy Prize, the most prestigious award in the visual arts in Hungary. His interactive kinetic installations are metaphors for the very timely issues of migration and identity.

We thank Barbara Rogoff for her knowledge and management of the Brinker Collection; Christopher Ball for spearheading the involvement of Quinnipiac University; Ani Molnár Gallery for their assistance with the art of Szilárd Cseke; Attila Pócze of Vintage Galeria for his assistance with presenting the photographs of Hungary; and, the Boca Museum’s curatorial and registrar staff, Kelli Bodle, Martin Hanahan, Kathy Goncharov, Marisa J Pascucci, and Lanya Snyder.

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The Birth of Modern Hungary

The Aftermath of the 1867 Compromise with the Habsburgs

Becoming part of the dual Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Kingdom of Hungary embarked on a road to modernization after the deadly period of Austrian retaliation following the 1848 Hungarian Revolution and war of independence. During this period of Realpolitik, Hungarian nobles concluded a compromise with the House of the Habsburgs and crowned Emperor Franz Joseph as King of Hungary in 1867. The resulting Hungarian “historical classes,” made up of both the high and lower nobility, greeted the country’s ensuing period of rapid industrialization — although inevitable — as a mixed blessing.

Budapest, the region’s dynamically developing capital city, along with evidence of its increasing wealth and growing middle class, was celebrated by many artists who represented scenes of modern urban life in styles connected to Impressionism and Post-Impressionism as well as with the more home-grown Art Nouveau movement. The emergence of a nouveau riche class that included both Germans and Jews, however, was controversial in the eyes of the Hungarian gentry. Paintings exhibited in this section evoke the spirit of progress enjoyed during this era — from 1867 to about 1905 — and display such French-inspired art trends as Impressionism and Realism. Some of the works are closer in spirit to Romanticism by celebrating nostalgia for country life as opposed to Budapest's urban modernity. Other works, especially paintings by the Nagybánya circle (named after the village in which the artists worked) indicate a keen and facile absorption of the Impressionist style.
Modern art was challenging from the beginning and was everywhere embattled. But this was to be expected, and was often welcomed, as the avant-garde stridently rejected the prevailing social order and its aesthetic norms in favor of a projected, often idealized, purity. Although what was understood as purity differed in time and place, it was universally informed by an abiding faith in the redemptive power of a new art committed to correct the wrongs of society and the shortcomings of human nature. At the same time, the new art strived to free painting, sculpture, architecture, and design from the constraints of their own history.

In order to effect such profound and lasting changes in society, in art, and most dramatically in human behavior, artists pursued a host of new styles; they developed new means of addressing audiences; and they recast the visual arts into a totalizing world view. On a few square inches of canvas or paper, or in the three dimensions of sculpture or architecture, designers sought to envision a perfect reality where the complications, contradictions, and conflicts of man and his often tragic history might be resolved. Naturally, this was a heady and ambitious objective and was marked by contention between various groups of modernists, each of which projected its own analysis of the problems as well as daring solutions to them. Perhaps, no group of forward-seers was more audacious than the Hungarian avant-garde. Both those artists active during the first third of the twentieth-century, as well as later generations, engaged in some of the most dynamic aesthetic experiments and social activities to have been witnessed anywhere, as the current exhibition documents so vividly.

