Chalice

Metalwork Collection

Accession Nr.:	51.46.1
Artist/Maker:	Szabó, Ferenc (1910 -)
Place of production:	Budapest
Inscription:	mesterjegy és 1872-1936 közt használatos pesti hitelesítőjegy
Materials:	silver
Techniques:	bent; chased; chiselled; hammered; pierced
Dimensions:	height: 17,2 cm height (with lid): 24,2 cm átmérő (fedél): 13,1 cm base diameter: 11,7 cm teljes súly: 629,8 g

This chalice representing the Modernist style is comprised of basic geometric forms (cylinders and a cone). Four short cylindrical legs support the plain, three-stepped base, from which rises a thin cylindrical stem. A slender, openwork node between two small, plain, disk-shaped stem rings breaks up the smooth, simple forms. The unique, stylized network of tendrils, leaves, and berries made from silver wires, threads and beads surrounding the stem presumably refers to the bay laurel tree (the “tree of life”), a symbol of victory over sin and death.

This chalice is a characteristic example of the Art Deco style and form due to the harmony of its orderly proportions, clear shapes, and the fine sparkling of its smooth surfaces combined with the unique, openwork pattern. At the same time, from afar the openwork modeling of the node evokes the tradition of the so-called *opus duplex*, a distinctive medieval technique typical of certain types of Gothic pieces of fine metalwork. Similar to those, this modern chalice is separated into two layers comprised of a solid metal base surface (in this case the solid column of the stem) above/around which there is openwork floral decoration. (TAKÁCS, Imre: Opus duplex in der Goldschmiedekunst des 13. Jahrhunderts und die höfische Kultur. *Ars Decorativa* 26. 2008, 7-37: 35.)

Alongside the preservation of traditions, major efforts began in the 20th century to modernize ecclesiastical art and liturgical items made of gold and silver. This idea became particularly relevant in Hungary as the anniversary memorial year of Saint Stephen (István) and the International Eucharistic Congress in Budapest (1938) approached. The applied artists in this difficult period that followed the lengthy worldwide depression strove to reflect the worldviews and new stylistic trends of their own period in their sacred works while also preserving traditions and observing liturgical conventions.

The Applied Arts Association and the Hungarian National Association of Applied Artists made efforts through grant competitions to support and encourage the production of works in fine metals, as well as their exhibition at home and abroad. (MAJOR István: Az ötvösművészet érdekében [In the Interest of Gold and Silver Work]. *Magyar Iparművészet* 41. 1938, 3-4.)

The works of gold and silver intended for the 1937 Paris World’s Fair included ecclesiastical items. This chalice, which was donated to the museum by the Applied Arts Association in 1951, may have been one of the works made for the competition. It then appeared at the Paris Expo, probably together with its accompanying footed plate for the communion wafer (inv. no. 51.47.1), which was donated at the same time.

Ferenc Szabó’s works not only garnered success in Paris, but also at other significant exhibitions in the 1930s such as the 1938 International Exhibition of Handicrafts in Berlin. We unfortunately know little of his output and of him as a

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person, despite the fact that for a time his career paralleled that of Erzsébet Okrutzky, who become far better known, in particular for her ecclesiastical works.

The elderly artist appeared at the Museum of Applied Arts as the creator of the exhibited chalice on the occasion of the Hungarian Art Deco Exhibition organized in 1985.

by Ildikó Pandur

Literature

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