Art historians in Hungary have largely ignored any appearances of expressionism before the First World War in Hungary, particularly the early reception and influence of German expressionism; thus it is appropriate to take a close look at exhibitions of expressionist art in Budapest and examine the reaction of the public and the art critics, as well as the effect they had on Hungarian art. The success of the modern trends, “isms,” stylistic influences, and movements in Western Europe, and the development of their local variants have been central issues in Hungarian art history, which attempts to emphasize, above all, the influence of French art; in the past decade, large exhibitions have focused on the impact of art from Paris during the period before the First World War.1 During this same time, however, Germany and Austria also provided decisive impulses for Hungarian art, especially in the exhibition hall. During the First World War, Hungarian artists had direct contact with the art scene in Germany, and by the 1920s, owing to their emigration, Hungarian avant-garde artists had become active participants.

Exhibitions in Budapest: The Neukunstgruppe (New Art Group)

The first reference to “expressionism” came in January 1912, on the occasion of the exhibition of the Viennese Neukunstgruppe, in the House of Artists (Művészház) in Budapest, which featured works by Egon Schiele, Oskar Kokoschka, Paris Gütersloh, Arnold Schönberg, Anton Faistauer, Anton Kolig, and Robin Christian Andersen. Recounting his conversation with one of the participants,2 an art critic noted that

in contrast to the impressionists, they call themselves expressionists, that is to say—as their haggard, full-bearded leader, Anton Faistauer explained to the author of these lines—they do not seek to convey the impressions acquired through vision, but to capture on their canvases the mediation of inner feelings filtered through consideration after viewing.3

Other art critics described their art as “ultra-secessionist” and “neomodern”—both prefixes were in common use as designators of the latest artistic trends.4 The demand for the designation of the new trends and the clarification of their relation to impressionism appeared constantly...
in the contemporary criticism. The term *impressionism* had been used to characterize modern artistic directions in Hungarian art criticism for a long time, especially after the emergence of the Nagybánya (today: Baia Mare, Romania) artists’ colony in 1896. In 1907, the first modern artists’ group was founded under the name MIÉNK (OURS)—the Circle of Hungarian Naturalists and Impressionists. It was at this time that the term *neoimpressionism* emerged, to describe the newer trends and the painting of the young artists. The founding members of the Nagybánya artists’ colony, whose program was based on a foundation of naturalism and impressionism, later referred to this second generation by the derogatory nickname “neos.” When the House of Artists organized a large-scale exhibition of international impressionists in 1910, with an art-historical overview ranging from the beginning of modernism up to contemporary trends, the postimpressionist movements were summarily placed under “neoimpressionists, synthetists and decorative aspirations.” Today we speak of the postimpressionists (Cézanne, Van Gogh, Gauguin), divisionists (Cross), fauvists (Matisse, Rouault), and cubists (Picasso). These terms, though already in use at the time, had emerged only shortly before and thus were not prevalent, and it was not yet possible to say which of them would become the definitive designation for the artistic movement in question. With respect to the Neukunstgruppe, the newly coined term *postimpressionism* also appeared in the press, but according to one art critic, “the definition ‘postimpressionist,’ as some people call the young group from Vienna, only alludes to chronological order.”

Most reports and critiques in the press echoed not only the most common derogative remarks of rejection (e.g., bluff, humbug), but also a number of specific phrases that would later return in descriptions of expressionism. These addressed—with both positive and negative connotations—qualities of the psychological (“nervous genius,” “hysteria”), the spiritual (“mystical,” “visions”), and the philosophical (“metaphysical torments,” “speculative meditation”) with respect to the artists and works; in reference to style and form, terms such as “archaic” and “primitive” occurred in the texts.

Used in reference to the visual arts, “expressionism” turned up in the belletristic literature the same year as the Neukunstgruppe exhibition, in the novel *In the Dust*, by Gyula Török (1888–1918), who used it in connection with a fictitious artists’ group called The Nine—a direct allusion to the existing Hungarian artists’ group The Eight (Nyolcak). Török, as the art critic of the daily newspaper *Magyar Hírlap* (Hungarian Journal), had reported on the exhibition of the Viennese artists; his novel was serialized, in 1912, in the same newspaper. Some art critics immediately found equivalents to the Neukunstgruppe in Hungarian art. They drew parallels between the young artists from Vienna and the members of the group The Eight, who initially exhibited, in 1909, under the name Keresők (The Seekers). This name was merely a reflection of the frequent references at the time to the progressive artists as “seekers” or “chercheurs” and referred to both their attitude and their artistic practice. The name was also a reflection of the group’s commitment to the search for new ways in painting, experiments with problems of volume, space, surface, color, etc. Their debut in 1909 was a great sensation, as it was the first opportunity to introduce the public in Hungary to the newest trends in contemporary art in the form of an independent exhibition. In April 1911, the group, now as “The Eight,” organized its next show in the National Salon (Nemzeti Szalon). An art critic, referring to the artists of the Neukunstgruppe as “seekers,” alluded to this exhibition. The leading figure of The Eight, Károly Kernstok (1873–1940), organized a large retrospective exhibition in the House of Artists just before the 1912 Neukunstgruppe exhibition. The significance of The Eight and the linking of their painting to expressionism came nevertheless only later.
The Sonderbund Exhibition in Cologne

In January 1912, only a few weeks after the term’s first appearance in Hungary, expressionism was mentioned several times in reports on preparations for the Sonderbund exhibition in Cologne. The critics wrote about the relation of the newer trends to impressionism and maintained that the exhibition aimed at presenting “modern artistic movements that emerged after impressionism, which may be properly defined by the term expressionism.” One article, titled “Expressionist Exhibition,” reported on the event before its opening in May 1912 and explained that the organizers had chosen this name because “the principles of the new radical directions start with turning against Impressionism, and seeking artistic discovery in completely different, even opposing ways.”

