

# The Eight - A Nyolcak

Hungary's Highway to Modernism

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## Facts & Figures

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- Duration:** 12 September - 2 December 2012
- Opening hours:** Daily 10 am - 7pm, Friday 10 am - 9 pm
- Address:** 1010 Vienna, Freyung 8
- Website:** [www.bankaustria-kunstforum.at](http://www.bankaustria-kunstforum.at)
- Catalogue:** *Die Acht - A Nyolcak. Ungarns Highway in die Moderne*, Exhibition catalogue of the Bank Austria Kunstforum Vienna. Edited by Gergely Barki, Evelyn Benesch and Zoltán Rockenbauer, 208 pages, approx. 200 colour plates, published by the Deutscher Kunstverlag, Munich. Text by Peter Vergo, Gergely Barki and Zoltán Rockenbauer.  
29 euros, available in the Bank Austria Kunstforums shop and in assorted bookshops.
- Tickets:** Bank Austria Kunstforum  
Club Bank Austria in all branches  
Austria Ticket Online ([www.ato.at](http://www.ato.at))  
Österreich Ticket ([www.oeticket.at](http://www.oeticket.at))

|          |   |            |
|----------|---|------------|
| Tickets: | Adults  | 9.- euros  |
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|          | Senior citizens                               | 7.- euros  |
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|          | Children up to aged 16                        | 4.- euros  |
|          | Family ticket                                 | 20.- euros |
|          | Groups (as of 10 persons)                     | 7.50 euros |
|          | Children up to aged 6                         | free       |
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Press text

## The Eight - A Nyolcak

### Hungary's Highway to Modernism

The autumn exhibition in the Bank Austria Kunstforum is devoted to the group *A Nyolcak - The Eight*: Károly Kernstok, Béla Czóbel, Róbert Berény, Ödön Márffy, Lajos Tihanyi, Dezső Orbán, Bertalan Pór, Dezső Czigány. In the years 1909/10 their alignment to the most modern trends that Europe had to offer in art at this time led Hungarian painting into a new phase.

The artists that came to be called *The Eight* went to Paris and studied the Fauves surrounding Henri Matisse, the painting of Paul Cézanne and the cubism of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque. Suddenly their pictures no longer corresponded to the traditional style of painting of around 1900 that clung to Late Impressionism and Symbolism. The group was radical and rigorous in abandoning the academic tradition.

“They are not at all eight; a whole new generation is standing behind them,” thus did the critic and *Nyolcak* friend György Bölöni characterise the euphoric mood of the young intellectuals and art scene in Budapest. Fighting alongside *The Eight* were writers like Endre Ady, philosophers like György Lukacs, musicians like Béla Bartok, and even magazines like *Nyugat (West)*, who were aspiring towards a contemporary approach to art, literature and music.

The group's first exhibition together was in Budapest in 1909. The scandal erupted; Budapest society was outraged by the unconventional pictures, dominated by garish chords of colour and unusual rendering of figures. During the following years the explosive group called themselves *A Nyolcak - The Eight* for their next exhibition in 1911 and continued to paint well off the beaten track of the academies and traditions. The individuality of their members is reflected in the rapidly changing palettes of their picture: after Fauvism they responded to

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Cézanne's principles of order, engaged in monumental painting inspired by Classical Antiquity, and became ardent exponents of Expressionism.

The group was an assembly of strong characters who each followed his particular stylistic preferences, thus it soon disintegrated. Only four were left of *The Eight* by the time the third exhibition took place in 1912. And at a guest appearance in the Vienna Künstlerhaus in 1914 the *Nyolcak* divided up into two camps: the more conservative Márffy, Orbán, Kernstok and Czigány exhibited in the Künstlerhaus, while the strongly expressionistic and unconventional works of Tihanyi und Berény were rejected by the Viennese jury.

Despite the short duration of *A Nyolcak*, this branch of the European avant-garde generates a strong impulse - quite opposite to the Austrian painting of the same period, dominated by late Symbolism and most notably by this year's ruling figure Gustav Klimt. The impression made by *A Nyolcak* is fresh, a new terrain. This example of Hungarian Modernism has been far too little known until now, and so this exhibition aims to position it on the international scene, as its quality and innovative power deserve.

The exhibition is a cooperation between the Bank Austria Kunstforum and the Szépművészeti Múzeum, Budapest and the Magyar Nemzeti Galéria, Budapest.

Chronology

## The Eight - A Nyolcak

### Hungary's Highway to Modernism

1873-1887

The artists later known as *The Eight* were born in Budapest: 1873 Károly Kernstok, 1878 Ödön Márffy, 1880 Bertalan Pór (in Bábaszék, Slovakia), 1883 Dezső Czigány and Béla Czóbel, 1884 Dezső Orbán, 1887 Róbert Berény.