The Hungarians were not alone in their commitment to create a new means of seeing, and ultimately a new way of behaving. Yet, they were among the most inventive and articulate of the artists who saw in a striking modern art a new way of envisioning, and then precipitating, a better world. Artists who belonged to the Hungarian group of The Eight [Nyolcak in Hungarian], many of whom were influenced both by the modernism of Paul Cezanne and by the radical philosophy of Georg Lukács, were eager to rebel against the conservative values and tastes of their fathers’ generation. The Eight, who had first called themselves, appropriately, The Seekers, represented artists of various temperaments, all of whom advanced various anti-traditional styles, even if they seized upon quite conventional subject matter: landscapes, nudes, and still life, among them. In this the Hungarians might be compared to the exactly contemporary Czech band bearing the same name, The Eight [Osma, in Czech]. Both groups wished to show the inherited world in a state of spiritual decline, and each brought together young artists from all parts of the respective country — the Czech lands of the Austro-Hungarian Empire as well as those regions subject to the Hungarian crown — with diverse stylistic affinities. What united these groups of Central Europeans, as well as their contemporaries among the German and Austrian Expressionists and the various like-minded modernists in the Baltic lands, was a general feeling of profound disquiet that only a new art might portray and through which a remedy could be visualized. The Bohemian Bohumil Kubišta’s engagement with an iconography of moral suffering, physical pain, [Kubišta, St. Sebastian, 1912, oil on canvas, National Gallery, Prague] and uncontrolled violence was a Czech counterpart to the Hungarian Lajos Tihanyi or Róbert Berény’s fascination with expressionist color, physionogmic distortion, and emotional immediacy. These artists and their confederates, as well as their opposite number in Germany, Latvia, Poland, and Estonia, portrayed in their startling canvases redemptive imagery for what they considered an etiolated cultural and political order.
The First World War unleashed the very tensions modern artists throughout Europe — Futurists in Italy, Expressionists in the German and the Austro-Hungarian Empires, and Suprematists in Imperial Russia — had been fomenting in the years preceding the outbreak of hostilities. By the conclusion of World War I, the cultural, political, and spiritual landscape had altered profoundly. For Hungarians, in particular, the conclusion of combat brought unprecedented changes geographically, emotionally, and aesthetically. The once-large multi-national kingdom was reduced to a rump state, whose diminished spiritual and physical dimensions soon led to a short-lived soviet republic for which many of the avant-garde contributed supportive posters, founded proletarian art schools, and produced engagé canvases, such as Sándor Bortnyik’s Red Locomotive (1918). Similar revolutionary art was created within both the defeated erstwhile Central Powers as well as in the newly-created nations, and in Bolshevik Russia. In Germany, a host of left-wing artist groups emerged during the early years of the Weimar Republic, with radical associations of artists active in Cologne, Dusseldorf, Munich, and Berlin, among other mostly urban centers. In the newly-constituted Czechoslovakia, where Osma/The Eight had flourished in Prague before the war, committed leftist artists, such as the Constructivist theoretician-architect-painter-graphic designer-agitator Karel Teige, the cubist Josef Čapek, and the dynamic Surrealists Toyon [Marie Cermínová] and Jindrich Štyrský [Štyrský, The Trauma of Birgh, 1936, oil on canvas, private collection — image to be secured through the Institute of Art History of Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague] pursued a modern art of liberation — of the spirit, of the individual, and ultimately of the state–free from
the constraints of the past. Similarly, the recently reconstituted Poland encouraged its modern artists to represent the new reality of a free, post-partition nation, whose various ethnic groups were now free to express their native character while contributing to the multi-national sovereign state. Anti-Romantic artists from formerly Russian-controlled Lwów (now in Ukraine) joined with representatives from the Bunt (Rebellion) group, who came from previously Prussian Poznania, to create new forms of Expressionism through which to combat the conservative strains of impressionism and naturalism in Polish culture.

[August Zamoyski, cover design for journal Zdroj (Source), 1918, New York Public Library] Bunt, like kindred Hungarian and Czech formations, was united more by general theoretical affinities and self-interest than by a systematic program or homogeneous aesthetic world view. Likewise, Poland’s Jung Idysz (Young Yiddish), formed after the armistice of November 1918, was the organizational vehicle for a diverse range of Jewish modernists, some of whom took advantage of political enfranchisement to articulate a distinctive “Jewish art,” while others capitalized on new artistic and political freedoms in order to strive for social integration. Both impulses drew upon German, Hungarian, and Czech Expressionist currents for their visual vocabulary. Perhaps, it was in the sphere of abstract art that Polish modernism registered its greatest triumphs, although its most accomplished innovators—Władysław Strzeminski and Katyrzina Kobro (and the Polish-Lithuanian Vytautas Kairiukštis Suprematist Composition, 1922-23, oil on canvas, Lithuanian Art Museum, Vilnius) were indebted especially to the pioneering Suprematist canvases and theoretical ruminations of Kasimir Malevich and his Constructivist confederates in Russia, as well as to the Hungarians László Moholy-Nagy and Lajos Kassák, and to Piet Mondrian and his fellow members of the Dutch De Stijl Group.

