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A Paradox of Applied Folk Arts. The Contribution of Cooperative Folk Arts to the Construction of the Notion of the Emblematic Creator

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ABSTRACT

The self-definitions of today's folk artists, as well as the concept(s) of folk art of official umbrella and quality assurance organizations, are rooted in complex, interrelated processes. In my study, I focus on the post-World War II concept of folk art, which is full of contradictions, but, despite all protests, has had an undeniable impact on the folk art of today. The system of applied folk arts paradoxically fostered the prominence of individual creators, in contrast to the communication of its novel cooperatives in the decades after World War II, which emphasized communal work. These creators – often possessing truly authentic folk art knowledge (some having gained their reputation before World War II) but no longer following the peasant way of life – were depicted by the media in rural or bucolic genre situations, thereby heavily aestheticizing the concepts of *folk* and *folk art*. At the same time, socialist cultural policy also emphasized their status as artists and creators, making them key figures in the cooperatives' work for decades as lead designers, prompting them to revitalize their local motif stock. At this point, another paradox of the Applied Folk Arts Council's perspective emerges, as the representation of the folk art of emblematic regions can increasingly be seen as the representation of the style of an individual (lead designer or charismatic artist). In my opinion, considering the 19th-century roots of the process, the definition of today's folk artists' products as unique works of art and the profound respect for design skills is rooted in this perspective that focuses on the work of iconic personalities, as I also point out in my case study analyzing Tiszafüred pottery through the work of several generations, a style that was adapted by Sándor Kántor and became known as Karcag pottery.

KEYWORDS

applied folk art, cottage industry cooperatives, emblematic ethnographic regions, individual artist, pottery

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In post-World War II Hungary (like in other countries of the Eastern Bloc), a series of cooperatives were established, providing a framework for agriculture, trade, small-scale industry, and cottage industry (etc.).[1] Although both the official public interest in the production of folk art objects and the cooperative forms of employment and distribution date back to the 19th century, the 1953 establishment of the National Alliance of Cottage Industry Cooperatives (Háziipari Szövetkezetek Országos Szövetsége, HISZÖV) and the Applied Folk Arts Council (Népi Iparművészeti Tanács, NIT) resulted in a significant change in production. The employment structure of the members became more streamlined and uniform than before, in line with the ideal of official state communication, i.e., full employment, and only pieces reviewed and approved by a body of quality assurance with a nation-wide scope, the NIT, were placed on the shelves of the network of stores operated by the cooperatives. The products of *applied folk arts*[2] produced in cooperatives have often been criticized by both the folk art movement of young people formed in the 1970s (Balogh – Fülemile 2008; Juhász et al. 2018; Cseh 2020a) and by ethnography. My study intends to nuance the image of this concept apostrophized as 'mass-produced,' 'impersonal,' or 'kitsch,' to highlight that the community- and self-definition of today's folk artists is rooted to a great extent in the ideas of applied folk art. In the first part of the paper, I examine the three components of the definition of a folk artist that I consider relevant, and then I illustrate my findings with a case study.

THE FOLK ARTIST AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE 'FOLK'

The roots of the definition of folk culture as national culture, the use of folk art objects in civil and intellectual (i.e., non-peasant) contexts, and the production of objects in the framework of the cottage industry reach back to the 19th century[3] in today's Hungary and in the historically Hungarian regions.[4]

[1]The applied folk art cooperatives – largely regional, with only a few exceptions – were established primarily in the 1950s and, after a restructuring in the second half of the 1960s, abolished following the 1989 regime change (when slightly more than 60 relevant cooperatives were reported nationwide). Some of the organizations continued their operation between 1990 and 2000, but today, with the exception of the legal successor of the Heves Folk Art and Cottage Industry Cooperative, they have completely disappeared (Nagy 1980a:65, 1980b; Ament-Kovács 2019a:687, 2019b:17, 2020:190).

[2]Within the present framework, I do not have the opportunity to present in detail the cooperative transformation of folk art and the history of handicraft and applied folk art cooperatives (for a separate study on this, see: Ament–Kovács 2020; on the social background of the era, see: Ö. Kovács 2013). I would like to emphasize that the application of the term *applied folk art* poses serious challenges to researchers, as it has indiscriminately encompassed all branches of folk art and decorative folk art that can actually be defined as authentic (including pastoral art), making no distinction between art that was cultivated occasionally or practiced as a specialty. It also integrated certain segments of cottage industry and small-scale handicrafts, the products of which would have been impossible to produce without a workshop equipped with appropriate technical equipment (Flórián 1992:4–5; Szilágyi 2006:264; Cseh 2014:107–138). Despite all this, the term is still in use among both artists and ethnographers, even though the latter are constantly striving to redefine it. On the relationship between ethnographic research and material folk art see: Cseh 2020b.

[3]For an overview of the 19th-century trend of using folk objects and the interest of the economic and intellectual elite in peasant culture, see Zoltán Fejős' comprehensive study: Fejös 1991. For a comprehensive bibliography of the topic: Domonkos – Nagybákay (eds.) 1992:115–118.