The Hungarian works exhibited in Cologne were assembled by Zoltán Felvinczi Takács (1880–1964), a specialist for Old German art, who became acquainted with Walter Cohen, one of the organizers of the Sonderbund exhibition through this field. Felvinczi Takács was a curator in the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest, but was also active as an art critic and published several articles about the exhibition in the Hungarian press. Felvinczi Takács obviously applied the term in a rather broad sense, as a collective noun for the newest trends in modern art: “The large movement that started with Impressionism and developed into expressionism quickly conquered Paris and later other countries as well.” He linked the emergence of these new trends in Hungary to Béla Czóbel (1883–1976), who first presented his “neo” works at the Nagybánya artists’ colony in 1906 and later became a member of The Eight. In another essay, titled “Expressionism,” Felvinczi Takács attempted to provide a closer and more concrete definition of the new style: “We can speak of expressionism in every case when we are faced with a certain logical enhancement of the depiction of forms and colors, and when it comes to an increase of expressive power.”

One third of the Hungarian participants in the Sonderbund exhibition were members of The Eight. On the occasion of their last exhibition, in November 1912, they were criticized and labeled “poor imitators” of the futurists and expressionists. With regard to international parallels and models, one finds elements of national rhetoric. Felvinczi Takács noted “the first great international exhibition showing the development and the program of expressionism there in the Rhine-region so full of French culture.” Hungarian artists also appear in this context, and Felvinczi Takács gives them their due: “We Hungarians make a good impression through the intensity of empathy and the directness of performance . . . with its warmth [the collection] shows or suggests more temperament than a whole series of official exhibitions for a complete museum.” The key words here thus emphasize the Hungarian character of this art. Objections by critics to the modern tendencies focused on their strangeness and outlandishness, while supporting critiques pointed out the local aspect of the Hungarian Youth as a form of legitimation.

it is only worth dealing with immature art on the grounds of chauvinism, as the meandering paths of Hungarian art will likely be closely followed by the Hungarian public . . . but why should we bother with the blunders of our Austrian brother-in-laws?
Art critic Artúr Elek (1876–1944) referred to both the Neukunstgruppe and the Sonderbund exhibition when he wrote about the Exhibition of Futurists and Expressionists, the traveling presentation of works from Herwarth Walden’s Berlin-based gallery Der Sturm that was shown at the National Salon at the end of January 1913. This was the first time that works of expressionist artists from Germany could be seen in Budapest. In a review of the original exhibition in Berlin published in the magazine Kultúra (Culture) in the spring of 1912, the author speculated that “it is not at all impossible to imagine that Budapest would also receive [the futurists], as Budapest provides a fertile ground for everything that is foreign, new and noisy.” Before Budapest, the exhibition had been in Vienna, but with only twenty-four futurist paintings on display. Walden complemented the works by the four Italian artists with another eighty-seven works by eleven artists, among them Oskar Kokoschka; the Berlin artists Egon Adler, Ludwig Meidner, and Arthur Segal; some Berlin-based members of the Neue Secession such as César Klein and Heinrich Richter-Berlin; Neue Secession painters from elsewhere, including Wilhelm Morgner (Figure 3.1) and Moriz Melzer, and even Czech member Bohumil Kubišta; and Wassily Kandinsky and Alexei Jawlensky, two representative figures of Der Blaue Reiter.

Although the futurists were represented by only a fourth of the works in the exhibition, critics focused on them. They viewed both futurism and expressionism as typical examples of the newest and most radical trends in art and tried to identify features they shared in common, among them novelty, fashionability, commercial considerations, as well as artistic programs and theory. The national viewpoint was also raised. The double cast was clear from the beginning: The German artists were the overdue followers of French painting; the expressionists were the “empty imitators of yesterday’s French revolution,” who at the same time—together with the French artists—all served as models for young Hungarian artists, particularly The Eight: “Gauguin- and Picasso-imitators, forebears of Márfy, Berény, Tihanyi, Pó, Perlrott-Csaba . . . and others.” A number of derogatory references were made to the German expressionists: “By far it is enough to say that they are weaklings as compared to their Italian revolutionary counterparts.” The disparagements reflect a focus on national characterology and nationalist prejudices: “[The expressionists] are cold, maneuvering and calculating; [they] work with the vocabulary of Matisse and Picasso; they are German revolutionaries on paper only.” And finally: “A pity, they are Germans, and by saying this I have said it all.”

In various articles published in the periodical A Hét (The Week), Károly Sztrakoniczky (1889–1915) gave further voice to the rejection of German art and raged against its exaggerated and harmful influence. On the occasion of the exhibition of the Viennese artists (Bund Österreichischer Künstler) in the House of Artists in March 1913, Sztrakoniczky unhappily noted that “in recent years Hungarian art culture has come under German influence,” and he emphasized that “German art” included both “Viennese” and “Pan-German” art. Among the German influences, he also noted the “Berlin expressionism,” but was of the opinion that Hungarian artists occupied the foremost position in comparisons with the new international trends: “The art of ‘The Eight’ is so much more imposing and so much more significant even in its errors, than the languid refinedness of German expressionism!” Sztrakoniczky was well informed about the newest developments; in September 1912 he dedicated an entire article in A Hét to the Blauer Reiter almanac and artists. He identified their influence in the works of Róbert Berény (1887–1953) that were included in the exhibition of The Eight in November 1913. In these articles, Sztrakoniczky did not use the term...
“expressionism,” which first appeared in his critique of “New Art,” one of the trends turning against impressionism. The sensational showing of the “ultramoderns” in the National Salon (Exhibition of Futurists and Expressionists, February 1913)—much like The Eight at the same venue two months earlier—brought great publicity and attracted a large number of visitors. Along with the reviews and articles describing the extreme reaction of visitors, several caricatures addressing the reception of new art in Budapest were also published (Figure 3.2). A caricaturist for the magazine Borsszem Jankó, referencing a current political issue, combined various styles and elements of the paintings with the following caption: “A Futurist—Has Drawn the Universal Suffrage Like This.” In another issue of the same magazine, there appears a would-be portrait gallery of artists from the three new movements: cubism, futurism, and expressionism. This triad of the current “-isms” is typical of the reception and the need to classify the new trends in art.

