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Where Art Met History: Holocaust Exhibitions in Early Postwar Hungary

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ABSTRACT

This study explores Holocaust-related exhibitions organized in early postwar Hungary, between 1945 and 1949, from the end of World War II up until the communist takeover. The high number of such exhibitions (26 in total) attests to the existence of a widespread and extensive culture of remembrance, especially in the first three years, when the vast majority of these shows (21) took place. These exhibitions involved art almost exclusively; even the historical exhibitions included artworks and relied heavily on graphic design solutions. The first part of the study provides insight into a pioneering historical exhibition organized in early 1946 in Budapest ('Those Who Died and Those Who Fought for Our People's Honor') and a similar exhibition material prepared later that year, sent to New York to be exhibited at YIVO in 1947 ('The Jews in Europe, 1939–1946'). In both cases, montage-based design played a key role in conveying messages; moreover, several autonomous artworks were equally integrated into the historical narrative. Both exhibitions were prepared by the Documentation Department, which, in the first case, belonged to the Jewish Agency for Palestine; in the second case, it was already merged into the Hungarian branch of the World Jewish Congress. Importantly, no data has surfaced so far about further historical exhibitions about the Holocaust (or similar topics: war crimes, antifascism, etc.), organized in Hungary in this period. The second part of the paper provides an analysis of the actors involved, highlighting the eminent role played by various organizations, and dedicating special attention to the Jewish and Zionist ones. The final part concerns art exhibitions, differentiating between 'martyr' and 'commemorative' exhibitions, both organized from the works of victims of the Holocaust – works that with a few exceptions did not themselves relate to the genocide – and exhibitions featuring artworks about the Holocaust created almost exclusively by survivors, mostly narrative graphic series depicting various personal experiences of the victims.

KEYWORDS

Exhibition history; postwar Hungary; Holocaust art; Jewish Agency for Palestine; World Jewish Congress; YIVO

Introduction

This study explores Holocaust-related exhibitions organized in early postwar Hungary, between 1945 and 1949, from the end of World War II up until the communist takeover. The first part provides insight into a pioneering historical exhibition organized in early

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1946 in Budapest ('Those Who Died and Those Who Fought for Our People's Honor') and a similar display prepared later that year, sent to New York to be exhibited at YIVO in 1947 ('The Jews in Europe, 1939–1946'). In both cases, montage-based design played a key role in conveying messages; moreover, several autonomous artworks were equally integrated into the historical narrative. The second part of the paper provides an analysis of the actors involved, highlighting the eminent role played by various organizations, and dedicating special attention to the Jewish and Zionist ones. The final part concerns art exhibitions. In summation, what this study explores are the various constellations of where and how art met recent history – the Holocaust – within the context of early postwar exhibitions in Hungary.

Holocaust exhibitions

A Holocaust-related exhibition (or Holocaust exhibition in short) is understood here as a display whose decisive aspect is the Holocaust: The exhibition either provides a narrative of (or reflection on) the Holocaust, or commemorates its victims. In other words, the genesis of these exhibitions or their content are inseparable from the Holocaust; without the latter they could not have taken place. Such exhibitions were organized at public or publicly accessible venues, and due to the ritual of an opening they constituted a social event. They were nonetheless fleeting in nature, as even despite vivid press coverage, due to the lack of a permanent and tangible result, such as a catalogue, they were quickly forgotten. This study excavates and reconstructs this once-important scene of early Holocaust remembrance in Hungary.

Art and history

As Holocaust exhibitions thematized a recent historical event, one might expect to find predominantly historical exhibitions, based mainly on historical sources, such as documents, press clippings, photographs, and verbal or written testimonies. Nevertheless, the Hungarian case contradicts these assumptions. Firstly, the overwhelming majority of these exhibitions were, in fact, art exhibitions; and secondly, even in the case of two historical exhibitions prepared in Hungary, art played an eminent role both in their content and their presentation.

Given the lack of prior, comprehensive research into other countries' exhibition histories, it remains a question whether Hungary was an exception, or whether the omnipresence of art at early Holocaust exhibitions was in fact widespread. Taking into consideration that the fine arts already had an established exhibition infrastructure and that many survivors, both art professionals and amateurs, created works about their experiences, the eminent role of art in exhibitions might prove to be a general phenomenon. This is further supported by the fact that most episodes of the Holocaust they visualized were lacking similar, readily available photographic documentation.

The 'myth of silence' and Holocaust exhibition history

The current research is in line with the historiographical turn of the last decades, which brought about a new interest in the early decades of Holocaust remembrance, thus

refuting the earlier ‘myth of silence’ that hypothesized a lack of such activities.¹ Nevertheless, the early postwar exhibition history of the Holocaust remains almost completely unexplored.² Although a few, exceptional, monumental exhibitions were discussed, the existence and history of further exhibitions remain uncharted.³ Moreover, the exhibitions that entered public knowledge were more about war crimes in general, as opposed to the exhibitions discussed here, which focused on the voice, perspective, and experience of the survivors, as well as the memorialization of the victims.

Although the subject of this study is art, the perspective is that of exhibition history. Consequently, the aim is not to analyze individual artworks from traditional art historical perspectives (such as style, composition, and quality), but rather to reconstruct the infrastructure (institutions, networks, and actors, along with their intentions), through which those reached the public. These attest to the existence and widespread nature of grass-roots initiatives, among which the contribution of Jewish and Zionist organizations, as well as the role of survivors in general, should be considered eminent.⁴

Hungary: The Holocaust and the early postwar period

With few exceptions, the history of Holocaust remembrance in early postwar Hungary remains unexplored.⁵ It nonetheless offers extremely rich material, especially in the domain of fine arts and in the case of exhibitions that previous research did not touch upon.⁶

The local characteristics of Hungarian history, the Holocaust, and its aftermath had important consequences on its early exhibition history. First of all – as opposed to the

¹Hasia R. Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945–1962* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); David Cesarani and Eric J. Sundquist (eds.), *After the Holocaust: Challenging the Myth of Silence* (London: Routledge, 2012); Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record! Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); and more recently in the case of the Eastern Bloc: Kata Bohus, Peter Hallama and Stephan Stach (eds.), *Growing in the Shadow of Antifascism: Remembering the Holocaust in State-Socialist Eastern Europe* (Budapest-Vienna-New York: CEU Press, 2022).

²In fact, the first major attempt to survey early postwar exhibition histories is the current issue of *The Journal of Holocaust Research* this study was also written for.

³These were usually made possible through public funds or infrastructure. Cédric Gruat, *Crimes hitlériens: Une exposition-deuil au sortir de la guerre* (Paris: Édition Tirésias-Michel Reynaud, 2017); Heidrun-Ulrike Wenzel, *Vergessen? Niemals! Die antifaschistische Ausstellung im Wiener Künstlerhaus 1946* (Wien–Berlin: Mandelbaum Verlag, 2018); “Warsaw Accuses: Ruins on Display,” in Agata Pietrasik, *Art in a Disrupted World: Poland 1939–1949* (Warsaw: Academy of Fine Arts-Museum of Modern Art, 2021), pp. 99–126.

⁴In the case of the two historical exhibitions, through selected examples – based on the catalogue and the partial recovery of exhibition material – several aspects of the presentation of history through art (both material and design) are considered. The reconstruction of the panorama of art exhibitions is based – due to the lack of catalogues and further sources – on their reception in the press. In some cases, further research might bring forth more details about some of these shows, yet their position and importance can only be judged within the complex system of early postwar Holocaust exhibition history, described below. The overview and analysis of the types of exhibitions and actors will also enable a future comparison between different countries.

⁵A few aspects (literature and social discourses) were recently explored: Tamás Kisantal, *Az emlékezet és a felejtés helyei: A vészidőszak ábrázolásmódjai a magyar irodalomban a háború utáni években* (Pécs: Kronosz Kiadó, 2020); Lóránt Bódi, “A kibeszélhetetlen számbavétele – társadalmi diskurzusok a holokausztról a II. világháborút követően (1945–1948),” PhD diss., ELTE University, Budapest, 2022.

⁶An exhibition, curated by Zsófia Farkas, recently showed a number of early postwar works; the exhibition catalogue with extended material is forthcoming. *Eyewitnesses: Depictions of Trauma from the Collection of the Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives*, Budapest, 2B Gallery, July 13–Aug. 17, 2021. Earlier, Katalin S. Nagy published a rich and detailed monograph, a veritable encyclopedia of Hungarian Jewish artists, in a grouping based upon their specific fate during the Holocaust (death during or survival of deportation, labor service, etc.); the biographies of survivors cover their postwar periods as well, up until the artists’ death. Katalin S. Nagy, *Emlékkavicsok: Holocaust a magyar képzőművészetben 1938–1945* (Budapest: Glória Kiadó, 2006).

deportation and murder of the majority of its rural Jewish population – from the capital city, Budapest, Jews were not deported.⁷ As survivors played a central role in creating artworks about the Holocaust and organizing exhibitions, this historical background offers a partial explanation as to why exhibitions took place almost exclusively in Budapest.

Following the fall of the right-wing Horthy regime and the rule of the Arrow Cross (Hungarian National Socialists), after the end of World War II a few years of relative political pluralism, as well as cultural and artistic freedom, followed: This was the transitory period during which the Holocaust exhibitions in question could take place. The gradual takeover by the communists reached its full potential by 1949. By this time, the number of Holocaust exhibitions had already diminished. Following the last few public opportunities to exhibit Holocaust-related works, the topic became undesirable due to the prevailing antifascist historical narrative, which concentrated on the heroes of the antifascist struggle, paying little attention to the victims.

