

Hungary

## VII. The Impact of Diverse Groups of Collectors on the Art Scene

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*Hungarian Private Collectors Turn International. A Case Study of Private Engagement in Contemporary Art in East Central Europe.*

Beyond the mainstream groups of collectors examined so far (e.g. businessmen), there are quite a few idiosyncratic phenomena worth noting. As elsewhere in the world, artists themselves are avid collectors in Hungary. Some of these collections (e.g. that of László Fehér, Tamás Konok, István Haraszty, Ákos Matzon) have become known through numerous exhibitions, yet there are dozens more. Most artists build their holdings by way of exchange, and this opens the way to international works, too, that would otherwise be difficult to obtain. A few artists (for instance Imre Bak) became known for that as early as in the 1970s, with museums borrowing foreign works from them; and it still holds that artist collectors are at the forefront of international collecting in the country.

Some of them have recently teamed up to promote their own oeuvre and their collections widely. Spurred by Dóra Maurer, the Open Structures Art Society (whose members range from István Nádler to Katalin Hetey) regularly stages exhibitions both in Hungary and abroad, based on their joint collection and documentation archive, which is an outstanding testimony of geometric creation in Hungary and the world over the past decades.

Art historians, curators likewise take an active part in the private exchange and flow of artworks, as do galleries, too. Gallery collections are particularly numerous in the country: they serve as reference for potential clients of the gallery who seem to lend higher credit to the artists if the owner of the gallery collects their works, too. Various gallery collections have been shown publicly (e.g. Godot Gallery, Várfok Gallery), proving to be a rather efficient tool of furthering the goals of commercial galleries.

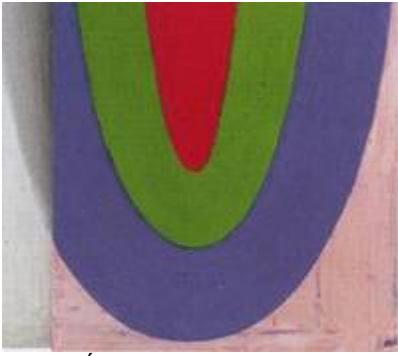
There are numerous further examples in each category. The Mobile MADI Museum is the collection of a group of artists, the Dovin Collection features as a gallery collection, while the holdings of Lajos Golovics make the case of art managers collecting. The private holdings of Lóránd Hegyi or the late Éva Körner and Ottó Mezei are examples of collections put together by art historians, and the list goes on. Altogether, we find a convincing spectrum of collections amassed by individuals or groups of individuals who are no professional collectors, yet are professionally involved in the arts scene. In some areas, these collections have dominant influence upon the fashion of collecting: in contemporary autonomous photography, two gallery collections are by far the most influential (that of Bolt Gallery and that of art dealer Károly Szabó). Adding the innumerable other institutional collections – from private and public foundations to schools, academies and various societies – we find that collecting has become a very widespread activity in Hungary.

However different the legal and financial background of these holdings of artworks, they certainly share a common impact: they radiate the conviction that contemporary art is worth treasuring. This I find central to underline against the widespread belief that contemporary art has no absorbing market in Hungary. On the contrary, a key finding of this research I have carried out since 2000 is that contemporary art is an increasingly popular form of the passion and the rational calculation of the most varied individual and institutional patterns of collectors in Hungary. True, these collections betray extreme differences in the quality and type of works acquired, and the conditions and prices applied in these transactions. As a result, the art market is far from being homogenous and transparent. This discrepancy describes the current situation in Hungary best: there is a lively scene for contemporary collecting in Hungary, yet it is of uneven and contradictory structure.

## VIII. International Outlook and Selected Further Reading

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Ákos Birkás, Kopf  
(174-9Mn8), 2008, Oil on  
canvas, 200x121 cm,  
courtesy: Gyula Kovács  
collection

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