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Márffy Ödön
(Monograph and Catalogue Raisonné)

Theses of the PhD dissertation

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1. The aim of the research

When Ödön Márffy started his fine arts studies in Paris in the autumn of 1902, Monet, Renoir, Cézanne, Gauguin were still alive, Bonnard was considered as a young painter and Picasso, who was working in his blue period, had just had his first exhibition. Matisse and his companions being almost completely unknown were doing those colour experiments which led to the appearance of the fauves in 1905. Besides the knowledge acquired at the École des Beaux Arts the young Márffy brought this colourful, always striving for new way of artistic approach in 1906. After his successful first Hungarian exhibition he was invited amongst the founders of MIÉNK. (The Circle of Hungarian Impressionists and Naturalists) Further developing his Parisian experiments in a collective thinking with his friends Béla Czóbel, Károly Kernstok and others they founded the first Hungarian avant-garde artist group at the end of 1909, which later became known under the name of the Nyolcak (The Eight) from 1911. The group's significance goes beyond the boundaries of fine arts. The closest partners of the Eight in the literature are Ady and the Nyugat generation, in the music Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, Leó Weiner and the Új Magyar Zeneegylet (The New Hungarian Music Association) This unmatched artistic blossoming, which was mainly simultaneous with the most modern European movements, was blocked by the First World War and the troubled internal and foreign political situation of 1918-1920. By the twenties the most members of the Eight had already emigrated, Márffy was the only member who was working permanently in Hungary. Partly due to this fact by the middle of the twenties he became the key figure of the KÚT (The New Society of Artists), and from 1927 he became the president of this society. In this period his art was widely accepted and welcomed in Hungary. After the Second World War he was the co-founder of the Európai Iskola (European School), which was representing the most modern trends of that era; however his art was counted as hidebound comparing to the works of the young. In the fifties his art was effaced. He was only honoured from 1958 in the last two years of his life, but the popularity of his works amongst the organizers of exhibitions and the collectors can be considered constant.

So Márffy was an artist who was in the van of the Hungarian painters and, in some of his periods, created outstanding works. Some comprehensive writings about his art were published even in his life, and after his death some popularising, illustrated monographies were also published, however some periods of the oeuvre were obscure until the most recent

times. The painter's early years or his Parisian period were completely unrevealed, we had only a faint knowledge about his fauvist period and the research regrettably neglected the late years.

Therefore the aim of my work is to explore Ödön Márffy's career in its full depth, and according to this to create a modern, well documented catalogue raisonné together with a monograph which represents the painter in a comprehensive way.

2. The selected methods of the research

The writing of the monograph was preceded by a several year-long research concerning Ödön Márffy's work, so the monograph is based on the oeuvre-catalogue and not vice versa. I conducted the research using selected resources. By favour of the private and public collections, the auction houses and galleries I had the chance to study and document the vast majority of the original works which are permitted to publish in reproductions. In the case of the latent or destroyed works I had to reline upon the notes and photographs of the Márffy's inheritance, the various public archives and photo collections, and the reproductions published in the exhibition's catalogues and in the contemporary press. During the documentation I tried to explore not only the physical qualities of the pictures but also their provenance, their appearances at exhibitions, and their bibliography as well. Meanwhile I tried to preserve the personal rights of the owners.

Most of the catalogue raisonnés processing whole oeuvres are chronological; however I considered it to be better not to start from a hypothetical timeline, but from the artworks themselves. Márffy worked in genre groups which can be well circumscribed. His figurative art almost completely misses the narrative element, so his oeuvre is definitely suitable for motive-based classification. Therefore in the case of the catalogue I have chosen the thematic-based (by genre, later by motive classified) elaboration.

On the other hand the monograph follows a chronological order, in other words it is a biography. I deal with the painter's biography, his artistic activity, his exhibitions, and his works born in the given period. The short picture analyses at the ends of the chapters set the most important works, which were created in same period, next to each other, so we do not lose the only real advantage of the chronology-based classification: the artistic progress becomes visible.

3. The main findings and results of the thesis.

Thus the thesis has two parts: one is the monographic elaboration of Ödön Márffy's career and the related database.

Parts of Márffy's career were connected to those important stages of his life which brought a change in his art too. That double-rooted artistic approach which combines the Cezannesque picture construction with the vivid colours of the fauves was shaped during his Parisian years in a way which shows these style elements nearly competing against each other. Nevertheless he only developed his really fauve art from 1908 in Nyergesújfalu in a mutual affecting with Kernstok and Czóbel. In the period of the Eight the development mostly was the intensification of Cézanne's influence. The constructivist intentions joined together with the demand of creating monumental compositions similarly to most of his fellow artists. During the war he worked as a military painter and by the end of the century his art slowly moved toward the expressionism. His marriage to Endre Ady's widow, Csinszka brought a significant change in his art too. Csinszka became determinant in Márffy's art just like in Ady's late poetry. The especially lyrical, liberately colourist, decorative art, which he developed then, associates him with mostly with the painters of the *École de Paris*. After 14 years of marriage the losing of his wife caused a serious crisis in his career, but throughout the years of loneliness he continued the way he had begun earlier. His style did not change much, but the signs of tiredness started to show in his pictures. His joining to the *Európai Iskola* and his second marriage in 1949 promised a new *élan* and Márffy even made an effort to get his art closer to the new expectations of the communist regime, but he did not succeed. His works turned into more realistic, however not realists. During the times of ignoring he escaped into still life painting and his late years are characterised by artistic decline.