Most of the artists mentioned in this study are not part of the canon of Hungarian art history. Two reasons might explain this: the Holocaust and emigration. Firstly, artists who were commemorated in exhibitions because they fell victim to the genocide left only a partial oeuvre behind. Secondly, many of the Jewish survivors who created works about the Holocaust did in fact leave the country (after their liberation, in the years leading up to the communist takeover, or during the 1956 Revolution), breaking their oeuvres in half geographically, and thus making their entry into the canon difficult physically (due to the relocation of the works), culturally, or even politically.

Part one: Historical exhibitions

'Those Who Died and Those Who Fought for Our People's Honor,' Budapest, 1946

The exhibition that opened in January 1946 at a Jewish Cultural Hall in Budapest was an ambitious endeavor.⁸ Titled *'Akik meghaltak és akik harcoltak népünk becsületéért'* (Those Who Died and Those Who Fought for Our People's Honor), it brought together history, fine arts, and applied graphic art, in order to narrate the Holocaust from a Zionist perspective.⁹

Organized by the Documentation Department of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, *'Akik meghaltak'* was accompanied by a 32-page-long catalogue published by the Jewish Agency, with the support of the Hechaluc (Hehalutz) youth movement.¹⁰ Since further photographic documentation of the exhibition has not surfaced so far, it can

⁷Concerning the history of the Holocaust in Hungary, see the third, revised edition Braham's monograph: Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 2016).

⁸21/b Fürst Sándor [Hollán Ernő] Street. The 'cultural hall,' which belonged to the Csáky Street Synagogue district, opened in 1938 in a modernist tenement building, which also housed a Jewish elementary school, built for a Jewish pension fund. "A Hollán-utcai új kulturterem felavatása," *Egyenlőség*, Apr. 7, 1938, p. 11.

⁹In the press; however, most probably following the press release, the exhibition was referred to not by its title, but rather as the 'documentary exhibition of the suffering of the Hungarian Jewry,' making the Zionist framework inconspicuous. *Szabad Nép*, Jan. 23, 1946, p. 4. A news item in the paper of the Social Democratic Party mentioned the title of the show, but in a purposefully shortened form, as *'Akik meghaltak és akik harcoltak ...'* in order to avoid mentioning the Jewish self-reference *'népünk becsületéért'* (for our people's honor), labeling it as an 'antifascist exhibition.' *Világosság*, Jan. 29, 1946, p. 4.

¹⁰Alfréd Trosztler, *Akik meghaltak és akik harcoltak népünk becsületéért* (Budapest: Jewish Agency for Palestine Dokumentációs Osztálya, 1946), p. 2.

only be evaluated based on the content of the catalogue, while the mise-en-scène can be judged by the single-known exhibition view, published therein¹¹ (Figure 1).

The long text in the catalogue, written by Alfréd Trosztler – who participated in recording protocols with the survivors – presents a historical narration, covering the episodes of the Holocaust first in Europe and then in Hungary.¹² He discusses various forms and groups of resistance, especially the Zionist youth, continues the text with the role of Jewish fighters from British Mandatory Palestine, and finally draws a contrast in between the devastation in Europe and the building of a new life in Eretz Israel. In the afterword, he addresses the reader directly, summarizing succinctly the almost teleological nature of the narrative presented in the catalogue:

Think of the blood of the little children spilled, the hecatombs of the corpses, let the death marches proceed in front of you, imprint it on your memory, why it happened, and then perhaps these sad documents will serve as a guide for you; then perhaps you will look for a way out and the past will not be repeated. ... Those Jewish youth who died in the ghettos and on the battlefields sacrificed their lives in the struggle for an ideal, for socialist Palestine. But if through their blood sacrifice they have succeeded in showing European Jews the right way, if they finally recognize where their place is – then they did not die in vain.¹³

Creating and illustrating the exhibition was a collaborative effort. It was organized by Imre Herbst, who also selected the photos. The catalogue includes 21 complex illustrations (mostly montages) and one map, all of which follow the narrative of Trosztler's text closely. The majority of the works were drawn by two artists, Jenő Szóts (ten works) and Gyula Lőrincz (eight), the rest were by Sraga (Shraga) Weil (two) and János Blassberg (one). The largescale montages illustrated key episodes of the historical narrative in a concise, visually compelling, and informative way. They presented a hand-drawn or painted overall composition, consisting of similarly handmade illustrative parts and striking typography, as well as inserted documentary photographs. Between Szóts and Lőrincz, clearly the former was more successful in organizing the various elements into a coherent composition, while a number of Lőrincz's montages appear to be rather unbalanced.¹⁴ Some of the works included are powerful infographics. Szóts's montage-based '*Gettó: Budapest*' compares the size of the city and the ghetto in Hungary's capital city, as well as the average space available for inhabitants therein¹⁵ (Figure 2).

Weil's neatly drawn diagram (a rare exception, as it does not use the technique of montage), '*A zsidó ifjúság védelmi szervezete*' (The Jewish Youth Defense Organization), shows the various types of activities performed.¹⁶ Szóts's 'Auschwitz Birkenau' represents

¹¹Photograph by Béla Kálmán. Trosztler, *Akik meghaltak*, p. 3. It was reported that the material of the exhibition would be recorded on 'keskenyfilm' (narrow, 16 mm film) in order to reach more people. It is currently an open question whether this meant the material included in the catalogue (and if so, whether the negatives survived), or if it alludes to a moving image. *Magyar Nemzet*, Jan. 23, 1946, p. 2.

¹²These were the protocols collected and recorded by the Deportáltakat Gondozó Országos Bizottság (DEGOB, National Committee for Attending Deportees). Horváth, "DEGOB," p. 46.

¹³Trosztler, *Akik meghaltak*, p. 32.

¹⁴Blassberg's montage is also of good quality; Weil's second work more closely resembles an autonomous work than an illustration. János Blassberg, "Schutzpass-blöff," in Trosztler, *Akik meghaltak*, p. 23; Sraga Weil, "A 'győzelmük' [Unser Sieg...]," in Trosztler, *Akik meghaltak*, p. 11.

¹⁵Trosztler, *Akik meghaltak*, p. 13.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 22.



Figure 1. Exhibition view of 'Those Who Died and Those Who Fought for Our People's Honor', Budapest, 1946, photograph by Béla Kálmán, in Alfréd Trosztler, *Akik meghaltak és akik harcoltak népünk becsületéért* (Budapest: Jewish Agency for Palestine Dokumentációs Osztálya, 1946), p. 3, © Metropolitan Ervin Szabó Library, Budapest Collection.

a typical, high-quality, and efficiently composed example of these exhibition montages¹⁷ (Figure 3).

The title is written with striking typography, with the subtitle set in smaller font: '*Hat millió ember temetője*' (Cemetery of Six Million People). The major graphic elements, the monumental, menacingly towering chimneys of the crematoria (probably red in the original) cut through the whole image, powerfully defining the composition and the topic of the panel, crossed diagonally by the barbed wire. In the montage, photographs and drawn/painted elements play a complementary role. Sites are reproduced on post-liberation photos, whereas – due to the lack of earlier images available for the author – prisoners, as well as the monumental figure of the perpetrator (with his back to the viewer), are visualized by the artist.

Based on the exhibition view and further sources, it is evident that the show included more material than the catalogue, in the case of documents and artworks alike. The center of the main wall (as well as the inner title page of the catalog) featured a life-sized female figure, entitled '*Éhség*' (Hunger) by István Örkényi Strasser.¹⁸ His sculpture both illustrates the period, and references, through the sculptor's fate, the Holocaust. It seems that the historical narration finishes on the left side of the hall, as the catalogue's

¹⁷Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 1. The artist was the victim of the Holocaust, while the work was exhibited earlier at the OMIKE martyr exhibition in 1946. S. Sz. [Sándor Szerdahelyi?], "Mártír-művészek," *Népszava*, June 27, 1946, p. 5.

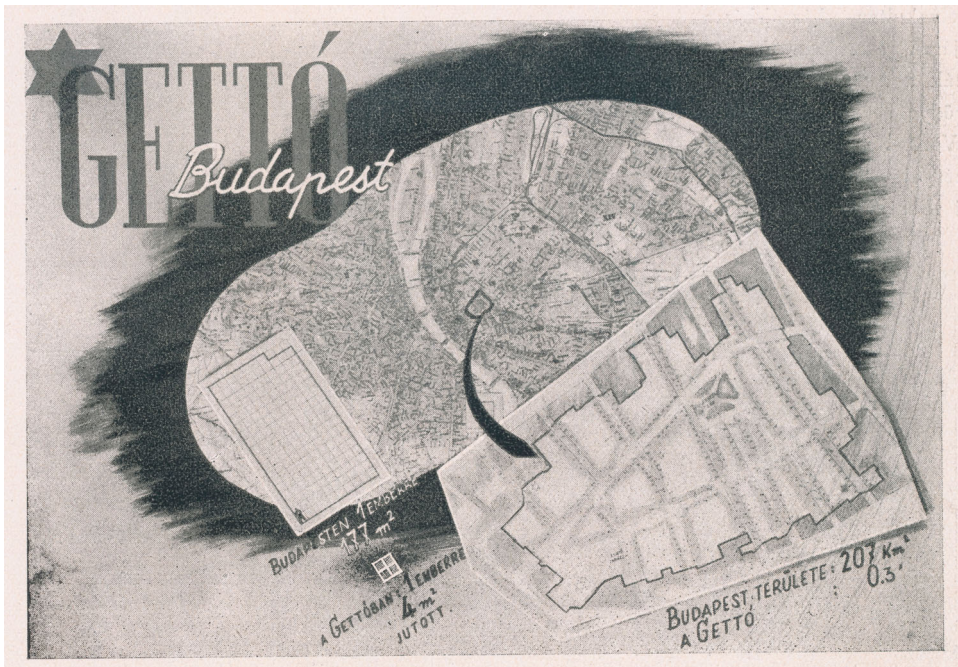


Figure 2. Jenő Szóts, *Gettó: Budapest* (Ghetto: Budapest), montage for the ‘Those Who Died and Those Who Fought for Our People’s Honor’ exhibition, in Alfréd Trosztler, *Akik meghaltak és akik harcoltak népünk becsületéért* (Budapest: Jewish Agency for Palestine Dokumentációs Osztálya, 1946), p. 13, © Metropolitan Ervin Szabó Library, Budapest Collection.

