

# The Presence of Cross-Cultural Pasts in the Art History of Central Europe

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The parish church in the Hungarian provincial town of Siklós is home to murals that reflect six centuries of the settlement's dynamic political, religious, and social history. Painted shortly after 1408, their style is heavily influenced by the Italian *trecento*. More recently, their restoration in the autumn of 1991 would have been carried out against a backdrop of the roar of artillery from the Serbo-Croatian war, as Siklós is situated only a few kilometers from the Croatian border. This part of Hungary was occupied by the Ottomans for almost 150 years during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Evidence of this occupation is visible in the murals: the eyes of the figures are mostly gouged out, manifesting the Muslim interdiction of the portrayal of human imagery (Figure 1). But the Ottomans left a more monumental relic in the settlement, too; a *djami* (mosque), built between 1543 and 1565, which is closely related to Balkan-Bosnian Muslim architecture. The restoration of its remains, completed in 1992, was later recognized by a Europa Nostra award (Figure 2). Apart from being a historic monument, the building was also inaugurated as a place of worship for Muslim tourists and foreign students of the nearby Pécs University. Within some months of its restoration it was to be used by the refugees of the Bosnian war who were living in nearby villages.

Before its fifteenth-century occupation by the Ottoman Turks, Bosnia was a buffer state between the Ottoman Empire and the medieval kingdom of Hungary. In the 1430s the king of Bosnia commissioned his figured tomb monument from the most fashionable workshop of Buda, the Hungarian capital, headed by a stone-carver trained in southern Germany. The fragments of the carvings in Hungarian red marble were later excavated in the vicinity of Sarajevo. In 1433 the King of Hungary, Sigismund of Luxemburg, was crowned Holy Roman Emperor in Rome. This ruler established a system of buffer states and chains of strongholds along the southern Hungarian border which were able to defend the land for a whole century against renewed Ottoman aggression. The architectural and artistic legacy of Sigismund himself and that of his companions on the throne of medieval Hungary was finally expunged by the Turkish occupation.

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**Figure 1.** Siklós (Hungary), parish church, mural painting with the head of an apostle (after 1408), with eyes gouged out later (Photo: Pál Lővei).



**Figure 2.** Siklós (Hungary), *djami*, built between 1543 and 1565 (Photo: Pál Lővei).

In the vicinity of Siklós there exist three further Turkish mosques. One was transformed into a Roman Catholic parish church and contains significant examples of mural paintings from the Baroque period. Another is also a parish church with an Early Modern extension added before World War II. The third, the *djami* and minaret of Jakovali Hassan in Pécs, was restored in the 1980s as a museum and a place of occasional Muslim worship and is the most intact example of

that building type in Hungary. A recently discovered *djami* in Esztergom, the seat of the head of the Hungarian Roman Catholic Church, the Archbishop of Esztergom, was restored two years ago. The National Office for the Protection of Cultural Heritage did not approve a full reconstruction of its minaret on the basis that a small aged engraving of the panorama of the town was all that could have guided restorers. Despite opposition to this decision from the officials and residents of Esztergom only the surviving lower base of the minaret was preserved.

Two more Ottoman minarets without their original mosques remain standing in the country. The taller and more intact and decorative of these is located in Eger. It attracts an enormous number of visitors due to the nationwide reputation of the town and its fortification as symbol of the desperate yet ultimately victorious fight of Hungary against the Ottoman invasion in 1552. Eger's fame originates partly from its association with nineteenth-century Romanticism, especially through being the setting for the most popular Hungarian novel, *Eclipse of the Crescent Moon* by Géza Gárdonyi (1899).

The most well-known legacy of the Ottoman presence in Hungary are the Turkish baths in Budapest, still fulfilling their original purpose, utilizing the healing waters of the thermal springs of Buda hills. They were restored after Western travellers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, fixated on the Orient, re-established their appeal.

The Ottoman ruler Suleiman the Magnificent annexed the central part of the country after victories in 1526 and 1541/43. In 1566 he died in Hungary shortly after his triumphant, but for Hungarians nevertheless enigmatic, last battle: the siege of Szigetvár. The defenders of the fortress, led by the Croatian/Hungarian Nicholas Zrinski/Zrínyi, all perished during a heroic breakout against overwhelming odds. The event was a popular literary and artistic topic during the Baroque period and the nineteenth century for both Croatian and Hungarian cultures. The Sultan's tomb no longer exists, but a new dual monument for Suleiman and Zrínyi was erected by the Turkish government in 1996.

