

Lajos Tihanyi's American Sojourn: 1929-30

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(translated by Judit Pokoly)

Lajos Tihanyi is remembered above all as a member of the artists' group "A Nyolcak" [The Eight], which was founded in Budapest in 1911. However, Tihanyi's oeuvre was not confined to the few years during which the exhibitions of The Eight took place. His painting was just as much a part of the Nagybánya school, as it later was of Parisian late Cubism and of international abstraction.

Tihanyi emigrated from Hungary in the fall of 1919, after the collapse of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. First he lived in Vienna, then for a few years in Berlin. He made Paris his home in the mid-1920s. In 1929 he went to New York for seventeen months, and he died in Paris in 1938.

Tihanyi's estate was returned to his native Budapest in 1970, and is now in the Hungarian National Gallery. One of Tihanyi's most loyal friends, the Transylvanian-Hungarian photographer Gyula Halász — better known as Brassai — arranged its repatriation. The returned paintings and drawings were displayed in an exhibition which served to focus on Tihanyi's work the interest of Hungarian art historians.¹ The first monograph on Tihanyi, written by Iván Dévényi, was published in 1968.² Some general works also mentioned Tihanyi, such as Krisztina Passuth's monograph on The Eight.³ Later Passuth wrote several articles on Tihanyi, and it was chiefly these studies, published during the seventies in French and German, that made Tihanyi known outside Hungary.⁴ In spite of this, Tihanyi's oeuvre is not that closely studied. The deaf-mute artist's extensive correspondence and communicative notes (which he used instead of everyday speech), provide much information about his art and events in his life. Only in the 1980s did historical research begin to process these writings.⁵

The painter carried on long and intensive correspondence with his friends, such as the writer Józsi Jenő Tersánszky, the painter Ödön Mihályi, and the critic György Bölöni. The majority of his letters are preserved in public collections in Hungary, such as the Petőfi Literary Museum in Budapest, the manuscript collections of the National Széchényi Library and of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and the archives of the Art Historical Institute of the Hungarian

Academy of Sciences and of the Hungarian National Gallery. Some letters are in London in the estate of Gustav T. Siden. Few have been published in full.

The present paper has a dual aim: to publish two of Tihanyi's texts in English, and to reconstruct Tihanyi's life in America from the written documents. The first study, entitled "What is painting?" was written by Tihanyi in Paris in 1928, in anticipation of his trip to America. We do not know exactly why Tihanyi wrote this text. Having been invited to several meetings of the New York artists' union, he might have wanted to present it to them, or perhaps he intended it as a general statement of his aesthetic principles, a kind of *ars poetica*. As far as is known, it was never published, not even in the catalogue of his exhibition at the Murai Gallery of Contemporary Art, the most appropriate venue for such a publication.

The key words of this remarkable text are materiality [anyagyszerűség] and colour — as expressed through "materials containing colors," i.e. pigment — which Tihanyi sees as constituting the essence of painting. He defines colour as the sole value of painting. By enumerating all the factors he considers alien to it — such as plasticity, light, drawing and contouring — he concludes that painting is the expressive force of pigment by and for itself applied to a planar surface. In stating this, he placed himself firmly within the formalist-Modernist aesthetic tradition, and anticipated the writings of the American critic Clement Greenberg, who would come to champion such an approach in the following decade.⁶ This anticipation is all the more interesting given Tihanyi's prediction of colour-field painting — in the lines "theoretically speaking the greatest accomplishment for a painter is to express himself with one colour if it dominates the entire surface..." — for Greenberg was the champion of this style of American art in the 1950s and 1960s. Tihanyi devotes most of the remainder of the text to a discussion of the necessity to keep to the requirements of the material used. He states that painting must be the objective expression of material, it must represent its nature instead of copying what is subjectively believed to be its essence. The aim of painting is not to depict objects or persons, neither is it to show colours and forms in space, but to express the material of pigment. This is a manifesto for a materialist, "concrete" painting, and is related to the ideas expressed by Theo van Doesburg and the "Art Concret" group of Paris at that time.

In this text Tihanyi all but renounces his former artistic self. He declares the fine draughtsmanship and emphatic contours of his landscapes alien to painting, and treats his earlier expressive portraiture in a similar manner. For financial reasons, he painted only portraits during his stay in America, and so did not conform to this philosophy of art in those works. Nevertheless, his Parisian paintings of the second half of the 1920s do more or less conform to these "materialist" principles, as his Manhattan exhibition, to be discussed below, demonstrates; in several of these works, his central concern was colour. The titles of these paintings do not refer to forms or to objects represented, but to the colours of which they are built up. This type of work, interrupted by the portraiture of the American sojourn, intensified during the 1930s to the point that

the painter even tried to impose these principles on his earlier pictures and portraits. The best example of this is the *Portrait of Kosztolányi* (fig. 1, see the appendix). Tihanyi denies all psychologizing and subjectivity in this work, proclaiming — rather unconvincingly — the interplay of colours to be its central theme. Though he was not always so in practice, by 1928 Tihanyi was an abstract painter in theory.

The idea of an American exhibition for the spring of 1928 had already been mentioned by Tihanyi in a March 1927 letter to Ödön Mihályi.⁷ Another letter speaks of an exhibition and a journey, but it was still in the planning stages in October of 1928. Friends in New York tried to talk him out of this trip. The following excerpt is from a letter by the Hungarian-American journalist Margaret Monahan (Margit Székely):

I called on some gallery owners but none of them seemed to be interested... [the New York dealer and curator J.B.] Neumann is firmly convinced that you should not come, for the following reasons: modern art has a very narrow basis in America. Now that business conditions are bad, it is especially so. Neumann is most friendly and is fond of you and has a high regard for your art. He says you are Tihanyi in Paris but no one would notice you here... He also says that you shouldn't come before your pictures are known here, unless you want to suffer.⁸

The attempted dissuasion failed to work. Tihanyi had more faith (if others did not) in the Greek Catholic Bishop of Hollywood, John Török, and in the gallery owner and photographer Alfred Stieglitz, a great patron of avant-garde art, than in Monahan or Neumann.⁹ This preference must have been largely due to Tihanyi's lack of opportunities at that time in Paris. By the late twenties commissions for portraits were almost non-existent, exhibiting was hardly possible and he could not survive on the occasional reproduction of a painting in a journal. When a work of his was purchased, or something was written about him in Paris, it was always by Americans. Though with a good deal of exaggeration, in Budapest he was referred to as a favourite European painter of Americans.¹⁰ The letters reveal that an American collector or collectors had visited his studio, but they are not named. His address book does contain the address of Katherine S. Dreier, a great patron of abstract art -- including that of Mondrian, whom Tihanyi knew and whose philosophy of art was similar to his own -- but there is no information on Dreier buying Tihanyi pictures or recommending them to others.¹¹ At any rate, they may have known each other personally, but even if they did not, it is to her credit that other American art collectors began to take an interest in contemporary French art and became aware of Tihanyi in Paris. In 1928 the *Portrait of Halász* (Brassai) of 1920 had already been acquired in Paris by H. Morgan, a New Yorker. Another painting of 1921, *Still Life with Oranges*, was bought by M.C. Harpham of Los Angeles.¹² Unlike every other painting he sold

in 1929, Tihanyi failed to note the date of this latter sale, though it may have changed hands in Paris before his departure. In any case, by November of 1928 Tihanyi no longer believed Monahan, and was convinced that he had to take his art to the American public.

