

Pázmány Péter Catholic University
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

THESES OF PHD DISSERTATION

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**IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF GREAT MASTERS – GYULA BENCZÚR AND
KÁROLY LOTZ AS TEACHERS OF THE FIRST AND SECOND
MASTESCHOOLS OF PAINTING IN BUDAPEST**

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1. Research background and problem definition

My dissertation deals with the history of the first Hungarian state sponsored higher art education institutions, the Master Schools of Painting I and II. The character of these schools was significantly influenced by the fact that they were led by the most renowned artists of historicism, Gyula Benczúr, Károly Lotz and Bertalan Székely.

My primary objective was to draw attention to the fact that these masters, apart from their outstanding oeuvre, were also involved in significant educational activities over decades. Therefore, in addition to exploring their teaching methods, I focused on placing the subject in an international context. I explored the work of the Master Schools, their role in Hungarian art life, and the later careers of their students.

My theme is closely linked to the early history of the Hungarian University of Fine Arts. Research on the University's past began in the 1990s under the leadership of Katalin Blaskóné Majkó, Director General of the Library. The period of the institution's history between 1920 and 1932 was covered in the 2011 exhibition entitled *Decade of Reforms*. The catalogue of this exhibition included a thorough paper by Vera Lájér on the Practical Painting Class and the Second Master School of Painting, which was an important contribution to my research. However, partly due to space limitations, Lájér has not yet dealt in depth with the question of Lotz's workshop, and the later careers of his students, nor has she discussed Lotz's influence on his pupils.

It was Júlia Vargyas, who first dealt with the circumstances of the founding of the First Master School of Painting and the cultural policy objectives behind it. She published her essay in the academic handbook on 19th-century Hungarian fine art. However, her research did not cover the significance of the master school system in the history of European art academies, nor the role of the Budapest Master Schools of Painting in the artistic and public life of Hungary.

Furthermore, Vargyas didn't examine in detail Benczúr's pedagogical principles, nor his teaching methods and his relationship with his students. In my research, therefore, I paid particular attention to these aspects. I have focused on the period between 1908 and 1920 in the history of the Master School of Painting I, which has been little studied in the literature so far.

The international context of the subject has been explored through analyses of the history of foreign institutions. It was Nicolaus Pevsner, who carried out the basic research on art academies until 1930. From the 2000s onwards, individual institutions initiated large-scale international projects to explore their past, usually on round anniversaries. In addition to the extensive jubilee publications, the studies of Ekkehard Mai shed light on the essence, development and spread of the master school reform model. His monograph published in 2010 is particularly important, as it summarises the results of Mai's research conducted during several decades. These antecedents have provided an indispensable basis for my exploration on the Hungarian characteristics of the introduction and functioning of the master school system.

To gain insight into the artistic and teaching methods of Benczur and Lotz, it was essential for me to study the teaching practices they explored during their study years abroad which contributed to the formation of their own teaching technique in Budapest. In addition to the research results of Gábor Bellák, I aimed to study such foreign archival sources and manuscripts relating to Benczúr's time in Munich and his master Karl von Piloty, which have been unknown to the Hungarian scholars.

The life's work of Károly Lotz's Viennese master – Carl Rahl – is less known than that of Piloty. Although his importance for Austrian experts of the period is undoubted, his oeuvre has not yet been thoroughly explored. The last summary of his art and his private

school was published more than forty years ago, in 1981, by Werner Kitlitschka. Since then, only Cornelia Reiter has published a few studies on Rahl. In Hungarian scientific literature, the importance of examining his artistic influence and private school has been most recently highlighted by Judit Boros. Although Ivett Polenyák's doctoral dissertation in 2014 focused on the role Rahl played in Munkácsy's Viennese period, due to her strongly historical (and not art historical) viewpoint on his pedagogy, several important aspects including his unique style did not get special attention.

