

Lajos Fülep

The task of Hungarian art history (1951)

Translated and edited by Nóra Veszprémi

Introduction: Lajos Fülep and Hungarian art

Lajos Fülep (1885–1970), arguably the most influential Hungarian art historian and theorist of the 20th century, only became part of the institutional framework in his sixties, after publishing many of his major writings as a freelancer. Having graduated from high school in 1902, he began his career as a journalist and critic. He undertook several trips to Paris and studied philosophy, literature and art history in Italy from 1907 to 1914. His art theoretical essay *Memory in Artistic Creation* earned him a doctorate at the University of Budapest in 1912. It was around this time that Fülep became associated with György (Georg) Lukács, with whom he co-edited a journal of philosophy, *A Szellem* (The Mind). During World War I, he was a member of the so-called Sunday Circle (Vasárnapi Kör), a group of progressive thinkers which included Frigyes (Frederick) Antal, Arnold Hauser, the writer Béla Balázs, the sociologist Károly (Karl) Mannheim, the poet and essayist Emma Ritóok, as well as Lukács and Fülep. In those years, Fülep worked as a secondary school teacher and – for a brief period – as an art historian at the Municipal Gallery of Budapest. He also studied theology and passed exams to become a Calvinist priest. In 1918 he worked at the Ministry of External Affairs and in the next year he was appointed as a professor at the department of Italian language and literature at the university. After the fall of the short-lived Council Republic of 1919, he was dismissed from this position. He subsequently practised priesthood in different small towns in Southern Hungary until 1947, while publishing his theoretical essays in journals and lecturing as a visiting professor at the University of Pécs in the 1930s. In 1948, he became a corresponding member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and in 1951 a professor at the Art History Department of Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest. From then until his death, Fülep was the central personality of Hungarian art historical scholarship, taking on a leading role in the establishment and organisation of new institutions. He was the chair of the newly founded Committee for Art History of the Academy of Sciences, editor-in-chief of the new scholarly journals *Művészettörténeti Értesítő* (Bulletin of Art History) and *Acta Historiae Artium*, as well as editor of a two-volume new history of art in Hungary. He published scholarly monographs on Rembrandt, Miklós Izsó and Gyula Derkovits. The new generation of art historians trained at the university in the early 1960s respected him as their master, and he is now widely considered the founding father of Hungarian art history writing as it is today.

As a critic, Fülep started out under the spell of the Symbolism of the Nabis circle. His artistic ideals were embodied in the work of Cézanne, his reverence for whom was rooted in the primitivism of the Symbolists. In the early 1900s, he

became an avid supporter of modernist tendencies in Hungary, most notably the Eight, a group of avant-garde artists influenced by Cézanne. The most pregnant trait of Fülep's criticism is probably his insistence on quality and originality: he had no patience for phenomena he regarded as bad art or non-art, and neither for any kind of academicism, including the 'modern academicism' he discerned in the work of certain followers of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. In the next decades, as he gradually turned from a critical-philosophical outlook towards a historical one and became more interested in art history as a historical discipline, Fülep also realised the importance of 'bad art.' The text published here is evidence of this turn. The question of national art – the definition of the concept and its relationship with global art history – recurred in Fülep's writings on multiple occasions. His first major attempt to address the problem was the essay *Hungarian Art*, first published in the literary magazine *Nyugat* (West) – a forum of modernists – between 1916–18, and subsequently in book form in 1923. In this text, Fülep aimed to grasp the question on a philosophical level, providing a brief survey of the history of the arts in Hungary – sorted into chapters according to medium: architecture, sculpture, painting – but concentrating on the formulation of a general definition. His final description of Hungarian art is a beautiful formula that can be seen as a contradiction in itself; a philosophical ideal so perfect that it is questionable whether it can ever be attained in practice, either by art or by art history writing. According to Fülep, Hungarian art is art that addresses and tackles universal artistic problems, internationally relevant at that specific time, but addresses them in a uniquely Hungarian way. In other words, it contributes something uniquely Hungarian, but at the same time universally relevant to world art, so that its 'Hungarianness' becomes identical with its universal significance. Ever the strict critic, Fülep only named a couple of artists from nineteenth-century Hungary who had achieved this: the sculptor Miklós Izsó, who addressed general problems of the representation of movement in his statuettes of dancing Hungarian peasants – that is, characteristically Hungarian figures – and the architect Ödön Lechner who developed a unique version of Art Nouveau by incorporating motifs from Hungarian folk art.

Staying true to his adamant anti-academicism, Fülep identified 'relevant' problems as formal problems, which he regarded as inherently artistic as opposed to superficial, 'external' aspects such as subject matter. At the same time, in his concrete examples Hungarian subject matter and motifs played a central role. This apparent self-contradiction lies at the heart of *Hungarian Art*, and sums up Fülep's extremely well thought-out, but still ambivalent stance on the 'national identity' of art. In his anti-academicism and insistence on formal problems, in line with the philosophy of the classical avant-garde he admired, Fülep renounced the nineteenth century, but his concept of the nation – necessarily – still relied on the concept forged in that age. The text incorporates nineteenth-century concepts of national character and identity – but not in a naive, unreflected way. In an experiment of particular intellectual bravery, Fülep endeavoured to assess, examine and critique those concepts – which still defined general thinking, and from which he himself could not be entirely free – in the light of modernist ideas; and to do so at a time when Hungarian nationalism was gaining new impetus due to the shock caused by the loss of territories in the peace treaty that concluded World War I.

The fact that mainstream Hungarian art history writing did not pick up on Fülep's ideas is demonstrated by the historiographical survey he offers in *The Task of Hungarian Art History*, his second major attempt to define Hungarian art and its discipline. This text came into being at a very different time. For one thing, Fülep was about to become part of the institutional framework; the text was written as his inaugural lecture at the Academy of Sciences, held in 1950 (it was subsequently published in 1951). This accounts for the first major difference between *Hungarian Art* and the later text: in *The Task of Hungarian Art History*, Fülep focused on narrower professional issues, aiming to provide a scholarly programme for subsequent research. It is the perspective of the historian, instead of the critic, that guides the text. Consequently, in lieu of offering a theoretical definition of Hungarian art, the text argues that Hungarian art can only be described through meticulous historical research. Albeit taking pains to distinguish Hungarian art from everything else, Fülep's final conclusion is not that the 'everything else' does not merit investigation. To the contrary, the art history envisioned by him relies on a vast amount of material examined in its historical, political, economic, cultural context.

Fülep's provocative starting point was that – despite all the literature that claims to be just that – Hungarian art history does not exist. He offered a detailed and scathing critique of his predecessors, especially the two former art history professors of the university, Tibor Gerevich and Antal Hekler. He contended that previous histories of Hungarian art had not defined their subject properly and were instead based on spurious ideas about national character which mainly served the underlying political agenda: the nationalist aim of proving the 'Hungarianness' of all artworks found in the historical territory of Hungary. Instead of this 'professional chauvinism,' Fülep proposed a Hungarian art history that would start out by defining its subject methodologically, based on solid criteria: 'not giving away anything that is ours, but ... not taking away anything that belongs to others.' He set up a distinction between 'art in Hungary' and 'Hungarian art,' as well as between the disciplines that examine their respective histories. The former includes all art created and/or found in the historical territory of Hungary, while the latter term only refers to art created by the Hungarian nation. The latter has to be gleaned from the former before the writing of Hungarian art history can properly start. For this end, research should accumulate all artworks from Hungary and investigate them in their historical context. It is only such a broad and deep investigation that can lead to the recognition of uniquely Hungarian tendencies, stylistic features, formal aspects – if they ever existed at all.

As in the case of *Hungarian Art*, Fülep's essay broke with traditional narratives while also being deeply rooted in them. The author's insistence on telling the story of Hungarian art as distinct from everything else derives from nineteenth-century ideas and his examination of medieval and Baroque art through the lens of the modern concept of the 'nation' can be critiqued as anachronistic. Moreover, Fülep's distinction between different ethnic groups in historical Hungary and their artistic achievements may, at first sight, raise the spectre of chauvinism. This suspicion is dispelled, however, as he clarifies his concept of the nation, which is essentially based on cultural and social aspects and conceived as a constantly evolving community forged in the interaction between different groups. When

denying the 'Hungarianness' of certain artworks, Fülep was not practising chauvinistic discrimination; to the contrary, he was acknowledging the contribution of other ethnic groups and breaking with interwar art historians' attempts at appropriation. Nevertheless, he was not completely able to rid himself from the heritage of the nineteenth century. Had he written the essay a few decades later, he would maybe have focused on multi-ethnicity instead of 'Hungarianness' – his historical position, as it were, did not allow him to do so. Still, his concept of 'art in Hungary' allowed the next generation of Hungarian art historians to set the question of 'Hungarianness' aside and focus on regional artistic tendencies, while refraining from an ahistorical projection of modern concepts of national identity onto the past. This methodology opened up the possibility of fruitful collaboration with art historians from neighbouring countries.

Fülep's inaugural lecture was written in 1950, and we cannot conclude without giving some thought to the historical circumstances. Hungary had been an ally of Germany in World War II and was defeated by Soviet forces in 1945. In 1948, a Communist government took over, and the next years saw the formation of a Stalinist dictatorship. Fülep's references to Stalin's writings are examples of the obligatory ideological fingerposts colloquially referred to as the 'red tail:' scholars of the age often inserted such references into their texts to avoid political scrutiny. On a basic level, in expressing a desire to concentrate on national art history while breaking with the chauvinism of the past decades, the text was in line with official cultural politics. Nevertheless, it is a sign of Fülep's integrity that his essay is, even in retrospect, the herald of a fresh start, rather than an ideological manifesto weighed down by official expectations. Renouncing the often jingoistic nationalism of the leading art historians of the interwar period, Fülep proclaimed a new art history based on painstaking research and the reconstruction of historical context. While this 'historical materialism' could, again, comply with official expectations, Fülep's insistence on the impartial gathering of facts gently subverted the possibility of putting art history into the service of official ideologies – be it right-wing nationalism or dogmatic communism. For instance, albeit admonishing the bourgeois 'non-art' of the nineteenth century, he contended that it merited study just like anything else, as the product of a certain time and social context. In doing so, Fülep not only transcended official expectations, but also his own previous ideas on the significance of quality, paving the way for an inclusive, non-judgmental art history. All its contradictions notwithstanding, *The Task of Hungarian Art History* was a groundbreaking text that is still instructive to today's Hungarian art historians.

I would like to thank Ferenc Gosztonyi and Árpád Tímár for their help and advice.

Selected bibliography

Lajos Fülep, *Egybegyűjtött írások* [Collected writings] I: Cikkek, tanulmányok [Articles, essays] 1902–1908, ed. Árpád Tímár, Budapest: MTA Művészettörténeti Kutatócsoport, 1988

Lajos Fülep, *Egybegyűjtött írások* [Collected writings] II: Cikkek, tanulmányok [Articles, essays] 1909–1916, ed. Árpád Tímár, Budapest: MTA Művészettörténeti Kutatóintézet, 1995

Lajos Fülep, *Egybegyűjtött írások* [Collected writings] III: Cikkek, tanulmányok [Articles, essays] 1917–1930, ed. Árpád Tímár, Budapest: Argumentum, 1998
Fülep Lajos levelezése [Lajos Fülep's correspondence] I–VII, ed. Dóra F. Csanak, Budapest: MTA Könyvtára – MTA Művészettörténeti Kutatóintézet, 1990–2007.
Charles de Tolnay, 'Les écrits de Lajos Fülep sur Cézanne' [with introduction and edited texts], *Acta Historiae Artium* 20 (1974), 103–24.