The Ottoman occupation, now more than three centuries in the past, has become an ingrained part of Hungary's history but causes no trauma on a political level or in the mind of the population. The small remaining number of Ottoman-built monuments represents a highly prized part of the country's historic heritage, but cannot compensate for the immense destruction and loss of Hungarian medieval towns, buildings, and works of art as a result of the Turkish occupation, especially those centres of the kingdom that held the greatest cultural capital. Due to these losses contemporary Hungarian medieval art history works in close collaboration with and is heavily reliant upon the evidence of archaeology, more so perhaps than is the case in any other European country, including its neighbours.

Hungary has a long history of multi-ethnicity from the Middle Ages onwards. The Hungarian/Magyar tribes who conquered the Carpathian Basin around 895 found Slavic people in residence there. At around the same period, the sparsely inhabited mountainous areas to the north and east were slowly colonized and settled by homogeneous groups of Saxon peoples. Simultaneously, the number of the Slavic ethnic groups – among them the ancestors of today's Slovaks – increased significantly and Romanians also began to settle the area. Towns everywhere became home to German and Latin inhabitants, some also for Jews.

The Ottoman incursions began in the early sixteenth century, but the northern and eastern parts of historic Hungary remained untouched by the resultant devastation. As a result, the majority of the significant medieval settlements, churches, and castles of the country's heritage can be found there. Prior to this, the Gypsy or Roma people had been appearing in Hungary from at least the beginning of the fifteenth century, while equally in the Late Middle Ages Serbs were seeking refuge there from Ottoman occupation (Figure 3). After the central and southern territories of the



**Figure 3.** Ráckeve (Hungary), Serbian Orthodox church, late 15th century (Photo: Pál Lóvei).

country were liberated from Turkish rule around the turn of the eighteenth century, German ‘Swabians’, Romanians, Serbs, and Croats were settled in the newly near-empty regions by the new landlords. Greek and Armenian merchants arrived, and Jews gradually came and settled from different regions of the continent.

The co-existence of several religions as a result of this multi-ethnicity was sometimes accepted with tolerance, sometimes not. But the country’s artistic heritage derived from these varied groups became very rich and manifold (Figures 4–6).

The social elite of these diverse ethnic groups was always adopted into the ‘Hungarian’ nobility. In the last third of the nineteenth century the rapid economic development of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy stimulated multifarious migration patterns within its borders throughout the Austrian, Bohemian, Hungarian, Croatian, Bosnian, and Polish territories of the Empire. Furthermore, developments in industry, building activity, and transport infrastructures brought newcomers from Germany, Switzerland, and Italy. The result was a cross-cultural flourishing in the arts of both historicism and Art Nouveau, not only in the major cities such as Vienna, Budapest, Prague, and Zagreb but in the smaller provincial towns as well.

This increase in multi-ethnicity was a similar phenomenon throughout the regions and states that bordered upon Hungary. The later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the birth of several nation-states in Central Europe and along the western strip of Eastern and Southern Europe. New countries in the Balkan peninsula emerged from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire – Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania – all of which gained their independence for the first time since the Middle Ages. After World War I Poland also retrieved its independence.

At the same time, this multi-ethnicity of historic Hungary became the basis for dividing its territory among these newly or recently created states. As a result, a very large number of ethnic Hungarians became minorities, especially in Czechoslovakia, Romania, and the South-Slavic State, which subsequently became Yugoslavia. Another consequence was that the country lost the greater part of its architectural and artistic heritage, especially its medieval component. After World War II, the most significant territorial change affected Poland, which was ‘pushed’ westwards,





**Figure 4.** Poniky (Slovakia), Roman Catholic church with 14th-century murals (Photo: Pál Lóvei).



**Figure 5.** Bârsana (Romania), Romanian Orthodox wooden church, 18th century (World Heritage site) (Photo: Pál Lóvei).



**Figure 6.** Budapest (Hungary), Dohány-street synagogue, 1854–59 (Photo: Pál Lővei).

being forced to cede huge parts of the country on the east to the Soviet Union (today's Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania) while obtaining, in compensation for these losses, German Silesia, Pomerania, and part of East Prussia. After the drastic political changes of 1989/90 the Czech Republic and Slovakia separated, while the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia have disintegrated into multiple independent republics.

