

Zsuzsa Sidó

Central European University, Hungarian Academy of Sciences

Modern Aristocrat - A Contradiction in Terms? Count Gyula Andrassy Jr., Advocate of Hungarian Art

(Diss.: Aristocratic Art Patronage in the Age of Nation-Building: The Count Andrassy family)

The paper will present a case study focusing on a Hungarian aristocrat, Gyula Andrassy Junior (1860–1929) and his activities in the field of fine art, with special attention on his positions as head of the Hungarian Fine Arts Society, of the National Salon and of the Saint George Association of Amateurs and Art Collectors.

The paper forms part of a chapter from my dissertation, which deals with late nineteenth century art in Hungary, with a focus on aristocratic art patronage at the time of nation-building. (Working title: *Aristocratic Art Patronage in the Age of Nation-Building: The Count Andrassy family*) The objective is to describe and interpret the ways in which aristocrats fulfilled their perceived social and civic responsibilities in the field of fine art during the second half of the nineteenth century. From a theoretical perspective, the work combines the scholarship about aristocratic decline and fall in social history and its East-European (Polish, Bohemian, Czech, Hungarian) specificities regarding the question of nation-building and the role of fine art. Building on these I would like to examine the social aspects of national art in a liberal setting and the role of a group of reform-minded (often called national) aristocrats. The Andrassy family was one of the very active aristocratic families to support the idea of a national culture and the cultural, institutional modernization of the country. They did this on several levels, including the support of the arts. While my research focuses on the Andrassy family, I am using other families and individuals as control cases as well.

Through the study of the role and agency of key members of the high aristocracy the aim of the analysis will be to reassess the established narratives about the modernization of artistic life and visual arts in late nineteenth century Hungary. Looking at aristocratic art patronage from this perspective has the potential to redraw previous understandings of the aristocracy as

a monolithic and conservative social class. It also has implications for the reinterpretation of linear narratives on aristocratic fall and decline.

Researching the agency of the aristocracy in the various aspects of art life – their role in the art market, as donors to museums, as commissioners and as artists, but also their role in lobbying for various questions of cultural politics – can shed new light on the politics of art patronage in the age of liberal nationalism. With this research, I would like to draw attention to the need for a more nuanced understanding of the social history of aristocracy in the “age of the bourgeoisie” and in the “age of nationalism.”

From among the many aspects of Gyula Andrássy’s activities in artistic patronage, in this paper I will focus on the speeches he made at public events, including exhibition openings. Using mainly discourse analysis, I aim to present the underlying philosophical motivations behind his collecting activity, his ideas about the politics of art and his attitude towards the new aesthetic movements in the beginning of the twentieth century. The discourse analysis will be complemented with historical contextualization built on contemporary newspapers and (art) magazines, contemporary visual material, memoirs, etc.