

In the Currents of the International Avant-Garde Movements

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If we examine the most important artistic schools and phenomena of Central and East-European countries not in terms of national specifics, but rather with the international avant-garde movements as our point of departure, then we find that the periods before and after the First World War are quite distinct. Before 1914, French Fauvism influenced the Hungarian Neos and Czech Eights, the earliest modern-inspired groups in both countries, as well as the later, more radical associations that emerged from them: the Czech Painters' Group and the Hungarian Nyolcak (The Eight).¹ In Prague, the leading role was taken by Cubism, which had originated in France but soon became autonomous, while the Hungarian Nyolcak style drew from Cézanne, Matisse, Cubism, Expressionism, and Futurism alike. There was no independent Fauvist painting in either country, although a Czech Cubism did exist. At its inception, Czech Cubism was linked to its French counterpart, but never became part of it, instead developing independently. While Cubism enriched works by Hungarian painters and sculptors living temporarily or permanently in Paris, it did not come to play a decisive role in Hungarian art; no real contact existed between French Cubism and Hungarian movements.

Expressionism was part of most new, evolving stylistic schools before the First World War, albeit often more furtively, and not in pure form. This was most relevant for Romanian painting, even before the Dada era, and for Czech Cubo-Expressionism. In Slovene painting, Expressionism appeared later, between 1920 and 1930: its representatives Veno Pilon, Ivan Cargo, Tone and France Kralj, Luigi Spazzapan and others remained firmly within the confines of figurative depiction, and their works cannot be regarded strictly as avant-garde.² Expressionism, mixed with Post-Impressionism or other schools, only appeared in certain characteristic marks, but did not exist as an autonomous movement.

Futurism in East-Central Europe

The situation is entirely different with Futurism which, as an avant-garde movement *par excellence*, expanded from Italy into most European countries. This was the first avant-garde movement which wanted, indeed loudly demanded, the transformation of art in its entirety, as well as the whole traditional social structure, institutions, indeed even individual lifestyles and habits, in a word: everything, including music, writing, cuisine, and so on. Futurism wanted to accelerate the rhythm of existence, and even if it did not succeed in doing so, its dynamism and momentum nevertheless recruited followers in many places.

Futurism appeared as early as 1909, primarily in literary form, in numerous European cities. That same year, Filippo Marinetti's *Futurist Manifesto* was published in Romania, Poland, and Slovenia. Futurism's fine-art debut came somewhat later in January 1913, with exhibitions of Futurists, Cubists, and Expressionists in Budapest and Lvov, and a Futurist show in Prague around the same time (Fig. 1.1). The Budapest exhibition aroused great interest, eliciting both positive and negative reactions from writers and artists, with Béla Balázs, Róbert Berény, Károly Kernstok, and later Lajos Kassák publishing commentaries.³ As a writer, Kassák was fascinated by the vision of Futurist image and Futurist spectacle; the impact of Carlo Carrà's painting *The Funeral of the Anarchist Galli* (*I funerali del anarchico Galli*, 1910–1911) would remain with him for years.

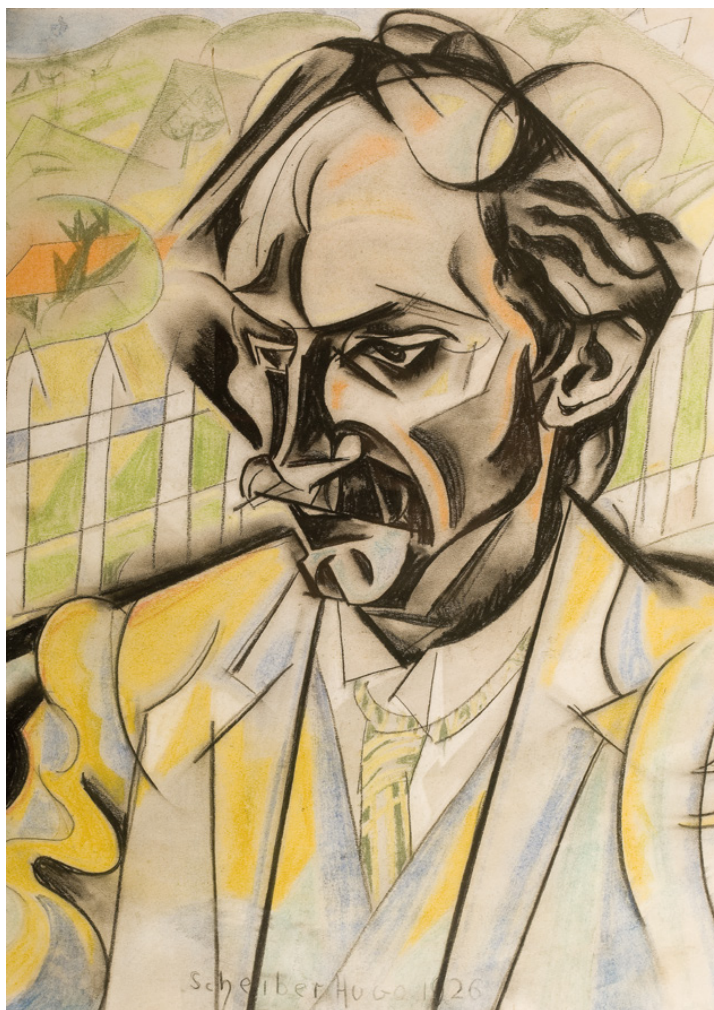


Fig. 1.1. Hugó Scheiber, *Portrait of Mihály Babits* (*Babits portréja*, 1926). Pastel on paper, 72 x 56 cm. Gallery Kieselbach, Budapest. © DACS 2019.

In his 1916 texts, Kassák reinterpreted the experience of Futurist painting in his own words, which pulsated with the force of fragmented words and sentences.⁴

Italian Futurism's direct wartime involvement proved unpopular everywhere. Nevertheless, the Hungarian painter most influenced by Futurism was also the farthest removed from its dynamism and aggression: Lajos Gulácsy.⁵ Having lived in Italy for a time, it was the experience of



GULÁCSY LAJOS: Ceruzarajz

war together with the spectacle of Futurist painting that presumably caused an unexpected change in his perspective: fear and anguish in a style resembling Futurism, expressed in the restless movement of deformed figures dissolving into one another (Fig. 1.2). At around the same time, Béla Uitz, one of the painters associated with Kassák's journal *MA (Today)*, also engaged with the experience of war and Futurist pictures, conveying the drama of military conflict with an approach similar to that of Carrà.⁶

However, the notion of war held by Kassák and his circle was diametrically opposed to Marinetti's. From the outset, Kassák was bitterly and intractably opposed to war, articulating his anti-war stance through his writings and editorial activities. This is precisely why Kassák only turned his attention towards Futurism once the war was over. In 1921, he reproduced one of Marinetti's

Fig. 1.2. Pencil drawing by Lajos Gulácsy. Published in *MA (Today)* 3/ 8–9 (September 1918): unpaginated. Petőfi Literary Museum / Kassák Museum, Budapest.

most original ‘tactilist’ manifestos in *MA*. However, relations between the two men could not be termed cordial or friendly; rather, this was an intellectual struggle between two rivals, two similarly-forceful personalities. On the occasion of the Futurist congress in Rome, Kassák published his view of Marinetti:

Without a doubt, F. T. Marinetti, *the Italian, the Futurist, the artist*, is one of the most characteristic personalities of our time ... That this movement was timely, or that it found its emphatic representative in Marinetti, is undeniable. But like every pioneer, Marinetti too had to fail in the struggle against the past. Because the path he has followed until now cannot remain the straight path leading to tomorrow...⁷

Marinetti and Kassák’s intellectual duel almost flared up into physical conflict when they met in person in Vienna in 1925. As Kassák later recalled:

The Marinetti-Kassák meeting quickly upended order in the classy hotel: we got embroiled in an enormous argument which almost ended up in fisticuffs, because I had already formed my categorical political and artistic-political standpoints, and could not in the least agree with Marinetti and the Futurists, whose work I otherwise acknowledged. Marinetti attacked the table so hard that the waiters came over to try and assuage the quarrel, but to no end. At the end of our meeting, Marinetti shook my hand for a long time and embraced me, saying that we need such artists who are determined to fight for their views.⁸

While Kassák was emphasising the differences between the Hungarian movement and Futurism, at the same time, in 1927, the Romanian journal *Integral: revistă de sinteză modernă* (*Integral: A Magazine of Modern Synthesis*) published a special issue (10/12) on Futurism.

The situation was completely different in Poland and Czechoslovakia, where an autonomous local variant of Futurism emerged. The first Futurist club was opened in Kraków in 1918 by the poet Bruno Jasiński, Stanisław Młodożeniec, and Tytus Czyżewski. Two years later in Warsaw, the Futurists published *Tak* and *Gga*, manifestos in the format of an almanac. Numerous smaller publications followed, including *Litmus Papers* (*Papierek lakmusowy*) and *Knife in the Stomach* (*Nuż v břuhu*). Unlike their Italian colleagues, the Polish Futurists declared themselves anti-nationalist and anti-patriotic, attacking Polish bourgeois nationalists and the church. Their literary works fused anarchist ideas with the Italian Futurists’ alogism. One of the most important Polish Futurists was Czyżewski, whose paintings used Formist modes of expression, while his poetry brought the phenomena of machines, dynamos, and magnetism to life. Futurist events were held in smaller Polish cities, but these were mostly fleeting in nature. Futurism left its most enduring mark on Polish literature. This characteristically Polish phenomenon was perhaps partly due to the popularity of the 1923 publication of texts by Italian Futurists Marinetti, Francesco Cangiullo, and others in the Kraków-based journal *Zwrotnica* (*Railway Switch*). Certain Polish Futurists, such as Jalu Kurek, maintained contact with Marinetti up until 1924.

In Bohemia, Futurism asserted itself in entirely different ways and forms. At the 1913 exhibition of Italian Futurists in Prague, it was not the paintings but rather the sculptures, such as Prampolini’s mobile statues, that captured the attention of modern Czech artists. Bohumil Kubišta was among the first to react to Futurism with his post-1913 Futurist-inspired paintings, but his early death put an end to any further development. Futurism left a more enduring mark in the oeuvre of the versatile Jiří Kroha. Kroha originally worked as an architect, but was equally assured in painting, sculpture, utopian design, and the performing arts. He was among the first to employ film projection in theatre, plays of light and dark, and lighting scenery: in other words, the basic concepts of Futurist theatre. As František Šmejkal has shown, Futurism played an important role in Kroha’s art, particularly his wall paintings for the Montmartre cabaret in Prague and his 1918–1919 drawings and watercolours. Šmejkal wrote:

The dynamism of modern life is expressed in the multiplication of contours. The figures decompose according to their axis of movement, with their most characteristic gestures recurring, and the organic integration of their shapes into their environment. The composition of energetic lines in dynamic diagonals, sharply contrasting colours, and mutually-penetrating geometric forms frequently gives the impression of rotational movement.⁹

Futurism in Czechoslovakia only truly asserted itself after 1920, primarily in journals such as *Disk*, *Pásmo* (*The Zone*), *Veraikon*, *Stavba* (*Construction*) and *RED*. In 1922, Josef Čapek designed the front cover for the Czech edition of Marinetti's *Words in Freedom*. Čapek's paintings suggest the Futurist vision and the threat posed by modern machinery.

From 1921 onwards, Futurism became increasingly important in Prague theatre. Italian Futurist theatre was embodied in the figure of Italian artist Enrico Prampolini.¹⁰ Compared to the other Futurists (Umberto Boccioni, Giacomo Balla, or Carrà), Prampolini's paintings were not particularly significant, yet his versatility, organisational flair and energy guaranteed him a special place within the movement. From 1920 to 1922, he was a travelling diplomat for Italian Futurism, working to secure artistic diplomatic contacts and reinforce fraternal and professional ties in various countries, including Czechoslovakia and Russia. A lively circle of writers and painters formed around Prampolini in Prague, which included Rudolf Kremlička, Jan Zrzavý, Bedřich Feuerstein, Josef Šima, Adolf Hoffmeister, and Karel Teige, in other words, artists from both the Stubborn and Devětsil circles. (At the same time, most of these artists and writers were also in close contact with Roman Jakobson.)

Having introduced modern Italian art to an audience that included many Futurists, in Prague's House of Art (Dům Umělců) in October 1921, Prampolini turned his attention mainly towards the theatre. In November that year, he directed the *Futurist Syntheses* at the Švandovo Theatre. This was the first time Prague audiences had witnessed a rotating stage, as well as the geometric, simplified avant-garde costumes and sets originally created for performances by the Italian Synthetic Futurist Theatre (Teatro Sintetico Futurista). Prampolini's key principle was to make the simultaneity of events perceptible. His ideas found fertile ground in Prague, where Feuerstein and Jiří Frejka continued with even bolder experiments at the Liberated Theatre (Osvobozené Divadlo).¹¹

In December 1921, the Švandovo Theatre organised a Futurist evening at which two leading personalities of the Italian and Czech movements met for the first time: Marinetti and Teige. The official encounter was followed by a friendly gathering at Teige's flat, where Marinetti read aloud from his own works. Personal contacts between the artists were facilitated by Růžena Zatková, a young Czech artist who had lived in Italy and had close connections to Marinetti's brother. As a result, it was Zatková who received Marinetti in Prague. Influenced by Boccioni, Zatková's works explored the impact of kinetic art, and she also painted and created assemblages, yet her role connecting others overshadowed her artistic significance.

Despite Zatková's involvement and the development of Italian-Czech personal contacts, the two movements swiftly and dramatically parted ways. Prampolini published his manifesto on absolute painting in the Czech journal *Veraikon* in 1922,¹² and publicised the activities of the Devětsil group two years later in his richly illustrated article on Czech art for a Rome-based journal, but this was where his role ended.¹³

Having participated in Marinetti's 1924 Futurist congress in Milan and his Fascist cultural activities, the Devětsil then broke with Marinetti's concepts and politics.¹⁴ Since Teige and colleagues could not adopt Marinetti's views as their own, any genuine, straightforward cooperation became impossible. Nevertheless, a certain artistic affinity remained, mostly manifesting itself outside the theatre, in new typographic possibilities and the re-creation of typography for postcards in particular.¹⁵ Despite Teige's reservations, *Pásmo* published a long article in its tenth issue of 1925 entitled 'Futurism and the Modern Italians', followed by a special issue on Futurism in February 1929. Yet by this time, both schools had abandoned their original aims, irrespective of politics, and could no longer be strictly regarded as avant-garde movements.

Considering these events, publications, and works scattered across space and time, it appears it was only in the early 1920s (and long after its first appearance in 1912 to 1913) that Futurism won any real impact and influence in East-Central Europe, precisely at the time that Marinetti was consciously seeking contacts with these countries.

Dada in East-Central Europe

International Dada emerged during and largely in opposition to the First World War. During the war, although Dada remained largely out of reach for East-Central-European countries, certain Dada phenomena were present in Polish literature, mixed with Futurism.

In 1918 to 1919, when hostilities ceased in former war zones and the Zürich Dadaists left their temporary home, Dada burst onto the battlefield of European avant-garde art almost without introduction, attracting perhaps even more attention than Futurism had. From the 1920s onwards, the Cabaret Voltaire's uncompromising, internationalist actions to offend middle-class mores, its unlimited desire for freedom, and a distinctive Dada philosophy became important factors and drivers in the development of nascent East-Central-European avant-garde movements.