[4]A certain percentage of cooperatives established in the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, as well as regions with significant folk art heritage, were partitioned from present-day Hungary as a result of the Treaty of Trianon that ended World War I (June 4, 1920). Due to revisionism and seeking authenticity, objects decorated with motifs from these regions shall be distinguished in the following from the subject matter of the production and use of the types of objects I have examined.

Despite the communist takeover and the lifestyle change of the rural population, and thus a certain degree of change in the function of objects, there was still a widespread demand for the use of folk art products. In official state communication following the establishment of dictatorship (1949), however, both clerical and national ideas were relegated to the background, and in this era, moderating the former national overtones, *folk* came to refer primarily to the representation of agrarian, peasant culture (just think of the revolutionary workers' and peasants' government).

According to the processes explained above – although not as a direct consequence – the Applied Folk Arts Council's ideology also aestheticized archaic folk art and the rural lifestyle of folk artisans (an idea elaborated in the next chapter). They had a penchant for depicting members of cooperatives in folk costumes[5] and in rural settings in stylized genre scenes, sometimes implying that their everyday way of life was more archaic than that of modern people. Although they broke with national ideas in their official communication, their exhibitions and publications disguised the fact that certain artists had always lived in cities, or that the tastes of intellectuals who consciously collected folk art or acquired holiday homes in villages in the decades before World War II had had a significant impact on the process of artifact production (Fügedi 1997:21–32; Cseri et al. (eds.) 2004; Vándor 2006:17–21). Many cooperatives played an essential role in exploring folk art resources, teaching traditional skills to thousands of their employees, and adapting object making traditions to contemporary needs. However, their endeavors show a deliberate stylization and intent to conflate ethnographic heritage with contemporary folk art objects,[6] as they have implemented an export strategy by partly appropriating cultural assets, which is not a uniquely Hungarian phenomenon (Virtanen 1993:31–32; Hashimoto 1998:35–36, 43; Schramm 2004:69) (Figs 1a–b).

Perhaps the consequence of this sometimes exaggerated aestheticization was that a group of young people interested in folklore and material folk art from the 1970s, called the *nomadic generation*, and the Young Folk Artists' Studio (Fiatal Népművészek Stúdiója), comprised

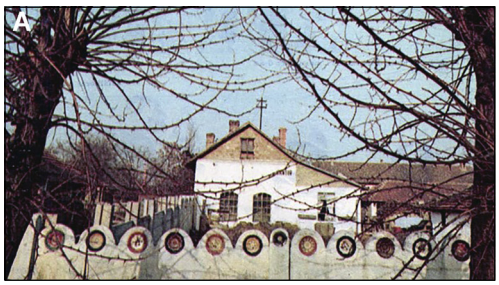

Fig. 1. (a–b) The figure of Sándor Kántor: idea and reality. Sándor Kántor's home, 1976. (Source: Bodrogi 1976:14); Sándor Kántor's House of Pottery, established by NIT in 1982 (now maintained by the Györffy István Nagykun Museum) (Photo by the author, 2015)

[5]On the era's concept of folk costume, see Ágnes Fülemile's comprehensive study: Fülemile 2020.

[6]For example, a booklet on the history of the Matyó Folk Art and Cottage Industry Cooperative in Mezőkövesd between 1951 and 1961 talks about Matyó folklife and folk art, but the relationship of this momentum to the objects produced by the cooperative is not explained at all. See: Molnár ed. 1961.

primarily of urban intellectuals, criticized the folk art concept of HISZÖV and NIT as well as the cooperatives' methods of mass production (Peate 1933:179) and voiced their objections to the unfunctionality of their mass-produced articles (Kányási Holb 2016:38). However, the movement objected not to the articles themselves but also to a lack of social function in their mode of production, thereby creating a kind of alternative reality; after all, in this era, folk art was still considered a living phenomenon and their movement the authentic stewards of folk art (Csomor 1979:7; Bánszky 2003:2; Szilágyi 2005:325–326; Cseh 2020a:229–231). A desire to return to nature became the key point of the events and creative camps organized by the members of the movement,[7] and the creation of an authentic atmosphere with folk costumes, scenery, craft demonstrations, and children's activities has remained a criterion in their craft fairs to this day. Thus, considering the implications of the fundamental changes in production and consumption, folk art became an independent style, in which *folk*, similarly to the 19th-century roots of the process, is an adjective in the category of the sociology of art (Verebélyi 2019:230), thereby preventing the applied arts from adapting folk art forms like they did in the Baltics and Scandinavia (Domanovszky 1973:4; Väkeva 1993:150).

THE FOLK ARTIST AS THE CREATOR OF AN EMBLEMATIC REGION

One of the goals of applied folk arts was to represent emblematic Hungarian regions.[8] In these ethnographic regions, the NIT and county museums intervened more effectively in what motifs and types of objects were to be produced. Indeed, unique innovations are not unprecedented in the history of folk art, but these new, hybrid products, created by combining the motifs of different settlements in a region, certainly are.[9]

The applied folk art movement, which safeguarded folk art, drew inspiration for its designs and motifs for the items sold in the cooperative stores primarily from the materials found in museums from the mid-1800s or possibly collected by cooperative members. In the re-established, revitalized workshops, the application of this approach was less of a barrier (see the first section of my case study). However, this expectation posed a difficult situation for the creative community of regions where modified forms of folk art have survived (such as the simplified hand-weaving culture of Őrhalom/Nógrád county/) or where the market-oriented history of

[7]On the relation of folk art to nature and naturalness, see Fruzsina Cseh's comprehensive study: Cseh 2021, as well as Gábor Tarján's case study: Tarján 1983.