1901-1907

The later members of *A Nyolcak* study in Paris: they experience the appearance of the Fauves in the Salon d'Automne 1905 and the major Cézanne retrospective in 1907. The salons of the Steins and exhibitions of the art dealer Ambroise Vollard enable the young Hungarian artists to become familiar with Post-Impressionism, the Nabis and the Fauves. As of 1905, they also exhibit in the Salon d'Automne and in the Salon des Indépendants.

An almost simultaneous development gets underway in Hungary that negates the painting of the academies and traditions: in summer 1906, Bela Czóbel brings the riotous colours of Fauvist painting from Paris to Nagybánya, an artists' colony founded in the late nineteenth century in Baia Mare, today Romania, a centre of Impressionist plein air painting - here he launches the revolution of the "Neos", named after the Neo-Impressionists; this leads to the formation of the so called "Hungarian Fauves". A circle of Hungarian Impressionists and naturalistic artists forms an association of modern art called MIÉNK in Budapest in late 1907; MIÉNK, likewise the Művészház, the Artists' House founded in 1909, offer artists rejected by the more conservative institutions - such as the municipal art gallery - the opportunity to exhibit their works.

1909

The group later known as *A Nyolcak - The Eight* make their joint debut with the exhibition *Uj Képek - New Pictures, a succès de scandale*; critics and public are outraged by the unconventional, Fauvist-inspired pictures and the provocative agenda of the group: "We are devotees of nature. / We do not copy her with the eye of the academies. / We draw from her systematically and with intelligence."

1911

In spring 1911 *A Nyolcak - The Eight* announce their next exhibition and in doing so form themselves officially into a group. The show is now characterised by large-scale Arcadian and Neo-classical-type compositions and a generally calmer painting style based on Cézanne's principles of order. A remarkable feature of the exhibition is the accompanying programme including readings and a concert by the Waldbauer-Kerpely Quartet with Béla Bartók.

1912

The *Nyolcak* are represented - minus Czóbel and Pór - at the international Sonderbund Exhibition in Cologne. The third exhibition of The Eight is held in Budapest in November. Berény, Tihanyi, Orbán and Pór are the only members to take part in this exhibition, which is defined by an Expressionist vein.

1914

A guest appearance of the Budapest Művészház in the Vienna Künstlerhaus marks the break-up of the group: the works of Bérény and Tihanyi are rejected by the conservative jury, Pór withdraws his works. Kernstok, Czigány, Márffy and Orbán on the other hand take part in the Künstlerhaus exhibition. All the members of *The Eight* participate in a peripatetic exhibition in the USA of contemporary graphics from Hungary, Bohemia and Austria, also at the International World Exhibition in San Francisco in 1915, where The Eight are given a room to themselves.

2010 marks the rediscovery of *A Nyolcak* in an exhibition in Pécs dedicated to the group of artists.



## The Exhibition Catalogue

*Die Acht - A Nyolcak. Ungarns Highway in die Moderne*, exhibition catalogue of the Bank Austria Kunstforum Vienna. Edited by Gergely Barki, Evelyn Benesch and Zoltán Rockenbauer, 208 pages, ca. 200 colour plates, published by the Deutscher Kunstverlag, Munich. Text by Peter Vergo, Gergely Barki and Zoltán Rockenbauer. 29 euros, available in the Bank Austria Kunstforum shop and in assorted bookshops.

*The interest in Early Modernism, the art of the first years of the last century, has remained unbroken. It is an art that revolutionised all that had gone before it and emancipated the painted picture from perceived reality. The so called founding fathers of Modernism - Cézanne, Van Gogh, Seurat, Gauguin et al. - stood proxy for this revolution. They pointed young painters the way to the modern age, led them into a complete break with centuries-old tradition of western painting. Matisse and the Fauves, some years later Braque and Picasso and early Cubism formed the basis for the evolution of Modernism and its avant-garde movements, eventually leading to Duchamp and his superb gesture of negation as regards any kind of art and painting.*

*The undisputed centre of this new awakening is Paris, the capital on the Seine, which dominated the international art scene at least until the mid-twentieth century. Paris and its artists were and still are the main focus of critical reception, and certainly of a broad-based public interest in art. The spread of Expressionism and Cubism across Europe as far as Russia has long been researched; the Dresden Brücke, Italian Futurism and the Russian avant-garde are part of our intellectual and educational repertoire. Special movements, such as Austrian Early Expressionism, have been sufficiently described and celebrated and for a long time now have boasted an international resonance. We think we know these important years of art history down to their last, even peripheral ramifications, and yet we are deceiving ourselves: the Hungarian artists with the group name of A Nyolcak (The Eight) are little known outside their native country, far from mentioning the fact that their voice in the chorus of Early Modernism has scarcely been heard hitherto. And yet this contribution*