Ernő Marosi, 'Fülep Lajos és "A magyar művészettörténelem föladata [Lajos Fülep and The Task of Hungarian Art History],"' in *Fülep Lajos emlékkönyv* [Collection of essays in memory of Lajos Fülep], ed. Árpád Tímár, Budapest: Magvető, 1985, 236–42.

Ernő Marosi, 'Utószó [Afterword],' in Ernő Marosi ed., *A magyar művészettörténet-írás programjai* [Programmes of Hungarian art history writing], Budapest: Corvina, 1999, 356–58.

Ernő Marosi, 'Európai művészet és magyar művészet. 1923 Fülep Lajos: Magyar művészet [European art and Hungarian art: 1923: Lajos Fülep's Hungarian Art],' in *A magyar irodalom története* [Histories of Hungarian literature] III, ed. Mihály Szegedy-Maszák and András Veres, Budapest: Gondolat, 2007, 69–83.

Ferenc Gosztonyi, 'A szimbolista Fülep (I.): A "primitív" Cézanne-től a Magyar művészetig [Fülep, the Symbolist (I.): From Cézanne, the primitive to Hungarian Art],' in 'A feledés árjai alól új földeket hódítok vissza.' *Írások Tímár Árpád tiszteletére* [Essays in honour of Árpád Tímár], ed. István Bardoly et al., Budapest: MTA Művészettörténeti Kutatóintézet, 2009, 64–80.

Árpád Tímár, 'Magyarországi vagy magyar? – Mi valósult meg Fülep Lajos akadémiai székfoglalójának programjából ["In Hungary' or 'Hungarian"? What has come to fruition of Fülep's programme?],' *Enigma* 16 (2009), no. 61, 46–55.

Ernő Marosi, 'Fülep Lajos: A magyar művészettörténelem föladata, a magyar művészettörténet-írás forrása és/vagy annak koncepciója [Lajos Fülep's The Task of Hungarian Art History: source material and/or programme for Hungarian art history writing],' *Ars Hungarica* 37 (2011), no. 2, 13–24. (as well as other essays in this issue, which is a special issue on Fülep)

Ferenc Gosztonyi, 'The early reception of Cézanne in Hungary, 1906–10: Fülep and Popper,' in *Cézanne and the Past: Tradition and Creativity*, ed. Judit Geskó, Budapest: Museum of Fine Arts, 2012, 179–90.

Nóra Veszprémi is a lecturer at the Art History Institute of Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. She specialises in nineteenth-century Hungarian and Austrian art, with a special emphasis on the relationship between visual culture and nationalism. She has authored a number of scholarly publications in Hungarian and in English and co-curated a major exhibition on art and national identity in nineteenth-century Hungary at the Hungarian National Gallery in 2010. Her book on Romanticism and popular taste in Hungary c. 1820–1850 will be published in 2015. She publishes a blog on Hungarian art at <http://hungarianartist.wordpress.com/>.

Lajos Fülep

The task of Hungarian art history (1951)

Translated by Nóra Veszprémi¹

The examples of the recurring inquiries into the tasks of other disciplines would suggest that, if the task of Hungarian art history has to be defined, it must be for the sake of being up to date at a time when new problems have arisen beside the old ones or revision has become necessary due to new results and the emergence of new perspectives, as it happened recently in the case of Hungarian political and economic history or literary history. Developments such as these always imply the previous existence of something that can be continued, or reformulated, reevaluated. The task of Hungarian art history is different: it is the task with which a discipline begins. For, no matter how improbable this sounds in the light of the massive amount of art historical literature produced in Hungary and the fact that the subject has been taught at the university for almost a century,² the history of Hungarian art does not exist. Scholarly literature by this name exists, works that bear this title and a semblance of art history exist, but the history of Hungarian art still does not exist; it cannot be identified with either one of these or all of them put together – at least regarding the period before the early nineteenth century. All that has been called by that name is not the history of Hungarian art, but the history of the arts in Hungary. The two are not the same. Firstly, the land of Hungary was always inhabited by other ethnic groups as well, and in growing numbers. Secondly, there were always foreign artists working here, some for shorter, some for longer periods, some settling here for good, shedding their foreign identities partly or completely, or else preserving them. In all this diversity, the discipline of Hungarian art history has not even been attempted, the idea of it has not even emerged. Art in Hungary does of course include Hungarian art, but that does not mean that the history of the former also includes the history of the latter. We will soon see to what extent it does not.

To bring into being what has not yet been – this is the task of Hungarian art history. To achieve something positive, we have to gain thorough knowledge of the negative, as well as of its cause. With that in mind, we will develop our argument around three theses, summing it up as briefly as possible:

1. Hungarian art history does not exist;
2. Why it does not exist;

¹ The translation is based on the following edition: Lajos Fülep, 'A magyar művészettörténelem főadata (1951),' in Ernő Marosi ed., *A magyar művészettörténet-írás programjai* [Programmes of Hungarian art history writing], Budapest: Corvina, 1999, 283–305, edited by Árpád Tímár. The translator would like to thank Árpád Tímár for generously allowing her to borrow some of his annotations, which are marked by **ÁT**.

² The art history department of Péter Pázmány University in Pest (today Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest) was established in 1872. Imre Henszlmann was appointed as the first professor of art history in 1873.

3. How it could be established.

I.

A comparison between the discipline of so-called Hungarian art history and that of the history of Hungarian literature can give us a clear picture of the significance and role of literature and its discipline as compared to art and its discipline in Hungarian culture, if we examine when and how the disciplines began, how they developed and how large an amount of scholarship they produced. It is not only that Czwitinger's 1711 collection of writers' biographies,³ as well as subsequently published biographies, histories of genres and poetical schools, or literary memoirs, have no equals in the field of the visual arts, but that at the time when comprehensive and systematic enquiry into the history of Hungarian literature was already happening, art historical research had not even begun, and a summary account could only be compiled a century later. Even if we do not reach back to considering Toldy's 1828 German-language *Handbuch*,⁴ it suffices to remind ourselves of *The History of Hungarian National Literature* [A magyar nemzeti irodalom története], published in 1851–52, as well as its 1864 sequel which extended its scope to contemporary literature,⁵ or of Toldy's 1854 *Handbook of Hungarian Poetry*:⁶ a compendium of the entire history of Hungarian poetry in excerpts (whose art historical equal could be a history of Hungarian art illustrated by a plethora of images). It also comes to mind that at the time of Arany's tenure as a teacher in Nagykőrös,⁷ that is, in the 1850s, he was already teaching the history of Hungarian literature at a secondary school level, in a necessarily sketchy, but still comprehensive form and – in Toldy's wake – from the most ancient times to his own. At the same time, Henszlmann, Rómer and Ipolyi⁸ were only beginning their research, publishing the first art historical monographs in the 1860s and 1870s. It is also revealing to compare the publication dates of the first scholarly journals of literary history with the fact that we never had and still do not have any art historical scholarly journals.⁹

³ Dávid Czwitinger, *Specimen Hungariae Literatae*, Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1711. The volume contains biographical data about almost 300 writers. – **ÁT**

⁴ Ferenc Toldy, *The Handbuch der ungrischen Poesie*, Pest and Vienna, 1827–1828. This was the first comprehensive history of Hungarian literature. – **ÁT**

⁵ Ferenc Toldy, *A magyar nemzeti irodalom története a legrégebb időktől a jelenkorig rövid előadásban* [The history of Hungarian national literature from ancient times to the present day], Pest: Emich, 1864–1865.

⁶ Ferenc Toldy, *A magyar költészet kézikönyve* [Handbook of Hungarian poetry], Pest: Gusztáv Heckenast, 1855.

⁷ János Arany (1817–1882), the most significant Hungarian poet of the second half of the nineteenth century, worked as a schoolteacher in the town of Nagykőrös, Eastern Hungary from 1851 to 1860.

⁸ Imre Henszlmann (1813–1888), Flóris Rómer (1815–1889) and Arnold Ipolyi (1823–1886) were the founders of Hungarian art history writing in the nineteenth century.

⁹ The first Hungarian journal of literary history, the *Egyetemes Philologiai Közlöny* (Universal Bulletin of Philology) was published from 1877, the *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* (Bulletin of Literary History) from 1891. Although scholarly articles on art history were sometimes published in the *Archeologiai Értesítő* (Bulletin of Archeology, from 1868) and in magazines

All this demonstrates, yet again, the primary role of literature in the life of the Hungarian nation. At the time when Toldy carried out his research, collecting and organising his material, Hungarian poetry was rising to equal any of the great national cultures – we can safely say, even the greatest. Hungarian art, however, did not exist, and István Ferenczy,¹⁰ returning home from Rome in 1824, arrived filled with the consciousness of becoming the founder of national art, thus virtually starting it, and the few enthusiastic champions of the significance of national art pinned all their hopes on him. This was the time when masters who came from abroad and settled in Hungary – the Hilds, the Pollacks¹¹ – created their buildings, in which the Hungarian nation – not creating art yet, but commissioning it – demonstrated yet again that it recognised the significance of art. The history of literature had a reason to be born, it had a basis and a goal, so it had to emerge, it could not possibly be left unborn – but the history of art had none of those. There was nothing to raise and stimulate the interest of the present in the distant past. What was available was not sufficient, not yet art; it was still in an embryonic state.

The structure of Hungarian culture, the proportion of art and literature was, however, different in the past, especially the distant past. In an age when literacy in Hungarian had not even begun, a good amount of high-quality art that was up to date with novel tendencies of European art spread all over the country like opulent vegetation, growing small, but beautiful flowers even in the lowliest places. Subsequently, still in the distant past, most of this was destroyed and buried, so that only desolate ruins remained; the few things that were saved – although often completely deformed – by continuous usage had no one to understand them and incorporate them into the consciousness of national, local history. Medieval art was only appreciated later on, even in other countries. In our country, even the consciousness of the continuity of art was broken. The early nineteenth century, the age of national awakening and reorientation brought reforms that deconstructed Baroque society, as well as its spirit, and – in a stark contrast to the Baroque revival of our own century¹² – rightly regarded the Baroque style as imported and its representative works as foreign, hence it could not use them to ignite a consciousness of national art and tradition; just as it desired Hungarian literature, it also wanted the rest of Hungarian culture to be Hungarian after a long period of alienation. The awakening of the desire for national art and the development of a real art life – rudimental, but still a reason to hope – were necessary for foreign art

mainly concerned with contemporary art, the first genuine academic journal of art history was the *Művészettörténeti Értesítő* (Bulletin of Art History), published from 1952. – **ÁT**

¹⁰ István Ferenczy (1792–1856) was a Hungarian Neoclassical sculptor, who began his studies at the Vienna Academy and subsequently spent six years in Bertel Thorvaldsen's studio in Rome before returning to Hungary in 1824.

¹¹ The architect János Hild (1766–1811) studied in Vienna and Italy before settling in Pest; his son József Hild (1789–1867) was trained in Vienna. Mihály Pollack (1773–1855), the architect of the Hungarian National Museum, was born in Vienna and was trained there and in Milan. – **ÁT**

¹² Fülep refers to the influential trend of Baroque revival in the interwar period, which manifested itself not only in art and architecture, but in all areas of Hungarian cultural life, and enjoyed official support. Of art historians, it is Antal Hekler (see Note 15) and Tibor Gerevich (see Note 26) who can be best associated with it. – **ÁT**

history to be able to exert its influence so that the discipline could come into being in our country. Henszlmann, Rómer and Ipolyi began their work with a programme akin to Toldy's, wishing to highlight the path of national self-preservation within national culture. The talent and knowledge of the initiators promptly elevated the new discipline to the level of the history of literature. The delay and the difference in quantity were subsequently reduced, even if not eliminated, by art historical publications of varied quality, and the proportions were evened out by general art literature, growing in quantity parallel to the upsurge in contemporary artistic practice. Then, at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s, we reached the point where three works were published in rapid succession to summarise the complete history of Hungarian art: Kornél Divald's: *Magyar művészettörténet* [Hungarian art history], 1927;¹³ András Péter's *A magyar művészet története* [The history of Hungarian art], 1930,¹⁴ and Antal Hekler's *A magyar művészet története* [The history of Hungarian art], 1934.¹⁵

Three books, but Hungarian art still has no history. The reason is not that the summaries were published too early, or that they were bad or outdated. Were that the case, we would have a precipitous, bad, or outdated art history. We do not, however, have anything at all. All three books tell the history of art that was partly Hungarian, partly not, art that partly belongs – definitely or possibly – to the history of Hungarian art, and partly – definitely or possibly – does not. Thus, it is possible to debate the quality or usefulness of these works in that framework, but as none of them is a history of Hungarian art or even tries to be, the same questions cannot be discussed in terms of what is not and is not even trying to be.