[8]Presumably due to the county museum system, ethnographic researchers in Hungary prepared regional folk art monographs not according to ethnographic regions but according to administrative units and counties, although they would have had the opportunity to examine cross-border regions after the 1989 regime change. For more information on this, see the volumes of the *Népművészeti örökségünk* [Hungarian Folk Art Heritage] series (referred to both colloquially and in the ethnographic profession as the County Folk Art series).

[9]The Applied Folk Arts Council, as the quality assurance body for products sold on the shelves of the cooperative store network, had the opportunity to form a consistent opinion on the quality of the types of objects being produced. The NIT was also indirectly involved in the training of individual creators and designers, but the collecting work of the employees of the cooperatives and the designers were influenced by the ethnographer museologists of the regional museum collections, sometimes to a lesser degree, other times more significantly. For example, the town Baja never had a weaving culture of its own, but as a result of the collections of the István Türr Museum in Baja and of teacher Flóra Báldi, Jánosné Porkoláb Éva Orjai was able to develop a unique weaving culture (Domanovszky 1983:24).

applied folk arts dates to the turn of the 20th century, and, understandably, the work of the immediate predecessors is seen as a model (e.g., Kalocsa/Bács-Kiskun county) (Kapros 1997:95; Romsics 2003:29–39). Detailed research is still needed to clarify why the still relevant antecedents of local material folk art and the role of NIT and local cooperatives are not taken into consideration in decision-making processes in certain regions. The potters of Óbánya received a certain level of training at the earthenware school in Mágocs or the Zsolnay Porcelain Factory in Pécs before World War II and were already making items (such as coffee sets) that were foreign to their local and folk traditions. In the case of Matyó embroiderers, the types of objects intended for personal use and for sale were distinguished as early as the beginning of the 20th century (Fügedi 1997:61; Vándor 2006:8; Fülemile 2018:70–71). Moreover, functionality did not usually play a role in their ethnographic concept, which is why the first generation of artists sometimes found it difficult to cope with the contradiction of producing traditionally non-commodity items for sale (Fél 1975:6). In some regions, urbanization and modernization caused less of an upheaval, as the communities have maintained a tradition and practice of continuously adapting to changes due to their less articulated culture (Jávor 1984:358).

The Bureau of Popular Education Propaganda (Népművelési Propaganda Iroda), which coordinated the activities of primarily local public cultural institutions, also published in large numbers the motifs of certain emblematic regions for special interest clubs and individual creators, accompanied by drawings of the embroiderable patterns. The approach of the works can basically be divided into two major groups. The volumes edited by ethnographers and based on museum collections include drawings of authentic copies of works of art,[10] while other publications were the result of the cooperation of ethnographers and artists, utilizing the embroiderers' design and drawing talents,[11] thereby projecting the key role designers would play in the future.

THE FOLK ARTIST AS "ARTIST"

The general public was introduced to some of the creators of the 19th-century cottage industry cooperatives by name (Fejős 1991:153–154; cf.: Landgraf 2019:556), and some of the artists and artisans were at this time already utilizing the motifs of folk art objects according to Hungarian tastes during the processes mentioned in point I.1. Considering the nationwide exhibitions after World War II, the tendency to highlight great personalities among folk artists and artisans was closely connected to the convergence of folk art to fine art and applied art. Of course, this approach was observable mainly in the exhibition themes of the displayed artifacts; in terms of professional training or social contacts, the relationship between the creators was firmly

[10]For example: Kerecsényi, Edit: *Zala megye népi hímzései I. Zalai fehérhímzések* [Folk embroidery of Zala County I. Whitework Embroidery of Zala]. Budapest: Népművelési Propaganda Iroda. 1975. Also: Fügedi, Márta: *Mezőkövesd és vidéke hímzései I. Szálánvarrott vászonhímzések – Mezőkövesd és vidéke hímzései II. Szabadrajzú hímzések* [Embroidery of Mezőkövesd and its Surroundings I. Cross-stitch Embroidery - Embroidery of Mezőkövesd and its Surroundings II. Freely Drawn Embroidery]. Budapest: Népművelési Propaganda Iroda. n.d.

[11]For example: Andrásfalvy, Bertalan – Németh, Pálné: *Sárközi hímzések régen és ma* [Sárköz Embroideries Past and Present]. Budapest: Népművelési Propaganda Iroda. 1982. Also: Fél, Edit – Beszprémy, Józsefné: *Nyugat-dunántúli szabadrajzú hímzések mintarajzai* [Drawings of Freely Drawn Embroidery Patterns from Western Transdanubia]. Budapest: Magyar Népművelési Intézet. 1993.

articulated, and the distance between them continued to increase until the regime change (Ament-Kovács 2020:189–196).

