



Hungary's 1100th Anniversary: An American Celebration

April 27 – August 31, 1997

Castellani Art Museum of Niagara University

“What makes life wonderful?”

*“Laughter, love of people, wonders of nature,
beauty of arts, and harmony of music,”
said the wise man.*

“I try to find them day by day. Where are they?”

*The wise man answered, “You have to open up
your heart to see them.”*

Hungary celebrated its 1100th birthday in 1996. If you know a Hungarian, you know that we are proud of our heritage, our rich culture and even our sometimes sad history. Hundreds of thousands of Hungarians were forced to leave their homeland and many settled in North America where doors were opened for them. Those who came to North America have become good citizens but they have never forgotten that they are Hungarians. *Hungary's 1100th Year: An American Celebration* is the result of their help. People with different interests and from diverse backgrounds all did something for our common goal. I have seen the artists and students in Budapest becoming committed to our exhibition, as well as the staff of the Castellani Art Museum and the students, faculty, and administration at Niagara University who supported this effort.

Within both the contemporary art from Budapest and the Hungarian folk art from collections in this region, you can see expressions of the history and culture of the Hungarian people. I am glad that today I can share this with you and I hope you will share it with someone else. When I came to the United States a year and a half ago I did not know a single person. Now, it seems I know the whole world. I would like to thank you for this world: Hungarians, Americans, Canadians, students, faculty, staff, priests, and citizens—everyone who put a piece into this celebration.

Reka Gobel
MBA Graduate 1997, Niagara University

FOREWORD

This exhibition of prints and drawings from the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts is a message from a country which celebrates the 1100th anniversary of its founding and—in spite of all the economic difficulties—feels the benefits of liberty again.

In the course of history, culture and art have always helped people to survive dictatorships. Now we have to protect our culture and traditions from an ever commercializing tendency of the world. For this reason, the essence of this message cannot be anything but the fact that culture has always been rooted in tradition. Thus, in spite of all the similarities, every culture brings information of vital importance which is different from all the others. The results which derive from these differences can enrich our global culture and make it more colorful at the same time.

In the spirit of the above mentioned thoughts, I would like to greet the teachers and students of Niagara University who have enabled us to deliver our modest message and add our colors to the palette of the world.

Szabados Arpad, President
Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts, Budapest

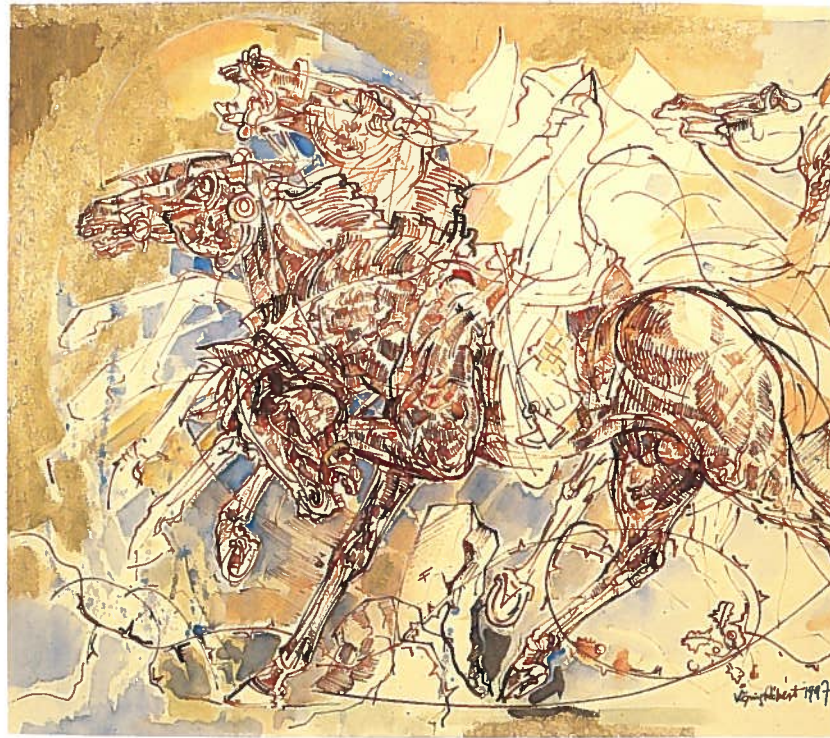


1.

