Growing in the Shadow of Antifascism

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arms and fists raised towards the sky. Without prior knowledge, they would rather seem to be workers at a demonstration than prisoners of a concentration camp.\textsuperscript{20} The sculpture thus meets the requirements of the antifascist narrative: it shows active figures instead of passive victims, whose portrayal was considered, as we have seen above, “pessimistic.”

**Victors vs. Victims: A Non-Commissioned Hungarian Plan**

The development of the official project for Mauthausen resulted in press coverage that provided both inspiration and opportunity for survivors to thematize the Holocaust. With its focus on the suffering of the victims, a non-commissioned plan for the Mauthausen memorial was similar to the majority of the unselected commissioned plans, its form, however, was much more progressive. It stepped further away from strict realism towards a more abstracted type of figuration. Rezső Berczeller (1912–1992) created his small terracotta sculpture titled *Mauthausen* in 1958 (figure 8.9) when the plans to erect a national memorial were already publicly known due to the fundraising campaign.

\textsuperscript{20} A contemporary work pertaining to the same iconography is Drago Tršar (1927–), *Manifestants I.*, 1959, Ljubljana, Moderna galerija (Museum of Modern Art).
The lower part of Berczeller’s work consists of a rough carpentered grid, which resembles beds in concentration camp barracks. Their rhythm also recalls the wooden sleepers of train tracks (railroad ties), thus evoking deportation.\(^{21}\) On this structure we see an extremely dense volume of individually unidentifiable bodies, formulated in an abstracted, geometrical manner.

We do not know whether Berczeller made any effort to have his plan selected in 1958, or to be allowed to participate in the competition during the following year. Nonetheless, it is certain that his work could not have met official requirements due to at least two reasons. First of all, instead of applauding the future victors of the fight against fascism, his work clearly commemorates the victims. Berczeller’s work thus lacks any visualization of the antifascist narrative, its commemorative tone therefore could have been identified as—to quote the jury’s phrasing—“pessimistic.” Secondly, the rather abstract way of figural expression he applied was dangerously close to abstraction, which was strictly banned in Hungary at the time.

The overall composition of Makrisz’s work is much closer to traditional forms of figuration than Berczeller’s. Makrisz’s figures, however, are also simplified to geometric forms. This is the reason why Ujvári’s analysis had to end with a “red tail,”\(^{22}\) defending on an ideological basis a work that, in its stylistic details, moved away from socialist realism. He wrote that, “One of the most valuable traits of the composition is that in the spirit of socialist realism—in the true sense of the word—it succeeded in creating a high quality, modern composition.”\(^{23}\) Berczeller’s work, which moved even further from realist figuration—and was indeed guilty of “pessimism”—could not have received such an apologetic defense.

**Victors vs. Victims: The Yugoslav Memorial**

The national monuments erected in Mauthausen offer excellent grounds for a comparative analysis that would, however, exceed the limitations of this study. Two significant caveats should nonetheless be highlighted. First, the victims of most nations came from more diverse backgrounds than the deportees from

\(^{21}\) The structure was interpreted as barrack beds and the sculpture was first published, titled as Mauthausen, in László Beke, “Berczeller Rudolf szobrászata” [Rudolf Berczeller’s sculptures], *Ars Hungarica* 2 (1985): 208.

\(^{22}\) A “red tail” is a sentence or a paragraph in a given text that provides it a communist (e.g., socialist realist) ideological framework. Situated usually at the end, it is added in order to conform—at least formally—to official expectations, even if the text itself contradicts them, with the aim to facilitate the publication of the text.

\(^{23}\) Béla Ujvári, “Memorandum,” May 1960, 3, SzM KEMKI ADK, 25000/2014/M/VII/1.