Design skill was a key concept in defining representatives of folk art as artists. The representatives of the first generation of the usually overrepresented Master of Folk Art[12] awardees carried on a kind of authentic tradition, which was not in line with NIT's concept of folk art. But their talent was sufficient to allow them as artistic directors and designers in the cooperatives to determine the decades-long work of the contractors and fabricators, even overcoming regular shortages of raw materials—in a word, the main profile of each branch of the cooperative (Flórián 1990:232; Szilágyi 2005:323).

This tendency prevailed both at the exhibitions organized by NIT[13] and at National Folk Art Exhibitions (*Országos Népművészeti Kiállítás*).[14] Among the awardees there was a pronounced appreciation of design and adaptations of works, and when the award was bestowed, the catalogues highlighted the designer rather than the cooperative that served as their actual place of work or the person who constructed the artifact (Varga – Reményik eds. 1972; Varga ed. 1973; Puskásné Oláh ed. 1992).[15]

When this first generation went inactive, the cooperatives contracted university-educated designers and provided regular training to their workers, which ensured new circulation for the production of artifacts, yet they continued to encourage the recognition of those with an outstanding talent for design as artists (Ament-Kovács 2019b:687; cf. Congdon 1986:97–100). As a result of this approach, in the case of embroidery and weaving, the Applied Folk Art Advisory Board (Népi Iparművészeti Tanácsadó Testület)[16] still awards the jury prize to the designer of the artifact and not to the constructor who actually made the item. This confirms the tendency according to which, in addition to the utilization of the motifs of a region, the reformulation that stems from the creativity of a given master should also be seen as following a norm when considering the work of today's folk artists (Verebélyi 2019:20; cf. Balogh 2010:125–129).

[12]The highest official award, established in 1952, for practitioners and stewards of material folk art and various folklore genres. The list of awardees is available at the following link: http://nepmuveszetmesterei.hu/(accessed May 26, 2021)

[13]The Applied Folk Arts Council organized the following competitions: *Kis Jankó Bori Hímzőpályázat* [Bori Kis Jankó Embroidery Competition] (1963–), *Gerencsér Sebestyén Fazekaspályázat* [Sebestyén Gerencsér Pottery Competition] – but the competition bears no longer his name today – (1967–), *id. Kapoli Antal Országos faragópályázat* [Antal Kapoli Sr. National Carving Competition] (1967–), *Országos Szőttespályázat* [National Weaving Competition] (1967–), *Országos Kismesterség Pályázat* [National Small Craft Competition] (1982–) (Varga 2006:198). To this day, competitions are announced every three years.

[14]Among the winners of the National Folk Art Exhibition, which has been held since 1973, representatives of cooperatives have been gradually replaced by creators from special interest clubs and members of the youth folk art movement. The exhibition, called *Élő Népművészet* [Living Folk Art], is held every five years (due to the pandemic, the last such occasion was in April 2021 instead of 2020), and the *Pomegranate Award* bestowed by the exhibition jury is still one of the most prestigious professional awards today.

[15]Of course, the quality of items purposefully made for exhibitions sometimes drastically differed from those made for sale (Csomor 1979:7).

[16]Nowadays, the qualification and *jurying* of artifacts is organized by the Applied Folk Arts Department of the Hungarian Heritage House (Hagyományok Háza, Népi Iparművészeti Osztály), and the title of Folk Craftsman is awarded by the Applied Folk Arts Advisory Board (NITT) as the successor of the Applied Folk Arts Council (NIT).

CASE STUDY

'Karcag pottery': The form of Tiszafüred pottery adapted by Sándor Kántor

In my case study, I present the revitalization methods of the Middle Tisza Region pottery tradition in a modified location, a process that began before World War II but flourished in the era of folk craft cooperatives, linking the process with the work of potters still active today.

The centuries-old Tiszafüred pottery tradition[17] seemed to have disappeared by the early 20th century, but, prompted by a higher impulse – and with some changes in form – it continued to live on thanks to the initiative of Sándor Kántor. Its focal point became Karcag, the center of post-World War II folk pottery in the Nagykunság, whose function as a hub was further enhanced by the revival of *kun* [Cuman] embroidery traditions[18] and cooperative lace-making[19] (Füvessy 2004:409). That Füred (Tiszafüred) once again became a dominant pottery center is due to the fortuitous fact that the family of Imre Szűcs – a student of Kántor – who later became a master himself, moved to Tiszafüred when Szűcs was a child—and thus the settlement regained the lead as a *Füred pottery center* after the death of Sándor Kántor (Fig. 2).