The International Postimpressionist Exhibition

Three months later, Borsszem Jankó published a caricature with the title “The Vision of a Man Smacked in the Face.” This was in response to another exhibition in Budapest, a spectacular review of contemporary art organized by the House of Artists, in May 1913. The title, The International Postimpressionist Exhibition, harked back to the similarly named International
Impressionist Exhibition organized by the artists’ society three years earlier, and the exhibition was regarded by some art critics as a continuation of this previous show. It is most likely that the 1913 futurist exhibition in Budapest and Walden’s visit on the occasion of its opening provided a decisive impetus for this venture. One of the organizers of the exhibition was Zoltán Felvinczi Takács, who, giving an account of the exhibition in Der Cicerone (The Cicerone), claimed that visitors would see paintings “they may [already] know from various exhibitions.” At the same time, the title suggested a connection with the postimpressionist exhibitions held in London; the press and one of the introductory texts in the catalogue falsely stated that the exhibition was “more or less the same as what was shown for the first time at the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition in London,” although it had nothing to do with it. Two thirds of the nearly 230 artworks came from international artists and were put together by Herwarth Walden; included were, among others, the traveling Blaue Reiter collection and paintings from various exhibitions, e.g., of the Neue Secession, Der Moderne Bund, Robert Delaunay, and Henri Le Fauconnier.

The detailed and extensive published critiques of the exhibition offered an overview of the latest trends in art; critics struggled to find their way amid the new schools and labels, i.e., the proliferation of “-isms.” The copy of the catalogue preserved in the Library of the Hungarian National Gallery includes annotations from art critic Artúr Elek, revealing his struggle with these terms; in the title listing on the cover: “neoimpressionism, expressionists, postimpressionists, Progressivists,” the third term is crossed out.

Figure 3.2 Miltiades Manno, “Hogy kell nézni a képeket a futuristák kiállításán” (How One Should Look at Pictures: In the Exhibition of the Futurists), Kakas Márton, February 2, 1913, 7
Expressionism in Hungary

The reactions to the exhibition were similar to those of the futurist exhibition: expressionist artists from Germany were rejected. However, they were confronted with much more hostility than artists from other countries. In the words of one critic, their work, which attempted to be original, was “based on mere afterthought.” Other critics noted that their “hazy theories (‘Der Blaue Reiter’ and ‘visible music’) considerably alienated the viewer from the original source of enjoyment of art: the pictorial effect.” The criticism was frequently based on German national stereotypes: “About the German expressionists we cannot say much. They are so extravagant, so wild, often so brutal, as only Germans can be, when they want to be really original.”

In terms of character, the obvious contrast was with the French:

Instead of Cézanne, Gauguin, and Van Gogh, a number of Germans appear. Their truthfulness is rather dubious. No, not even dubious. The stentorian colors and thickly painted “lines” are without any reason and purpose. And what about the balance of forms and colors? A modern person from Berlin gets neurasthenia, if this is mentioned. The French demonstrate more taste and culture.

On the other side were the Russians: “Although [they] do not even begin to approach the refinement of the Frenchmen, [they] are much more interesting and talented than the Germans participating in the exhibition.” Ironically, there were some mistakes concerning the nationalities of the artists. Although Kandinsky was regarded as a German, his fellow painters from Germany, Alexei Jawlensky and Marianne Werefkin, were regarded as Russian artists, who “are not so much the theoretician, like Kandinsky and his fellows; they are painters instead, trying to convince us not with abstract formulas of mathematics, geometry and arithmetic, but with the prime elements of painting: form, line and color.” Some of the critics’ characterizations also recall the positive stereotypes of Hungarian national characterology: “There is something appealing, instinctive in their rampancy and temperamental mixtures.” Some of the Hungarians in the exhibition, members of The Eight, were associated with the achievements of expressionism: “Ódón Márffy, Róbert Berény and Lajos Tihanyi are searching roughly in the direction of the theory of expressionism for a means of expressing their message.”

Expressionism’s influence on Hungarian art appeared relatively early; already in 1912 one can trace a change in the paintings of Róbert Berény and Lajos Tihanyi (1885–1938). Comparing their portraits with the paintings of Oskar Kokoschka, exhibited in Budapest in January 1912, they show similar features. Róbert Berény’s *Ignotus portréja* (Portrait of Ignotus, 1912) was first exhibited at the third exhibition of The Eight in November 1912 and shows a completely different approach to forms and a new handling of light and color, compared to his *Weiner Leó arcképe* (Portrait of Leó Weiner) of the previous year, shown in the same exhibition. The composition of the Ignotus portrait displays similarities with Kokoschka’s painting *Karl Kraus* (1909), although an exact comparison is not possible because the work is now lost and known only from a black-and-white photograph. Berény participated in the postimpressionist exhibition with two works, one of them the portrait of Béla Bartók (1913; Figure 3.3). The luminous face in front of a sketchily painted, colorful background and the suggestive look are akin to Kokoschka’s portrait of *Ludwig Ritter von Janikowski* (1909).

