

## In Memoriam Júlia Szabó

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It is with both sadness and gratitude that I remember Dr. Júlia Szabó as one of the foremost scholars of Hungarian art history of the modern period. Her work was wide-ranging, extending with equal facility throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Perhaps best-known for her work on the history of Hungarian Activism and the Hungarian avant-garde in general, she was also one of the foremost scholars on 19<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian art, and from 1994 she acted as curator of the mainly 19<sup>th</sup> century art collections of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Dr. Szabó completed her degree in 1962 in the Faculty of Arts of Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) in Budapest, majoring in art history and English. Her thesis was on Gyula Derkovits' graphic art. It was while analysing Derkovits' woodcut series *1514* that she first delved into iconographic questions, employing both visual and literary sources. This kind of richly based iconographic analysis remained her primary method of art historical scholarship throughout her scholarly career.

She began her working career in 1962 as an assistant curator in the Graphic Art Department of the Hungarian National Gallery, later being promoted to curator. She defended her doctoral dissertation on Hungarian Activism in 1969, at which time she was hired to the Művészettörténeti Dokumentációs Központ [Art Historical Documentation Centre] and in 1971 to the Művészettörténeti Kutató Intézet [Art Historical Research Institute] of the Hungarian Academy of Science. It was in her 1973 publication *Antik romok a XIX. század festészetében és rajzművészetében* [Antique ruins in 19<sup>th</sup> century painting and drawing] that she began to systematically deal with the iconographic questions of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. landscape, and she defended her *Kandidátusi disszertáció* on this theme in 1996. Her study of 19<sup>th</sup> century representations of Saint Ladislaus, King of Hungary, grew out of this interest. Through an analysis of Tivadar Csontváry's paintings depicting cedars, she became interested in the iconography of the cedar tree, on which she produced a whole series of first-rate publications. Related to this work was her interest in the "emotional" landscapes of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian and

international avant-gardes, on the then-popular thematic of *Einfühlung* (the projection of feeling *into* the landscape), particularly in the paintings of the Activist artist János (Hans) Mattis-Teutsch.

While she never held a permanent teaching position at a university, from the 1970s onwards she did teach occasional courses in modern art history at the art historical and *Népművelés* (Continuing Education) departments of ELTE, in the program for foreigners of the Közgazdaságtudományi Egyetem [University of Economics, Budapest], and for three terms at the Central European University in Prague, when it was still located there. Starting in 1998, she taught regularly in the Art History Department of Pázmány Péter Catholic University near Budapest.

It was in this capacity as a research associate at the Art Historical Research Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Science that I first met Dr. Szabó in 1979, while I was in Hungary by the good graces of the Hungary/Canada Exchange Scholarship for undergraduates. She was not only gracious and open to assisting a young Hungarian-Canadian scholar, she encouraged and supported my research at the time on Dada elements in the Hungarian avant-garde in many different ways. I remember one particularly memorable afternoon when she took me along on her visit to the ailing Ödön Palasovszky in his apartment off the Margit Körút. It became clear to me on that visit that she was not only researching and writing about this early 20<sup>th</sup> century generation of Hungarian artists, she was their friend and supporter in their old age as well. One of the most impressive aspects of her person was her uncompromising attitude towards honesty, generosity, and hard work, in an environment in which it was not always easy to maintain such values. She was unfailingly generous with her time and knowledge, she and her husband Dr. Ernő Marosi, also a highly respected art historian, never failed to invite me to their home on visits to Budapest. Always curious about my work, she provided commentary and assistance when I asked for it. She provided a human and moral, as well as a scholarly model for me and for many other young art historians.

Dr. Szabó passed away suddenly in Budapest on 30 June, 2004. She will be sorely missed by her colleagues in the museum and scholarly worlds, as well as by her students, both in Hungary and abroad.

\* This text is partly based on the autobiography of Dr. Szabó generously provided by Ernő Marosi.

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