

## ART EDUCATION WITHIN AND BEYOND THE WALLS OF THE UNIVERSITY

### ART, ART-THEORETICAL AND ART SUPPORTING PURSUIT OF ARTS PROFESSORS AND TEACHERS AT DEBRECEN UNIVERSITY BETWEEN 1914 AND 1949<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** This study is based on the PhD dissertation of the author. Its major goal is to explore, present and analyse artistic, art patronal and public activities of lecturers at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Debrecen as part of their instruction during the first period of the history of the university. The time frame of the research spans from the establishment of the arts and humanities faculty of the university to the formation of the new faculty structure following the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. The study contributes to the enrichment of results so far unexplored or partially explored about significant cultural – historical, cultural educational, and art patronal activities of lecturers, departments, workshops of the Arts and Humanities Faculty of the University of Debrecen and those of the city’s intellectual circles. Research was carried out with qualitative methods. The results of the study include that teachers and professors of the humanities provided the leading body of Debrecen’s public life, and as its integral part, the leaders or elite of the art scene in the city.

**Keywords:** art education; arts teachers and professors; artistic, art-theoretical and art supporting activities; cultural life of Debrecen

#### 1. Introduction: the goals of the research, the circumscription of the theme

A great number of celebrations and meetings, conferences and concerts have been organised recently to commemorate the centennial of the foundation of Debrecen University. In addition, a great many of historical researches have begun to explore the history of the jubilant university and the works of their prominent personalities. The present study belongs to this stream of research. University history and publications in the field have served as a theoretical basis to our work,<sup>3</sup> and we searched for novelties and primary sources which had not been researched before. Being a lecturer of Debrecen Reformed Theological University I have found it obvious to research the field in the sense that the Reformed College of Debrecen was the ‘cradle’ of Debrecen University founded in the first third of the 20th century with great difficulty. The Reformed College was not only the ‘cradle’ of the university but also

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<sup>3</sup> Mudrák József: A Debreceni Tudományegyetem Bölcsészettudományi Karának története (1914 – 1949); Orosz István, Barta János (szerk.): A Debreceni Egyetem története 1912-2012; Papp Klára (szerk.): A Debreceni Egyetem Bölcsészettudományi Karának története I., benne Kerepeszki Róbert: A Bölcsész- és Történettudományi Kar, 1912–1929; Papp László: Amikor a Nagyerdő még a Bem térig ért... Emlékek a 100 éves Debreceni Egyetemről, különös tekintettel a Tisza István és a Kossuth Lajos Tudományegyetemre (1912-2012).

the carrier of its spiritual heritage and the supporter in its development. The research antecedent of theme selection was first my thesis and then my dissertation written on the Educational Sciences Master Degree Program, in which I studied the pursuit of the first professors of Debrecen Pedagogical School (Béla Tankó, Gyula Mitrovics, Sándor Karácsony) in aesthetic education and artistic public life. This dissertation makes an attempt to draw a complex portrait of those lecturers, whose professional career has poorly or not been researched before from this respect. The scientific significance of the dissertation comes from the new approach towards the researching university arts professors' works and overall pursuit.

The main aim of my study is to highlight and analyse arts professors' artistic, art patronizing and public pursuit during their teaching profession in the first period of university education. Here we make an attempt to summarize and synthesize culture-historical and aesthetic achievements accomplished by teacher members of university arts departments, educational workshops and urban intellectual and art circles. The 1948-49 academic year brought a significant turning point in Hungarian tertiary education as well as in the university life of Debrecen, therefore the timeframe of my study covers the period from the beginning of the Arts and Humanities Faculty (hereafter referred to as Arts Faculty) of the university until the formation of the new faculty structure after World War II.

The first half of the 20th century saw artistic activity in several departments of the Arts Faculty mainly in the form of education and also as a supplementary activity. On the basis of our approach we follow the following classification of branches of art: dance, music, fine arts, architecture, applied arts, literature, theatre, photography and cinematography. We wish to introduce and discuss creative and/or supporter attitudes towards the above mentioned well-separable areas of art in the life-works of the above-mentioned professors. As far as literature is concerned, we concentrate on fine literary creative activity as opposed to literary history activities.

The role and significance of aesthetic, art-theoretical contents and art-historical knowledge in the formation of students' attitudes mediated through education is discussed in the last section? At a number of organisational units of the Arts Faculty we have found teachers and several professors among them who had been experts not only in their own discipline but in one or more branches of art as amateur creators, performers or devoted supporters of artists.

