BUDAPEST, HUNGARY

Hungarian National Gallery: Masterpieces

Twenty paintings from the Hungarian National Gallery, from the history pictures of Madarász and Munkácsy to Szinyei Merse in the open air, portraits by Ferenczy and Rippl-Rónai, and Derkovits's Bridge Builders.



The Hungarian National Gallery is in Buda Castle in Budapest and is devoted to art made in Hungary and by Hungarian artists. Its collection follows Hungarian painting from earlier centuries into the modern period, and alongside grand history, portraiture and landscape it makes room for scenes of everyday life.

The twenty paintings chosen here cover that range. History comes from Viktor Madarász and from Mihály Munkácsy's battlefield at Isaszeg, while Simon Hollósy contributes a study of an advancing crowd. Munkácsy also supplies the opposite extreme: one woman at a collection box. Every one of Pál Szinyei Merse's pictures here is set out of doors, whether a picnic, a balloon, a meadow of poppies or a lady in violet against a landscape. Károly Ferenczy and József Rippl-Rónai contribute portraits and self-portraits, and Ferenczy's include his own children. László Paál paints a village road and the inside of a forest, and Lajos Gulácsy paints literary and fantastical encounters. The latest picture, Gyula Derkovits's Bridge Builders, turns to industrial labour.

Artline chose these works from the museum's documented holdings, independently of the museum, and individual works may be on loan or off display. Dates and attributions follow the linked records and keep their qualifications.

Explore this selection in Artline

See the selected works alongside books and events from their period, or compare when the artists lived. The books and events provide context, not evidence of direct influence. Works without confirmed dates remain in this guide.

Artworks in context Who lived when?

artlines.org/guides/hungarian-national-gallery

The selection · 20

1. Picnic in May
   Pál Szinyei Merse · 1873
2. Lady in Violet
   Pál Szinyei Merse · 1874
3. The Balloon
   Pál Szinyei Merse · 1878
4. Meadow with Poppies
   Pál Szinyei Merse · 1896
5. Woman with a Birdcage
   József Rippl-Rónai · 1892
6. Self-Portrait in a Brown Hat
   József Rippl-Rónai · 1897
7. On the Hilltop
   Károly Ferenczy · 1901
8. Double Portrait: Béni and Noémi
   Károly Ferenczy · 1908
9. Self-Portrait in the Studio
   Károly Ferenczy · 1903
10. Siblings: The Artist's Children
    Károly Ferenczy · 1911
11. The Magician's Garden
    Lajos Gulácsy · 1906–1907
12. Dante's Meeting with Beatrice
    Lajos Gulácsy · c. 1906
13. The Road to Berzova
    László Paál · 1871
14. Depths of the Forest
    László Paál · 1876
15. The Battlefield of Isaszeg
    Mihály Munkácsy · 1867–1868
16. Before the Collection Box
    Mihály Munkácsy · 1874
17. Dózsa's People
    Viktor Madarász · 1868
18. Ilona Zrínyi before the Investigating Judge
    Viktor Madarász · 1859
19. The Rákóczi March: Study
    Simon Hollósy · 1899
20. Bridge Builders
    Gyula Derkovits · 1932

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Picnic in May

Pál Szinyei Merse

1873 · Hungarian National Gallery



Pál Szinyei Merse. Picnic in May. Image credit: Pál Szinyei Merse; Source credit: JAFZGy3-8OmOnw at Google Cultural Institute maximum zoom level. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

A party has settled round a white cloth in the open air, and nobody is posing. Some are busy with the food, others with conversation or their own thoughts, and they make no formal ring. That ease was carefully made. Szinyei Merse holds the afternoon together through the gaps between the figures and the objects scattered on the cloth.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 1547

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Lady in Violet

Pál Szinyei Merse

1874 · Hungarian National Gallery



Pál Szinyei Merse. Lady in Violet. Image credit: Pál Szinyei Merse; Source credit: OAEKWA0OA9AYqQ at Google Cultural Institute maximum zoom level. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