Little information is available about the journey. By the late twenties some of the relationships that had earlier elicited intensive correspondence had slackened, e.g., with Tersánszky and Mihályi, while other close friends, such as Bölöni and Brassai were living in the same city. Tihanyi's contact with his family had almost broken off. He had increasing conflicts with his brother, and his family supported his trip to America on the condition that he never ask them for money again, as his fellow artist, the composer and painter Henrik Neugeboren (Henri Nouveau), wrote in a letter.¹³ Information on his American sojourn is included in Tihanyi's letters addressed to American friends from Paris in the later twenties, and in letters sent to his friend Virgil Ciacian in Oradea, Rumania (formerly Nagyvárad, Hungary), after his return to France.¹⁴ Letters by Tihanyi of the period are either lost or buried in unpublished estates such as that of Brassai. Thus we also have to rely on the correspondence of his Parisian friends with third parties to round out our knowledge of his American stay.

Tihanyi spent a total of seventeen months in America, sailing into New York harbour sometime in late January of 1929, and arriving back in France on 25 May 1930.¹⁵ The earliest document of Tihanyi's stay in New York is a telegram of February 2, 1929, sent by Henry Miller to Tihanyi's Times Square Hotel suite to cancel an appointment because Miller had to leave for Washington on urgent business.¹⁶ Miller's telegram offers us hints concerning Tihanyi's social contacts in New York. Tihanyi must have got to know Miller when he and his wife visited Paris in 1928. Miller returned to Paris in March of 1930, this time staying for several years. In his books he does not write in as much detail about his social life during his 1928 stay in Paris as he does about the thirties, but presumably he did visit the cafés frequented by other penniless members of the "lost generation." "I have no money, no resources, no hopes. I am the happiest man alive" - one reads on the first page of *Tropic of Cancer*.¹⁷ This introductory sentence might as well have been spoken by Tihanyi. Miller probably met Tihanyi through Brassai, who later wrote his recollections of Miller. For his part Miller wrote the introductions to nearly all of Brassai's books. As Miller returned to Paris a year after Tihanyi's arrival in America, they could easily have rescheduled their cancelled meeting. Unfortunately, no further reference can be found to Miller in Tihanyi's papers, nor are Brassai's letters more revealing. The foreword to the published letters, however, contains a quotation from Miller: "Dans ce temps-là, il me semble, je ne connaissais que des étrangers... Nous étions alors six à nous réunir frèquement : Brassai. Perlès, Tihanyi, Reichel, Dobó et moi."¹⁸ In this context, "Dans ce temps-là" denotes the early 1930s, confirming that Miller maintained his relationship with Tihanyi in America.

Concerning Tihanyi's early days in New York, and his general financial situation, we have the following report by the artist himself, contained in a letter to Ciaclan of 25 May 1931:

You are mistaken when you think that I did not like America, and I like it (sic). Your error is understandable because you have never seen America, and have not known me now for a long time... After arriving in New York, I stayed for several days on Ellis Island, and from there I proceeded to an elegant hotel [the Times Square] where I stayed three weeks, and where, with \$68 in my pocket, it cost me \$3 per day. The 'miracle' of how I lived in New York for 17 months when I received the promised assistance neither from my family nor my friends is already in the past. I was stuck, and could do nothing...

Brassai, one of the friends Tihanyi was probably requesting assistance of, wrote the following in a letter of 1930: "Tihanyi still tries to get money in New York; he's had several exhibitions with a lot of moral and little pecuniary success."¹⁹ In a letter to Károlyi of 12 February 1929, meanwhile, Monahan writes that "Tihanyi arrived a few days ago. I am afraid that he will meet with serious difficulties here. His paintings are too modern for Americans. Besides there is a distinct financial depression in America right now. [Emil] Lengyel, I believe can be of some help to him."²⁰ Apart from these texts, little is known of his life in America. Thus, in reconstructing Tihanyi's American experience, the second of his English language texts, in which the painter summarizes his views on American art and culture, becomes crucial. Only an English version of this is known, therefore it may have been composed in that language. (The corrections in pencil between the typed lines are in a hand other than Tihanyi's.)

When Tihanyi arrived in America, the construction of skyscrapers was on the upswing, reaching a peak with Howell's and Hood's Daily News Building of 1929-30. One of Tihanyi's Manhattan addresses was on 34th street, where in 1931 the world's tallest building, Shreve, Lamb and Harmon's Empire State Building was erected. It was the architecture of New York that made Tihanyi review the differences between European and American art. That is the subject of this second text, which was intended either for publication, or as a talk.

Conspicuously enough, Tihanyi made no mention whatsoever of contemporary American painting. Not that he was alone in this; Manhattan's Museum of Modern Art, opened in 1929, also aimed to present European art — that of Cézanne, Gauguin, Seurat and Van Gogh — rather than the products of American Modernists, such as Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley or Georgia O'Keeffe, to the public. Also, during the early 1920s, when image after image of American technical achievements appeared in European avant-garde periodicals, few reproductions of American works of Modernist art were included. All in all, the views of America expressed in this text bear close similarities to the attitudes

towards America expressed by other Hungarian artists of the avant-garde. The same themes of American technical as opposed to artistic achievements, and the poetry of Walt Whitman were the touchstones of a polemic between the American poet Gorham Munson and the Viennese Kassák circle in 1922-21.)

In selecting the pictures to be taken to America, Tihanyi adjusted to the taste of the American public as he imagined it and as his friends outlined it. The works exhibited at his two shows in America — the Group Exhibition of American and Foreign Artists at the Brooklyn Museum and a commercial exhibition at the Murai Galleries of Contemporary Art in New York — give an indication of the types of taste he was trying to satisfy. For the Brooklyn show he chose works that might satisfy more conservative inclinations, while for the commercial display he selected abstract and late Cubist compositions almost exclusively. While there is no documentary evidence that he knew before he left that he would have these two exhibitions in America, he did pack for the trip with these two aspects of public taste in mind.

