

Moving and Still Images Showcase Hungarian Art at the American University Museum

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WASHINGTON, D.C. (March 5, 2009)—Two new spring exhibitions showcasing Hungarian art open at the American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center as part of the Extremely Hungary festival. One show focuses on influential modern Hungarian painter Lajos Vajda, the other presents videos by young Hungarian artists. Both exhibitions open to the public Tuesday, March 17, and close Sunday, April 19. The museum will host an artists' reception from 7 to 9 p.m. on Friday, March 20, to celebrate the opening of these exhibitions.

Lajos Vajda is the first comprehensive survey in the United States of the work of Lajos Vajda, the greatest master of twentieth-century art in Hungary. His works influenced that of the Budapest-based European School (1945–48), as well as subsequent generations of Hungarian and Central European artists. The exhibition presents collages, paintings, and graphic works from Vajda's Parisian photomontages to his late monumental charcoal drawings, culled from mainly European private and public collections.

Influenced by a range of modern and traditional artistic styles, Vajda studied at the Budapest Academy of Fine Arts before spending time in Surrealist circles in Paris. After his return to Hungary in 1934, he lived in Budapest and spent his summers in Szentendre, a picturesque town on the banks of the Danube known for its multi-ethnic population and artists' colony. In Szentendre, Vajda studied Jewish folk art and the icons of the village's churches, and collected the ornamental motifs of local houses and alleyways. Vajda aimed to combine the artistic idioms of the historical avant-gardes with elements of folk art and traditions of vernacular architecture. His work unites local and universal, folklore and avant-garde, architecture and visual art. The remnants of orthodox icons, architectural details and religious symbols appear in semi-transparent, montage-like overlaps in both Vajda's series of iconic self-portraits and graphic works. His vast artistic output is all the more remarkable given his premature death: Vajda died in a Jewish Forced Labor Camp in the fall of 1941, at the age of 33.

Another Time—Another Place: Contemporary Hungarian Video Artists is a selection of videos by young contemporary Hungarian artists. The exhibition explores shifts in time and space mostly in the context of exhibitions running in parallel. The custom-made visual texture of different videos may also serve as an opportunity for the artists to reveal their artistic strategies while shedding light on their critical, receptive or analytical attitude towards the medium, catching them in moments of self-reflection or remembering. For their inspiration these works rely heavily on the visual experience of everyday life, and with their minimalist plot they make an appeal to viewers sensitive to a more traditionally contemplative mood pregnant with expectation and appreciative of slight movements.

These exhibitions are part of **Extremely Hungary**, a yearlong festival showcasing contemporary Hungarian visual, performing, and literary arts in New York and Washington, D.C., throughout 2009. The festival is organized by the Hungarian Cultural Center in New York, which sponsors a range of programs celebrating Hungary's past, present and future, and is made possible in part by funding from the Hungarian Ministry of Education and Culture. For more information, please visit the festival's website at www.extremelyhungary.org.