The title does not name her. It identifies her by her dress, and the painting gives the dress much of the work. The violet fills a large part of the canvas, and its dark folds bring the figure forward from a landscape of green and gold. The colour sets her apart from that background while staying closely related to it. Szinyei Merse builds the portrait partly out of costume, and the shape the dress gives her body counts for as much as her face.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 5078

03 / 20

The Balloon

Pál Szinyei Merse

1878 · Hungarian National Gallery



Pál Szinyei Merse. The Balloon. Image credit: Pál Szinyei Merse; Source credit: YQGm73WzJ0sNUA at Google Cultural Institute maximum zoom level. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Szinyei Merse gives the sky, usually the backdrop of a landscape, to a striped balloon. It fills the sky, and the stripes make the rounded envelope clear against the blue. The basket hanging beneath gives a sense of the height, while the land shrinks to a narrow strip below. The whole weight of the picture shifts upwards.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 4648

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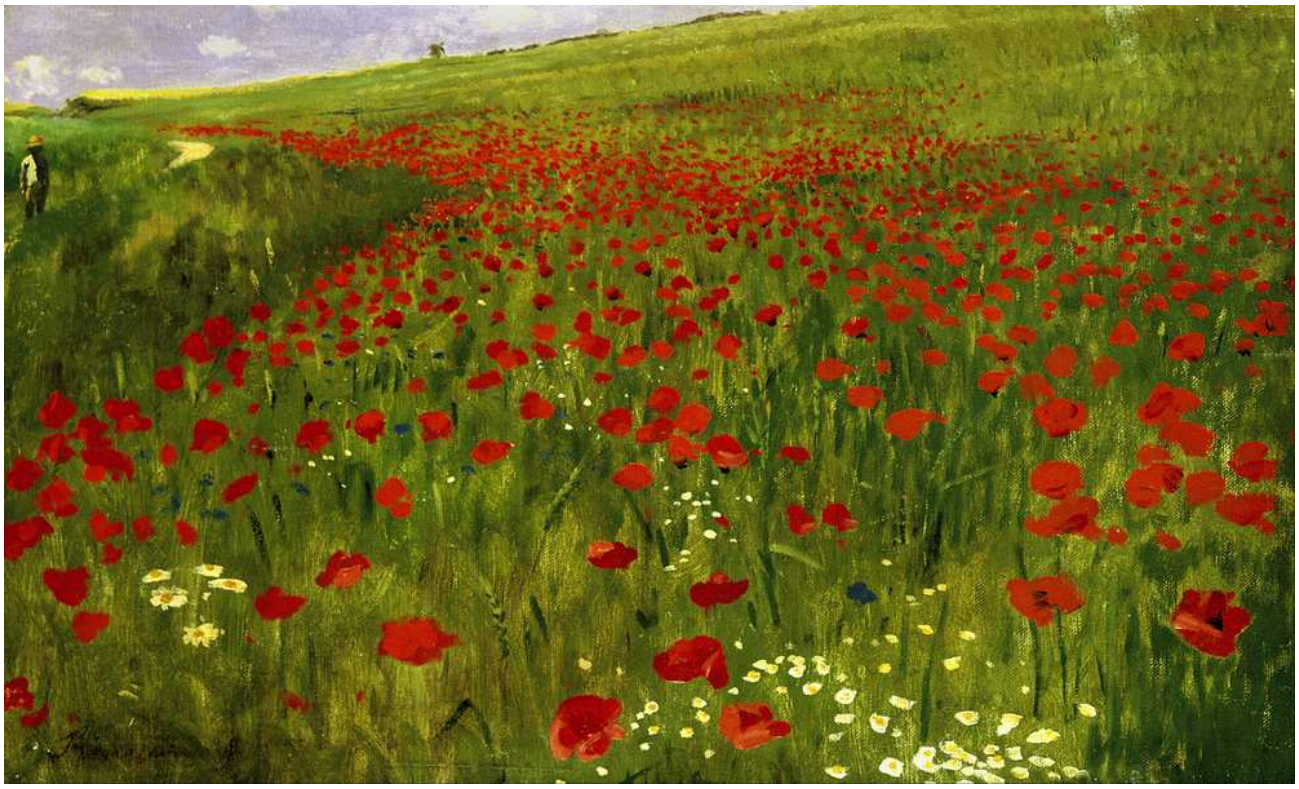
Meadow with Poppies

