

FOUR PAINTERS

*Daniela Bikácsi—Ernő Kunt—Ildikó Simsay—
Gábor Záborszky*

Last summer's exhibitions in Budapest were somehow all relevant to the problem of tradition versus innovation. The majority of Hungarian painters and graphic artists have reached a point where the old forms evolved by previous generations no longer convey their message adequately, yet while experimentally worth new forms of expression, they wish to preserve continuity, too.

This may seem to be reformism or even conservatism but this appearance would certainly be deceiving in the cases of the four young artists: Daniela Bikácsi, Ernő Kunt, Ildikó Simsay, and Gábor Záborszky.

Daniela Bikácsi exhibited only water-colours in the Studio Gallery. Water-colour is not considered the medium for facile, appealing painting in contemporary Hungarian art, including the art of Bikácsi. Like everybody else, she enriches the water-colours with additives to render them more close-knit, fuller. She also uses various tools: by alternating the soft and hard brush on the surface of her compositions she creates fluffier or scratchier patches of individual colours—sometimes she scratches the strata of paint, to bring forth patches of more expressive brushwork from under the series of layers.

These, however, are only her means and not her end in her search for new solutions starting out from tradition. The tradition in question is the art of the Hungarian painter Aurél Bernáth, her sometime teacher at the Academy of Fine Arts. Bernáth's art had grown out of the soil of the European avant-garde—especially the constructivism and expressionism of the twenties—and he has developed a very characteristic closely structured "post-impressionist" language which includes even expressive gestures; his chief virtue was the forceful and accurate treatment of colour. Bikácsi acquired from Ber-

náth this selfconscious and forcefully structured colour treatment, but she has transcended this stage and replaced the colour scale intended for the mimetic approximation of reality with a different grouping showing the influence of the "Hard edge" where contrasting rather than complementary colours play the leading role. This method seems apt to express everything from surrealist play to complete abstraction. Witness particularly the following works: "Gate," "Imagined Gate," "A Merry Animal," "Sleeping Demons," "Landscape" and "Sight."

Ernő Kunt is half a generation ahead of Bikácsi and, on these grounds, can be gradually eliminated from the ranks of the "young artists." He is, however, not an alien among them: indeed, his career and ambitions bring him nearer to them than to his contemporaries.

Although he exhibited paintings and coloured etchings in the Art Gallery, the bulk of his work consists of drawings. And these drawings are a good example of the dichotomy of tradition and innovation in his art.

The sources of Kunt's art are farther back in time than those of Bikácsi. He draws his inspiration from the early years of this century, the period of "activism" in Hungarian art, which had found its definitive form in the workshop of the two reviews edited by Lajos Kassák, the *Ma* and the *Tut* published from 1915 to 1925.* In the period of its growth activism was fed by two sources: the early avant-garde movements in France, and the style and content of German expressionism. By combining the two Kunt might have become eclectic, but he managed to avoid this and created a synthesis which enabled

* See NHQ 28.

him to progress further, primarily as a graphic artist.

Activist draughtsmanship developed the powerful stroke of the heavy line to its limits, communicating simultaneously both the physical and intellectual processes of formation. Kunt assimilated this complex approach successfully: he sketches his lines with powerful strokes of Indian ink; their swing preserves the rhythm of the drawing and their strong body gives weight to the entire composition and to each of its elements.

This identity in concept and style is, however, only partial: Kunt's works show the influence of the cubist spatial view and expressive *Weltanschauung*, but they have also absorbed the experience of calligraphy.

Unfortunately, this successful synthesis can be found only in his tint-drawings; otherwise he is carried away by the colours and still unable to discipline the brush-strokes running wildly on his surfaces. For instance, the drawing of the "Four Minarets in Bokhara" is a fine piece of work but the picture gets lost in the whirling and howling reds.

Ildikó Simsay exhibited at the Studio Gallery. If we must find affinities with other painters we will be reminded of Tivadar Csontváry, Lajos Gulácsy, István Farkas—i.e. the artists closest to surrealism. Yet together with the art of Nolde and Munch, these present but remote analogies to Simsay's paintings. Even so Simsay is not alone in her art: it is not difficult to detect in her works the impact of the naïve "surrealism" of folk artists, of primitive painters and carvers, and of the figurative world of the Hinterglass pictures, or the figures in the paintings of Margit Anna* whose art stems from the same sources.

I should add that the peculiarly convulsive character of her system of communications

which recalls Munch and Nolde confines her art to its own narrow circle. Her mysterious figures and whirling colours seem to obey the pressure of something and gradually detach themselves from the stylistical conventions of art.

Gábor Záborszky also exhibited his works at the studio Gallery, this forum of young artists. Being the youngest of the four, he naturally reacts in the first place to the contemporary trends in painting. He first presented his works to the public two years ago and since then has experimented with almost all the opportunities offered by the styles of our age—especially the variations of the New York School. It seems, however, that his period of indiscriminate experimentation is nearing its end: the material of this new show is homogeneous in style and concept. His pictures are related to the main stream in Pop Art—the photos and documents he uses are rather evident, but they are accompanied by picturesque elements; carefully shaped surfaces enhanced by certain colours surround the photos which are distributed with a deliberate carelessness. This notion of placing them at random acquires an ever more important role in Záborszky's compositions because these objects can thus be used again and redistributed in a different framework.

Of course, this description does not mean that Záborszky has arrived at a settled, fixed style. His present style leaves everything open, he may advance or step back from here. One thing seems certain, though, that Záborszky will progress along his own path, whatever that may be; these two years have taught him sovereign mastery over his selected means, and it seems that he does have a lot to say. His frequent changes were also motivated by the abundance of his messages.

* See NHQ 32 and p. 178 of this issue.