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Graphic Magazines and Poster Art in Interwar Hungary

The main research question of my project is examining what role graphic design and poster art periodicals played in promoting modern typography, printing technology and Constructivist aesthetics to a Hungarian audience, both the public and advertisers. The intention, content, graphic form, editorial networks and outlook of these publications warrant a more detailed analysis. The rationale behind this project is to offer an alternate, complementary view to the existing research on avant-garde art and magazines of this period. By critically engaging with this vibrant period of Hungarian graphic design as a continuation and transformation of an earlier artistic avant-garde tradition, especially through the connections with the ideological and educational model of the Bauhaus, this research project addresses a chapter in the history of art journals that has been so far overlooked by researchers but one that deserves scholarly attention.

Magazines were arguably the most important instruments of communication for the progressive visual artists of the Hungarian avant-garde during the early 20th century. The émigré artists made a considerable contribution to poster and graphic design across Europe. Lajos Kassák's revamped MA journal, László Moholy-Nagy and Farkas Molnár's typography and magazine designs at the Bauhaus, Sándor Bortnyik and Róbert Berény's advertising posters in Weimar and Berlin were of exceptionally high artistic quality. This chapter of Hungarian art is well documented in both English and Hungarian language literature and forms a meaningful part in the main discourse on European Modernism. However, within this revised historic-artistic geography, there are still some areas of relative obscurity. There is considerable disparity between the amount of research into the graphic arts and its literature of the early 20th century in Hungary compared to that of the late 1920s and 30s. The change in Hungary's political conditions by 1925 allowed the return of left leaning artists and other intellectuals after a period of exile abroad. The return of these influential figures to Hungary in the late 1920s is the ideal starting point for examining the origins and particularities of graphic design magazines. These artists, amongst them former associates of Kassák, artists

like Berény, Bortnyik and others, began to work as commercial artists alongside their fine art practice. Poster art remained one of the only feasible domains for avant-garde artistic creation in the conservative political environment, where creative freedom was often strictly limited. The understanding of how the highly political works of the émigré years were repositioned into a commercial environment and how it related to the artists' earlier works created abroad forms a key part of the thesis.

Through the magazines' support poster became an artistic product in and of itself that defined the vision of generations of young artists and designers between the interwar period. The intent of these periodicals went beyond just championing a certain type of aesthetic. The principles of modernist art and design were circulated through these periodicals during the late 1920s and early 1930s.

It is easy to recognise that, while this variation of the avant-garde has been overlooked, it is wholly worthy of interest. They represent material proof of vital artistic activity and the continuation of the avant-garde tradition in the commercially driven environment of advertising. The quality of the layout and graphic presentation, the theoretical discussions that characterised the magazines *Magyar Grafika*, *Reklám-Élet* and *Plakát* encourage greater interest in their roles as both spaces for communication, as works of art and as historical documents. The contribution of the research project is to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural activity of the period by presenting a complementary side to fine art practice in the field of poster and graphic art.