While the 1920s and early 1930s constituted modernism’s maturity as a new system of aesthetic and social redemption was being promoted throughout Europe, ranging from the Baltic to
the Balkans and from the Atlantic Ocean to the Ural Mountains, Hungary was mostly an exception. Many of the nation’s greatest figures, especially those who had supported the 133 days of communist rule in 1919, went into exile as soon as an ultramontane regime consolidated its authority in Budapest by 1920. In Berlin, Weimar, Vienna, and Moscow, among other locations, Hungarian modern artists continued to advocate through their innovative paintings, graphics, and sculpture for a new world that promised to give birth to a new mankind. Most often these exilic artists worked under financially and socially trying conditions. However, by the mid-1920s, encouraged by a general amnesty offered by the right-wing Hungarian government, a flood of native artists repatriated. Upon their return to Budapest, the artists had to contend with both a regime and an intellectual climate no longer interested in modern art and with little patience for those who still championed revolutionary aesthetics. Thus, while most of Europe tolerated, if not always encouraged, modern art, Hungary was anomalous in abjuring it. As a result, an aesthetic "neo-conservatism" supplanted the earlier phases of radical styles and content. With occasional exceptions, such as the Hungarian version of the German Bauhaus and vital architectural design and graphic arts activities, Hungarian art surrendered the utopian ambitions that had animated it earlier and that continued to prompt movements and individuals throughout Western and East-Central Europe. Ironically, Russia, which had originally inspired Hungary’s and all of Central Europe’s abstractionists also officially abandoned a radical modernism in favor of an aesthetic reactionary realism, although for rather different political reasons.

The comparative conservatism affecting art and defining politics was patent by the mid-1930s throughout Europe. The climate for stylistic experimentation and utopian aspirations that
had characterized the visual arts from Tallinn to Lisbon and from Berlin to Belgrade had subsided in the face of the rise of authoritarianism almost universally. Thus the retreat from progressive art that took place in Hungary during the early 1920s had expanded to Europe at large by the mid-1930s. And with the outbreak of World War II in 1939, there was even less latitude for idealistic modern artists to exhibit or to promote their often pacific world view.

Within a couple years of the defeat of Nazi Germany and its allies (including Hungary), the victorious Soviet Union had extended its dominion over much of Central and Eastern Europe, whereas a medley of mostly liberally democratic governments was elected in Western Europe. This political division between East and West would have signal consequences for the course of modern art. Modernism itself did not disappear in the countries subject to soviet directives regarding culture. Rather, innovative, challenging, and not infrequently politicized art continued to be created, even if necessarily exhibited clandestinely. Surrealism persevered in Poland; Constructivism continued in Hungary; Expressionism existed in Eastern Germany; and other ‘isms’ were pursued in the East Bloc from the Baltic north to the Yugoslav south. Even in the U.S.S.R. modernism maintained a potent, if frequently underground, presence. In most of the region, realism predominated, and not just because it was the favored idiom of the authorities. As in the West, representational art had a resurgence of genuine popularity which extended from Pop Art to
more naturalistic styles. At the same time, however, abstraction was never eclipsed. In Hungary, for instance, hard-edged and lyrical non-figurative art [as in the work of Imre Bak and István Nádler] took place at the same time as the work of Ellsworth Kelly [Kelly, Gray with White, 1978, Fondation Beyeler] and Mark Rothko, among a multitude of others, achieved wide success in the U.S. and Western Europe.