Yet it was not the Zürich Dadaists that visited Prague in 1920, but their Berlin followers Raoul Hausmann and Richard Huelsenbeck, who introduced their audience to the German Dada scene. The meeting was exceptionally successful, since a group of friends already existed around Artus Černík who were very responsive to Dada. Černík was one of the founders of the Devětsil movement, and would later edit the journal *Pásmo* based in Brno. It was probably due to him that the representatives of German Dada felt immediately at home in Prague. In September 1921, Hausmann returned to Prague with Kurt Schwitters and Hannah Höch to undertake a Dada lecture tour of Czechoslovakia. Schwitters continued his creative work in Prague, on occasion making his characteristic Merz collages by Prague lamplight. He regularly visited the city until the end of the 1920s.¹⁶ Initially, Schwitters's Dada evenings were mostly attended by local Germans, but later also attracted Czech intellectuals who were relatively early to welcome the spirit of Dada. This enthusiasm culminated in *The Modern Art Bazaar* (*Bazar moderního umění*) exhibition of 1923.

Collages, photos, photomontages, and typographic compositions by the Devětsil artists were inspired by earlier international (and mostly German) Dada works, although this was mostly in terms of their general approach since no concrete borrowings can be observed. Interest in Dada art endured, with Teige publishing many texts on Dada, yet this interest was not exclusive, since Czech artists were equally occupied with Constructivism, L'Esprit Nouveau, and other schools.¹⁷

Czech Dada in Prague dominated theatre, specifically the Liberated Theatre from 1926 under its directors Jindřich Honzl and Jiří Frejka. This mobile theatre and its broad stylistic repertoire, including occasional cabaret, was the joint work of foreign authors (Marinetti, Ribemont-Dessaignes, Yvan Goll, Jean Cocteau and Alfred Jarry) working together with Czech writers (Vítězslav Nezval, Teige) and Czech directors, dancers, actors, and set designers (Antonín Heythum, Jindřich Štyrský, Ivan Mrkvicka, Zdenek Rossmann and others). Pantomime and dance played a particularly important role. In 1927, Jiří Frejka and a few other members left to establish a new theatre, the Dada, and performed works including Schwitters's *Shadow Game* (*Schattenspiel*) and Cocteau's *The Wedding Party on the Eiffel Tower* (*Les mariés de la Tour Eiffel*). František Šmejkal wrote that, in 1927, 'the first piece by playwrighting and acting associates Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich was performed at the [Liberated Theatre]; it was full of poetist humour and puns in which some form of Dadaist absurdity lived on, and met with huge success from the audience'.¹⁸

Schwitters's presence and active participation in theatrical and artistic life indicated close contact between the Devětsil group and the Dada scene in Hannover, and his exhibition in Prague at the end of 1926 was one of the highpoints of this collaboration. Thereafter, Czech theatre, cabaret, and fine arts continued to absorb the spirit of Dada.

Two representatives of the Serbian avant-garde, Branko Poljanski and the young Dada writer Dragan Aleksić, discovered Prague together in 1920. One year later, they founded a Dada club in Prague to promote Zenitist concepts.¹⁹ Aleksić organised Dada evenings for the same purpose in smaller Serbian towns, Osijek and Subotica.²⁰ Poljanski and Aleksić consciously developed connections with Tristan Tzara and Schwitters, and even sought contact with Kassák. Nonetheless, Ljubomir Micić, the founder of the journal *Zenit*, criticised Aleksić's Dada activities, either out of jealousy or antipathy towards Dada. In response, Aleksić established his own journals in 1922, first *Dada-Jazz* and then *Dada-Tank*. Their contents were bold and explicitly

anti-tradition, and the covers reflected the spirit of international Dada, yet neither existed for more than one issue.

Although most Romanian Dadaists were based in Switzerland, the movement's influence did reach Bucharest in the 1920s, primarily at the 1924 exhibitions organised by the journal *Contimporanul* (*Contemporary*).²¹

Polish Dada was practically indistinguishable from Polish literary Futurism or Formism (with which Futurism was partly interlinked). Polish Dada was characterised by playfulness, humour, and fluidity but could not be regarded as a distinct trend within Polish art.²²

Dada played a decidedly larger role in Hungary, having been discovered as early as 1920 by young members of the *MA* group exiled in Vienna. After the long war years of isolation in Budapest, the world had opened for them in the Austrian capital, allowing them to encounter international Dadaists for the first time. The earlier political character of Zürich Dada, its opposition to war and nationalism, had lost its urgency, even though this had been perhaps most important for Kassák. Nevertheless, from 1921 onwards, major figures from Zürich and international Dada soon started appearing in *MA* with increasing frequency. Éva Forgács wrote:



Fig. 1.3. Lajos Kassák, cover of the Hungarian edition of Tristan Tzara's *The Gas Heart* (*Le Coeur à gaz / Gázszív*), (1922). Petőfi Literary Museum / Kassák Museum, Budapest.

Kassák thus had to undergo an internal change and a change in approach before [MA] could publish its first issue in 1921, which was almost entirely a Dadaist publication ... He plugged [MA] into the current of the international avant-garde, in which both image and text were of equal significance.²³

Kassák clearly took great pleasure in publishing artists who, like himself, used two languages of expression: verbal and visual art. They included Hans Arp, Kurt Schwitters, Theo van Doesburg (under the name I. K. Bonset), and Raoul Hausmann. In place of Activist works, MA also featured Francis Picabia, Man Ray, Tristan Tzara, Richard Huelsenbeck, George Grosz and others.²⁴ Even before publishing his own first concrete poems, Kassák included Sándor Barta's 'The Green-Headed Man' ('A zöldfejű ember'), a concrete poem in a perfectly Dada style, in the third issue of MA in 1921.

