

THE ROLE OF SOVIET ADVISORS in the Stalinist Transformation of East European Art

Reuben Fowkes

Research Fellow in Location Memory and the Visual
MIRIAD, Manchester Metropolitan University
www.translocal.org

Introduction

This article considers an important and often overlooked aspect of the Sovietisation of Eastern European art and culture in the late 1940s and early 1950s, namely the role of Soviet cultural advisors in determining the course of party policy on the arts. This issue is considered through the case of the official visit of the Soviet painter Constantin Finogenov to Hungary during the first *Hungarian Soviet Friendship Month* of February 1949, an occasion which was both an opportunity to educate party-minded Hungarian artists about Socialist Realism and a pretext for the compilation of an in-depth report for the Soviet authorities into the state of Hungarian art. The visiting Soviet art specialist described his mission as to 'give an exhaustive analysis of Hungarian art and characterise in detail individual tendencies, individual artists and their work', while admitting in the same breath that any attempt to do so was 'a very hard and responsible task.'¹ Finogenov's report provides insight into the mechanism by which the Soviet cultural paradigm was imposed on East European art worlds, and a glimpse of the fractured state of Hungarian art on the brink of Stalinist transformation.

¹ C. Finogenov, *A magyar képzőművészetről [About Hungarian art]*, Archive of the Office of Mátyás Rákosi M-KS-276-65/331, p.1

The Soviet-Hungarian Friendship Month of February 1949 took place at the height of the political and social transformation to Stalinism, and was itself a key instrument of the cultural revolution that accompanied the adoption of many aspects of the Soviet system in Eastern Europe.² The event was organised by the Hungarian-Soviet Cultural Society, and involved presentations and performances by a Soviet delegation that was made up of the Soviet Deputy Health Minister, a representative of the All Union Society for Cultural Links Abroad, a Russian poet, an agrobiologist, a composer, two dancers, a cellist, pianist, three singers, a 40 person Georgian singing and dancing troupe, and a group of 7 chess masters with 13 personal assistants, and Constantin Finogenov. An internal Party document reveals the goals of the Soviet culture month as to

on the one hand, introduce and popularise the artistic and scientific achievements of the Soviet Union in Hungary, on the other to gain assistance in the ideological struggle that we have now initiated with increased force to squeeze out Western bourgeois influence from all areas of Hungarian cultural life.³

The decisive shift from the politics and practices of the post-war coalition period, to the radical policy of 'building socialism' on the Soviet model took place in the autumn of 1948. Although 'a sharpening of the class struggle' had been proclaimed at the Cominform meeting that condemned Tito and the Yugoslav Communist Party at the end of June 1948, there was some delay in the full implementation of the resolution across the Bloc.⁴ In the area of art and culture, a radical new policy had been announced by the Hungarian communist party in June: 'The Party rejects the reactionary bourgeois principle of 'art for art's sake' ... we want optimistic art that heralds the victory of the ideas of people's democracy.'⁵

² See also É. Ständeisky, *A kigyó bőre: ideológia és politika*, in: *A Fordulat évei: politika, képzőművészet, építészet* [The years of transition: politics, art and architecture], ed. by É. Ständeisky et al., Budapest: 1956-os Intézet 1998, pp. 164-166.

³ *Proposal for the Organisation of the Soviet Culture Month*, Hungarian-Soviet Society Archive P2148 – 2, p. 284.

⁴ The views of the Hungarian leadership were apparently clarified by the fate of the Polish leader Gomułka, who was removed in September 1948 for attempting to preserve an element of Polish independence and resist full Sovietisation.

⁵ Quoted by G. Pataki, *Van alkonyat, mely olyan, mint a hajnal* in: *A Fordulat éve...*, p. 229.