*is essential. The Eight revolutionised more than the art of Hungary; they were in fact placed at the very epicentre of the momentous artistic revolutions, which they responded to and shaped almost simultaneously with the inventors. The epochal upheaval in society and culture associated with the fin de siècle had Budapest in its grip as well. Writing, music, theatre and the visual arts found themselves in a kind of collective new awakening, countering tradition, united by the interest in Paris, in international countries abroad, in a “go out into the world” feeling that distinguishes the Hungarian artists so profoundly from the artists of Austrian Early Expressionism and the still ruling doyen of art nouveau - Jugendstil - Gustav Klimt.*

*Study years in Paris: since 1905 exhibitions in the Salon d’Automne and Salon des Indépendants in Paris together with Kandinsky, Jawlensky, the Fauves and more; contacts to the important intellectual circles, Leo and Gertrude Stein; personal encounters and friendships everywhere with the Fauves and other path-breaking artists, and finally the decision to bring everything together in Hungary: this describes a constellation that is unique in Europe, borne on faith in an artistic common cause and an intermix of genres, depending in the end on the idea of endowing significance to Hungarian art as a whole and the potential of shaping it in terms of international Modernism. The pictures of Károly Kernstok, Béla Czóbel, Róbert Berény, Ödön Márffy, Lajos Tihanyi, Dezső Orbán, Bertalan Pór, Dezső Czigány are furthermore always infused with an exotic idiom. There is a foreignness about them that naturally has to do with the artists’ socialisation in Hungary, yet - measured against their Russian colleagues - emerges as much more indirect. The exploitation of their own folk art for instance, an urgent theme for the early Russian avant-garde, is not as common in the Hungarians. Pre-eminent here are (intellectual) moods, reverberations from the faraway sphere of their own painting tradition. These are the connections that incidentally preclude absolute autonomy in their pictures (seen this way bringing an anti-modern gesture into the pictures). This is their curse, but also their fascination.*

*With this exhibition the Bank Austria Kunstforum is presenting the ground-breaking group of The Eight for the first time outside Hungary. The exhibition*

*spans an arc from the Fauvist beginnings in Paris, the years of the Secession of the Hungarian tradition and the first collective - and scandal-clouded - exhibition Uj Képek (New Pictures) in 1909; then the group's years of success and the two major exhibitions of The Eight in 1911 and 1912, and their final appearances. Inner discord and increasing differences in artistic orientations had already put a strain on the group for some years. The outbreak of the First World War, the new political constellations in Europe and the various fates of the artists eventually ended this chapter of Hungarian art. It must be evaluated as a contribution to the development of Modernism that is as original as it is convincing in its entitlement to this and its quality.*

(Ingrid Brugger, Director of the Bank Austria Kunstforum in the foreword to the exhibition catalogue)

## Exhibition Programme Preview 2012/2013

### **Miquel Barceló, 12 December 2012 - 10 March 2013**

Miquel Barceló (born in 1957 in Felanitx, Mallorca, lives and works in Paris and Mallorca), represents one of the leading formations in the New Painting that defined the art of the nineteen-eighties. Material and form are directly related in Barceló's art. Here, the process-related moment of forming and kneading is particularly important - whether loam, clay, soil or pastose oil paint. Barceló's artistic work concerns recollection, the collective memory of the elemental and archetypal. The around eighty paintings, bronzes and ceramics displayed in the exhibition have as their theme creation and transience to an equal degree: sensuous fruits in overripe lushness rot in the next instant or mutate into death's heads.

Barceló also integrates natural - non-artistic - processes in his work, for instance when he has termites perforate his works on paper, or uses unorthodox working material, for example blackens his canvas with the ash from his studio fireplace. Nature as a constant that is subjected to constant change: Barceló's painting and sculpture present themselves as a constantly changing system, as an open cosmos between life and death. The exhibition - the first solo Barceló show in Austria - is being developed in close cooperation with the artist.

### **Meret Oppenheim - Retrospective, 21 March - 14 July 2013**

Meret Oppenheim (1913-1985) is one of the most significant and idiosyncratic artists of the twentieth century. Even while still young she became a legend in Paris as the creator of a cup coated in fur - "Breakfast in Fur". Since then she has been renowned as a scandal-producing muse, a mysterious model and as the foremost female exponent of Surrealism. Her multifaceted oeuvre embracing painting, sculpture, poetry and design cannot be pigeon-holed into any particular style and stringent development. Oppenheim's interest is in the transformation between genders, human being and animal, nature and civilisation, dream and reality. Myths, games and dreams are as much her tools as starting point as are

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the writings of C.G. Jung and literary sources. In the 1970s Oppenheim was a vehement opponent to socially assigned gender roles and came to be a central identification figure in feminism. “Freedom isn’t given to you, you have to take it,” was her credo. In spring 2013, the Bank Austria Kunstforum is presenting the first posthumous retrospective on Meret Oppenheim in Austria as a celebration of the centennial of her birth. The exhibition will then move on to the Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin.