Growing in the Shadow of Antifascism

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represented compared to the narrative of the antifascist struggle. Nevertheless, these projects opened up both physical and virtual discursive spaces, where the memory of the Holocaust could emerge and start to take form.

1965, Hungarian National Gallery: Exhibiting the Antifascist Narrative

Although set in Hungary, the exhibition entitled Hungarian Artists Against Fascism (1965, Hungarian National Gallery) served a similar cause as the memorial in Mauthausen and the exhibition in Auschwitz. It was organized in connection with the Fifth Congress of the International Federation of Resistance Fighters (FIR), which took place in Budapest.54 Consequently, the exhibition aimed to position the country for an international audience through its art production related to the antifascist struggle.

The exhibition attempted to trace a politically progressive tradition from World War I up to the present, attributing a central role to the political lineage of the socialist leadership. Despite the role Hungary played in World War II and in the Holocaust, the exhibition created an image of the country as one at the forefront of the fight against fascism.55 Judging by the exhibited material, antifascism was understood as a broad, undefined framework, which encompassed more or less any historical or contemporary topic considered meaningful from a left-wing—not necessarily communist or socialist—point of view.56

Showing approximately 650 pieces, the exhibition was a gargantuan enterprise even if most of the artworks were rather small in scale. Seventy percent of them consisted of graphic works, complemented by paintings, posters, sculptures, and medals. The catalogue (figure 8.23) comprises data from all exhibited works, but contains only 15 illustrations. The titles are enough, however, for a thematic analysis. The time frame of the works ranged from World War I to the 1960s, covering such topics as World War I, the Hungarian Republic of Councils in 1919, the Horthy regime and World War II, and contemporary issues

55 Hungary was an ally to Nazi Germany during World War II. In March 1944, German forces entered the country to prevent it from leaving the Axis. Hungary’s governor Miklós Horthy stayed in power, appointing a pro-German prime minister. The Hungarian government and authorities played a crucial role in the deportation of Hungarian Jews and Roma.
56 A substantial number of the exhibiting artists were in fact either members or supporters of the Group of Socialist Artists (Szocialista Képzőművészek Csoportja), an organization active in the interwar period and during World War II.
like colonialism, peace movements, and the threat posed by nuclear weapons.\footnote{The characterization of the exhibited material is based on the thorough analysis of the works’ titles included in the catalogue. Due to the high amount of data involved it is impossible to include here details about the different groups of works.}
The topics related to World War II and the Holocaust appeared within this wider framework. One part of these works focused on the war in general, others on the enemy: fascism, and the fight against it, including a number of works representing partisans and the liberation.

Although it was not a central subject of the exhibition, it appears that the curator, Zsuzsa D. Fehér, did make a substantial effort to provide a wide and varied representation of the Holocaust.\footnote{See her introduction: Fehér, \textit{A magyar képzőművészek}, 5–7 (in Hungarian), 9–12 (in French), as well as her article: Zsuzsa D. Fehér, “Magyar képzőművészek a fasizmus ellen: Jegyzetek a kiállítás rendezése közben” [Hungarian artists against fascism: Notes during curating the exhibition], \textit{Népszabadság}, December 19, 1965, 8.} Instead of only relying on public collections and state-funded artistic projects, she also borrowed works from private owners that represented the victims’ perspective. For instance, a high number of works were exhibited from Imre Ámos, an excellent Hungarian painter of Jewish origin who was murdered in the Holocaust. His works, on loan from his widow, depicted the war, dark visions of his experience, forced labor, and the
Commissioned Memory

ghetto.\(^{59}\) Naturally, all plans for the Mauthausen memorial were shown, as were some recent works connected to the preparation of the Auschwitz exhibition.\(^{60}\) Among the Holocaust-related material, the labor service and the—often thematically related—illustrations of Radnóti’s poems were also recurring topics.\(^{61}\) Two monumental paintings evoking the deportation were also exhibited, as well as three graphic series, entitled *Lager* (Camp).\(^{62}\)

Judging by their titles, works connected either to the victims or to the Holocaust in general that were not about war or fascism more broadly made up more than ten percent of the exhibition. By sheer number of works shown, the 1965 exhibition in the Hungarian National Gallery can be considered the single largest attempt up until that date to show works related to the Holocaust.\(^{63}\) It seems that the interest of the curator was mostly historical, preferring works that depicted contemporary events rather than those that reflected upon the events from a distance. Despite the fact that recent Holocaust-related works by progressive artists were already available, the curator did not include these pieces in the exhibition, most likely because of the conservative nature of the museum.\(^{64}\)

Although born out of the political need to position Hungary at both a domestic and international level as an important actor in the history of the antifascist struggle, the exhibition is deeply relevant to the history Holocaust memory. Compared to the art publications and exhibitions about the Holocaust in the immediate postwar years, which usually featured works by a single artist, this new exhibition provided the first opportunity to see and compare a larger corpus of Holocaust-related works. Despite its shortcomings—primarily the absence of recent, progressive works—the exhibition can be considered an important step towards the inclusion of the Holocaust both in Hungarian history and in the history of art.

\(^{59}\) The following references reflect the numbers of the works listed in the catalogue (Fehér, *A magyar képzőművészek*). Imre Ámos: paintings: no. 1–3; graphic works: no. 4–21. Exhibiting in Auschwitz the works of martyr artists, including Ámos, was suggested by Péter who was in fact the second husband of the painter’s widow, Margit Anna. Péter, “Pannók, tablók és plasztikák,” 23.

\(^{60}\) Sculptures, medals: no. 46 (István Kiss); 67–68 (Ferenc Laborcz); 76 (Agamemnon Makrisz); 75, 80 (István Martsa); 108 (József Somogyi).

\(^{61}\) Graphic works: no. 73, 183, 200, 229, 230, 308, 309, 316, 337, 377.

\(^{62}\) Paintings: no. 48, 50 (Deportation); graphic works: no. 130, 200, 250 (Lager).

\(^{63}\) The exhibitions and publications of the early postwar years (1945–1948) involved mostly single artists.

\(^{64}\) Interestingly enough, in the same year art historian Lajos Németh had already criticized the jury of a large contemporary exhibition partly because of their avoidance of Holocaust-related art. He named a couple of examples: “Lili Ország’s antifascist requiem series, . . . Lakner’s rejected painting, Kondor’s works protesting barbarism—now in the Auschwitz Museum thus regrettable not presentable here.” Lajos Németh, “Gondolatok a X. Magyar Képzőművészeti Kiállításról” [Thoughts on the 10th Hungarian Exhibition of Fine Arts], *Kritika* 10 (1965): 46.