Yet, despite some socialist innovations in, for example, organising travelling exhibitions of contemporary art to mining areas, by the end of the year there still had not, for example, been a major art exhibition that came close to satisfying the demands of party critics.⁶

Much of the impetus for what amounted to a revolution in Hungarian cultural life can be traced to the communist party's Agitation and Propaganda Committee, which was set up in October 1948. The chair and deputy chair of the committee were József Révai and Márton Horvath, the party's ideological heavyweights in the cultural sphere. The minutes of the Secretariat meeting are absolutely explicit about why, from the Party's point of view, such a committee was called for:

The sphere of Hungarian culture has lagged behind our successes in the political and economic spheres... Political reaction, which has been driven out of political and economic life, has managed to maintain its footing with relative success in the more loosely controlled areas of education, science, literature and art.⁷

One of the first targets for the Agitation and Propaganda Committee was the transformation of the Hungarian-Soviet Cultural Society from an association for the furtherance of cultural and scientific exchange between the two countries, to a mass organisation dedicated to popularising the Soviet Union among the working masses. In recognition of this changed focus, and in the spirit of rebranding, 'cultural' was dropped from the name of the organisation.⁸

⁶ The closest attempt at producing an exhibition of socialist realist art in 1948 was *A Közösségi művészet felé [Towards a Communal Art]*, curated by Mariusz Rabinovsky, in December 1948 at the Artists' Union. The works in the exhibition were criticised in the official art journal "Szabad Művészet" for their formal failings and lack of optimism. See, *Ankét a közösségi művészetről*, "Szabad Művészet" 1949 No. 4, pp. 129-130.

⁷ *Minutes of the MDP Seretariat*, (21 October 1948) Archive of the Hungarian Workers' Party M-KS-276-54/15ő.e.

⁸ As a result, the third national meeting of Secretariat of the Society resolved to 'significantly correct, broaden and deepen the work of the Hungarian Soviet Cultural Society'. *Minutes of the third national meeting of the Secretariat of the Hungarian-Soviet Cultural Society*, (24 October 1948) Hungarian-Soviet Society Archive P2148 – 2, p. 84.

The Hungarian Soviet Society was then a subject as well as an instrument of the sovietisation of cultural life in Hungary.

Before proceeding with a commentary on Finogenov's report, I would like to provide some direct evidence of its importance in the history of the sovietisation of Hungarian art. A letter to the party leader, Mátyás Rákosi, and the future Minister of Culture, József Révai, from Ernő Gerő, a leading communist with close links to the Soviet leadership, provides a rare glimpse into the thought processes of the Communist leadership during the Stalinist transition. On 19 April 1949, Gerő wrote:

I've read the criticisms of the cultural delegation, and it's my impression that they're right about the fundamental issues... It will be necessary, after the elections, in part making use of these criticisms, for the politburo to deal with these questions, because it's time to pour clean water into the glass, to publicly declare the Party's point of view.⁹

After the rigged elections of May 1949, the party did indeed proceed 'to pour clean water' into the institutional vessels of the art world. On 26 May 1949 a fine arts committee was set up within the Agitation and Propaganda Section of the Party to prepare within two weeks a report on changes to Hungarian art organisations.¹⁰ Its recommendations were used to complete the institutional transformation of the art world on Soviet lines, and did indeed apparently draw strongly on the systematic advice of comrade Finogenov.

Art History

Finogenov began his report by commenting on Hungarian art history. Despite 'reaching a high developmental level' in certain periods, Hungarian art had since Nagybánya, been 'under the influence of the decadent bourgeois art of French post-impressionism and German expressionism.'¹¹ Formalist tendencies, he notes,

⁹ *Letter to Rákosi from Gerő*, 19 April 1949, Archive of the Hungarian Workers' Party M-KS-276-65/331 ő.e.

¹⁰ The committee members were Ferenc Redő, Sándor Ék, Ernő Schubert and János Antalné. Archive of the Hungarian Workers' Party M-KS-276-86/28 ő.e.