Dada also influenced Kassák as an artist. His earlier, small collages were as comparable to Kurt Schwitters's Merz prints as his *Numbered Verses* (*Számozott költemények*) were to Schwitters's poems, although neither work borrowed explicitly from Schwitters. Kassák published some of his numbered verses in the February 1921 issue of MA. As Pál Derék writes: 'with the help of reality fragments broken down into ever smaller units during the desemiotising process and through condensing them into 'bricks' (Kassák), a construction method could come about that allowed harmony to enter the work of art'.²⁵

Kassák did not want to become a Dadaist and preserved his own integrity, yet he also played with the tools of Dada in his texts and pictures.²⁶ Indeed, the entire linguistic construction and inner logic of his image architecture manifesto, and the repeating contradictions and self-contradictions all reflect the Dada editorial technique.²⁷ Kassák was particularly interested in Dada as an artistic tendency and method, and proposed an exchange of publications in a 1921 letter to Tzara. He offered MA in return for 391, and requested translations of Tzara and Picabia for publication.²⁸ Kassák designed the cover for Tzara's *The Gas Heart* (*Le Cœur à gaz / Gázszív*),²⁹ and would continue to count on Tzara's friendship for many years, as their correspondence attests (Fig. 1.3).³⁰

At the same time that Kassák discovered international Dada, MA began publishing works by a new contributor: László Moholy-Nagy. In 1921, Moholy-Nagy's entire approach, his painting and drawing style comprised of mechanical elements, bore most resemblance to international Dada and Picabia's style in particular. The following year however, MA took a decisive turn towards Constructivism and the geometric abstract, and after 1925 further Dada phenomena appeared only in Budapest and mostly in literature and theatre.

This period after 1925 marked the second era of Dada. The new, revised approach emerged in Prague and Budapest theatre, with contemporary plays, pantomimes, dances, Dada sets and directorial style. In Budapest, the writer Ödön Palasovszky set up the Green Donkey Theatre (*Zöld Szamár Színház*), named after a painting by Sándor Bortnyik (who cannot be described as a Dadaist). Bortnyik had also returned to Hungary in the meantime. He designed the sets and wrote the *Green Donkey* (*Zöld szamár*) pantomime based on his experiences in Germany and at the Bauhaus: the play was published in the fourth (1925) issue of *Periszkóp* (*Periscope*), based in Arad, Transylvania. Nevertheless, the Green Donkey Theatre only represented Hungarian Dada for a short while, and in a somewhat isolated fashion. At around the same time, another (exclusively) literary centre came into being, the short-lived Budapest journal *IS* (*Also*), which published Dada and Surrealist writings by Árpád Mezei, Imre Pán, and György Gerő from 1924 to 1925. Thereafter, Dada was only present in Hungarian intellectual life blended together with other schools, into which it slowly dissolved.

The Influence of De Stijl: Vilmos Huszár

The impact of De Stijl, its geometric, puritan art and meticulous theory, coincided with Dada's influence in East-Central Europe. The leading personality and theorist of De Stijl, Theo van Doesburg, was also active as a Dada poet under the pen name I. K. Bonset at the same time, thus paradoxically embodying the fusion of these two otherwise contradictory movements.

