

**ÚJ SZENZIBILITÁS IV.**  
**NEW SENSIBILITY IV.**



### 1. Situation '87 – Pularism and Search for Identity

This is the fourth and concluding part of the exhibition series "New Sensibility", started in 1981. The primary aim of the series was to present the latest tendencies in Hungarian visual art, those new subjectivist endeavours that followed the analytic, structuralist, conceptual and expansionist approaches. It also aimed at exploring the theoretical background to this new artistic attitude. In the light of the manifestations made by the trends "New Sensibility", "heftige Malerei" and "Subjective Historicism", we attempted to reconsider the relationship of Hungarian art to the international art scene. The exhibitions also tried to show the works of the youngest generation side by side with those of the middle generation, disregarding the groupings of generations as formed way back in the seventies.

These biennial exhibitions were the first to explore the New Subjectivist and Trans-Avantgarde trends coming to the fore in Hungarian art and they also offered viewpoints and proposals to other exhibitions based on particular themes and tendencies. The result of this attempt can be seen from the fact that the regular participants of the "New Sensibility" exhibitions were invited to other exhibitions too; for example, the majority of the works shown at four exhibitions – "IMAGE '84 in the Budapest FÉSZEK Gallery" in 1984; "Wet Paint: New Wave of Hungarian Painting" in 1984; "Snapshot: Three Generations of Hungarian Painters" in 1985; and "Eclecticism '85" in 1986 – belonged to artists who regularly participated in the "New Sensibility" exhibitions of 1981, 1983, 1985, and 1987, for more than a half decade followed up and made the public acquainted with the development, stylistic and theoretical changes and gradual differentiation of Hungarian New Subjectivist and Trans-Avantgarde art. It was also an important achievement of these exhibitions that they made it easier for many young artists to start their careers, since these were opportunities for them to have their first public show, which otherwise would have been difficult to obtain; and moreover, they could exhibit their works together with those of older, established artists.

Right from the start, the conception of the "New Sensibility" series had artistic pluralism as an important element. This fact has a significance reaching far beyond the aesthetic program of the "New Sensibility" exhibitions, if the general artistic practice and approach of the eighties are taken into consideration.

There are certain categories that can be used when trying to describe new Hungarian art: aesthetic subjectivism, search for identity, a close link to traditions of cultural history, and pluralism. These categories are not only important if the present situation is to be understood but they have decisive roles in the analysis of Hungarian art in the past two decades.

The category of pluralism, on the one hand, relates to the general situation of the art scene in the mid-eighties, when different phenomena co-exist: the avant-garde tendencies of the seventies, the impulses of Trans-Avantgarde as developed in the late seventies and early eighties, and other approaches, which conserved the artistic innovations of the sixties, the provincial – and sometimes folkloristic or naive-realistic-naturalistic – trends that developed quite independently of international tendencies.

On the other hand, this pluralism has a deeper, attitudinal element: that is, the new art of the eighties does not attempt at exclusiveness, methodological rigidity, reductionism and monolithic systems, neither does it show signs of a forced collectivism which would pretend to be a "movement". This relates to a new interpretation of artistic development which gave up the earlier monolithic model, the conception of development as an inevitable process. History, a subjective and creative relationship to history and the artist's self-liberation and search for identity are regarded as decisive factors by new art. Consequently, in place of an "inevitable development" theory, interpreted mechanically and fatalistically, there is a new approach to art, which is centered around a positive evaluation of regional art, a respect for the specific features of individual careers, the artists' self-seeking and a multifaceted dialogue with tradition.

Thus pluralism, on the one hand, is a fact given and on the other hand, it is a positive phenomenon which is undertaken consciously and which is related to the freedom of individual ways, an antireductionist approach, the appreciation of regionalism and a bold, unbiased and unlimited interpretation of the intellectual tradition of "past and the place". The latter phenomenon may be termed 'subjective historicism'. The oeuvres of many representatives of new Hungarian painting include the specific stylistic metaphors of subjective historicism, in which today's artists interpret and change the styles of the past, transforming them into personal stylistic metaphors, with a view to the expression of their own state of existence. Fragments of styles in local traditions, especially those of Baroque, Art Nouveau, Symbolism and Expressionism, but also those of late Cubism and Post-Constructivism mingling with elements of Art Deco, appear time and again in the subjective stylistic metaphors of Hungarian art, in the exciting and multifaceted process of the artistic identity-seeking. It is no coincidence that Hungarian artists today feel closely attached to the very phenomena of art history that do not represent 'pure' stylistic formulas but which, right from their origin, developed as a peculiar co-existence of various motives; the 'pure' models, which appear frequently in western European art, are seldom found in Hungarian art. This belongs to the very characteristic features of central European art history,



resulting from a specific cultural background. The innovating Hungarian artists of the eighties try to find their place in history and in European – and in particular, central European – culture. They are restless in investigating their peculiar and often ambivalent relationship to the traditions of Hungarian art. As opposed to the alternatives of renouncing history and denying tradition, Hungarian art in the eighties is featured by the approach to history as practised by Trans-Avantgarde and by subjective historicism that was formed in its wake. In the subjective stylistic metaphors created in the spirit of subjective historicism, artists relate forms of past ages directly to themselves, fill up the old pictorial topoi with individual gestures of their own, projecting in this way images of the past onto their personal experiences of today.