If we found – partly, to a larger part or only – foreign artists in whole periods of Italian, German or French art history, we would question whether Italian, German, French art exists at all, inferring that if it does, all those foreign elements cannot be incorporated into its history, and if they are incorporated for some reason, this will not result in the history of the art of the above-mentioned nations, but in something else, and their art history will only come into being once it is gleaned out of that something else. But we do not even have to turn to other countries and

¹³ Kornél Divald (1872–1931) was an art historian, critic, and photographer mostly known for his work in the field of art historical topography and his popular art historical writings aimed at a wider audience.

¹⁴ András Péter (1903–1944) was an art historian who specialised mainly in medieval art, especially Italian painting of the trecento. His history of Hungarian art aimed to place the art of Hungary into an international context, while judging it according to its own unique historical conditions. Péter, who was of Jewish descent, was unable to find employment as an art historian, so he finally took on a job at the Franklin Publishing House owned by his father and gave up art historical research. He died in the Holocaust in 1944.

¹⁵ Antal Hekler (1882–1940) was an art historian who started his career as an excellent scholar of the art of classical antiquity and worked as a curator at the Hungarian National Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest, before becoming a full-time professor of art history at Pázmány Péter University, Budapest in 1918. From that time on, he turned his attention towards medieval, Renaissance and Baroque art and Hungarian art. Hekler supported right-wing extremist politics and from 1926 to 1929 he was *primus magister* of the Turul Society, a militant students' association that aimed to expel Jewish students from universities.

imaginary problems for revelatory examples. The history of Hungarian literature was written – and could only be written – after separating Hungarian-language literature from the literature of other ethnicities. Art is a singular creation just like literature, and even if – lacking linguistic barriers – the art of other nations is received more easily, that does not change its origin, and it will only come into the possession of the recipient if it exerts wider influence, if it is partly or wholly appropriated in practice. In the history of Hungarian art, Hungarian and non-Hungarian were lumped together. A whole period, 100–150 years, yields foreign names only, scarcely any Hungarian ones: Pietro Antonio Conti, Luca Antonio Colombo, Pietro Spazzo, Carlo Martino Carlone, Antonio Galli Bibiena, Christoph Tausch, Johann Lukas von Hildebrandt, Georg Raphael Donner, Paul Troger, Franz Anton Maulbertsch, Jakob Fellner, Melchior Hefele, Martin Wittwer, Franz Anton Hillebrandt, Mathias Gerl, Anton Pilgram, Ludwig Gode, Johann Eberhard Blaumann, Jakob Gabriel Mollinarolo detto Müller, Johann Anton Krauss, Johann Nachtigall, Franz Sigrist, Johann Lukas Kracker, Stephan Dorfmeister etc.;¹⁶ and if we add all the works whose makers cannot be named but whose location and cultural environment suggests a non-Hungarian origin; as well as all the works from early medieval times that cannot even be Hungarian, and the subsequent works that partly are, partly are not, and those from the late middle ages and the Renaissance that are certified not to be Hungarian, just as the Baroque works mentioned above – then we have sufficient reason not to consider the history of old art in Hungary as a history of Hungarian art, and because a methodological differentiation between and separation of the two has not yet been attempted, we can declare that the discipline of the history of Hungarian art has not yet begun.

We have seen that the history of Hungarian literature and art differ from each other in age, stage of development, and quantity; but besides these unessential relative differences there is something else too. The absence of the history of Hungarian art does not mean some kind of inferiority in terms of quality, a relative belatedness compared to literature; the categoric 'does not exist' that we have proclaimed is not a judgment of value which denies the existence of the discipline in its excessive strictness. Whether there is a difference in quality has nothing to do with our reasoning. The question is only whether it does or does not exist. The history of Hungarian literature has been discussing its own material ever since it began. The so-called history of Hungarian art has never done that – not in the beginning, not later, not now. Thus, its non-existence is not relative, it is not non-existent by existing to a lesser degree – it does not exist at all. It may sound paradoxical that something exists and still does not exist, but it is not the statement that is paradoxical – it is the fact itself.

II.

How did this deficiency come about and what was its cause?

Just as everywhere else, the history of art in our country was born from local necessities and possibilities, but in selecting its subject and defining its methods it followed the countries where the discipline of art history had already emerged. In

¹⁶ Fülep cites the names of foreign painters, sculptors and architects working in Hungary in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

the history of Hungarian art, however, it is not just style, influence, the travels of artists, authorship, social class and the personalities of commissioner and creator, the lives and personalities of artists, as well as the economic, social, political, ideological issues behind all these that are important, but there are other questions too, which the scholarly models either lack, or even if they do not, they do not attach great significance to them. Thus, Hungarian art history should not only pose questions based on these models, such as: what kinds of influences manifest themselves in Hungarian Romanesque art; or in Hungarian art of other periods; what did the structure of feudal society look like in Hungary; how did industrialisation and embourgeoisement happen and how did cities develop; how did Renaissance architecture emerge in Northern Hungary; what did Raphael Donner create in Pozsony (today Bratislava, Slovakia) and on whose commission,¹⁷ and how do these works compare to the rest of his oeuvre and to contemporary sculpture? It should also ask questions such as: are influences simply influences, did they produce art that can be called Hungarian; if they did, where, when and why can art be designated as such? Regarding the German inhabitants of Northern Hungary and Transylvania, who kept a sometimes closer, sometimes looser contact with their former homeland and borrowed from its art directly and indirectly, with Hungarian mediation or relying completely on German models, but sometimes also differing from the latter and producing art that cannot be explained by German examples and schools, does their art belong to German or Hungarian art? Does it belong to neither of them completely, or sometimes mostly to one, sometimes mostly to the other, and when, how and why? What are the criteria in different times that allow us to speak of Hungarian art or of the art of other ethnic groups, is it the ethnicity of the makers or are there any other criteria, and how should the criteria be applied? Subsequently, do the works doubtlessly identified as the products of other ethnicities – for instance if the artist is German and the commissioner Hungarian, or if they are both German – belong to the history of Hungarian art at all, or do the questions of when, where and to what extent depend on the location and the period? Where, when and why can Hungarian cultural influence be regarded as one that encompasses the cultures of other ethnicities and when should the latter be considered ethnical and part of the culture of their own people outside the borders of the country or products of relative cultural seclusion? These general questions are followed by more specific ones such as: were the artists of the statue of St George in Prague Hungarian or not¹⁸, and is it that fact or something else that decides to which art history the statue belongs? Similarly, how

¹⁷ Georg Raphael Donner (1693–1741) was one of the most significant Austrian Baroque sculptors. From 1729 to 1739 he worked in the city of Pozsony in Northern Hungary (today Bratislava, Slovakia) in the court of Prince Imre Esterházy, Primate of Esztergom. Besides being patronised by the primate, he also fulfilled commissions for other Hungarian aristocrats.

¹⁸ The bronze statue of Saint George on horseback, standing in Prague outside St Vitus Cathedral, was made in 1373 by two sculptors identified as the brothers Martin and George (Márton and György) from Kolozsvár (then in Hungary, today Cluj-Napoca, Romania). For a recent survey of research findings about the statue see Ernő Marosi, *Kép és hasonmás* [Image and likeness], Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1995, 86–123.

should we categorise the works of the artist M. S.,¹⁹ a painter of unknown identity and debated ethnicity; and so on. I purposely highlighted the last two because they are either a matter of debate between Hungarian and German art historians, or both parties regard the questions as already decided to their respective advantage.

For it would be an overstatement to claim that questions such as these do not come up elsewhere, in the places from where Hungarian art history borrowed its methods. They do, but they have different meanings in different contexts. In those countries, the point of departure is an unproblematic fact, like the Hungarianness of our literature: their art is Italian, German, French; occasionally, in borderline cases, the question of the national identity of individual objects is raised, but even if it cannot be solved, if it remains debated for a while or for good, this does not change the essence of their art. There, these questions are not central but peripheral in significance; here, the centre and periphery of art are both problematic; what is a peripheral question there is central here. Any culture would be glad to claim as its own masterpieces such as the statue of St George or the *Visitation*,²⁰ rightly or wrongly attributed to Master M. S., but the face of German art will not change, its structure will not topple without them. To them, they are a bonus, to us the capital itself. If works such as these are taken away from Hungarian art, whole periods are orphaned. Hence, it is a crucial question whether they belong there or not. The physiognomy of Hungarian art, as it has been traced up to now, has many such debatable, or not even debatable features. Still, its history has not addressed them in depth. Although it realised their importance, it addressed the ethnic origin of artists only occasionally, in order to protect something, to secure it against foreign claims, and this was not done according to principles and criteria applied to the whole history of Hungarian art, nor with a methodology adequate to engage with its central questions. It is only natural that in other places this peripheral question is not treated as central – why would it be? – but it is not natural that in our country, the central is treated as peripheral, although it would be of crucial importance to do otherwise. Our art historians write art history like Italian art historians write Italian art history, as if Donner, Maulbertsch, Sigrist were ours in the same way as Giotto, Michelangelo, Tiepolo are theirs. However, they never methodologically investigated whether it was possible to talk about Hungarian art in the same way as about Italian, German, French art. Instead, they analysed styles, schools, artists' personalities just like in the West. For instance, there is extensive scholarship on the

¹⁹ Master M S is the anonymous artist of an altarpiece from Selmebánya (today Banská Štiavnica, Slovakia) whose 8 panels – 7 of which are known – showed scenes from the birth and Passion of Christ. (Today, four of the panels are in the collection of the Christian Museum of Esztergom, one at the Hungarian National Gallery, one at the Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille, and one in the parish church of Hontszentantal [Svätý Anton, Slovakia].) The scene of the Resurrection is signed with the letters M S and the date 1506. Recently, the art historian Miklós Mojzer proposed an identification with Marten Swarcz, the painter of Veit Stoss' high altar in Cracow. See Miklós Mojzer, 'Der historische Meister MS sive Marten Swarcz seu Martinus Niger alias Macin Czarny, der Maler des Krakauer Hochaltars von Veit Stoß II,' in *Annales de la Galerie Nationale Hongroise 2005–2007*, Budapest: Hungarian National Gallery, 2008, 90–138.

²⁰ One of the panels of the Selmebánya altarpiece (see previous note), now in the Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest.