Pál Szinyei Merse

1896 · Hungarian National Gallery



Pál Szinyei Merse. Meadow with Poppies. Image credit: Szinyei Merse, Pál (1845 - 1920) – Painter (Hungarian) Born in Szinyeújfalu. Died in Jernye. Details on Google Art Project; Source credit: SwEgfZYCYPZimw at Google Cultural Institute maximum zoom level. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Szinyei Merse's latest picture in this selection has the plainest subject. Each red touch could be a single poppy or part of a pattern spreading through the green, and he leaves both readings open. The horizon is narrow, so the meadow itself holds the attention.

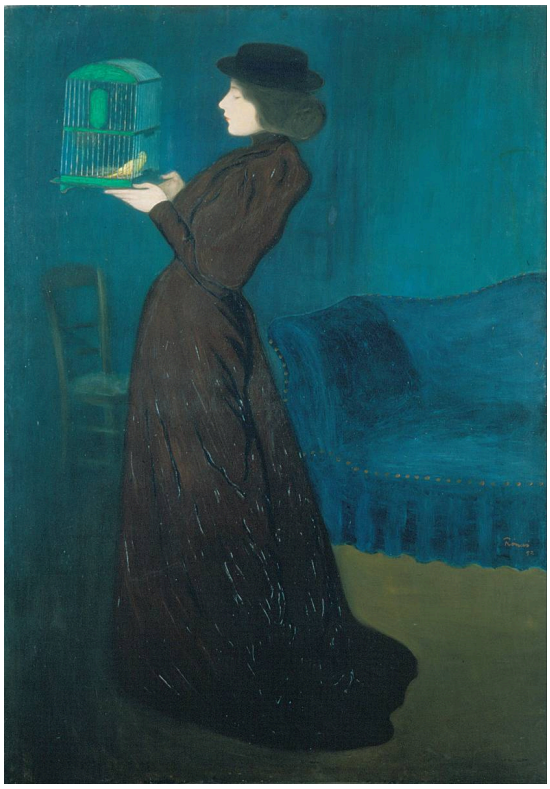
Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 3474

05 / 20

Woman with a Birdcage

József Rippl-Rónai

1892 · Hungarian National Gallery



József Rippl-Rónai. Woman with a Birdcage. Image credit: József Rippl-Rónai; Source credit: -QHtiPUw_NMxsg at Google Cultural Institute maximum zoom level. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

The woman is a long dark silhouette in a blue-green room, and the only thing that breaks her outline is the small cage she holds. Why a cage? Rippl-Rónai offers no anecdote. He keeps the room plain enough for that one object to change the whole arrangement, and builds the picture from the upright body, the hands and the suspended cage.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: FK1385

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Self-Portrait in a Brown Hat

József Rippl-Rónai

1897 · Hungarian National Gallery



József Rippl-Rónai. Self-Portrait in a brown hat. Image credit: Rippl-Rónai, József (1861 - 1927) – Painter (Hungarian) Born in Kaposvár. Died in Kaposvár. Details on Google Art Project; Source credit: YAG0kbOemTb_SQ at Google Cultural Institute maximum zoom level. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Rippl-Rónai painted himself in front of a wall crowded with pictures, which places the likeness firmly within his profession: a painter among pictures. The brown hat of the title sits above a turned face, and a grey coat spreads across the foreground as a broad area beneath them. The crowded wall was chosen as part of the self-portrait.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 57.60 T

07 / 20

On the Hilltop

Károly Ferenczy

1901 · Hungarian National Gallery



Károly Ferenczy. On the Hill-top. Image credit: Károly Ferenczy; Source credit: A Ferenczy Károly-kiállítás készítőinek blogja Pic Source of painting properties: Fine Arts in Hungary. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Most of Ferenczy's pictures in this selection keep people at close quarters. Here the person is small: a dark figure standing where shaded vegetation meets clear sky, with the landscape dominant. The open space around the figure keeps it distinct, and its smallness gives the measure of the view.

