

Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts  
Doctoral School

**Diverging ways of Mannerism- producing influential effects  
thus far**

**A subjective (hi)story of art**

**DLA thesis**

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## ***I. MANNERISM:***

Mannerism, or rather all those works which are considered to belong to this category today, was interpreted as a decadence, a degeneration, a deviation from the norms for a long time. It was only discussed in terms of late Renaissance or in terms of early Baroque. Some defined it as a transitional style. However, an independent style of art of an epoch cannot have its main criterion as being transitional.

A new era had to come to announce the possibility of the existence of different norms. An era that considered this anticlassic epoch important among its chosen traditions.

This era was the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its theoreticians were the founding fathers of the Vienna School of spiritual history. They outlined a formula of art history that regards the commencement of the typical formal and thematical characteristics of Modern Art as originating in Mannerism. They studied the characteristics of this style of art and sought the method of a possible definition starting from this approach.

Mannerism is highly difficult to define, negation is almost the only possible way of doing it; thus by using those qualities which make it differ from Renaissance and Baroque. Its diversity is not only the variation of the possible solutions but in many cases it is the vehicle of radically different tendencies. In its diversity and in its contradictory “diverging ways” the prefiguration of the present diversity and contradiction can be seen. We might say, that it is the prefiguration of the present-day misery if we were not inclined to think, that the harmonious periods which seem to be uniformly justified are no more than ephemeral episodes in human history and thus crisis, juncture is the natural state of art. We have to ignore here such harmonies which were created artificially, voluntarily or which were commanded to exist.

I haven't studied the historical-sociological background of this style of art. It would have overstepped the limits of this thesis and furthermore, this field had and still has erudite experts.

All in all, what I find the most difficult is to define the status of the writer of this thesis, that is, to define my status. After all, it is obvious that in this case the contingency of dilettantish art history, some kind of “preening in the gown of erudites” may arise.

Let me make it clear then, that this thesis contains the reflections of a practising artist thus it does not intend to represent a scholarly approach.

After the short summary of the researches on Mannerism I described the most prominent schools and masters of Mannerism on the basis of researchers like *Heinrich Wölfflin*, *Max Dvořak*, *Frigyes Antal*, *Arnold Hauser*, *Károly Tolnai*, *Kristóf Doris*, *Tibor Klaniczay* and *György Kelényi*.

I have paid special attention to the *Micelangelo-Tintoretto-Greco* line because this trend was rediscovered and adopted by Expressionism, especially by German Expressionism, since this epoch was as well the period of the emancipation of the German artistic achievements, that is, those so-called achievements beyond the Alps. This anticlassic tendency of art, that finally in the early 20th century self-consciously regarded its own deviation as a value, found its antecedents logically in Gothic art, in Mannerism-that adopts the basic gothic idea-, and in Romanticism.

As I have already mentioned, Vienna School provided the spiritual background for this style of art. On the basis of *Alois Riegl's* term: "Kunstwollen" (volition of art), *Max Dvořak* and his followers attributed the same rights to every different "Kunstwollen" that is conceivable and realizable in diverse places and in diverse epochs and thus they evenly appreciated such eras as the age of Mannerism.

The manifestation of the idea of Gothic transcendency in Renaissance art and the point since this tendency became apparent dates from a late work of *Michelangelo*, from the so-called *Rondanini Pietà*.

The comparison of the above-mentioned work of art with the early *Pietà*- that is in Rome, in St. Peter's Basilica -, does not merely demonstrate two periods of the artist's career because it also represents the difference between two art movements, that is, between High Renaissance and Mannerism.

I will also explicate alterations like the decomposition of the three unities of action-place-time and the emergence of such Gothic and at the same time Modern compositional solutions as simultaneous scene-making and the application of more perspectives, more viewpoints.

By the sketch of diverse Mannerisms, by the outline of 16th century style pluralism I aim at presenting the early prefiguration of 21th century style pluralism.

The scarce amount of such characteristics which are able to typify the whole style of art: the tipped balance, or in the words of *Arnold Gehlen*, the lack of stability, being raised to the level of a principle.

## **II. EXPRESSIONISM:**

Let me move on to the topic of Expressionism. It can be demonstrated how this art movement chose Mannerism to be one of its rediscovered guidelines beyond its own traditions (*Grünewald, Holbein, Cranach, Dürer*). The history of art is as well a history of the wandering motifs, interior citations, allusions, paraphrases and parodies, namely, a history of confidential winking at each other and of scoffings. This belongs soundly to the beneficial inward drift of art.

Nevertheless, the emergence of the first academies is the symptom of the ideas becoming stiff and dogmatic-and Mannerism is the epoch of this process as well. This very era is also to be renowned by the appearance of the first woman artists. It is also during this period that the archetype of the romantic artist comes into the world: a neurotic, unstable, sceptical artist who is deranged or driven to the verge of insanity by his own doubts.

On the score of the above-mentioned examples the affection of expressionist artists for this epoch is by no means accident. I do not aim at presenting Expressionism in a chronological way. I preferred to study the parallelisms with respect to Mannerism. I have highlighted the themes of biblical compositions with special attention to the suffering of Christ and man, that is, the Passion. I have also dealt with the significance of the themes of the framework.

It is important to note that both Mannerism and Expressionism pay special attention to the humiliated, suffering man.

The chapter of Expressionism gives an opportunity to present the Hungarian version that is synchronous with the main trend of this style of art.