¹¹ Nagybánya is the Hungarian name for the town of Baia Mare in Romania and the location of a famous artists' colony founded by members of an independent art school

strongly influence the work of even such democratic-revolutionary artists as Gyula Derkovits, István Dési Huber, Bertalan Por, András Beck, János Kmetty, and Sándor Bortnyik. While a whole group of the new artist generation is wallowing in unproductive abstract experimentation – such as Ernő Schubert, Béla Bán, Ferenc Márton, János Martinszki, Endre Rozsda, Ferenc Jankovics, Juci Vajda, Magda Zemlényi and Gyula Marosán – all of whom are communist party members.¹²

The problem that the Soviet art consultant correctly diagnosed was that the vast majority of socially-progressive artists who came to the fore in the coalition period had strong ‘formalist tendencies’. In terms of the Hungarian art world at the time, there had been a return to prominence of artists who had been involved in the 1919 Republic of Councils, then in many cases spent the Horthy years in exile, and returned only after the end of the Second World War. It is clear that as late as February 1949 this group had not understood what was required of them by the Party or had not yet adapted themselves to the requirement to produce socialist realist work.

This problem was resolved in some cases by a conscious decision to abandon the artist’s previous style in favour of socialist realism. Béla Bán’s work provides a clear example of this type of politically-inspired artistic transformation, although all artists who wished to remain active under sovietised cultural conditions were under the same pressure. András Beck was another artist who underwent a stylistic transformation in this period. He was forced to repeatedly remodel his entry for the József Attila statue competition until it managed to unambiguously convey the required optimism and revolutionary fervour. Interestingly, both of these artists went into exile after the 1956 revolution and reverted to more abstract styles.

The problematic artistic legacy of 1919 came to the fore during the Soviet Hungarian Friendship Month when Finogenov strongly criticised the exhibition on ‘The 1919 Revolution and Art 1910-1920’. His analysis of the catalogue revealed that there were seven revolutionary posters from 1919, as opposed to 77 works with completely empty titles like ‘Nude in Flight’ and ‘Girl’s Head’. The catalogue introduction provocatively referred to the ‘incomparable

in Munich in the 1880s, that managed to break with academic art and was associated with Impressionism.

¹² C. Finogenov, *A magyar képzőművészetről [about Hungarian art]...*, op. cit, p.1.

perfection' of Hungarian poster art from 1919, comparing current revolutionary art unfavourably with the art of the pre-war period and failing to criticise the 'strong expressionist influence' visible in the poster art of the period.¹³

The issue of how to treat the legacy of leftwing inter-war modernism went to the heart of the struggle over sovietisation, as it was also related to the question of the preservation of national artistic traditions in the face of the stylistic uniformity on the Soviet model that was being actively pursued by the Hungarian Party from late 1948 onwards.

The other side of the coin of positive evaluation of early-twentieth century avant-garde revolutionary art was a tendency to devalue Socialist Realism. Finogenov noted that both among party-painters and Marxist theoreticians, the 'damaging view and theory is current according to which although the Soviet Union is a forward-looking, progressive country, Soviet art lags behind Western art.' He quotes Lukács pointedly as an illustration of this anti-Soviet viewpoint.¹⁴

A related issue was the prevalence of the 'elitist theory, according to which the ordinary people are not mature enough to understand the 'new revolutionary forms' of art, and so need to be educated so that they learn to understand and value the 'new' art.' The elitist aspect of this theory lay in the fact that in effect artists were 'placing their own tastes and views above those of many millions of progressive socialist state builders.'¹⁵

To illustrate this point, Finogenov drew attention to a revealing mis-quotation of Lenin made by the Minister of Education, Gyula Ortutay, at the opening festivities for the Friendship month held in the Opera House. While the original Lenin text correctly translated called for art to be 'understandable and pleasing to the broad working masses', the same passage was mis-translated as 'the masses must understand and must like art.' This slip indicated the prevalence of 'elitist, sham innovatory' views that 'leave the door wide open to all colours of formalism.'¹⁶

¹³ Ibidem, p. 4.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 2.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 2.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

The Artists' Union

One of the main causes for the pernicious spread of Formalism in Hungarian art was the lack of an effective artists' union that would be able to stand up strongly for socialist realism, and 'actively struggle for paintings of high quality artistic finish with ideological content', while at the same time 'in a critical spirit assimilate the legacy of both international and Hungarian classical art.'¹⁷ As a consequence of the failings of the existing institutional set up, there was a decided lack of 'systematic party criticism of the formalist method', especially in art magazines.