He exhibited fourteen pictures at the Group Exhibition of American and Foreign Artists, held at the Brooklyn Museum from June to October 1929.²² The subtitles on photocopies preserved in the Tihanyi estate reveal that the exhibited works included the portraits of György Bölöni, Virgil Ciacian, Dezső Kosztolányi (fig. 1 — see the appendix to this volume), Andor Halasi (fig. 2), Itóka Bölöni (Otilia Márkus), Lajos Fülep and Lajos Kassák, as well as *Family* of 1921 (fig. 3), self portraits of 1912 and 1920, two landscapes (*Hungarian Landscape*, *Mountain Landscape*), two still lives (*Oranges*, *Cactus*), and a *Nude*. The list shows fifteen photos though only fourteen items appear in the catalogue. As the catalogue omits the names of the portrayed persons, it cannot be established which photocopy had incorrect data. Itóka Bölöni's portrait seems to be identifiable with *Portrait of a Woman*, the portrait of Dezső Kosztolányi, lost in America after the exhibition, with *Portrait of a Hungarian Poet*, and Halasi's portrait with *Portrait of a Critic*, but one cannot identify the other pictures as precisely. There is no knowing which picture was meant by *Portrait of a Young Woman* or (since his portrait of the Hungarian sculptor Pál Pátzay's was not there) *Portrait of a Sculptor*, or who was represented in the *Portrait of a Man*, Ciacian, Fülep, György Bölöni or Kassák. The exhibition, organized by Herbert B. Tschudy, head of the painting department of the Museum, also included the work of the little-known Hungarian sisters Berta and Elena de Hellebranth.

The exhibition received a good deal of newspaper coverage, including reviews in the *New York Sun* (6 June) by Henry McBride; in the *New York Herald Tribune* (9 June) by Carlyle Burrows; in the *New York American* (28 June) by William B. McGormick; in the *New York Times* (9 and 30 June) by Elisabeth Luther Cary; in the *Brooklyn Times* (16 June) by Lillian Semons; and in *Brooklyn Life* (22 June) by Ruth Gladys Davis. Most reviews made mention of Tihanyi, for instance in the *New York Herald Tribune*:

In Lajos Tihanyi, a Hungarian painter, who is represented chiefly by portraits and still life, one sees a similar exponent of the direct method in painting. His "Portrait of a Critic" is very much to the point, though his work as a whole loses much of its purport in the overwrought accentuation of the rhythmical qualities he attempts to bring out in his painting.

As we have seen, this picture is identical with the *Portrait of Andor Halasi* (fig. 2). A critic and translator, Halasi was the editor of the Budapest journals, *Kritika* [Critique] and *Irodalmi Élet* [Literary Life], in the teens. He also contributed to Kassák's first periodical, *A Tett* [The Deed], the precursor of the better-known *Ma* [Today]. During the 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic he was a member of the Writers' Directorate and head of propaganda in Georg Lukács's Commissariat for Public Education. Tihanyi remembered having painted Halasi's portrait in 1913.²³ The portrait of the elegant man in a suit with a thin long face, pointed nose and high brow was, as mentioned, bought by Bishop John Török. The correspondence between Tschudy and Török reveals that the Bishop then donated the picture to the Brooklyn Museum.²⁴ But it was not only Török's donation that drew the museum's attention to the painter. The October issue of their publication, the *Brooklyn Museum Quarterly*, carried the reproduction of another Tihanyi painting, the *Family* (fig. 3).²⁵

Tihanyi, however, was left with a bitter aftertaste at the close of the exhibition. His estate includes several handwritten lists of works, all having the remark "lost in America in 1929" entered against the Kosztolányi portrait of 1914. It is not the only Hungarian painting lost abroad, neither is it the only Tihanyi work thus fated; his art school drawings sent to the Milan International Exposition of Industrial Art of 1906 perished in a fire at the Hungarian pavilion. Hungarian art historians have not given up the idea of finding the Kosztolányi portrait, and this picture will be discussed in detail in the hope of its recovery. Contemporary criticism considered it to be one of Tihanyi's best works. Sharing this conviction, the painter took it with him into the uncertainty of emigration after the collapse of the communist regime in 1919.

Tihanyi's friendship with Kosztolányi began in the first years of the decade. Starting out as a journalist, Kosztolányi was a major contributor of critical writing and poetry to the important Budapest avant-garde literary journals *Nyugat* [Occident] and *Világ* [World], and he regularly published books of verse. Tihanyi most probably met Kosztolányi at an evening program given in honour of The Eight, when the poet recited three lines from the title poem of his book *A szegény kisgyermek panaszai* [Complaints of a poor little child], which went through five editions between 1910 and 1919. Little is known of the subsequent course of their relationship, but a letter by Tihanyi suggests that by 1914 it had grown deeper than a passing acquaintance.²⁶ The painter included an ink drawing of a sitting nude in the letter with the following dedication: "To Dezső Kosztolányi with sorrowful friendship / Lajos Tihanyi, March 1914." The drawing is of the same

date as the portrait, so one might well ask why their friendship had become "sorrowful," and whether this "sorrow" can be discerned in the portrait.

The portrait of the poet, clad in a black coat and waistcoat with a bow-tie, his face turned slightly sideways, belongs to the series of psychologizing portraits Tihanyi began to paint in 1911, and first presented to the public in 1918 at the MA Gallery, at which time they, including the Kosztolányi portrait, caused controversy (fig. 1).²⁷ But apart from finding the picture to be *léleklátó* ("soul-seeing"), critics concentrated on the even subtler psychology of some of the other portraits. By the end of Tihanyi's career, however, in the French poet Robert Desnos's 1937 book *Tihanyi*, in reviews of this book, and in the 1938 obituaries for Tihanyi (such as those of György Bölöni and György Bálint), attention was focused more on this portrait.²⁸ The writings of Bölöni and Bálint give insight into Tihanyi's work, while reflecting their different world views. Bölöni, just like Tihanyi, chose emigration, while Bálint remained at home, as did Kosztolányi. Also, the two obituary writers represent differing opinions of Kosztolányi's role in the events surrounding the Republic of Councils in 1919. György Bálint analyzed the portrait in *Pesti Napló* [Pest Journal] in the following words:

...whenever I think of him, I will always see the face in the portrait because I think it is the authentic, the true face. It's both attractive and disquieting, dreamy yet challenging, softly "decadent" and yet sharply masculine. It does not only show the poet's brow, eyes and nose but his poems, short stories and essays as well. Even those works that he was to write much later, in the last period of his life - *Édes Anna* [Anna Édes] and *Hajnali részegség* [Drunkenness at dawn]. It is as if the painter Lajos Tihanyi had sensed the future masterpieces in the poet's features, just as a palmist feels your fate in the web of lines on your skin.