Presumably, this process could not have taken place if a potter born into the trade (for example, the Gerencsér family in Siklós or the Fazekas family in Nádudvar) had initiated the establishment of a new workshop. Sándor Kántor (Karcag, September 4, 1894 – Karcag, October 23, 1989) abandoned the peasant way of life of his ancestors when he apprenticed with the potter János Ácsi Kovács for four years in 1907. Upon completing his apprenticeship, at the age of 17, he was too old to continue working as a novice but still too young to become an independent master and establish a workshop, so he asked for help from the secretary of the Debrecen

[17]In Tiszafüred, one of the major centers of the Middle Tisza ceramic style groups, sources indicate the presence of potters since the 18th century, but these early masters were still making black vessels. Glazed vessels became typical of the region from the 1830s, and *Miska jugs* (wine pitcher in the form of a man), *butykoskorsó* (water jugs), *butella* (brandy flasks), *szilke* (dish glazed inside and out), and, of course, bowls and plates were already significant among the types of items produced. The base colors of the latter were varied, with white, brown, green, red, yellow, ocher, and *dudi* (pale yellow). They usually had undulating edges, and they often used two colors on the vessels, in which case the color of the inside of the vessel was usually the opposite of that of the outside. The most common ornamentations were plant elements, such as the triple flower or the double flower with a bent stem. Families who have been making pottery for generations played a major role in the development of this style, but by the end of the 19th century these native Tiszafüred dynasties had disintegrated, and by this time, in addition to the traditional Füred style, they were also creating items in the Gyöngyös–Pásztó style (Füvessy 1979:192–218, 1993; Nagy-Molnár 2006).

[18]The *kuns* (Cumans) were a Turkic nomadic people who by the beginning of the 13th century came under pressure from the Mongols invading Europe, and eventually settled in the Carpathian Basin through several contact zones, although scattered communities can be traced back to the end of the 11th century. *Kun embroidery* is an important element of the local Nagykunság identity, which is today in the Trans-Tisza region. This type of embroidery flourished by the middle of the 19th century. At that time, the base material was hemp cloth, and the embroidery was made with yarn made from the wool of the *racka* sheep, dyed in pastel colors. The typical motif of this embroidery type is the *Cuman rose*, and areas were filled with the so-called *tendril* and *mustache* motifs. Due to a nationwide interest, artifacts ornamented with Cuman embroidery were produced in large numbers in the local folk crafts cooperatives. For embroidery activities in cooperatives and special interest clubs, see: Füvessy 2004:409–410.

[19]Regional lace-makers – taking into account local use induced by a certain degree of local embourgeoisement – have been making their products for sale for many decades. Belonging to a mixed cooperative (at that time there was one folk craft cooperative in Karcag with a mixed profile and one that produced ceramic items exclusively) further increased the importance of this in terms of artistic activity and employment opportunities.

Fig. 2. Sándor Kántor in his workshop, with the "Miska" jugs that have become his trademark (Fortepan_96538/ Antal Kotnyek)

Chamber of Commerce. Due to his limited financial circumstances, he worked at the Zsolnay Porcelain Factory in Pécs from March to December 1912, where he received the news from the secretary of the Chamber of Commerce that he would have the opportunity to attend a masterclass at the Uzhhorod (Ungvár) State Vocational School for Earthenware Industry. After completing the course, he also worked in Homonna, Kassa, Mágocs, and Debrecen. Having fulfilled his military service, he was able to obtain a business license in 1920, so he had the opportunity to continue his trade, although at that time he made simple, cheaper utensils. The

town of Karcag provided him with a large workshop at the public brick factory, but, having moved several times, he was only able to create his optimal workshop conditions in 1929. As an emblematic representative of applied folk arts, he was among the first to receive the title of Master of Folk Art in 1953 and was awarded a grand prize at the 1958 Brussels World's Fair. He had a solo exhibition at the Palace of Art in 1970[20] and was awarded the Kossuth Prize in 1978[21] (Ruffy 1972a, b, c, 1973a, b; Domanovszky 1977; Kaposvári 1982:3–14; Varga 1983:255; Füvessy 2004:408).

His career perfectly exemplifies the pre-World War II, institutionalizing roots of applied folk arts. Having graduated from a vocational school as a master potter, in addition to his eclectic knowledge of materials he also developed his drawing skills in the education system. Another defining element of his career was his 1927 encounter with professor of ethnography István Györffy,[22] who encouraged him to revive the endangered art of Tiszafüred pottery. Although after Füred pottery the ceramic culture of Mezőcsát and Gyöngyös–Pásztó also influenced his work, it was nonetheless defined by the Middle Tisza Region folk pottery tradition. Thus, Karcag pottery is seen as an independent style of Tiszafüred ceramics adapted by Sándor Kántor.

Two decades prior to the guidelines issued by the NIT or county museum professionals, from the 1930s, his work shows conscious efforts to not only reproduce the authentic objects he collected but also recreate them. Already between the two world wars he was producing household commodities (such as coffee sets) adapted to the lifestyle and taste of the urbanites of the era. The sculptures of *Karcag Judge* and *Woman in Fur Coat* can be considered original works of his inspired by the 1958 Brussels World's Fair (Domanovszky 1970; Bodrogi 1979:9; Lengyel 1991:39). The sculptural representation of humans has a respectable, age-old tradition in Hungarian pottery, and especially in the Middle Tisza region.[23] The popularity of this type of artifact among the urban intelligentsia is indicated by the fact that in January 1936, ethnography professor István Györffy ordered 10 more Miska jugs[24] from Sándor Kántor in a letter, for, as he explained, he had given them away to his friends. Although the people of the Nagykunság claimed that the wine jug depicts the Jász-Cuman hussars' costume, it was presumably the

[20]The Kunsthalle (Műcsarnok), built in 1895 on Heroes' Square, is the largest exhibition hall in Budapest, hosting exhibitions of contemporary art and typically providing an opportunity for the most significant representatives of the fine and applied arts to showcase their work.