last montage is identifiable in the photo. The sculpture stands in between two poster-sized paintings of human figures, inscribed with the questions ‘*Merre?*’ (Which Way?) and ‘*Hová?*’ (Where To?) – answered, no doubt, by the exhibition from a Zionist perspective, as in the catalogue.¹⁹

The inclusion of autonomous artworks represents an important feature of the project. Since the exhibition opened in January 1946, the organizers could already select artworks either published or exhibited in 1945. Excerpts of two series are reproduced on the same page of the catalogue: Edit Bán’s four aquarelles, which seem to be photographed at an exhibition setting, either earlier at Bibliotheca Officina, or – as the catalog was published quite possibly after the show – at the exhibition in question, probably arranged in one of the large, horizontal, glass cases, visible on two sides of the hall²⁰ (Figure 4).

The second set of four works is from Sraga Weil’s album ‘*Tanuságtétel*’ (Testimony, see below), which, although published only in 1946, must have been available directly from the artist, who was involved in illustrating the exhibition. Lastly, the only foreign artist present in the catalogue is ‘A. Schik’ (Arthur Szyk), whose work is reproduced in order to evoke the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.²¹ According to an article, works by Péter

¹⁹Trosztler, *Akik meghaltak*, p. 3.

²⁰Ibid., p. 12 (works reproduced), p. 3 (exhibition view).

²¹Ibid., p. 25. Arthur Szyk: *The Repulsed Attack* (from *The Songs of the Ghetto*), 1943, The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life, UC Berkeley, inv. no. 2017.5.1.113.



Figure 3. Jenő Szóts, *Auschwitz Birkenau*, montage for the 'Those Who Died and Those Who Fought for Our People's Honor' exhibition, in Alfréd Trosztler, *Akik meghaltak és akik harcoltak népünk becsületéért* (Budapest: Jewish Agency for Palestine Dokumentációs Osztálya, 1946), p. 7, © Metropolitan Ervin Szabó Library, Budapest Collection.

Áldor, Miklós Adler (no doubt, their series '1944' and '16 *fametszet*,' see below), and Béla Kádár (his album, *Dies irae*, published in 1945) were equally present.²²

The exhibition, which opened on January 22, was scheduled to last until February 5, but it was prolonged by one additional week, until February 13.²³ After the original two weeks, a detailed account appeared in *Szabad Nép* (Free People), the daily of the Hungarian Communist Party. The reporter urged everyone to visit the exhibition, which, according to her, had 6000 visitors thus far, but 'most of them [were] Jewish.' Unfortunately, her information that the exhibition was going to be sent to London and then shown all over Europe cannot be confirmed at the current stage of research.²⁴

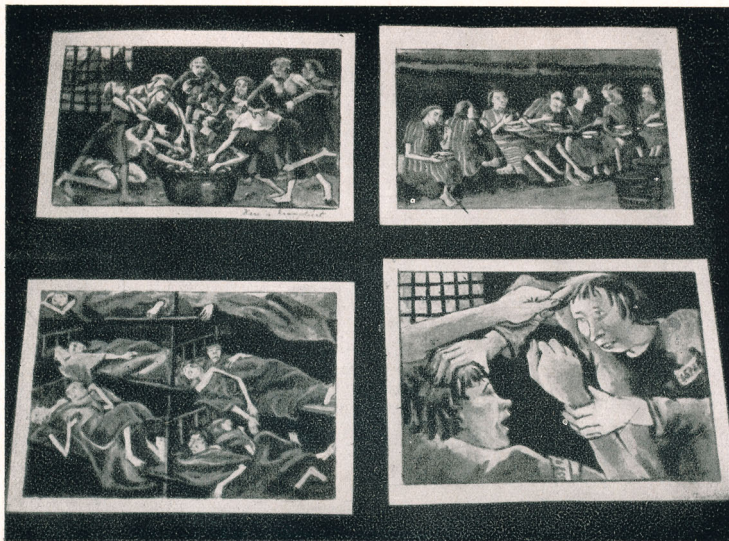
'The Jews in Europe, 1939–1946,' New York, 1947

A related, but more compact display was also prepared in 1946 by the Documentation Department of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, which by that time had been merged

²²Miklós Adler's name was mistyped as "Károly Ádler." "Az elmúlt korszak szörnyűségei – egy kiállítás tükrében," *Világ*, Jan. 24, 1946, p. 2. Kádár Béla, *Dies irae* (Budapest: Anonymus Irodalmi és Művészeti Intézet, 1945).

²³*Szabad Nép*, Jan. 23, 1946, p. 4; *Magyar Nemzet*, Feb. 6, 1946, p. 2.

²⁴The author herself was Jewish; this might explain her dissatisfied comment hinting at the lack of non-Jewish visitors. Fehér Klára, "A Fürst Sándor-utcai kiállítás bemutatja a 680.000-es gyilkosság dokumentumait," *Szabad Nép*, Feb. 6, 1946, p. 4.



Bán Edit aquarelljei



Sraga Weil rajzai

Figure 4. Works by Edit Bán and Sraga Weil from the catalog of 'Those Who Died and Those Who Fought for Our People's Honor', in Alfréd Trosztler, *Akik meghaltak és akik harcoltak népünk becsületéért* (Budapest: Jewish Agency for Palestine Dokumentációs Osztálya, 1946), p. 12, © Metropolitan Ervin Szabó Library, Budapest Collection.

into the Hungarian branch of the World Jewish Congress.²⁵ They responded to the call of YIVO (the Yiddish Scientific Institute), sent out in preparation for their 'Jews in Europe, 1939–1946' exhibition, which opened on 20 January 1947, at their headquarters in New York.²⁶ The exhibition was a gargantuan enterprise:

Planned to occupy a major portion of the Yivo [sic.] building and to include several thousand objects, the exhibit[ion] will attempt to give visual expression to the magnitude of Jewish suffering and martyrdom under the Nazis and their collaborationists, to present Jewish heroism and resistance to the foe, and to show the efforts to rebuild Jewish life in Europe.²⁷

The work on the Hungarian contribution was directed by Ákos Epstein; the panels were prepared by Ervin Abádi and Félix Kassowitz. According to a news report, the content consisted of photographs, charts, newspaper articles, and documents, organized on ten panels. The historical narrative discussed the intellectual leaders and mass murderers of antisemitism, the anti-Jewish 'white terror' that followed the fall of the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919, anti-Jewish laws, forced labor service, the German occupation, the rule of the Arrow Cross, deportation and mass murder, liberation, retribution, and, in the last two panels, the work of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the current situation.²⁸

The exhibition occupied three floors of YIVO's building on 535 West 123rd Street, organized in three parts (corresponding with the floors): 'Under German Occupation,' 'Under German Domination,' and 'The Survivors.' Hungary was placed in the second one, sharing Room 28 with the Netherlands, Denmark, Greece, and Yugoslavia.²⁹ The survival of the original Hungarian panels (or any other displays) at YIVO cannot be confirmed at this point, but I was able to locate photographs of three out of the ten panels: one about concentration camps, one concerning the rule of the Arrow Cross, and one showing the liberation.³⁰ All three panels are montages, incorporating photographs and handmade elements in a drawn or painted overall design. The panel about concentration camps goes one step further than those included in the 'Akik meghaltak' exhibition: It similarly features artworks published earlier, but instead of showing them separately, the art prints are incorporated into the montages (Figure 5).

The artworks are applied in the same way and with the same function as the photographs: In the case of those episodes when photo documentation was not readily available, artistic accounts were used as authentic sources to illustrate the historical narrative. Four prints were incorporated from Miklós Adler's series '16 fametszet,' two from Ágnes Lukács's album 'Auschwitz női tábor,' and two from Sraga Weil's

²⁵Institutional history: Rita Horváth, *A Magyarországi Zsidók Deportáltakat Gondozó Országos Bizottsága (DEGOB) története. Makor: Magyar Zsidó Levéltári Füzetek 1*. (Budapest: Magyar Zsidó Levéltár, 1997), pp. 22, 45, 51.

²⁶"Exhibit on the Jews of Europe, 1939–1946," *News of the YIVO*, no. 17 (Nov. 1946): pp. 1, 4, 5. I would like to thank Leo Greenbaum at YIVO for his kind help and for sending me the scanned newspapers.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 1.

²⁸"Kiállítás mutatják be New Yorkban a magyar zsidóság történetét," *Képes Figyelő*, Jan. 4, 1947, p. 20.