Object source · Open artwork

08 / 20

Double Portrait: Béni and Noémi

Károly Ferenczy

1908 · Hungarian National Gallery



Károly Ferenczy. Double Portrait (Béni and Noémi). Image credit: Károly Ferenczy; Source credit: Photo by User:Yelkrokoyade Source of painting properties: Fine arts in Hungary. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Béni and Noémi share a blue surround but not a pose. A raised arm and joined hands give them different postures, and neither mirrors the other. Ferenczy connects them while keeping their actions distinct, so the picture is read across the space between them as well as face by face, and never settles into two matching likenesses in a single frame.

Object source · Open artwork

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Self-Portrait in the Studio

Károly Ferenczy

1903 · Hungarian National Gallery



Károly Ferenczy. Self-portrait (in the Atelier). Image credit: Károly Ferenczy; Source credit: Fine Arts in Hungary:. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Here Ferenczy shows himself at work. His raised hand points towards something beyond the edge of the canvas, and whatever he is considering stays out of view. Painting equipment identifies the studio. A few years earlier, Rippl-Rónai had placed himself against a wall of pictures. Ferenczy shows the activity itself, and the working gesture keeps the picture from settling into a conventional portrait.

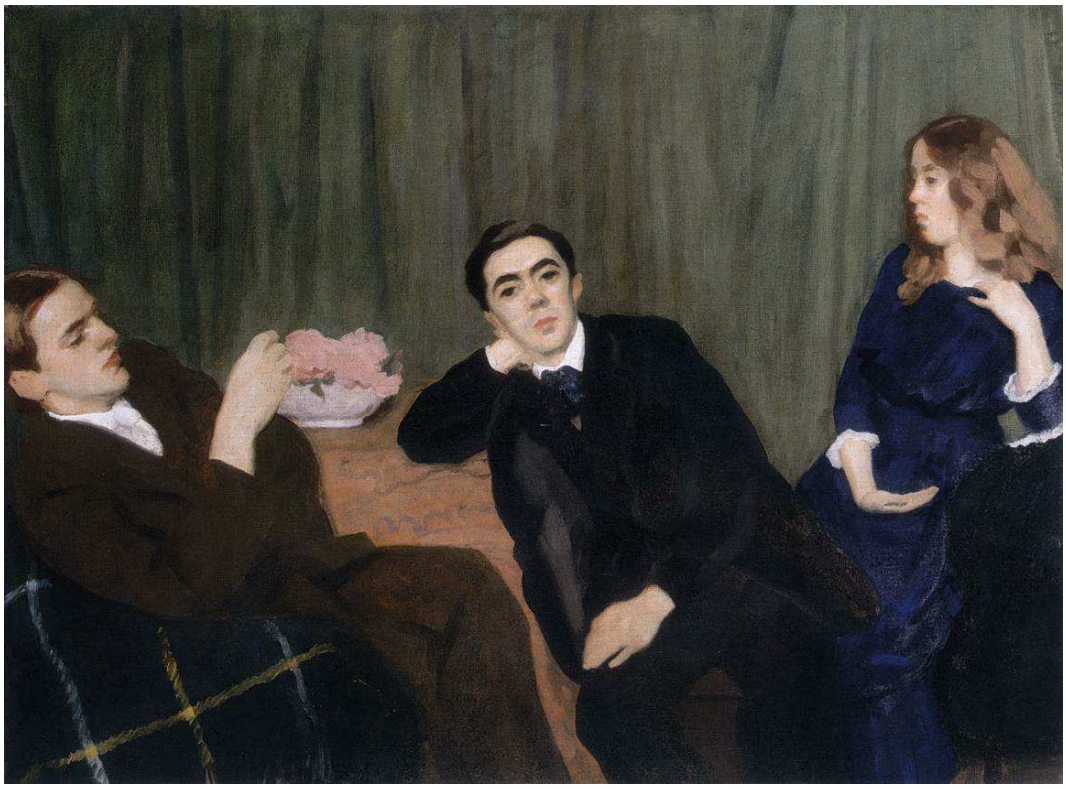
Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 2473