The significance of Béla Tankó, Gyula Mitrovics, Sándor Karácsony, teachers of Debrecen School of Pedagogy, is outstanding in this regard therefore we discuss their contribution to art-aesthetic education and its role and place in their life-work in in separate paragraphs in the last section?

Debrecen School of Pedagogy has always played an important role among the other Hungarian schools of educational science there were periods in our history when pedagogical views had been established at Debrecen University were of countrywide significance. Large-scale, comprehensive, synthesizing research on the performance of Debrecen School of Pedagogy started in 2003, and the findings were published in a few volumes. We joined the research led by Prof. László Brezsnaynszky called "Debrecen School. Pedagogical – teacher-training trends and their representatives in historical context"(OTKA, record number: K62593) at the Institute of Educational Sciences at Debrecen University.

The majority of the first arts professors at the university respected art or aesthetic education in their life-work having regarded it as an important factor in personality development, i.e. in the process of education. With their 'out-of-university' activities the teacher personalities we deal with in our study all had an outstanding impact on making the city's cultural life more colourful and program choice wider. Therefore our research findings enrich the so far unrevealed or partly revealed culture-historical, culture populariser and art supporting activity not only of university arts professors but that of arts departments, workshops and urban intellectual circles.

In our research the key consideration was that at the beginning of the 20th century to what extent university elite was socially expected to be involved actively in cultural and art life, or active participation in art was random, isolated, a private interest. The questions we considered to be crucial for this would include:

1. Were private docents expected to have perfection expertise in art, which strengthened their new 20th century public position? Was it a special interest to deal with the questions of art education in their career or all arts professors were involved in this activity as a tendency?
2. How did the theory of art appear in the curriculum of the university? Did it belong to mainly one department or several departments, or were there teachers who possibly taught only art subjects?
3. In our research we also wanted to answer the question if there was a relationship in the examined period between the students' choice of thesis themes and the art-aesthetic subjects and contents taught by teachers of arts faculty. Whether only those teachers tutored research on art subjects who taught art or among the tutors we can find teachers who were merely personally engaged in the theme? Within what subjects did the students write the most theses and with what results? What professions did these students choose for themselves after graduation? To what extent were their career determined by art education?
4. It is of high priority to clarify what public forums and events provided opportunities for university teachers to display their work or show their performances, and to patronize artists financially and morally. In what kind of art societies or associations, university or out-of-university organizations did they play an active role either as a leader or other position-holder? What branches of art were the teachers in our research involved?
5. What was contemporary cultural life of the city like? How was it affected by university teachers' public art activities? What was the audience of Debrecen like? Was it conservative or progressive and open-minded? What place did they take in contemporary Hungarian culture?

## 2. Methodology and different approaches, sources

Throughout the research qualitative methods were used in data collecting. We conducted historical and history of ideas research with biographic methods to explore the art activity of the university teachers and professors involved in the research. We regarded Debrecen School of Pedagogy as the main source and having found that there were several other teachers in the Arts Faculty who were actively engaged in art. We expanded the research into other departments of the Arts Faculty, and furthermore, into out-of-university events and organizations. All kinds of art activities which had been specified among the aims of the research i.e. fine literature, music, dance, visual arts, theatre, architecture, applied arts, photography and cinematography were examined as a medium. Art collecting, art patronizing activities and taking roles in art and public life were examined as well. Accordingly, 18 arts professors' career was analysed altogether from theoretical and practical aspects of art, namely Béla Tankó and János Mata, who had researched and educated Philosophy, Gyula Mitrovics and Sándor Karácsony teachers of pedagogy, János Hankiss, Géza Juhász and Ákos Koczogh literature professors, Nándor Láng and István Járdányi-Paulovics professors of archaeology, Jenő Gerlótei professor of French literature, Kálmán Gáborjáni Szabó and Zoltán Kádár teachers of the history of art, Béla Pukánszky, who taught German literature, Rezső Berei Soó, professor of botany, Imre Csenki, who taught and researched the history of art, and last but not least Gábor Lükő, who taught and researched folklore. Taking part and publishing in art public life were the main activities of Tankó, Mitrovics, Hankiss, Pukánszky, Soó, Mata and G. Szabó while it was an additional activity for the others.

