

The Nancy G. Brinker Collection of Hungarian Art
Works of Passion, Interludes and Progress

The modern art created in Hungary not only provided the Magyar nation with a powerful self-image; it also helped shape the character of visual aesthetics universally. Hungarian artists of the twentieth century developed the styles and defined the content of modernity from Budapest to Berlin, from Kecskemét to Chicago. Legions of Hungarian painters, designers, sculptors and architects brought with them to new homes throughout the world the innovative, and often revolutionary, aesthetics they had first articulated in their native land in an earlier age, most dynamically during the first third of the past century. Moreover, later generations of Hungarian artists continue to acknowledge in their current work the creativity and aesthetic originality that had inspired their forebears. Thus, the art one sees in the Brinker Collection represents not just a rich survey of the achievements of a singular Hungarian culture; it presents to a world audience our shared aesthetic heritage.

The span of styles, the range of references and the variety of media in the Brinker Collection attest to the expansiveness of Hungarian art, both of the classical avant-garde era and of contemporary times. Moreover, like the modern art itself, the present collection demonstrates less a closed practice than it illustrates a developing process. Hungarian modern art, and this collection that brilliantly presents it, is multifarious. The artists represented include the internationally celebrated – for example, Róbert Berény, Béla Uitz and Sándor Bortnyik, whose constructivist composition is a perfect exemplar of the heroic European avant-garde – as well as those less widely known. Further, several painters are represented by works in styles of formats less frequently exhibited publicly, though of consummate significance historically and aesthetically. Thus, the acknowledged masters of Hungarian modernism, while it introduces us to appreciation – develop, so will the Brinker Collection. As a “work in process” the Collection evinces the dynamism and variability of modern art itself, while reflecting the creative curiosity, open-mindedness, and discriminating taste of Ambassador Brinker.

With this collection, Nancy Brinker has embarked on a process of self-discovery and selfless cultural advocacy. The Hungarian modern art presented here embodies the collector’s uncurbed excitement about the vital culture of modern Hungary and its future, just as it reflects and documents a maturing understanding of that nation’s complex and often contradictory history – its decades of accomplishment, openness and innovation; and its years of constraint and tribulation. Indeed, it is this very history of cultural high points and political abjection that makes Hungary’s art compelling for both a native and a world audience. Consequently, the works illustrated in the present catalogue constitute a compelling invitation for us to look closely. For in this stimulating assembly of great paintings and small masterpieces, the Brinker Collection affords a new vision of an art and a history that belongs as much to us as to Hungary.

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