Bölöni saw quite another person in the portrait. "He shows the shyness of a little child and the anxieties of a nervous person on the face of Kosztolányi," he wrote in the obituary. In his book, *Az igazi Ady* [The true Ady], Bölöni gives a detailed analysis of the portrait: "The Tihanyi portrait shows the disarranged face of a neurotic whose features display cowardice and fear. The face is full of treacherous lurking and slyness ready for ambush."²⁹

Kosztolányi's political "*volte-face*" of 1919 — as perceived by Bölöni — would explain the adjective "sorrowful," as well as Bölöni's less than favourable description of Kosztolányi's face in the portrait. In 1916, however, Bölöni could not as yet notice signs of such a political shift to the right. Indeed, Bölöni saw the portrait differently in 1916 than in 1938. In his review of Kosztolányi's 1916 book, *Tinta* [Ink], he emphasized the poet's honesty and courage.³⁰ At that time he praised Kosztolányi for the lack of fear in his writings, for his commitment to a definite world view, for having self-respect and for his awareness of artistic superiority. These attributes and personality traits are quite incompatible with the

former, but this contradiction shows well how the viewer projects his personal experiences and changing judgments onto a picture.

Tihanyi never accepted the views that his portraits were "psychologizing," and that he could see into the souls of his subjects. In the case of Kosztlányi's portrait, instead of "soul-seeing," he wrote of "the valorization of two pinks against a large but not heavy mass of greenish black".³¹ The onlooker, however, is not obliged to limit the picture's analysis to such a "valorization." Though protesting against non-formal types of analyses, in his heart Tihanyi must have felt there was some truth to them, and that was probably why he took the portrait along for his conquest of America.

Not long after his debut in the Brooklyn Museum, twelve of Tihanyi's paintings were displayed in an exhibition at the Murai Galleries of Contemporary Art. Unlike the previous one, in this "Showing of European and American Moderns," almost all the works were abstract and late Cubist pictures, such as *Blue and Yellow*, *Red and Blue*, *Knife and Fork*, *Guitar*, *Le Metro* and *Still Life with Apples*. Of the earlier pictures only a *Portrait of the Artist* and a painting of a sitting girl were included. The latter is probably identical with the *Seated Girl* painted in Berlin. According to Krisztina Passuth, Tihanyi sold his painting *Bridge* (fig. 4), one of his major Berlin works, to Mrs. Will Durant at this exhibition,³² but this picture is not included in the catalogue. The threatening tone of gallery owner Arnold Murai's letter demanding money suggests that the exhibition brought neither financial nor critical recognition for either of them.³³ The only success Tihanyi could report as a result of this exhibition was the reproduction of a *Self-Portrait* (1912) in the *New York Telegram* in 1930.³⁴

These exhibitions and reproductions were the "moral" success mentioned by Brassai in his cited letter. Though in his view Tihanyi's stay in America brought him no financial rewards, this was probably only partly true. In November, 1928, Monahan wrote to Tihanyi the following about another Hungarian painter: "Neumann says [Béla] Kádár received commissions for a few portraits to be painted as required in Philadelphia. As he was badly in need of money, he accepted the commissions for very little pay. At present he has no work to do." Tihanyi seems to have been in a similar situation. Getting portrait commissions in America must have been far more significant for Tihanyi than an outsider might expect, however, for in Paris he had sorely missed this respectable means of earning a living. In New York we know he painted portraits of István Dobó and his wife,³⁵ and drawings have survived of Bishop John Török and Louis T. Gruenberg (figs. 5, 6). Though similar to his work of the teens, the known New York portraits lack the depth and psychological insight of his earlier works. In fact, some clients may have refused to accept their portraits, as Tihanyi's estate contains at least one painted in New York, that of the painter Nicholas (Miklós) Suba, which is signed "L. Tihanyi N.Y. '29" (see figure 7).

According to Tihanyi, he completed nine portraits in New York in 1929. Unfortunately, he referred to most of them as *Portrait of a Woman* or *Portrait of a Man*, and we know the identities of only three of the sitters. Two are of

Tihanyi's love, Cecile, and one is of Nicholas Suba who lived in Brooklyn (figs. 7, 8). Since these three pictures remained with Tihanyi, and the works acquired by the Hungarian National Gallery include two painted in 1929 (one male and one female portrait), they are probably the portraits of Nicholas and Cecile Suba.³⁶ Of the rest of the pictures, we know only their owners, who may very well have been the sitters as well. A female portrait was in the possession of June Mansfeld, and a male portrait belonged to Frederick Kiesler, the Austrian-American architect, whom Tihanyi probably knew from Kiesler's stay in Paris in 1925, and with whom he corresponded in March of 1926, soon after the architect's arrival in America.³⁷ The third female portrait belonged to Dobó's wife, Fukishima, whose name is not in the address book. The fourth portrait of a woman was owned by Ivor Kármán, and it may represent his sister Lilla Kármán. One of the male portraits belonged to Sándor Barta, the other to the physician Joseph Hollós. There is no way of knowing who Barta was, but he could not have been the Sándor Barta who published in *MA*, and who later published the journals, *Akasztott Ember* [Hanged Man] and *Ék* [Wedge]. That Barta, who was in contact with Tihanyi, lived in the Soviet Union after 1925. Hollós can be identified as the physician who wrote a book to combat alcoholism and who contributed to the cure of tuberculosis. He lived in America from 1924 on, and founded, among others, the New York left-wing groups Kulturszövetség ([Hungarian] Association of Culture) and the Ady Society, the latter in 1929.³⁸ Another picture of 1929 is known, but Tihanyi only noted the initials (A.B.) of the portrayed person on the reverse, so he cannot be fully identified.³⁹

It is hard to reconstruct Tihanyi's social life in America, but the subscription lists for Desnos' *Tihanyi* album of 1937, his correspondence and his address book suggest that in New York he enjoyed a busier social life than he had in Paris.⁴⁰ Tihanyi's address book includes, among others, the following Hungarian names: John Biró, Joseph Brummer, Sándor Finta, Zoltán Haraszti, Willy Pogány, Emil Lengyel, Egon Kornstein, Ivor Kármán, John Török, "Dr." E. Ormándy, Fritz Reiner, Béla Rózsa and Nicholas Suba. Adjacent to some of the names, Tihanyi noted the phrase, "kindly follower." These were: Pogány, Caroll Kitchen, M. Higgins, Catherine Jackson, Tolmach, Ormándy and Reiner. One of the "kindly followers" is Willy Pogány who illustrated Nándor Pogány's book, *Magyar Fairy Tales from Old Hungarian Legends*, published in New York in 1930. The other is the conductor Eugene Ormándy. Ormándy had a Tihanyi painting titled, *Paris, Pont St. Michel*, painted in the teens. A well-known Hungarian pianist, Fritz Reiner was a pupil of Béla Bartók, and in 1931 he became the musical director and conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra.⁴¹

Considering Tihanyi's hearing impairment, his address book registers a remarkable number of musicians. Tihanyi must have met Egon Kornstein, a member of the Waldbauer-Kerpely quartet. In the fall of 1918, Kornstein, then a reserve lieutenant in the Austro-Hungarian army, had organized an art exhibition in Belgrade, and he invited Tihanyi to take part. While in Budapest peace

demonstrations and soldiers' mutinies were daily news, the exhibition in the capital of the Serbian enemy constituted a mute protest against the war.⁴² Tihanyi had also long known the violinist Ivor Kármán. In his letters to Ödön Mihályi from Berlin, he often mentioned the musician's sister, Lilla, also a musician, whose passage to America her brother wished to arrange.

