



READING GROUP GUIDE

Hungarian Art: Confrontation and Revival in the Modern Movement By Éva Forgács

Introduction

A collection of insightful essays, monographic texts and rarely seen images tracing from birth to maturation several generations of Hungarian Modernism.

Leading modernist scholar Éva Forgács corrects long-standing misconceptions about Hungarian art while examining the work and social milieu of dozens of important Hungarian artists. While this is a book sophisticated enough for students of art history and professional art historians, Forgács engages the reader at every turn so that even a layman with an interest in art will find her subject matter approachable and intriguing.

Forgács' wide-ranging and well illustrated history includes a variety of important intellectual figures such as László Moholy-Nagy, Béla Balázs, György Lukács, and Lajos Kassák, as well as a selection of important artists, art exhibitions, and art journals, many of which were produced during exile periods in Vienna. Forgács also entices readers to engage with a host of less well known artists and forgotten initiatives: the European School; the transcendentalist revivers of Malevich; the exponents of the postmodern 'new sensibility' of the 1980s; the post-socialist post-constructivists of the 1990s. She challenges canons and attacks key questions head on, provocatively exploring, among other things, whether or not "democracy grows under pressure."

Forgács paints a fascinating image of Hungary across the 20th century and Budapest as a microcosm of the social and political turmoil raging across Europe between the late 19th century and the collapse of the Soviet Era.



**Art history at its best.
– Hattula Moholy-Nagy**



REVIEWS

Éva Forgács is a brilliant guide to the history of modern and contemporary art in Hungary. These essays – whether appraising the achievements of Modern Movement heroes like László Moholy-Nagy or excavating the overlooked practices of neo-avant-garde artists of the 1970s and 1980s – combine deep understanding of modern art with a critical perspective on the many myths which have been attached to it. Hungarian modernism now seems far more vivid.

– David Crowley, Royal College of Art

Éva Forgács has a remarkable ability to condense her cosmopolitan breadth of scholarship into admirably coherent, easily comprehensible writing. She situates the subject of her research within the broader sociocultural context of its times in such a readable manner that it is informative for the layperson and professional alike. We come away with the feeling that our time has been well spent indeed.

– Hattula Moholy-Nagy

The culmination of decades of sustained research, this erudite publication is an immensely precious resource and a vital contribution to the further exploration of the rich intertextual fabric of European art as a whole.

– Klara Kemp-Welch, Courtauld Institute of Art

The leading English-speaking expert on Hungarian art from the avant-garde of the pre-World War I years to the present, Forgács is as astute in confronting Hungarian politics and the nation's cultural development as she is at elucidating the nature of the artworks themselves. A dazzling intellectual performance.

– Marjorie Perloff, author of *The Vienna Paradox*

Hungarian modernism may be a terra incognita for many but the distinguished art historian Éva Forgács is an invaluable guide to the territory. Her essays are shafts of light illuminating a complex terrain which is not only located at the center of Europe but, given the seismic political shifts that have occurred there, central to the history that defined the 20th century.

– J. Hoberman, author of *The Red Atlantis: Communist Culture in the Absence of Communism*



READING GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What international trends of art were absorbed by early 20th century Hungarian artists?
2. How did Hungarian models of Constructivism differ from other iterations of the style?
3. How did Hungarian progressive art survive during the communist era?
4. What ideas dominated the Hungarian art of the 1945-1948 period?
5. Which concepts were the most characteristic for the Hungarian iteration of Post-Modernism?
6. How can the presence of an “existentialist art” be pinpointed in Hungarian Modernism?
7. Why did Kazimir Malevich’s Suprematism resonate particularly with many Hungarian artists in the recent decades?
8. What role did György Lukács play in various chapters of Hungarian Modernism?
9. Why was the 1968 Iparterv exhibition a landmark in Hungarian art?
10. What was the legacy of the 1956 revolution in the visual arts in Hungary?
11. Why did the Hungarian neo-avant-garde fight a two-front battle?



IMAGE DISCUSSION

Use the images below to discuss specifically how these artworks relate to the themes of Hungarian modern art that you have just uncovered.

Róbert Berény, *Woman in Armchair*, 1912 (p. 44)

Lajos Kassák, *Dynamic Construction*, 1922–1924 (p. 102)

László Moholy-Nagy, *Photogram*, 1922 (p. 133)

Tihamér Gyarmathy, *Blue, White, Central*, 1946 (p. 143)

Ilona Keserü, *Sensation*, 1976 (p. 163)

László Fehér, *At the Foot of the Monument*, 1989 (p. 193)

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Éva Forgács, formerly professor of art history at László Moholy-Nagy University in Budapest, has been teaching at Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California since 1994. She has a Ph.D. in Art History from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. A former curator at the Hungarian Museum of Decorative Arts and visiting professor at UCLA, she has also been active as a curator and art critic, and has published several books both in her native Hungary and in English, including *The Bauhaus Idea and Bauhaus Politics* (Central European University Press, 1995; Jelenkor, 2010). She co-edited *Between Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-gardes 1910–1930* (The MIT Press and LACMA, 2002) and has published a number of essays and monographs on various aspects of Modernism in edited volumes, textbooks, and journals.



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