Principally through journals and reproductions, artists in the East were surprisingly aware of developments in the West, although the reverse was far less true. Of course, there were émigrés from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary (especially following the Revolution of 1956), East Germany, and other lands under soviet suzerainty who served as intermediaries between East and West. Nonetheless, what is important to register here is how styles that may have struck a Western audience as universal were inflected to respond to specific historical and cultural circumstances of the respective nations to the East. Thus the Pop Art from communist Estonia or Hungary may appear to be stylistically related to that exhibited by Andy Warhol or James Rosenquist, but the former’s references and resonances were intentionally oriented to local realities, as the mass consumer culture characteristic of the West, and the very matrix from which Western Pop artists drew, did not exist in the communist bloc of the period [Harro Koskinen The Pig Attacks, 1969, Tallinn, KUMU Museum]. Hence, it is essential to keep in mind that modern styles promoted as transnational in the West were embraced critically in the East so that they could be inflected to meet local contexts and expectations.

Despite the political brotherhood and military solidarity proclaimed by the Eastern Bloc regimes, the region was far from monolithic. And nowhere was this more true than regarding visual culture. Hungary, with its “goulash communism,” was comparatively open to stylistic experimentation, especially during the 1960s and 1970s. Most were creative alternatives to the officially promoted “Socialist Realism” that had first been articulated in the early 1930s in the U.S.S.R. and later imposed as official policy in the soviet satellites. In truth,
governmental doctrine was rarely enforced in the realm of making art, although it was periodically imposed regarding exhibiting (and, of course, commissioning) works of art. Hungary’s centuries of resistance to Germanization and, especially, Slavicization likely prompted the national government to be comparatively tolerant of styles that were perceived elsewhere as objectionably “formalist” or condemned for appealing to “bourgeois” sensibilities, as was the case in East Germany, Romania, and Czechoslovakia (especially following the military suppression of the Prague Spring in 1968). Modern artists in Yugoslavia, which in 1948 broke from several important (military and economic) alliances with the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact, by contrast enjoyed relative freedom of artistic production and even exhibition. Moreover, several of the constituent governments in the Yugoslav federation supported experimental art with public funds, especially during the 1970s and 1980s. And like many Hungarians, Yugoslavs were much freer to travel than other socialist citizens, even if all had only the most limited access to convertible currency. Nonetheless, travel to Western museums, participation in Western exhibitions, and contact with Western dealers, scholars, and critics provided creative stimulation, productive associations, and material advantages that were reflected in the array of modern styles and subjects that artists embraced upon their return to their native lands. [see Tomislav Gotovac, Showing ELLE MAGAZINE, 1962, Zagreb Museum of Modern Art]

The degree of freedom afforded to modern artists under communism varied country to country, with Hungary, Yugoslavia, Poland (following the “thaw” in the mid-1950s and before Martial Law was established in
the early 1980s), and Estonia likely enjoying the greatest latitude. Nevertheless, painters, sculptors, graphic artists (especially those making posters), and increasingly performance artists were almost always able to present their creativity privately, even if faced with official opprobrium and occasional censure. Moreover, with ever increasing (unofficial) contact with colleagues and supporters in the West, the Eastern artists’ manifestations of modernism were often as strikingly progressive as that on view in the West, where a structured gallery, museum, and exhibition system might be understood as having been as limiting as the different form of cultural control practiced in the East.