²⁹Four-page leaflet of the exhibition, YIVO, Archive of Philip Friedman, RG 1258, Box 15, courtesy of Agata Pietrasik. Unfortunately, neither at YIVO about this exhibition (upon my request), nor at the Central Zionist Archives concerning both the 1946 Budapest exhibition and the 1947 YIVO exhibition (upon Rachel Perry's request, whom I thank for this information), were archivists able to identify any relevant archival holdings.

³⁰Photographs by Tibor Bass, MAFIRT (Magyar Filmipari Rt.), Dec. 21, 1946, held at the photo archives of the Hungarian News Agency (MTI), at MTVA: no. MTI-FOTO-FMAFI19461477003 (concentration camps), no. MTI-FOTO-FMAFI19461477001 (rule of the Arrow Cross), no. MTI-FOTO-FMAFI19461477002 (liberation).



Figure 5. *Concentration camps*, panel from the Hungarian material for 'The Jews in Europe, 1939–1946' exhibition at YIVO in New York in 1947, photograph by Tibor Bass, MAFIRT (Magyar Filmipari Rt.), Dec. 21, 1946, held at the photo archives of the Hungarian News Agency (MTI), © MTVA, no. MTI-FOTO-FMAFI19461477003.

'*Tanuságtétel.*' The upper left corner of each panel shows an open book, with a biblical quote (in Hebrew and English) and a short historical narrative (in English) on the left, accompanied by an illustration on the right page. On the deportation panel, these read: 'Even not to ye all ye that pass by behold and see it there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow.' (Lamentations 1:12) and 'At Auschwitz those gassed are most fortunate the others perish under horrible sufferings [*sic*], starvation, and by execution.'

Both the exhibition in Budapest and the panels sent to New York represent early historical narratives, framing the Holocaust from a decidedly and outspokenly Jewish (in the case of Budapest, more specifically: Zionist) perspective. The montage-based design, which allows for a concise, informative, and visually appealing presentation, also connects the two projects. Another shared aspect is the use of preexisting art material in the historical narration, integrated either into the exhibition or the montages themselves.

The relevance and importance of these early postwar collections became clear a decade later when documentary materials were requested from the Hungarian Jewish community by the Mémorial du martyr juif inconnu in Paris. The latter's first step in 1956

was to inquire about the fate of the exhibits displayed in Budapest, and advise the organizers in Paris to contact YIVO for the Hungarian exhibition material sent to New York earlier, because, as they put it, ‘material of comparable value cannot be compiled eleven years after the end of the horrors.’³¹ The same value attributed to documents was also ascribed to design solutions. When the first, short-lived, and small-scale Hungarian exhibition opened in Auschwitz in 1960, a new version of Szöts’s infographic, ‘*Gettó: Budapest*’ illustrated the history of the ghetto.³² It seems that, by that time, early postwar exhibition displays – similarly to artworks from the period – were becoming historical sources themselves, ready to be recycled in new contexts.

Part two: Actors: The postwar landscape

In the case of both exhibitions and publications, most of the organizations involved had either an outspoken or more subtly Jewish, and in many instances Zionist, character. Depending on the types of organizations, the exhibitions served a commemorative, artistic, or community-related purpose (connected to the Jewish community, left-wing or artistic circles), or rather an amalgam of these. Some of the organizations that either initiated or sponsored such events were local; others, especially the Zionist ones, were branches of international networks.³³

An outspokenly Jewish organization

The most obvious ‘suspect’ to exhibit Jewish art material in Hungary was the Országos Magyar Izraelita Közművelődési Egyesület (Nationwide Hungarian Jewish Association for Public Education), better known by its acronym, OMIKE. Its activities were widespread: Among others, it operated a drawing school, library, and the Mensa Academica – a dining hall for students in higher education. The association gained paramount importance during World War II, when, in the framework of the Művészakció (Artist Action), it provided venues and financial support for Jewish artists (actors, musicians, singers, writers, painters, and sculptors alike), who lived under dire conditions due to the gradual introduction of anti-Jewish laws.³⁴ Since many of its members and supported artists were murdered in the Holocaust, OMIKE initiated a number of post-liberation commemorative events, including an early, largescale exhibition, which was representative of the loss suffered by the art scene and the Jewish community.

Organizations with Jewish membership or ownership

Another important, less obvious hub was an association for modern art, the Európai Iskola (European School), founded in 1945, which brought together progressive

³¹Telegram from the Magyar Izraeliták Országos Irodája (MIOI) to Alexander Grossman, Aug. 24, 1956; Report on the Hungarian documentary material to be sent for the memorial exhibition of Mémorial du martyr juif inconnu in Paris, Sept. 9, 1956, Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives, HU-HMJA-VI-6-1. I would like to thank Viktória Bányai for drawing my attention to these documents and for sharing them with me.

³²Visible on negative no. 6322, Archives of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. I would like to thank Zoltán Kékesi for sharing the exhibition views with me.

³³In this part, concentrating on the actors, I only refer to the exhibitions briefly; the following parts of the study, which provide a typology of the exhibitions, include their details (original Hungarian title, dates, and sources) in the footnotes.

³⁴Harsányi László, *A fényből a sötétbe. Az Országos Magyar Izraelita Közművelődési Egyesület évtizedei 1909–1950* (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2019).

artists, mostly of the surrealist and abstract streams.³⁵ Although it had no direct connection to the Jewish community and its official organizations, indirect ties were, in fact, numerous. The group had a considerable Jewish membership, and Lajos Vajda, the most important ancestral figure and (posthumous) member of the group, was also Jewish. Moreover, he died due to lung problems that worsened during his time as a forced Jewish laborer to the Hungarian army. He could therefore be – and in the literature had often been – considered a victim of the Holocaust.³⁶ Many of the members earlier attended, or even got to know each other, at OMIKE's Mensa Academica.³⁷ Additionally, the exhibition space used by the group belonged formerly to OMIKE.³⁸

In the process of researching postwar exhibitions, a further, virtually unknown hub started to take shape: the Bibliotheca Officina, the exhibition space of the Officina publishing house, which housed no less than four art exhibitions on the subject of the Holocaust, among them one by Edit Bán in September 1945 – the earliest one, which concentrated exclusively on works depicting the Holocaust. There are numerous reasons that may explain this phenomenon: Not only were the owners, Ödön és Dezső Löbl, Jewish, but their publishing house had also conducted activities related to the Jewish community and the Holocaust. In 1942, they printed *The OMZSA Haggadah*, a bibliophile edition published to support the undertakings of Országos Magyar Zsidó Segítő Akció (Nationwide Hungarian Jewish Relief Action), whereas during 1944 they printed *Schutzpasses* (Letters of Protection).³⁹ After the war, they published the books of the journalist and early Holocaust historian Jenő Lévai, and were the printers of *32 Lithographs by István Zádor Showing the Work of the American Joint Distribution Committee in Hungary*.⁴⁰ Taking this context into consideration, their willingness to host Holocaust-related displays in their exhibition space is understandable.

An antifascist perspective

The Magyar Képzőművészek Szabadszervezete (Free Organization of Hungarian Fine Artists) was probably the largest and most active artists' association in this period. Founded in early 1945, it was active until 1949, and from 1947 even published an art

³⁵Péter György and Gábor Pataki, *Az Európai Iskola és az Elvont Művészek Csoportja* (Budapest: Corvina, 1990).

³⁶Daniel Véri, "Vajda Lajos zsidósága: rétegek és kontextusok," *Múlt és Jövő*, vol. 29, no. 4 (2018): pp. 52–71.

³⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 59–62, 68.

³⁸Address: Üllői út 11 (–13). By that time, they rented it from the *Magyar Nők Demokratikus Szövetsége* (MNDSZ, Democratic Alliance of Hungarian Women), but I do not agree with the authors of the monograph that it was a 'strange coincidence' that some members exhibited here not only when it was operated by the European School, but also previously, in OMIKE times. Rather, I believe this was rather the consequence of the connections and social capital of the Jewish members of the group. György and Pataki, *Az Európai Iskola*, p. 30.

³⁹Géza Ribáry, (intr.), *Haggáda* (Budapest: Országos Magyar Zsidó Segítő Akció-OMZSA, 1942). *Schutzpasses* were issued by embassies of foreign, neutral countries and stated that the owner of the document was under the protection of the given state. Under the rule of the Arrow Cross, such original and forged documents were acquired by many Jewish citizens in Budapest. Géza Komoróczy (ed.), *Jewish Budapest: Monuments, Rites, History* (Budapest: CEU Press, 1999), p. 405.

⁴⁰Jenő Lévai's books, printed by Officina in 1946 include: *A pesti gettó csodálatos megmenekülésének hiteles története; Fekete könyv: A magyar zsidóság szenvedéseiről; Szürke könyv: Magyar zsidók megmentéséről; Fehér könyv: Külföldi akciók zsidók megmentésére. Zádor István 32 litográfiája az Országos Zsidó Segítő Bizottság magyarországi munkájáról / 32 lithographs by István Zádor showing the work of the American Joint Distribution Committee in Hungary, 1949* (date according to the catalog of the Hungarian National Museum, inv. no. LTM 67.41).

periodical, *Szabad Művészet* (Free Art).⁴¹ As a left-leaning organization, they organized a number of memorial exhibitions for artists who fell victim to fascism. Although most of the artists they commemorated were of Jewish origin, the discourse in the press about the ‘martyrs’ sometimes shifted from Jewish victimhood towards interpreting the victims as ‘socialist martyrs.’⁴²

Zionist actors: exhibitions vs. publications

Various Zionist organizations played a pivotal role. Strikingly, the only two historical exhibitions ever prepared in Hungary in the early postwar years – discussed earlier – were both produced by such organizations.