A short digression should be made here. If we put aside for a while the specific concern of painting and examine the new art of the eighties in general, we may witness in the most diverse layers of culture the coming up of the question of a personal relationship to local tradition, cultural history and art-history. Mainstream tendencies in the sixties and early seventies consciously denied history and tradition and searched exclusively for possibilities of media-improving, relating questions of linguistic development to those of expansionism. From the mid-seventies on, however, there was an apparent need for the courses of linguistic innovation to be reconnected with history, cultural traditions and great topoi and symbols of the common past. In Hungarian art this claim appeared in an even more entangled and complex way. In Hungarian visual arts of the sixties, innovation manifested itself in extreme simplification; the alternatives were a direct, quick and mechanical join in international avant-garde art on the one hand, and the innovation of national traditions, i.e. folklore, on the other hand. The breach between avant-garde and tradition seemed irreconcilable and irreparable. Hungarian avant-garde artists did not see any means to bridge the gap between international avant-garde culture and the preservation of national historical traditions. The question was put in the form of "either/or". In western Europe, too, those tendencies were only noticed which connected directly to those of international art, to Hard Edge art, Colour Field painting, Minimal Art, Concept Art, or to various phenomena of Performance art. This resulted in a view that in Hungarian art it was a specific avant-garde attitude which carried on development and any phenomenon differing from that model was judged provincial and regressive.

The second half of the seventies saw a general restructuring in outlook, in the course of which art criticism once again began to appreciate regional phenomena. Personal self-liberation and self-creation got into the focal point of attention, which included particular stress on the immediate intellectual environment of the artist, on artistic interpretations of the spiritual specifications of "past and place" and the possibilities of a poeticized history. Consequently, regional spirituality

could become a direct element in the formation of imagery. New art in Hungary abandoned rigid and sterile formula and, instead of a static differentiation between that which is national and that which is international, it put forward the traditions of central European culture. It left behind the naively and heroically conceived alternatives of the sixties as was described above. The new art of the eighties regards Past as a repository of symbols that are alive and can be made topical; there is a rich variety of topoi, symbols and compositional schemes to be found in the history of art, which can be related to the present day. They touch upon today's questions of existence in a way which will show the questions as formed by the past, adding width, perspective and variety to today's questions by historical examples and parallels. Through notions of the past projected onto the present and fragments of styles and topoi in art history related to our day, established historical gestures are superposed on subjective artistic gestures. Individual and personal contents are united with historical parallels and allegories so that the art-work becomes the focal point of references and imaginative ways. The artistic personality relates experiences of history to himself, puts on styles of former ages, enriching in this way the visual manifestations of his most current experiences of existence. Artists of the eighties look on the artistic Ego and history, cultural history as an inseparable unity; individual gestures are intertwined with great motives and archetypical forms of history. A work of art is the sensuous-visual objectification of this very unity. A picture is a lively and inextricably multifaceted spectacle that is impossible to be modelled. In this way the individuality of particular art works becomes stronger. Parallel with this, reproductive media lose their importance and individual techniques come to the fore (painting, drawing, moulding, carving, etc.). Each work of art has its own individual life; it puts on costumes of earlier styles, but through them the present is visible in a way which adds historical perspective and, by historical associations, depth to gestures of today. The new work of art is a sensuous-visual personification of the subjectively reinterpreted "cultural metaphor".

The particularity of the art-work and the sensuous power and irradiation of the imagery are contrasted to model-like, abstract, reductionist and analytic type of works in the sixties and seventies. It was exactly this increased sensuality that in the very early eighties, at the time of new painting's appearance in Hungary, arose feelings of hostility on the one part, and instances of professed approval on the other part. There was a change going on in the notion of modernity. The set standards and values of the Hungarian art scene and critical judgement, that had been connected to certain favoured methods and elements of outlook (e.g., media-development, expansionism, unlimited creativity, analysis of forms, systematization, intellectual modelling, a change in art's functions, reductionism, intermedial principles, etc.), and in the very beginning of the eighties they



began to be queried, or at least they experienced a great change. Instead of analysis, the demonstration of personal existence, and instead of media-development and expansionism, individual authenticity and the personification of the "cultural metaphor" came to the focus.

The young generation of artists, coming onto the scene in the beginning of this decade, regarded artistic activity a field for a radical self-liberation and a poetical self-creation, that is a domain within which the artist formulates his new images of identity through a series of intimate and varied dialogues with cultural history. The works of young artists are featured by a blend of immediate experiences of existence and symbols taken from the history of culture. In addition to them, there were a few members of the older generation (István Nádler, Imre Bak, Ákos Birkás and Károly Kelemen, who is their junior by ten years) who contributed to the acknowledgment of the new approach to art in the eighties by a re-interpretation of the avant-garde art of the seventies and by their shaping the artistic ways of "New Sensibility" and "Radical Eclecticism". In their works the re-interpretation of avant-garde tradition has a greater role to play, which includes the reconsideration of their former artistic activities. It is a characteristic element in the development of Hungarian art that the leading exponents of this great change in outlook in the eighties were the very same artists who had created, way back in the seventies, a definitely avant-gardist art. Now, in the eighties, they have again concentrated their energies on working out a new, authentic and topical approach to art. Their art show no traces of a "heftig" way of expression so characteristic of the young generation, neither do they show signs of the aggressive, and shocking metropolitan subjects, of Neo-Expressionism that reveal extreme situations of existence in a direct and stridently frivolous way. It is more important to them to find possibilities of re-creating a connection between the artistic creation of reality and the domain of "cultural metaphor" by a reinterpretation of the subjectively actualized symbols and topoi of cultural history, in the spirit of completeness. This striving towards completeness makes it possible to discover reserves of meaning within topoi of cultural history that may contribute responds to questions and challenges of our time. It is by this search for spiritual identity that the new ideal of completeness is formulated. It is not formulated in the spirit of a visionary future, against history; on the contrary, it takes its origin in a profound understanding of history and regional culture, in the personification of the "cultural metaphor" and in a poetical interpretation of the artist's intellectual environment. The new image of identity in this way is not represented in abstract models but in personal and concrete experience. The experiential elements in the relation to history and the intellectual environment are concentrated in the work of art, the artist's own experience of existence is depicted in a lively and radiant sensuous form, with symbols of cultural history projected on.