Toward the latter years of the 1980s, and ever increasingly from the early 1990s with the collapse of communism, artists from Central and Eastern Europe seized upon the new freedoms both politically and culturally. Many of the styles embraced were continuations of earlier developments. However, liberation from official realist doctrine or ideologically approved styles allowed for the embrace of new modes of aesthetic engagement: from oil on canvas to body art to novel forms of conceptualism. Yet one dimension of Hungarian and east European post-1989 art-making differed markedly from aesthetic practices in North America and Western Europe. For the first time since the consolidation of authoritarianism in the mid-1930s and then through the long decades of communism, artists were now able to reconnect
with the modern art history of their forebears. As a result, a reprise of Malevich’s Suprematism took place in Russia; a reworking of Kassák and Moholy-Nagy’s Constructivism was evident in Hungary; a reconsideration of Karel Teige’s utopian abstraction was undertaken in the Czech Republic; and similar variants of modernism of the 1910s and 1920s were re-engaged by artists from the same lands during the late years of the 1990s and into the twenty-first century. Part of this embrace stemmed from a need to bridge the historical gap between the pioneers of modernism and contemporary practitioners. But there was also a wide-spread belief in the region that one might build constructively and logically upon the aesthetic triumphs and theoretical foundations that had made modern art so visually and intellectually potent in the first place. Thus to “rejoin” the world as equal partners and contributors, contemporary artists from Hungary and the entirety of former soviet geographical bloc had to revive the past in a manner that paid respect to its accomplishments without slavishly parroting its outward appearances. This artful negotiation resulted in a novel form of appropriation, one that paralleled—at least superficially—the “appropriation art” that was a dominant mode of art-production in the United States and Western Europe at the same time. The difference was one of meaning and resonance: for Central and Eastern European contemporary artists, engaging the past was a means to affirm and appropriate for contemporary purposes a heroic age of accomplishment; for the West “appropriation art” was a novel means of severing modern art’s boldest styles from the philosophies that originally justified them. But then the modern art of Hungary and its region long sought to merge aesthetics and ethics, while many creative figures in the West celebrate the independence of art from
Hungarian Photography

In the early years of the 20th century, Budapest was the venue for several photography exhibitions that greatly influenced public taste and drew people’s attention to the medium. The 1910 international photography exhibition at the city’s Art Hall exemplified the manner in which Hungarian photographers sought to shape a new direction for the medium. It demonstrated for the first time that photography could achieve broad artistic recognition and art critics were prepared to accept it as an artistic medium. The new century also saw the establishment of Hungary’s first amateur photography clubs, which in many cases supported artistic progress in opposition to the conservatism of professional photographers and studio owners. However, relative to other countries in Central Europe, photography clubs were rather late to develop in Hungary. Moreover, their members were often drawn from the aristocracy and influenced by German culture. The outdated aesthetic ideals of the clubs tended to put off the young photographers of the era.

During World War I, apart from the Sunday newspaper, none of the Hungarian weekly newspapers had the resources to employ staff as war photographers. Their only option was to publish photographs taken by soldiers at the front. One such newspaper held contests with the aim of obtaining the best battlefield shots. The first was announced in the third issue of the newspaper in 1915. Three prizes were subsequently awarded, for a total of 3,000 Austro-Hungarian krones, a large sum in Hungary at the time. At first, photographs submitted in the contest appeared on the front or back page of the newspaper; later, the editors established a separate photography column. Among those submitting pictures, a number would become well known in Hungary and abroad.

In the aftermath of World War I, several photographic genres and styles developed in Hungary, with only partial overlap and interaction. As elsewhere in Europe, photographers began to specialize. Hungarian art photography developed in a rather unique fashion, and this uniqueness initially brought success to Hungarian photographers in Western Europe, though it later proved to be a dead end. Practitioners of the so-called Hungarian style abandoned the non-silver printing processes of the Pictorialists and published their photos in the form of gelatin silver prints, employing shiny surfaces while retaining the soft-focus effects of Pictorialism. To enhance their compositions they primarily made use of backlight. Between the Wars, this style of photography received the widest recognition in Hungary and was also supported by official cultural policy.

Meanwhile, some Hungarian photographers made art that was not associated with a particular style or political orientation. Most photography in Hungary was, however, influenced by the debate between “populists” and “urbanists,” a dispute that extended to both politics and aesthetics, as exemplified by the social-documentary photographers’ critique of the Hungarian style. In this interwar period only a small number of photographers in Hungary adhered to the modernist schools. Those young Hungarians with an interest in modern photog-
raphy and a desire to learn from the progressive masters tended to move to Germany, often attending courses at the Bauhaus. In general, however, at this time the prevailing mainstream art in Hungary was averse to modernism. Concurrently, those photographers who had left Hungary found particular success in various German newspapers and magazines.

