

**Gábor Térey's museum organizing and scholarly activity  
as the chief curator of the Old Masters' Gallery (1896-1926)**

Theses of the PhD dissertation

by

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The Museum of Fine Arts was celebrating its centenary in 2006 can pride itself on the contribution of outstanding experts enriching its collections with competence and devotion. Art historiography, however, is still at fault for a manual elaborating the history of the institution spanning 100-110 years. Although the tone and accents of the volume prepared for the 50<sup>th</sup> jubilee reflected the mentality of that era, the authors did strive to offer a comprehensive and thorough overview of the museum's history. It is still a fundamental summary, but the changes and the growth of the collections over the past half a century make it indispensable to add new information and to revise some chapters.

The first step of recent museum historical researches was to clarify the activity of Charles Pulszky, head of the National Picture Gallery, in an exhibition in 1988, followed by a summary of the oeuvre of the architect of the museum, Albert Schickedanz. Apart from showing the professional role of the persons who actively contributed to the foundation of the Museum of Fine Arts, the curators of these exhibitions also expressly aimed to do historical justice to their undeservedly forgotten predecessors and at the same time to review the decisive culture political events of the turn of the century.

When the museum was founded a hundred years ago, the conscious and professional enrichment of the art collection and the organization of the institution at the highest standards of the age were to the credit of Dr. Gábor Térey, a scholar of museology completely forgotten by today. After the summaries of the great predecessors in the museum, the dissertation aimed to explore the work of the first director of the Old Masters Gallery is a museum historical documentation as well as a belated tribute paid to the nearly 30 years' efforts of a great scholar.

The exploration of Gábor Térey's oeuvre he bequeathed to posterity as scholar, museologist and responsible director at the Museum of Fine Arts is a hard task for a researcher today because of its diversity and variety.

Systematic research was impossible for a long time because the museum archive was in disarray. The Archive systematization began in the 1980s and scientific research could only start in recent years. During the systematic elaboration of the material, however, defects were found, thus this stock did not suffice to reliably elaborate either the official course of running the institution or the enlargement of the collections, and it was necessary to seek out documents pertaining to the Museum of Fine Arts in other institutions. It did not take long to realize that only some of the files in the National Archives and the National Széchényi Library's Manuscript collection were conducive to the exploration of Térey's role and personality. To discover his correspondence, I searched through the materials of the foreign partner institutions, archives, data collections and libraries with which Térey was in contact personally. That was how I found his correspondence with Jacob Burckhardt in the Jacob Burckhardt Stiftung in Basel, and relics of his friendship with Wilhelm von Bode in the archives of the Berliner Zentralarchiv Staatliche Museen – Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Térey's dialogue with the leading representative of American art trade Sir Joseph Duveen has been preserved in the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles. I also found data on the life and university studies of Gábor Térey in the municipal and university libraries of Basel, Strasbourg, Freiburg, Geneva and London. During the research a large amount of documentary material has been found which might be of signal importance for the investigation of the Hungarian cultural policy in the period between 1896 and 1926. It is indispensable to make this so-far wholly unknown set of documents available, so I append it to this study. The documents are presented in the original language and orthography, as well as in Hungarian translation. The compilation of Térey's bibliography required long and meticulous research, but it is the only basis for the due evaluation of his contribution as a scholarly researcher. The list is still incomplete as only the periodicals to be found in Hungary have been explored.

Gábor Térey (1864-1927) belonged to the generation born around the Compromise between Austria and Hungary, who became the leading figures of the economic-social-cultural transformation of the nation. The family history faithfully reflects the 19<sup>th</sup> century history of Hungary: the family of German origin on the father's and English origin on the mother's line settled in the Partium to become Hungarians of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The only son was schooled at the best institutions, to which the intellectual basis was created by the personal contacts of the father of a wide vision and the financial basis was provided by his lucrative agricultural business. In the 1880s, the teaching of the humanities was still rudimentary in Hungary, thus a thorough art historical qualification could only be obtained at West European universities at large financial sacrifice. This constraint was to Térey's benefit, as he could get in touch with Jacob Burckhardt, the most outstanding intellectual figure of his time, at Basel University whose epochal lectures he attended. The great scholar's self-negating devotion to scholarship, his modern thinking way ahead of his age set an example for the young researcher for life. Their surviving correspondence reveals a sincere friendship between master and disciple. The former student did not only inform his professor of his current research results and publications, but also shared with him his concerns about scientific questions and personal career, counting on the famous scholar's advice and understanding. These letters afford a glimpse of Térey's Strasbourg period between 1892 and 1894. His first books and articles on Albrecht Dürer and his contemporaries were published in this period as well as his doctoral dissertation on Hans Baldung Grien. He owed a lot to Strasbourg: the municipal grant of the town ensured the subsistence of his family and during his researches he came into contact with the most influential members of the community of German art historians. He wished to devote his life to university education, so he moved from Strasbourg to Tübingen. However, his expectations were not fulfilled, so he finally became habilitated and given a private lecturer's post at the