With the help of document and content analysis we described how Debrecen Reformed College worked, how Hungarian Royal University of Debrecen was born on the grounds of the College and how the University and its legal successors were established. With the same method we discussed the activity of cultural and art organizations inside and outside the university, analysed the documents written by and about the concerned teachers of Arts Faculty. The messages of the works and the educational principles the authors represented and handed down have also been examined. Describing Béla Tankó, Gyula Mitrovics and Sándor Karácsony, the professors of the initial period of Debrecen School of Pedagogy we followed a certain algorithmic structure of content: early life, ideology, career in education, aesthetic principles and assessment of the career. To collect data about the foundation, history, operation and outstanding personalities of Debrecen Reformed College and Debrecen University we studied primary sources such as personal documents, manuscripts, relational, friendly and discipular memoirs having

found in the archives or being in the property of relatives together with university almanacs and records. We have also attempted to read and elaborate the documents of personal inheritance left, criticisms, reviews and jubilee studies written by colleagues and contemporary scientists. These primary, often previously not researched, sources were obtained from the Manuscript Collection and the Collection of Microfilms and Photographs of National Széchényi Library, Arts and Science Library of the University and National Library of Debrecen University, the Archives of Diocese of Trans-Tisza Region, Hajdú-Bihar County Archives of the National Archives of Hungary, the Collection of Local History of Méliusz County Library and the manuscripts of the Collection of Literature and Fine Arts of Déri Museum. Relying on these sources we have found former students and family members, whom then we interviewed and corresponded with.

To select and discuss literature review of the field we applied secondary sources, which were the following: collected works about the antecedents and establishment of Debrecen University, up to the present published or collected works, articles, studies and initially university later national publications about the professors' professional career, with special emphasis on the books published in honour of the centenary (Mudrák 2012; Mudrák and Király 2012; Orosz and Barta 2012; Papp L. 2013; Kerepeszki 2014; Papp K. 2014). Additional secondary resources were books and publications on the history of Debrecen Reformed College (Barcza 1988; Győri L. 2006), publications and study collections of Debrecen School of Pedagogy having been published hitherto and relevant doctoral dissertations (Brezsnyánszky 2004, 2005, 2007; Fekete K. 2004, 2007, 2013; Fenyő 2004, 2006, 2007, 2015; Ugrai 2005, Holik 2006, Gosztonyi 2008, Köves 2009, Vincze 2011, Vargáné Nagy 2013).

### 3. Conclusions: new scientific results of the research

In this study we discuss the significance of art creator, art theory educator and art patronizing activities of professors and teachers, who worked at the Arts Faculty of Debrecen University between 1914 and 1949. We claim that these arts professors and teachers having been the members of the examined organizations and associations belonged to the governing boards of the city's public and art life (often in several organizations simultaneously). However, there were deep and meaningful friendships and serious professional conflicts at the same time within this community.

On the basis of the results, the fact that Debrecen arts professors taught art has proved that the beginning of the 20th century at arts faculties could be described as the period of thorough educational freedom: every teacher taught what he wanted, what he believed in. The professors in question were very much likely to find this freedom in teaching aesthetic contents. They did not bolt themselves in the ivory tower of their discipline as their forefathers did in the 19th century. We can observe a shift in their role taking in public life as well. Being intellectual leaders they were to occupy positions in social associations, cultural societies. Therefore most of them represented their university at national and international meetings and conferences not only as a teacher but as well as a private person. The roles they had taken provided a number of opportunities for them to perform in public. Several publications of theirs came out in national and leading local papers, and they frequently gave lectures on fine art, music and literature both formally and informally on the Hungarian Radio, in the Hungarian State Opera House, Museum of Fine Arts, Déri Museum, Csokonai Theatre, Csokonai Circle, House of Artists or at the public events of Ady Society. Some of them expressed their thoughts and messages in creating works of art that carried their unique well-recognisable style both in appearance and in content. Others patronized artists in need. Many of them became well-known by citizens as critics.

We researched those out-of-university art and cultural or informative events and other opportunities for performing where the teachers, having been involved in the research, were introduced and reported on the large variety of their activities. These art events and forms of exhibition included the reading sessions of Csokonai Circle, the studies and reviews had come out in Debrecen Review, the exhibitions of Maecenas Association, House of Artists and Ajtósi Dürer Guild, the art events of Ady Society, the lectures and programs of Debrecen Summer School, the exhibitions, art shows in museums and city concerts.

Although teachers of other university departments mediated art contents, it was the lectures of the Departments of Philosophy and Pedagogy where art was the most emphasised. It originated from the teachers' interest and special qualifications and from their profession in the case of the teachers of Archaeology and History of Art. Therefore we cannot claim in general that all arts teachers mediated aesthetic knowledge in practice. Instead, it was more typical that dealing with theoretical questions of art in the lectures was a special phenomenon which made the examined university teachers' career more colourful.