These tumultuous political events did however have some positive effect on the field of art history. The lack of a prominent medieval heritage in the new, smaller Hungarian state stimulated the rise of new research programmes in Baroque and Neo-classical art and architecture as early as the 1920s and 30s. In the two decades from 1965 to 1985 (which turned out to be a special kind of 'golden age' in the history of Hungarian monument protection), interest in the fragmented remains of historic monuments led to the methodological and practical development of a complex method of building research ('Bauforschung').

The new nation-states of the twentieth century called upon their claimed cultural heritage to legitimize their existence, asserting their long history and supposed cultural eminence. They started searching for national characteristics in the field of art history as well. In the early Gothic palace-chapel in Esztergom, built around 1200 and excavated in 1934/36, the sculpted heads of the

decoration were identified as 'portraits' of the bearded and moustached Hungarian master-sculptor and of the clean-shaven French one as well. The medieval and Renaissance altar-pieces, panel paintings, and statues of anonymous authorship which had been collected earlier by the museums of Budapest and Esztergom, in the majority of cases from the territories of the later-founded neighbouring states, were accredited as works of Hungarian masters – that is to say, members of the Hungarian-speaking nation as perceived in the ethnic sense by nineteenth-century nationalism. This outlook was also prevalent elsewhere: some of the same or similar artworks were seen by Slovakian art historians to be by Slovak masters.

Yet it is impossible to conclude with any certainty what the mother tongues of the medieval masters in the Carpathian Basin were. A lot of them certainly spoke German, others Hungarian, but there must have also been quite a number of Slavs and Romanians among them. They all had but one common characteristic: they were subjects of the King of Hungary. On this basis, since the beginning of the 1950s, the entries for medieval and Baroque art works – murals, panel paintings, statues – in catalogues published in Hungary show their provenance by using the historically associated political reference 'in Hungary' instead of the ethnically associated label of 'Hungarian'. The two-volume art historical survey published several times between 1956 and 1973 was given the title 'The History of Art in Hungary', but has been followed by other variations since. Sometimes there has been a resistance to this more general approach – one version was issued in 2001 with the title 'Hungarian Art from the Beginning until 1800', apparently as a private initiative on the part of the publishing house in non-conformity with the preference of the authors.

The majority of the old and new states of Central Europe started to compile series of 'national' art histories in the second half of the twentieth century, sometimes in parallel with similar historical works. The comprehensive Polish publications were among the first to have been started in the 1950s, with the initial volumes appearing in 1971, but the revised series is yet to be completed. The Hungarian handbook project was originally anticipated to consist of eight parts, but after three double volumes were published in the 1980s the project remained incomplete until recently when efforts were made to restart the work. The history of Bohemian/Czech art, consisting of six parts across 11 volumes, was completed by 2007. In Croatia work was begun during the Yugoslav period, but the series of nine volumes is still far from complete. The six-volume Austrian work was published in quick succession around the turn of the millennium. All these works were prepared under the aegis of the national academies of sciences. The only exception is the survey of the art in Slovakia, which was organized and published by the Slovak National Gallery and which relates to a series of up to four important exhibitions on different stylistic periods. In Slovenia an exhibition project accompanied simultaneously by catalogues was dedicated to the country's Gothic art in 1995.

The concepts behind these publications are somewhat varied. In the first volumes of the Polish and Czech series short chapters were dedicated to the periods of prehistory and early history preceding the 'national' states, while two entire volumes of the Croatian series deal with the prehistoric period and Antiquity. The Austrian and Hungarian volumes (with the exception of those relating to the twentieth century) cover the whole extent of the historic Austrian territories (part of which now belong to Slovenia and Italy) and of the Hungarian Kingdom respectively. In the Polish publications the historical domain of the culture was included along with the present situation. For the Croatian, Slovenian, and Slovakian works the present national borders constitute the framework for the discussion. This latter, though, is an unhistorical approach and is somewhat arguable: collections, descriptions, and depictions of a state or ethnic territory as it previously existed are indisputably necessary for understanding and protecting its heritage.