By the end of 1986, the new approach to art has been more or less crystallized, its system of categories formulated and stylistic conclusions manifest. Parallel with the calming down of heated debates and open confrontations of the early eighties, a slow and latent shift in the focus of attention has become more and more visible. In the late seventies and early eighties innovators concentrated their energies on setting the new phenomena against the art of the previous one and a half decades, drawing a distinction between the approach and achievements of "New Sensibility", "Trans-Avantgarde", "Radical Eclecticism" and "heftige Malerei" and those of avant-garde art in former years. As opposed to this, facts of continuity are becoming more important today, and throwing new light on the entirety of 20th-century art comes to the fore. New painting does not simply represent new styles, new tendencies and new movements in art, but the breaking up of the homogeneous model of modernism, a more critical and differentiated judgement on avant-garde culture, including a redefinition of rigid and un-historical clichés prevailing through long decades. The new art of the eighties started an "earthquake of values" in Hungary too; Hungarian artists, too, have reconsidered questions of the complex relation to regional culture. The art of "New Sensibility" and "Radical Eclecticism" accepts a model of development which is pluralistic, based on individual perception and style and which takes regional particularities into consideration. This model rejects the principle of gradual, "logical" and "inevitable" development; it does not regard innovation as absolute value. It conceives art as the complex of individual artistic responds to historical challenges and endeavours of self-creation.

## 2. "New Sensibility" and the development of new painting 1980–1986

The category of "New Sensibility" is a collective term used for all phenomena that base artistic activity on aesthetic self-liberation and self-creation, on the dialogue with cultural history, on the personification of the "cultural metaphor", and on the intensity of individual experience of existence, as opposed to analytic, reductionist, conceptual, structuralist and technical tendencies of the seventies, which created abstract models and concentrated energies on media-research. These new phenomena emphasize the sensuousness of the art work and the self-revealing character of the personal ways of creation, in contradiction to the immaterializing endeavours of Conceptualism. They set the particular picture of an independent existence against abstract, impersonal and intellectual models.

The category of "New Sensibility" is not a stylistic category. It marks a characteristic artistic attitude and outlook of the late seventies and early eighties, one which was the first in Hungarian art to express the specific features of a general and far-reaching change in the approach to art. "New Sensibility" is a multifaceted



phenomenon comprising various forms of expression from the art of individual mythologies through the Hungarian ways of Trans-Avantgarde and "heftige Malerei" to the consciously historical examples of "Radical Eclecticism" and manifestations of "meditative painting". Although the category of "New Sensibility" cannot be linked to a particular style and tendency, nevertheless it seems that in the previous six years, the characteristic features of this artistic attitude have been manifested in its purest form in various works of Hungarian new painting. The aim of this exhibition was to make the public acquainted with those phenomena that brought about momentous changes in art. That is why the achievements of Hungarian new painting are on display here: the new approach of the eighties to art first manifested itself in new painting, in the painting of "New Sensibility", and it has been showing in its most distinct and consistent form ever since.

1980 was a turning-point in contemporary Hungarian art. In the summer of 1980, Tibor Hajas, the outstanding artist of Hungarian avant-garde in the seventies, died under tragic circumstances. In the same year István Nádler and Imre Bak, quite independently of each other, carried on radical changes in their styles of painting. Nádler, giving up his minimalist and structuralist outlook of one and a half decades, unexpectedly began making gesture-paintings of intricate structure. The heterogeneity of the various groupings of signs is only united by the intense power and dramatic force of the personal expression. The heterogeneity of various pictorial elements (abstract gestures, more concrete indications of landscapes, signs based on musical structures, imprints of chance interventions, fragments of mechanical lattice-work, etc.) is consciously maintained in Nádler's new paintings. He regards this new kind of picture as some "visual diary", notes on pictorial thoughts and an expression of the complexity of personal experience. He gives up formal and structural endeavours, the exact and impersonal documentation of certain processes and the conception of an abstract and universal model.

Imre Bak, too, began shaping his eclectic compositions in 1980. These compositions of references to the most diverse historical styles are built in a system of intricate spatial structures that are transposed in plane. He abandons the homogeneity of the visual language to form a perplexing and ambivalent unity out of different surfaces, fragments of forms referring to various contents and spatial elements marking different space-conceptions. Bak finds his motives in cultural history. He projects the ornamentation of the Vienna Art Nouveau onto details taken from ground-plans of Post-Modern buildings. He mixes patterns of Art Deco with crystal-clear forms of Mondrian, references to Malevitch and László Moholy-Nagy, fragments of Lajos Kassák's "architecture of picture" presented in an ironical evocation. In the same way he mixes them with motives taken from Hungarian folklore, which often refer to an earlier style of Bak's own, too. References to historical styles and to their own "subjective history", that is their own previous stylistic periods, are important elements in

both István Nádler's and Imre Bak's works made after 1980. The way they place pictorial elements of their earlier works into a completely different context, again lays stress on historicism, the historical relativity of artistic conceptions and the pluralism of aesthetic systems. By mingling motives of "pure" stylistic formulae, elements of reductionist systems with each other, they break the validity of homogeneous models and the power of time, to demonstrate history's function of constant re-evaluation.

Besides István Nádler, Ákos Birkás, too, began in 1981 to join free gesture-painting with abstract structures of intellectual and symbolic composition. Ilona Keserű painted her "landscape" of Gellért Hill in 1981. In this painting the emblematic forms she used earlier are shifted, as it were, onto elements of actual sights. The colouring is a peculiar blend of artificial light, that of neon used in cities, and of natural light grasped in an extreme moment. All this appeared in Ilona Keserű's "Post-Modern city-scape" as a startling, mystical, and highly subjective vision of various meanings.