Hungarian Baroque – but we do not even know where it is. In our country, the Baroque is not Hungarian as it is Italian in Italy or German in Germany. It is not completely Hungarian – but it probably has Hungarian aspects. Hungarian material has not been gleaned from the conglomerate. The nationality of an artwork does not depend on whether the artist came here to create it or created it at home and sent it to Hungary. Frescoes and churches cannot be sent here – panel paintings, medals, sculptures can. The former are categorised as 'Hungarian' material because they were made here, while the latter, if imported, are not – whereas, in reality, they are all equally foreign. It does not change anything when art historians prove that someone was German, or at other times emphasise the Hungarianness of something in a loud and pathos-filled voice adequate to the central importance of the issue, and instead of any proof pester us with extremely unreliable stylistic analysis or curiosities. Hekler is not satisfied with the simple rehabilitation of the unnational eighteenth century; the Hungarianness of the Baroque does not need any proof at all, to the contrary, he uses the style to prove the fervent national spirit of the age, because 'it is evidenced by monuments and written sources that this art, commissioned by the Hungarian high clergy and aristocrats, played a crucial role throughout the eighteenth century in the creation of national cultural ideals and the idea of a nation state, with a gradually strengthening, almost romantic fervour.'²¹ How is it manifested? 'The sign of this striving – Hekler continues – is that in his sculptural group in Pozsony²² Raphael Donner dressed Saint Martin in Hungarian festive attire – obviously following the wishes of Primate Esterházy; a few years later, in 1745, János Pálffy and Antal Grassalkovich pleaded to the generosity of towns and counties so that "the royal residence, to be built to the glory and happiness of our nation and dear homeland" could be presented to Empress Maria Theresa as a present from the country.'²³ A splendid decision, rooted in the most Hungarian of all virtues: national sentiment and loyalty to the ruler.'²⁴ He goes on to state that 'the foreign-born Sigrist surprises us with the Hungarian Baroque (!) representations of the humanities in the ceiling frescoes of the Lyceum in Eger. In dome frescoes by Maulbertsch and others, Heaven and Earth are populated by saints wearing Hungarian costumes.'²⁵ This is no persiflage, but an accurate quotation of an original text, and neither is it the result of some momentary lapse of reason, hand picked by us – the whole book relies on this kind of 'scholarship,' of which we will see further examples later.

²¹ Antal Hekler, *A magyar művészet története* [The history of Hungarian art], Budapest: Könyvbarátok Szövetsége, 1935, 129.

²² In 1734, Donner (see Note 17) created the high altar in the cathedral of Pozsony (today Bratislava) on the commission of Primate Imre Esterházy. In the centre stood a life-size statue of St Martin and the beggar, flanked by two adoring angels of a monumental size. The altar was taken apart in 1865, and only parts of it survive: the sculptural group with St Martin can still be seen in the cathedral, while the two angels are on display at the Hungarian National Gallery in Budapest.

²³ The Baroque royal palace in Buda Castle was built on the site of the medieval palace during the reign of Empress Maria Theresa (1740–1780). Construction works were supervised by Count Antal Grassalkovich.

²⁴ Hekler, *A magyar művészet*, 129.

²⁵ Hekler, *A magyar művészet*, 130.

All up to now only motivates that, due to the undetermined nature of its material, Hungarian art history does not exist and with such a methodology cannot exist either. The cause itself, the *causa efficiens* which lies behind the motivation, has not yet been named. It can be easily deduced from the handbooks and monographs, but in can also be found formulated as a principle.

The cause is, in short: the inability or unwillingness to give up on something, the desire to possess everything as our own. This can take several forms: an unreflected, naive clinging to what is valuable; a lack of deliberation, a blindness to problems; professional chauvinism – the significance of a discipline is proportional to that of its material; national chauvinism; a fear of appearing to dismiss national values or not to be protecting them. This wide range, from conscious appropriation to a naive illusion of being in possession, encompasses all varieties of Hungarian art history, with only a few exceptions. If possible, art historians did not talk about sensitive questions; they hushed them up, unless provoked; when they did talk, they mostly declared, instead of proving; they consciously or blindly avoided the truth for the sake of beautiful pretence; but whatever the cause, it resulted in the unreliability of the material.

The works that formulate this underlying cause in the form of principles are the following: Antal Hekler, *A magyar művészettörténelem föladatai* [The tasks of Hungarian art history], 1921; Tibor Gerevich, *A régi magyar művészet európai helyzete* [The situation of old Hungarian art in Europe], 1923; Idem, *Művészettörténet* [Art History], 1931; Idem, *A magyar művészet szelleme* [The Spirit of Hungarian Art], 1939.²⁶

Hekler enumerates the deficiencies of Hungarian art history, calls for the gathering of material to encompass a complete knowledge of artworks, a complete and reliable topography of historical monuments – what he neglects, however, is to describe the methodology of identifying Hungarian material, the criteria for inclusion. Instead, he characterises the phases of Hungarian cultural history through sweeping generalisations:

The wide-reaching fertilising force of Hungarian Renaissance culture best shows that this plant spread its roots deep into our soil and grew to bear fruit. It was not only Italian noblemen in the entourage of King Matthias and

²⁶ Tibor Gerevich (1882–1954) was an art historian who specialised in Italian Baroque painting, as well as the art of medieval Hungary. After working at the Hungarian National Museum and serving as director of the Esztergom Christian Museum, he became a professor at Pázmány Péter University in 1924 and organised the Institute of Christian Archeology and Art History, a rival to the department led by Antal Hekler (see Note 15) at the same university. Also in 1924, Gerevich was appointed as director of the Hungarian Historical Institute in Rome, a post he held until 1930, becoming an influential figure of conservative, nationalist cultural politics while building cultural relations between Italy and Hungary. His university Institute was dissolved in 1949, as part of the reorganisation of the university, but he continued lecturing in the remaining years of his life. His book on Hungarian Romanesque architecture is still an indispensable reference work.

Queen Beatrice²⁷ who had employed famous Italian artists, but also our Hungarian high clergy and nobility.²⁸

The second sentence disproves the first: if the only proof of the deep-rootedness of the Renaissance is the employment of Italian artists and the only proof of its vitality is the transmission of Renaissance art to neighbouring countries, then there was no deep-rooted Renaissance culture in Hungary, because that would have required its assimilation into local culture; if it had spread its roots in our country, the signs would be different. And even in that case, we would have to ask what was the creative contribution of Hungarians besides the commissions of Hungarian priests and noblemen. All of Hekler's arguments, with which he attempts to prove the deep-rootedness of foreign cultural trends and the assimilation of foreign artists, the way their works became, as he puts it, 'integral parts of our national culture'²⁹ – something he treats as a given – are similar. In this vein, the spirit of the age yields a programme:

And when we speak of the cultural values of our past, our glance does not stop at the arbitrary borders drawn at a green table;³⁰ it wanders through Transylvania, Northern Hungary and the Southern regions,³¹ even the smallest corners of which loudly proclaim that the Hungarian race and the Hungarian soil was never barren in the field of artistic culture either. The artistic remains in Greater Hungary are ours; we will never give them up. Their scholarly analysis is our right and our duty; the soul that reveals itself in them is the soul of our nation, opposed to which the spirit of denial flutters helplessly. These monuments are the most effective and most revelatory means of proving our cultural superiority.³²

Voilà: this is why Hungarian art history never was, never could be, and never should have been.

²⁷ King Matthias Corvinus (r. 1458–1490) was a generous patron of culture who rebuilt the royal palaces of Buda and Visegrád in the Renaissance style and patronised many Italian artists. He built up an outstanding collection of illuminated manuscripts (the Corvina Library) produced in the studios of the best Italian masters. His wife, Queen Beatrice of Aragon was the daughter of King Ferdinand I of Naples, and she played a part in Matthias' patronage of Italian artists and humanists. Matthias imported the latest tendencies of Italian art to Hungary through high-quality examples, but this courtly Renaissance did not exert much influence in other parts of the country, apart from a few isolated examples.

²⁸ Antal Hekler, 'A magyar művészettörténelem föladatai [The tasks of Hungarian art history],' in *Hekler Antal válogatott dolgozatai* [Selected writings of Antal Hekler], ed. Nándor Láng, Budapest: Akadémia, 1942, 373.

²⁹ Hekler, 'A magyar művészettörténelem,' 373.

³⁰ Hekler refers to the so-called Treaty of Trianon, the peace treaty formally ending World War I between the Kingdom of Hungary and the Allies. The treaty, which was ratified in 1920, allocated two thirds of the former territory of Hungary to neighbouring countries. The revision of the treaty was a central concern for right-wing politics in interwar Hungary.

³¹ In the Trianon Treaty (see previous note), Transylvania was allocated to Romania, Northern Hungary to Czechoslovakia (today's Slovakia) and Southern Hungary to Yugoslavia.

³² Hekler, 'A magyar művészettörténelem,' 375.

We will separate Gerevich's programmatic writings from his monograph on Romanesque art in Hungary.³³ Although the latter is also suffused with an urge to prove the Hungarianness of everything, its rich material and the author's wide knowledge still distinguish it as a work that will prove useful when the history of Hungarian art is finally written. His first programmatic work is a polemic against those who deny the existence of Hungarian art history,³⁴ most of all László Éber, who began his dissertation (published in 1909) on sculpture in Transylvania by stating that:

It is a fact long acknowledged that any reference to the history of Hungarian art is necessarily incorrect because the artworks preserved in our country do not exhibit any distinct, characteristic, uniform traits that we could identify as truly ours. Caught between international influences coming from several directions, from near and from far, the Hungarian nation was unable to create anything new from the foreign elements and to express its national character this way.³⁵

Gerevich does not succeed in proving the opposite. Not because Éber is right, but because he is not right either. Éber is not right because in the absence of previous methodological investigation it is unknown whether or not Hungarian art exists, and calling something 'a fact long acknowledged' is not a scholarly argument; Gerevich is not right because his claim that old Hungarian art exists is just as arbitrary as Éber's claim that it does not, and the works he cites to prove his claim are arguments more to the contrary. The two opposites correspond to such an extent that he uses Éber's own words to state what the latter had denied: 'it is a fact long well known that Romanesque church architecture produced a characteristically Hungarian building type.'³⁶ Whereas at the moment all that is 'well known' is that there is a distinct type characteristic of Hungary, but whether it is Hungarian, we do not know. Gerevich proves the Hungarianisation of the Gothic through objects from Northern Hungary, an area inhabited by other ethnic groups – objects whose Hungarianness is doubtful at the least and should first be proven or shown to be probable; and proves it by referring to something whose existence should also be proven first: 'Hungarian spirituality' and 'Hungarian artistic approach:' 'Restraint and sobriety, the avoidance of mannered excess, a greater respect for reality and a tranquil mode of expression are the style-transforming factors resulting from Hungarian spirituality and the emerging Hungarian artistic approach.'³⁷ It is Hungarian spirituality, treated as an already verified entity, which differentiates provincial Hungarian Gothic from the source of influence, magnificent French

³³ Tibor Gerevich, *Magyarország románkori emlékei* [Romanesque monuments in Hungary] (Budapest, 1938)

³⁴ Tibor Gerevich, *A régi magyar művészet európai helyzete* [The situation of old Hungarian art in Europe], Budapest: Dunántúl Kiadó, 1924.

³⁵ László Éber, 'Erdélyi szobrászati emlékek [Sculpture in Transylvania],'*Művészet* 8 (1909), 171.

³⁶ Gerevich, *A régi magyar*, 7.

³⁷ Gerevich, *A régi magyar*, 9.

Gothic, in such a beneficial way – based on evidence provided by a few wood carvings. And the whole construction and the history of old Hungarian art in general is based on such *petitios principii* and wholly undefined objects. They point out three, four, five foreign influences in an artwork and then conclude by declaring it characteristically Hungarian. Gerevich also adds that it is much better than its German or French counterparts.