Critiques of the third exhibition of The Eight recognized the changes in the painting of both artists. In connection with the Ignatous portrait of Berény, Felvinczi Takács stressed the inspiration artists drew from Kokoschka. Expressionism as a category was cited by only one art critic in relation to the international art in the Paris exhibitions that served as model for the group of The Eight. In this case, expressionism was mentioned together with futurism and “the group of artists who divided the world into geometrical forms” (i.e., the cubists). Art critics mostly used the
terms “futurism” and “cubism” for the art of Berény and Tihanyi. Even Berény, who responded to those condemning his endeavors by saying that he was merely imitating the currently fashionable “-isms” (cubism, futurism, and also Globism[]), did not mention expressionism.

Tihanyi’s portrait of Jenő Miklós (1911) was sent to the Sonderbund exhibition in 1912. In contrast to its closed contours and solid forms, the portrait of György Bölöni (1912) shows a new style, with compact forms of the human body and clothes dissolving into angular surfaces; the result is similar to the paintings of Kokoschka; for example, his portrait of Baron von Dirsztay (1911). The Bölöni portrait was displayed both at the third exhibition of The Eight and the International Postimpressionist Exhibition. The features of the Kokoschka portraits such as the psychological characterization of the figures with at times caricature-like distortions, the typically deformed hands, the agitated dynamism of the figures, and the loose brushwork are also to be found in the portraits of Tihanyi. The influence of works such as the portrait of Adolf Loos (1909) is evident in the period, which lasted until the end of the 1910s. The portraits of Lajos Fülep (1915) and Lajos Kassák (1918) were shown in 1918 at Tihanyi’s personal show in the gallery of the Hungarian magazine MA (Today) (Plate 5).

**Lajos Kassák and His Magazines After the First World War**

With the outbreak of the First World War, international artistic exchanges and the movement of artists and artworks came to a stop, but the impact and reception of these new developments
carried on. The exhibitions held in Budapest in 1913 made a strong impression on Lajos Kassák (1887–1967), a young poet, who founded his first magazine two years later. Kassák’s visits to the exhibitions of contemporary art were probably inspired by his brother-in-law, Béla Uitz (1887–1972), who was a young painter at the very beginning of his career at the time. The Exhibition of the Futurists and Expressionists had a profound impact on Kassák, who wrote a poem on the painting *I funerali del anarchico Galli* (Funeral of the Anarchist Galli, 1910–1911) by Carlo Carrà, which was published in two different issues of his magazine *A Tett* (The Action). After its interdiction, in 1916, Kassák launched a second magazine, *MA* (Today), which published reproductions of expressionist artworks on a regular basis (Figure 3.4). Kassák had contact to the Berlin gallery and Der Sturm, and *MA* distributed Sturm books and postcards from 1917 onwards. Following its example, Kassák even opened a gallery in the same year; the first exhibition was dedicated to János Mattis Teutsch (1884–1960), who had visited the *International Postimpressionist Exhibition* in 1913. (This is known from a catalogue of the exhibition that survived in his personal bequest with his personal notes.) After the First World War, Mattis Teutsch was in contact with Herwarth Walden and exhibited at the Sturm gallery in Berlin. In addition to Mattis Teutsch, *MA* reproduced and exhibited artists such as József Nemes Lampérth (1891–1924), who had started his career at the House of Artists, and Béla Uitz, who had visited the exhibitions there before the First World War.

The exhibition reviews published in *A Tett* were written by Béla Uitz, who often referred to the new “-isms” when describing contemporary art shown in Budapest; for example, the work

![Figure 3.4](image-url)
of artists such as Dezső Czigány (1883–1938), the members of the former The Eight, or Vilmos Perlrott-Csaba (1880–1955), a former member of the Matisse Academy in Paris and an important representative of the Neos at the Nagybánya artists’ colony. Contemporary art became more important in MA, and the new artistic movements, among them expressionism, too, were a permanent feature in critiques and reviews. In an exhibition review, Kassák described the latest paintings of Nemes Lampérth and his use of such intense colors as proof that “his latest work shows his development towards expressionism.” Writing about Mattis Teutsch in connection with his exhibition at the MA gallery, Kassák noted:

If we strive to establish Mattis Teutsch’s place in the dominant artistic trends of today (he is of Saxon origin), we could find it among the expressionists, who fully represent the German psyche. Thus, his separation from us here and there is determined primarily, and I think definitively, by his ethnicity.

The rhetoric of national characterology had already appeared in Kassák’s texts before the formation of A Tett and reappeared later in the articles published in the initial issues of the magazine.

In 1917, MA became a sales agent for the German magazines Die Aktion and Der Sturm and also a distributor of books by authors such as Carl Einstein and Herwarth Walden; it also offered Der Sturm postcards for sale. Among the MA circle was the young art critic Iván Hevesy (1893–1966), whose book about contemporary art movements was published by MA in 1919 under the title Futurist, Expressionist and Cubist Painting (Figure 3.5). In the first edition, Hevesy tried to identify a core feature for each of the three movements and, at the same time, connect them to their national backgrounds:

none [of the three] could grasp straight away and all at once the art of the future, but each captured an aspect. Futurism focused on activity, expressionism on feeling, while cubism on reason. (Interestingly, the three tasks were resolved by the three races: Futurism by the Italians, expressionism by the Germans and the Russians, and cubism by the French.)

In 1922, a second, revised and enlarged, edition of the book was published. In the chapter “Expressionism,” Hevesy listed many names, including some of the artists (e.g., Kokoschka, Pechstein, Campendonk, and Marc) he had probably seen in Budapest. Their national backgrounds are once more significant: alongside the futurist Italians and the cubist Frenchmen stand the expressionists, “almost without exception Germans or Germanized Russians.” In the case of the Hungarian János Mattis Teutsch, Hevesy—echoing Kassák’s explanation of his art from five years earlier—also mentions that the artist was of “Transylvanian Saxon origin.”