university of Freiburg im Breisgau in 1895. He lectured on Italian, Flemish and northern art as well as the history of German sculpture and architecture for three years. It was in the autumn of 1896 that he received the honouring request to systematize the print collection of the National Picture Gallery in Budapest, which he gladly accepted.

Gábor Térey's appointment to the National Gallery was during the ministership of Gyula Wlassics, called by the contemporary press the "first minister of fine art". In 1896 the Parliament ruled the foundation of the Museum of Fine Arts by uniting the National Picture Gallery and the fine arts stock at the National Museum, and entrusted the enlargement of the new museum to Károly Pulszky. The expert of great erudition, experience and art trade contacts purchased a great many old masters' works. Minister Wlassics wanted to get down to organizing the museum administration, but first the confused financial background of Pulszky's acquisitions had to be cleared. For the time of the investigation, the minister put himself personally in charge of the purchases and in May 1896 he appointed deputy Ernő Kammerer to replace Pulszky as government commissioner, although Kammerer was a lawyer by profession. His name is indelible from Hungarian cultural history not only on account of his local historical and archeological work but also by the exemplary organization of the administration of the Museum of Fine Arts. In the Hungarian system of administration, the museums belonged under the cultural department of the ministry of religion and public education, but local administration and the interaction between museum and ministry was the responsibility of commissioner Kammerer. He accomplished this work successfully by smoothly transforming the earlier organization of the National Picture Gallery into an up-to-date institution functioning in the same way as its counterparts in Europe. Not being an art historian himself, it was his important job to find the right person for the professional control of the museum. Upon Kammerer's recommendation, the minister invited Gábor Térey, an art historian of great acclaim from a young age. The aim being the

creation of a museum upon European patterns run at high professional standards, it was a logical step to invite an expert with sufficient experience and international contacts, as well as support from such foreign authorities as the curator of the Berlin gallery Hugo von Tschudi.

The young, agile art historian had fairly good connections in the ministry which he tried to put to good use on behalf of the museum. His close circle of friends included the head of the department of artistic affairs, Elek Koronghi Lippich, who was his equal in age and mentality. It was he as a confidant and artistic adviser of Wlassics who called the minister's attention to Térey. Wishing to ascribe a great role to him in the organization of the administration, too, the minister also appointed him to a high post in the National Hungarian Art Council reorganized in 1901. As the body preparing the decisions of the ministry's art department, the Council was the professional supervisor of the museums and had a salient role in governing state purchases. In charge of the painting section, Térey was an unevadable authority in the art life of the turn of the century.

Originally, Gábor Térey was put in charge of the print collection, but his scope of work was soon extended to include various other managerial functions: he had to decide about the acceptance of donations and his word was decisive for purchases. He compiled and published the scientific catalogues of the gallery, and in the absence of Kammerer he substituted for the commissioner, headed the administration and the daily affairs. As the new museum in the making was meant to be at the level of the great European partner institutions, Kammerer was sent on a study tour of 25 great European cities in the company of Térey and architect Lajos Rauscher. They visited 65 museums, examined their architectural build, the art historical value of the collections and system of exhibitions and the inner organization and proceedings of the institution. Térey further extended his circle acquaintances during the trip, meeting the most influential figure of the Berlin museums councillor Wilhelm von Bode, director of the Königliche Museen for the first

time in person, although they had already corresponded earlier. They kept in contact for three decades, most often consulting each other prior to purchasing art works, and they also exchanged views in disputes over the attribution of certain paintings. Their professional discourse shows two museologists of similar mentality, who discussed the topical questions of art and museum organization freely. The destinations of Térey's foreign travels and the institutions studied there reveal that apart from the enlargement of the old collection, the minister also ascribed an important role to the young expert in acquiring contemporary foreign works and setting up the sculpture collection.

