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HISTORY OF THE HUNGARIAN APPLIED ARTS
AFTER 1945

Subtitle: Particularly the development of design in the field of
ceramics, glass and porcelain arts

Thesises of the PhD. dissertation.

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1st: Research Objectives

The subject of this paper is the history of Hungarian applied arts after World War II. I started working on this program and dealing with postwar ceramic and glass arts in 2004. My primal goal was to write the “missing story” of postwar Hungarian Applied Arts and Design, add a new chronology to the works, to clarify theoretical concepts and install a new terminology which describes the events more closely and properly. In the last seven years it was revealed to me that the conceptual grid of "design view" and "applied arts" are of a different nature. The further exploration of the historical background during my research revealed more and more ideological issues surrounding the theory of applied arts and design aesthetics. Also artists, who started their career in the thirties, played a decisive role in the education of the next generation of contemporary Hungarian applied arts. Many of them started their teaching career after World War II and provided a high-level training in the '50s-'60s. Their art is almost completely unknown to the general public in spite of their importance and their appreciation is mostly superficial in professional circles too.

While writing the paper a dramatic change has happened in Hungary. Producing and artistic bases have been closed and disappeared sometimes after centuries of operation. At the beginning of my research these factories, which are also included in the paper (Gránit, Zsolnay, Parádk, Karcag) still existed, but now they are subjects to liquidation almost without exception. This series of events opened a new direction to the research. I was determined to find out the reasons of this radical transformation. As a result of great manufacturing developments in the sixties, many artists started to deal with industrial design with the promise of “creating a new culture by the development of a better environment”. This promise appeared in a distorted manner for the industrial design as well as in the theory of applied arts but also in the literature of design theory, with lots of ideological determinations attached to it. Therefore I’ve decided to turn directly to the artists, life works, oeuvres, artifacts rather than joining this ideological and theoretical debate. I started the development of a new system that takes its base on the discussion of events, artists and works directly.

2nd: The choice of research methods

Catalogues of exhibitions, personal interviews, archival research, biographies of artists, works of art are forming the base of my thesis. My conclusions are based on the analysis of the chosen era. The critical discussion of historical documents (political and economical also institutional history), is according to the chronology. This is because as an art historian, I regard the works of art as the basis for historical research - artists and the literature on new art comes second place. It is also because theory and practice went very far from each other during the communist era, therefore the return to the works of arts is necessary when analysing these pieces.

Another possible method would have been probably easier: the critical survey of existing literature. There are two cases when I do that: I examine the most recent works of Gyula Ernyei and József Vadas on the same subject as I'm discussing here, mainly because the publication of their work took place in recent years. However, comparing different aspects of the same issues in international literature, drawing out the essence in each case and considering what could be useful would have made for an equally effective method to reach my goal, but in the same time it would have distracted me from my intentions of a fundamental approach to artists and their works. A highly theoretical discussion would have shifted the direction of my research into a field I wanted to avoid by all means. With the latter method an attempt for the comparative criticism of Hungarian and international literature would had been achieved, rather than the intended attempt to sketch new lines for the history of Hungarian arts and crafts. The new system I set up by studying the works and artists is based on the internal logic of research - it's not derived from results of a theoretical debate. After considering them, I tried to avoid fully engaging international art theory literature, because as much as they give important reference points, concepts and insights - they are not entirely applicable to Hungarian events. Yet some books should be emphasized for their approach and methods because they provided models for my analytical work.

Among these there is the Victoria & Albert Museum's 2008 "Cold War Modern Design: 1945-1970" exhibition and the accompanying book of essays. In many aspects this work enriched the historical context of my study. The British research focuses on four parallel lines and points of intersection: these are Design, Art, Architecture and Politics. Since the V&A Exhibition mostly has an approach valid from the point of view of the "Western Half" of the Iron Curtain, my goal was to find view from an "Eastern" position. Sources from the former

Soviet Union revealed the “reflections” of the discussed events, therefore I have lifted references from Russia for my thesis. Previously unknown correlations became clear to me about society, science, politics and economic history. I understood the international impact of the year 1958 and the "attitude shift" in Eastern-European art. The imprint of "hand-driven" communist culture became evident. Artists' careers and fates were pulled into a better or worse perspective, aesthetical styles became significant or obsolete. I tried to shine new light on these historical events and make them tangible in my thesis. I wanted to show how Hungarian applied arts were developed and distorted by these events.