INTRODUCTION

The Castellani Art Museum of Niagara University is honored to present this American celebration of the 1100th anniversary of the founding of Hungary. This commemoration was initiated, organized and implemented by Reka Gobel and Peter Taczman, two Hungarian students from the M.B.A. program at Niagara University. Returning to Hungary after completing his degree, Peter Taczman coordinated the preparation and loan of artwork from The Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts in Budapest, while Reka Gobel introduced this project to the Hungarian American communities in Western New York and Southern Ontario and coordinated the fundraising efforts to support it. Judith Krauza, guest folk arts curator, identified and researched the wonderful examples of historic and contemporary Hungarian folk art from area families and collectors who, in addition to loaning part of their collections, generously shared their information, personal experiences, and stories. The folk art component is also made possible through generous support from the the Folk Arts Program of the New York State Council on the Arts. Dr. Sylvia Bakos, an art history professor at Buffalo State College, whose speciality is contemporary Hungarian art, provided the critical analysis of the contemporary artwork within an historical context. This event, therefore, not only celebrates the founding of Hungary, but also promotes awareness of the country's rich cultural heritage, as expressed here by people of all ages, but most importantly by young people, both in Hungary and within our own communities.

Sandra H. Olsen, Ph.D., Director
Castellani Art Museum of Niagara University



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YOUNG ARTISTS IN AN OLD COUNTRY: CELEBRATING HUNGARY'S 1100TH ANNIVERSARY WITH CONTEMPORARY ART

To commemorate a nation's 1100th anniversary with works of art made in the last three or four years may seem a strange idea at first. Yet, this exhibition of contemporary graphic works from Hungary proves otherwise. In their salient aspects the exhibited works demonstrate a connection with the past, as well as a continuity of present and future. The exhibiting artists are teachers and students of the Academy of Fine Arts, the pre-eminent college level art school of Hungary, located in the capital, Budapest. Among the exhibitors there are six teachers, three recent graduates, and one student.

The exhibited prints show many subjects that are at once old and new, while their media revive old techniques and interpret traditional methods in modern ways. This contemporary art incorporates aspects of history and continuity not in a literal or fact-based manner, but rather, in symbolic, evocative, highly romantic and personal ways.

The most obvious reference to history is displayed in a series of fourteen pen, ink, and wash drawings shown by Robert Konig. Titled *Hun Legend - Fragments*, the series depicts horsemen and riderless horses engaged in various activities. The subject was inspired by a literary source, the *Prelude* to the epic poem *Csaba biralyfi (Prince Csaba)* by one of the nineteenth century's greatest poets, Janos Arany. The *Prelude* conjures up the remote past in misty, dream-like images:

*Before my eyes the ancient images pass
As alive, as intact as in times long past:
Arrow-straight Hun youths on their tall, slim horses
Race by on the great plain with their bows flexing.*

*And the group gallops off swifter than the wind
Leaving the earth's dust like a white fog, drifting.
There I saw the heroes' youthful offspring,
And the dark shadow of Attila looming."*

The highly gestural and at the same time delicate style of Konig's drawings lend appropriate visual form to Arany's evocative mood, while the washes of color add a misty feeling. Some of the drawings contain washes of gold, which, combined with the sepia of the drawing, give a sense of splendor and opulence to these pictures. A few of the drawings, on the other hand, are done in white ink and chalk on black paper; these have a strange, ghostly feeling. By means of these stylistic devices, Konig creates a wonderfully rich group of drawings that express history in a highly personal, symbolic manner. This interpretation of historic heritage also makes use of the motif of the Hun horseman.