Herwarth Walden and Hungarian Artists in Berlin

Given the historical situation, German-Hungarian contacts became more extensive and direct. After the fall of the Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919, a number of progressive artists left Hungary and immigrated mostly to Germany. Former members of The Eight went to Berlin, among them Lajos Tihanyi, who also belonged to the MA circle. The impact of expressionism was to be seen in the twenties, in the work of the Hungarian émigré artists living in Germany. Some belonged to the generation that started its career at the turn of the century, among them Károly Kernstok and Vilmos Perlrott-Csaba. The work of the younger artists who had been admitted to the Weimar Bauhaus also showed the influence of expressionism. Several artists
from Hungary participated in Der Sturm exhibitions: László Moholy-Nagy, who had close contacts with Kassák, had lived in Berlin for some time, and later became a teacher at the Bauhaus, showed his works there in 1922, 1923, 1924, and 1925; the young Aurél Bernáth (1895–1982), who later repudiated his early avant-garde period, exhibited in the gallery in 1923; and Gyula Hincz (1904–1986), who went to Berlin in 1928, presented his work there in 1929.

In 1924, Herwarth Walden’s book *The New Painting: Expressionism* was published in Hungary. The Hungarian edition included reproductions of works by two Hungarian artists who had exhibited several times in the Sturm gallery: Béla Kádár (1877–1956) and Hugó Scheiber (1873–1950). These two artists, as well as János Mattis Teutsch, were treated in the chapter “Expressionists” by Ernő Kállai (1890–1954), whose pivotal book *New Hungarian Painting* was issued by the same publisher the following year. In the introduction, Kállai explained that the goal of his book was to demonstrate the process by which something “specifically Hungarian” evolved in response to the inspiration drawn from the art of various European nations. His aim was “to trace this metamorphosis,” and to point out the “function of the genuine Hungarian national and socio-psychological components.” The search for “national traits” was to help him to “provide a proper basis for a more in-depth national interpretation of the newer trends.” For Kállai, the expressive character of Hungarian painting played a central role; he emphasized the local and independent aspects of this in the case of several artists and coined a new term, “expressive naturalism,” for this phenomenon. In the accordingly titled chapter, he analyzed the work of various members of The Eight (e.g., Károly Kernstok, Bertalan Pór,
András Zwickl

Ödön Márrfy), as well as that of Béla Uitz and József Nemes Lampéth, who belonged to the core of the MA circle. In his interpretation of the art of József Egry (1883–1951), we see how Kállai tried to adapt the originally foreign features of expressionism to Hungarian art: “Egry’s Hungarian temperament tends rather to the emotionally expressive, and is less of a constructive nature in a spiritual sense,” and in his “lyrical Hungarian impulsivity, he did not know what to make of the instinctively pure and harmonic stylistic principles of the French tradition, with which he was not familiar.”

Kállai paid particular attention to the art of the young Aurél Bernáth; he showed that “the core substance of the Hungarian temperament” was loaded with “somatic elements” and that “its earth-bound instincts . . . emerged from materiality.” In contrast, he characterized German and Russian expressionism as “the fusion of fully psychic experience,” and maintained that Franz Marc’s art “spiritually purified sensuality” radiated harmony. This “can be a psychic reality only in cultures that tend to involve mysticism,” and that is the reason why Bernáth could not achieve this—although Kállai wrote about one of the artist’s works that “it is linked to the romantic Hungarian traditions of loose picturesqueness, and it is, so far, the first relevant assimilation of European expressionism into these traditions.” At the same time, Kállai also stated that “only the music of Bartók, and the poetry of Kassák, Sándor Barta, and Aladár Komját offer something comparable to the primitive and determinedly expressive Hungarian character of [Bernáth’s] drawing” (Figure 3.6). In the following chapter, “Expressionism,” Kállai explained that there had been the possibility to create a “Hungarian expressionism” based on peasant life.

Figure 3.6 Aurél Bernáth, Föld (Earth), c. 1922, in Ernő Kállai, Új Magyar piktúra [New Hungarian Painting] (Budapest: Amicus, 1925), Figure 60. © HUNGART, 2017
Expressionism in Hungary

in the Hungarian villages. The paintings of Kádár and Scheiber, the two central figures in this chapter, he characterized as “superficial decorativeness” and “mannered, enforced attempts,” and stigmatized them with the derogatory term “mere expressionists.”

The assimilation of expressionism in Hungary was a long and gradual process. Publications in the 1930s already treated the movement as past history. In 1938, Ákos Koczogh (1915–1986) titled his doctoral thesis on contemporary literature “Expressionism.” The chapter dedicated to “Hungarian expressionism” begins with Kassák and his two magazines. In his characterization, Koczogh emphasized that “almost everything typifying our expressionism is based on German features placed into a Hungarian context.”

István Genthon (1903–1969), author of the 1925 article “To the Death of Expressionism,” published a comprehensive monograph on modern Hungarian art in 1935. In his book, The History of New Hungarian Painting, he used the established terminology and followed Kállai in using the term “expressive naturalism” for the artists of the MA circle active before the First World War (e.g., Uitz and Nemes Lampérth). Expressionism itself was reserved for the interwar period and for artists living in Germany. Genthon also stressed the German nature of expressionism and contrasted its “flowing emotion” and “passion” to the “Gallic spirit that insists on ancient ‘raison.’” Nevertheless, “the endeavors of expressionism are not alien to Hungarian art.”