The ‘silicate arts’ are the most illustrative of this process. The silicate arts are linked to most of the areas covered by the field of Applied Arts and Design. This artistic practice has its field in studio arts as well as a complementary art to architecture, also as a genre of fine arts (for example ceramic sculpture). Some areas overlap with Design, Crafts, Folk Art (pottery), skilled trades (glass grinding, stained glass), and traditional crafts (clay industry). Highlighted artists such as István Gádor, Margit Kovács, Julia Báthory, etc. have worked in many of these areas parallel to their artistic activities. This allows simultaneous investigation of several parallel phenomena in ceramics, porcelain and glass art. The Hungarian glass art has a peculiar position from this point of view because the main events concerning its development happened during my chosen period of study, taking place between 1938 and 1990 and coming to completion by the millennium.

My primary sources of study were in the archives of the Lectorate of Fine and Applied Arts and the College of Applied Arts (MOME). Documentations of the Üvegyipari Művek (Glass Industry Works) and Granite Factory were also used. The remaining additional materials still in existence are in the actual factories; Ajka, Parad, Tokod, Salgótarján Glass Factories, Herend, Hollóháza, Hódmezővásárhely and the Zsolnay factory workshops must be visited for documentation research. Archiving the history of art in these facilities is an important task for future research. This work however, clearly exceeds the scope of this paper. I am not intending to close further research with this doctorate program, as it will likely to become purposeful as a stepping stone in the research of other fields.

For the doctoral thesis I have studied over 100 artists' biographies, I systematised over 2700 different works of art, I included sources from more than 10 different countries. I extended my study to English, American, French and Russian sources, also relating elements from

Japanese, German, Italian, Czech, Polish, Romanian and Serbian ones. I tried to investigate and integrate the Hungarian applied arts and crafts as deeply as possible into the context of international crafts and design.

Many works and biographies had to be filtered though. More than a dozen of the artists I mention have not been given an appearance in the Hungarian literature for more than two or three decades. Many of them have not yet appeared in monographs, their names had disappeared from the context of Applied Arts. In the case of other artists I have singled out those people who were linked to the discussed subject. I don't want to condemn or judge anyone. I feel I have no right and moral grounds to do so. I have tried to examine the historical process objectively but I could not overlook some personal tragedies which in their own way influenced the development of Hungarian arts and crafts.

3rd: Key findings of the paper, the results in seven theses:

First Thesis: A new chronology.

Throughout my research it became apparent that the parallel historical events (1945) which are close to the history of art, are not necessarily in close correlation with the events and changes in the Applied Arts. It has become reasonable to set up a new art-historical chronology.

First stage: 1938 – 1958

The early years - national and folk art: 1938 - 1948 (the years around World War II)

The socialist classicism and the populist folklorism: 1948-1956 (around the Stalin era)

Transitional period: formation of new fields of crafts and design: 1956 -1958

Second stage: 1958 – 1995

The “socialist modernism”: 1958 - 1968 (approximately the Khrushchev-era)

The era of “Hungarian design”: 1968 - 1985 (around the Brezhnev era)

The decline of Hungarian design: 1985-1995 (about the disintegration of the Soviet Union)

Second Thesis: A new interpretation of the concept of design

Besides the chronological questions, the definitions used in different reports about applied arts and design issues in relation to overlapping areas are used so inconsistently that I found it important to take stock of trends in the genre. The concept of “design” has different meanings according to historical interpretations. It also varies geographically, linguistically, as it appears in different contexts. “Design” can not be limited strictly to the field of industrial design. The concept has wider interpretations with different attributes, and points to Applied Arts in many fields. The "design" refers to a broad range of phenomena in terms of theory. It had appeared in Hungarian sources relatively early, although not literally, since the English concept entered the language only recently. The "modern techniques", "methods of mass and serial production," then the "industrial engineering" and "methodical planing of aesthetic objects" are mentioned since the nineteenth century. “Design” developed a specific, a rather technical meaning in Hungarian conditions. Hungary's industrial revolution and the resulting developments, enterprises growing around the 1920s and 30s, have shown interest in design. At the second half of the 1930s, the then- director of the School of Applied Arts, Ferenc Szablya -Frischauf has made contact with the Ganz factory and other big industrial factories to make it possible for applied artists to enter these factories and experiment on “design”. That was the time when design started entering the mainstream of Hungarian applied arts.