Why would a Hungarian artist choose the Huns as the symbol of his recollection of Hungarian history and myth? Why would the poet Arany? The Hungarian concept of the Huns is very different



from the singularly negative, derogatory Western European interpretation of that historic nation and its most famous king, Attila, who ruled in the fifth century, A.D., and amassed an empire that stretched all the way from the Rhine River eastward to the Caspian Sea. In contrast to the Western European barbarian image, the Hungarian interpretation of the Huns and King Attila is much more positive, even heroic. At an early time a belief arose that held the Huns to be the mythic brother-nation of the Hungarians. This idea, which is denied by historians today, appears in medieval and later Hungarian literature, and also in the well-known old tale *The Legend of the Miraculous Stag*.

While it is true that the Huns came to Western Europe as spectacularly effective conquerors, the extreme and prejudicial picture of barbarism that later historians gave of them is not accurate. The actual historical eyewitness descriptions of Attila, for example, by the Byzantine Ambassador Priscus—who knew Attila personally—show the Hun king as a man of simple, moderate habits, a shrewd strategist, and an intelligent, fair-minded leader of his people. Thus, the more positive Hungarian interpretation of Attila is more objective historically.

Konig uses the Hun horseman as a symbol of Hungarian origin and history. The Hungarians and their predecessors in the Carpathian Basin, the Huns and Avars—peoples who were all expert horsemen—eventually transmitted to Western Europe all their accumulated skill and expertise in using the horse for transportation. At that time, this invention was comparable to the advent of the railroad, the motorcar, and the jet plane in more recent times. Therefore, the horse symbolizes not only the mobile lifestyle and devastating battle strategy of

the East European horse-riding peoples, but also their definitive contribution to European civilization and their whole identity. Throughout their long and stormy history this side of the grave and beyond, they had the company of their faithful friend, one of the most decisive factors in the course of human history—the horse.

The horseman constitutes an ancient Hungarian emblem of national myth, history, and freedom. The rich folklore of the horse and rider expanded even further in the art of the early twentieth century, as the horseman assumed modern symbolic connotations of the Arcadian harmony of man and nature and social and cultural regeneration, despite an often harsh destiny.

Continuity of past and present is also evoked by subject and technique in the other works in the show. In the *Still Life* and *Genre Scene* series by Imre Kocsis, for example, old and new aspects converge. These series consist of prints of gum-arabic, an old technique of photographic printmaking that employs a photo sensitive emulsion. In this way, photographic prints are created with unusual textures and unique, colorful tonalities that are not part of the original photograph. Kocsis' *Genre Scene II*, for example, has a faded, grainy texture reminiscent of an old photograph, with some exquisitely delicate, hand-made tints. In this picture, old pottery, and a man in an overcoat, that makes him look as if he belonged to some bygone time, are juxtaposed with children dressed in jeans and sneakers. The combination of old and new evokes the passage of time in a quiet, contemplative, mysterious way. Like Konig's horses and riders, Kocsis' offbeat gathering of characters reveals a romantically fluid continuum of time and experience with shifting, dream-like bits and pieces of past and present.

This fluid movement between past and present permeates the show as a whole. Rita Keselyak's aquatint series *Contrasts* has the look of old photographs, with its velvety brown tones. The aquatint series *Staircase* by Kinga Horvath spirals in a dark, infinite space. Andras Baranyay's delicately modeled *Handshake* series and Nikolett Papp's *Still Lifes* look like ghostly landscapes. The surrealist imagery of Alajos Eszik and Zoltan Csordas present pictorial enigmas, while the *Bridge* lithograph series by Tibor Somorjai Kiss constitutes holistically abstract images. And the large, vividly colored lithographs of Gabor Pasztor, such as *Self Portrait with Shako*, combine subtle modeling with richness of textures and a wealth of strange, marine motifs in a surrealist image that is marked by modern whimsy and baroque grandeur.

The romantic, fluid convergence of past and present in the work of this group of young artists from the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts is a uniquely modern celebration of a very old country's 1100th anniversary of statehood.

Sylvia D. Bakos, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor, Fine Arts Department, Buffalo State College

* Translation by Sylvia Bakos

HUNGARIAN FOLK ART: A DECLARATION OF IDENTITY

The folk art included in this celebration of Hungary presents Hungarian history and culture from another point of view. Like much traditional art, it expresses the cultural language of its originating communities. Folk art springs from community life. The traditional folk artist does more than merely decorate an object or make something to fill an empty corner. His creation is prompted by an inner need to express his identity as a member of a group, a community, a nation. This sense of identity is nourished by the values and traditions of the past. Master folk artists like Lajos Fazekas and Miklos Kovacs are highly revered in today's Hungary. Firmly grounded in tradition, they continue to flourish and to grow.

Lajos Fazekas makes an ancient type of elegant black pottery. His surname means "potter" in Hungarian. The art was handed down in his family, from father to son, for 200 years. By 1950, the production of handmade black pottery had seriously dwindled in his home town, Nadudvar, but the Fazekas family persisted in its production. Now, Lajos Fazekas works to preserve the art's traditional values as well as to express himself and the time in which he lives. He is not bound by the past, but rooted in it, supported by it. Handmade black ceramics from Nadudvar are no longer everyday tableware; they cannot compete in the marketplace against inexpensive mass produced wares. However, they continue to attract customers with exquisite taste.



Miklos Kovacs is one of about a dozen remaining master practitioners of the art of blue-dyeing in Hungary. He is the third generation in his family to produce patterned fabrics using a hand resist printing (batik) technique. The fabrics are dyed in natural indigo or chemical indan-

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throne to create a white design on a rich blue ground. Hand-printed blue-dyed fabrics were once used as everyday clothing and household furnishings but have been replaced by less expensive mass produced fabrics, although white on blue prints remain popular. Miklos Kovacs' blue dyed cloth is made into clothing, tablecloths and aprons by his two daughters, Maria and Gabriella. The family regularly travels to fairs and festivals, the traditional outlets for their work. They also own and operate a retail store in Szentendre, a town near Budapest noted for its galleries, craft outlets and souvenir shops.

For Hungarians now living abroad, folk arts act as a vital link to their homeland and cultural heritage. Jenő Horvath of Rochester, New York, treasures the frieze coat he inherited from his father. "I feel different just putting it on," he says. The coat was made for Horvath's father around 1955 by Samuel Karsay, a close friend since the men were in a prisoner of war camp in Austria. Interestingly, a frieze coat is worn without the wearer's arms being put through the sleeves. Mr. Horvath explains that in Hungary the coat's sleeves were sometimes sewn closed and used as an extra pocket to hold a pipe, tobacco or a lunch taken into the fields. A father would save a bit of food, or pick a pretty flower, and keep it in his sleeve to surprise his child upon returning home.

Eva Tarnoy decorates her Queenston, Ontario, home with items that proclaim her ethnic identity. The throw pillows on her sofa, including one made by her daughter, are a catalog of traditional embroidery designs from various regions of Hungary. A wooden box, carved and painted by a friend, sits on a shelf. Pitchers and plates, again some made by local Hungarian friends, hang on her



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kitchen walls. "Everyone has these kinds of things," she says, referring to members of local Hungarian-Canadian and Hungarian American communities. Folk arts embody a core of personal identity, that strength from within, which enables someone coming to a strange land to build a new life on the firm foundation of the old.

Folk arts also serve as a cultural touchstone for a new generation born on different soil. Veronica Lehotay of Buffalo, New York, was the first member of her family to be born in the United States. Ms. Lehotay grew up surrounded by beautiful Hungarian things which her mother taught her to appreciate. She remembers her mother saying, "This isn't just a pillow," and going on to explain its cultural history. Now Ms. Lehotay is the cultural ambassador passing on what she has learned. She heads the local Hungarian scout group, is an avid folk dancer and collects folk costumes each time she returns to Hungary.

Hungarian folk art has long been admired by people from non-Hungarian cultural backgrounds. Three such collectors have joined members of local Hungarian immigrant communities in generously loaning folk art for this exhibit.