Basing on the about one-and-a-half thousand works reproduced and documented during the research of the last ten years we see Márffy's oeuvre in a more unified way than earlier. His international connection in the case of the French postimpressionism and later the fauvism are comprehensible as he had been studying these directions on location. On the other hand it is interesting that the artist, who was working almost solely in Hungary, developed an art during the decades resembling to those of his contemporaries working in France, but without any real connections to these artists. Primarily the parallels can be demonstrated with the oeuvres of Derain, Dufy, Manguin, Van Dongen, Kisling.

I am convinced that the catalogue raisonné published in the appendix may be considered as being rich comparing to other Hungarian works of the same kind. To this are connected an

artist-related bibliography which contains nearly 2000 titles, a list of exhibitions striving for completeness, and a signature-catalogue following a chronological order.

Since the monograph published in 2006 the database has been enriched with many new information, some latent or unknown pieces of art as well as some new information concerning the painter's life were revealed. Therefore it is hoped that the continuation of the research promises an illumination of many further details.

4. Selected publications in the topic of the dissertation

Monograph

- Rockenbauer Zoltán: Márffy. Budapest – Párizs: Maklary Artworks. 2006.

Exhibition Catalogue

- Márffy és műzsái. [katalógus]. A bevezető tanulmányt írta, az életrajzot és a kiállításjegyzéket összeállította, a képeket válogatta Rockenbauer Zoltán. Budapest: Ernst Múzeum. 2003.

Studies

- Czóbel Béla emlékkiállítás. Halálának 25. évfordulója alkalmából. [Bevezető a kiállítási katalógushoz.] Budapest, Sopron, Zalaegerszeg, Kaposvár, Szolnok, Miskolc, Debrecen, Hatvan. 2001.
- Márffy Ödön tanulóévei. A párizsi ösztöndíj (1902-1906). In: *Ars Hungarica*, 2005. 1. sz. 109-140.
- Márffy vad színekkel. Egy életmű átértékelődése az aukciók tükrében. In: *Art Magazin*, 2005. 1. sz. 38-40.
- Márffy feketén-fehéren. Amiről a Rónai Dénes-negatívok mesélnek. In: *Art Magazin*, 2005. 1. sz. 41-44.
- Az eltűnt Márffyk nyomában. Wanted 2. In: *Art Magazin*, 2005. 2. sz. 50-52.
- A „Három akt”, avagy elveszett-e Márffy Ödön korai főműve?. In: *Művészettörténeti Értesítő*, 2005. 3-4. sz. 309-318.
- Vadak a Duna-parton, avagy tekinthető a magyar Collioure-nak Nyergesújfalu? In: *Magyar Vadak Párizstól Nagybányáig. 1904-1914.* Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Galéria, 2006. 137-143.
- The Fauves by the Danube, or Could Nyergesújfalu Have been Hungary's Collioure? In: *Hungarian Fauves from Paris to Nagybánya. 1904 – 1914.* Budapest: Hungarian National Gallery, 2006. 125-132.
- A fauve-os hatások alakulása a modern magyar csendéletfestészetben. In: *Magyar Vadak Párizstól Nagybányáig. 1904-1914.* Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Galéria, 2006. 173-184.
- Márffy Ödön. In: *Magyar Vadak Párizstól Nagybányáig. 1904-1914.* Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Galéria, 2006. 268-269. l.
- A muzikális Nyolcak. Műzsák randevúja a pesti kávéházakban. In: Kieselbach Tamás (szerk.): *Magyar zene és kép. Zene, ritmus, hangzás, kép, fotó, látvány.* Budapest: Corvina, 2007. 58-71.
- A Nyolcak egymás közt. In: Berecz Ágnes – L. Molnár Mária – Tatai Erzsébet (szerk.): *Nulla dies sine linea. Tanulmányok Passuth Krisztina hetvenedik születésnapjára.* Budapest, Praesens: 2007. 82-89.
- Des fauves au bord du Danube. Nyergesújfalu peut-il être considéré comme un Collioure hongrois ? In : *Fauves Hongrois. 1904-1914.* Paris : Ed. Biro. 2008. 112-117.
- Les influences fauves dans la peinture hongroise de nature morte. *Fauves Hongrois. 1904-1914.* Paris: Ed. Biro. 2008. 154-159