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*In Search of the Budapest Secession: The Artist Proletariat and Modernism's Rise in the Hungarian Art Market, 1800–1914.* By Jeffrey Taylor. Saint Helena, CA: Helena History Press, 2014. 260 pp.

Jeffrey Taylor's book covers the emergence of the modern art market in Hungary, locating the evolution of Hungarian artists' groups, organizations, and exhibition venues from the early nineteenth century to World War I within the international developments of the era. Taylor interprets the *fin-de-siècle*, one of the richest periods of Hungarian art, from a hitherto underexplored angle, placing the intricate mechanisms of the art market in the focus of his investigations. Protagonists like the Nagybánya group or The Eight and major modern artists like József Rippl-Rónai or Lajos Tihanyi thus appear in an unusual light, portrayed not only as pioneering artists but also as conscious actors in the art trade and inventors of groundbreaking (self-)marketing strategies.

The author is currently assistant professor of arts management and entrepreneurship at Purchase College, State University of New York, and for a long time has been an active participant in the art business himself. Thanks to his practical expertise, Taylor knows the art market from the inside and from the outside: he is intimately familiar with the mechanisms of the art trade in a way in which very few academic art historians are. The great strengths of Taylor's book stem from the author's multi-faceted knowledge: his hands-on experience on the one hand, and his academic erudition on the other.

The book's introductory chapter outlines the emergence of European art markets and points to the dispersion of models, originating in France and the Netherlands but adopted also by the European peripheries in the course of the nineteenth century. During the process of what Taylor calls market pluralization, the intermediaries of art (exhibition venues and organizations) would multiply, beginning with breakaway movements which challenged the monopoly of dominant national organizations and continuing with an ever-increasing number of private galleries and splinter organizations, which created rival forums for the art trade. After outlining the pan-European models, Taylor briefly marks out the position of Hungarian art organizations within the international trends, indicating (at this point, only in an introductory manner) the similarities and differences between the core countries of Europe and a peripheral state like Hungary.

The question raised by Taylor in the introduction as one of his chief problems involves the dating and identification of the Secession in Budapest:

his question concerns which particular group or movement can be characterized as equivalent to the well-known Secessions of Central Europe, i.e. the Vienna Secession, the Munich Secession, or the Berlin Secession. But “Secession” as a term is not used by Taylor exclusively to designate movements and organizations which have gone down in art history by that name. He interprets Secession as a movement which shatters the market monopoly of a formerly hegemonic organization and therefore has key importance in the development of modern art markets. By tracing the evolution of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century art organizations in Hungary, he sets out to devote his book to the quest for the Hungarian Secession.

Chapters 1 and 2 deal with the evolution of the art market in nineteenth-century Hungary. Chapter 2 presents the emergence of a major national art organization, the National Hungarian Society of Arts (*Országos Magyar Képzőművészeti Társulat*), and analyzes the role its exhibitions, modeled on the Paris Salons of the period, played in a period in which the art market in Hungary was just in the making.

Chapter 3 discusses the history of the National Salon, a second large art organization in Hungary founded in 1894, which was the first significant formation to challenge the former monopoly of the National Hungarian Society of Arts. At the beginning of the chapter, Taylor formulates an excellent reading of what *Nemzeti Szalon* was all about, interpreting the new institution from the point of view of market logic and competition within the profession, rather than explaining its emergence by aesthetic differences. In his introduction of the pre-World-War-I history of the National Salon, Taylor offers excellent close readings of the conflicts, struggles and rivalries within the Hungarian art world. In this chapter, Taylor also examines the problem of the artist proletariat, going deep into the roots of the issue. According to Taylor’s thesis, the emergence of the free art market and the late-nineteenth-century proliferation of exhibition opportunities gave rise to an artist proletariat, steadily increasing in numbers as the nineteenth century drew to a close; out of that mass, only a narrow elite (which Taylor terms “the labor aristocracy of established artists”) was able to make a living off the arts as a profession.

In Chapter 4, Taylor traces the evolution of private galleries in Hungary, following the process of specialization from the mixed profiles of early dealers to the specialized art galleries of the early twentieth century. Taylor introduces the five par excellence modern art galleries that operated in Budapest in the early 1900s, and he introduces the reader to their business models. By presenting a

number of their exhibitions, Taylor shows the importance of the roles played by new galleries in shaping the new canon; analyzing their activities, Taylor also identifies various new types of exhibitions, such as “solo-type shows” or traveling exhibitions accompanied locally by social events, emphasizing, very aptly, the marketing strategies at work behind the staging of the shows.

Taylor’s main question in the book is what one should identify in Hungary as the equivalent of European Secessions; which institution or splinter group bears the closest resemblance to the well-known European models of the era.

Taylor’s preoccupation with capturing the Hungarian Secession, however, may have diverted his attention away from other equally important achievements of his own work. Is the main issue *really* which group or institution we should call secession? The story Taylor tells is actually more exciting: he interprets the relatively well-known history of turn-of-the-century Hungarian art from an unconventional and highly original point of view. Taylor’s close examination of various interest groups and their behind-the-scene struggles provides the reader with hitherto undiscovered perspectives, offering a richer understanding of the special logic of art as an economic field.