10 / 20

Siblings: The Artist's Children

Károly Ferenczy

1911 · Hungarian National Gallery



Károly Ferenczy. Siblings (The Artist's Children). Image credit: Károly Ferenczy; Source credit: Fine Arts in Hungary:. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

The three children are grouped close together, yet each turns in a different direction, and they are not made to look outwards together. Flowers and a curtain help to organise the group. As in the double portrait of Béni and Noémi, being close does not mean sharing a pose.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 6336

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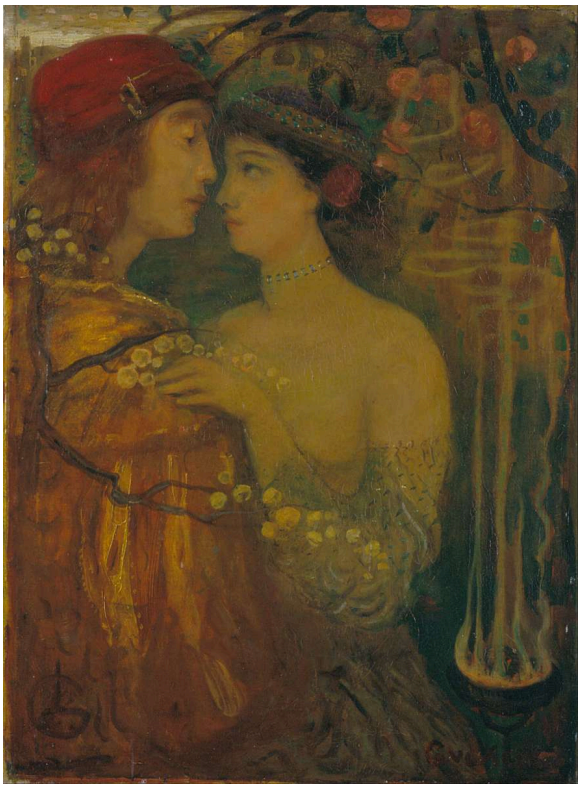
The Magician's Garden

Lajos Gulácsy

1906–1907 · Hungarian National Gallery



Lajos Gulácsy. The garden of the magician. Image credit: Lajos Gulácsy; Source credit: 5QESAciqYHxpww at Google Cultural Institute maximum zoom level. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Everything gathers at the narrow gap where the figures' heads almost meet. Around them is a richly patterned setting, but Gulácsy withholds the usual clues to space, so the garden is hard to map, and costume and gesture have to carry the relationship. That the figures are close is clear. Where they are, and what has brought them together, is not, which seems apt for a garden that the title gives to a magician.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: FK10197

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Dante's Meeting with Beatrice

Lajos Gulácsy

c. 1906 · Hungarian National Gallery



Lajos Gulácsy. Dante's Meeting with Beatrice. Image credit: Lajos Gulácsy; Source credit: Fine Arts in Hungary:. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

The title promises a meeting, and Gulácsy paints the moment before it. A path and some trees still separate the figure in red from the approaching women. It makes an instructive pair with The Magician's Garden, painted at about the same time, where the figures' heads almost touch. In this picture the distance has not yet been crossed.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: FK302

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The Road to Berzova

László Paál

1871 · Hungarian National Gallery



László Paál. The Road to Berzova. Image credit: László Paál; Source credit: Self-scanned. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Paál gives the picture to a road. Reddish and ordinary, it links houses, trees and scattered figures, with no grand view beyond. The warm ground and the upright autumn trees pull the eye in different directions, and between them the village gains depth and continuity without a single focal point.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 2230

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Depths of the Forest

László Paál

1876 · Hungarian National Gallery



László Paál. Depths of the Forest. Image credit: László Paál; Source credit: https://www.hung-art.hu/kep/p/paal/muvek/1875-78/erdomelz.jpg. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Where The Road to Berzova opens out along a village route, this picture closes in. Tall trunks gather round a pale opening, and the wood becomes something like an interior lit from far off. The repeated verticals give order without uniformity, since growth stays uneven and the foliage is dark. The opening hints at a way through, but the enclosing trees fill most of the view.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: FK1819