Leaving out all that is in between, let us go straight to Master M. S. – let us see the arguments Gerevich uses to justify the bestowing of this desired great treasure on the Hungarian patrimony in the process of partition. 'The pictures of the Visitation, the Nativity and the four scenes from the Passion of Christ are the most unique products of Hungarian form creation', 'His crucified Christ is not a broken ruin, like the Christ painted by his closest art historical parallel, Grünewald, who painted his Crucifixion with the characteristical harshness of German realism: the Christ by Master M. S. preserves his divine dignity even in his suffering.'³⁸ For a contrary view, let us quote Gerevich's pupil, István Genthon:

Christ's eyes are bulging, his mouth is drooping, his skeletal, wizened face twitches for a last time in his struggle with death, while at the end of the outstretched arms his hands are cramped with pain. We have no other picture that depicts suffering with a similar expressive force, its spirit is barely Christian; the torture faced by the Man-God yells out the barbarian, wild cries of tormented humans.³⁹

Those who know the picture know that it is the latter description that is genuine, and they also know that it is this quality that makes the picture stand out: the paroxysm of suffering, the realism of the horrible. It is not an overstatement to say that it is on par with Grünewald's works. German art history attributes these pictures to the Augsburgian Jörg Breu or to him and his studio; E. Heidrich reproduces the Visitation in his *Die altdeutsche Malerei* as a work of Jörg Breu;⁴⁰ it is not important whether this attribution is wholly accurate, because it is undeniable anyway that the pictures fit seamlessly into German painting, but not into Hungarian art. In the context of Hungarian painting, their painter can only be discussed as a 'meteorlike' miracle, as Genthon describes him – and that is not a very good certification.

Gerevich uses the same kind of arguments to prove the Hungarianness of the best examples of art in Hungary in his *The spirit of Hungarian art*.⁴¹ In order to oppose the German art historian Pinder,⁴² who had, as he puts it, categorised the Kolozsvári brothers and Jakab of Kassa⁴³ as German 'with no hesitation,'⁴⁴ he

³⁸ Gerevich, *A régi magyar*, 24–25.

³⁹ István Genthon, *A régi magyar festőművészet* [Old Hungarian painting], Vác: Pestvidéki Nyomda, 1932, 107.

⁴⁰ Ernst Heidrich, *Die altdeutsche Malerei*, Jena: Diederichs, 1941, 275–276.

⁴¹ Tibor Gerevich, 'A magyar művészet szelleme [The spirit of Hungarian art],' in Gyula Szekfű ed., *Mi a magyar?* [What is Hungarian?], Budapest: Magyar Szemle, 1933, 419–488.

⁴² Wilhelm Pinder, *Die deutsche Plastik des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts* (München, 1925), 67.

⁴³ Jakab (Jacob) of Kassa (in German Jacob Kaschauer; Kassa/Kaschau is today Košice, Slovakia) was a sculptor and glass painter who worked in Vienna and died in 1463. His

identifies them as Hungarian with a similar lack of hesitation, but also without any proof. The Hungarianness of the two brothers is, according to him, a 'resolved question,' and so is the fact that their art emerged from Hungarian goldsmithery. 'Their artistic personalities are clearly distinct from the development of German sculpture.'⁴⁵ That is true, but this negative statement does not prove their Hungarianness. The connections between the statue of Saint George and international art, as well as Hungarian goldsmith's works and seals depicting figures on horseback have been thoroughly examined,⁴⁶ however, as scholarship did not – like in most other cases – reach down to the foundations, contenting itself with spurious facts (such as the artists' name, which has multiple interpretations) and stylistic analysis, the Hungarianness of the work still cannot be regarded as 'proven.' The final argument, employed by Gerevich elsewhere, as we have seen, was formulated in the following way by one of his pupils: 'Its spirit is typically Hungarian: they chose the most dramatic moment of the story and depicted it with a sober realism devoid of any excess, which signifies an early instance of the manifestation of the restrained, balanced, sober spirit of Hungarian art.'⁴⁷ However, just as Master M. S., this statue is also classified by Genthon as one of the miracles, 'lonely pinnacles'⁴⁸ of Hungarian art, which makes the understanding and interpretation of its Hungarianness very difficult, although – let us add – not impossible, because at least it does not lack precedents. The Germanness of another 'lonely pinnacle,' Jakab of Kassa – who is known to have worked in Germany – is just as evident as that of Master M. S., and the question of his Hungarianness cannot even be raised as a possibility, as in the case of the Kolozsvári brothers.

Gerevich then goes on to cite examples of 'a pure and sober approach and a striving for clarity,'⁴⁹ 'a well-developed sense of rhythm,'⁵⁰ and its 'characteristic flow,'⁵¹ the 'unique Hungarian sense of proportion,'⁵² the 'Hungarian sense of beauty,'⁵³ the 'cheerful calmness'⁵⁴ from among the best examples of art produced by German ethnic groups in Hungary, and he even finds Hungarian anthropological types among examples of a facial type that existed centuries-long in painting everywhere in the German territories, including Flanders.

name is known from written sources and comes up in connection with the high altar of the cathedral in Freising, Bavaria, whose sculptures he completed in 1443.

⁴⁴ Gerevich, 'A magyar művészet szelleme,' 425.

⁴⁵ Gerevich, 'A magyar művészet szelleme,' 425.

⁴⁶ At the time Fülep gave his inaugural lecture, the most recent and most thorough work was Jolán Balogh, *Márton és György kolozsvári szobrászok* [Márton and György, sculptors from Kolozsvár] (Cluj-Kolozsvár, 1939). – **ÁT**

⁴⁷ Dezső Dercsényi, *Nagy Lajos kora* [The age of King Louis I the Great], (Budapest, 1941), 123.

⁴⁸ Genthon, *A régi magyar*, 100.

⁴⁹ Gerevich, 'A magyar művészet szelleme,' 455.

⁵⁰ Gerevich, 'A magyar művészet szelleme,' 477.

⁵¹ Gerevich, 'A magyar művészet szelleme,' 477.

⁵² Gerevich, 'A magyar művészet szelleme,' 478.

⁵³ Gerevich, 'A magyar művészet szelleme,' 478.

⁵⁴ Gerevich, 'A magyar művészet szelleme,' 478.

In the plump, blossoming faces of our medieval Virgins and female saints we can recognise the Hungarian type and ideal beauty, even if they were created in areas inhabited by German and Flemish settlers, because these had mixed with Hungarians thus adapting to Hungarian anthropological character, and the artistic types they created were determined by common and universal Hungarian development.⁵⁵

He is carried away by the praise of Hungarian sobriety as he approaches the end of this enumeration to a point where he exclaims:

Hungarian people use few gestures, they do not fling their arms about, their sparse words are accompanied by little movement... [Hungarian Baroque art] is calmer than the general requirements of the style... in our baroque sculptures and paintings, the gestures of the figures are calmer, less agitated. Munkácsy's Christ, in his painting *Christ before Pilate*,⁵⁶ owes the awe-inspiring impression of divine majesty to his dignified, straightened body and his completely motionless hands.⁵⁷

Christ's hands are, as we all know, tied up so how could he gesture? All the other figures, however, use as many gestures as Munkácsy saw fit for this dramatic scene, regardless of what Hungarian calmness prescribes. This contrast constitutes the core of the picture, no less.

The conclusion to this train of thought and the whole ideology is the following:

If we wished to sum up the essence of Hungarian art in a few words, we could point to the calm and pure approach adequate to the Hungarian spiritual temperament... Our historical art did not only belong to ethnic Hungarians, but also to the other peoples sharing the same state, culture and moral views, constituting one of the bonds between them.⁵⁸

As a consequence of that bonding, assimilation has always been going on in Hungary. Firstly, the Hungarian people were assimilated to Europe in an economic, political, social and cultural sense from the first time they set their feet on the land. Besides this general process, assimilation was also happening on a smaller scale: other ethnicities were assimilated to Hungarians and vice versa, in different regions in different ways and to different extents, in a constant flux. Art is one of the signifiers of this process, and it often provides an excellent way to measure it. From

⁵⁵ Gerevich, 'A magyar művészet szelleme,' 479–480.

⁵⁶ Mihály Munkácsy (1844–1900) was a Hungarian artist who lived in Paris from the early 1870s and achieved great international fame. *Christ before Pilate* is a colossal work painted in 1881 on the commission of the art dealer Charles Sedelmeyer, who took it on a successful tour around Europe and the USA. *Christ before Pilate* (Art Gallery of Hamilton) was followed by *Golgotha* (1884, collection of Imre Pákh) and *Ecce Homo* (1896, Déri Museum, Debrecen).

⁵⁷ Gerevich, 'A magyar művészet szelleme,' 482.

⁵⁸ Gerevich, 'A magyar művészet szelleme,' 487–488.

this natural process, we have to clearly distinguish conscious and purposeful appropriation, cultural nationalism or imperialism, which began in the nineteenth century and went on until the end of World War II. The main principle of the latter is: if you take mine, I take yours. This is why there was no separate Hungarian art history and why it could not come into being, and neither could the art histories of other ethnicities in Hungary; what for, if anything could be branded as Hungarian, or just as well, for instance, as German.

I do not mean to suggest that the complete corpus of Hungarian art historical literature is chauvinistic and propagates 'cultural superiority.' Furthermore, the programmatic texts quoted here cannot be held responsible for all the problems. Just as much as they produced the national morale, they were its products themselves. They could only come into being and become so effective in a certain milieu. The spirit is the same, even if it was less conscious and determined at first – this is why Hungarian art history could not be born when its time had come. But subsequently, the authors of these programmes exerted a great influence through ideological training, their example, their university lectures; everyone is probably their pupil in one way or the other, either in terms of ideology or of methodology. This is why what had never begun could not continue. And why it still does not exist.

III.

But now the reason is no more, so the consequence should also cease to be. A new opportunity has arisen, the question is how to use it.

The new opportunity is an opportunity to implement a new view of and new approach to Hungarian art and art in Hungary. It leads to a new task, which requires a new methodology. It is the task that has to be specified first.

It is the sign of great difficulty when a scholarly programme first has to define the concept of its subject. It is usually a given that there is a general consensus, and if a certain study wishes to use a specific interpretation or wishes to extend or constrict the subject somewhat, it can simply do so by clarifying its aims in the course of its argument. It is certainly unnecessary to define the subject of Hungarian art history before the nineteenth century – that would be superfluous and fussy, just as in the case of literature. Nevertheless, the fact that something was practiced for hundred years that was called Hungarian art history but was really something else reminds us of the undefined nature of the subject of this discipline. Hence, it has to be defined, otherwise the task itself will remain vague. The subject of Hungarian art history is – and this has to be declared, even if it is a tautology – Hungarian art, art created by Hungarians. By Hungarians we do not mean a Hungarian people of so-called 'racial purity' – that we would never find anywhere. Neither do we mean some sort of a priori and arbitrarily constructed notion of an eternal popular or national character, because that does not exist either. What does exist is a Hungarian nation that evolved in the course of the centuries and is still constantly evolving; a community made up by Hungarians and the ethnicities that lived with them or joined them in their economic, social, and political life; furthermore, there exists a conscious or inherited identification with that community. The people, or, from the time we can call it so, the nation is not a *constans quantitas* – it is transformed, modified, differentiated, articulated, so much so that it is full of contradictions, oppositions, opposing trends both diachronically

and simultaneously. According to the Stalinian definition: 'The nation is a permanent community of people that had developed in the course of history, founded on a spiritual temperament manifested in a shared language, territory, economy and culture.' (Marxism and nationality)⁵⁹

All art created by Hungarians thus defined – no matter the foreign influences or catalysts – is Hungarian art, the subject of Hungarian art history. This subject is multi-layered, and consequently so is the task of the discipline. The subject includes what is necessarily, definitely Hungarian, even if we do not know yet what it is. The first step towards fulfilling the task is hence to find the Hungarian material and outline its historical existence. Then there is what is doubtful, but its Hungarianness is likely. There is also what is undetermined, but there is a chance that its Hungarianness can still be proved. The likely, but doubtful and the hopeful, but undetermined should be discussed as such, the categories clearly specified. All of these are subjects of Hungarian art history, but on different levels. And there is more. Hungarian art probably influenced ethnic groups that lived here and shared the same culture even if they were not assimilated to Hungarians ethnically, and it could also have influenced neighbours. This influence is also the work of Hungarians, and Hungarian art history has to investigate it, assess its extent, refer to the art other ethnic groups created in its wake. These layers are the subjects of Hungarian art history, this is the scope of its task.