1980 in the career of István Nádler and 1981 in that of Ákos Birkás brought a watershed in style and approach. Nádler quitted geometrical abstraction, the immaterial and impersonal models as built by Minimal Art; Birkás abandoned the intellectual hyperrealism that touched upon conceptual art and sociological and ontological issues as well. They turned to the ways of expression practised by new painting. These were more expressive and antireductionist forms, which expressed subjective experiences and individual notions of completeness.

The change in the art of Imre Bak and Ilona Keserű took a more gradual course. It was a gradual process of re-evaluation, in the course of which their former systems of forms and approach to composition were changing step by step. Homogeneous pictorial systems that had been valid earlier became dissolved and subjective notions of completeness manifest themselves in heterogeneous systems of forms.

In the late seventies and early eighties Károly Kelemen shaped his own subjective historicism, which also centers around questions of history, the transformation of aesthetic values during the courses of history, and the historicalness of the concrete meaning of avant-garde. Kelemen was the first in Hungarian art to deal with the grave question of the crisis set in modernism. In 1981 he made his "manifesto" by his exhibition in Budapest. Almost all his works shown there presented the now legendary figures of avant-garde culture as "backgrounds" "behind" subjective gestures. Kelemen's gestures are those of erasure both in the concrete and in the symbolic meaning of the word. These gesture tear up an old system arbitrarily and radically. He uses gestures of erasure in the same way as gesture-painting uses personal and passionate brush-strokes. His "eraser-strokes" erase, as it were, historical images which here appear only as a kind of back-pattern and which represent certain significant figures of avant-garde culture, certain events and details of performances.



What was new in Kelemen's art was not only a new interpretation of eclecticism and the superimposition of heterogeneous systems of forms. Radically new was his approach to art, which showed modernism to be a product as "perishable" and "short-lived" as was art before modernism. By his new works Kelemen tried to manifest that avant-garde culture was utopian, related to a certain moment, and nested into history, consequently it was historically relative. One of the most important factors in his method is that each primary pictorial element carries cultural-historical references as well. By this Kelemen abolished the method of "pure" form-analysis to create instead, the fundamentals of "subjective historicism". The dynamic erasing-gestures, on the one hand, refer to the gesture-painting in the forties and fifties by evoking the passionate and subjective strokes of the brush. On the other hand, they add a completely new content to this reference: these gestures do not fill up the canvas; on the contrary, they erase the drawings that has filled the canvas. With this contrary process he makes us realize the position of artists in the eighties. The unrestrained forms of the primary gestures cut into the historical representation showing in the picture and erase, tear up and ruin images of the past. Whereas informel artists of the avant-garde in the fifties and the forties created elementary signs on the empty canvas, demonstrating their own existence, artists of the eighties project their own signs onto images of history. By erasing the past Kelemen also creates new images of past, as the eraser-gestures enter into the historical presentation, they transform and make the images of the past personal. This erase-gesture includes a further allusion, too. It evokes an action of Robert Rauschenberg's in 1953, which is interpreted as a symbolic manifestation of the birth of pop art, a kind of "ritual parricide". In 1953 Rauschenberg erased a drawing of Willem de Kooning, demonstrating in this way the relationship of the new pop-generation to the extremely subjectivist art of Abstract Expressionism. When Kelemen in his "eraser-paintings" chooses paintings from the history of avant-garde to destroy in a way that includes historical allusions itself, he attempts at touching upon that intellectual state, which is given for the new artists of the eighties: out of meanings and symbols that can be made topical by a subjective reinterpretation of cultural history, he creates a new structure of meanings. In this new structure of meanings the focal point is the artist's personal relationship to history. Here the notion of completeness is linked to the subjective reinterpretation of history, to symbols of a past related to the individual, and not to utopist visions of the future, nor to media-innovations that support these visions.

By the end of 1981 the situation became ripe for showing the new artistic endeavours at a collective exhibition. The exhibition entitled "New Sensibility I" in the Budapest FÉSZEK Gallery tried, for the first time, to show the new artistic ways under one roof. Naturally, the basic questions and ways of this new art were rather vaguely outlined by that exhibition. It laid greater stress

on discontinuity than on the investigation of precedents and hidden continuity. It was only a few days later that Károly Kelemen's exhibition of 1981 opened in the Dorottya Street Gallery in Budapest. These two exhibitions can be regarded as the two most significant events in the development of new painting and "New Sensibility".

In the following years there has been a remarkably quick, rich and varied process of transformation going on in the Hungarian art scene. Talented young artists join in the representatives of "New Sensibility" and "radical eclecticism". Some young artists presenting themselves in the first third of the eighties, create characteristically Hungarian forms the dramatic, shocking and dynamic "heftige Malerei". It contains elements of both lyricism, a "quasi-Impressionism" which touches upon surface phenomena of city life, and those of "Neo-Expressionism" that directly reveal aggressivity, angst and conflict. On the other hand, there is a spread among young artists too, of "subjective historicism". In addition and besides, there is another tendency within the new artistic endeavours, which starts from the reinterpretation of Hungarian avant-garde tradition in the sixties and seventies and which tries to interpret certain elements of Conceptual Art according to a new-subjectivist and eclectic approach. Many representatives of Hungarian "narrative painting" in the eighties started from the post-conceptual art of the seventies. It is again the Hungarian minimal art of the sixties and seventies and in a broader sense, the forms of the international concretist, minimalist and structuralist art that is reinterpreted in the spirit of the eclectic approach of the eighties by some artists. All these tendencies by the mid eighties brought about a highly differentiated and fundamentally pluralistic artistic situation. Today, in 1986, it becomes more and more evident that this new art makes both artists and the public re-evaluate the present situation over and over again, and more importantly, it requires a historical re-evaluation of the recent past, of the avant-garde art in the sixties and seventies.