15 / 20

The Battlefield of Isaszeg

Mihály Munkácsy

1867–1868 · Hungarian National Gallery



Mihály Munkácsy. The Battlefield of Isaszeg. Image credit: Mihály Munkácsy; Source credit: Munkácsy Foundation Info Pic. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

For a battlefield picture, it is notably short of heroes. Small figures and animals are scattered across a wide, darkening landscape, and the ground runs on well beyond any single action. Broken light picks out activity here and there, but no dominant figure draws the event together, and the field is hard to take in at once.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 1821

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Before the Collection Box

Mihály Munkácsy

1874 · Hungarian National Gallery



Mihály Munkácsy. In front of the Collecting Box. Image credit: Mihály Munkácsy; Source credit: https://mng.hu/mutargyak/persely-elott/. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

A woman reaches towards a collection box fixed to the wall, and that is the whole action. Munkácsy isolates her in a dim interior and lets the light fall on her face and clothing. The gesture tells us she is giving, and nothing in the picture explains what moves her to it.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 7022

17 / 20

Dózsa's People

Viktor Madarász

1868 · Hungarian National Gallery



Viktor Madarász. Dózsa's People. Image credit: Viktor Madarász; Source credit: Hungarian National Gallery Info Pic. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

The title promises a people, and Madarász shows them as a group defined by effort. The figures strain around a raised body and a tall support, and bent limbs, cloth and lifted arms show how difficult the body is to handle. The suffering is given a physical structure before any one face stands out. What holds the group together is the task in hand more than any shared expression.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 54.324

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Ilona Zrínyi before the Investigating Judge

Viktor Madarász

1859 · Hungarian National Gallery



Viktor Madarász. Ilona Zrínyi before the Investigating Judge. Image credit: Viktor Madarász; Source credit: Fine Arts in Hungary:. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

The woman and child stand. The men facing them have the seats, the arms and the ceremonial apparatus of the room. Madarász conveys institutional power through how space and objects are shared out as well as through faces. Standing upright sets the pair apart, but it also exposes how unequal their position is, since they have so few means of occupying the room.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 2805

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The Rákóczi March: Study

Simon Hollósy

1899 · Hungarian National Gallery



Simon Hollósy. "The Rákóczi-March" (Study). Image credit: Simon Hollósy; Source credit: Fine Arts in Hungary: More info: [1]. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Because this is a study for The Rákóczi March, its unevenness is part of the interest. Some faces already stand out from the advancing crowd while others are still rough marks, yet the movement of the whole group is settled. You can see the arrangement still being put together: the crowd moves as one before its members have become individuals.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: FK8032

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Bridge Builders

Gyula Derkovits

1932 · Hungarian National Gallery



Gyula Derkovits. Bridge Builders. Image credit: Gyula Derkovits; Source credit: Fine Arts in Hungary:. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Pale beams cut across workers in orange above blue water. Derkovits fits the people and the structure they are building into one tight network of edges, and the same divisions organise both, so the labour cannot be separated from the bridge.

Object source · Open artwork

What holds a group together

Many of these pictures turn on what binds several people together, and the answer changes with the subject. In the room where Ilona Zrínyi faces her judge, people are sorted by power. Among Dózsa's people the bond is shared physical effort, and in Hollósy's study it is the forward push of a crowd. Szinyei Merse lets his picnic party hang together loosely. Ferenczy keeps Béni and Noémi, and his children, close while giving each a posture of their own, and Derkovits binds his workers tightest of all, into the framework of the bridge. Against these stand the solitary figures: Munkácsy's woman at the collection box, Rippl-Rónai's woman with her cage, the small figure on Ferenczy's hilltop. In those pictures a single gesture, an object or simply open space does the organising that a group does elsewhere.

Further reading

The Practice and Science of Drawing

Harold Speed · Read free · English

Harold Speed's book is a general guide to drawing, not a study of Hungarian painting. It offers a working vocabulary for how figures, masses and colour are organised in a picture. That vocabulary can be tried out on these pictures, from the placing of Ferenczy's sitters to Derkovits's tight arrangement of workers and steel.

Museum website · Official collection guide

Sources and visitor information checked: 2026-10-12
