

PREFACE

There is a veritable surge in North American interest in the twentieth century Hungarian avant-garde today. An exhibition of art mostly from the collection of New York dealer Paul Kövesdy was on display late in 1987 and early in 1988 in Connecticut and Vermont, and a catalogue containing several essays was published on the occasion. Stephen Mansbach is in the process of editing a major catalogue to go with a travelling exhibition of the Hungarian avant-garde he is putting together for the Santa Barbara Museum of Art. Articles by various authors, including Esther Levinger, who has contributed to this issue, have appeared in major American art journals during the past couple of years. I am in the process of organizing more sessions on the Hungarian avant-garde for the Hungarian Studies Conference to be held at the University of Toronto in May of 1989, and an exhibition of Hungarian art in Toronto collections produced between 1900 and 1949 is being prepared for the Hart House Gallery at the University of Toronto to coincide with that Conference. This is, then, a good time for such a special issue of the *Hungarian Studies Review* to appear.

The idea for this special issue of the *Hungarian Studies Review* first arose after a well-attended session on the topic at the Third Triennial Hungarian Studies Conference at the University of Toronto in May of 1986. The session was organized and chaired by myself, and included presentations by all the authors in this issue. To papers by them, I have added my own "Connections Between the Hungarian and American Avant-Gardes During the Early Twenties," originally published in Hungarian as "Kassák és az amerikai avantgárd" [Kassák and the American Avant-Garde] in the volume *Magam törvénye szerint. Tanulmányok és dokumentumok Kassák Lajosról* [According to my Own Laws. Studies and Documents on Lajos Kassák], (Ferenc Csaplár, ed. Budapest: Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum and Múzsák Közművelődési Kiadó, 1987).

The documentary section more or less assembled itself. Hattula Moholy-Nagy, the daughter of the artist, sent two previously unpublished letters concerning her parents' naturalization as United States citizens, and kindly agreed to their publication. She and Alain

Findeli also recommended that I contact André Gabor of Chicago, who in turn put me on to Zita Schwarcz, an old friend of László Moholy-Nagy, who agreed to be interviewed about Moholy-Nagy and the Hungarian-American Democratic Council. She was also generous to send the information on Moholy-Nagy in the Hungarian-American Council on Democracy's newsletter. The Gropius and Bayer pieces came of their own accord, so to speak, as well. Dr. Thomas Vámos sent them, and we are very thankful to him for that, as we are for his having agreed to their publication.

The issue falls into two thematic sections, each having a certain coherence to it. The first section deals with the Hungarian avant-garde in Hungary or near it from about 1906 to 1929, with a focus on its central figure, Lajos Kassák. Sylvia Bakos' article serves as an excellent introduction to those unfamiliar with the Hungarian avant-garde tradition in art by dealing with its early years. Her concentration on the intellectual origins of its aesthetic theories serves as a background for those interested in reading Esther Levinger's analysis of Kassák's International Constructivist aesthetics. Levinger's article also gives the reader information on Kassák in his "heroic" days of Viennese emigration. My own article serves to underline the importance of international connections for the Hungarian avant-garde, and the fact that it deals with American connections, seems particularly appropriate in a North American publication such as this one. It also contains an American account of a "Constructivist" get-together at László Moholy-Nagy's Berlin apartment hitherto unnoticed in the Moholy literature. This brings us to the second section, which focuses on the theories and activities of Moholy-Nagy. Alain Findeli's article fills us in on Moholy's important pedagogical theories; while Diane Kirkpatrick's piece focuses on what Walter Gropius, in his appreciation of Moholy-Nagy appearing in the Documents section of this issue, named as his "great contribution to leadership in art": his ideas on space and time, and his "vision in motion." Interestingly enough, Herbert Bayer, in his appreciation of the artist, cites Moholy's "brilliant chapter on space" in his book *Vision in Motion* as "his great contribution." The documents assembled on Moholy-Nagy's involvement with the Hungarian-American Council for Democracy serve to point out what his family have always taken for granted, but what has not generally been acknowledged, namely Moholy-Nagy's concern for the future of his homeland, a concern which lived side by side with the appreciation of his adopted home, the United States.

In addition to thanking the authors for their contributions and patience, I would like to thank Hattula Moholy-Nagy, Zita Schwarcz, André Gabor and Thomas Vámos for their help in assembling the material for the documentary section of the issue. The assembly and editing of both the documentary material and the issue as a whole were carried out while I was the recipient of a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Doctoral Fellowship. The Council has also provided funds to help with the publication of this special issue of our journal. I wish to take this opportunity to thank the Council for its support.

Oliver Botar

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