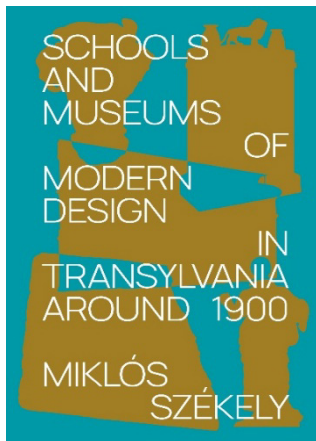


BOOK REVIEW:

Miklós Székely, *Schools and Museums of Modern Design in Transylvania Around 1900*, Budapest: Institute of Art History, Research Centre for the Humanities, 2023



The volume *Schools and museums of modern design in Transylvania around 1900* explores the arts and craft movements in Transylvania after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 until World War I, through the lenses of the industrial development, education, and culture in several towns of the region which came under the jurisdiction of the newly created independent Hungarian administration and which are today a part of Romania. The author Miklós Székely, researcher at the Institute of Art History in Budapest, has pointed out over the years in several published articles different aspects of the presence and transformation (in approach and mentality) of arts and craft movements which emerged in the mid-19th century, in connection to the industrial education in the region discussed. However, this book summarizes the results of ten years of research, and brings a more concrete approach to the analysis of the impact the industrial vocational schools had on the applied art movements in Transylvania. On the other hand, the book also investigates the state involvement in industrial education and the part it played especially during the 1890s, when a reorganization of the institutions was carried out and a national system was implemented.



In the *Introduction*, Miklós Székely outlines first the historical context of the region of Transylvania and presents the concepts used in his research. For example, he discusses the concept of museum of industry, getting the reader familiar with the meaning and the importance of this kind of institution in the context of industrial and applied arts education in Transylvania. Apart from being a key point in the modernization of national industry, the author points out that a museum of industry, through its collecting strategy, is a very reliable source for such research, together with the libraries which were organized at the time. For Miklós Székely, these sources provided a glimpse of the theoretical and practical backdrop for industrial education in the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. Other concepts discussed by the art historian in the *Introduction* are those of industrial art and industrial education, both bringing useful additional information for a better understanding of the research theme.

When presenting the existing literature on the subject, the author highlights the merits of several previous publications on industrial vocational education in Hungary, books such as *Fifty years in the history of Hungarian industry* by Mór Gelléri and *Industrial Education in Hungary* by József Szterényi. However, one notices the originality of Miklós Székely's approach is different, with a different focus on the issue of vocational education. For instance, while Mór Gelléri analyses the reciprocal developments in industry and arts, Miklós Székely focuses on the impact the industry and the industrial education had on the approach and mentality of arts in the studied period.

As the art historian points out in the *Introduction*, the research does not concentrate so much on towns such as Timișoara, Arad or Oradea, which were more developed in terms of industrialization and also home to industrial vocational schools at that time. The main focus lies instead on towns like Cluj-Napoca, Târgu Mureș, Zlatna, and Odorheiu Secuiesc, mainly due to the abundance of archival documents and workshop products related to the studied period. One should mention that many of these sources have never before been exploited for the study of the emergence and transformations in the approach of arts and crafts movements in Transylvania.

The first chapters of the book are dedicated to Cluj-Napoca. The art historian presents the founding of the school and the museum of industry using a variety of sources, from newspaper articles, registries, collection of artefacts, exhibition catalogues, construction plans, old photographs and even travel journals. In his endeavour, Miklós Székely manages to sketch the road from merely an idea, born in the second half of the 19th century, to build a school and a museum of industry to their actual realization, delivering an easy understanding of the factors which contributed to the development of such institutions in Cluj-Napoca and

their impact on the arts and craft movements. The analysis centred of the town of Cluj-Napoca through the lenses of social, economic and cultural history in the mentioned period revolves around several key figures of the society which contributed to this achievement. The author mainly relies in his research on investigating the contribution and cooperation of the director of the institution at that time, of other teachers, of the central administration, as well as of the industrialists and entrepreneurs of the town. The art historian also brings into discussion the educational reform, the teaching methodology, and the way in which the courses and practical training were organized within these institutions. Furthermore, the reader gets acquainted with the activity of collectors who had a significant contribution to the spreading of Oriental material culture in Europe and especially in Hungary. Miklós Székely considers that the presence of Oriental objects in the collection of the museum of industry gave the students the opportunity to study them as examples of tools and samples, which rendered more relevant the task of the museum in the industrial educational system.