Numerous, often interrelated, almost exclusively left-wing Zionist organizations were involved in publishing graphic albums about the Holocaust between 1945 and 1946. The Borochow-kör (Borochow circle), the ‘adult’ branch of Hashomer Hatzair published Péter Áldor’s album, titled *1944*.⁴³ Hashomer Hatzair also published Sraga Weil’s album, *Tanuságtétel* (Testimony).⁴⁴ Miklós Adler’s *16 fametszet* (16 woodcuts) was published by *Hechaluc* (Hehalutz) – which also belonged to Hashomer Hatzair in Hungary – and supported by Ezra, a committee of the Jewish Agency for Palestine.⁴⁵ *Hechaluc* published the *Sárga könyv* (Yellow Book) as well, a collection of memoirs, illustrated by Weil.⁴⁶ The Szocialista Cionisták Pártja (Ichud, Party of Socialist Zionists) printed the album of Ágnes Lukács, *Auschwitz női tábor* (Auschwitz Women’s Camp).⁴⁷ In contrast with the abundance of publications by left-wing groups, right-wing organizations, namely Brit Hatzohar and their youth group, Brit Trumpeldor (Betar) published jointly only one album, Ervin Abádi’s *Két csillag – két világ: 1939–1945* (Two Stars – Two Worlds: 1939–1945).⁴⁸

Not only can the number of these publications be considered rather substantial, but also their weight in the total production of Holocaust-related albums. Taking this into consideration, it is striking that with the exception of two historical exhibitions, none of the art exhibitions was organized by Zionist organizations. It seems that, most probably due to the lack of appropriate infrastructure, such as access to exhibition halls – that were in fact very few and difficult to acquire after the devastation of the war – Zionist factions chose to be more active in supporting publications of artworks depicting the Holocaust.

⁴¹For a contemporary overview of their activities, see András Beck, “A Szabadszervezet munkája,” *Szabad Művészet*, vol. 1, nos. 1–2 (Feb.–March 1947): pp. 24–25.

⁴²See, for instance, the announcement of a lecture by art historian Arany M. Abonyi, titled “Life of socialist martyr artists”: *Világosság*, Oct. 18, 1947, p. 5.

⁴³Péter Áldor, *1944* (Budapest: Borochow-kör, 1945). A second edition was published by Független Magyarország the same year. For a concise explanation of various Zionist organizations, see Attila Novák, *Átmenetben, a cionista mozgalom négy éve Magyarországon* (Budapest: Múlt és Jövő Kiadó, 2000), pp. 187–97.

⁴⁴Sraga Weil, *Tanuságtétel* (Budapest: Hasomer Hacair, 1946).

⁴⁵Miklós Adler, *16 fametszet* (Debrecen: Hechaluc, 1945). Magyarországi Ezra Bizottság was the aid organization of the Agency. Horváth, “DEGOB,” p. 11.

⁴⁶Béla Vihar (ed.), *Sárga könyv: Adatok a magyar zsidóság háborús szenvedéseiről 1941–1945* (Budapest: Hechaluc, 1946). The ten illustrations were also published separately: Sraga Weil, *Hogy emlékezzetek ... 10 illusztráció a “Sárga Könyv”-ből* (Budapest: Hechaluc, 1945).

⁴⁷Ágnes Lukács, *Auschwitz női tábor* (Budapest, Szocialista Cionisták [Ichud] Pártja, 1946).

⁴⁸Ervin Abádi, *Két csillag – két világ. 1939–1945* (Budapest: Brit Hacohar–Brit Trumpeldor, 1946).

Part three: Art exhibitions

'Martyr' and 'commemorative' exhibitions

The first category of exhibitions, whose genesis had been deeply intertwined with the Holocaust, was dedicated to a victim or to multiple victims of the Holocaust, commemorating them through the exhibition of their works. According to contemporary labeling, these fell into two subcategories: 'martyr' or 'commemorative' exhibitions – the choice of words largely depended on the organizers and their motivation. Those with a pronounced Jewish background chose 'martyr exhibition' more often, as it was a widely used term in this period to denote victims of the Holocaust (building on the traditional framing of pogrom victims).⁴⁹ Those who wished to express an art historical perspective instead, chose mainly a neutral, general art-historical term, 'commemorative exhibition,' making the reference to the Holocaust less pronounced. With the exception of works created during forced-labor service, the exhibited works did not relate to the Holocaust. Nonetheless, many of the articles published in the daily press interpreted earlier works in connection with the fate of the artists, suggesting that they had 'felt' or 'foreseen' the future.⁵⁰

The most representative martyr exhibition was organized by OMIKE in May 1946, at the Régi Múcsarnok (Old Kunsthalle), on the prestigious Andrassy Avenue. It included works by at least fifteen artists. The importance of the event went beyond the Jewish community, as attested by the venue and the fact that it was opened by the then minister for culture, Dezső Keresztury. Instead of a regular catalogue containing the works, the exhibition was accompanied by a 'pro memoria' publication, listing the fate of each martyred artist. Among the artworks, only that of Imre Ámos – who had continued working during his forced-labor service – directly referenced an episode of the Holocaust.⁵¹

A number of commemorative exhibitions were connected to the European School. The earliest exhibition – 'Szabad nép – szabad művészet' (Free People – Free Art) in 1945 – was dedicated to the memory of an art critic, Miklós Rózsa. It featured nine artists, all of them future members of the European School, among them a posthumous member, Imre Ámos.⁵² Further commemorative exhibitions were dedicated to the ancestral figures of the European School. In early 1947, 'Last Graphic Works of Imre Ámos' was mounted at Művészbolt (Artist Store), which was operated by Imre Pán, founder of the group. In this case, the works were also thematically linked to the Holocaust.⁵³

⁴⁹Cf. Kata Bohus, "Parallel Memories? Public Memorialization of the Antifascist Struggle and Martyr Memorial Services in the Hungarian Jewish Community during Early Communism," in Kata Bohus, Peter Hallama and Stephan Stach (eds.), *Growing in the Shadow of Antifascism: Remembering the Holocaust in State-Socialist Eastern Europe* (Budapest-Vienna-New York: CEU Press, 2022), pp. 87–108.

⁵⁰Véri, "Vajda Lajos," pp. 55–56. A few examples: S. Sz. [Sándor Szerdahelyi?], "Mártír-művészek," *Népszava*, June 27, 1946, p. 5; Ilona Berend, "Bán Béla és Ámos Imre grafikái," *Színház*, vol. 3, no. 8 (1947): p. 22; S. Sz. [Sándor Szerdahelyi?], "Kiállítás," *Világosság*, May 7, 1947, p. 6; R. F., "Mártírművészek posthumus kiállítása," *Szivárvány*, Sept. 27, 1947, p. 10.

⁵¹OMIKE mártír művészeinek emlékkiállítás, Régi Múcsarnok, June 15–30, 1946. I was not able to locate a copy of the 'pro memoria' publication, mentioned in the press. Opening announcement: *Szabad Nép*, June 14, 1946, p. 4. S. Sz., "Mártírművészek," p. 5; P. S., "Kiállítás, amely vádol," *Jövendő*, June 27, 1946; Arany M. Abonyi, "Ámos Imre alkotásai a mártír művészek kiállításán," *Magyar Nemzet*, Feb. 27, 1966, p. 14. Cf. Daniel Véri, "Faji és vallási szempontok: Ámos Imre művészettörténeti recepciója," *Múlt és Jövő*, vol. 28, no. 3 (2017): pp. 45–49.

⁵²*Szabad nép – szabad művészet*, in the exhibition hall of Magyar Kommunista Párt (Hungarian Communist Party), located on Városház Street, opened before May 23, 1945. The exhibition was organized by Ernő Kállai, on behalf of the Anonymus Irodalmi és Művészeti Intézet (Anonymus Literary and Art Institute). Mária Dutka, "Rózsa Miklós emlékkiállítás," *Világ*, May 23, 1945, p. 4; János Fóthy "Szabad nép – szabad művészet. Kilenc művész kiállítása," *Kossuth Népe*, May 25, 1945, p. 4.

⁵³Ámos Imre utolsó grafikái, Művészbolt, Jan. 16–31, 1947. "Három kiállítás," *Szabad Szó*, Feb. 2, 1947, p. 10.

Lajos Vajda's drawings were equally exhibited there, while his paintings were shown later that year at the group's exhibition hall.⁵⁴

Private, commercial galleries also provided venues for a few commemorative exhibitions, such as the Szalmácssy Gallery in the case of painter Gyula Hatvani Perlusz in 1946, and the Fókusz Gallery in the case of painter Dávid Jándi and sculptor István Örkényi Strasser in 1947.⁵⁵ Compared to various exhibitions of single artists, usually organized at minor venues, in 1947 important national institutions provided space for the commemorative exhibitions of two accomplished artists. The Nemzeti Szalon (National Salon) organized an exhibition for painter István Farkas, and the Szépművészeti Múzeum (Museum of Fine Arts) for sculptor Ö. Fülöp Beck, yet the reason for their deaths was often omitted.⁵⁶

Several martyr exhibitions were initiated by the Magyar Képzőművészek Szabadszervezete. In 1946, they organized the only exhibition outside of Budapest, dedicated to four local artists in the museum of Pécs.⁵⁷ At their exhibition halls, operated in the Régi Műcsarnok, three exhibitions were mounted. The first was a commemorative exhibition dedicated to graphic artist Bertalan Göndör in 1947; in 1948, two martyr exhibitions were organized: 'Martyr Artists: Andor Sugár Painter, György Goldman Sculptor,' followed soon thereafter by the 'Second Martyr Exhibition,' dedicated to painters István Cserepes, György Kondor, and László Schnitzler.⁵⁸ In the case of the Sugár-Goldman exhibition, the press omitted to mention the Jewish origin of the artists, who were cast – due to their involvement in the Szocialista Képzőművészek Csoportja (Group of Socialist Artists) – as socialist martyrs or martyrs of the Hungarian labor movement.⁵⁹ Based on their example, one article went as far as to suggest the founding of a museum for

⁵⁴Vajda Lajos rajzai, Művészbolt, June 1947. –ayka-, "Vajda Lajos," *Szabad Művészet*, vol. 1, nos. 6–7 (July 1947): p. 120. Vajda Lajos festményei, Európai Iskola, Sept. 28–Oct. 12, 1947. "Kiállítási naptár," *Szabad Művészet*, vol. 1, nos. 9–10 (Oct. 1947): p. 182.