Térey had extensive correspondence with his foreign colleagues, but few relics survive. He had the strongest ties in Germany, which lived on after his moving to Budapest on account of family ties. He was in touch with the leading researchers, museum and university leaders including Max von Friedländer, Hugo von Tschudi, Carl Justi, as well as with publishers of art historical periodicals. He regularly published in *Der Cicerone* and *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst* published in Leipzig, in *Kunstchronik*, *Kunstchronik und Kunstmarkt*, the *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft* and *Jahrbuch der Königliche preussischen Kunstsammlungen in Berlin*, in *Kunst und Künstler*, the *Münchener Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst*. In addition to Germans, Térey was in contact with various organizations and researchers in London, including the leaders of the Dürer Society and the Burlington Fine Arts Club, Campbell Dodgson and Sidney Colvin of the British Museum and Charles Aitken and Charles Holmes of the National Gallery. He also had a close relationship with the noted researcher of medieval Italian painting Robert Langton-Douglas. The most outstanding periodicals, the *Burlington Magazine* and *The Studio* regularly published his articles, as a sign of the recognition of the Hungarian researcher. Apart from the English colleagues, mention must be made of the professional acquaintance with Bernard Berenson, acknowledged as the greatest authority on Italian painting at the time. It

developed through correspondence and grew into personal friendship after the Berensons visit to Budapest. An important working contact was established with the specialist of Dorotheum in Vienna, Theodor Frimmel.

In 1906 the museum staff numbered about 15. In addition to Térey, curators Simon Meller and József Wollanka were art historians. Meller was employed for the graphic collection, Wollanka handled the sculpture collection. Secreterial and administrative tasks were seen to by János Peregriny and János Rónai. In the first decade of the museum, the collections were not separated organizationally, so Térey was in charge of the picture gallery and the collection of prints and drawings, as well as the stock of sculptures and modern paintings. As director of the department of the Old Masters Gallery he also administered the graphic collection until 1910, staging several exhibitions a year to popularize this branch of art. The exhibitions were accompanied by catalogues and popularizing articles. Although from the opening the Contemporary Foreign and Hungarian Paintings Gallery was independent, acquisition and the categorization of the material as well as its exhibitng, the direction of the sculpture collection and the Historical Picture Gallery were all among Térey's tasks until 1914. His diverse work also included the handling and systematization of the enormous photo collection he improved. This stock was a documentation of equal weight to the library, since reproductions of art works had a fundamental role in scientific research.

In the Old Masters Gallery which he became director of in 1904, the central task was not acquisition but the inventorying and scientific evaluation of the existing stock between 1896 and 1906. At the time of the opening in 1906 the Old Masters Gallery occupied the right wing of the first floor. There were ten large rooms and sixteen cabinets at Térey's disposal to present a selection of 837 works - the cream of the collection - grouped by ages and schools to the professional community and the public. Térey's first permanent exhibition of 1906 and the accompanying scientific catalogue presented the Budapest collection at the professional level of contemporary German, Dutch,



Belgian, and Austrian museums. Similarly to the catalogue of the Academy's picture gallery (1897), Térey's 1906 catalogue guided the visitors from room to room, giving all important information, bibliography and professional opinion of each painting, and orienting the public in space and time by a brief biography of the painter. For professional considerations, a strong point of the catalogue is the presentation of signatures and inscriptions, as well as the reproduction of the most important pieces. His work was the initiator of the dialogue between the leading West European professional circles and the ambitious Hungarian culture, and it can safely be declared that the representatives of the partner institutions treated their colleague in Budapest as their equal.

The growth of the collection entailed constant rearrangement of the permanent exhibition. The most extensive renewal was in 1913 when the Pálffy collection was put on display. Since it was the wish of the donator to present his bequest as a separate unit, the earlier closed arrangement of the picture gallery was changed. After the reshuffling, Térey prepared the descriptive inventory of the Pálffy gallery in 1913, and in the next years he created the revision of the entire material of the gallery with the new acquisitions also included. The catalogue published in Berlin in 1914 carried the works of the gallery by Byzantine, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and French masters with reproductions of all the paintings and a supplement with copies of the signatures and inscriptions. It was an innovation that he presented the paintings by schools and by the alphabetic order of the artists, and he added notes concerning the condition of the paintings. The ornate second volume was to have contained the Netherlandish, German, Austrian and English schools, but the war prevented its publication. The next substantial change in the stock and arrangement of the gallery collection took place after the war. With the additions and the showing of frescoes the number of exhibits in the Old Masters Gallery increased to 1125. In 1918 the museum published a new Hungarian catalogue to accompany the rearranged exhibition. The last,

wholly revised version of the former catalogue appeared in 1924 in English and Hungarian languages.