In the early eighties there was a claim for collective presentation, for forming a group, and the generally characteristic, common features got prominence in the theoretical definition of new art. By the mid eighties, however, the particular features of individual ways were considered more important to be examined and shown. In the early eighties, the biennial "New Sensibility" exhibitions, the exhibitions organized by the Budapest "Rabinec" (Later called "Rabinext") Common Atelier and Gallery, and group shows of the Fészek Gallery and Ernst Museum mostly aimed at a comprehensive demonstration of the new tendencies, drawing attention mainly on common, and distinctly new, features of new painting, "New Sensibility" and "Radical Eclecticism". According to the new requirements of the mid eighties, however, the exhibition entitled "Eclecticism '85" that was organised in the beginning of 1986 and that had 33 participants, concentrated on the pluralism of new painting, the



differentiation going on in tendencies and styles. This process of transformation is even stronger today. New painting managed to break through and by the mid eighties a new approach to art took shape. This gradually transformed earlier system of values, threw new light upon evolutionary correlations worked out earlier and also upon problems of the relation of Hungarian art to the international art scene.

Possibilities of individual ways and personal expression today seem more differentiated and richer than they had in the beginning of the decade. After the dynamic and provocative "Sturm und Drang"-epoch of the new art has calmed down, there are signs today of a meditative, inward-looking, more intellectual and introverted artistic approach, which is focussed on the shaping of

individual notions of completeness. The mid-eighties saw the formation of a new "meditative painting" and a more general symptom of "cooling down", that is the extremely dramatic and psychic self-revelation and the shocking images of aggressivity gradually lose their importance.

This half a decade in the art of "New Sensibility" calls for viewing the movements and achievements of this period from some "historical perspective". The recent past has become history very quickly, and if realized, this fact throws out new challenges to contemporary artists.

LÓRÁND HEGYI



## FOREWORD TO THE EXHIBITION "NEW SENSIBILITY I"

*"You could think this sculpture an alive maid being hidden by shame from move; art is hiding that it is only art. The copy enamoured the amazed Pygmalion. Fumbling his work he tries to guess whether it is a human body or only an ivory, and he does not want to admit that it is only ivory after all."*

*(Ovid: Metamorphoses)*

While modern art creates new myths one after the other, myths and Utopias, heroic dreams are destroyed by evidences of historical-social process — and pieces of art torn out of their context are getting defenceless and exposed to misinterpretation and indifference. The myths of modern art: the "myth of activity", the myth of "creating the collective Self", the myth of aesthetic education of the new spiritual communities, the myth of an expansive art over the material and social reality, the myth of the destroyed walls between life and art — "pick up" the thoughts drawn up by artistic activity at the moment where the artistic practice comes to an end and "life would begin", if the intercourse between artistic-intellectual reality and nonartistic realities were harmoniously correlative. But it is not harmonious at all, or even, so problematic that new myths of inter-mediary function rise between the artistic-intellectual reality and nonartistic reality of the everyday life. The myths — and "anti-myths" of modern art are — so to say — extending the realm of art, make people believe that art is "not only art", and do not admit that ivory is ivory after all, even if it is just unlike. These myths work in an imaginary sphere, in the world of contemplation on the artist, the arts and the social tasks and mission of arts, in the world of some Utopia and draw up contents — not seldom formal or ritual ones — which are closed into the autochthonous structure of the artistic workpiece, and just — in lack of a real, direct social and private reception — remain dumb. These modern myths on art can be considered metaphors giving peculiar odds to some of the works — as far as they are existing at all — and opportunity to the artist to attempt to make his activity a part of the social practice. Because this attempt proves to be impossible — or requires a "self-denial" of the artist in such extent which would cease the art itself — the artist has no other chance to realize his collaboration with the social practice than to create a "meta-action" practised by help of a myth, where the real encounter of art and life is "substituted" by some sort of aesthetically determined "pseudo-ritual". This desired encounter — which is a "quasi-encounter", the imaginary imitation of the real encounter — has an aesthetic scene: "art is hiding that it is only art"; because it tends from art towards society and not conversely. It tends from art towards the world of "non-art", expands the scope of art on the heterogeneous field of "non-art", believes, wants to believe and suggests that its activity

surpasses the realm of art and aims at a change and reform of life, i.e. a genuine practical activity. This creating activity can at the same time never break with its own aesthetic roots and never be involved in the social practice, the production, but serves its metaphysical character: its subjectivity and "alternative character" exceeding the everyday, practical definiteness. When the artist driven by the desire of a real, productive, practically useful activity and an encounter of the real life, gives up the relative autonomy of creation, gives up the principles of poetic individuality and transparency — i.e. the work of art as an opening window should let an outlook towards the values of an "other world", towards a transcendent sphere —, leaves the imaginative world of artistic representation and creation; when he departs from the subjectivity of alternative values and aesthetical approach — will be irresistibly possessed by the practiced object-fetishism of the utilitarian art. He will get involved in the naive-technicist and impersonal practice of the omnipotent design, in the conflictlessness of productivity, or in the false and mendacious illusions of the noisy, diverting, optimistic show-makers and entertainers, and of the obsequious flattering, "charming" decorative art. On the contrary, if the artist attempts to pass the boundary between art and life in the direction of the anti-art, i.e. towards the "open structures" hunting direct and radical social-political effects, the above contradiction will be reproduced again: in spite of its openness, radicalism and unconventionality this deed remains "only art", and "art is hiding that it is only art" again. It remains art being unable to dissolve either in the everyday practicalism or in the determinedness of actual policy, or in any kind of "practical" social activity. Having a view-system of artistic character, the artist projects the principles of artistic approach towards the sphere being over the traditional frames. This sphere is never the social reality itself but an "area between", the "no man's land" which is of cardinal importance for the modern artist. This is the area from where the artist — in the course of his subjectively outworked "quasi-actions" — can take aim — allegorically — at the society itself, but because he cannot reach the aim in its directness and tangibility (it is hindered, among others, by the intricate system of art-institutions and impersonality of the system of social receptors), makes attempts to recall it by the ritual "quasi-actions" of artistical myths.

