

Friendship of Peoples. Africa as a Theme of Solidarity in Socialist Hungarian Art—The Works of Gyula Hincz

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This article presents a case study of the prominent socialist modernist Hungarian artist Gyula Hincz (1904–1986) and his lesser-known series of works from the 1960s, known as the *Africa-series*. Unlike his Asian-inspired works that can be connected to a specific, well-documented study trip to North Korea, Vietnam, and China in 1957–58, his African-inspired works are far more difficult to identify. Although these graphics, tapestries, statuettes, and large-scale oil paintings often appeared among his exhibited works—as evidenced by the lists of works available in archives and catalogues—and were mentioned in reviews and articles published at the time, the sources rarely included any images. This paper aims to identify and analyze these artworks, distinguish them from Hincz's *Peace-series*, and examine their possible sources of inspiration, along with some photographs found in photo archives. By exploring why Africa became a significant topic for the artist, the objective is to better understand how Africa and African culture were perceived and interpreted in 1960s socialist Hungary.

Keywords: Hungarian art, socialism, African-period, solidarity, Soviet diplomacy.

His social interest no longer manifests in abstract images but rather in extremely colorful, thematic works. In the *Africa-series*, he addresses the problems of the liberated Black Continent. This includes works such as the *Senegalese Girl*, *Friendship of Peoples*—and, most notably, the one entitled *Lumumba*, in which mourning Negro women stand in a circle and mourn the dead leader, whose head appears as a translucent ghost in the image.¹

Hincz's *Africa-series* was introduced with these words in 1968 in *Művészet*—the most important art magazine of the time—in an article providing a thorough overview of the artist's painting up to that point, written by Sándor Lánicz, art historian of Műcsarnok [Kunsthalle] Budapest.² It was not published in connection with any particular exhibition or unveiling of work, but rather reads as a profile on the artist, focusing specifically on painting during a decade when his graphic works received more publicity.³ The article also included several black-and-white reproductions from various periods of the artist's career, one of which was captioned as *Africa* [Fig. 1].



1. *Africa*, published in *Művészet* 9, no. 4 (1968): 36. LATGA, Vilnius 2025

Afrika, *Művészet* 9, nr. 4 (1968): 36. LATGA, Vilnius 2025

- 1 Sándor Lánicz, "Hincz Gyula festményeiről" [On Gyula Hincz's Paintings], *Művészet* 9, no. 4 (1968): 37.
- 2 Lánicz worked there between 1957 and 1969, and subsequently at the Research Group for Art History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences between 1970 and 1990.
- 3 Lánicz also edited a publication on Hincz in 1972, which contained twelve offset prints (A5 size), an introductory text, and a biography of the artist written by Lánicz in four languages. Sándor Lánicz, *Gyula Hincz* (Corvina, 1972).

Today, the painting is held in the Contemporary Collection of the Hungarian National Gallery, where it is (incorrectly) catalogued under the title *East-Asian Travel* [Fig. 2]. In this relatively large oil painting, Hincz powerfully combines colorful abstract forms and brushwork with the character studies that also appear in his earlier sketches and graphic works. Hincz had a longstanding fascination with the female form, frequently depicting nudes as well as mother-and-child compositions. In this work, one sees that same interest, now combined with an appreciation for diverse racial characteristics.



2. *East-Asian Travel*,
1960–65, oil on canvas,
119.5 × 150.5 cm, Hun-
garian National Gallery,
Museum of Fine Arts,
Budapest, MM89.48.
LATGA, Vilnius 2025

Kelionė po Rytų Aziją,
1960–1965, drobė,
aliejus, 119,5 × 150,5
cm, Vengrijos naciona-
linė galerija, Budapešto
dailės muziejus. LATGA,
Vilnius 2025

The work was donated to the museum after Hincz's death and it was most probably misidentified by those who inventoried his artistic estate in 1987. At the time, his *East-Asian travel* was well-known and thoroughly documented⁴—unlike his *Africa-series*, as we will see. Unfortunately, none of the paintings mentioned by title in Lánicz's article can be identified with absolute certainty today, and their current whereabouts remain unknown.⁵