The end of the Second Millennium and other significant dates of the past few decades have given opportunities for examining various basic problems relating to the history, art, and heritage in the region (Lóvei 1996, 2001). In 1996 Austria celebrated the thousandth anniversary of its name Ostarrîchi/Österreich being mentioned in a charter for the first time. The historical development of the 'Austria concept', the growth of 'regionalism' and provincial identities, Austrian myths both old and modern, and an imaginary archive of Austrian statehood provided the guiding concept for a huge twin exhibition. In the same year, Hungary commemorated the 1100th anniversary of the Magyar settlement of the Carpathian Basin. Superb exhibitions were organized not only for this event, but also for the millennium of Pannonhalma, the country's first Benedictine Abbey, and for the centennial of the millennial celebrations of 1896, which had taken place at the height of the unprecedented economic development of historic Hungary in the last third of the nineteenth century.

In some respects, a similar but much more art-historical event than the Ostarrîchi-exhibition was organized in Budapest in 2000. That year marked the turning not only of a European/Christian millennium, but also the thousand year anniversary of the foundation of the Hungarian state with the coronation of the first king of the country, (Saint) Stephen I. The exhibition, entitled 'History–Image', with the subtitle 'Some Connections between Art and the Past in Hungary' surveyed the relationship between history and art from the Middle Ages to the present day, presenting the different types of historicism from medieval times onward, and the methods by which art history was dealing with these topics (Mikó & Sinkó 2000).

Simultaneous with the creation of these 'national' art histories was the contradictory notion of using art to promote a unified Europe (Simion 2000; Marosi 2000). Austria played a pioneering role in this with very large exhibitions in the 1970s and 1980s devoted to the periods covered by the reigns of the Habsburg monarchy's great rulers. These were accompanied by successful efforts to involve international participation in the scientific work involved. In the 1980s the state-administered Renaissance Castle of Schallaburg in Lower Austria provided a place for exhibitions relating to important historic and artistic periods of some then still socialist countries, notably the Renaissance Art of Hungary, the period of the Polish Jagiellonian dynasty, and the Baroque and Neo-Classical Gardens of the German Democratic Republic (Lóvei 1992). After the political upheavals of 1989/90, the first great new programme in the field of art history initiated in Central Europe was a series of international exhibitions presenting Central European Baroque art, inspired by the recently formed Central European Initiative organization in harmony with programmes sponsored by UNESCO and the Council of Europe. In 1992–1993 the museums of Austria, the Czech Republic, Poland, Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia, and Slovenia, with the help of loans, mounted exhibitions displaying various characteristics of the common Baroque heritage from the Ukraine to North Italy (Lóvei 1993). The Council of Europe oversaw the Czech-German-Hungarian-Polish-Slovak millennial project 'Central Europe around 1000', which involved a series of more or less analogous exhibitions in all of the participating countries (Wieczorek 2000). It was clearly stated that the programme was to emphasize the thousand-year-old links of the Central European countries with the West, a somewhat forgotten association in the twentieth century, but recalled by those countries' planned (and since then successful) entry into the European Union. Croatia however, despite its important and relevant Christian heritage, was left out of participation in this programme, partly at least because of its involvement in the 1990s Balkan War.

The publications of the 'national' art histories are to be supplemented by a nine-volume handbook, organized through international cooperation in Leipzig, on the history of art in Eastern and Central Europe (from the Baltic to the Adriatic), discussed within the European context.



The value for a society of its cultural heritage is the basis of the Convention of the Council of Europe that was adopted at Faro in Portugal in 2005. According to this Convention, 'cultural heritage is a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions'. One of the more significant novel ideas in this document is the definition of 'heritage community', which 'consists of people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations' (Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, I.2 a,b). This implies that groups and/or individuals have the right to express their affinity to any part of European heritage, independent of ownership and localization. Moreover anybody, alone or within a community, may belong to several heritage communities. Heritage communities can circumscribe themselves on the basis of long-lasting historical connections, or of links dating from only one or two generations. In this multi-ethnic and, in terms of statehood, highly divided Central Europe, citizens of different countries can and may have a common heritage, so that art historians and other experts of different nations have the naturally mutual right to interpret parts of this shared heritage that are found in any other country. Perhaps the most effective paper of the CIHA conference organized in Budapest in 2007 was devoted to the different constructions and interpretations of heritage, emphasizing particularly the role of heritage communities (Dolff-Bonekämper 2008).