Most of the artists that Genthon associated with expressionism lived in Germany (e.g., Berény, Czóbel, Bernáth); however, he also identified expressionist features in the work of artists who did not move to Germany, among them József Egry, who had an exhibition in Berlin at the Galerie Gurlitt in 1926, and Gyula Derkovits (1894–1934), who encountered German expressionism in Vienna, where he lived for two and a half years (1923–1925; Figure 3.7).

Application of the term expressionism to Hungarian artists and Hungarian art history only began in the 1960s. In 1964, the volume Expressionism came out in a book series dedicated to the publication of sources related to various artistic movements. In the introductory essay of the subsection “Hungarian and Eastern-European Expressionists,” Ákos Koczogh wrote about Kassák and his publications and also briefly discussed the fine arts. In contrast to Kádár and Scheiber, “whose expressivity connected with Der Sturm did not leave a significant mark on Hungarian painting,” members of The Eight (Pór, Tihanyi, Czóbel, Berény) and other artists, such as Egry and Derkovits, were mentioned as representatives of expressionism in Hungary. The latter two were the key figures of the chapter “Hungarian expressionism” in Lajos Németh’s (1929–1991) book Modern Hungarian Art, published in 1968. In his book Németh followed earlier authors: in the discussion of the group of The Eight he referred to expressionism in connection with Berény and Tihanyi, and he stressed primarily the inspiration of Kokoschka. It is noteworthy that in several cases he tried to avoid the term, with allusions, for example, to the “German fauves,” who are only later mentioned as artists of “Die Brücke.” Expressionism is also mentioned in reference to the Activist movement of Kassák, both in general and with respect to artists such as Mattis Teutsch and Nemes Lampérth. Regarding Uitz, following the example of Kállai, Németh used the preferred terms “expressive” and “expressivity.” He provided a short overview of the artists who emigrated to Germany after the fall of the Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919, demonstrating the influence of expressionism on their art and the painters who exhibited at the Sturm gallery (Kádár and Scheiber), but in the introduction of the chapter, he claims that expressionism finally found a place in Hungarian art through two painters, Egry and Derkovits, who were in fact not directly linked to Germany.

In the case of Derkovits, Németh went back as far as The Eight to demonstrate the domestic forerunners. He claimed that the pathway to Derkovits’s “Hungarian expressionism” was through Kernstok, with whom Derkovits had studied for a short time. His reasoning in the introductory text of the chapter “Hungarian Expressionism” echoes the well-known words:
“[Expressionism] closely corresponded to the national character of Hungarian art, a component of which was Romanticism, as expressionism maintained many of the principles of Romanticism” and “in Hungarian art, emotion and passion often gained the upper hand over reason.”

With respect to expressionism’s reception, beginning in the 1920s various authors turned to a strategy of division and differentiated an expressionism based upon foreign models from the “expressive” features of the Hungarian art, which are among its key components. It seems that the denial of expressionism lasted until after 1945, and was still justified by reservations against avant-garde movements regarded—now from a different point of view than earlier—as ideologically problematic. In the 1960s, when demand arose for the inclusion of Hungarian art in the international context, it became impossible to omit foreign influences in comprehensive studies of modern Hungarian. The solution that provided the necessary accentuation of the autonomy and autochthonous character of Hungarian art was the creation of a separate “Hungarian expressionism” alongside “German expressionism”—a distinction whose supporting arguments still draw on elements of national characterology.

Notes


3 “Az impresszionistákkal ellentétben expressionistáknak nevezik magukat, vagyis—mint vezérünk a szikár, kőszakállás Anton Faistauer e sorok írójának magyarázta—nem a látás útján nyert benyomásokat akarjuk visszaadni, hanem a látás után az átgondolás konfliktus benő megérzés kifejezéssel való közvetítését akarjuk vásznánk megvalósítani.” Cs. [Andor Cserna], “Bécsi festők a Művész házban” [Painters from Vienna in the House of Artists], Egyetértés [Concord], January 6, 1912, 18.
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8 The term neoexpressionism was first used for the second generation of the colony in 1906. Ervin Plány, “A nagybányai festők kiállítása” [The exhibition of the artists in Nagybánya], Nagybánya és videke [Nagybánya and Surroundings], September 2, 1906, 2–3.


11 Rob. [?], “Neukunst: Ausstellung im Művészház” [Neukunst: Exhibition in the House of Artists], Budapester Abendblatt [Budapest Evening Paper], January 5, 1912, 3; Ervin Ybl, “Neukunst Wien a Művésztsínházban” [Neukunst Wien at the House of Artists], Magyar Nemzet [Hungarian Nation], January 7, 1912, 10; “Modern osztrák festők” [Modern Austrian Painters], Az Est [The Evening], January 6, 1912, 5; vd. [Dániel Várnai], “Neukunst Wien a Művészszínházban” [“Neukunst Wien” at the House of Artists], Népszava [The Voice of the People], January 7, 1912, 5; Bgy. [György Bölöni], “Kiállítások: Kokoschka a Művészszínházban” [Exhibitions: Kokoschka at the House of Artists], Világ [World], January 21, 1912, 20; m.e. [Elek Magyar], “A Neukunst a Művészszínházban” [The Neukunst at the House of Artists], Magyarország [Hungary], January 6, 1912, 13; Bgy. [György Bölöni], “A ‘Neukunst Wien’ a Művészszínházban” [The “Neukunst Wien” at the House of Artists], Világ, January 6, 1912, 15.

12 The novel Porban [In the Dust] of Gyula Török was published as a book in 1917. Gergely Barki stated that this included the first mention of expressionism in Hungary: Gergely Barki, “Lassan összeáll a kép” [The Picture Slowly Becomes Clear], in Cat. Autumn Auction (Budapest: Kieselbach Galéria, 2004), 153. However, the art critique on the Neukunst-exhibition by Andor Cserna had been published earlier. The novel appeared as a serial in the newspaper Magyar Hírlap. The author also wrote a detailed report on the Neukunst-exhibition, from which it becomes obvious that he had heard Anton Faistauer speaking about their art: Gyula Török, “Bécsi festők a Művészszínházban” [Viennese Painters in the House of Artists], Magyar Hírlap, January 6, 1912, 5–6.