4 For more details, see Barbara Dudás, "A Távol-Kelet igézetében – Hincz Gyula ázsiai utazása(i)nak grafikai lenyomata" [Under the Spell of the Far-East—The Graphic Impressions of Gyula Hincz's Asian Travels], in *(Kevésbé) szigorúan ellenőrzött nyomatok. A magyar sokszorosított grafika 1945–1961 között című konferencia kísérő kiadványa* [(Less) Strictly Controlled Prints. Accompanying publication of the conference *Hungarian Printmaking between 1945 and 1961*], ed. Györgyi Madarász (Miskolc: Herman Ottó Múzeum–Miskolci Galéria, 2018), 19–25.

5 Hincz left behind thousands of works in his studio and apartment, which were inventoried in 1987 and then donated to museums across Hungary. The largest donation went to the

Hincz's biography makes it clear that he frequently received grants, scholarships, and various invitations to travel (and often exhibit) abroad, beginning in his early years at the art academy. One of his first solo exhibitions was organized at the Galerie Der Sturm in Berlin in 1928.⁶ He spent nine months in Rome on a state scholarship in 1930–31⁷ and travelled to Transylvania several times with the financial support of a Szekelyland stipend programme between 1941 and 1943.⁸ Between 1938 and 1966, he participated in group shows at the Hungarian Pavilion of the Venice Biennale six times, and in 1970, he represented Hungary with a solo exhibition (with sculptor József Somogyi).⁹ From 1949 to 1963, Hincz taught illustration and painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Budapest. In 1952 and 1957, he received the Mihály Munkácsy Prize—a state award given to artists of exceptional talent working in the framework of Socialist Realism. In 1958, he received the Kossuth Prize, another state award that acknowledges outstanding achievements in the fields of science, culture, and the arts. That

already existing Hincz Collection at the Trágor Ignác Museum (TIM) in Vác, while additional works were donated to the Hungarian National Gallery, the Petőfi Literary Museum, and the Hungarian Labor Movement Museum in Budapest. During the inventory, each work received a label with a title, technique, and date. When an artwork did not have an artist-provided title or exhibition label on the reverse, a descriptive title was assigned on the spot—many of which were later adopted as official titles by museums. One of the objectives of my long-term research on Hincz's oeuvre (see bibliography and my short bio) has been to identify as many of these works as possible through archival materials, exhibition catalogues, and books on the artist.

- 6 For more details on the exhibition and Hincz's early constructivist-surrealist works, see Éva Bajkay, "Út a berlini Sturmtól a budapesti aukciókig. Hincz Gyula újabban előkerült konstruktív-szürrealista művei" [From the Sturm in Berlin to the Auctions in Budapest. On Gyula Hincz's Recently Discovered Constructive-Surrealist Works], *artmagazin* 16, no. 3 (2018): 54–60.
- 7 For broader context see Julianna P. Szűcs, "A 'Modern' Official Art: The School of Rome," in *A Reader in East-Central-European Modernism 1918–1956*, ed. Beáta Hock, Klara Kemp-Welch, and Jonathan Owen (London: Courtauld Books Online, 2019), 317–329.
- 8 For broader context, see Jenő Murádin, *Szekelyföldi ösztöndíjasok 1941–1943* [Recipients of the Szekelyland-Stipendium 1941–1943] (Csíkszereda: Csíkszeredai Kiadóhivatal, 2012).
- 9 For more details, see Barbara Dudás, "On the Path Towards Triumph—Gyula Hincz at the 35th Venice Biennale and at the Budapest History Museum," in *1971—Parallel Nonsynchronism*, ed. Dóra Hegyi and Eszter Szakács (Budapest: punch / tranzit.hu, 2022), 164–171. (The English edition of the exhibition catalogue accompanying the exhibition *1971 Parallel Nonsynchronism*, Budapest History Museum, Kiscelli Museum – Municipal Gallery, Budapest, October 13, 2018 – March 24, 2019.)

same year, he was appointed rector of the Academy of Applied Arts in Budapest, a position he held until 1963. Starting in 1957, he also served as a board member of the Association of Hungarian Fine and Applied Arts. Politically, Hincz was openly leftist and a member of the Communist Party.

