Hungarian Artists
The Brinker Collection represents a rich survey of the achievements of the Hungarian culture and 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.

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 it does to Hungary.
My passion for Hungarian art began at a tumultuous time in September 2001, when I was sworn into office to serve our country as the United States’ Ambassador to Hungary – just five days before September 11.

Due to the delay my art collection had failed to arrive from America. In the mean time, I asked my friend, historian and collector István Rozsics if the artists I had befriended through him in Budapest would like to display their art in the American Residence? There began my love affair with Hungarian Art.

The show, including works by László Fehér, István Nádler, Károly Klimó, Imre Bak, Tamás Soós, and Attila Szücs, among others, gave me comfort and contrast in conflict. My friends in Budapest recognized they deserved for their contribution, which was more valuable than generally acknowledged.

As I made progress in my study of Hungarian art I grew more and more involved, and could not resist developing my own vision – and, eventually, my own collection.

I concentrated my explorations on modern Hungarian painting, which I found both familiar and surprising, highly energetic but not shying away from revealing melancholy; an intriguing mix between well known idioms and idiosyncratic expression; featuring strong structures and strong color, but also aenary, delicacy and often evoking a sense of humor and tranquility while among the countless wars of Central European art.

My involvement began as an effort to honor Hungarian artists as seen through the eyes of an American. Spanning the period from shortly before the Austro-Hungarian Empire to the present, my collection mirrors this country’s tumultuous past, highlighting historic, and in some cases, drastic, times. There are paintings by artists killed in the Holocaust. One of my favorites is a portrait completed in 1906 by János Vaszary of Countess Ilona Batthyány, a Hungarian woman born into the aristocracy, who herself celebrated the arts.

Each of my pictures has its own story and artistic and expressive value to the viewer. I am eager to share my excitement about these works, and feel very, very fortunate to be able to give some visibility to modern Hungarian art, which deserves so much more study, exposure, and appreciation.
My passion for Hungarian art began at a tumultuous time in September 2001, when I left the United States to take up public office to serve our country as the United States Ambassador to Hungary — just four days before September 11.

I was struck by the richness and powerful quality of Hungarian art, which is steeped in the turbulent history of the country. As an art historian I wasn't unprepared, but I didn't expect to be so moved by them. Of the early Hungarian modernists studied and exhibited in France and Germany, none of them were in the United States. In fact, I didn't even know about them. With the exception of László Moholy-Nagy, for example — he had been to the United States and had a few works from his studio available for sale. As I made progress in my study of Hungarian art I grew more and more involved, and could not resist developing my own story and artistic and expressive value to the viewer. Desiring to honor Hungarian artists and give some visibility to their contribution, which was not as well known then generally, I concentrated my explorations between well known idioms and the work of lesser-known artists with strong structures and strong color but also a poetic sensibility, and with a great variety of contemporary, avant-garde works which I found both familiar and surprising, highly energetic but also shying away from revealing historical context, an ongoing mix between well known classical and modern visual and emotional qualities and strong content, and a great variety of themes.

I am particularly fond of my Aba Novák watercolor of the New York skyline from 1935: the mirror image of my own journey, it demonstrates the unmistakable water-marks of humor and complexity which are present in the paintings of many of these artists. Also among my favorite artists are the true early modernists of Hungary, including József Rippl-Rónai, György Krizsan, Lajos Vajda, Endre Bálint, and the artist's disciple Lili Ország. In the meantime, I asked my friend, historian and collector István Rozsics if the American ambassador to Hungary — just four days before September 11, when I left the United States to serve our country as the United States Ambassador to Hungary — just four days before September 11 — would like to display their art in the American Residence. This began my love affair with Hungarian art.

The show, including works by László Moholy-Nagy, István Szonyi, Károly Klimó, Imre Bak, Tamás Lippay, and Márton Nagy, among others, was received by the press and the public with great interest and professional sensibility. What was meant to be an effort to bring Hungarian artists as seen through the eyes of an American spanning the period from shortly before the Second World War to the post-Holocaust period would soon be recognized as the distinctive water-marks of Central European art.

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Hungarian artists of the 20th century developed the styles and defined the content of modernity from Budapest to Berlin, Kecskemét to Chicago. Legions of Hungarian painters, designers, sculptors, and architects brought innovations — and often revolution — aesthetics they had first articulated in their native land.

The Brinker Collection extends and complements the acknowledged masters of Hungarian modernism — Róbert Berény, Béla Uitz, Sándor Bortnyik — while introducing us to original artists of more modest reputation. The Collection demonstrates the dynamic qualities and variability of modern art itself, while reflecting the creative curiosity, open-minded nature, and discriminating taste of Ambassador Brinker.

With this collection, Nancy Brinker has embarked on a process of self-discovery and selfless cultural advocacy. The artwork embodies the collector’s uncurbed excitement about the vital culture of modern Hungary and its future, as well as an understanding of that nation’s complex and often conflicting past. It is a very telling — and sometimes contradictory — history of accomplishment, openness, innovation, and pain of constriction and liberation that makes Hungary’s art compelling for both a native and a world audience.

Steven Mansbach
Professor of the History of Twentieth-Century Art
University of Maryland at College Park

László Fehér, 1953
Brigade Excursion (Genre Paintings II), 1979
Oil on fiberboard, 160cm x 220cm

Collection Curator and Historian: István Rozsics
Curatorial Advisors: Eva Forgacs, Steven Mansbach, William Heidrich, László Baan
Exhibition Manager: Michael Ennis
Graphic Design: Beveridge Seay, Inc.
Photography: Brandon Webster, Kelly Marin
Hungarian artists of the 20th century developed the styles and defined the content of modernity from Budapest to Berlin, Kecskemét to Chicago. Legions of Hungarian painters, designers, sculptors, and architects brought to the world – and often revolutionized – aesthetics they had first articulated in their native land.

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