Professor Tom Muir Wilson, an educator for 35 years, retired from 22 years of teaching photography and art at the Rochester Institute of Technology. His wife, Sherry Clark Wilson, has a background in art education and textiles. Together they operate Craft World Tours which offers travelers the rare opportunity to visit the studios, workshops and homes of artists in Eastern Europe, South America and Asia. Professor Wilson started visiting Hungary in 1962. Asked why he acquired the frieze coat featured in this exhibit he sighs, "It's just damn beautiful."

Nancy Howard Lyon of Canandaigua, New York is an artist with 31 years of experience teaching art in the classroom. She has made four trips to Hungary. Much

of the folk art she acquires on her global travels finds its way into her classroom at the Victor, New York, Intermediate School. She is a strong proponent of multiculturalism in education and incorporates folk art into every unit she teaches. She uses patterns from her textile collection to illustrate crosscultural references for her students.

Folk art may be viewed like any other work of art, with shape, color, texture, composition and proportion its universal defining features. Like all art, it is influenced by technical, social and political change, but it is most wholly seen within the context of the cultural traditions of its maker.

Judith Krauza
Guest Folk Arts Curator

List of Artists

Faculty, The Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts

Robert Konig

Born 1951, Szekesfehervar, Hungary
Hun Legends-Fragments
pen, ink and wash
Alongside the Danube River
selection from portfolio of linocuts

Gabor Pasztor

Born 1933, Tura, Hungary
Self Portrait with Shako, 1996
lithograph
The Painter and His Muse
lithograph
Still Life, 1996
lithograph

Andras Baranyay

Born 1938, Budapest, Hungary
Shaking Hands I II III
offset lithographs

Tibor Somorjai Kiss

Born 1959, Bratislava, Czechoslovakia
Blue Bridge
lithograph
Subway
lithograph
Bridge XX
lithograph

Alajos Eszik

Born 1953, Kiskunfelegyhaza, Hungary
Playing Button-football/Monasz
lithograph
Expulsion/ Adam and Eve
lithograph

Imre Kocsis

Born 1940, Mako, Hungary
Genre I
gum arabic print
Genre II
gum arabic print
Still Life with K.I.'s Pots II.
gum arabic print
Still Life with K.I.'s Pots III.
gum arabic print

Students, The Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts

Zoltan Csordas

Born 1970, Szombathely, Hungary
Mirror Walkers I-II
lithograph

Nikolett Papp

Born 1970, Budapest, Hungary
Still Life I-IV.
aquatint

Rita Keselyak

Born 1974, Budapest, Hungary
Contrasts IV-V.
aquatint

Kinga Horvath

Born 1971, Miskolc, Hungary
Stairs I. II.
aquatint

Acknowledgments

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Finally, we wish to extend our heartfelt thanks to the lenders from Western New York and Southern Ontario who have generously shared their folk arts and experiences with museum staff and the general public: Veronika Lehotay, Eva Tarnoy, Nancy Howard Lyon, Emma Balogh, Tom and Sherry Wilson - Craft World Tours, and The Horvath Family. Special thanks are due to guest folk arts curator Judith Krauza, guest essayist, Dr. Sylvia D. Bakos and the artists, particularly Robert Konig and Imre Kocsis, for sharing their time, expertise, and creativity with all of us.

Cover:

Beaded detail from embroidered apron
Artist Unknown
Kalotaszeg Region, Transylvania
20th century
Courtesy Nancy Howard Lyon

Inside:

3. Painted ceramic plate
Kun Gazda Family
Karcag, Hungary
c. 1955

Courtesy Tom and Sherry Wilson



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4. Frieze coat and detail
Artist Unknown
Great Plain, Hungary
pre World War II
Courtesy Tom and Sherry Wilson

Contemporary Works:

1. Gabor Pasztor, *Self Portrait with Shako, 1996*
lithograph

2. Robert Konig, *Hun Legends-Fragments*
pen, ink and wash

5. Imre Kocsis, *Genre I*
gum arabic print

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