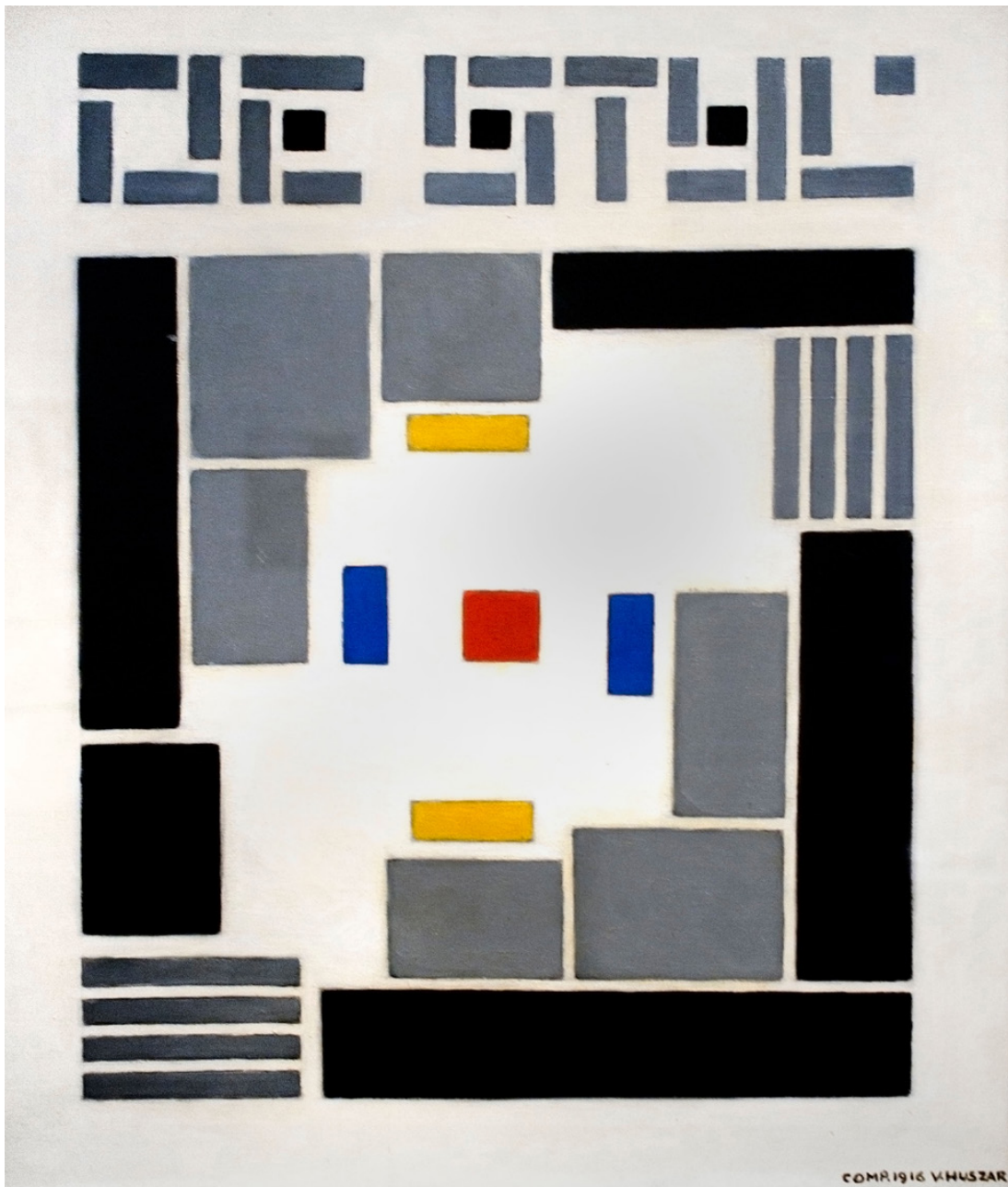


Fig. 1.4. Vilmos Huszár, *Abstract Composition* (draft for the journal cover of *De Stijl*, 1916). Oil on panel, 42.3 x 38.9 cm. Peter Horree / Alamy Stock Photo. © 2019 Erven Vilmos Huszár/ DACS.

De Stijl as a movement was inseparable from the journal of the same name. Its first issue was published in 1917 with a logo and inscription by the Hungarian artist Vilmos Huszár (Fig. 1.4).³¹

Huszár was still very young when he arrived in the Netherlands from Hungary, influenced by József Rippl-Rónai's decorative, colourful style and Béla Czóbel's paintings from his Fauve-inspired neo-Impressionist phase. Huszár's early pictures in the Neo style confirmed his confident sense of colour and compositional skills, although his painting style changed somewhat in later years once he had settled permanently in the Netherlands. From 1916, he developed towards pure abstraction, making his first stained glass windows. Representing a new genre within De Stijl, they featured a characteristic ensemble of traditional techniques, traditional or gothic window frames, and framed geometric abstract composition.

The conceptual background and art theory of the De Stijl movement was mainly based on Piet Mondrian's philosophy of art, the theory of neo-Plasticism, which also greatly influenced Huszár's theoretical writings and works. According to Mariann Gergely:

the three primary colours (red, yellow, blue) are used in place of the colours of nature; distinct colour plains appear instead of the illusion of spatial form; and straight vertical and horizontal lines represent the eternal latitudinal and longitudinal dimensions of existence.³²

Huszár's initially-abstract De Stijl art loosened somewhat in his interior designs. They realised the same De Stijl principles as his pictures, but in three-dimensional space with colourful wall surfaces. His *Berlin Model* (*Berlin makett*), co-created with Gerrit Rietveld, won great success at the 1923 Great Berlin Art Exhibition [*sic*]. The same year, and following Van Doesburg's example, Huszár organised a Dada lecture tour with Van Doesburg and Schwitters, during which he presented his mechanically-movable dance figures. He would later design numerous functional, applied-art objects, just like the Bauhaus masters, before returning to painting.

The intellectual encounters and rivalries between *De Stijl* journal and *MA* lasted from 1921 to 1924. Kassák published a poem by I. K. Bonset (Van Doesburg) in April 1921, followed one year later by De Stijl works and an article by Van Doesburg with twelve illustrations in June 1922. In return, *De Stijl* published works and texts by Moholy-Nagy, László Péri and Kassák.³³ However, relations between the two movements collapsed in 1923. In 'Correction (for the attention of *De Stijl*)', published in the July 1923 issue of *MA*, art critic Ernő Kállai hit out at De Stijl, a school he considered exclusively Constructivist and, as such, out of touch with everyday life since 'it cannot bring together people into a society'. Cooperation between *De Stijl* and *MA* thus came to an end, the intellectual duel continuing not only within the printed press, but also at (and beyond) the Bauhaus, where Van Doesburg found equally little success. Although Van Doesburg wanted to further disseminate his concepts within the Bauhaus, the De Stijl course of his Weimar free school was not made part of the Bauhaus curriculum. Ultimately, it was László Moholy-Nagy, and not Van Doesburg, who was appointed as professor at the Bauhaus in the spring of 1923.³⁴

Other East-Central-European artists who came into contact with De Stijl included the Czech Emil Filla, and members of the Polish BLOK and Praesens groups. A prominent figure in Czech Cubism, Filla left his homeland during the war and settled in the Netherlands, in part due to his friendship with Béla Czóbel who already lived there. Filla had encountered the De Stijl movement in 1917, as his correspondence with Van Doesburg and Paul Citroen attests.³⁵ However, his friendships with De Stijl members dwindled after he returned home in 1921.