The idea of heritage communities underpins the opportunity for countries and nations to assist in the maintenance of heritage components which formerly belonged to them but which are now located in the territory of another state. Countless examples of this have already occurred. Since the political changes of around 1990, Germany has the opportunity to restore old monuments in the former East Prussian, now Russian-governed, *oblast* of Königsberg/Kaliningrad. The Hungarian state gives modest financial and professional assistance for the repair of medieval churches in Transylvania, which has been part of Romania since 1918. Germany also took part in the large-scale restoration of some World Heritage Saxon-built ecclesiastical monuments in Transylvania. The Budapest burial-place of the dervish Gül Baba, who died during the thanksgiving service after the Ottoman occupation of the Hungarian capital, Buda, in 1541, has been a place of Turkish pilgrimage since the nineteenth century, with the site being restored by Turkey in the 1990s. German experts organized the work on the topographical handbooks of historic monuments of Saxon Transylvania, which could in turn be of assistance to similar studies of monuments of certain districts in the Hungarian-speaking Székely region in eastern Transylvania through the cooperation of architects, art historians, and restorers from both Hungary and Romania. During the European Heritage Days the programmes in Hungary regularly include sites and events of interest outside of the country, generally in neighbouring ones, but sometimes even further afield, according to the annual theme. The historical, artistic, and cultural significance of these sites and monuments can be interpreted in various ways, both in the context of the programme of the country where they are situated, and as well in the Hungarian context, proving that both the citizens of the country under whose jurisdiction and control they currently fall and Hungarian citizens alike belong to a common heritage community.

Historic monuments and works of art constitute only one aspect of heritage and heritage communities. Sources and special knowledge linked with these are equally important. The architectural and monumental heritage sites in Slovakia, Transylvania, and the Austrian Burgenland were supervised by the Hungarian monument authority from around 1872 until 1918. From its foundation, the registration and classification of monuments were laid down as the first and most important task of the new organization. The initiation of such administrative work made necessary the establishment of the Monument Committee archives, with the documents of this collection in the possession of



**Figure 7.** Hust (Ukraine), colossal Orthodox church in construction in the town centre, just behind the small traditional houses (Photo: Pál Lővei).

the current Heritage Office in Budapest now constituting the basis of our present knowledge of the history of monument protection in Hungary. At the same time the collection of drawings and plans relating to the monuments was also begun. These documents have proved very important both for the maintenance and the historical interpretation of the monuments. The archives of the Heritage Office are also open to all experts coming from abroad, given that the regular repair and restoration of the historic monuments equally conforms to the basic interests of Hungary. Sometimes the interests of the neighbouring countries may seem to differ, but in the majority of cases, these states also have a well-organized monument protection system. It may be said that each is constantly trying to solve the often enormous problem of financing such research and restoration, regardless of the nationality for which the monuments were originally built.

In some cases, however, conflicts between the old and the new can revive an historical opposition. Colossal new Byzantine churches for Orthodox Christians are being built close to ancient churches and monuments in Transylvania and in the Ukraine (Figure 7), demonstrating the predominance asserted by the national majority, especially in the last two decades, through the destruction of the historical dimensions and obliteration of the perspectives of the historic settlements and buildings. Analogous cases in Bosnia have produced a height contest between the bell-towers of brand-new Catholic churches and centuries-old Muslim minarets that now stand in close proximity



**Figure 8.** Budapest (Hungary), construction works on the site of demolished 19th-century dwelling houses just behind the great synagogues of the town centre (Photo: Pál Lóvei).

to one another. Destroying historic monuments in the spirit of *damnatio memoriae* was a regrettable feature of the recent past, especially during the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s. The strategically senseless damage done to Dubrovnik, a World Heritage city in Croatian Dalmatia, and the similarly absurd demolition of the Ottoman bridge in Mostar by Croats led to the appending in 1999 of the Second Protocol to The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1954), increasing the range of its application. But it must be acknowledged that all such intentional devastations fall well short of the dilapidation resulting from lack of financial provision for heritage preservation, and the serious destruction of much of the architectural heritage as the consequence of economic pressures all over the region, as for example in the case of the historic centre of Budapest (Figure 8).