The photographs in the exhibition represent the best and most intriguing period of Hungarian photography and were selected to complement the important paintings included in the neighboring exhibition, *Hungarian Art: A Century of Rebellion and Revival*. These photographers played a crucial role between the World Wars and later in the development of Hungarian photographic art. Of particular note is that the exhibition includes works by both Hungarian photographers who chose to stay in Hungary and who—unlike those who went abroad—are still almost unknown to researchers of international photography.

Dr. Péter Baki
*Guest Curator and Director,*
*Hungarian Museum of Photography*
Sylvia Plachy
The Hungarian Connection

Sylvia Plachy’s first trip back to her native Hungary in 1964 began a long and prestigious photography career. The works in this exhibition date from every decade from 1964 to 2016.

Plachy subsequently became staff photographer for the Village Voice in 1974, and has published many books including, Signs & Relics; Goings on About Town: Photographs for The New Yorker; Out of the Corner of My Eye; Sylvia Plachy’s UNGUIDED TOUR, (with a 45 rpm record by Tom Waits); and Self Portrait With Cows Going Home, a book of photographs from her trips to Eastern Europe.

Her photographs have appeared in The New York Times Magazine, The New Yorker, Fortune, Artforum, and other publications. Plachy’s work has been collected and shown by such institutions in the United States as the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum, New York; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Minneapolis Institute of Art, and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Her work has also been exhibited in Japan and has been shown extensively in Europe.

Her fellow Hungarian, the legendary photographer Andre Kertesz, was a friend and mentor, and Plachy is often credited as his artistic heir for her poetic street photography.

Kathleen Goncharov
Curator of Contemporary Art
My father promised to buy me a Coca Cola if we made it across the border to Austria. Coca Cola, “the forbidden fruit” of the West not sold in the Eastern Block, turned out to be a disappointment and no compensation for the loss of my first home.

I was born in Budapest in 1943. The specter of Hitler informed my past and Stalin dominated my childhood. In the shadow of his massive statue as fighter planes roared over the city, a row of little men would wave to the marching soldiers and passing tanks and pioneers on each May 1st and November 7th.

Life in Hungary was far from Paradise, yet it was the only life I knew until my thirteenth year. Silences, heavy with secrets, are what I remember most. In 1956, while my friend Marika and I were sewing Christmas slippers, the revolution broke out. We rushed to the square where Stalin’s statue stood and joined the singing crowd while men with torches separated the tyrant from his boots. But a few weeks later Russian tanks put an end to the elation. Fearing reprisals, my parents and I became refugees. After two years in Vienna we ended up in Union City, New Jersey. In 1964, fortified by my American citizenship, and with money I earned at the five-and-dime store and a borrowed camera, a Robin, on my neck, I returned.

In those intervening eight years Budapest had barely changed. In its worn gray majesty, it still held an emotional sway over me. Though a policeman and his family lived in our former apartment, Nagyi, my grandmother, had moved into my room and I arrived just as my friend Marika from grammar school was getting married. From that time on, I would go back every time I had saved up the fare to pick the bones of my childhood dry. My newfound passion for photography became the bridge between past and present, and allowed me some keepsakes.
Eventually things changed. Starting in 1989 the oppressive statues and red stars were removed, the names of cities, streets and movie theaters reverted back to their pre-war names, bodies from mass graves were buried with ceremony, and I was getting assignments to photograph some of these changes.

The pictures in this exhibition are about my search for memories of my Hungarian childhood during my return trips to Hungary. There are also photographs from Transylvania, where many Hungarians still live and, which since World War I, is part of Romania.