[21]The Kossuth Prize is the highest Hungarian state award in recognition of cultivating and nurturing Hungarian culture. It has been awarded to folk artists 5 times to date, in 1955 (Antal Kapoli Sr., shepherd carver), 1978 (Sándor Kántor, potter), 2017 (András Galánfi, woodcarver), 2019 (Miklós Kovács, blue-dyer), and 2020 (Tibor Erdélyi, folk dancer and wood carver).

[22]István Györffy (Karcag, February 11, 1884 – Budapest, October 3, 1939). In 1934, he became the first public regular professor of ethnography at the University of Budapest, today's Eötvös Loránd University.

[23]For a summary of the sculptural depiction of the human form in Hungary, see: Fél – Hofer 1966, and the 1983 catalogue of the Tiroler Volkskunstmuseum in Innsbruck: NN. 1983.

[24]The *Miska jug* is one of the most popular Hungarian pots, traditionally made on the Great Plain, its name derived from the nickname for Mihály/Michael. The first piece is probably from Hódmezővásárhely, from 1824, and during the 19th century this type of item was produced in large numbers in other pottery centers on the Great Plain, mainly in Mezőcsát, Mezőtúr, and Tiszafüred. Although it became very popular in the middle reaches of the Tisza at that time, it gained its national and international reputation in the 20th century. In addition to the hussar uniform, a common decorative element of the item type is the snake, which is believed to grant the owner of the pitcher long life. For details, see: Csupor – Füvessy 2014.

hussars of Queen Maria Theresa's time (1740–1780)[25] that are actually depicted. This type of artifact with a strong emotional factor prompted Kántor to create his sculptural ceramic pieces called Karcag Judge and Woman in Fur Coat. The Karcag Judge has a round belly from head to bottom, and its most prominent elements are the braided decoration and necktie. These artifacts, modeled primarily after brandy flasks, were grandiosely enlarged versions made for the Brussels World's Fair. Due to their large size, they functioned primarily as decorative items, while their smaller versions, which became more colorful in the 1960s, were used in households according to their original purpose as drink vessels, flower containers, or ashtrays (ash stands) (Domanovszky 1970; Nagy Molnár 2007: 295–299) (Figs 3–6).

In addition to the aforementioned state awards and a series of international exhibitions (e.g., Belgium, Finland, India, Japan), Kántor's friendship with craftsmen was also a hallmark of his

Fig. 3. Sándor Kántor: traditional Miska jug (Source: DOMANOVSZKY 1970: Color plate no. 1.)

Fig. 4. Sándor Kántor: sculpture of a woman from Karcag in fur coat, with a Tiszafüred plate on her head (Hungarian Heritage House, Museum of Applied Folk Arts, inv. no.: 1/1652)

[25]The original of the Hungarian loanword is the German *Werbung*, which means recruitment. In this case, it refers to recruitment to the hussars, that is, the light cavalry regiment.

Fig. 5. Sándor Kántor: the Karcag Judge (Hungarian Heritage House, Museum of Applied Folk Arts, inv. no.: 1/1924, currently in the depository of Sándor Kántor's House of Pottery)

Fig. 6. Sándor Kántor: man with bowler hat (Source: DOMANOVSZKY 1970: Color plate no. 4.)

reputation. The peculiarity of his workshop was not only that he worked with his own clay but also that – in contrast to the cooperatives, where each work process was performed by different employees – he only delivered finished items to the cooperative,[26] although he did employ assistants in his workshop. He undertook partial work only for his acquaintances; for example, the foundations of Géza Gorka's[27] work were thrown in his workshop (T.E. 1976:14–15; LENGYEL 1991:39). Although he was a member of a cooperative in Budapest and had been involved in the Folk Arts Council's work, as a recognized solo artist he expressed criticism of excessive serial

[26]Sándor Kántor has been a member of the Budapest-based Folk Artists' Cooperative since 1954.

[27]Géza Gorka (1895–1971), a Munkácsy and Kossuth Prize winner Hungarian ceramic artisan and a good friend of Sándor Kántor, opened the exhibition of his oeuvre in the Műcsarnok.

production that was typical of cooperatives in an interview, for which Tibor Bodrogi, the then deputy director of the Ethnographic Research Group[28] of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, condemned him in the columns of the periodical *Tükör* (Bodrogi 1976:27).

The vegetarian master, who never missed his daily exercise and often slept with an open window or outdoors, trained several generations in his workshop and taught them the artistic and professional tricks of pottery (Lengyel 1991:40). The works of his apprentices draw mostly on the forms and motifs of Tiszafüred pottery, which was also Sándor Kántor's inspiration, but their approach already shows great influence by their master's innovations. Indicating the depth of his influence as a creator of a new canon, the members of the 'Kántor School' have by now developed their own life program through archeological interest, the sculptural depiction of the human form, or the reassessment of the use of color, and many of them have been awarded the Master of Folk Art award (Kresz 1978:2). To mention just a few names, his disciples included Mihály Szabó (with whom he collaborated in his workshop for more than twenty years), his son-in-law, Ferenc Kun Gazda, as well as Imre Szűcs, László Kovács, and István Sz. Nagy.

Of Sándor Kántor's students, the reimagined, playful ceramic figurines of the master had perhaps the greatest influence on the art of Imre Szűcs (born only a few years after World War II), who sought out his workshop at the encouragement of his teacher Elemér Illényi. In the half century of his career,[29] he preferred to make human-shaped, pocket flask-sized, small sculptures, as well as various types of vessels shaped like hens. An attempt to break away from his master's style can already be noticed in his earlier works, but the hallmarks of his individual style feature most emphatically on his vessels. His 19th-century vessels with intricate etched ornamentals filled in with brown, black, and green on a yellowish-white background actually became the trademarks of his dynasty (Kresz 1978:2). His works are primarily made for actual use; decorative objects were less frequently thrown on his potter's wheel. His forms and motifs are considered more traditional; in the course of his career, he pursued new avenues mainly through the use of color, often using green and black on a white background, a color combination that was used less often by the old masters of Füred (Fig. 7). In recognition of his work, his motifs – and not the ceramic motifs of Tiszafüred in general – were selected by the Szentkirályi Mineral Water company (Szentkirályi Ásványvíz) as the decoration of their packaging intended to communicate Hungarianness as an authentic brand value; this series won them the Water Innovation Award in 2011.[30]

The wife of Imre Szűcs, Erzsébet Nagy, is also a potter, and through her motifs and forms she represents a playful art similar to that of her husband's with her typically black vessels. Two of Szűcs's daughters, born in the 1970s and themselves awarded with the title of Young Master of Folk Art, have carried on his profession, but in the course of their career, they found their own way of making tableware in the typical family style by implementing several innovations: they use blue and yellow to decorate their artifacts, even though Füred potters did not traditionally use these colors and neither did Sándor Kántor or Imre Szűcs as solo artists. Additionally, Judit

[28]Today: Institute of Ethnology, Research Centre for the Humanities, Eötvös Loránd Research Network.

[29]In 2013, the Museum of Hungarian Applied Folk Arts paid tribute to the fifty-year career of Imre Szűcs with the exhibition called *Az agyag vonzásában* [The Allure of Clay].

[30]For an overview of the project, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gi1Ag1wmPKU (accessed April 3, 2021). For the master's own information, see his website: http://szucskeramiak.hu/motivum.php (accessed April 3, 2021). On the issue of folk art and originality, see Fruzsina Cseh's study in this issue.

Fig. 7. Imre Szűcs: Miska jug. (jury photo, nr. 2015.13.004. With the permission of the Applied Folk Arts Department)

Szűcs also became interested in making pearl jewelry, while Andrea Szűcs turned to creating spice jars, uniquely shaped bakeware, pitchers, candle holders, and smaller figurines (Figs 8 and 9). The generation of potters between Imre Szűcs and his daughters is represented by Zsóka (Erzsébet) Nagyné Török, who was an apprentice of Szűcs and also hailed from Tiszafüred. The legacy of her mentor can be clearly detected in her human-shaped brandy flasks, but her ceramics, which are made predominantly in the Füred style and other pottery centers on the Great Plain, represent a more traditional trend based on museum objects. She applies her innovations primarily to her bakeware designed for daily use (Fig. 10).

From 1967, another apprentice of Sándor Kántor was István Sz. Nagy (1949–2012), who, in addition to making black ceramics, revived the Reform era (1825–1848) style of Mezőcsát and Tiszafüred by using etched patterns and a narrower range of colors (Kresz 1978:2; Varga 1983:255). He worked as the artistic director of the former Earthenware Cooperative of Karcag (Karcagi Agyagipari Szövetkezet), and later developed an independent workshop in parallel with his long career as an educator. His son, pupil and also offspring, a young man of the same age as

Fig. 8. Andrea Szűcs: plate. (jury photo, nr. 2021.06.068. With the permission of the Applied Folk Arts Department)

Fig. 9. Judit Szűcs: soup plate. (jury photo, nr. 2015.12.149. With the permission of the Applied Folk Arts Department)

Fig. 10. Zsóka Nagyné Török: plate. (jury photo, nr. 2021.06.089. With the permission of the Applied Folk Arts Department)

Szűcs's daughters, István Sz. Nagy, Jr., essentially followed in his father's footsteps, but is currently living abroad (Bartha 2011:44).