The task does not, however, extend to the autonomous art of other ethnic groups, created under either Hungarian or other influences, and neither to art created in ethnic areas, whether Hungarian or definitely not Hungarian, if it did not initiate some sort of development in Hungarian art, regardless of whether the patrons were Hungarian.

The layered task of Hungarian art history also belongs to the history of art in Hungary. The latter, however, has further tasks. Art history in Hungary will not be annihilated by the establishment of Hungarian art history, it will go on to exist autonomously and will be indispensable to the latter due to their intertwined nature. The correlation between them is so strong that neither of them can be established without the other, as art in Hungary includes Hungarian art and Hungarian art is somehow often present in non-Hungarian art. Still, the history of art in Hungary is no substitute for the history of Hungarian art. Although their subject matter is intertwined – often inextricably –, their objectives and structures are different. The history of Hungarian art, if it really wants to be that, has to articulate this difference clearly and accomplish its own task. The history of Hungarian art has one axis, the history of art in Hungary has several. The axis of the task of the former is to ask why, when, and how Hungarian art came into being within the great diversity of the land, where, when, and why it evolved or stagnated, what are its characteristics, and does it have a role and significance in the history of European art, especially in the Eastern part of Europe, and if yes, what. The history of art in Hungary has as many axes as there are ethnic groups creating historically relevant art in Hungary, and it has to investigate all of them, among them Hungarian art, just as the history of Hungarian art investigates the art of the

⁵⁹ J. V. Stalin, *Marxizmus és nemzeti kérdés* [Marxism and the national question], Budapest, 1948, 11.

Hungarians. So, while the task of Hungarian art history does not include the investigation of the art of other ethnic groups, which incorporated Hungarian influences but went on to evolve in its own singular way, the task of the history of art in Hungary includes it. (It needs not to be mentioned that it is the task of the the art histories of the nations in question to investigate their own art, just as Hungarian art history investigates Hungarian art.) It has to search for external influences in the art of these peoples. Nevertheless, even if something only belongs to the task of the history of Hungarian art, it does not mean that it is none of our business, because even if it is not the task of Hungarian art history, it is and should be the task of Hungarian art historians. (German-language literature produced in Hungary does not belong to the history of Hungarian literature, but we still have to engage with it.) Lastly, it is not even the task of the history of art in Hungary to examine material that had not induced anything, either in Hungarian art or in the art of other peoples. This belongs to the task of art history in general, which still does not mean that it is not important to us, nor that our art historians should not engage with it, specifying clearly what that material is and why it interests us.

Let us see for once what the Hungarian nation was and what kind of art it produced here in the course of these thousand years. Self-knowledge is an indispensable part of national existence, and the history of literature and art came into being in the previous century in its support. Once we have conducted an unbiased investigation of Hungarian art, whether it existed – which has been denied by some –, and if it did exist, what part of art in Hungary was created by Hungarians in the widest sense. Furthermore, whether it existed continuously and organically, as the art of some more fortunate nations, or maybe, torn by devastating storms, only in certain periods and with great gaps – then the result will surely be that Hungarian art is much less than what has been referred to as such, less than art in Hungary, but maybe more than what we now expect in our unawareness. And we might find out other things, for instance that in our self-satisfaction over all the pompous products of foreign art we neglected things that were maybe not as showy, but created by Hungarians; gems worthy of appreciation even in their modesty, maybe even masterpieces within their own categories. Hence, what we lose on the swings, we gain in abundance on the roundabouts. Finally, we will be able to integrate Hungarian art, of which we will have gained genuine knowledge, into the complete historical existence, the past and present of Hungarians, into the entirety of their economic, social, political, cultural existence, the organisation of their material culture, economic and artistic industry, literature, music, scholarship, in short, into their whole culture. It will complement and clarify the latter with its own characteristics, and vice versa.

The material that constitutes Hungarian art can be defined in principle, but not in practice. It is this definition that is the objective of historical research, of the analysis of works, of comparative art history. The subject matter of Hungarian art history will evolve in the course of the research. But only if our declared objective is the history of Hungarian art, not only in its name, but in reality, and if we have a principle to which we keep ourselves when examining and identifying the material, as well as a methodology used in the process of examination and identification. The principle is included in the definition of Hungarian art. The methodology has yet to be found. The objective is: a Hungarian art history that is like the history of

Hungarian literature. The task is harder than that of the latter, but that is no reason to neglect it. The crucial difference is that while the material is not ready-made in the case of the history of Hungarian literature either and it grows and expands constantly, it is in the making from the very beginning, because from the very beginning it has a solid criterion: language, and it has a core to which material found on the way can be added. Art history lacks such simple criteria. We have to find one that is solid enough to supplement the linguistic criterion. Something that would be an unattainable ideal in its purest form, but can still serve as a useful regulatory principle in practice. The history of Hungarian art is possible and can be realised to the extent to which this principle can be applied.

The whole thing would be simple if we could just scan scholarly literature on the history of art in Hungary for sections and chapters dealing with Hungarian art, sort them chronologically, proportionally, thus producing the history of Hungarian art. However, as we have seen, previous literature is unreliable in this very respect: in identifying works as Hungarian.

As a criterion for the categorisation of the material, we could suggest the names and ethnicities of the artisans. That is, however, unsatisfying because information on the greatest period of art in Hungary, the Romanesque period, is scarce, and many artists are unknown in subsequent periods too. The criterion is also unreliable, because it cannot serve as a guide in itself. Names such as Tamás of Kolozsvár,⁶⁰ Jakab of Kassa, Pál of Lőcse⁶¹ are not family names in the modern sense: they refer to the place of birth or activity, and the bearer of the name can still be either Hungarian or German. Johann Anton Krauss, who called himself the 'sculptor from Jászó', 'statuarius Jaszoviensis,' was from Moravia, and there is no sign of his assimilation. But even in the times when names had become official, a simple analysis of names will not take us anywhere. Petőfi would still be a Hungarian poet if he had kept the name Petrovics.⁶² Rippl-Rónai is a Hungarian painter without the Rónai,⁶³ and so is Derkovits despite his name.⁶⁴ Names do not prove anything. To

⁶⁰ Tamás of Kolozsvár (Kolozsvári Tamás) was probably the painter of an altarpiece from the Benedictine monastery of Garamszentbenedek (today Hronský Beňadik, Slovakia), now in the Christian Museum of Esztergom. The altarpiece came into the collection of Archbishop János Simor in 1872. The identification of the artist is based on a predella which once presumably belonged to the altarpiece but was destroyed by fire in the nineteenth century. It bore the date 1427 and an inscription that referred to the artist as Tamás (Thomas) of Kolozsvár.

⁶¹ Pál of Lőcse (in German Leutschau, today Levoča, Slovakia; 1465/1470–1480 – 1537–1542) was the sculptor of the high altar of the church of St Jacob in Lőcse. A number of other works in the region can also be attributed to him.

⁶² Sándor Petőfi (1823–1849), the Hungarian Romantic poet who died in the War of Independence Hungarianised his name from the Slavic Petrovics.

⁶³ József Rippl-Rónai (1861–1927) was a Hungarian painter influenced by Post-Impressionism and Art Nouveau. He is regarded as one of the most excellent masters of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The first half of his family name, Rippl, is German, while the second half, Rónai, is Hungarian.

⁶⁴ Gyula Derkovits (1894–1934) was a Hungarian painter whose unique style is related to Expressionism, Cubism and Constructivism. He was involved in the workers' movement and his works often convey social criticism. Derkovits, whom Fülep considered as one of the greatest Hungarian painters, had a Slavic name.

demonstrate the irrelevance of ancestry it will suffice to refer to Dürer, the most German of all painters. Nothing comparable to his profile in the contemporaneous medal by H. Schwarz⁶⁵ has been produced by Hungarian anthropology or ethnography. 'In der Tat hält es schwer' – says Wölfflin himself – 'in diesem Rosselenker der Puszta den 'fleissigen Kläuber, der Dürer doch gewesen ist, wiederzuerkennen.'⁶⁶

What is left, then, is stylistic analysis. As our examples have shown, this method is used to prove anything and its opposite. We could say that something better, more meticulous, more substantial and most importantly unbiased has to be used. Stylistic analysis is an important, indispensable tool for art history, but it is useless in defining Hungarianness. How could we decide whether the most carefully and scrupulously analysed stylistic traits are Hungarian without knowing whether the artwork itself is Hungarian? Italian, German, French, etc. traits are easy to assess because we know which objects are Italian, German, French, but this is exactly what our stylistic analysis lacks. The Hungarianness of the artworks has to be ascertained or at least proved to be probable first; then we can identify and enumerate the stylistic traits typical of Hungarian works. Otherwise, how could we identify them? Through stylistic analysis? No stylistic analysis can be perfect enough to save us from this circular logic.

And with that we have exhausted the methods used up to now. No matter how we look at it, the conclusion is that these methods will not lead us anywhere unless we understand that, as the artistic material in Hungary differs from that in Western countries in its undetermined origin and the subtlety of its relations, the previously neglected surplus of the task – which is its very basis – can only be completed via a method founded on filling in the blanks. In previous Hungarian art history, all the objects with the information regarding their origin, their making, their chronology, comparative stylistic analyses, attributions are hanging in midair – it is unclear, what produced them and where, what absorbed the influence, what carried, nurtured, modified it, it is unclear what is behind and under the characteristics, we cannot see the soil, the region, the people, the society, the reality in which the art was born, in which it evolved and declined, or into which it grew and where it elapsed. We only see royal, clerical, aristocratic, noble patrons, bourgeois patrons from towns, and artisans of all social classes and ethnicities; this seems to be enough regarding religious and courtly art, but only seems to be, because it is not; we cannot see what the entire culture was built on and what surrounded it, who produced what and how, making the flowering possible in the first place through their labour. The foundations are missing as if they had never existed. We sometimes hear about the birth of towns, their rise and decline, but not about the how and why; who lived there and in what numbers, what did they do for a living, how did they live – we cannot see that. The bourgeoisie built churches, public buildings, private buildings, had them decorated, was involved in what it had commissioned, specified its demands and desires, the subject matter it found interesting, the manner and style it preferred, but what the bourgeoisie was like and what it commissioned and why, we do not know. We know even less, virtually

⁶⁵ Hans Schwarz (1499–?) was a German medalist who made a portrait medal of Dürer. – **ÁT**

⁶⁶ Heinrich Wölfflin, *Die Kunst Albrecht Dürers*, Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1908, 355.

nothing, about villages. There are village churches, but no villages. All these, of course, are worthy of investigation in other countries too. But they are not indispensable to the identification of the nationality of the works, if it is already known. Here, they are indispensable. Without searching through the foundations minutely, we will never find certainty, nor probability. The problem of Hungarian art history is a revealing example of how it is impossible to achieve something without historical materialism, and how it is possible with its help.

The task has to start at the beginning and with the foundations. Without completing the basic prerequisites, no one can begin writing Hungarian art history. The new method has to be applied in research before the conclusions are drawn, and that is a vast and difficult job. And if someone claimed that the problem could be solved by borrowing the foundations, material culture, etc. elaborated by scholarship in other countries, it would only reveal their complete ignorance of the task. The art historian has to collaborate with the general historian and is much indebted to the revision of Hungarian history which has already begun, but has to interpret everything in relation to his subject and analyse the historical conditions of art. This is the art historian's most important task, one that requires great critical insight, comprehensive knowledge, an unbiased, not chauvinistic approach. It is a task incomparably greater and harder than was Hungarian art history or the history of art in Hungary with the previous methods, which only encompassed partial problems. Naturally, none of the applicable previous results should be thrown away; they should all be put into the service of the new objective. The end goal is: the entirety of Hungarian art shown within the entirety of Hungarian existence.

It follows from the above that the putting into practice of this programme should begin with the methodical division of the land into regions showing distinct historical and ethnographical developments, and, if reasonable, into smaller sections, such as individual towns, and subsequently these areas should be rigorously described in topographies and monographs. Studies of the economic, political and social history of a certain region or town should ask whether there existed a culture that would explain certain artworks – instead of describing them as 'miracles' –, as well as art in general, especially its quality and style. They should also investigate which ethnic group had produced it, and if not a unified group, what were its components. As ethnic origin alone is not a determining factor, the cultural environment has to be examined: its assimilating power, the scope of its influence. The national criteria of a region are the same as those of the nation: a historically evolved, long-standing community, a temperament manifested in a shared language, territory, economic life, and culture. Regions differ from each other in other countries too, they differ in their ages and stages of development, and in our land they also differ in their nationalities. But we cannot generalise in the case of ethnicities either. Because it is not that, for example, in a certain period there was significant artistic activity in an ethnic region, but not in the Hungarian regions, or vice versa: rather, there was activity in one part of a region, and none in another, or in part of a period, but not at other times. They all have to be examined individually, the general ethnic character of a geographical area is not a sufficient criterion. Art is not Hungarian just because it was commissioned by Hungarian patrons, whether aristocrats, noblemen, or bourgeois, guilds or towns, whether the commission was for one object or for a number of works that defined the image of

the city, and no matter how great a part they played in the planning – art can only be called Hungarian if the foreign influences yielded some sort of permanent characteristic, an ingrained tradition. Communities, and within them the communities and individuals that commissioned art changed constantly over time, of course, especially in regions inhabited by ethnicities; furthermore, they were often abruptly altered, ruined, interrupted by great historical events that affected the whole country; in certain regions, these did not have any effect, but in others, certain ethnic groups, especially Hungarians were expelled or almost eradicated in large areas, for instance in the south – and with these changes, the natural and forceful ones alike, the destiny of Hungarian art changed or was aborted for a shorter or longer time, or else it changed its ethnic character, the influences it absorbed, its orientation. Hence, place and time have to be taken in their constant evolution, more than anywhere else in the world.

The topographies and monographs have to extend to everything that can be uncovered by research in their chosen areas and periods, they should not rule anything out initially. Data that seems insignificant could prove to be characteristic when regarded in context. Pieces of information clarify and amplify each other, and their order of importance, as well as their role in determining the Hungarianness of something will only become clear in the end. Stylistic analysis, the history of imagery, studies in iconography, for instance on the survival of motifs originating in the age of the Conquest in the Romanesque period,⁶⁷ Hungarian legends in the age of the Árpáds, etc., costumes, anthropological characteristics, especially in the case of periods when Hungarians constituted a 80–90% majority of the populace should all be employed, but they will only gain real meaning and decisive validity when placed into the most complete reality possible. This criterion and method will allow us to validly state or deny that something is Hungarian, or to suggest its possibility, and to identify and build the complete corpus of Hungarian art – not a priori, but in the end, as a result of having thoroughly discussed the entirety of the historical life of Hungarians.

Apart from multi-faceted and painstaking research and analysis, this type of judgement also requires a consistent ethos of truth and fairness, as much regarding other nations, as regarding our own in terms of class. It may seem, for example, as if in the Baroque period there had not only been rich aristocrats and priests, but also a rich, efflorescent Hungarian artistic culture. The truth, however, is the exact opposite, especially in the ravaged Hungarian areas.⁶⁸ The truth is, that there was wealth, culture and even demand, but there were no Hungarian artists to satisfy it immediately after the devastation. Hence, art was imported like coffee or tea – and it did not occur to those aristocrats, lauded for their blazing Hungarian spirit, to found some kind of Hungarian school of art with the help of the foreign masters they invited in. They had wealth in abundance – Hungarianness, not as much. In relying exclusively on foreign art, their patronage was more an obstruction to the

⁶⁷ The conquest of the Carpathian Basin by Hungarian tribes happened in the late ninth century.

⁶⁸ Fülep refers to the period from the early sixteenth to the late seventeenth century when Hungary was plagued by constant battles with the Turks. From 1541 to 1686 a large part of the country was under Turkish rule, including the city of Buda.

revival of Hungarian art than its catalyst. If the Baroque was assimilated into local productivity, that happened in spite of them, and not due to their activity.

I now ought to discuss Hungarian history as a whole, and in each period and region, from the first centuries, when Hungary was a major power and its art was in bloom, through its decline, its conquest by the Turks, then by another foreign power,⁶⁹ its colonial status, and finally its new rise, show the major tasks, revealing in the fortune of the people the fortune of the art. But that would have to be the subject of a longer study, even in its sketchy form. Instead, I will briefly touch on the general principle of the expansion of Hungarian art history.

In Hungary, just like elsewhere, the major styles found their way to all levels of society, to the bourgeoisie and the rural population, becoming bourgeois or popular. We have to investigate their dissemination and popularisation with particular care up to the last visible trace because these mean that they adapted to us, they were transformed into Hungarian or ethnic; provincialism and regionalism is identical with Hungarian national or ethnical. In the course of their popularisation, great styles are transformed, adapted, nationalised as local traditions. It is not sufficient to thoroughly examine the great works, the churches of Ják, Lébény or Zsámbék,⁷⁰ while only describing the lesser ones in a descending order according to their sizes or ornamentation and barely mentioning the smallest ones, because it actually is these that were probably not built by foreign masters, they are the ones that show what became of a style in the hands of the peoples of this country. And if we want to prove the nationalness of the great works, we can only do so by investigating artistic culture in general. In a place where village churches such as the ones around the Balaton were built, the likes of which also existed in the plains, as evidenced by archeological findings, ones like the churches in Egregy, Mánfa, Óraljaboldogfalva, Csempezkopács, Börzsöny, Szász, Sima, Tarnaszentmária, Tótlak, Turnicse, Velemér, or the not as numerous remains of the Gothic, there must have existed a flowering culture. The Renaissance was not simply an imported courtly art: in Northern Hungary, in Transylvania, among the nobility, bourgeoisie and the people, it lived on in traces for a long time even when it was over elsewhere; the tradition of the 'flowery Renaissance'⁷¹ produced in the hands of the people works such as whole rows of gates in streets in Sekler villages,⁷² an art just as perfect according to its own terms as a folk song compared to the great

⁶⁹ Turkish occupation was ended by Austrian forces in the late seventeenth century, which, however, also meant that the entire Kingdom of Hungary became a province of the Habsburg Empire.

⁷⁰ Ják and Lébény are two localities in Western Hungary with well-preserved Romanesque churches dating from the first decades of the 13th century. The premonstran abbey church of Zsámbék, near Budapest, was built in an early Gothic style c. 1220–1234 and is preserved as a picturesque ruin.

⁷¹ Hungarian art history writing uses the term 'flowery Renaissance' (*virágos reneszánsz*) to refer to a certain style of architectural decoration quite common in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Hungary, most typically found in Transylvania, but also appearing in Western regions. The style is described as a popularised version of the Renaissance style and was named after its most characteristic motif.

⁷² The Seklers (*székely*) are a Hungarian-speaking ethnic group who inhabit central Transylvania.

compositions of great composers. Even the Baroque, imported in very different conditions, was acclimatised into a uniquely Hungarian style in the decoration of country mansions and village houses. The Empire became a practically national style in mansions and peasants' houses.

We have to use the criterion and method outlined above to find out what was the part played by Hungarians in the creation of this artistic material up to the wooden village churches and houses with Empire columns: where, when and why did Hungarian artistic culture exist and why was it the way it was; and to show, where, when, why it did not exist. It is not enough to know what Maulbertsch and the like did here, we have to find out at last what Hungarians, and among them the Hungarian people, did. The kind of village architecture which we would like to include among the subjects of art history and award it with a special place – we mean buildings like the ones in Zamárdi, Lepsény, Ószöd, Szárszó, Bálványos, Arács, Nemespécse, Szentgál etc. around Lake Balaton, or Tiszaderzs, Tiszafüred, Kunhegyes, Abádszalók in the Nagykunság, a similar blank area on the map of art –⁷³ had up to now signified the presence of folk culture almost unclaimed: for art history, it was not sufficiently grand art, too ethnographical, for ethnography it was art received from above, not sufficiently popular. This artificial separation has to be done with. A significant portion of Hungarian art history cannot be investigated and understood either through art history or ethnography alone, just as the same goes for many other traditions of ours (for instance, our heroic songs⁷⁴). Here, just as above when we discussed the construction of a topographical and monographical foundation, we have to draw attention to the necessity of cooperation.

Our whole approach has to change. Then the chapter on medieval art will not be illustrated with a photo of the present cathedral of Pécs (in Hekler's book the caption reads: 'it owes its present form to the reconstruction led by Baron Frederick Schmidt from 1882 to 1891'⁷⁵ – he even claims we 'owe' something for the butcher's work), although it has nothing to do with Romanesque architecture in Hungary as it was built by the German professor Friedrich von Schmidt to replace the original Lombardesque cathedral; instead, illustrations will show smaller village churches, which have preserved their original form and spirit even after conservation. The present cathedral of Pécs can only find its place in the chapter on nineteenth-century art as an example of the destruction and forgery that age was capable of – the original building could still have been saved. The approach that only appreciates representative great works and records the rest as if they were just documents or tools will have to end, because the latter are necessary to understand historical continuity, the development of a tendency or the local characteristics of a region. To only appreciate a style in outstanding works – this is a *contradictio in adiecto*. The style is the language of the whole community. We do not have a Brunelleschi, a Michelangelo, a Rembrandt, and our monumental buildings from the first five hundred years have almost completely disappeared. Instead of struggling to

⁷³ Fülep cites the names of localities around Lake Balaton, Western Hungary, and in the Nagykunság, to the East of the Danube.

⁷⁴ A characteristic genre of old Hungarian poetry from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (*vitézi ének*).

⁷⁵ Hekler, *A magyar művészet története*, 19.

compensate for that loss by appropriating what is foreign and showing off Hildebrandts, Donners, the 'Austrian Tiepolo,'⁷⁶ let us recognise that in great artistic periods the universality of the style is valuable in itself, and that our popular products, however unassuming or clumsy compared to the greatest works, are not simply an archeological surplus to scholarly research, but just as lively as the greatest works, and capable of causing the same pure, unadulterated pleasure. It is no great feat to show the greatness of the great works – let us see greatness in the small ones, because it is there. Our popular past calls out to us with a huge force from ruins and fragments, their artistic value and truth is still of an incomparable educative influence. The cheap little clay votive statuettes found in the vicinity of Greek temples radiate the same beauty and nobility as the great works – and our tiny Egregy church, so well situated that it dominates the landscape regardless of its size, expresses something that is only possible in this simplicity, unaffectedness, this incredible naturalness. It transforms and elevates a whole locality and turns it into a masterpiece, just as the Greek temple of Segesta transforms its own environment. This is what Hungarian art history should show us, it should teach us to build an animated relationship with the art of our past, it should teach us to understand it, love it, find pleasure in what we have, not for the sake of chauvinism – it is not chauvinism to appreciate what is ours –, but because nothing else can replace it in sending this message.

Some might still claim this is unpatriotic, as it means giving to others what is ours – but those objections can now be forgotten: to the contrary, we are not giving away anything that is ours, but we are not taking away anything that belongs to others. At the moment, we do not even know what is ours. The fact that we possess something does not mean it is ours, legal possession does not equal spiritual ownership, and that goes for everyone else too. But how can we expect them to respect what is ours if we do not respect what is theirs? Once we have found out what is ours, we will be able to appreciate it properly. This will be the beginning of a new relationship with our past, and consequently with our present and future.