Sylvia Plachy, 2016
Szilárd Cseke: Gone Too Far

Cseke traveled from Budapest to create this interactive site-specific installation especially for The Art of Hungary. This work, Gone Too Far, consists of several individual works that address social issues such as the current migration crisis, discrimination of “the other” based on ethnicity or religion, and an economic system that causes turmoil among affected populations. As a native of Eastern Europe, he is well aware of the dangers of identifying with populist demagoguery and how important it is for individuals to think critically, overcome prejudice, and act responsibly toward others.

The table in the center of the exhibition titled, Good Shepherd (2016), is an interactive work, made from used materials, in which ventilators randomly propel Ping Pong balls. Like migrants, these balls have little control over their fate, and constantly bump into obstacles. When a ball falls through the hole in the middle of the piece, audience members are encouraged to pick it up and return it to the table.

Another major work in Cseke’s installation is titled Limits of Growth (2016). Like our current economic system, this giant cushion is a victim of recurring cycles. Two fans, one that pushes air in and the other that pushes it out, mercilessly drive its constant motion. This process is a metaphor for an economic system that insists upon constant growth, and for the disorientation those without power suffer when that system deflates.

Above our heads, we find Cseke’s Dual Identity (2015), an artwork consisting of a large white ball enclosed in a long transparent tube. That ball is thrust back and forth between opposite poles by two fans. The movement mimics the to-and-fro of political opinions in the 20th and 21st centuries, especially in Eastern Europe.

Spaces (2016) is a three-channel video of the
random movement of objects left to their fate by chance. (Mihaly Lukacs assisted Cseke with the filming and post-production of the video.) The pair of paintings, Spaces (white) and Spaces (black) was created during the filming of the video, and although they are static, random movement is implied.

The whole installation is bathed in a cold industrial fluorescent light, and the disorientation it causes is what Cseke considers a reflection of our time and society.

Szilárd Cseke was born in 1967 in Papa, Hungary, and now lives and works in Budapest. He is one of the most important figures in Hungarian contemporary art today. He was awarded Munkacsy Prize in 2014, the most prestigious grant in the visual arts in Hungary. He participated in exhibitions at The Armory Show, New York City, ARCOmadrid, and Artissima, Turin, Art Brussels, and his work was the subject of a solo exhibition at the Museum Kiscell, Budapest.

Cseke represented Hungary in the 2015 Venice Biennale with, Sustainable Identities, a site-specific installation at the Hungarian Pavilion. He is represented by Ani Molnar Gallery, Budapest.

Kathleen Goncharov
Curator of Contemporary Art
The Birth of Modern Hungary

**Figure 1**
Vilmos Aba-Novák
(1894 – 1941)
*Trattoria*, 1929
Oil on canvas
Nancy G. Brinker Collection

Context and Realities Regarding Hungary's Modern Art

**Figure 2**
László Fehér
(b. 1953)
*Brigade Excursion*, 1979
Oil on fiberboard
Nancy G. Brinker Collection

**Figure 3 (from left to right)**
Károly Kelemen
(b. 1948)
*Tallow-Dream*, 2000
Graphite, lacquer on canvas
Nancy G. Brinker Collection

László Fehér
(b. 1953)
*Portrait of Nancy Brinker*, 2004
Oil on canvas
Nancy G. Brinker Collection

Ilona Keserü
(b. 1933)
*Carve Study II*, 1969
Oil on canvas
Nancy G. Brinker Collection

**Figure 6**
Béla Kádár
(1877 – 1956)
*Country Scene*, 1923
Oil on board
Nancy G. Brinker Collection

**Figure 7**
József Nemes-Lampérth
(1891 – 1924)
*Kolozsvár*, 1920
Black and colored India ink on paper
Nancy G. Brinker Collection

**Figure 8**
Béla Uitz
(1891 – 1924)
*Seated Woman*, 1918
Walnut stain and India ink on paper
Nancy G. Brinker Collection

**Figure 9**
Béla Uitz
(1891 – 1924)
*Seated Woman*, 1918
Walnut stain and India ink on paper
Nancy G. Brinker Collection