14 The term “chercheur” had already been used in 1901 for József Rippl-Rónai. — a [Miklós Rózsa], “Nemzeti Szalon. A tavaszi tárlat II. Sorozata” [National Salon. The 2nd Series of the Spring Exhibition], Hazánk [Our Homeland], May 19, 1901, 9.

15 Csil-la Markója and István Bardoly, eds., The Eight (Pécs: Museum Janus Pannonius, 2010).

16 The group contained eight members (Károly Kernstok, Bertalan Pór, Ödön Márfy, Béla Czobél, Dezső Czigány, Dezső orbán, Lajos TIhani, Róbert Berény), but there were always “invited guests” in their exhibitions, too. Regarding the name “The Eight” there is an interesting parallel to the Czech artist group “Osma” [Eight] that had existed a few years earlier (1907–1908). In May 1912, the art magazine Művészet (Art) published a report about the first exhibition of the magazine Der Sturm in Berlin also showing Kokoschka’s works which could have been seen in Budapest previously. Margit Vészsi, “Berlin levele” [Letter from Berlin], Művészet, 1912 (Vol. 11, No. 5), 197.

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18 N.N., “Modern magyar művészek kiállítása Kölnben” [Exhibition of Modern Hungarian Artists in Cologne], Egyetértés, February 11, 1912, 15.
19 N.N., “Expressionista kiállítás” [Expressionist Exhibition], Művészeti krónika [Art Chronicle], May 15, 1912 (I/2), 7.
21 Zoltán Felvinczi Takács, “Művészeti programkiállítások és beszámolók” [Artistic Program Exhibitions and Reports], Nyugat [West], September 1, 1912 (V/17), 373.
22 Ibid., 373.
23 Dr. Zoltán Felvinczi Takács, “Expressionizmus” [Expressionism], Új Élet (Népművelés) [New Life (Community Education)], July 1912 (No. 12–13), 435. The article was written after his visit in Cologne, where he had seen the exhibition and also met organizers and artists.
24 K.S. [Simon Kemény], “Nyolcak” [The Eight], Magyar Figyelő [Hungarian Observer], December 1, 1912 (II/23), 399.
26 Felvinczi Takács, “Művészeti programkiállítások és beszámolók,” 373.
28 Artúr Elek, “Futuristák és expressionisták” [Futurists and Expressionists], Az Ujság [The News], January 26, 1913, 18–19.
30 J. R., “Die Futuristen” [The Futurists], Reichspost (Morgenblatt) [Imperial Postal Service (Morning Paper)], December 14, 1912, 11. I hereby express my thanks to Irene Chytraeus-Auerbach for providing a copy of the article.
31 The exhibition was later showed in Lemberg [today: Lviv, Ukraine]; see Lidia Głuchowska, “Poznanie Expressionism and Its Connections with the German and International Avant-Garde,” Chapter 4 in this volume.
33 N.N. [György Bölöni], “Futuristák és expressionisták” [Futurists and Expressionists], Vílág January 28, 1913, 15.
37 Aladár Bálint, “A futuristák” [The Futurists], Magyar Nyomdászat [Hungarian Typography], February 1913 (XXVI/2), 42.
38 Jean Preux [Károly Sztrakonickzky], “Rhapsodie hongroise” [Hungarian Rhapsody], A Hét, March 16, 1913 (XXIV/11), 174–175.
39 Ibid., 175.
40 Jean Preux [Károly Sztrakonickzky], “Der blauere Reiter” [The Blue Rider], A Hét, September 1, 1912 (XXIII/35), 565–566.
41 Jean Preux [Károly Sztrakonickzky], “Nyolcak” [The Eight], A Hét, November 17, 1912 (XXIX/46), 743.
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43 Annie Samassa D., “Futuristák és Expresszionisták” [Futurists and Expressionists], Budapesti Hírlap, February 16, 1913, 31–33; Miltiades Manno, “Hogy kell nézni a képeket a futuristák kiállításán” [How One Should Look at Pictures in the Exhibition of Futurists], Kakas Márton, February 2, 1913 (XX/6), 7.

44 Dezso Bér, “Egy futurista—így rajzolta meg az általános választójogot” [A Futurist—Has Drawn the Universal Suffrage Like This], Borsszem Jankó, February 2, 1913 (ILVI/2356), 20.

45 “Kubista, Futurista, Puxista, Expresszionista” [Cubist, Futurist, Paxist, Expressionist], Borsszem Jankó, February 23, 1913 (ILVI/2359), 10. Besides the three new “-isms,” there appeared a fourth group: “Pax” was a newly founded conservative art group in Budapest; it had chosen its name to send the message that it stood for peace on a field of art full of conflicts between the different groups.


48 N. N., “Nemzetközi postimpresszionisták a Művész házbán” [International Postimpressionists in the House of Artists], Egyetértés, April 27, 1913, 14.

49 Z. T. [Zoltán Felvinczi Takács], “Die Ausstellung der Postimpressionisten” [The Exhibition of the Postimpressionists], Der Cicerone, 1913 (V/12), 471.

50 Budapesti Hírlap, April 18, 1913, 15; N. N., “Postimpresszionisták a Művész házbán” [Postimpressionists in the House of Artists], Magyarország, May 1, 1913, 12–13; N. N., “Postimpresszionisták” [Postimpressionists], in Katalógus a Művész ház nemzetközi postimpresszionista kiállításához [Catalogue to the International Postimpressionists Exhibitions of the House of Artists] (Budapest: Művész ház, 1913), 5. The first essay contains texts by different authors (Guillaume Apollinaire, Fernand Roche); three quarters of its length is taken up by the almost complete quotation of Roger Fry’s introduction and preface of the catalogue for the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition at the Grafton Galleries in 1912.