Power struggles within the art world are interpreted in Taylor’s book not as competing aesthetics and credos of “schools,” but as acts of competition for better sales opportunities. Taylor’s highly ingenious interpretations throw the milestone exhibitions of the period, steadily fixed in the hagiographies of Hungarian artists and described hundreds of times by the creators of the modern canon, into an entirely new light. The reader will understand that the rise of certain groups, such as the Nagybánya painters, depended at least as much on their successful strategies of protest and marketing as on their artistic novelty, especially compared to unsuccessful group formations in the same period.

Having acknowledged the unquestionable merits of the book, I would make a few critical observations as well. One of the major shortcomings of the book is already apparent in the introductory chapter, and it runs through the entire volume. One assumes, and the reviewers quoted on the back cover of the book also assume, that Taylor’s potential audience will consist of readers from all around the world, ranging from non-Hungarian art historians to art collectors, people who are not experts in fin-de-siècle Hungarian art but wish to acquaint themselves better with it. The critical observer, however, cannot avoid the impression that Taylor in fact did not really clarify to himself who his book’s target audience would be. The issue here is not one of content but one

of communication. Taylor seems implicitly to suppose that his readers will be familiar with the artistic movements and institutions he discusses in the book; even the introduction is written in this spirit. Taylor makes insider references to movements, groups, and institutions without sufficiently introducing them to his readers. Hungarian names of groups and venues, as a rule, are only translated into English at their first occurrence, but then are used in their original Hungarian forms throughout the book. Hungarian is an esoteric language to most foreign readers, and one cannot presuppose any degree of familiarity with the meanings of Hungarian words (unlike in the case of French, Italian, Spanish, or German texts). To most native English readers, *Nemzeti Szalon* (National Salon) and (a more striking example) *Magyar Képzőművészeti Társulat* (Hungarian Society of Fine Arts) will appear undecipherable at best and intimidating at worst. The frequent use of such Hungarian names, although of course understandable from the point of view of accuracy, makes reading comprehension difficult for non-Hungarian readers and unnecessarily burdens Taylor's otherwise excellent and very readable style. It may have been more prudent to use the English versions of the names of the various art groups and venues throughout the book, with the Hungarian originals given at the first occurrence.

The second problem is that Taylor does not sufficiently introduce the milieu about which he intends to write. Again, the implicit assumption seems to be that the reader will know all the basics about the Hungarian art world of the fin de siècle and he or she will not need any orientation. That assumption is most probably wrong, unless the author's intention was to address his book to the professional circle of Hungarian art historians; otherwise, a thorough introduction to the circumstances of the art world in Hungary, including its structures, groups, and institutions, would have been not only beneficial but a must at the beginning of the book.

Maybe as a consequence of the book's general strategy, the broader context (e. g. society and politics) is not discussed at all. One would of course not expect the author to paint a broad canvas of turn-of-the-century Hungary, but Taylor should have included at least some examination of the interactions between art, society, and the political sphere. An understanding of societal forces is strikingly absent from Taylor's main arguments. "The expanding stream of young men and women throwing themselves into the profession of artist" (p.xi), and, hence, producing the artist proletariat, according to Taylor's thesis, is a phenomenon that requires much more complex explanation that is not limited to market mechanisms and exhibition facilities: much of the explanation should deal with

conditions that lie *outside* the world of art, e. g. with the growing social prestige of art as a profession at the end of the nineteenth century.

Other factors may be directly related to art but external to Hungary. Near Munich, one of the undisputed art centers of the region until the end of the nineteenth century and a city with its own academy of fine arts, was an art market far superior to Budapest because of the presence of foreign customers; Munich offered very attractive sales opportunities and probably motivated several talented young Hungarians to embark on a career as an artist in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

As far as the embeddedness of the art market is concerned, contextualization is not among the virtues of *In Search of the Budapest Secession*. New Cultural History and New Art History do not seem to have influenced Taylor's approach very much, although his highly ingenious, market-oriented focus clearly sets him apart from conventional art histories as well. In general, he scarcely deals with the other side of the art market, namely customers and the public at large, unless in the abstract as part of the demand side of the art trade. Neither are the contemporary habits of exhibition attendance (as an element of emerging bourgeois lifestyles) discussed in depth, nor is the social prestige of membership in partially lay art societies analyzed.

Apart from these shortcomings, however, the book offers a refreshingly new reading of the Hungarian fin-de-siècle. I can heartily identify with Taylor's pragmatic approach, and I fully appreciate Taylor's insights as well as his erudition. The body of primary sources on which he draws is truly impressive, as is his synthesis of the secondary literature. *In Search for the Budapest Secession* will be indispensable reading for anyone interested in the birth of modern art in Hungary and a good introduction to the evolution of market models in nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Western art.

Erika Szívós