Le Corbusier said that houses are "machines of living". The expression describes well the cult of technology of the 20s and 30s where the industrial production and the objects of industrial art formed a whole set of utopian ideas. The concept of "total design" not only applied in arts and crafts, but also in architecture as well as in all aspects of life. The building, the living spaces, environment, and society as a whole "has to be re-designed". This "social engineering approach" later on took roots in history of art and literature too. By the 1990s, the societies in the East have long been suffering under "Plato's curse" as Karl Popper once expressed. The doctrinaire utopian idealism had a tight grip on the concept of "design."

The "modern design" also describes an idealistic artistic attitude. Most trends mentioned above share a similar way of thinking. The different trends call it different names: "total

artist," "draughtsman," "common spirit", "unified style." This particular 'modern attitude' signifies the artistic endeavours of most artists of the era from Philip Johnson to Mies van de Rohe from Lajos Kassák to Károly Kós.

Third Thesis: The dominant styles of Hungarian arts and crafts

On the basis of these different sources, and also on the basis of differences between works of art I felt justified in disrupting the conceptual unity that was created in relation to Art Deco in Hungarian art theory. The original title of the 1925 Art Deco exhibition in Paris also suggests two, even three separate groups.

- The "Art Deco" style translated simply as "decorative arts" is mostly based on the traditions of the Arts and Crafts Movement and Art Nouveau.

- The "Art Moderne" style, mostly formed by younger artists has an emphasis on the trends of contemporary Modern Art and also provides a new interpretation to support handicrafts.

- The concept of "Art Industriel," appears implied already as a third distinct trend. Setting it apart from Art Moderne at this early stage is not justified. At the same time it shows that this is the root of the "industrial art" and "artistic design" of the postwar era which developed later.

Jonathan Woodham in his 1997 work entitled "Twentieth Century Design" dedicates a whole chapter to the relationship between design and national identity. Woodham states that the diversity of design is a result of a process, when the material culture of the 20th century evolved organically from former subject groups applied and transformed into a modern environment. The appearance and the design of goods reflected national identity. Following the thread of Woodham's thought it is time to fix and define the concept of "Hungarian design identity."

In the Hungarian arts not only the different offshoots of international styles show their traces, but there is a distinct "Hungarian style" which is also predominantly present. Originating from the Hungarian version of the Arts and Crafts Movement, it developed its own variations and aesthetics of style by the Second World War. The material culture goes through a radical transformation throughout the modern era and during the industrial revolution. Many

important elements of cultural identity for example rural traditions were in grave danger in these times. It was a time when the radical transformations in the structure of society hastened the erosion of communities carrying forward tradition from generation to generation. Sources of national identity started to disappear or change in such a radical way that their knowledge of craftsmanship and their artefacts needed to be recorded to be rescued from oblivion.

Intellectuals were alerted and applied artists had a decisive role, a strong social and national responsibility of keeping and transforming the elements of identity in the field of material culture and goods. The conflict between "people's art" and "machine art" was inevitable. The radical transformations in traditional rural communities actually happened during the communist era after the collectivisation of farms around the countryside. From the end of the fifties onwards, trends in "design" define the image of each period. A form of the "folkloric crafts" lives on by being adapted into items of mass-production released from firms conforming to the socialist ideal. In the broad sense, "design," such as the "sixties, seventies, eighties' style is now almost applicable as a certain concept of style. This paper tries to follow the evolution of styles, therefore the main areas of trends - including design -, genres, styles are also explored:

Folk art and crafts: applied art in the field of crafts

- The authentic folk art
- Era of folklorism
- "Third Way": exploration and application of folk art
- National sentiment and decorativism in industrial and applied arts

The role of Hungarian religious art in the forties: the applied art as complementary art of architecture

- The program-based classical modernism art
- The arts in the context of Buildings.