⁵⁵Hatvani-Perlusz Gyula, Szalmácssy Galéria, Nov. 1946. "Két kiállítás," *A Reggel*, Nov. 4, 1946, p. 7. Örkényi Strasser István szobrászművész és Jándi Dávid festőművész emlékkiállítás, Fókusz Galéria, opened on Sept. 7, 1947. "Kiállítási naptár," *Szabad Művészet*, vol. 1, no. 8 (Sept. 1947): p. 156.

⁵⁶Farkas István emlékkiállítás, Nemzeti Szalon, March 1–16, 1947. François Gachot, (intr.), *Farkas István emlékkiállítás* (Budapest: Nemzeti Szalon Művészeti Egyesület, 1947). Beck Ö. Fülöp emlékkiállítás, Szépművészeti Múzeum, Oct. 4–Nov. 4, 1947. Beck Ö. Fülöp emlékkiállítás (Budapest: Országos Magyar Szépművészeti Múzeum, 1947). The cause of death and its reason was rarely mentioned. For instance, the newsreel about Beck's exhibition only indicated that he died during the siege of Budapest, as opposed to the catalogue, which stated that he left his apartment, where he found refuge from the 'persecution of the Arrow Cross,' never to return. "Beck Ö. Fülöp szoborkiállítása a Szépművészeti Múzeumban," *MAFIRT Krónika*, no. 92 (October 1947), accessed Dec. 1, 2022, <https://filmhiradokononline.hu/watch.php?id=6550>; Ernő Kállai, "[Introduction]," in Beck Ö. Fülöp, p. 1.

⁵⁷Magyar Képzőművészek Szabad Szervezete Pécs XIII. csoportkiállítása a Baranyamegyei Múzeumban Károly Ernő, Kellermann Emil, Király Lajos, Roder Judit műveiből, Pécs, Baranya Vármegyei Múzeum, July 21–28, 1946, organized in the framework of Magyar Képzőművészek Szabadszervezete, initiated by Ferenc Martyn. "Négy festő postumus kiállítása," *Dunántúli Népszava*, July 14, 1946, p. 8; Nikelszky Géza, "Négy festő emlékkiállítása a Baranyavármegyei Múzeumban," *Dunántúli Népszava*, July 21, 1946, p. 6. The exhibition was revisited in: Nagy András, (ed.), *Négy festőművész. Király Lajos, Roder Judit, Károly Ernő, Kellermann Emil* (Pécs: Janus Pannonius Múzeum-Pécsi Zsidó Hitközség, 2014).

⁵⁸Göndör Bertalan emlékkiállítása, Képzőművészek Szabadszervezete, April 20–May 4, 1947. "Kiállítási naptár," *Szabad Művészet*, vol. 1, no. 3 (April 1947): p. 42. Gábor Pogány Ö., *Göndör Bertalan grafikai művei* (Budapest: Hungária Hírlapnyomda, 1947). *Mártírművészek: Sugár Andor festő, Goldman György szobrász*, Képzőművészek Szabadszervezete, Feb. 19–Mar. 3, 1948. "Kiállítási naptár," *Szabad Művészet*, vol. 2, no. 2 (Feb. 1948): p. 55. *II. Mártírkiallítás: Cserepes István, Kondor György, Schnitzler László festők* (instead of György Kondor, the initial plan included Béla Hegedűs), Képzőművészek Szabadszervezete, May 15–24, 1948. "Kiállítási naptár," *Szabad Művészet*, vol. 2, no. 5 (May 1948): p. 196; A. E. F. [A. Andre Fenyő?], "Három mártír művész emlékkiállítása," *Szabad Nép*, May 22, 1948, p. 4.

⁵⁹László Schalk, "Sugár és Goldman," *Művelt Nép*, vol. 2, no. 6 (March 15, 1948): p. 10; "Mártírművészek," *Szivárvány*, vol. 3, no. 11 (March 15, 1948): p. 14; *Szabad Nép*, Feb. 20, 1948, p. 4.

martyred socialist artists.⁶⁰ This plan, however, was never realized, and the changing tone already foreshadowed the communist takeover, which put an end to the series of martyr exhibitions dedicated to Jewish artists.

Exhibiting artworks about the Holocaust

Soon after the liberation, artworks about the Holocaust, usually drawn or as a printed series, began to reach the public, partly through exhibitions and partly through publications. Most of the exhibitions were individual shows, dedicated to Holocaust works – usually one narrative graphic series – of a single artist. The integration of artworks into historical exhibitions and exhibition montages, discussed earlier, constituted a secondary usage.

In 1945, the '*Szabad nép – szabad művészet*' exhibition, mentioned above, featured a ten-piece graphic series by Ferenc Martyn, entitled '*A nagy mocsár*' (The Great Swamp)⁶¹ (Figure 6). The series of surrealist drawings, initiated in 1944 but most probably finished in 1945, was later, under socialism, renamed and reinterpreted as '*A fasizmus szörnyetegei*' (Monsters of Fascism) within the framework of antifascist memory politics. Although Martyn himself was not Jewish, he had a personal motivation for creating the series: His fiancée was a survivor of Auschwitz, while in 1944 he was hiding as a military deserter.⁶² He also played an important role in the martyr exhibition in Pécs, as the initiator of the show and the author of the introduction to the short catalogue.⁶³

Three artists had solo exhibitions, featuring graphic series about their deportations, created after the liberation. These narrative, figurative series can be placed within the categories of testimony and witnessing. Edit Bán's exhibition was organized at Bibliotheca Officina in September 1945.⁶⁴ A review characterized the display as 'images observed with a keen eye and painted with reporter-like objectivity.' The author of the article nonetheless questioned their artistic value: 'These paintings are, of course, shocking and outrageous, as are the deportation memoirs that have seen the light of day so often recently. But they have only as much to do with art as those with literature.'⁶⁵

György Kádár's exhibition took place in February 1946, also at Bibliotheca Officina, with no less than two state secretaries opening the exhibition.⁶⁶ In the press, these works were

⁶⁰Schalk, "Sugár és Goldman," p. 10.

⁶¹Dutka, "Rózsa Miklós," p. 4.

⁶²Daniel Véri, "A holokauszt és a zsidó identitás szimbolikus ábrázolásai (1939–1960). Bálint Endre, Martyn Ferenc, Major János és Maurer Dóra grafikái," in Gábor Pataki (ed.), *Szigorúan ellenőrzött nyomatok. A magyar sokszorosított grafika 1945–1961 között* (Miskolc, Herman Ottó Múzeum–Miskolci Galéria, 2018), pp. 54–60.

⁶³See note 28.

⁶⁴*Bán Edit festménysorozata deportációs élményeiből*, Bibliotheca Officina, opened on Sept. 22, 1945. *Világosság*, Sept. 28, 1945, p. 2. In my opinion, the series of 30 aquarelles exhibited and published in the last decades as works from the 1945 exhibition were created later, most probably in connection with the 1954 exhibition 'Résistance, libération, déportation' in Paris. The original series were in a landscape format and in pale colors, signed as 'Bán Edit,' with autograph titles in Hungarian; in contrast, the 30-piece series are in a portrait format, signed 'Edith Kiss' (surname of her second husband), with autograph titles in French. From the original series, four works were published in the catalogue of the '*Akik meghaltak ...*' exhibition (see earlier). Cf. Helmuth Bauer *Innere Bilder wird man nicht los. Die Frauen im KZ-Außenlager Daimler-Benz Genshagen* (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2010), pp. 79–81, 117–20.

⁶⁵J. F., "[untitled]," *Kossuth Népe*, Oct. 2, 1945, p. 2. It is worth noting that later Bán became the sculptor of the first narrative Holocaust memorial in Hungarian public space, four reliefs inserted into the outer wall of the Újpest synagogue in 1948. "Vasárnap avatják fel az újpesti mártírok hatalmas emlékművét," *Világosság*, July 21, 1948, p. 4.

⁶⁶Kádár György *grafikai kiállítása*, Bibliotheca Officina, opened on Feb. 9, 1946. *Népszava*, Feb. 8, 1946, p. 4; *Világ*, Feb. 8, 1946, p. 2.