The encounter between De Stijl and Polish representatives of Constructivism was substantially different, and less personal in nature.³⁶ Poland did not have a De Stijl movement, but rather a Polish De Stijl approach. The Poles had already clarified their own theoretical and practical concepts when they came into contact with De Stijl. Notwithstanding the many differences, the relevance of the encounter lay in the fact that the De Stijl's principles, organising structures, and thoughts on the functions of art were fairly analogous to those of their Polish counterparts. Polish and Dutch artists were well acquainted with each other's activities. When *BLOK* started publishing in 1924, Mieczysław Szczuka requested that Van Doesburg publicise the Polish avant-garde in his journal in return for *BLOK* advertising *De Stijl* in almost every issue. Both *BLOK* and *Praesens* reproduced illustrations and theoretical texts by Dutch artists. Among the Poles, it was primarily Władysław Strzemiński and Katarzyna Kobro who critically explored Van Doesburg's architectural concepts and counter-compositions. Nevertheless, they held Van Doesburg's art in exceptional regard, in particular because he focussed his attention towards space, rather than volume. Just like Van Doesburg, the Polish Constructivists regarded space as the key starting point for modern creative sculpture and architecture. They agreed that isolated surfaces, pure colours, and straight lines were crucial in architecture to foreground volume as much as possible. Their theories—Van Doesburg's Elementarism, Strzemiński's Unism, and Stażewski's Constructivism—had much in common.³⁷

All differences aside, it was the Polish BLOK and Praesens groups whose activities most resembled the thinking, abstract geometric style, and later Functionalist works of De Stijl artists. This was a true intellectual meeting of minds whose influence would be felt for years to come.