The address book contains about one hundred and fifty names. As the identifiable names reveal, Tihanyi was mainly in contact with artists, art dealers (Neumann, Joseph Brummer), and social scientists and journalists (historian Emil Lengyel, journalist John Biró, historian-librarian of the Boston Public Library Zoltán Haraszti). This does not, of course, preclude his relationship with other Hungarians not closely related to the arts or to literature, such as the psychiatrist Sándor Radó. Furthermore, Tihanyi kept in contact not only with Hungarian Americans. Far more non-Hungarian than Hungarian names are entered in his address book, but even fewer of them can be identified today. One of them was Peggy Guggenheim, to whom, in Paris, Tihanyi sold a 1917 landscape of Badacsony on Lake Balaton. His subscription sheets also contain a few non-Hungarian names.⁴³

Apart from the paintings mentioned above, some other Tihanyi works entered private collections in America in 1929-30. A *Still Life with Palms* (Berlin, 1921) went to Dr. Morris Hilguitt of 44th Street and a *Berlin Landscape* of 1922 to the painter Lajos Márk in Brooklyn. His *Self Portrait*, painted in Vienna in 1920, came into the possession of Mrs. Himler in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and his landscape, *Souvenir de Nice*, of 1926-27 went to Arnold Schoen of New York. Tihanyi noted on the reverse of a photo of a female portrait that it was in a private collection in New York and indicated "Dr. M's" collection in New York as the provenance of a *Landscape* of 1918.

A few words should be devoted to Arnold Schoen, since Tihanyi's estate contains a Schoen manuscript analyzing Tihanyi's art. The scholar whose chief research interests, attested to in several of his books, were the history of architecture and culture in Budapest, later became the director of the Budapest Historical Museum. Whether this Schoen lived in Brooklyn and is identical with the Schoen who had a Tihanyi picture is unknown, but his writing seems to take account of Tihanyi's "What is painting?," so it is worth quoting a passage from it.

If we should mention the names of Picasso and Cezanne in connection with [Tihanyi's] name, it would be impolite to see his works as more than studio pieces... In the final analysis, these studies suggest that their creator has a sense of composition, is good at drawing, that their main asset is decoration, and they avoid carrying a meaning, that he is hardly interested in problems of lighting and is fond of abstraction, and finds planar movement pleasing.⁴⁴

To resume the list of works, John Török also had several Tihanyi paintings, including the *Composition Sketch: Christ on the Cross* of 1920, a *Self-Portrait* of 1920 and a *Female Portrait, Catherine*, painted in Paris in 1927. This Catherine might be identical with the "kindly follower" Catherine Jackson included in the address book at Bishop Török's address.⁴⁵ The present location of these, just as those of the above-mentioned Tihanyi pictures, is not known.

In January of 1930, Tihanyi applied for the extension of his American visa at the Immigration Office. The U.S. Department of Labour's Immigration Service acknowledged receipt of his application in a letter of 20 January 1930. He probably asked for a half-year extension, since in March Brassai expected Tihanyi to return in June,⁴⁶ and, as noted, Tihanyi returned to Paris (sailing with his friend Count Michael Károlyi) around May 30.

As Neugeboren judged it, Tihanyi returned to Paris because his American trip had been a failure.⁴⁷ His return may also be ascribed to his strong attachment to Paris as a city, and his longing for his friends there. Or, one might presume that the failure of the exhibition at the Murai Galleries convinced the painter already engaged in abstract art that his place was in Paris. What is certain is that during his extended stay in New York in the first half of 1930, Tihanyi no longer received commissions for portraits, as all of his New York paintings bear the date 1929. One is thus inclined to share György Bölöni's view, who reflected upon Tihanyi's journey to America in the following words: "He was induced to leave Paris by an American journey. Though he found clients in New York and his pictures went to museums, the immense world crisis that was just beginning swept away his crops."⁴⁸ Tihanyi arrived in America in 1929, the year of the stock exchange crash and the beginning of the global economic depression, and his premature departure was in large part also due to this circumstance. As he wrote in the already quoted letter to Ciaclan:

For the time being I only wish to relieve you of your mistaken beliefs that people work ten hours a day there — at least! — and that I worked non-stop. I would have gladly done so, had I been able to, but when I returned, the tally of eight million unemployed I left behind me was reduced by only one... The crash came, and neither work nor sales were possible. I painted portraits. I sold pictures, but never at American prices, and I came back with a few hundred dollars I had scraped together, because I *had* to.

NOTES

This article was researched with support from the Soros Foundation.

¹*Tihanyi emlékkiállítás* [Tihanyi memorial exhibition], introduced by Zsuzsa D. Fehér and Brassai (Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Galéria, 1973).

²Iván Dévényi, *Tihanyi* (Budapest: Corvina, 1968).

³Krisztina Passuth, *A Nyolcak festészete* [The painting of The Eight] (Budapest: Corvina, 1968).

⁴Krisztina Passuth, "La carrière de Lajos Tihanyi," *Acta Historiae Artium* (1974) 22, no. 1-2. Passuth, *Magyar művészek az európai avantgarde-ban* [Hungarian artists in the European avant-garde] (Budapest: Corvina, 1974). Passuth, *Tihanyi* (Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1977). "A neósok" [The Neos] in Lajos Németh, ed., *Magyar művészet 1890-1919* [Hungarian art 1898-1919] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1981).

⁵Csilla Csorba, "Tihanyi Lajos levelei Tersánszky Józsi Jenőhöz" [Tihanyi's letters to J.J. Tersánszky], *Kritika* (1981) no. 8, 21-26. Valéria Majoros, "A Tihanyi-Tersánszky barátság alakulása 1919 után" [The Tihanyi-Tersánszky friendship after 1919], *Sub Minervae Nationis Praesidio: Studies on the National Culture in Honour of Lajos Németh on his 60th Birthday* (Budapest: ELTE, 1989): 285-89. Majoros, "Tihanyi Lajos 1911-es aktjai" [Tihanyi's nudes of 1911], *Új Művészet* (1990) no.2, 47-48. Majoros, "Tihanyi Lajos festőkortársairól. I. A magyarok. II. Az egyetemes művészet képviselői" [Tihanyi on contemporary painters. I. Hungarians. II. Representatives of international art], *Ars Hungarica* (1991) no. 2, 211-19 and (1992) no. 1, 99-114. Majoros, "Tihanyi Lajos Nagybányán" [Lajos Tihanyi at Nagybánya] in: *Nagybányai művészek* [Artists of Nagybánya] (exh. cat.) (Miskolc: Miskolci Galéria, 1992).

⁶See, e.g., Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," *Arts Yearbook* 1 (New York, 1961).

⁷Lajos Tihanyi's letter to Károly Mihályi. Paris, 27-31 March 1927. Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum — henceforth PIM — V 2293/289/55.

⁸The letter written in New York on 2 November 1928 was included in Tihanyi's estate. (Hungarian National Gallery Archive — henceforth MNGA — 18881/74) He must have got to know Margaret Monahan (Margit Székely) through Mihály Károlyi, when she was in Paris in 1928. Monahan (then Székely) emigrated with her two daughters to America in 1919 and lived in New York City. She supported her family by designing lingerie, but also worked as a journalist, and took an active part in Hungarian-American intellectual life as well as the literary life of Greenwich Village. In her letters to Károlyi, Monahan often sent messages to Tihanyi, and Károlyi mentioned them together in a letter he wrote to György Bölöni in 1930. See: Margaret Monahan's (Margit Székely's) letters to Mihály Károlyi, New York, 13 September 1928 and 25 October 1928, Archives of the Párttörténeti Intézet, Budapest, 704.f.64, 144-145, 161-163 and Mihály Károlyi's letter to György Bölöni, New York, 24 January 1930, quoted in György Bölöni, "Mémóir," in his *Egy forradalmi nemzedék* [A revolutionary generation] (Budapest, 1982): 511. Monahan also wrote to Károlyi about Tihanyi's arrival to America, and sent his greetings. See Margaret Monahan's (Margit Székely's) letters to Mihály Károlyi, New York, 12 February and 27 October 1929. (PIM 704.f.65, 39 and 168).

⁹János Török (1890-1955) was a follower of Mihály Károlyi, who played a role in Károlyi's bid for peace with Italy during the First World War. He was arrested for this in 1917, and was freed from prison when Károlyi came to power in 1918. After this he emigrated to America where he became the Greek Catholic Bishop of Hollywood. Török is mentioned by Oszkár Jászi and János Hock in their letters to Mihály Károlyi. Hock and Jászi referred to him as an "adventurer," while Károlyi called the bishop "unpleasant" and "bohemian," someone with whom one had to be both firm and careful. See Hock, 10 February 1922; Jászi, 17 July 1922; Károlyi, 30 March 1923, 17 November 1924, 1

December 1924 in Tibor Hajdu, ed., *Károlyi Mihály levelezése* II [The correspondence of M. K. II] (Budapest, 1990).

Stieglitz is mentioned in Monahan's letter along with Neumann. The exact addresses of both can be found in Tihanyi's handwritten address book. MNGA 18873/1-12.

¹⁰This was emphasized in the article in *Az Est* [The Evening] (19 June 1938) about Tihanyi's death. The readers of *Színházi Élet* [Theatre Life] of 1931 might also have believed this; while the Hungarian papers never wrote about him, *Színházi Élet* reported with reference to the *Chicago Daily Tribune* that Tihanyi was attacked on the street in Paris, suggesting how popular the painter was in America.

¹¹The address of Katherine S. Dreier is included in Tihanyi's address book. Tihanyi's name does not appear in the comprehensive catalogue of the Dreier collection: Robert L. Herbert, Eleanor S. Apter and Elise K. Kenney, *The Société Anonyme and the Dreier Bequest at Yale University: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984).

¹²Harpham's name comes up in Tihanyi's letters to Mihály Károlyi, Monahan mentions this name, and a Fred M. Harpham wrote Károlyi a letter from Akron, Ohio.

¹³Henrik Neugeboren's letter to Ernő Kállai. Paris, June 1938. Cited by Ida F. Mihály: "Dokumentumok Tihanyi párizsi éveiről és haláláról" [Documents about Tihanyi's Paris years and his death], *Művészet* [Art] (1968) no. 12, 10-11.

¹⁴Lajos Tihanyi's letter to Virgil Ciacan, MNGA 23279/1991.

¹⁵In a letter from New York to Virgil Ciacan of 20 February, Tihanyi writes that he had "been here for a month." In another letter to Ciacan of 25 May 1931, Tihanyi notes that he had returned to France exactly a year previously. Also, in Brassai's letter of 28 February 1929 to his parents, he notes that he was living in Tihanyi's hotel room since the latter was in New York. Brassai, *Előhívás. Levelek* [Photographic development. Letters] (Bucharest: Kriterion, 1980): 134.

¹⁶MNGA 18789/73.

¹⁷Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer* (Paris: Obelisk, 1949).

¹⁸Henry Miller, introduction to Brassai, *Histoire de Marie* (Paris: Editions du Point du Jour, 1949): 8-9.

¹⁹Brassai, *Előhívás. Levelek*: 137. Another source is Tihanyi's Christmas and New Year's greetings of 1929 to Itóka Bölöni. (New York, 25 December. PIM V 4132/350/4) From György Bölöni's letters to Károly Mihályi we know that Tihanyi wrote them several letters from America, but these have not as yet come to light.

²⁰Margaret Monahan's letter to Mihály Károlyi, 12 February 1929, PIM 704.f.64.ö.e.39.

²¹On this, see Oliver A. I. Botar, "Connections Between the Hungarian and American Avant-Gardes During the Early Twenties," *Hungarian Studies Review* (Spring 1988), 40-42.

²²*Group Exhibition of American and Foreign Artists* exh. cat. (New York: Brooklyn Museum, 1929): 332-345.

²³MNGA 18803/73, no. 35 in the oeuvre catalogue. Here, Tihanyi dated the painting to 1913, but in the museum's registry it bears the date 1915. See Mária Halasi, "Elkésett ismeretség" [Belated friendship], *Tükör* [Mirror] (9 March 1976). Here the size is indicated as being 40 X 30 cm, which is unlikely, for in a letter of 19 December 1932 sent by Elisabeth Hamlin, Secretary of the Department of Fine Arts at the Brooklyn

Museum, the size is cited as being 40 x 50 cm (15 1/4 x 19 3/4 inches). See MNGA 18828/73.

²⁴The first letter of the Brooklyn Museum to Török is dated 21 September (MNGA 18882/74). He is informed of when the exhibition will close, and that he could buy the Tihanyi picture if he wished. In Bernard Tschudy's letter to Török of 22 October he thanks the Bishop for the donation of the Tihanyi work he had purchased, as expressed in Török's letter of 4 October. Tschudy remarked that although he was aware of the greatness of Tihanyi's painting, he was not convinced the conservative directors agreed with him. (MNGA 20501/1980). On 28 October the Museum sent another letter of thanks to Török (MNGA 18785/73), and in a letter of 12 December to Tihanyi they inquired about his date of birth (MNGA 18879/74). In December Tihanyi wrote to the Museum asking for photos of his picture. He received them, as the estate proves, but in a letter of 19 December the Museum also informed him of the size of the frame. (MNGA 18828/73).

Though the Pittsburgh Carnegie Institute itself has no record of such a transaction, according to Tihanyi a *Self-Portrait* was also purchased by Török, and deposited at the Institute in 1927. The cited Tihanyi letter refers to the deposit in Pittsburgh (see note 6).

²⁵*Brooklyn Museum Quarterly* (October 1929) 16, no. 4, 132.

²⁶Lajos Tihanyi's letter to Dezső Kosztolányi, Hungarian Academy of Sciences Manuscript Collection, Ms 4628/21.

²⁷Catalogue of Lajos Tihanyi's exhibition, *MA [Today]* (15 Oct. 1916), 3, no. 10, no. 35.

²⁸György Bölöni, "Tihanyi," *Szabad Szó [Free word]* (25 June 1938), 2. György Bálint, "Egy kép alá" [On a picture], *Pesti Napló [Journal of Pest]* (17 October 1937), 9.

²⁹György Bölöni, *Az igazi Ady [The true Ady]* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1978): 609.

³⁰György Bölöni, "Tinta" [Ink], in, *Egy forradalmi nemzedék [A revolutionary generation]* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1982): 213-15.

³¹Lajos Tihanyi's letter to Ernő Kállai, 29 January 1937. Quoted by Mihály, "Dokumentumok Tihanyi párizsi éveiről és haláláról," 8.

³²Krisztina Passuth: "La carrière de Lajos Tihanyi," 125-49.

³³Arnold Murai's letter to Lajos Tihanyi, undated. MNGA 18835/73.

³⁴Oil on canvas, 71 x 58 cm, bottom left: "Tihanyi L. 1912." Hungarian National Gallery (henceforth MNG) inv. no. 70.132 T.

³⁵We have little information on István Dobó but, as mentioned, Henry Miller cites him in his writings as having lived in Paris in the early thirties.

³⁶Portrait of a woman, 1929. Oil on canvas, 50.5 x 40 cm, bottom left: "L. Tihanyi N.Y. 1929." MNG inv. no. 70.189 T. The photocopy of the latter can be found in Tihanyi's estate, the reverse bearing Tihanyi's note that it is a picture of Miklós (Nicholas) Suba and was exhibited in Paris in 1930 and 1931. (MNGA 18781/73-12.)

³⁷New York, 10 March 1926, MNGA 18825/73. On Kiesler, see e.g. Lisa Phillips, *Frederick Kiesler* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1989)

³⁸Several of Hollós' letters are among Mihály Károlyi's papers. On the Ady Society, see Julianna Puskás, *Kivándorló magyarok az Egyesült Államokban 1880-1940 [Emigrant Hungarians in the United States, 1880-1940]* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1982): 351. See also József Hollós, "Magyar kultúrelét New Yorkban" [Hungarian cultural life in New York], *Korunk* (1932).

³⁹MNGA 18781/73-31.

⁴⁰Tihanyi's social circle in Paris could not have been small either, as indicated by the Hungarian sculptor Márk Vedres' remembrance: "[Tihanyi] complained that he had little money. I recommended that he ask each of his friends for a franc, instantly he'd be a millionaire." Márk Vedres, "Tihanyi Lajosról" [On Lajos Tihanyi] (Paris, 17 June 1938), Archive of the Art Historical Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (henceforth MTAMKIA), no inventory number.

⁴¹He may only have the same name, but one of Tihanyi's younger sisters was Mrs. Henrik Reiner.

⁴²Zoltán Bálint, "Magyar képzőművészeti kiállítás Belgrádban 1918 őszén" [Hungarian fine arts exhibition in Belgrade in the fall of 1918], *Művészettörténeti Értesítő* (1966), no. 2, 119-21.

⁴³The subscription sheets feature the name of Toscan Bennet, who is also included in the address book. Other names are also recorded with American addresses, but they cannot be made out in his handwriting. Some American letters are also found in Tihanyi's estate, all written by Hungarians. They include: Emil Lengyel's letter, New York, 16 December 1935, MNGA 18875.74; Árpád Kallós's letter, New York, 15 April 1929, MNGA 18843/73, Nándor Pogány's letter, New York, undated, MNGA 18815/73.

⁴⁴MNGA 16277/1964

⁴⁵There was a Jackson mentioned in connection with Török in Mihály Károlyi's letters to Oszkár Jászi and Mrs. Károlyi, but this person was Mary G. Jackson of Westminster, Maryland. See the letters of 17 November 1923, 24 January 1924 and 1 December 1924 in Hajdu, ed. *Károlyi Mihály levelezése II*.

⁴⁶Miller must have brought the news to Brassai, for he arrived in Paris on 4 March and Brassai forwarded this piece of information to his parents on 11 March. Tihanyi may have adjusted his return date to Károlyi, for on 24 January Károlyi wrote to György Bölöni that he hoped Tihanyi would return with him. The "luxury trip" refers to the fact that Károlyi had to travel third class while in emigration. See Bölöni's cited "Memoir" on this.

⁴⁷Henrik Neugeboren's letter to Ernő Kállai. Paris, June 1938.

⁴⁸György Bölöni, "Tihanyi," *Szabad Szó*, Paris, 25 June 1938, in, György Bölöni, *Képek között* [Among pictures], edited by Edit Erki (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1967): 519-21.

Appendix

Two English Texts by Tihanyi

Note: The translations are somewhat garbled in places, but in the absence of any originals, we have decided to print them as they are, with a few clarifying insertions in brackets.

I. What is Painting?

Painting is based on the appreciation of colors. It is realized through the utilization of materials containing colors.

The raw material is transformed into new living value by properly utilizing every part of it. The material [which] does not reveal new values is dead.

The good material is responsible for itself and in itself. Each color is separately responsible for itself and in itself and can express only *one* real value.

This is the *just[e]* [proper] color which cannot be replaced.

The expressive-responsible-color has a voice of its own.

The painting which is not realized by itself but through the interaction of lines and values (colors) may be a good or clever representation of one or more objects or figures based on optical or objective impressions. It may be merely play or a composition involving brain work but the significance of music is not expressed by the musical or by one's knowledge based on musical tradition. Intuitive concepts are expressed only by talent and newly found values.

Creative expressions which do not impose themselves with the proper utilization of the material — through the qualities inherent in them — (including drawing and the boundary lines of values) are falsified and subjective impressions.

Brain work means struggle with the material and the power of thought over the material.

The author "composes" with words, the sculptor with stone and metal, wood or other material. The painter is working with colors.

By utilizing the values of a given surface the painter [is] struggling with the quality, quantity and dimensions of his material in the same manner and at the same time.

When one paints on a flat surface, plastic expression is a false value, done with the false utilization of the value of the material. The other improper expression of painting is the light which is incorporeal like the gases whose utilization means in laboratory work [sic].

In this sense a musical instrument hidden behind the picture or even the odor of a flower or that of a piece of cheese may transmit our feelings or sentiments.

The painter has greater obstacles to overcome using less material, he is making use of and the... manner he adopts. Theoretically speaking the greatest accomplishment for a painter is to express himself with one color if it dominates the entire surface, if [it] is the outcome of the necessity that this color in itself is entirely expressive and that there is no need for another color because it would be superfluous.

The work and its value does not depend on the restriction of the material but in the preservation and expressiveness of the real value of the material used.

Mental or physical work coincides with the accomplishments of the physical action. The brush or any other instrument — intermediaries — are for the evaluation and not for the degradation of the material.

The eyes, hands and instruments of the painter are as bad as the brain which leads them if he uses them in contradiction to the real nature of the material.

There are no rules and no limits in the selection and employment of the materials, but freedom is a relative notion and the laws of work are given in the nature of the material.

Ce' qu'il faut, c'est refaire dans la matière.

The material contains everything that is truthful and beautiful, but truth and beauty have to be brought out not through hampering tendencies but with the aid of the given necessity.

The most inferior factor of creative work is its tendency to create the "beautiful" with the aid of aesthetic and other tendencies, and aesthetic and literary reminiscences, in the dark architecture of misty corridors, in the vaults of a hall supported by pillars.

This spiritual parasitism results in reproducing activity.

The creation of aesthetic values results then in the production of objets d'art.

Snobbism, together with the parasites of aesthetics and business, are working for the development and stabilization of this false culture.

This is the ces "beaux arts" which exists not only is one's imagination.

The real object of painting is not only the representation of one or more figures or objects, their interpretation and composition in space. Nor is its object the simultaneous interaction of optical effects and of dynamical forms. Painting is the expressive — in itself and for itself — colors on a surface.

A painting can never be abstract because owing to its physical qualities the material is concrete.

In spite of all kinds of geometrical, optical and "color-erotic" devices the surface of the canvas remains smooth and the work of the painter can be realized only on this surface.

"Transmissive constructions" require the utilization of strange and plastical materials which break up the surface. It is an unavoidable necessity that the

painter should dominate the surface within the given dimensions by the complete and convenient use of material.

In this the subjective and objective function of painting is exhausted because the subjective function is only possible in objective connections.

Whatever lies outside of this is unimportant and does not deserve to be mentioned.

We do not know more about physical phenomena than we do about psychic and psychological phenomena and these do not sufficiently explain the creation of a work of art.

The painter who has written these lines had long ago disposed for himself of this "mystic" adage:

I am not doing what I wish to do.

But I can wish to do what I am doing [sic].

Lajos Tihanyi
(Paris, June 1928)¹

II. [untitled]

It has been my ambition for years to visit America. I cannot understand why so many European artists do not appreciate the spiritual values of this country and do not find it important to get acquainted with it.

On the other hand, American artists have contributed so much to European art and its traditions that it is difficult to perceive the difference between their methods and ours, although the products of old American art greatly surpass the value of the Asiatic and other pre-historic arts.

The new art and its important representatives will find the most useful values in the new artistic creations of America. The machine art, cubism, the German "Neue Sachlichkeit" and the *ci-devant* constructivism represented the parasitic efforts of contemporary Europe. The constructive creations of America, on the other hand, reflect the spiritual and physical work of the modern world.

The ethical purity of these constructions assumes an ever growing importance. Huge masses and lines demand incontrovertibly the preponderance of the beauty of the material.

These new buildings have to be built with the best material and by the best craftsmen. The good work of the constructor will be improved upon within a short time by the architect. I understand that in a height of 100-200 meters the large planes and cupolas cannot assert themselves to best advantage even in electric light. They need the help of gold, the most noble metal. This luxury is justified but the luxury of the American home, I can not help saying came from

the junk room of Europe, pretty and spurious, except the wonderful hygienic equipment.

Some American banks and office buildings represent the same happy combination of modern architecture and interior decoration as some of the Renaissance churches and castles of past ages.

I believe that within a short time European art, an iconoclast, will completely orient itself toward America. American taste will welcome Europe's additions which will make for the perfection of a new style. Europe should beware, so that American influence should not be predominant.

I am not very familiar with American literature but I dare to compare Walt Whitman's puritanic simplicity with the silent stone piles of the sky-scrapers.

In the works of the unknown American artists of 200-300 years ago I have found a few strikingly beautiful pictorial mementoes. I have seen knotted rugs which in their simplicity and intelligent use of the material surpass the home art of any European country.

The European woman makes herself pretty, whereas the American woman ornaments herself.

Louis /Lajos/ Tihanyi
June 1929, New York City²

Notes to the Appendix:

¹Hungarian National Gallery Archive, 18829/73.

²Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum, V3481/29/10.

List of Illustrations. See the appendix to this volume (pp. 115-122).

1. *Portrait of Dezső Kosztolányi*, 1914, oil on canvas, 80 X 90 cm. (Present location unknown).
2. *Portrait of Andor Halasi (Portrait of a Critic)*, 1913, oil on canvas, 40 X 50 cm. (Brooklyn Museum, New York).
3. *Family*, 1921, oil on canvas, 115 X 90 cm. (Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest, inv. no. 70.1/9 T).
4. *Bridge*, oil on canvas, 60 X 82 cm. (Present location unknown).

5. *Portrait of John Török*, 1929, chalk on paper, 63.7 X 49.2 (Hungarian National Gallery, inv. no. F.70.157).

6. *Portrait of Louis T. Gruenberg*, 1929, chalk on paper, 49 X 32.1 cm. (Hungarian National Gallery, inv. no. F.70.136).

7. *Portrait of Nicholas Suba*, 1929, oil on canvas, 50.5 X 40.5 (Hungarian National Gallery, inv. no. 70.201. T).

8. *Portrait of a Woman (Cecile)*, 1929, oil on canvas, 50.5 X 40 (Hungarian National Gallery, inv. no. 70.189 T).