It must be evident by now why we said at the beginning that the task was especially great. The method outlined above does not reduce the material in size, instead, it expands it, and with it the task expands too. The value of the material will not decrease either, it will just be different than before, and thus we will gain in abundance what is ours while going without what belongs to others. Such a great task requires collaboration, a working group,⁷⁷ not only in its entirety but also in its details.

It also has to be seen that what we are thinking of are topographies of a different nature than the one that began the planned series of topographies of the

⁷⁶ Franz Anton Maulbertsch was described as 'the Austrian Tiepolo' by Hekler, 'A magyar művészettörténelem,' 372. – **ÁT**

⁷⁷ In 1951, the Hungarian Art Historical Working Group (later Art Historical Documentation Centre) was founded as a research institution independent of universities and museums. In 1969, the Centre was attached to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, whose Research Institute of Art History continues the Centre's legacy. – **ÁT**

monuments of Hungary (the volume on Esztergom, published in 1948⁷⁸). According to the editor's foreword: 'A topography is a topographical record... it is a registry of our movable and immovable monuments, a foundation for all our further works and publications.'⁷⁹ Yes, it is that too, but it has to be much more – especially in our country, in order to initiate the writing of Hungarian art history. It has to provide all the preparatory work necessary for the history of Hungarian art. The first volume of the topography of Esztergom is like a descriptive catalogue of a library with a collection of works originating from many places: it is necessary, it is useful, but it cannot serve as a basis for Hungarian art history, just as the library catalogue cannot serve as a basis for the history of literature. The planned second volume on local and county monuments should be written according to the principles outlined here, and so should the rest – this is how the history of Hungarian art could begin at last.⁸⁰

As we approach the present, the task changes, but it does not become easier. The complicated question of ethnicity loses its importance, but the question of national character remains, and that of quality becomes more complicated. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there is incomparably more bad art and non-art than art, and usually not somewhere in the periphery, but in a distinguished position, officially recognised, purchased, rewarded, flooding not only large exhibitions, but the streets, squares, homes – and this is so characteristic of that unartistic age that its art history cannot be written without including bad art, which belongs to the reality of the age to such an extent that it has to be referred to constantly, and it cannot be neglected because the art life of the age was defined by a struggle for life between good and bad. This is something completely new in the realm of art, and so also in its history. The task is to analyse quality, not style, as in the previous periods. Quality has to be analysed in earlier art too, but not in order to create a divide, because there is nothing to reject, either because there never was, or because it has been weeded out by the passage of time. This evaluation is a delicate task that requires special abilities. Hungarian art history has useful good traditions besides the bad ones.

The period beginning with the early nineteenth century can be regarded as one large task and its detailed discussion could again only be achieved in a longer essay; here I will only touch on the subject so that it does not go without mention. In other respects this is the age most thoroughly investigated with the method of historical materialism, but not from the perspective of art, so art history still has a lot to investigate regarding the causes of the progress that occurred in these 150 years from the progressive movements of the nobility and the emerging bourgeoisie through the different phases of capitalism towards socialism; a period in whose first decades there was barely any art and which progressed towards an abundance and originality that made a mark even in an international framework. In the following, I

⁷⁸ *Esztergom műemlékei. I. rész. Múzeumok, kincstár, könyvtár* [Monuments of Esztergom. Part I: Museums, treasury, library], ed. István Genthon, Budapest: Műemlékek Országos Bizottmánya, 1948.

⁷⁹ Tibor Gerevich, 'Bevezetés' [Foreword], in Genthon ed., *Esztergom műemlékei*, 2.

⁸⁰ The second volume on Esztergom was not published; the topographical series continued with the volume on Sopron and its vicinity in 1953. – **ÁT**

will only mention a few subjects from the intertwined process of initial delay and sudden upsurge.

Although interest in Izsó has grown in the last two or three decades, a thorough investigation of his work in relation to the reality of his time is still missing.⁸¹ Let us also mention here that scholarship on sculpture generally drags behind compared to that on painting.

The fate of architecture in the age of capitalism and the fact that, in the midst of all the imitation, the history of architecture came to a complete standstill is a very important and extremely fascinating problem. The architecture of Budapest as compared to other cities could be the subject of a very illuminating study.

It is almost unnecessary to mention the subject of Munkácsy, as it is well ingrained in popular consciousness. For now, let us only say that the method usually used to address the topic will not yield any results. A large part of Munkácsy's works was produced to satisfy the capitalistic market, and his oeuvre cannot be lumped together as one whole.⁸² The painter himself would strongly object to treating works painted with artistic ambition in the same way as those produced for sale. We cannot forgo criticism and the search for truth in anybody's case. Literary history has progressed further in this respect too, as exemplified by the evaluation of phenomena such as Mikszáth.⁸³

On the pages that will unavoidably have to be devoted to pseudo-art, the Hungarian Art Society will deserve a separate chapter.⁸⁴ Following a promising start when it supported the young Izsó and Munkácsy, it went on to foster Margitay⁸⁵ and Philip de László,⁸⁶ representing that extremely reactionary social class which was embodied in literature by Jenő Rákosi⁸⁷ and the like. Backed by the power of the state, it sought to extinguish all progressive tendencies. Contemporary professional criticism had already given its verdict over the phoney masters the Society propagated, and the verdict has been upheld by the passage of time. In uncovering

⁸¹ Miklós Izsó (1831–1875) was a sculptor best known for his representations of Hungarian peasants. Fülep regarded him as one of the greatest figures of Hungarian art. In his *Magyar művészet* [Hungarian art], published in 1923, he singled out Izsó as one of the few artists who achieved the great task of creating real Hungarian art: that is, art that addresses timely, relevant, universal artistic problems in a uniquely Hungarian way.

⁸² By works produced for the market, Fülep means Munkácsy's so-called 'salon genre pictures,' paintings depicting idyllic scenes in Parisian bourgeois homes. The painter, however, started his career with Realist representations of peasants, work and poverty, works highly appreciated by strict critics, as well as nationalist and Marxist ideologues alike.

⁸³ Kálmán Mikszáth (1847–1910) was a very prolific novelist and journalist known for his witty, anecdotic style.

⁸⁴ The Hungarian Art Society (Országos Magyar Képzőművészeti Társulat) was an association of artists and amateurs founded in 1861. It organised exhibitions and supported artists through grants and awards.

⁸⁵ Tihamér Margitay (1859–1922) was a painter trained at the Munich Academy who mainly painted anecdotic genre paintings.

⁸⁶ Fülöp László (Philip de László, 1869–1937) was a Hungarian painter who rose to international fame with his buoyant, elegant portraits of the highborn and wealthy. He settled in England, married the heiress Lucy Guinness, and adopted an aristocratic lifestyle.

⁸⁷ Jenő Rákosi (1842–1929) was a writer and playwright working in the genre of 'peasant play' (see Note 89)

the class roots of the reaction of the past and its mendacious ideology, art history has to employ strict critique in order to safeguard us from the return of the pompous jingoism of the Millennium,⁸⁸ its fake peasants and 'peasant's plays',⁸⁹ its bourgeois pseudo-romanticism and its fake labourers, the Gyula Pekárs⁹⁰ and Sándor Csizmadias⁹¹ of painting, under some new, good-sounding slogan. The damage would be revealed after a while, but by then it would have happened.

Hollósy,⁹² the teacher is better known today than the painter, whom we can barely judge for lack of an adequate knowledge of his works. The reconstruction of his oeuvre is one of our most urgent duties. What is known gives us much hope even in its unevenness. Besides his inferior works there are also excellent ones, and even within one painting averageness is coupled with a high quality hardly attained by any of his pupils.

Hollósy's name reminds us of Nagybánya, and the fact that its history has barely been investigated.⁹³

A volume of Réti's collected published and unpublished works would be very welcome.⁹⁴

It would also be desirable to collect information on Rippl-Rónai, Csók,⁹⁵ Nagy Balogh,⁹⁶ Derkovits, and Dési Huber⁹⁷ while it is possible, while we still have a number of witnesses.

⁸⁸ The Millennial Celebrations of 1896 commemorated the thousand-year anniversary of the Conquest of Hungary, whose date was consensually set as 896.

⁸⁹ The 'peasant's play' (népszínmű) was a popular genre of late-nineteenth-century Hungarian theatre, which after its heyday came to be seen as the epitome of kitsch.

⁹⁰ Gyula Pekár (1867–1937) was a minor writer, journalist and politician.

⁹¹ Sándor Csizmadia (1871–1929) was a poet and journalist with strong Socialist political views. The mention of this poet was, in 1951, a rather brave reference to the low quality of Socialist Realist poetry. – **ÁT**

⁹² Simon Hollósy (1857–1918) was a painter who operated a private artists' school in Munich in the 1870s–1880s and went on to establish the Nagybánya artists's colony with some of his former pupils in 1896. He later moved to Técső (today Tiachiv, Ukraine). His landscapes and genre paintings represented a unique version of plein air painting and naturalism, which provided an important example for the Nagybánya masters.

⁹³ The artists' colony in Nagybánya (today Baia Mare, Romania) was founded in 1896 by a group of artists who had formerly studied in Munich and were associated with Simon Hollósy (see previous note): Károly Ferenczy, Béla Iványi Grünwald, István Réti, János Thorma and Hollósy himself. The colony is best known for plein air landscapes, but the artists' output was actually much more diverse and included, for instance, genre paintings and pictures of biblical subjects, which often conveyed complex, symbolic meanings. Welcoming younger artists, Nagybánya also witnessed the emergence of avant-garde tendencies in the early 1900s. A monograph on Nagybánya is still missing, but in 1996 the Hungarian National Gallery devoted a major exhibition to the colony, and the exhibition catalogue is today the most important reference work on the subject.

⁹⁴ István Réti (1872–1945) was one of the founders of the Nagybánya artists' colony (see previous note) whose importance lies more in his writings on the history of the colony than in his paintings. His collected writings have still not been published, but his history of the colony has been published twice: *A nagybányai művésztelep*, ed. Nóra Aradi, Budapest: Képzőművészeti Alap, 1954; and ed. Géza Csorba, Budapest: Kulturtrade, 1994. – **ÁT**

We know that Stalin's beautiful thesis is addressed to us too: '...all nations – small and large – have their own characters, traits that are uniquely theirs and lacking in other nations; these traits provide the surplus with which each nation enriches the treasury of world culture, making it more complete. In this respect, all nations – small and large – are in the same position, and all nations are equal in significance to any other nation.'

In this thesis an ancient desire of nations is manifested, attesting to its truthfulness. The thesis of social truth is ancient in a general sense, but its practical application is novel. The application of the thesis quoted above is, to us, life itself. We know that in the art of our recent past and our present we have produced that surplus, so we have every right to demand the application of that truth on us. It will be the task of our art history to find out whether the art of our more distant past, of our whole history, awards us with the same rights. In our quest to prove our right to the thesis in general, art history plays a difficult, but especially beautiful role. And this is not only its scholarly task, but also its main national vocation.

⁹⁵ István Csók (1865–1861) was a painter who studied in Munich and Paris, and subsequently associated with the artists of Nagybánya. He started his career under the spell of naturalism and symbolism, creating his most important masterpieces, and went on to become a painter of late Impressionist landscapes and genre paintings.

⁹⁶ János Nagy Balogh (1874–1919) was a painter influenced by Cézanne and modernism who lived in extreme poverty and worked as a painter of walls in order to earn a living. Due to his meagre circumstances, his oeuvre consists of small-scale pictures of subjects easily available to him: self-portraits and pictures of his lowly studio.

⁹⁷ István Dési Huber (1895–1944) was an avant-garde painter who was a member of the illegal Communist party and often incorporated political messages in his works.