Hungarian Photography

**Figure 12**
László Lakner
(b. 1936)
*Paprika*, 1984
Oil on canvas
Nancy G. Brinker Collection

**Figure 13**
László Fehér
(b. 1953)
*Dinner of the Homeless*, 2004
Oil on canvas
Nancy G. Brinker Collection

**Figure 14**
László Fehér
(b. 1953)
*Self Portrait with Staircase*, 2001
Acrylic on canvas
Nancy G. Brinker Collection

**Figure 15**
László Fehér
(b. 1953)
*Smoking Man*, 1998
Pastel on paper
Nancy G. Brinker Collection

Figure 16
André Kertész
(1894 - 1985)
*Satiric Dancer*, 1926, printed about 1967
Gelatin silver print
Hungarian Museum of Photography

**Figure 17**
Gallery view of Hungarian Photography

**Figure 18**
Robert Capa
(1913 - 1954)
*Advertisement of Chaplin’s newest film on Váci Street*, 1948, printed about 1970
Gelatin silver print
Hungarian Museum of Photography
Figure 19
Gábor Kerekes  
(b. 1945)  
*Concrete Silo*, 1970s  
Gelatin silver print  
Hungarian Museum of Photography

Figure 20
László Moholy-Nagy  
(1895 – 1946)  
*Photogram Self-Portrait*, about 1925, printed 1973  
Gelatin silver print  
Hungarian Museum of Photography

Figure 21
Brassaï  
(1899 – 1984)  
*Feast in Bayonne*, about 1936  
Gelatin silver print  
Hungarian Museum of Photography

Sylvia Plachy  
*The Hungarian Connection*

Figure 22
Sylvia Plachy  
(b. 1943)  
*Brother Bela and His Dog*, 1993  
Archival Pigment Print  
Courtesy of the artist

Figure 23
Gallery view of Sylvia Plachy: *The Hungarian Connection*.  
On left of photo:  
Sylvia Plachy  
(b. 1943)  
*Transylvanian Woods*, 2001  
C-Print  
Courtesy of the artist

Figure 24
Sylvia Plachy  
(b. 1943)  
*Fate, Pusztas*, 1996  
C-Print  
Courtesy of the artist

Figure 25
Sylvia Plachy  
(b. 1943)  
*Social Realism*, 1976  
Vintage Silver Gelatin Print  
Courtesy of the artist

Figure 26
Sylvia Plachy  
(b. 1943)  
*Dori, Gellért Pool*, 1984  
Vintage Silver Gelatin Print  
Courtesy of the artist

Szilárd Cseke: *Gone Too Far*

Figure 27 - 30
Gallery view of Szilárd Cseke: *Gone Too Far*

Works include:  
*Dual Identity*, 2015  
PE foil-tube, metallic filament, LED tubes, electrical fans, fan boxes, polystyrene balls, sensors  
Courtesy of the artist  
*The Good Shepherd*, 2016  
Fluorescent tubes, electrical fans, steel, Plexiglas, Ping Pong balls  
 Courtesy of the artist  
*Limits of Growth*, 2016  
Solflex, electric fans, Plexiglas  
Courtesy of the artist  
*Spaces*, 2016  
Three channel video  
Courtesy of the artist  
*Spaces (black)*, 2016  
Acrylic spray on canvas  
Courtesy of the artist  
*Spaces (white)*, 2016  
Acrylic spray on canvas  
Courtesy of the artist

Front cover
André Kertész  
*Satirc Dancer*, 1926, printed about 1967  
Gelatin silver print  
Hungarian Museum of Photography

Back cover
Lili Ország  
(1926 – 1978)  
*In Front of the Wall*, 1955  
Oil on canvas  
Nancy G. Brinker Collection
The Art of Hungary
October 18, 2016 – January 8, 2017
Curators: Kathleen Goncharov, Marisa Pascucci, Lanya Snyder

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