A related matter was the way that the 'family' and 'group spirit' of the leading artists had led to an 'unprincipled, subjective and liberal handling of the issues', as well as to an incorrect use of existing cadres, either in the area of artistic production (commissions, studies, etc), or the filling of jobs (teaching in the Academy, schools, worker studies, journals).

One consequence of the dominance of cliques was the failure to use what Finogenov refers to as 'specialists', such as Márk Vedres, Kisfaludi Stróbl, Sándor Mikus, Oszkár Glatz and István Zador. Such technically-assured artists were often sidelined or even repressed by the formalistic masters, who routinely dismissed their work as 'naturalist' and 'bourgeois kitsch'. As a result, the specialists had begun to work in a 'harder, schematic style', believing this to be the 'new revolutionary' form. Finogenov adds an interesting caveat to the effect that he 'naturally is not in the position to make judgements about the social profile of these specialists.'¹⁸

One consequence of the sovietisation of the art world was indeed an increased tendency to use these 'specialists', many of whom were closely associated with discredited Horthy regime. Kisfaludi Stróbl, who had spent the inter-war periods doing portraits of the Hungarian and British ruling class, was in the summer of 1949 given the important commission for a *Gratitude Statue* to Stalin. He had already made good direct contact with the Soviets in early 1945, when he was personally chosen by Marshal Voroshilov to do the Gellért Hill *Soviet War Memorial*. He had also been one of the few to visit the Soviet Union on the first Hungarian Soviet delegation of spring 1946. Sándor

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 3.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 5.

Mikus, who until very recently had been in the camp of small, symbolic nude sculptures, had just taken a decisive step towards collaboration with the Soviets by working with a Soviet sculptor on the *Steinmetz Monument*, which was completed in December 1948 in curious and controversial circumstances. This commission was characteristic of the pained and confused state of the art world at the moment of Stalinist transformation.

Finogenov also points to a failure to use the two artists who up to that point were the only figures in the Hungarian art world that were fully committed to Socialist Realism. In his view, Sándor Ék and Jolán Szilágyi could both be much better used than at present 'in an organisational and artistic capacity.' In fact, these two artists, who had spent many years in exile in the Soviet Union, did not manage to gain pre-eminent positions in the art world, which continued to hold them at a disdainful distance.

The Academy

Finogenov's study trip to Hungary involved visits to the Academy of Fine Arts and the School of Applied Arts, as well as to the new evening schools for worker-artists that had been set up in major factories. His report is highly critical of the educational practices in the academies, the outlook of the professors, and the output of the students. He was full of praise for the worker-art schools, which he predicted would, in combination with the use of old 'specialists', eventually provide the new artist cadres for a socialist society.