The applied arts in the fields of industry: the beginnings of industrial design and manufacturing

- “Made In Hungary” – Hungarian products
- The first contacts between applied arts and light industry

The "a program" of the 30s for the wider material culture was to replace imported goods with a "new Hungarian style," which finally could supercede cheap mass products, and Hungarian culture could give quality to homes. The complex issue of the "Hungarian design" means the creation of this program. In spite of these efforts the “Hungarian style” didn’t mean the “design reality” of everyday life. Noone was actually using the jars and drinking from cups that were exhibited. There were no such “Hungarian rooms” in people’s flats, Hungarian furniture was not used in the average homes. The exhibited "spaces of idea" did not correspond to the realities of none of the following: the Hungarian tradition of applied arts, the public taste which had evolved from Hungarian Art Nouveau, the national mood and the social conditions. Examples of functionalist modernist applied arts which stood closer to international styles were products of small workshops.

Fourth Thesis: Applied Arts in economic history and industrial history

The Applied Arts are basically tangible arts. The technological background is prerequisite, so the artist already has to adapt to certain conditions if he wants to get results. This is exponentially true in silicate arts: for glass and porcelain a space for production is essential. Even in the ceramic art is complex manufactural background is essential. The glass and porcelain needs some kind of "factory", the "workshop" means the productive starting point of ceramic crafts.

Prior to World War II and thereafter, during the fifties, the "Hungarian material culture" the factory conditions were present: theoretically. Mostly the arts were practiced in workshops. Light industrial production in Hungary was fundamentally conservative, business-minded and consumer goods were under import pressure. However, towards the end of the 1930s a new era of industrial art began. Then the artists born in the earlier part of century were moving from Hungarian Arts and Crafts towards the field of "design" as an artistic approach. They wanted to use the opportunity to create a separate, distinct and internationally competitive Hungarian design culture, fulfilling the aims of the concept of "Hungarian applied arts.”

The modernists were major supporters of this mission. The attitude of the applied artist, however, regardless of the genre of arts is fundamentally different from the fine artist, largely because they work mainly on-demand, with relatively high costs of raw material. In a complex manufacturing process it is difficult to “let the artistic spirit go”. In comparison with fine artists’ practices, an applied artist rarely works in detached isolation; in the same time the opportunity for individual experimentation is limited because of the sophisticated technologies required by the discipline. For that reason it is not possible to establish "underground applied arts" either.

Fifth Thesis: The applied arts and architecture

Theoretical discourse about Hungarian arts have largely began in the field of architecture. A complex question of theoretical issue therefore can be transposed to the applied arts almost directly. The arts and crafts first appeared "as a complementary art" of architecture at the beginning of the 19th Century. The theoretical guidelines of architecture were predominant. Architects directly influenced applied artists by their aesthetic demands. The architects created the primal theatre of Applied Arts by creating spaces with certain requirements. At that time there was a need for the related arts to fill the spaces designed by architects, in fact the architects actually defined the scope for the creativity required in their plans. If we look at it this way: Art Nouveau architecture needed ceramics, furniture and decorative ornamentation, also large stained glass windows. The Art Deco architecture required mural works and the architectural concept desired matching objects. Independent co-artistic works were properly applied, the craftsmanship and new technology achievements were balanced in the original concept. It formed all together a kind of "Hungarian Baukunst" in the 1930s. The new trends of modernism lacked ornamentation and did not require such "related arts". Instead “design” was applied: the sleek modern buildings only needed functional objects and furniture following in aesthetic, therefore the applied arts as a whole shifted from the status of "complementary art" to design.

This process in our country accelerated in the second half of the 1905s, and peaked in the 70s and 80s. The use of the "modern" idea had a dialectical connotation to society, economy, art as a whole, regardless of genre. Those ideas which are true to the architecture, are still in effect in applied arts. The principle of totality based on the idea that every "Application" is

part of a larger, coherent (Marxist) philosophy. Its subordinates appear in arts and architecture. In the beginning it might have fulfilled decorative purposes, but after the 1960s the purely functional tasks associated with modern architecture would eliminate applied arts as complementary art. This process can be followed throughout the whole time: from the "Hungarian salon" to the "home-factory kitchen programme."

Sixth Thesis: The Hungarian Applies Arts in the Cold War and Socialism

Besides stylistic issues, trends, genres such additional background events can be reported on in which the direction of arts and crafts movements have defined ideological components. During the post-1958 period, the nature of applied art training moves away of that of the pre-war period; the structure and terminology of the applied arts genre moves through an intentional and radical transformation. The separation and crystallisation of new genres happened simultaneously, the elements of the previously associated areas segregate in a deliberate, planned but largely inconsistent effort.

The "socialist design" and the Marxist concept of "industrial art" determines the next generation's scope. Many conflicts have risen, and also were created within the genre and between artists. It was mainly because everything directly depended on the current need of cadres for the dictatorship. Carriers depended on loyalty and opportunism rather than talent. The directions of development, and styles were centrally defined. By the end of the period the applied arts in architectural context became mostly a generational genre for the old artists. The folk arts and handicrafts were permanently separated from the discourse of the applied arts. The background institutions also started to deteriorate. The crisis of the political system also affects the arts, and had a fatal effect on "Hungarian design" one of the predominant fields of applied arts in the 1970s.

In the first years after the communist takeover the formerly independent arts trends, styles, artists were shepherded under the umbrella of a unified socialist style. During the stalinist Rákosi era the regime mostly employed the more experienced artists of the previous period and adapted then existing styles to the new socialist-realist taste. Between 1958-1960 however, an entirely new structure was introduced. This reflects "cold war modernism", the modern of the Soviet Union which was installed in Hungary too. New people were placed into the education system, new cadres were named into the decision-making positions and in a

couple of years the old masters and their styles were overshadowed, even entire genres were wasted away. The structural generational and theoretical change was so big and so radical, and the whole context of Applied Arts was put on such new foundations, that the continuity of this structure and some elements of these institutions are still valid.

Seventh Thesis: The roots of main trends in contemporary applied arts

In Hungary, the Marxist interpretations of art and aesthetics became standard. Also a new economic and social structure was built up after 1965-68 which gave a new, even more decisive role to design. Leaders of key institutions were even considering stop teaching handicrafts in high level education. The concept of “applied arts” became peripheral, the “design” was applied to nearly every aspects. The internal processes of Hungarian applied arts were not organic, but mechanically determined by the socialist leadership in Moscow where the central lines were created. Trends, the opportunities for artists, the central cadre requirements were depending on the Cold War strategic measures. In the 70s the socialist interpretation of “continuity of design” the “dialectical superiority of design over craftsmanship” is still sometimes present in the discourse about measures of applied arts. The long lasting results are:

- The professional arts and crafts seceded from the areas of folk art and craftsmanship
- A "fine-applied arts" and an "applied art design" subgenre was created in place of the concept of “Hungarian Applied Arts”
- Certain genres of art, especially crafts begin to tend towards the framework of “studio arts” as a reinterpretation of craft. As a result of these events and processes a similar new chronology can be suspected around the Change of the Political System, like the first stage of this paper. Beginning of 1975 and ending around 2005 or between 1995 and 2004 new chronological sections can outline the history of contemporary applied arts.. In this paper, however, I did not want to deal with this.

4. Publications on the topic of the dissertation

Papers:

- [1.] „Szélkakas hetven éve. Egy magyar üvegstúdió története 1933-2003.”
A MAOE iparművészeti szakkollégiumának ösztöndíjasaként e tanulmányban
katalogizáltam a La Girouette Művészeti Stúdió tevékenységét. 2004. Budapest,
kézirat, manuskript, 84 pages

Cathalogues:

- [2.] **Minya Mária murális művészetéről. Katalógus.** tanulmány+ oeuvre-katalógus,
Budapest, 2004. Magánkiadás, 48 pages. (also in English)
ISBN 963 214 956 4
- [3.] **Báthory Júlia Üveggyűjtemény katalógusa.** 2004. tanulmány (English, French
and German summary) + oeuvre-katalógus, Dömsöd, 2004. Schola Manufactura
Alapítvány, 64 pages
ISBN 963 009 1666
- [4.] **Kovács Julianna Ferenczy díjas üvegművész oeuvre katalógusa** 2006.
tanulmány (also in English) + oeuvre-katalógus, Dömsöd, 2006. Schola
Manufactura Alapítvány, 64 pages ISBN 9630610406
- [5.] **Szilágyi András üvegművész oeuvre katalógusa.** 2006. tanulmány (also in
English) + oeuvre-katalógus, Dömsöd, 2006. Schola Manufactura Alapítvány, 64
pages
ISBN 963061040X
- [6.] **Csemán Ilona Ferenczy díjas kerámikus művész oeuvre katalógusa.** 2010.
tanulmány: „Út Petrába” Vác, 2010. magánkiadás, 48 pages

Other publications in Hungarian:

- [7.] **A Zsolnay 150 éve. Kiállítás az Iparművészeti Múzeumban**
http://www.kontextus.hu/hirvero/kiallitas_2005_0302.html
Megjelenés éve:2005. Letöltés ideje: 2011. szeptember.28.
- [8.] **A Megfestett fény- Díszüveges munkák a történelmi Magyarország
építészetében**

<http://hetivalasz.hu/kultura/rabul-ejto-ablakok-13192/>

Megjelenés dátuma: 2006.01.05. Letöltés ideje: 2011. szeptember.28.

- [9.] **Terminál az alagút végén – Az Erzsébet téri gödör eltüntetése, Magyar design, Finn forma**

<http://hetivalasz.hu/kultura/terminal-az-alagut-vegen-12930/>

Megjelenés dátuma: 2005.11.17. Letöltés ideje: 2011. szeptember.28.

- [10.] **Formatervezési díj 2010 – vegetálók, igyekvők és nyertesek**

http://artportal.hu/aktualis/hirek/szilagi_b_andras_formatervezesi_dij_2010_vegetalok_igyekvok_es_nyertesek

Megjelenés dátuma: 2010. 10. 10. Letöltés ideje: 2011. szeptember.28.

- [11.] **A lebomló zacskó és a cyberpunk – Designszemle a Terminálban**

http://artportal.hu/aktualis/hirek/szilagi_b_andras_a_lebomlo_zacsko_es_a_cyberpunk_designszemle_a_terminalban

Megjelenés dátuma: 2010. 10. 8. Letöltés ideje: 2011. szeptember.28.

- [12.] **...érzékeled? - kiállítás-sorozat a FISE Kálmán Imre utcai galériájában ...
érzékeled? címmel. (fiatal keramikus, porcelán és üvegművészek kiállítása)**

http://artportal.hu/aktualis/hirek/szilagi_b_andras_erzekeled

Megjelenés dátuma: 2007. 3. 18. Letöltés ideje: 2011. szeptember.28.

- [13.] **Őszi Kerámiatárlat az Olof Palme házban - A Gádor-díjas Minya Mária keramikusművész kamaratárlata.**

http://artportal.hu/aktualis/hirek/szilagi_b_andras_oszi_keramiatarlat_az_olof_palme_hazban_a_gadordijas_minya_maria_ke

Megjelenés dátuma: 2006. 11. 24. Letöltés ideje: 2011. szeptember.28.

- [14.] **Kovács Gyula emlékkiállítása a Ponton Galériában**

http://artportal.hu/aktualis/hirek/szilagi_b_andras_kovacs_gyula_emlekkiallitasa_a_ponton_galeriaban

Megjelenés dátuma: 2006. 11. 17. Letöltés ideje: 2011. szeptember.28.

- [15.] **A skandináv design Budapesten – a mítoszon innen és túl**

http://www.kontextus.hu/hirvero/konferencia_2005_0620.html

Megjelenés éve: 2005. Letöltés ideje: 2011. szeptember.28.