None of the above listed attempts is able to pass the boundary between art and life and to wind up the poetic individuality and intellectual independence of art without causing damage in the creating gesture and in art itself or without making them completely disappear in the objective and impersonal definiteness of practical life: since this boundary is passable only from the side of life, if is possible at all. The gesture of artistic creation contributes to the realization of the historic



definiteness of this boundary in one hand, and to the realization deriving from pervasion and perception of alternative values manifested in the works, on the other. In this context the Ovid-citations "only art" and "only ivory" are made a special stress upon: the artistic creative gesture forms new qualities by the poetic individuality and the personal presence of the piece of art. These qualities are able to act only in this "secondary reality", they can "realize" the values unfoldable in the everyday, practical life only in the sphere of this image-born reality. This "realization" is sometimes so powerful that its creator, the modern Pygmalion is virtually astonished seeing his creature "more real" than reality. In this case "only art" means not "mere" but "more": after the aborted 20th century Utopias and after the myths of the "collective artistic activity" it means the possible artistic activity itself.

The possible artistic – creative – activity is based upon a curious sensibility: a kind on intellectual sensitivity, a sort of intellectual experience and ability of forming which is powerful even in the moment when the remnants of the myth are peeling off the work, and the artist and his work face alone the objective reality: when the artist can move to any directions from his instant position because he is bound nowhere by any convention, when the last fragments of the myth of the great expansion has trickled off him, when he is cut off from the strict, reductive systems and absolute interpretations, when he does not accept theoretically preformed programs and ways and methods deduced from these programs anymore, when the impersonal objectivity of the documentation is obviously not of documentary value anymore, when in the generalization of intellectual experiences – coming from the most heterogeneous and instantaneous sources – he is guided by no values and no inner logic of any closed system, and when the smallest detritus of these unpredictable intellectual experiences is able to become a medium of human culture, or a metaphor of personal decisions and choices of existence.

"... art is hiding that it is only art". The word "only" is very important for us: in this "only" there is drawn up the withdrawal from the illusion of the great expansion, from the heroic activism, from the utilitarian-productivistic optimism, from the object-fetishism of the naive-technicism and at the same time drawing near to a new, introverted personally authentic art. An introverted sensivity is now coming into existence: new evaluation of the personality, refusing any kind of reduction, folding out of the poetic individuality of art and personal existence of the works of art; a tendency open to every direction, a tendency which has something common with eclecticism, a tendency approaching all intellectual-emotional happenings by an intim, fumbling spontaneity; a tendency making much account of the sensual moments of artistic work and drawing them into a direct intellectual context: "New sensibility". "Art after myths". "Art beyond Utopia". Resigned art.

Besides the ten partakers of the present exhibition some young artists could also have been invited, but partly the old personal connections, partly the spatial conditions of the exhibition made it impossible. The exhibition does not aim at completeness; the organizer has used the possibility provided by opening the new room of the FÉSZEK Gallery. The partakers of the exhibition are artists of different age, belonging to different generations, working in rather different ways and fields of art; they do not form any group and their concerted show is concentrated only for this occasion. Most of them are presenting works neither exhibited nor published, representing in some cases a recent shift of artistic approach.

LÓRÁND HEGYI

FÉSZEK Gallery, December 1981

Exhibiting artists:

Klára Borbás, Károly Halász, István Kalmár, El Kazovszkij, Ilona Keserű, Dezső Korniss, István Nádler, Sándor Pinczehelyi, Dezső Tandori, Gábor Záborszky



## FOREWORD TO THE EXHIBITION "NEW SENSIBILITY II"

Although we are now at the beginning of the eighties, we can feel already that a really new art situation manifests itself — after the "silent revolution" of the last five-six years. This fermentation was really a "silent revolution" without movements and ideologies, without struggles, battles and tragedies, but even so with some significant results — if we can use this word at all. We became aware of a fundamentally new art situation, of an essentially new cultural status belonging to the eighties — and behind these moments the characteristic artistic-attitude of the early eighties became obvious. After the rebellious and expansive avantgarde to the sixties and after the media-centric and "cool" avantgarde of the seventies now we are looking towards the "Trans-Avantgarde" of the eighties. Perhaps just this change-of-attitude is the very moment of the "silent revolution" of the "Trans-Avantgarde": turning inwards, emotional expression, decorativism, frivolity, reverie and picturesqueness, lack of programs, aptitude of openness as well as mental power to be able to move in all directions, irrelevance of rigorous analytical research, connection of the individual life with the cultural metaphor absorp-

tion of the cultural tradition into the most intimate and primary spheres of Ego, presence of Time and History in the world of the most personal realizations and imaginations, and together with these moments there is the hyperindividual wish for the direct expression of tensions, there is the pulsating richness of the surface — which brings the softest and finest gestures near to the experience of significance of life. This new sensibility does not reckon any kind of puristic systematical, reductivist models: it refuses the model in general! Instead of this the new sensibility of the "Post-Modern age" offers the gestures of the direct "fumbling-about-existence" based on individual authenticity.