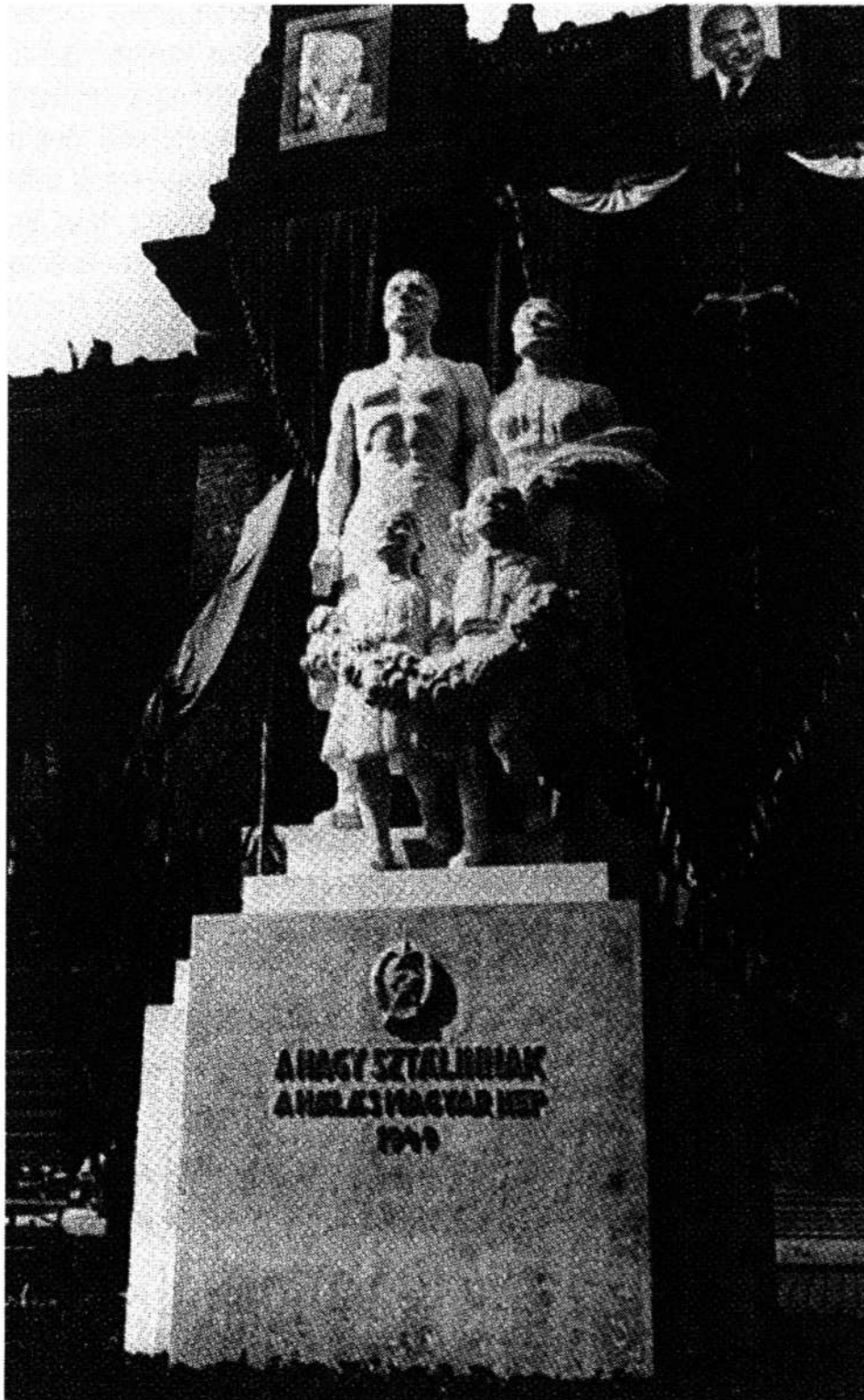
His principle objection to art teaching practices at the School of Applied Arts was that from the first year onwards students were allowed to do drawings of nude models, rather than gradually progress year by year in subject to reach a climax of life drawing in the third or fourth year of study. Students were also not, he reported, made to assimilate the work of classical styles and understand the importance of special materials, such as clay, stone, bronze and wax. The wall painting department was clearly 'strongly under the influence of formalism.'¹⁹

At the Academy of Fine Arts, he found only two or three works in the mosaic workshop which were worthy of attention, one of which was a head by a student of the old specialist, Kisfaludi Stróbl. He notes how he was neither

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 6.



Steinmetz Monument, Budapest, 1948



Kisfaludi Strobl, *Gratitude*, 1949

shown the workshops of the Painting, Sculpture, and Graphics departments, nor the studios of the leading artists András Beck, János Kmetty, Bertalan Pór and others, with the implication that they all had something formalist to hide.

A further impression was that caricature has yet to assume 'defining significance in political life.' The cartoons in popular magazines still reflect 'the tastes of the urban population rather than those of the working class and peasantry.' There is much 'inappropriate depiction of male and female workers, of simple people, as well as the grotesque and discriminatory depiction of black people and other nationalities.' Better use here, he suggested, could be made of the work of Jolán Szilágyi.²⁰

Finogenov, at one point, wonders aloud whether the fact that people agreed with his open criticism of their work was a good sign of their intentions and wish to change, or if people were simply being polite towards a guest. It was important that they understand that the issue of the day for Hungarian artists was to 'consciously break from Formalism' and it was not enough to hope that through an 'automatic process' artists will 'grow into socialist realism.'