There is another particularly threatening process underway for art history in relation to monument protection in the region, from Belarus to Croatia: the increasing number of reconstructions of historic monuments which are growing continually in size and scale. Though the key word for such projects is ‘authenticity’, its meaning has largely departed from the century-old standard of according pre-eminence to original material remains, following Alois Riegl’s ideas. No longer are projections of the forms of missing details and elements restricted to scholarly publications, where they can be discussed, debated, and repeatedly revised. Now they are being physically reconstructed, using the remaining originals as historical maquettes. During this process, truly original parts can



**Figure 9.** Visegrád (Hungary), royal palace of King Matthias Corvinus, brand new reconstruction of the second storey with 'Renaissance' arcades (Photo: Pál Lővei).

be lost or hidden by the new, with the latter being considered just as authentic as the former. The residual ancient remains may thus lose their art-historical value as sources of scholarly research for future generations. But it is as though this is not considered important, having become secondary to the achievement of arrogant political goals or superficial tourist entertainment. In such a process a country rich in archaeological sites and ruins can easily lose its most important remains, such as is happening in today's Hungary, in particular its medieval ones (Marosi 2001; Somorjay 2008) (Figure 9). It was partly these tendencies, the eliciting of false memories, the modern 'use' of the distant past, which formed the subject of the noteworthy exhibition entitled: 'Infectious Middle Ages in Central-Eastern Europe after the political transformations' which was held in Budapest in 2006, with material collected from all over Central and Eastern Europe by the students of the Department of Medieval Studies at the Central European University.

A heritage community involving several states can lead to transnational nominations for the UNESCO World Heritage List. The component triangulation points of the Struve Geodetic Arc can be found in seven countries, from Norway, Sweden, and Finland in the north via Russia, Belarus, and the Ukraine through to Moldova in the southeast of the continent. Great Britain's Hadrian's Wall in 2005 became part of the transnational 'Frontiers of the Roman Empire' World Heritage site, after the inclusion of the German *limes* – the addition of the Hungarian extension is now in progress. Hungarian experts in monument protection supported the inclusion of historic towns and ecclesiastical buildings of common heritage in Slovakia and Romania in the World Heritage List. Nominations of cross-border sites (Dolff-Bonekämper 2004), e.g. the former Habsburg Empire's greatest system of fortifications on both the Slovakian and the Hungarian banks of the Danube, are on the tentative World Heritage list. The wooden churches of the Carpathian Mountains comprise a gradually expanding group of World Heritage sites in Poland, Slovakia, and Romania. Multi-ethnicity can equally be the basis of as yet only planned World





**Figure 10.** Óriszentpéter-Pityerszer (Hungary), 19th-century village dwelling house preserved as a museum (Photo: Pál Lóvei).

Heritage sites within the boundaries of a single state as well: the network of rural heritage buildings in Hungary consists of dozens of village dwellings preserving various house-types, furnishings, equipment, and material culture of the different nationalities of the country (Sisa 2000) (Figure 10). There is only one ethnic group of the country's people not included: the Roma. In spite of their valuable skills they really have no traditional architectural heritage. But this does not explain why there is no museum or even a substantial collection of art works from their six-hundred-year history in the Carpathian Basin. In 2007 the First Roma Pavilion was established at the 52nd Venice Biennale as a European project, with a collection of works from contemporary Roma artists representing eight European countries, from Great Britain, France, and Germany through Hungary, Bosnia, and Serbia to Romania and Finland. Curated by a young art historian from Hungary, the exhibition was organized with the goal of challenging the exotic 'Gypsy' stereotype that has existed for centuries (Junghaus & Székely 2007). A comprehensive Hungarian Roma art exhibition, a survey of the production of almost a half -century, was planned as part of the programme of the European Cultural Capital of Pécs 2010.