LÓRÁND HEGYI

Óbuda Celiar Gallery, February 1983

Exhibiting artists:

Klára Borbás, El Kazovszkij, Károly Kelemen, Gábor Záborszky



The first appearance of the exhibition New Sensibility in 1981 at the FÉSZEK Gallery with 10 artists aimed to be only a forecast: something new is coming forth in Hungarian art, some new aspect is silently unfolding in painting and in three-dimensional works, as well, in the oeuvres of aged and young artists equally. At that time that exhibition could not have been thought to be able to show a comprehensive view; it was rather a proper indicator of some kind of changing, of a subsurface fermentation, giving the opportunity to catch the very beginning of an artistic transformation and to demonstrate the rearrangement of aspects and views with works, respectively.

The majority of the ten partakers took part with curious, extraordinary and "unusual" pieces of art at the exhibition. The symptoms of new intimacy and new subjectivism were completely unusual and without predecessors in 1981, most of the exposed works seemed consequently almost "alien" and rather arbitrary. The small "landscape" of Ilona KESERŐ – with the stylized black silhouette of the Gellért-Hill and the sparkling light of green neon lamps contained so unusual and never-tasted qualities which threw out the possibility of a new eclecticism. Keserő's recent works really prove her drawing towards a new eclecticism based on arbitrary abstract signs and signs of the visible world indicated that the phenomenon is not only the revival of the abstract expressionism of the forties but the demand on forming an extraordinary personal and eclectic artistic reality.

Instead of the "gestural writing" of the abstract expressionism the search for personal identity, the realization of the cultural intercalations and the lack of "pure formulas", a kind of anti-reductive aspect were getting determinative. Further activity of István Nádler and Károly Halász was getting in this direction; the exhibition "New Sensibility" in 1981 proved therefore a proper forecast. The expressive and dramatic trends of new painting have recently grown stronger especially in the activity of the youngsters: Zoltán ÁDÁM, László MULASICS, Zoltán SEBESTYÉN and Gábor ŐSZ. The trends individual mythology, new intimacy and new romanticism were represented by the installations of EI KAZOVSKIJ and István KALMÁR and by collage-paintings of Gábor ZÁBORSZKY. In EI Kazovskij's art the birth and death of myths, the process of evolution and breakdown of the cultic scale of values emerge as attitudes, as permanent factors of human existence. In this case the personal, arbitrary formgiving of the new eclecticism is manifested again by stylistic-metaphors recalling Hellenism and symbolism, respectively.

In 1981 all of these thoughts could have been drawn up with exploratory and searching character and that exhibition had taken an uncertain, transitional, unpredictable and "hypothetical" task. Since 1982 it has

motif-associations of heterogeneous pictorial elements and surprising style-metaphors. In the works of Imre BAK made after 1982 an objective, reasonable "radical eclecticism" is unfolding which reflects the intellectual situation of the eighties and at the same time intends to absorb the traditional features of Central-European culture. In this kind of eclecticism the style-metaphors, the fragments referring to stylistic characteristics of certain artists and elements of his own earlier works result in a very exciting, genuine, dynamic, manifold and complex world of forms.

István NÁDLER's and Károly HALÁSZ' gestural paintings exhibited in 1981 were full of emotional elements showing some interest in the structure, as well. Containing the moments of pictorial heterogeneity and manifoldedness, the works proved the growth of subjectivism and expressivity. In this new way of pictorial representation the personality of the artist is put in the centre again, the direct representation of the immanent state of the Self, the radical freedom and autonomy of Self-notions, the unrestrained forwardness of fantasy and emotions were dominating. The manifoldedness of the pictorial reality, the heterogeneity of the picture-building elements, the calligraphic gestures and the organized forms, the provocative association of the transforming the former frames and possibilities, of course. As soon as in 1984 great, comprehensive and retrospective exhibitions were organized showing the works of elder and younger artists, as well. The Bak-Birkás-Molnár-Szirtes show exposed at Pécs in February, 1984 evidently proved that not a new style-orientation was the question. The great stylistic variety indicated a new tendency of view, drawing off the reductivist-analytic models, pushing forward of the aesthetical subjectivism, respectivity to the history, the myths and the style, the new evaluation of the tradition, and the individual approach of the "cultural-metaphor" – which led the personality of the artist back to a cultural-historical context, into the state of cultural intercalation, while the interiorizing of the cultural milieu helped him to preserve his autonomy.

The exhibitions "KÉP '84" (PICTURE) in March–April, 1984 in the Budapest FÉSZEK Gallery and "FRISSEN FESTVE" (WET PAINT) in August 1984 in the Ernst Museum were really representative shows where the whole new Hungarian painting was exposed in its richness and variety. The youngsters had also several opportunities to show their works at Budapest and in the country. The shows of Zoltán ÁDÁM, József BULLÁS, István MAZZAG, Tamás, SOÓS, László MULASICS, Zoltán Sebestyén, György CSESZLAI, Gábor SZÖRTSEY and András KONCZ were also remarkable events of new painting.

By these great, comprehensive reviews the exhibition "New sensibility II" was able to reveal only a slice of the



been appearing quite obvious for the profession and for the public as well, that an important, multifarious shift of artistic approach is taking place – involving more generations – in Hungarian art being parallel to the international phenomena of trans-avantgarde, new painting and radical eclecticism. The peculiarity of the Hungarian type of evolution is that answers given to the cultural challenges of the eighties are drawn up first not by the revolting members of the young generation but by some representatives of the middle one. István NÁDLER's and Ákos BIRKÁS' new expressive painting, Imre BAK's and Tamás HENCZE' radical eclecticism, Miklós ERDÉLY's intimate "soft geometry", Sándor PINCZEHÉLYI's picturesque painting, Károly HALÁSZ' "pseudo-gestural painting" form different paths of new sensibility: The art of Károly KELEMEN absorbed the aspect of "subjective historicism" of the trans-avantgarde as early as the last third of the seventies. The historical view of the present and the subjective interpretation of the recent past as a "style-metaphor" mean the elevation of the "cultural-metaphor" in a personal and intimate level. Kelemen was the first in drafting the obvious fact that any style, any scale of forms, any existing attitude is proper for the artist of the eighties to draw up the new identity-picture of his own.