The Ministry of Education and the Arts Council are strongly criticised for holding to the damaging view that by trying to impose socialist realism on artists, the result would be to 'drive the best artists into the arms of abstract art'. He was equally sceptical of the common view that the slow pace of progress towards socialist realism in Hungary reflected the fact that after all 'it had taken thirty years to reach the current level of artistic success in the Soviet Union.' These views were a clear sign of 'negligence and weak leadership' in the governmental art institutions.²¹

Finogenov confessed to having a 'very good impression' of the Csepel and Tatabánya worker-studios, and to feeling 'great joy' at the successes of young and old workers in the field of drawing and sculpture.

From these worker-studios will come the new cadres of Fine Arts, who together with the most excellent realist artists will decide the question of Socialist Realism in Hungary.²²

²⁰ Ibidem.

²¹ Ibidem.

²² Ibidem, p. 7.



Constantin Finogenov's Visit to the Hungarian Artists' Union, 1949

In a sense he was right in this case, by the early 50s the first graduates of the new artistic education were appearing, many with socially-relevant family backgrounds, and all working in a convincingly Socialist Realism style. This of course did not stop them abandoning Socialist Realism in future years as their own work and the artistic requirements of the state as commissioner changed in the post-Stalin years.

Recommendations

After giving his impressions of the current state of Hungarian art, Finogenov went on to make a series of specific recommendations. These included:

- A) To organise a unified artists' union with the following tasks:
 - 1. To undertake ideological education work amongst artists, including the study of dialectical materialism, party history, and the basis theory of Marxism-Leninism.
 - 2. To address the question of the 'innovators' and 'sham-innovators' in art history.
 - 3. Party criticism and self-criticism should be practiced on artists and their work.
 - 4. The professional knowledge of artists should be raised.
 - 5. Thematic exhibitions should be organised in Budapest and the provinces.
 - 6. Establish an art foundation to deal with commissions, artist study trips, participation in state anniversary exhibitions and the like.

- B) Cadres
 - 1. To raise up ideologically qualified cadres from the existing intelligentsia.
 - 2. To set up a responsible work circle of communist artists.
 - 3. To take the best from the worker-studios and raise them up through the Academy using scholarships.

- C) Party art criticism and attitudes to aesthetic questions must be worked out.

- D) Serious attention should be paid to the situation of artistic education.
 - 1. A resolute struggle must be taken up against formalist and elitist tendencies in the teaching faculty of the arts institutions.
 - 2. Special attention should be paid to the teaching of composition, and to the practice of inspection of students' sketchbooks.
 - 3. There should be a root and branch examination of the teaching of drawing.

- E) Serious attention should be paid to art studios in the big factories, which should be supported.

- F) Exhibition policy
 - 1. Organise an office for group visits to museums by factories.
 - 2. Temporary travelling exhibitions for factories with discussion groups should be organised.
 - 3. Visitor books for ordinary visitors.
 - 4. Worker visitors to take part in academic conferences.²³

One year later, as a member of the Soviet delegation of the second Soviet-Hungarian Friendship Month, Alexander Zamushkin, director of the Tretyakov Gallery, visited a transformed Hungarian art world. Zamushkin's first public engagement was a visit to the Academy of Fine Arts, where he made a short rousing political speech. The students lined up in rows, greeted him with singing and flowers, and he was welcomed in the name of the Academy by Sándor Bortnyik. This was in contrast to Finogenov's reception at the Academy the year before, when he was only shown the mosaic department. On a subsequent visit he

dealt in detail with every question, lectured the students and spoke with the professors about Soviet educational methods. He then visited the studios, dealing in detail with individual artistic problems, and expressing his opinions everywhere.²⁴

We cannot help getting the impression that this time round the staff and students of the Academy were better prepared to receive an important Soviet

²³ Ibidem, pp. 9-12.