Figure 6. Ferenc Martyn, *A nagy mocsár* (The Great Swamp), no. 3, 1944/1945, pen and India ink on paper, 352 × 251 mm, © Janus Pannonius Museum, inv. no. 79.237.

again deemed important from the perspective of witnessing. Their artistic qualities were confirmed, but the main role was attributed to their documentary value:

It is not even appropriate to praise the artist's imagination and constructive graphic power, because all this is secondary to the interest that the Prime Minister's Office should acquire the entire material of this exhibition, hold it together, and take it to every corner of the capital and the country, but also to international forums, to let the trumpets of the apocalypse blare in deaf ears.⁶⁷

Such a largescale acquisition did not take place, and it seems that the artist himself was not satisfied with the public outreach of the show: In March, he restaged his 'lager graphics' exhibition in his own apartment.⁶⁸ According to an interview with the artist, Hungarian authorities did not express an interest in the exhibited material; however, the Swiss Red Cross, the Austrian-Hungarian Cultural Association, and Czech diplomacy started negotiations about future exhibitions. At the moment of the interview, exhibitions in Vienna and Prague seemed to be secured, but at this stage of research, it cannot be confirmed whether they actually took place.⁶⁹

Gitta Gyenes exhibited her narrative – but due to its soft texture, somewhat elevated, dream-like – series of drawings in 1946 at Fészek, a prestigious artists' association (Figure 7). Contrary to Bán and Kádár, whose works recounted their deportation and life in concentration camps, Gyenes illustrated her survival in the Budapest ghetto.⁷⁰

The Magyar Képzőművészek Szabadszervezete, which was also active in the case of martyr exhibitions, hosted the show of a fourth artist, György Román in 1947. Although only a portion of the exhibited material was related to the Holocaust, the scale and technique of large oil paintings – especially since all the other exhibitions involved graphic works – make it a notable event.⁷¹

Public trials of war criminals at the People's Tribunals constituted important and widely publicized events of postwar political life. A number of Jewish artists set out to document these trials; their interest was – to varying degrees – partially a survivor's, partially a reporter's. György Román's series of portraits were not exhibited in this period, but the exhibition of chalk drawings by Margit Eppinger Weisz was expected to open around December 1945.⁷² Péter Áldor, illustrator of the weekly *Új Magyarország* (New Hungary) had an exhibition in May 1946 at the Bibliotheca Officina, featuring 'political caricatures – created mostly during the trials of war criminals.'⁷³ It is unclear whether this

⁶⁷"A miniszterelnökséghez," *Népszava*, Feb. 21, 1946, p. 3.

⁶⁸Kádár György *lager-grafikái*, György Kádár's apartment, 51 Fürst Sándor [Hollán Ernő] Street, first floor, opened before Mar. 5, 1946. *Népszava*, Mar. 5, 1946, p. 4.

⁶⁹S. S., "Svájcbán, Ausztriában és Csehszlovákiában rendeznek kiállítást Kádár György auschwitz-i képeiből," *Dolgozók Világja*, Apr. 6, 1946, p. 10.

⁷⁰Gyenes Gitta, Fészek Klub, Oct. 26–Nov. 10, 1946. In addition to this series, the exhibition included further works as well.

"Gyenes Gitta festőművész kiállítása a Fészekben," *Magyar Nemzet*, Oct. 26, 1946, p. 4; Mr., "Gyenes Gitta kiállítása," *Kossuth Népe*, Nov. 2, 1946, p. 6.

⁷¹Román György, Képzőművészek Szabadszervezete, opened on Nov. 23, 1947. *Szabadság*, Nov. 14, 1947, p. 4; *Magyar Nemzet*, Nov. 23, 1947, p. 2; Endre Murányi-Kovács, "Képzőművészet," *Haladás*, Nov. 27, 1947, p. 10.

⁷²Drawings to be exhibited soon: B. F., "7 képzőművészeti hír," *Demokrácia*, Dec. 2, 1945, p. 8. She participated in two exhibitions, most probably the drawings were not exhibited at the first one (artists from Szentendre), but rather at the second, organized at the district VI location of the Social Democratic Party (41 Andrassy Avenue). B. F., "7 képzőművészeti hír," *Demokrácia*, Dec. 9, 1945, p. 8; S. Sz. [Sándor Szerdahelyi?], "Szocialista képzőművészek kiállítása," *Népszava*, Dec. 16, 1945, p. 2. Cf. Veronika Pócs, "Una pintora y mecenas en Budapest después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial. El rol y la actividad artística de Margit Eppinger Weisz entre 1945 y 1948," in *Margit Eppinger Weisz. Travesías* (Buenos Aires: Fundación OSDE, 2019), pp. 13–27.

⁷³Áldor Péter, Bibliotheca Officina, opened before May 25, 1946. P. Gy. N., "Áldor Péter kiállítása," *Új Magyarország*, May 28, 1946, p. 11; J. F., "Áldor Péter grafikái a Bibliothecában," *Kossuth Népe*, May 25, 1946, p. 4.



Figure 7. Gitta Gyenes, *Viszik a nőket a KISOK-ról* (Women are taken from the KISOK [a sports field]), 1944 (1945?), India ink on paper, 343 × 255 mm, © Hungarian National Museum, inv. no. LTM 63.129.

exhibition included some of the drawings from his Holocaust album, 1944, but it could also have featured a further, related portrait series. Áldor visited the imprisoned war criminals awaiting their trial: He conducted short interviews with them while drawing

their portraits that the models were asked to sign. The series of reports, titled ‘Így láttam a háborús bűnösöket!’ (This is How I Saw the War Criminals!) were published in *Dolgozók Világlapja* (Workers’ World Newspaper).⁷⁴ Ironically, he reflected on his own role in a caricature in connection with the death of major war criminals, such as Hitler Mussolini, Szálasi, or Tiso, leaving the only survivor, Franco’s portrait on the wall uncrossed. The artist is shown, lamenting: ‘Whom will I draw if they take out my last model?’⁷⁵ (Figure 8).

Following the three solo shows, Bibliotheca Officina hosted an unusual group exhibition in March 1947. It featured drawings by children attending Jewish elementary and high schools in Budapest, who were asked, in the framework of a school project, to give an account of their ‘experiences in 1944.’ Although the exhibition material seems to have been lost, Viktória Bányai, who is researching the show, was able to identify a similar set of drawings, dating back to 1945.⁷⁶

It seems that after 1947, the number of Holocaust-related exhibitions diminished radically. Most probably, this happened partially because the first great wave of early Holocaust remembrance was already about to subside, as in other countries (and the fact that many artists had already emigrated, especially those involved in Zionism), but also because of the changing political situation. As mentioned earlier, in the case of the ‘Second Martyr Exhibition’ of 1948, the dominant discourse had already shifted towards political martyrdom. In the case of exhibitions in 1948 and 1949 showing artworks that depicted the Holocaust, I was able to identify those of Ernő Barta; and even on those occasions, the artist’s ‘Danse Macabre’ print series was not the main focus, as it was exhibited among a wider selection of works.⁷⁷ Lipót Herman’s exhibition of his single, monumental work – referred to as ‘martyr painting’ in the articles – at the end of July 1949 must be considered a rare and late episode, made only possible by the interest and autonomy of the Jewish Museum and the status of the renowned artist, who was also co-chairman of OMIKE at that time.⁷⁸ The 11-square-meter large polyptych, painted between 1947 and 1949, depicted episodes of the Holocaust, with the central panel, ‘Ezekiel’s Vision,’ representing the resurrection of the martyrs, including identifiable figures from the art and literary worlds.⁷⁹

The panorama of exhibitions introduced here could only be reconstructed by a thorough examination of the contemporary press. Single Holocaust-related works must have also been present at various group exhibitions, but, with a few exceptions, given the general lack of a catalogue or even a leaflet marking the list of exhibited works, as well as the limited number and length of press reviews, it is impossible to detect their presence and reconstruct their circulation.

⁷⁴Péter Áldor, “Így láttam a háborús bűnösöket!,” *Dolgozók Világlapja*, Nov. 24, p. 6; Dec. 1, p. 2; Dec. 8, p. 28; Dec. 15, p. 8; Dec. 29, p. 30, 1945.

⁷⁵Péter Áldor, “A spanyol válság a műteremben,” *Új Magyarország*, April 23, 1946, p. 8.

⁷⁶Bányai Viktória, “Gyermekrajzok a Vészkorszakról,” *Ezredvég*, vol. 31, no. 2 (March–April 2021): pp. 139–47. I would like to thank Viktória Bányai for generously sharing information about her ongoing research.

⁷⁷Ernest [Ernő] Barta, *Danse macabre 1944–45* (Budapest: Edition Körmendy, 1945/1946). Barta Ernő, Barta Éva, Szalmássy Galéria, May 2–27, 1948. *Kelet*, vol. 33, no. 5 (May 1948): p. 8; *Magyar Nemzet*, May 13, 1948, p. 2. Barta Ernő, Fészek, opened on May 28, 1949. *Haladás*, May 25, 1949, p. 11; Máriusz Rabinovszky, “Kiállítások,” *Szabad Művészet*, vol. 3, no. 6 (June 1949): p. 258.

⁷⁸Cf. Harsányi, *A fényből*, p. 303.

⁷⁹A photographic reproduction, showing the works with the wings open: Lipót Herman, *Ezekiel látomása* (Ezekiel’s vision), 60 × 67.5 cm, Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives, inv. no. 64.1641. *Magyar Nemzet*, Aug. 2, 1949, p. 4; “Mohácsi Jenő, Szomoró Dezső, Révész Béla alakjai Herman Lipót mártírokról készült szárnyasképén,” *Magyar Nemzet*, July 6, 1949, p. 3; “Hatalmas mártírfestményt fejezett be Herman Lipót,” *Világ*, July 26, 1949, p. 4. Cf. Bohus, “Parallel Memories,” pp. 99–100.