52 N. N., “Postimpresszionisták” [Postimpressionists], Egyetértés, May 4, 1913, 11.


54 Artúr Elek, “Postimpresszionisták kiállítása a Művész házbán” [Exhibition of the Postimpressionists in the House of Artists], Az Ujság, May 4, 1913, 19.


59 Elek, “Postimpresszionisták kiállítása a Művész házbán,” 19.

60 Zoltán Felvinczi Takács, “Négyen a Nyolcak közül” [Four from The Eight], Nyugat, November 16, 1912 (V/22), 763–686.


63 Róbert Berény, “Némely színdalmaidomzhoz” [To Some of My Vituperators], Magyar Hírlap, November 27, 1912, 10.


65 Béla Útz, “Cigány [sic!] és Csaba a Tavaszi tárlaton” [Cigány (sic!) and Csaba in the Spring Exhibition], A Tett, April 20, 1916 (II/12), 200.

“Ha a ma domináló művészeti irányokban helyet keresnénk Máttis Teutschnak (ő szász eredetű), a német pszihét [sic!] teljességében kifejező expressionistákánál találnánk meg. Tőlünk való itt-ott elkülönülését tehát, elsősorban és gondolom, véglegesen fajsága determinálja.” Lajos Kassák, “Máttis Teutsch János katalógusából” [From the Catalogue of János Máttis Teutsch], MA, October 15, 1917 (II/12), 195.

Saxon refers here to the German minority in Transylvania.


69 The first advertisement was published in the first issue of the third year (November 15, 1917).


71 “…[a törekvések] egyike sem tudta rögtön, egyszerre megfogni az új jövő művészetét hanem annak csak egy-egy oldalát. A futurizmus az aktivitást, az expressionizmus az érzést, a kubizmus az értelmet. (Érdekes dolog, hogy a három munkát három faj végezte el: a futurizmust az olaszok, az expressionizmust a németek és az oroszok, a kubizmust a franciák.)” Iván Hevesy, Futurista, expressionista és kubista festészet, 24.

72 Iván Hevesy, A futurizmus, expressionizmus és kubizmus művésze [The Art of the Futurism, Expressionism and Cubism] (Gyoma: Kner Izidor, 1922), 22.

73 Ibid., 23.


77 Ernő Kállai, Új magyar piktúra, 5–7.

78 Ibid., 8, 7.

79 “Egy magyar temperamentum inkább érzelmesen expresszív, mint szellemi értelemben konstruktív természet.” “…a lirikus magyar impulzitás, mely a francia hagyományoknak az ő számára idegen, mert ösztönösen tiszta és harmónikus stilustörvényeivel nem tudott mihez fogni.” Ibid., 86.

80 Ibid., 113.

81 Ibid., 115, 112.

82 Ibid., 120, 110–111.

83 “Bernáth rajzának koncentrálta kifejezőerejű, primitív magyarságához fogyhatót csak Bartók muzsikája, Kassák, Barta Sándor és Komját Aladár költészeté teremtett.” Ibid., 121. Sándor Barta and Aladár Komját were avant-garde poets of the magazine MA.

84 Ibid., 124. Already in 1921, Kállai wrote about the “failure” of expressionism and claimed that “expressionism died.” Péter Mátyás [Ernő Kállai], “Új művészet I–II” [New Art I–II], MA, June 1, 1921 (VI/7), 99.

85 Ákos Koczogh, Expressionizmus [Expressionism] (Budapest: Published by the Author, 1938), 39. Koczogh gave a short but comprehensive overview of the expressionist literature in Germany, and began the chapter “Harcos évek” [Militant Years] with mentions of the magazines Der Sturm and Die Aktion (25–27).

86 István Genthon, “Az expressionizmus halálára” [To the Death of the Expressionism], Magyar Írás [Hungarian Writing], 1925, 5, 65.
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88 Ibid., 240.
89 Ibid., 253, 257, 264.
90 Ibid., 251, 267.
92 Ibid., 109–110.
94 Ibid., 62. The book of Lajos Németh has been translated into English (Lajos Németh, *Modern Art in Hungary*, Budapest: Corvina, 1969. Translated by Lili Halápy, translation revised by Elisabeth West). It is instructive that the three mentions of “expressive” (expresszív) and “expressivity” (expresszivitás) regarding Béla Uitz had been translated only one time as “expressive” (elements); in the other two cases, the translators used the terms “Expressionist style” and “Expressionism,” 71–72. In her monograph dedicated to Derkovits and published in the same year as Németh’s book, Éva Körner discussed expressionism in general and its impact on Derkovits with much more differentiation: Éva Körner, *Derkovits Gyula* (Budapest: Corvina, 1968), 109–112.
95 “Megfelelt ez a magyar képzőművészet nemzeti karakterének is, hiszen annak egyik összetevője a romantika volt, az expresszionizmus pedig sokat megőrzött a romantika elveiből.” . . . a magyar képzőművészetben az emóciók és az indulatok gyakorta fölébe kerültek a rációnak.” Lajos Németh, *Modern magyar művészet*, 91. The translations in the English version of the book are: “This was the style which most nearly corresponded to the national character of Hungarian fine arts, for Romanticism, one component of the artistic tradition in Hungary, was also one of the elements of Expressionism.” “. . . in the Hungarian art fine arts emotions had always dominated reason.” Lajos Németh, *Modern Art in Hungary*, 102.