After 1982 group exhibitions showing different manifestation of the new artistic approach came one after the other. More and more young artists were appearing on the orbits of new expressionism, "radical eclecticism", new intimacy and "subjective historicism" – ena, stylistic trends and moods of intuition which make attempts to draw up the special cultural situation of the eighties, i.e. searching the new identity-picture of the artistic Self in the eighties. The collective term new sensibility covers the phenomena: new intimacy, new subjectivism, new improvisative expressionism, "subjective historicism" and "radical eclecticism". The present exhibition attempts to group these artistic manifestations by putting the activity of the youngest generation of artists into this context.

The works of the youngsters are characterized by tightening expressivity, strong emotional richness, preference for the absurd in topic and ingenuine, witty subjective "style-metaphors". A peculiar "quasi-mannerism" is also appearing, where the ornamental, decorative transcription of existing motives is linked to the expression of the fantastic, the dreamlike and poetic moods. The complexity of composition and semantical manifoldness of subjective "style-metaphors" are generally characteristic especially of József Bullás', Tamás Soós' and László Mulasics' painting. In addition to the listed values an emotionally motivated dramatic gestural painting appears in the works of Zoltán Sebestyén and Gábor Ósz. The fresh, improvisative setting of visual and emotional impressions, some kind of "post-conceptual impressionism" is also toning the art of the young generation. This is generally connected to the moods of new-wave music, where the banal and sentimental is mingled with the intellectually screwed

trends of changing. The exhibition organized in February, 1983 in the Óbuda Pincegaléria brought – among others – surprising and unexpected works of Károly Kelemen: These large pictures painted with harsh colours, dynamical, distracted brushwork broke with the well-known monochromism and former style of the artist, following a frivolously decorative, ornamentally eclectic, expressive way of painting. Some sort of "post-modern" hedonism has appeared here, where the tension between the banal topic and abundant details was converted into an exuberant, tormented, manifold pictorial world the most intimate and instantaneous moments and at the same time the historic existence of citations, allusions and associations were transmitted by subjective "style-metaphors". In Kelemen's painting destructive, extravagant, informal surfaces high-flown, ornamental well-done, "manneristic" fragments are welded by some sort of resigned decorativeness. The fragments refer "once-expressed" attitudes, gestures and feelings to life in an altered, re-interpreted and actualized way.

The exhibition "New sensibility II" in 1983 was only a flash again, drawing attention to the newest symptoms of the trans-avantgarde painting and to the attempts for integrating "cultural metaphor" and personality. The exhibition at the same time made stress upon the state of stylistic pluralism and some works risen from individual mythologies and new intimacy were also presented. Consequently, the concept new sensibility can be interpreted a collective term: a frame of all the phenomena. The present exhibition "New sensibility III" points out dominantly the different tendencies of new painting, because the changing in artistic approach characteristic of the new sensibility seem to be drawn up mainly in painting. These processes are quite open and unpredictable. The exhibition does not want to form any channel to the events nor to vindicate oracular merits. A picture of Ákos Birkás has been chosen to be the sign, the pictorial motto of the exhibition. A stylized head, a face in dark blue tones is looking ahead surrounded by a tormented, destroyed, decomposed world, burnt, black ruin-like fragments under the lowering sky painted by flame-like, red stripes and trickled patches. It is a late 20th century "landscape" from the fields of the soul – speaking of brokenness, hopelessness and defencelessness. In the picture nevertheless a latent, scarcely noticeable but definite sign of vital understanding can be detected, striving through the vivid, pulsating, painfully instantaneous moments. The presence of the anthropomorphic structure based on a hidden symmetry means nevertheless the promise of a kind of totality. This totality is the integrity of the "fields of the soul", the concept of perfection existing as a possibility in the aesthetical process of composition. This concept is based not on the indifference of a model produced by strict, reductive simplifications but on the vital richness and authenticity of the individual notions of totality. New intimacy does not rely up on general, omnipotent models but has its roots in the compactness and



resulting in an absurd and grotesque world of fantasy, as in the painting of István Mazzag and Kálmán Pollacsek.

The young artists following the ways of new painting brought unusual and quite new in colouring as well, which is completely unprecedented in the Hungarian art: the tones of pale pink, pale green, neon-lilac and dazzling yellow give sometimes and aggressive, perplexing composition, or on the opposite a smooth, lyric one, respectively. This new way of colouring being characteristic of István Mazzag's and Kálmán Pollacsek's painting is in a way ranging with the "metropolis-topics" of the international new wave tendencies, though the Hungarian version bears the sign of a new lyricism, e.g. in works of Zoltán Ádám and Tamás Soós; and is cut off from the remnants of expressionism like heroism, the dark romanticism of threaten and decay, the pseudo-tragic fate of the late 20th century anti-heroes.

unexhaustibility of life and personality. This abundance serves for a starting point to build the new identity-picture of its own by letting the "cultural metaphor" act through the personality.

LORÁND HEGYI

Exhibiting House of the Budapest Gallery,  
September, 1985

Exhibiting artists:

Zoltán Ádám, Ákos Birkás, Klára Borbás, József Bul-  
lás, György Cseszlai, István Kalmár, El Kazovszkij,  
Károly Kelemen, András Koncz, István Mazzag,  
László Mulasics, István Nádler, Gábor Ősz, Kálmán  
Pollacsek, Zoltán Sebestyén, Tamás Soós, György  
Szőnyei, Gábor Szörtsey, Gábor Záborszky