²⁴ *Report of the Hungarian-Soviet Society National Centre for February 1950*, Hungarian-Soviet Society Archive P2148 – 2, p. 503.

visitor. In autumn 1949 the reform of the School of Fine Art had been taken further by the new director, Sándor Bortnyik, who took over from Pál Pátzay on 5 October 1949. The demotion of Pátzay had been on the cards for over a year, for his failure to push the School in a socialist realist direction. An internal party memorandum of September 1948, which was echoed by Finogenov's report, states:

The work of the School up to now bears all the signs of bourgeois anarchism. The rector, Pál Pátzay, makes no effort to give any kind of unified ideological leadership, with the result that every teacher in possession of a professorial sinecure can teach as he sees fit.²⁵

Zamushkin also gave two talks at the Artists' Union to audiences of over 300 artists, who discussed his speech afterwards. According to the internal MSzT report, 'although the presentation was excellent, the difficulties of translation tired out the listeners.' In the debates following one speech, a majority of artists were reported to have concurred with his views. He also spoke to the leadership of the union, and 'gave answers to many organisational, artistic and political questions.'

He was of course speaking to a very different Artists' Union to the one that greeted Finogenov the previous year. In September 1949 the Union of Hungarian Fine and Applied Artists had been established, merging the two existing artists' unions. The union had in effect been transformed from a mass organisation on the model of a trades union [*Szabadszervezet*], to an elite association [*Szövetség*] of between 100 and 300 members. There was in addition to the official committee of the union, a parallel party committee which overlapped in membership with the former and 'received its instructions directly from the cultural politics section [of the Hungarian communist party]'

The membership of both the official committee and the party committee was decided on by the Secretariat of the Hungarian Workers' Party on the basis of recommendations by the Agitation and Propaganda Committee in August 1949.²⁶ The committee of the new union was made up of leading figures of

²⁵ *Report of the MDP State Propaganda Department 14 September 1948*. Archive of the Hungarian Workers' Party M-KS-276-108/3 ő.e.

²⁶ *Report from the Party's department of cultural politics to the Secretariat, 23 May 1949*, Archive of the Hungarian Workers' Party M-KS-276-54/45ő.e.; and *Minutes of*



Soviet Painting Exhibition, Budapest 1949

the Stalinist era art scene, such as the sculptors Sándor Mikus, Kisfaludi Stróbl and Mark Vedrés, all of whom were at that moment engaged in the creation of highly political public monuments, and incidentally all of whom were spoken positively about by Finogenov as specialists with whom it was necessary to work. The painters selected to head the union were János Kmetty, Sándor Ék, Aurél Bernáth, Robert Berény, Ernő Schubert and Sándor Bortnyik, all of whom had shown themselves willing to bend to the wishes of the Party, as well as the hard-line communist art critic Gábor Ó. Pogány. The symbolic president of the union was the most famous living Hungarian painter, István Csók, who along with Berény and Bernáth (both non-Party members), were there to give the new union artistic credibility.

Absent from the new list of leading art figures were many of those who had played a key role in the first post-war incarnation of the Artists' Union and many former members of the Arts Council. Those missing included the sculptor András Beck, who had been elected secretary general of the artists' union in 1947, the non-party sculptor and former rector of the Academy, Pál Pátzay, and the painter István Szőnyi.²⁷

Zamushkin also visited the art department of the Ministry of Culture, an organisation that was much more in tune with socialist realism than the Arts Council or the Ministry of Education with which Finogenov had dealt with the previous year. The Ministry of Culture [*Nepművelési Minisztérium*], was established in summer 1949, and took over the artistic and cultural work of the VKM, the Arts Council, and the Ministry of Communications [*Tájékoztatásügyi Minisztérium*]. The hard-line political orientation of the new institution was communicated to the art world by means of a statement in the September-October 1949 issue of *Szabad Művészet*: 'The basis of the Ministry's work, and its starting point, is the recognition that the enemies of the workers, the exploiting classes, must be expelled not only from economic and political life, but also from the fields of culture, ideology and popular education.'²⁸ The new Ministry of Culture inherited the cadres and mindset of the communist party's Agitation and Propaganda Committee and its first Minister was József Révai.

Secretariat 10 August 1949, M-KS-276-54/57ő.e.

²⁷ For the make-up of the new union, see "Szabad Művészet" 1949 No. 9-10, p. 428.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 429.