One of the central tasks of the museologist was the enrichment of the wealth entrusted to his care also in this period. During the thirty years he spent as director of the Old Masters Gallery he gained imperishable distinction in this regard as well. The acquisition policy of the Museum of Fine Arts between 1900 and 1926 was hinged on two pivots: professional competence and connections. Térey was in possession of both, that is why he succeeded in acquiring over 300 paintings for the museum by purchase or donation. Two-thirds of the paintings acquired during Térey's time came from Hungarian and Budapest collections, one-third coming from the auction houses of the great art trading centres of Europe: Vienna, Paris, Amsterdam, Berlin. The leading role of Budapest and the Hungarian market as the source of acquisitions is understandable, because after the extensive purchases by Pulszky mostly in Italy which devoured immense amounts of money, only a fragment of the institution's annual budget was available for acquisitions, hence there was far less opportunity to buy works at expensive foreign markets than at home. In this regard, Vienna also belonged to the home market, and the art dealers of Berlin and the German towns had lower prices than their colleagues in Paris and London. During his regular trips abroad Térey remained in almost daily contact with the leading auction houses, he also knew the private collections well, and he successfully cashed in on his contacts with art dealers at the auctions, bringing home several Outstanding masterpieces for the Museum. He kept in contact and made advantageous deals for the museum with such foreign specialists as the art dealer of Hungarian origin François Kleinberger in Paris, the auction houses Georges Petit and Manzi-Joyant also of Paris, Jacob Goudstikker of Amsterdam. Paul&Dominic Colnaghi's of London, Berlin-based Rudolf Lepke and Eduard Schulte, Julius Böhler and Hugo Helbing in Munich, and the owner of the largest American auction house in the age, Sir Joseph Duveen. There can be

no overvaluing of his personal interference which resulted in the acquisition of many a valuable piece for the museum. Before the war he had the chance to take part in the auctioning off of some famous European collections (Somzée, Brussels 1904; Königswarter, Berlin 1906; Charles Sedelmeyer, Paris 1907; Gerhardt Gusztáv, Berlin 1911; Weber, Berlin 1912; Crespi, Paris 1914), from where he usually returned with stop-gap pieces obtained at reasonable prices. Thanks to his friendship with Goudstikker of Amsterdam, he had the opportunity to acquire important pieces from the late Prague manufacturer Gustav Hoschek's collection prior to the auction. Similarly significant was the benevolence of the Paris-based art dealer François Kleinberger, who issued credit to the museum on several occasions for the purchase of saliently important paintings. Naturally enough, these noble gestures were also motivated by a business sense, but the art dealer's generosity was not revealed to every customer.

The decisive period of growth in the Museum of Fine Arts coincided with the years prior to World War I. In one decade between 1904 and 1914, the gallery stock was enriched with 270 paintings, nearly half comprising the mentioned bequest of count János Pálffy. Some other members of the aristocracy also contributed to the enrichment of the collection. Count Sándor Apponyi, count Béla Széchenyi, and the Andrassy family donated some paintings to the museum yielding to the friendly persuasion by Térey.

With the outbreak of World War I in 1914 the uncertain political and economic situation put an end to the foreign purchases of the museum, so growth solely depended on generous gifts. Thanks to the generosity of private collectors in Pest and the emigrants abroad, the Old Masters Gallery grew even in these difficult years. Upon Térey's call the large manufacturers and entrepreneurs of Pest who had been playing an increasing role in art collection from the turn of the century beside the nobility were also ready to make donations. They included the most significant and richest businessman as Mór Lipót Herzog, the art collector and dealer Marcell Nemes, as well as

some affluent and erudite members of the lower middle class (Ármin Stern, Frigyes Glück, Lukács Enyedi) felt it their patriotic duty to leave some pieces of their private collections to the nation.