The art-historical concept of Central Europe, the different European regions and their connections has been previously analysed by two earlier CIHA programmes in Hungary: the conference of 1965 with the topic of Gothic and Renaissance Art in Central Europe (CIHA 1967), and the 22nd Congress of the CIHA held in Budapest in 1969 (Rózsa 1972; Vayer 1972). The historical viewpoint of 'Central Europeanness' was later impressively argued by the historian Jenő Szűcs (1983) in his article on the three historical regions of Europe, examining the problems of Central Europe between East and West. The idea of smaller geographical art-units within the Carpathian Basin had emerged prior to this: both Hungarian and Slovakian art histories take as their basis the catalogue of medieval artworks whose compilation began as early as the first years of the twentieth century, and an example of which is the recording of the specific characteristics of the Saxon Szepes/Zips/Spiš and the Sáros/Šariš regions in today's Slovakia.

As the subject of a series of catalogues on Romanesque, Gothic, and Renaissance architecture, art, and mural paintings, Transylvania was and is considered as a special cultural unit. Questions of the art geography of other regions became a topic of discussion in contemporary Hungary only after the political changes around 1990. In 1994 the exhibition 'Pannonia Regia. Art in Transdanubia 1000–1541' attempted to survey the medieval art produced in the territory south of the Danube – in other words in western Hungary – in what had earlier been the Roman province of Pannonia (Mikó & Takács 1994). The success of the event led researchers to concentrate on a region whose medieval architectural and artistic monuments had been considered to be something of a mystery: a huge volume of work was published in 2000, with papers by experts from Romania, Serbia, Hungary, and Croatia on sites in the southern part of the Great Hungarian Plain and its neighbouring territories (Kollár 2000). A subsequent volume in print encompasses an even greater geographic scope, from the Transylvanian mountains to the eastern part of the Austrian province of Styria. The associated project expanded international participation and filled some significant gaps of knowledge, but did so without any real historic or art-historic homogeneity.

A vision of Central Europe is represented by the Journal CENTROPA, edited and published since 2001 in New York with the help of a broad international advisory board, and devoted to examining the region's rich cultural diversity in nineteenth and twentieth-century architecture and related arts.

In 1965 and 1969 the 'Central European' programmes of the Budapest CIHA events meant a chance for greater openness, even within the Soviet block, after a period of seclusion for more than one and a half decades. They provided the first opportunities for Eastern European art historians to come together, and at the same time to meet their Western colleagues. Similar investigations have not lost their importance and actuality, amply shown by the conference 'The Borders in the Art History of Central Europe', held in Bratislava in 2007 (*Ars*, 40: 121–292). After 1989/90, however, the whole world was opened up for research and discussion. This is why, for the Budapest CIHA conference of 2007, the title and topic 'How to Write Art History: National, Regional or Global?' was chosen (CIHA 2008).

Twenty years of democracy in Central Europe have brought changes in scholarly work too. Politics cannot always rely on everyday circumstances. Even in a sometimes confrontational atmosphere on the level of governments and parties, professional connections can develop. Exhibitions on common history and art have been organized in this past decade in Budapest, with very significant loans of art-works from Romania, Croatia, and Slovakia – something unimaginable in the 1980s. At the same time, exhibitions on Gothic and Renaissance art in Bratislava were supported by Hungarian institutions. Of course, nationalistic critiques can be heard grudging the participation of 'too many' foreign authors in the exhibition catalogues, but the ideas of heritage communities can still be fulfilled. A breakthrough was the travelling exhibition on the *œuvre* of one of the most important painters of Central Europe around 1900, László Mednyánszky. Apart from disagreements over his being Slovak or Hungarian, the unified Hungarian and Slovakian collections of his works on display, first in Budapest then in Bratislava, then finally also in Vienna, together with their catalogues, brought success for museums and art historians, being a hit both for professionals and the public. Interpretations can and will be different, but the right to have access to material and sources of common heritage has already started to be generally accepted. 'The productive communication over the borders requires tolerance and understanding of the differences, which might be understood not only negatively as tolerating a different opinion in spite of the negative emotions it produces, but also positively as an opportunity for the declaration of the cultural richness, typical of Central Europe' (Gerát 2007).

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