Conclusion

Finogenov had in many respects been in a good position to judge the progress of Hungarian art towards the goal of Soviet Socialist Realism, because unlike the vast majority of Hungarian artists and critics at that particular historical juncture, he knew what Socialist Realist art and a Stalinist art system should look like. A year later and partly as a result of the adoption of many of the recommendations of his report, the situation in Hungarian art was a lot clearer. A consolidated body of artists with new social privileges had understood what was required of them by the new Hungarian art, and had actually seen the original Soviet model upon which they were to base their work at the traveling exhibition of Soviet masterworks that visited Hungary in December 1949. A single art journal now provided a consistent line of critical interpretation based on adulation of Stalin and Soviet Socialist Realism. There was a buzz of activity as committee of critics toured a hundred artists' studios aiding them with their designs for what was unambiguously called the First Hungarian Art Exhibition. The summer and autumn of 1949 marked the decisive shift towards the sovietisation of Hungarian art, coming a year after the political decision to sharpen the class struggle in the cultural sphere, and six months after the visit of the Soviet art advisor Constantin Finogenov, whose report clarified the position of the Hungarian party leadership and provided concrete suggestions as to how a radical transformation could be achieved.

Rola radzieckich doradców w procesie stalinowskiej transformacji sztuki we Wschodniej Europie

Artykuł dotyczy ważnego i często pomijanego aspektu procesu sowietyzacji kultury i sztuki we Wschodniej Europie w końcu lat 40. oraz wczesnych latach 50., mianowicie roli radzieckich doradców kulturalnych w kształtowaniu partyjnej polityki w dziedzinie sztuki. Zagadnienie to jest rozpatrywane na przykładzie oficjalnej wizyty radzieckiego artysty Konstantyna Finogenowa na Węgrzech podczas Miesiąca Przyjaźni Węgiersko-Radzieckiej w lutym 1949 r. Jego wizyta jest analizowana zarówno jako wykorzystanie okazji do edukacji partyjnych artystów węgierskich na temat realizmu socjalistycznego, jak i do sporządzenia dokładnego sprawozdania dla radzieckich władz na

temat stanu węgierskiej sztuki. Sprawozdanie to daje wgląd w mechanizm umożliwiający narzucenie środowiskom artystycznym Europy Wschodniej radzieckiego modelu kultury, jak również rzuca światło na fragmentację sztuki węgierskiej, znajdującej się na krawędzi stalinowskiej transformacji. Problemem zidentyfikowanym przez radzieckiego konsultanta były silne „tendencje formalistyczne” wśród znakomitej większości społecznie zaangażowanych artystów okresu powojennego. Sprawozdanie jest wielce krytyczne w odniesieniu do praktyki nauczania artystycznego w akademiach, światopoglądu profesorów oraz prac studentów. Finogenow prognozował, że absolwenci robotniczych szkół artystycznych, razem ze starszymi „specjalistami”, stworzą w przyszłości nowe kadry sztuki socjalistycznego społeczeństwa, dawał również szczegółowe sugestie reformy węgierskiej akademii na wzór radziecki.

Sprawozdanie Finogenowa jest omawiane w kontekście wizyty innego radzieckiego eksperta podczas Miesiąca Przyjaźni Węgiersko-Radzieckiej w 1950 r. Dzięki misji Finogenowa, Aleksander Zamuszkin, dyrektor Galerii Tretiakowskiej, zastał przekształcony świat węgierskiej sztuki, dużo bardziej uległy w stosunku do radzieckich potrzeb i żądań. W ciągu roku skonsolidowane środowisko artystyczne, obdarzone nowymi socjalnymi przywilejami, pojęło, czego wymagała od nich nowa węgierska sztuka. Jedyne istniejące pismo artystyczne zapewniało teraz konsekwentną linię krytyki zredukowanej do pochlebiania Stalinowi oraz radzieckiemu socrealizmowi. Lato i jesień 1949 r. przyniosły radykalny zwrot w kierunku sowietyzacji węgierskiej sztuki, rok po politycznej decyzji zaostrenia walki klasowej w sferze kulturalnej, a sześć miesięcy po wizycie Finogenowa, który stworzył scenariusz takiej przemiany.