Translated by Gwen Jones

- 1 Artists of the Hungarian Neo grouping typically studied in Paris; some were pupils of Matisse (e.g. Vilmos Perlrrott-Csaba, Géza Bornemissza) or had joint exhibitions with him (Béla Czöbel, Sándor Ziffer). Intensive colours in plain compositions, strong contours and simplified shapes characterise the 'Neo' style. The first Hungarian avant-garde group was formed, in 1909, out of chiefly Neo artists (they were later known also as 'Searchers'). Nyolcak (The Eight) was an avant-garde art movement of Hungarian painters active mostly in Budapest from 1909 to 1918. They were connected to Post-Impressionism and radical movements in literature and music as well, and led to the rise of modernism in art culture. The members of [Nyolcak] were: Róbert Berény, Dezső Czigány, Béla Czöbel, Károly Kernstok, Ödön Márffy, Dezső Orbán, Bertalan Pór and Lajos Tihanyi. They were primarily inspired by French painters and art movements, including Paul Cézanne, Henri Matisse, and Fauvism ... While [Nyolcak] as a group had only three exhibitions, their activity was of immense significance, as their influence went far beyond the visual arts. The exhibitions were accompanied by series of symposia, and by events featuring new Hungarian literature and contemporary music'. 'Wikiwand', accessed 30 October 2019, [https://www.wikiwand.com/en/The_Eight_\(painters\)](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/The_Eight_(painters)). (*The Editor*)
- 2 *Ekspressionizem in nova stvarnost na Slovenskem 1920–1930*, exhibition catalogue (Ljubljana: Moderna Galerija, 1986).
- 3 *Kortársak szemével. Írások a magyar művészetről 1896–1945* (Budapest: Corvina, 1967), pp. 127–32.
- 4 Lajos Kassák, 'Carlo D. Carrà *Anarchistatemetés* című képe alá', *A Tett* 11 (1916): pp. 174–76. For more on this subject, see: Julia Szabó, 'Some influences of Italian Futurism on Hungarian painters', *Acta Historiae Artium* 24/1–4 (1978): pp. 435–43.
- 5 The art of the virtually self-taught Lajos Gulácsy (1882–1932) is not associated with any particular school, although he is occasionally said to be a forerunner of Surrealism on account of the kind of dreamy lyricism lingering over his paintings. His works also evoke a medieval or Pre-Raphaelite sensibility and feature Rococo-style figures that live in Naconxypan, a fantasyland of his invention. Upon the outbreak of the First World War he suffered a nervous break-down and from that time on was repeatedly treated in psychiatric sanatoriums, and died as an inmate of a psychiatric institution. (*The Editor*)
- 6 See Béla Uitz, *Háború (Szuronybarc)* (1917) and *Háborús rajz*, both reproduced in Júlia Szabó, *A Magyar aktivizmus művészete 1915–1927* (Budapest: Corvina, 1981), pp. 56–57.
- 7 Lajos Kassák, 'F. T. Marinetti (a futuristák római kongresszusa alkalmából)', *Periszkop* 1 (1925), Arad. Reprinted in János Kovács (ed.), *Periszkop 1925–1926. Antológia* (Bucharest: Kriterion, 1980), p. 272.
- 8 Lajos Kassák, *Az izmusok története* (Budapest: Magvető, 1979), p. 275.
- 9 František Šmejkal, 'Futurismus a české umění', *Umění* 1 (1988): pp. 20–53.
- 10 *Enrico Prampolini*, exhibition catalogue, Galleria Civica (Modena, 1978); Luigi Tallarico, *Verifica del futurismo* (Rome: Giovanni Volpe, 1970).
- 11 Plays directed by Prampolini in Prague include: p. Buzzi, *Parallelepiped* (Švandovo Theatre, 1921); Marinetti, *Il tamburo di fuoco* (National Theatre, 1922); *La Rinascita dello spirito*; E. Morselli, *Glauco* (National Theatre, 1923); William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* (National Theatre, 1924); L. Folgore, *Quadrante d'amore* (National Theatre, 1924). See: Federico Brook and Vittorio Minardi (eds.) *E. Prampolini* (Rome: Istituto Italo-Latino Americano, 1974), unpaginated.
- 12 Enrico Prampolini, 'Tendenze della pittura italiana d'avanguardia e nuova pittura assoluta', *Veraikon* (April 1922): p. 44–48.
- 13 Enrico Prampolini, *Feuerstein, NOI 2* (1924): p. 46.
- 14 František Šmejkal, 'Le constructivisme tchèque', *Bulletin analytique des périodiques d'Europe et de l'Est* 29 (1983): pp. 38–40; Květoslav Chvatík and Zdeněk Pešat, *Poetismus* (Prague: Odeon, 1967), pp. 109–40.
- 15 Giovanni Lista, *L'Art postal futuriste* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1978), p. 38.
- 16 František Šmejkal, 'Schwitters und Prag', in Michael Erlhoff (ed.) *Kurt Schwitters Almanach* (Hannover: Postskriptum, 1983), pp. 109–40.
- 17 Karel Teige, 'O dadaistech', in *Tvorba 2* (1927): p. 168.
- 18 František Šmejkal, 'A 20-as évek cseh avantgardja', in *Devětsil*, exhibition catalogue (Budapest: Múcsarnok, 1989), unpaginated.
- 19 Zenitism was the specifically-Yugoslav avant-garde aesthetics born around the magazine *Zenit*, founded and edited by Ljubomir Micić. The magazine was published in Zagreb (February 1921–May 1923) and Belgrade (June 1923–December 1926). (*The Editor*)
- 20 Irina Subotić, *Likovni krog revije 'Zenit' (1921–1926)* (Ljubljana: Znanstveni inštitut Filozofske fakultete, 1995), p. 7.
- 21 Ion Pop, 'Dada Rumänien', in Stephan Waetzoldt (ed.) *Tendenzen der zwanziger Jahre* (Berlin: Neue Nationalgalerie and Akademie der Künste, 1977), 3/111–3/114.
- 22 Andrzej Turowski, 'Dada Polen', in Stephan Waetzoldt (ed.) *Tendenzen der zwanziger Jahre*, 3/100–3/102; Andrzej Lam, *Polska awangarda poetycka. Programy lat 1917–1923. Antologia* (Kraków: WŁ, 1969).
- 23 Éva Forgács, 'Le a széplelkek macskazenéjével', in Forgács, *Az ellopott pillanat* (Pécs: Jelenkor, 1944), p. 140. See also: Imre Bori, *A secessziótól a dadáig* (Novi Sad: Fórum, 1969).
- 24 Activism, an avant-garde movement of progressive artists, philosophers, and writers, was launched by Lajos Kassák around 1915–1916. The Activists had radical views on society and arts without, however, a uniform programme, and took part in reforming the institution of art during the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919. (*The Editor*)
- 25 Pál Deréky, *A magyar avantgárd irodalom (1915–1930) olvasókönyve* (Budapest: Argumentum, 1998), p. 28.
- 26 Teige nevertheless regarded Kassák's 1922 appearance as Dadaist. Teige, 'O dadaistech', p. 168.
- 27 Lajos Kassák, 'Képarchitektúra', *MA* (March 1922): unpaginated.
- 28 Lajos Kassák, letter to Tristan Tzara, 1922; Lajos Kassák, letter to Ödön Mihályi, 1921. Budapest, Kassák Museum. See also: Péter György and Gábor Pataki (eds.), *A Dada Magyarországon* (Budapest: Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem, 1982).
- 29 Tzara, *Gáz-Szív* (Vienna: MA, 1922). Front cover by Lajos Kassák.
- 30 The correspondence is split between the Bibliothèque Littéraire Doucet (Paris) and the Kassák Museum (Budapest).
- 31 On Vilmos Huszár, see: Sjarel Ex and Els Hoek (eds.), *Vilmos Huszár* (Utrecht: Reflex, 1985); Éva Bajkay, 'A Hungarian Founder of the Dutch Constructivists', *Acta Historiae Artium* 30 (1984): pp. 311–26.
- 32 Marianna Gergely, *Huszár Vilmos (1884–1960) festő, tervező* (Budapest: Hungarian National Gallery, 1985), unpaginated.
- 33 László Moholy-Nagy, 'Produktion-Reproduktion', in *De Stijl* 6/7 (1922).
- 34 Krisztina Passuth, 'Théo van Doesburg et le mouvement d'avantgarde hongrois', in Serge Lemoine (ed.), *Theo van Doesburg, Peinture, Architecture, Théorie* (Paris: Philippe Sers, 1990).
- 35 Vojtech Lahoda, 'Emil Filla en Nederland', *Jong Holland* 9/3 (1993): pp. 45–7.
- 36 Andrzej Turowski, 'De Stijl i Polska Awangarda', in Paul Overy, *De Stijl* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1978), pp. 140–58.
- 37 A fundamentally-important text on this theme is Andrzej Turowski, 'L'avant-garde polonaise et Théo van Doesburg', in Lemoine (ed.), *Theo van Doesburg*, pp. 172–9.