Among Rahl's Hungarian-born students, Mór Than and Károly Lotz's work in the genre of mural painting is the most significant, as they spread their master's style in the Hungarian capital. Research into 19th-century Budapest mural painting was started by Gabriella Szvoboda-Dománszky, and since then some of the most significant secco cycles have already been the subject of academic theses and studies.

In connection with the previous results, I have examined Rahl's artistic principles and teaching practice in detail with the help of Viennese archival, museum and library sources. In addition, I was also interested in how Rahl influenced Lotz as an artist and teacher, in what points their methods differed, and how Lotz developed his own artistic style.

I also paid particular attention to the life's work of Lotz's and Benczúr's students. Of the eighty-two pupils only the names of Károly Kernstok, Adolf Fényes, Aladár Körösfői-Kriesch and József Koszta have generally been mentioned in the analyses so far, while other students have not been examined. These analyses suggest a simplistic picture: those who attended the Master Schools either became epigones or created in a style completely different from that of Benczúr, Székely or Lotz. I have therefore tried to draw a more refined picture of the work of the former students, based on art works

available in public collections, as well as reproductions and descriptions.

Finally, I have also examined the role that the years spent at the Master Schools as well as the network of relationships developed there, might have played in the students' later careers and professional opportunities.

2. Research methodology

In the first half of my thesis a historical approach was followed. The main sources were the student registers, forms and manuscripts preserved in the Library, Archives and Art Collection of the Hungarian University of Fine Arts (MKE KLM), as well as the materials kept in the Institute of Art History of the Humanities Research Center of the Hungarian Research Network (HUN-REN BTK MI). As the supervisory body of the Master Schools was the Ministry of Religion and Public Education, the Minister always included a separate section about these institutions in his annual reports. The available printed reports in the Library of the Hungarian House of Parliament were a great help in providing a chronological sketch of the history of the schools. Several documents can be found in the Archives of the Central European Research Institute for Art History (KEMKI) as well, including those relating to the foundation of the Painting Master School I, the official invitation of Benczúr and the temporary housing of the school in the building of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Apart from the institutional historical aspect, my research was mainly aimed to gathering information on the content of the education provided in the schools and the educational principles of the leading masters. I therefore compared the primary sources with information from pupils' recollections, contemporary press interviews and private

correspondences, which I treated with a high degree of source criticism.

In the second half of the dissertation, I examine the influence of Gyula Benczúr and Károly Lotz on their students. I have compiled the data, reproductions and contemporary descriptions of the works of art produced at the Painting Master School I into an Excel spreadsheet. Some of the original paintings and prints concerned are in the Hungarian Museum of Fine Arts – Hungarian National Gallery, and I have also analysed them.

The challenge of research was that most of the works related to the Lotz School are wall paintings, of which many have been destroyed, and many of the works by Benczúr's students are missing. I therefore also relied on contemporary reproductions and descriptions.

A separate chapter describes through case studies those artistic problems that appear in the works of several pupils at the same time. This part of the dissertation concentrates mainly on the works painted at the school, but occasionally examines paintings made immediately before or shortly after the students entered the Hungarian institutions. The aim was not to give a complete overview of the paintings produced at the schools, but to answer the question of whether Benczúr or Lotz played a role in the students' choice of subjects and artistic experiments, using examples grouped according to motifs and topics. In my analyses, I have primarily applied genre theory, but I have also occasionally used a stylistic-critical or iconographic approach.

The final chapters of the thesis examine the role of the Master Schools in shaping the later careers of their students. Firstly, I have compiled a list of the names of the pupils based on the registers kept at the MKE KLM and written a short biography of each of them (see the selection in the appendix). My research has focused on those students at the Master School I, who attended the institution for more than one year, and about whose works I have been able to gain an overview through descriptions, reproductions and the study of

originals. Concerning the visitors of the Practical Painting Class – the predecessor of the Master School II – I only focused on those who continued their studies at the named school. In addition to basic information (name, place and date of birth etc.), the curricula include details of studies, prizes and awards won. Furthermore, the related literature and archival sources are also listed. From these entries I compiled an encyclopaedia. For this part of the dissertation, I also conducted a research in the Archive of the HUN-REN BTK and the Archive of the KEMKI, but I used the Arcanum Digital Library, the Hungaricana portal, the Namespace application of the Petőfi Literary Museum and the "Matrikeldatenbank" of the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich alike. Examining the collected data from an artistic sociological perspective, I have been able to unravel the former students' opportunities and the typical career paths they followed, which in many cases were decisively influenced by their years at the Master Schools.