The next three chapters refer to the evolution of the industrial educational system in the Transylvanian town of Târgu Mureş. The approach is similar to the one in the previous chapters. First of all, the author analyses the importance of the museum of industry for the community, then he focuses on the vocational school and the key figures of the town such as the mayor and the school director at that time. He also analyses the pedagogical approach and the objects made by the students for a better understanding of the impact the industrial vocational schools had on the applied art movements in Transylvania. As the art historian justly pointed out, the training in vocational industrial institutions and the objects made there are the other facets of the history of modern Hungarian architecture and applied arts.

The last chapters are more oriented towards more specific matters. In the case study on Zlatna, Miklós Székely analyses the specific background and the modernization of the town, with its multi-ethnic environment in the final years of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century focusing only on the local stone carving and cutting school. He investigates the implication of the authorities in ensuring financial resources for the school, the implication of the teaching staff, the contents of the curriculum and the resulting workshop objects using almost the same types of sources and research methodology as in the previous chapters. The discovery in the year 2014 of a new and unique source, namely a stone and plaster collection, in the attic of the school in Zlatna enriches the research conducted by Miklós Székely and renders a better and more precise image of the impact the industry and the industrial education had on art in the studied period. The curious reader is gratified with a detailed description of the

collection in terms of art morphology and the particular way in which the objects were made. Moreover, the author explores how they contributed to the development of a modern approach towards applied arts, especially in the distinctiveness of Art Nouveau style. He concludes that the plaster casts discovered in Zlatna reflect certain modern art tendencies in Transylvania. Based on this type of sources, Miklós Székely's research manages to bring into light the importance of discovering new evidence for a better understanding of the development of arts and crafts movements in Transylvania.

The last case study investigated in the book is dedicated to the town of Odorheiu Secuiesc. While he explores the turn-of-the-century industrial modernization in Odorheiu Secuiesc through the history of the industrial school and the way these two aspects collide, the author follows the same research questions and the methodology as in the previous chapters.

Despite the fact that Miklós Székely uses many different sources throughout his book, it is important to mention that, as the art historian himself cautions his readers, the source material for such a documentation do not abound. For instance, a significant part of the documents regarding the schools and the museums of industry after the end of World War I are lost or kept in archives with very restricted access. Due to this aspect, the reader is being presented only with a fragmentary view of what the industrial vocational education really meant for the evolution and the legacy of the applied arts in Transylvania.

At the end of an extremely dense inquiry and in-depth analysis regarding the way in which industrial vocational schools in Transylvania impacted the mindset of the applied art movements, the reader is acquainted with the aftermath of the industrial vocational education in Transylvania. Miklós Székely meticulously points out that the arts and craft movements had a tremendously impact on the way Transylvanian architecture, material culture, and interior design were perceived in the epoch and how they evolved. Throughout the whole book, the argument is well structured, while the careful methodological examination of the available sources is supported by a rich visual material, such as maps, historical photographs, and various objects found during the research. Therefore, the work *Schools and museums of modern design in Transylvania around 1900* is well-suited for anyone who is looking for a glimpse of not only what the applied art movements in Transylvania and its developments and trends meant, but also on the evolution of the industrial education and its connections with other parts of the world.

Overall, the book written by Miklós Székely fully answers to its own main research question, by emphasizing the important impact of the industrial vocational schools and museums in Transylvania on the approach and mindset

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of the applied art movements. Using various types of sources, including new discoveries, the book is a much-needed contribution to the field of art history and even further, to the social, political, and economic history of Transylvania and Hungary in the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century.

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