The evaluation of Gábor Térey's scientific work is a hard task for a researcher of today because it is widely extensive and enormous. At first Térey was preoccupied by 15th century German painting, by Dürer and his age, and later he turned to the 17th century Dutch and Flemish art as his specialty. Parallel with that, he laid great weight on the presentation of old and contemporary Hungarian art. Térey's extant works include three enormous monographs requiring immense researches. The earliest is the monograph of the oeuvre of *Hans Baldung Grien*, a pupil of Dürer born in Strasbourg. It was published in six volumes between 1894 and 1900. Although Grien's oeuvre catalogue Térey compiled has largely shrunk by now, it was an extraordinary achievement and successful attempt in its age. His unfinished undertaking was the exploration of the oeuvre of the Flemish landscapist *Jan Siberechts*. As a result of his investigations, he found over sixty paintings by the forgotten interior and landscape painter. Over the years he also managed to purchase some typical Siberechts works for the museum or acquire them as donations, but it was his Belgian colleague, Timon Henricus Fokker who edited and published the volume on Siberechts using the manuscript he got from Edith Térey. He also plunged into the exploration of the oeuvre of another forgotten artist, *Jakab Bogdány*, a Hungarian painter of still-lives, who arrived in the English royal court from Eperjes in the late 17th century and left behind a sizeable oeuvre in the Isles. During the patient and persistent data collection Térey found a considerable portion of the Hungarian painter's oeuvre in English castles, and the written documents of his life in Dutch, English and French archives. Relying on archival documents, Térey managed to follow the paths of some paintings and identified 38 still-lives in English rural mansions.

In addition to the highly exacting and taxing endeavours the monographs, exhibition guides and gallery catalogues, Térey's literary oeuvre contains masses of short articles. It can safely be declared that all his writings ranging from the presentation of his research results to his popularizing articles in daily papers are scientifically thoroughly based achievements at the highest intellectual level of the age. Since he deemed it as one of his most important tasks to popularize the paintings at the Museum of Fine Arts, this group of his writings is the most voluminous. He published his observations in foreign papers to call the attention of the international researchers to the rich collection of the Budapest museum. He wrote of the gallery's new acquisitions, Károly Pulszky's purchases, private collectors' gifts, successes at foreign auctions. As a knower of Hungarian private collections, he devoted writings to their description, with the unconcealed intention of acquiring one or another valuable painting for the museum. His precise accounts on this theme were published in *Der Cicerone*, the *Zeitschrift für Bildende Kunst*, *Kunstchronik*, *Kunstchronik und Kunstmarkt* and *Kunst und Künstler*, so he informed a broader professional readership of the Hungarian private collections. In his reports of the auctions at the Ernst Museum, he called attention to paintings by many lesser Hungarian masters that cropped up in the Hungarian art market. In addition to scientific articles, he had a flair for feuilleton to entertain the broader public interested in art. He wrote about the purchases of the museum, exhibitions, known or little acknowledged artists. These writings aimed at a broad readership were published in *Vasárnapi Ujság*, *Pester Lloyd* and *Magyar Szalon*.

Térey's professional work also included giving appraising attests to private persons and art dealers. This extra-museum work became official in 1918 when he was engaged as the old masters expert of Lajos Ernst's auction house. Térey's professional expertise was widely acclaimed among his foreign colleagues. He was often co-opted into the organizing committees of major international exhibitions or invited to the related congresses. In his

curriculum vitae he listed the great international exhibitions to which he actively contributed, curated the Hungarian material or improved understanding of artistic questions of certain periods. His international contacts also earned Térey commissions abroad. He successfully reorganized the Strossmayer Gallery in Zagreb between 1925 - 1926. He subjected the entire material to scientific revision, picked the exhibitable paintings, prepared the plan of installation and offered practical advice for the technical modernization of the gallery, and his work was acknowledged by the Serbian king with St Sava order.

Térey made the acquaintance of Sir Joseph Duveen, the greatest American art dealer in 1923. Their relationship starting on a professional basis soon turned into friendship and filled with meaningful activity the last phase of the scholar's life forced into retirement from the Museum of Fine Arts. After the visit of Bode and Friedländer, Duveen also invited Térey to visit America and hold lectures on the Hungarian art life and the Central European conditions of art for the American art collectors. The visit took place in winter 1924. Duveen did not only pay the travel costs but also enabled Térey to study the most famous private collections on the East Coast.

This scholar of international authority was not respected in his native country, but had to suffer the jealousy, slander and unjust persecution by his colleagues. When evaluating the picture collection of Marcell Nemes in the 1910s, he was accused of complicity with the collector. Though the investigation cleared him of the accusation, the impeachment probably contributed to his neglect when a new director was elected to head the Museum of Fine Arts. Appraisal belonged to the work of museum associates, yet in 1923 this was the pretext for a new wave of attack against him. He was denounced for his appraising work by a colleague and a counterinterested art dealer, which brought on him an inquiry by the ministry's supervisory organ of museums. During the protracted proceedings Térey went for a long study tour in America, which was another reason for strict measures to be taken

against him. The investigating committee interpreted the acknowledgement and gifts he took home as aggravating circumstance instead of a great success, and in the autumn of 1926 it ruled that Térey had to go into old-age retirement.

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