3. New results

In my thesis, I demonstrate that the introduction of master schools has established an institutional model in Hungary, which was based on workshop practice and respect for individuality. This model had already worked very well in several European – mainly German – art academies. Its success was mainly due to its practice-oriented and individualistic character. It has also enabled inherently rigid institutional structures to adapt flexibly to the needs of the emerging art market.

I. One of the special features of the Hungarian Master Schools of Painting is that due to the historical circumstance they were established relatively late and adapted to the local circumstances. Unlike institutes abroad they were not the top level of academic training, but essentially a substitute for it. The institutions in Budapest

were supposed to fulfil the function, which was not the aim of those, who developed the original European reform model, and they were unsuitable to do so.

II This issue was pointed out by several contemporary critics, first before the artists of Nagybánya and then before the group of the Eight started to gain reputation, i.e. at the turn of the century and around 1905. The criticisms were based on personal interests and the desire to gain a foothold for the new artistic groups and movements in the market, but they also raised several legitimate concerns. Gyula Wlassics, who was the most committed to the idea of free schools among all the Hungarian ministers of culture, perceived the problems clearly, but the change would have required more radical reforms than his. Despite the attacks and criticism, the schools were sustained by the respect for the leading teachers and their important role in state commissions, as well as by artists returning from abroad who wanted to join the Hungarian art scene through the opportunities offered by these institutions.

III Another important Hungarian characteristic is that the Master Schools in Budapest developed in parallel not only with the free schools but also with the art market, which began to flourish only in the second half of the 19th century. Consequently, they became both instruments and beneficiaries of state patronage of the arts.

The cultural policy objective behind their establishment was to boost portraiture and historical painting. Although these two genres were an important part of the schools' activities, and the students were involved in the execution of state and public commissions, they were free to create in the studios provided by the schools. They worked on pictures for exhibitions, but many of them also drew illustrations. As they had already graduated previously at a foreign academy or at the Hungarian Royal School of Model Drawing and Draughtsmanship Teacher Training (predecessor of the Hungarian University of Fine

Arts), they didn't really attend lectures in the Master Schools. Instead of that they were taught in a workshop-like manner via personal instructions.

IV. Benczúr's influence on his students can be seen most clearly in the transmission of a conservative aesthetic approach and the Baroque artistic tradition, most clearly manifested in the genres of portraiture and history painting, whether in the motifs or compositional solutions. In addition, he may have played an incentive role in the subject choices of his students working in the fields of nude compositions in mythological-biblical settings and the genre painting, but he also encouraged his students' experiments with *plein air*. Although a realistic approach is evident in the works of his pupils, very few of them adopted the highly materialistic character of Benczúr's painting technique.

Lotz's influence is most evident in the work of Viktor Tardos-Krenner, who worked closely with him. Unlike Rahl, the Lotz workshop was made up of an ever-changing group of people, and his collaborators were not limited to his students. Since their level of involvement in each commission was different, there was no stylistic similarity between them and their master, as in the case of Rahl's workshop.

V. In addition to free use of the studio, library and costume collection, the Budapest institutions provided a good opportunity for young artists returning from abroad to establish their careers. Most of them were interested in historical painting, portraiture and mural painting. Like their former masters, Lotz and Benczúr also used their network of contacts and their reputation to secure commissions and stable working conditions for their students. Regular opportunities to exhibit, participate in competitions and win prizes helped them start their careers in Hungary. Furthermore, the friendships and acquaintanceships they had developed during their studies often turned into working relationships later during their lives. They utilised

the knowledge acquired in the Master Schools not only as independent artists but also as teachers and conservators.