Mihály F. (Furtai) Szabó (1912–2003) was a servant in the home of Sándor Kántor's brother, Imre Kántor, whom Kántor took on as an apprentice in 1926. He can be considered not only an early disciple but also an associate, because he worked with Sándor Kántor even before developing his distinct style. Their artifacts were primarily thrown by Szabó and decorated by Kántor, which is why the mint master mark bears the *Kántor–Szabó* name. He built his own workshop in 1965 with his son, Mihály F. Szabó, Jr. (1944–2009), whose work shows the most significant historical and archeological interest among the members of the Kántor school (Domanovszky

1975:16–18). He learned to use the potter's wheel primarily from his father, and from 1959 he learned the craft of decorating from Sándor Kántor. In the beginning, it was the forms and motifs of 18th–19th-century Debrecen ceramics that defined his work, but later he gained national recognition by reconstructing the ceramics of the Great Plain from the Renaissance and the Ottoman Occupation, in addition to breeding racka sheep [31] (Fig. 11). Under his father's influence, the work of his son – the same age as the daughters of Imre Szűcs and István Sz. Nagy, Jr. – Mihály F. Szabó, Jr. (Jr.) has also centered on the reconstruction of archeological ceramics, but in the early 2000s, for financial reasons, he temporarily left the profession he was educated in. Today, however, he manufactures a wide range of tile stoves in his ancestral hometown of Karcag in the Nagykunság Region, and his stove manufactory even has a 2000 m^2 showroom in the Budapest metropolitan area.

From 1971, László Kovács, born in the mid-1950s and recognized with a Master of Folk Art title, was the youngest of Sándor Kántor's disciples, who had the opportunity to learn from both Mihály F. Szabó, Jr. and István Sz. Nagy. Besides the Tiszafüred and Middle Tisza styles, from 1983, the re-creation of the Kalocsa pottery tradition was also greatly influential on his art, as he

Fig. 11. Mihály F. Szabó, Jr.: Ottoman-era bowl (Hungarian Heritage House, Museum of Applied Folk Arts, inv. no.: 1/294)

[31]For their life history, see the Master of Folk Art database: http://nepmuveszetmesterei.hu/index.php/dijaozottak-neve/75-f-szabo-mihaly. Also: http://nepmuveszetmesterei.hu/index.php/dijaozottak-neve/76-f-szabo-mihaly-ifj (accessed April 3, 2021).

moved his workshop to the settlement at the request of the town of Kalocsa. To this day he makes Miska jugs and Füred-style vessels, but his style is more refined than the traditional, typically using fewer colors on his artifacts, predominantly green and black. In his workshop – depending on demand – products from other regions are also made, but the secondary dominant trend of his interest is openwork ceramics (Fig. 12). His associate, and perhaps most recognized of his students, was Helga Madár, holder of the title of Young Master of Folk Art, who, like the previously mentioned Szűcs girls, István Sz. Nagy, Jr., and Mihály F. Szabó, Jr. (Jr.), represents the generation of potters born in the 1970s. Her most favored genre is openwork pottery, the motifs of which she applied in her jewelry-making. Although she has always worked in the Kalocsa workshop, since 2010 she has turned to the novel forms of Tiszafüred-style figurative ceramics, and her product types and sculptures show a definite influence of the ceramics reimagined in Karcag (Fig. 13).

Summary

In its great era from World War II until the regime change, applied folk art, relying on its 19th-century and pre-World War II roots, notwithstanding the regime's cooperative overtones, and presumably under the influence of the dominant impulses of applied art, continued to foster the prominence of individual creators. These creators, often with truly authentic folk art knowledge but no longer following the peasant way of life, were depicted in cultural policy in rural, peasant environments and genre situations based on a 19th-century concept of folk art, thus strongly aestheticizing the concept of folk and folk art. Paradoxically, socialist cultural policy emphasized their parallel identities as artists and creators and made them a defining figure in the cooperatives for several decades. With the active participation of museum professionals and ethnographers, they reworked the motifs and forms of the folk art heritage of their local community, at times moderately, other times more drastically, occasionally creating an independent style, similarly to Karcag, presented in the case study above. At this point, another paradox of the Applied Folk Arts Council's (NIT) concept emerges, as the representation of the folk art or motifs of emblematic

Fig. 12. László Kovács: platter (jury photo, nr. 2014.12.087. With the permission of the Applied Folk Arts Department)

Fig. 13. Helga Madár: human-shaped flask (jury photo, nr. 2015.12.052. With the permission of the Applied Folk Arts Department)

regions can increasingly be seen as representing the style of a charismatic individual. In my opinion, the definition of objects produced by today's folk artists as unique works of art and, in the case of the current quality assurance body (Applied Folk Art Advisory Board),[32] a profound respect for design skills are largely rooted in this concept, despite the consistent criticism of the cooperative system.

With my case study, I wanted to shed light on how this process works in practice. The adaptation of Tiszafüred pottery, a process started by Sándor Kántor before World War II and successfully achieved during the decades of socialism, became an independent style known as *Karcag pottery*, even though the marks of Middle Tisza Region pottery can still be recognized in his own works as well as those of his students. The members of his 'school' representing the

[32]The Applied Folk Art Advisory Board (NITT) took over the qualification of the artifacts in 2004. See footnote 16 for details.

cutting edge of the profession carried on their master's legacy in different ways. Besides the two dominant orientations of his creative activities (playful sculptural representation and archaeological interest), perhaps it is his design and revamping of traditional motifs that signals his significance, as to this day Szentkirályi Mineral Water communicates Hungarianness as an authentic brand value not with the general motifs of Tiszafüred pottery but with the patterns of a specific, named artist, Imre Szűcs.

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