## **III. HUNGARIAN EXPRESSIONISM**

The era-between the turn of the century and the I. World War-is the period, when Hungarian art kept up with the main West-European aspirations, all the following eras are characterised by increasing provincialism, by being shut and by shutting ourselves up. Between the I. World War and the II. World War Expressionism gradually withered away, however, during this period excellent works were created nationally and internationally as well. At the outset of the era the group of “neósok” from Nagybánya (*Czóbel, Csaba Vilmos Perlrott, Sándor Ziffer*) made an exhibition with the French fauvists in Paris. Hungarian art

was absolutely french-oriented until the I. World War, as a matter of fact, until Trianon anyway. In this essay I also aim to accentuate the significant differences between French Fauvism and German Expressionism. After the period of the Hungarian communism a group of Hungarian artists emigrated with the wave of emigration of the intellectuals, some of them settled in Vienna, some of them chose to live in Berlin that was developing into a more and more exciting cultural metropolis. With the aid of the connections of *Kassák* and The Sturm, Hungarian activists, expressionists were able to become regular exhibitors of Sturm Gallery.

At the same time, official Hungary initiates italian-orientation. *Tibor Gerevich* founded The Academy of Hungary in Rome. Its neoclassical style that merges Modern with pre-Raphaelite elements is a part of the European neoconservative tendency.

Expressionism as an art movement fatigues and disappointedly passes away with its utopian, messianic character, but the expressionist method in brushwork and in drawing remains in art's repertoire of techniques, from which it is brought out and used from time to time.

Mannerism interests me, Expressionism interests me even more, but what arouses my interest the most is the lot of Hungarian art and of Hungarian artists. The fragmentation, the story of uncompleted movements, lives and careers. The attitude of aversion to the expressionist style, of keeping distance from it on the part of most of the Hungarian artists and of the public at large, this attitude interests and intrigues me. The process, during which the style of Nagybánya became the main tendency of Hungarian art, which in spite of presenting the sober, bourgeois middle course amongst the isms and the official regime-art, was getting more and more anachronistic. In this thesis I study *Aurél Bernáth's* figure and thoughts more in detail.

I also write about the possibilities of the subjective, temper-ridden art, about the dramatic heightening of colours and lights, about the vehement, almost unnatural diabolism of the figure's motions, about the mask-like and other kinds of distortions of the faces. To conclude, about the possibilities of opinion in figurative art

#### ***IV. GROTESQUE***

Consequently the category of grotesque comes up. Grotesque was one of the styles of wall decoration in ancient Rome. Initially it was the name of a gross decoration, made of motifs like interlaced garlands, humans, animals and objects. In the name “grotesque” the word of *grotta* (cave, italian) is hidden. The purpose of the deviation from what is ideal, harmonious and classic is the depiction of the unsound, of the vile, of the fallible, of the ugly, of the ridiculous, of the terrible, of the bizarre, of the futile and of many other conditions, which deviate from the perfect.

I also write briefly about the bizarre and about the caricature as they are related to the grotesque. I have to put down the glory and the slow descent of grotesque in the 20<sup>th</sup> century history of Hungarian graphics as well.

In my opinion, Hungarian grotesque graphics depicts the evident response to the world of Kadarism that turned from absurd blood-curdler into a narrow-minded operetta. *Mihály Gácsi, Líviusz Gyulai, János Major, Csaba Rékasi, Imre Szemethy, Károly Dorosz, Ferenc Banga, Miklós Dolnik...*

## ***V. THE INFLUENTIAL EFFECTS OF MANNERISM AND OF EXPRESSIONISM THUS FAR:***

Coming near to the end of my doctoral thesis I also intend to point up the diversity of the emergence of Mannerist-Expressionist attitude in almost-past and in present aspirations. Starting from neoexpressionist, abstract expressionist continuity that lives on in German, in Austrian and even in Swedish art, through the so-called Heftige Malerei (impetuous painting) and Actionism; each of them is a direct line offspring of this core. Furthermore, Surrealism, Symbolism, Conceptual art, Fluxus art, Gesture painting and Appropriation Art originate in Mannerism as well.

## ***V. ABOUT MYSELF:***

At the end of the thesis I reveal my scarcely concealed intention of finding my place in the above-mentioned tendency of art. After all, for an artist, the history of fine arts is a genealogy. Some artists accentuate the continuity, others aim at creating *tabula rasa* again and again.

I am interested in the movements of the figure. The open curves of a movement talk sometimes about freedom, about the timeless happiness of an ecstatic instance. Inarticulate gesticulations talk about doomed attempts, responding to the unanswerable questions by a storm of movements. The appearance of a numbly griveous figure here and there stands for the temporary or final surrender of the game. Similarly to quondam expressionist, I highly admire the art of *Tintoretto* and *Greco*, being full of ecstatic, spiritual greatness. It is the same spirituality that fascinates me in the works of *Nolde* or *Rouault*.

Whereas I apprehend and register in my mind the process of the personality becoming more and more fragmented, solitary and empty and thus the depreciation of its significance and validity, I am still unable to harmonize with that art, which in order to illustrate the above- mentioned process takes its personality out of the work of art. It is obviously a romantic attitude, which also makes me a part of the aforesaid relations. Naturally, there are some artisits in this pedigree whom I cannot stand, but it is not possible even in art to choose our ancestors.

Otherwise, history heads towards me and finds its goal in me.