4. Relating publications

Studies:

Lotz Károly seccói a Magyar Tudományos Akadémia nagytermében. *Tanulmányok Budapest múltjából*, 37. (2012) 125–161.

A modern technika Olümposza. A Keleti pályaudvar falképei. *Életmód-történeti pillanatképek I.* Szerk.: J. Újváry Zsuzsanna – Mezei Emese. Pázmány Péter Katolikus Egyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kar, Bp., 2018. 97–114.

Lotz Károly fal- és mennyezetképei a Régi Múcsarnok épületében. *Ars Hungarica*, 48. (2022) 1:39–52.

Székely Bertalan korai nőnövendékei (1871–1885). *Ars Hungarica*, 48. (2022) 2:187–210.

Books, book chapters:

Az Országház falfestményei. Országház Könyvkiadó, Bp., 2016.

Az Országház falfestményei. Országház Könyvkiadó, Bp., 2021.

The Murals of the Parliament Building. The Office of the Hungarian National Assembly, Bp., 2017.

Wand- und Deckengemälde im ungarischen Parlament. Országház Könyvkiadó, Bp., 2018.

Les peintures murales du Parlement. Országház Könyvkiadó, Bp., 2018.

Los murales del Parlamento. Országház Könyvkiadó, Bp., 2018.

I dipinti murali del Parlamento. Országház Könyvkiadó, Bp., 2018.

Lotz Károly mennyezetképei a Régi Műcsarnok épületében. *A művészet terei. A Magyar Képzőművészeti Egyetem műemléki öröksége és művészeti gyűjteményei.* Szerk.: Révész Emese. Magyar Képzőművészeti Egyetem, Bp., 2021. 39–40.

The ceiling murals of Károly Lotz in the Old Kusthalle. *A művészet terei. A Magyar Képzőművészeti Egyetem műemléki öröksége és művészeti gyűjteményei.* Szerk.: Révész Emese. Magyar Képzőművészeti Egyetem, Bp., 2021. 43–44.

A Mintarajztanoda „női osztálya”. *Modellállítás. Az emberi test képi konstrukciói.* Kiállítási katalógus. Magyar Képzőművészeti Egyetem, Bp., 2021. 60–62.

The „female class” of the Hungarian Royal Drawing School. *Modellállítás. Az emberi test képi konstrukciói.* Kiállítási katalógus. Magyar Képzőművészeti Egyetem, Bp., 2021. 64–66.

Székely Bertalan pedagógiai tevékenységéről. *Modellállítás. Az emberi test képi konstrukciói.* Kiállítási katalógus. Magyar Képzőművészeti Egyetem, Bp., 2021. 100.

About Bertalan Székely’s pedagogical work. *Modellállítás. Az emberi test képi konstrukciói.* Kiállítási katalógus. Magyar Képzőművészeti Egyetem, Bp., 2021. 101.

Artwork descriptions:

A Nemzeti Múzeum díszlépcsőházának falképciklusa. *A magyar művészet a 19. században. Képzőművészet.* Szerk.: Papp Júlia – Király Erzsébet, MTA BTK – Osiris, Bp., 2018. 513–517.

Lotz Károly falképei a Magyar Tudományos Akadémia dísztermében. *A magyar művészet a 19. században. Képzőművészet.* Szerk.: Papp Júlia – Király Erzsébet, MTA BTK – Osiris, Bp., 2018. 520–527.

A Károlyi-palota 1864-ben készült falfestményének kartonjáról készült, kézzel átfestett albumin fotók. 1880 körül. MKE, Művészeti Gyűjtemény. *Térfoglalások. A Régi Műcsarnok története.* Kiállítási katalógus. Magyar Képzőművészeti Egyetem, Bp., 2022. 32. (4.4.)