

HUNGARIAN MEMORIES OF FIUME: CSABA SKULTÉTY'S COLLECTION

AN EXHIBITION AT THE NATIONAL SZÉCHÉNYI LIBRARY
8TH MAY 2009 – 12TH JULY 2009



“To love the whole of our shared home country,” says László Sólyom, the Hungarian Republic’s President in the introduction to Csaba Skultéty’s collection catalogue. Without memories there is no identity. The country of memories is the whole of the one-time

Hungarian Monarchy that sank as Atlantis. No one but us will remember it; our knowledge, our image and the emotions it evokes preserve and shape our memories and form an integral part of our identity. Csaba Skultéty comes from this Hungary. He started collecting relics of

Fiume based on family tradition. Fiume seems to have been a random choice. In fact, however as a port, a gateway to the sea and a landmark to the world’s blood circulation, it is an emblematic city with connections to all areas of Hungarian history, economy and culture. In the 19th century it was a vital component of the Hungarian plans for a nation state, which both Széchenyi and Kossuth paid visits to. According to our tradition, “Fiume is the pearl of the Holy Crown.” Due to the turns and twists of history, in the second half of the 20th century its memory faded; it is high time we discovered it again.

The quality of collections is defined by the spiritual and material value and/or theme of works in it. In the latter case, even small items gain some added value simply because they are about a given theme, in our case about Fiume. Postcards, bills and envelopes are pieces of the jigsaw of the everyday life of a past era that will stay the same forever. Naturally, even this set of artifacts has its particularly interesting items as, for example, the Hungarian general architectural director Franz Rauchmüller von Ehrenstein’s handwritten and drawn designs bound into four volumes. Commissioned by



Part of the exhibition

Palatine Joseph, the author studied the waterways and continental routes leading from Buda to Fiume. The material objects of the collection – souvenirs, postcards, boxes, trade goods, daggers and decorative swords of officers and non-commissioned officers who graduated from the Naval Academy – reflect a multi-coloured Fiume. First, there is the seaside where people spend their holidays. Second, it is a huge centre of shipping and trade through which merchandise produced in Hungary is shipped to all corners of the world. Third, it is a naval and administrative hub where a governor represents national interests and well-established schools provide professionals. Last but not least, this city is a special mix of peoples: it is the shared home of Italians, Croats and Hungarians.

Bearing in mind all these factors, the exhibition was not organized by types of exhibits, but primarily by themes, symbolically imitating the board of a ship, leaving it for the visitor to decide whether the vessel is coming into Fiume from the open sea, or is just setting sail. In the first hall, the collection cargo was placed into sea chests in thematic grouping. In the second space, taking the form of a ship's cabin, we placed the photo collection and the both quantitatively and qualitatively rich book collection. This is where you could watch the film that

the staff of NSZL's Collection of Historical Interviews had collated from excerpts of contemporary newsreels and later film stock. The accompanying texts were selected from books and periodicals displayed. For designing spaces, some vitally important objects were borrowed from the Hungarian Technical and Transport Museums, among them the flag of the Royal Hungarian Sea Navigation Co. 'Adria' Ltd, the motto of which was "Be useful to your country." Two contemporary cameras were borrowed from György Gabányi's private collection.

A catalogue was produced to accompany the exhibition, with descriptions of some three hundred items, the introductory words of the Hungarian President and words of greeting from the mayor of Fiume-Rijeka and Italy's ambassador.

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The exhibition was designed and the catalogue edited by Andrea Benkő. Graphic design was done by Veronika Bubik and visual design by István Ágoston. We thank Endre Véssey for the photographs and Gábor Hanák for the film shown in the exhibition.

The central exhibition area taking the form of a seaport