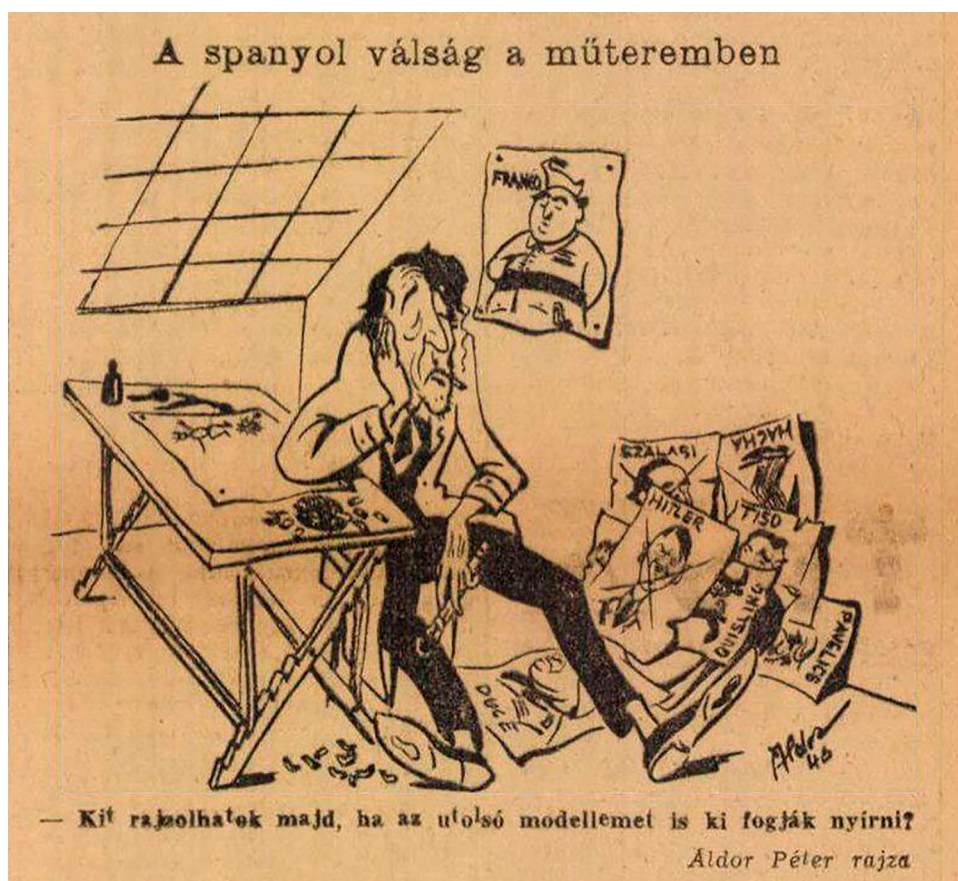


Figure 8. Péter Áldor, *A spanyol válság a műteremben* (The Spanish crisis in the studio), *Új Magyarország*, April 23, 1946, p. 8.

Conclusions

The sheer number of Hungarian exhibitions organized in connection with the Holocaust in the early postwar period – 26 in total between 1945 and 1949 – attests to the existence of a widespread and extensive culture of remembrance. The first three years were especially dense, as the vast majority of these shows – 21 – took place from 1945 to 1947.

Whether the abundance of exhibitions is unique to the Hungarian case, or the magnitude was similar on a regional and European level, can only be judged if similar analyses are conducted in further countries. A comparative analysis could also illuminate whether the extent of Hungarian activities identified above is proportionate to the size of the country and – more importantly – the number of survivors, the social group that initiated most of these projects.

The sharp decrease in the number of Holocaust exhibitions after 1947 can be attributed to two reasons: the lack of new material and ideology. Following the post-liberation eruption of testimonies – visual, literary, and documentary alike – and commemorative acts, the intensity of this strong first wave had to subside at some

point due to the lack of new material. Yet 1948 brought about a new emphasis on socialist martyrs, shifting the focus away from Jewish martyrdom. Moreover, the communist takeover and the new system's prevailing antifascist memory politics made it undesirable to talk specifically about Jewish victimhood. The situation must have been similar in other Eastern Bloc countries as well, yet the real weight and importance of the political pressure may only be assessed when the timelines of Holocaust exhibition histories are established and compared between the countries of the Eastern Bloc and the 'West.'

Early postwar Holocaust remembrance took myriad forms, from commemorative rituals through press coverage and publications to exhibitions. It is remarkable, however, that exhibitions – one of the few forms that took place in a physical space and could therefore evoke and facilitate personal interactions – involved almost exclusively art; even the historical exhibitions included artworks and relied heavily on graphic design solutions. Exhibitions generated vivid press coverage; in this contemporary discourse, art was deemed a valuable form of witnessing that was probably more directly accessible to the general public than written memoirs.

Exhibitions that exclusively featured art fell into two categories. The first type were 'martyr' or 'commemorative' exhibitions, which were organized from the works of artists who fell victim to the Holocaust. Although, because of the fate of the artists, these 'martyr' and 'commemorative' exhibitions represented the genocide in the public sphere and public discourse, the works – with the exception of those created during forced labor service – did not relate to the Holocaust. By contrast, the second type – exhibitions of art about the Holocaust – featured artworks created almost exclusively by survivors, mostly narrative graphic series depicting various personal experiences of the victims.

In terms of actors, the Hungarian case attests to the importance of Jewish organizations, and other groups with considerable Jewish membership. By definition, OMIKE was a Jewish institution, the Officina publishing house had Jewish ties, and the European School had significant Jewish membership. The Magyar Képzőművészek Szabadszervezete constitutes a partial exception, as probably a leftist, antifascist worldview, rather than its Jewish members, was behind the support of martyr exhibitions. Various, often interrelated, Zionist organizations were a major driving force behind publishing graphic albums depicting the Holocaust, yet due to the lack of access to exhibition spaces, they were not able to initiate art shows.

Nevertheless, local branches of international Zionist organizations held paramount importance in the case of historical exhibitions. They were responsible for both early postwar materials: the 1946 exhibition in Budapest and the Hungarian panels sent to be exhibited at YIVO in 1947. From multiple perspectives, the 'Those Who Died and Those Who Fought for Our People's Honor' exhibition was an outstanding show: It integrated photographs, fine arts, and applied graphic art in order to narrate the Holocaust from a Zionist perspective. The cutting-edge montages, infographics, and typography helped convey the message in an effective and appealing way. The transnational nature of the Jewish Agency could have certainly facilitated foreign connections, but whether the material circulated internationally, as planned at the time of the exhibition, remains a question.

The ten panels sent to YIVO represented similar solutions, but from a less overtly Zionist perspective, as far as can be assessed by photographs of three of them and the press reports. Based on press coverage and the fraction of the Hungarian contribution, it is clear that the ‘The Jews in Europe, 1939–1946’ exhibition in New York must have been not only a gargantuan, but also an impressive show, which is worth revisiting from both the perspective of European Jewish communities, which provided the material, and that of US audiences. It is important to note, however, that no data has surfaced so far about further historical exhibitions about the Holocaust (or similar topics: war crimes, antifascism, etc.), organized in Hungary in this period.⁸⁰ The permanent exhibition of the Jewish Museum, opened in 1947, is only a partial exception, as only a small documentary part was included in the show, which featured material both from its art and historical collections.⁸¹

The value of these early postwar exhibition materials was already clear in 1956 and 1960, when they were intended to be used or were indeed recycled in new exhibition contexts, similarly to earlier artworks. The analysis of both art and historical exhibitions can therefore be revealing, not only about the memorial culture of the early postwar period, but also about the memory politics of later decades.

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⁸⁰There were quite a few initiatives, without any apparent results. At the end of February 1945, the *Budapesti Nemzeti Bizottság* (National Committee of Budapest) decided to organize an antifascist exhibition, which – due to reasons unknown – did not take place. Ferenc Gáspár and László Halasi, (eds.), *A Budapesti Nemzeti Bizottság jegyzőkönyvei 1945–1946* (Budapest: Budapest Főváros Levéltára, 1975), pp. 49, 51. According to the call for submissions, an ‘antifascist exhibition’ was planned by the Nemzeti Segély (National Aid) for September 1945, but there is no trace whether the show materialized. “Antifasiszta kiállítást rendez a Nemzeti Segély,” *Magyar Jövő: A Nemzeti Segély Lapja*, July 14, 1945, p. 1. A similar call was issued for another antifascist exhibition, planned by the local branch of the *Antifasiszta Szövetség* (Antifascist Alliance) in the city of Miskolc, without further trace. *Felvidéki Népszava*, Mar. 7, 1948, p. 3. It seems that news of the Vienna ‘Antifascist Exhibition’ (certainly the ‘Niemals vergessen!’ coming to Budapest were also unfounded. *Dunántúli Népszava*, May 1, 1947, p. 5.

⁸¹The material included posters, newspapers and decrees. “A Zsidó Múzeum megnyitása,” *Magyar Nemzet*, July 5, 1947, p. 3; M. R., “Újra megnyílik a Zsidó Múzeum. Beszámoló a megmaradt és széthordott kincsekről,” *Világ*, July 5, 1947, p. 4.

Behind the Iron Curtain (2020). He curated numerous research-based exhibitions, most recently 'The Modern Idol: Henry Moore in the Eastern Bloc' (Bucharest, 2021–2022). His latest study is 'Commissioned Memory: Hungarian Exhibitions in Auschwitz, 1960/1965' (exhibition: Blinken Open Society Archives, 2023; forthcoming book: CEU Press, 2024).

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