The interest in art life has proved to be rather moderate in Debrecen in the examined period. Local artists struggled for their living. The chance of state finance, orders from the city or paid status such as an art teacher was little. This resulted in disappointment among the artists in the city. Hence art organizations and associations had to make increased effort to establish the relationship between the artists and the audience. It was a highly difficult task even for the most dedicated members. Collecting works of art had little tradition in Debrecen so there were few private collectors living in the city and they bought the works of earlier periods. It makes the activity of the few above-mentioned university professors even more exceptional. The city as a Maecenas did not exist, it merely provided place for exhibitions, performances and concerts. It was the Ady Association with its Literature sessions, Music and Fine Art classes whose impact not only on the local audience but on the audience of the capital city made Debrecen an outstanding cultural centre among the other rural towns.

It has proved to be characteristic of the examined teacher careers that the teachers had contacts with almost all branches of art but did not have personal contacts with all of them. Having analysed their writings, our first impression was that they had mainly published on questions of literature. The reason for that probably was that most of them had been writers themselves. At the same time we have found that the questions of literature and poetry were the most powerful among the other art and ideological questions in the period. In addition to literature, music was close to most professors for several reasons. They regarded it as a form of art capable of mediating the purity of religion on the highest level and in the most effective way. On the other hand, most of them were qualified musicians, played instruments and performed at events such as the Popular College Nights, performances, concerts, city concerts and smaller chamber nights.

On the basis of our research results the significance of the Debrecen School of Pedagogy is remarkable. In addition to his aesthetic lectures at the university Béla Tankó regularly performed at concerts with his university colleagues and students and had talks on the history of music and music aesthetics at the Popular College Nights and at the informative lessons of Debrecen Summer School. However, he can be admonished from the respect that he put neither his high-level talks nor his valuable ideas on paper. We could hardly find writings of him. Gyula Mitrovics published fine art exhibition reviews in national papers and regularly opened art shows mainly in Budapest from his young-age period he spent in Sárospatak. As the first head of the Department of Pedagogy, a lecturer of History of Art and a regular presenter of Debrecen Summer School he taught several subjects within aesthetics and history of art even though his aesthetics was behind the times, rather Kantian. Sándor Karácsony, who played on several musical instruments, emphasised the elemental involvement of folk art in the education of the young. Dramatizing played a significant role in his pedagogy. Being a student at Debrecen Reformed College he wrote several poems and plays and he never denied them in spite of the fact that these works were weak and of poor quality. Later, in his secondary teacher years he even directed a play. These three professors were pleased to patronize their young beginner or poor artist acquaintances, colleagues and students both morally and financially. One of their patronized was János Mata, who frequently got ex-libris orders from the university.

Another significant result of the study is the aesthetic message of the examined teachers' careers since art creating activity, writings on understanding art and reviews were all elemental parts of these careers. We have found an interesting relationship between these careers: no matter whether they had come from Debrecen or other places, sooner or later they all became members of those organizations in which the intellectuals of the city gathered, and in these organizations they kept close professional and friendly relationship with each other. Their active role-taking in publishing, scientific and informative lecturing, creating activity played an important role in the cultural life of the city. The fact that Debrecen was

regarded as the citadel of Hungarian culture in some branches of art in the period was in great part due to these outstanding personalities.

Analysing several theses written by students at the Arts Faculty we have found that art-aesthetic content in the themes had appeared in a low number, and most of them were elaborated under the supervision of those professors or university teachers who did not lead art courses as their main subject. Those teachers at the same time whose major was art supervised only one or two theses or none at all. Most of them were teacher degree theses and some of them were defended as doctoral dissertations. University students of the examined period seem to have been reluctant to choose art for their theses since it was a demanding job and needed a high level of self-dependence. Systemizing and examining the syllabuses of the university we have observed that art-aesthetic and art-theoretical courses appeared at more than one department. In the first place we have found courses on philosophy, pedagogy and history of art. The topics of these courses are well traceable in the art theme selection of the theses. Certain courses of the supervisors can be recognised in the titles of the theses. We assumed that art theme selection by the students would reflect their teachers' impact on their studies and had influenced their choice of career and interest after graduation as well. However, we have found little information about such an influence. The reason for this is that our only sources of information were the relatives and writings left. Unfortunately, there is no relevant follow-up research available, either. To sum up, the presented results of our study gave a detailed and comprehensive overview of the multi-various and multidisciplinary activities done by the teachers and professors of the Arts Faculty of Debrecen University at the beginning of the 20th century.

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