In April 1957, he was part of a cultural delegation travelling to Moscow—visiting factories, the Lenin Museum, then Saint Petersburg and Tashkent as well—on the occasion of the anniversary of Hungary’s soviet liberation. Hincz travelled alongside academics, writers, actors and composers.¹⁰ In a later interview, he recalled that visiting Uzbekistan was the most influential experience of the entire trip.¹¹ As mentioned before, he also undertook an extensive study trip across East Asia in 1957–58, visiting friendly communist states. The trip was organized by the Institute for Cultural Relations, the official institution of cultural diplomacy in the Kádár era (established in 1949, operated until 1980), and a key player in cross-cultural art exchange. The main tasks of the Institute were: 1) promoting Hungarian culture abroad; 2) introducing the cultures of other peoples in Hungary; 3) preparing and assisting with the implementation of cultural agreements with different countries; and 4) fostering scientific and artistic relationships.¹² By the time of his Asian travels, Hincz already held a well-established position. According to plane tickets preserved in the family archive,¹³ he travelled to Pyongyang, North Korea—together with poet István Simon¹⁴—followed by Hanoi, Vietnam, and Beijing, China. After the study trip, he often portrayed Asian figures in his paintings,

10 “Magyar kulturális küldöttség utazott a Szovjetunióba” [Hungarian Cultural Delegation Travelled to the Soviet Union], *Népszabadság*, April 3, 1957, 1.

11 Mária Dutka, “Műteremlátogatás a Kínába induló Hincz Gyulánál” [Studio Visit to Gyula Hincz, Who Is Travelling to China], *Magyar Nemzet*, October 9, 1957, 7.

12 For more details, see Szabolcs László “Az új kalandozások kora: a Kulturális Kapcsolatok Intézetének működése az 1960–70-es években” [The Age of New Adventures: The Operation of the Institute of Cultural Relations in the 1960s and 1970s], in *Felsőoktatási intézményeink külkapcsolatai a 20. században* [Foreign Relations of Our Higher Education Institutions in the 20th Century], ed. Lengvári István (Pécs: PTE Egyetemi Levéltár, 2021), 63–85.

13 I am infinitely grateful to Jenő Hincz, Gyula Hincz’s nephew, for granting me access to the material still in the family’s possession. (Several folders of handwritten notes and sketches from the artist’s trip remain unpublished.)

14 After the trip, Simon published a collection of poems illustrated with Hincz’s watercolors: István Simon, *A Jange vitorlái. Versek Kínából, Vietnámból és Koreából* [Sails of the Yangtze. Poems from China, Vietnam, and Korea] (Budapest: Magvető, 1959).

etchings, and sculptures, and held dedicated exhibitions of these works—most notably at the Exhibition Space of the Institute for Cultural Relations (established in 1955, operated until 1980).¹⁵ He was most fascinated by China, and after the trip, he often acted as an expert on contemporary Chinese art. In August 1958, he opened the *Chinese National-Style Painting Exhibition* in Budapest,¹⁶ followed by a lengthy review on the socialist renewal of Chinese painting.¹⁷ In addition, he became a board member of the Hungarian-Chinese Friendship Association upon its founding in 1959. At that time, Hungary's diplomatic relations with China—and other communist countries of the Asian Eastern Bloc—remained strong. However, after 1960, under Soviet pressure, the Hungarian leadership was compelled to distance itself from Beijing.¹⁸ According to Miklós Losonci—Hincz's biographer—the artist “fell in love with Chinese culture at the wrong time,” as the deterioration of Sino-Hungarian relations occurred just when the Chinese influence might have flourished in his works. Losonci suggests that this shift explains why Hincz turned his attention towards Vietnam instead: “It is good fortune in misfortune that he was able to refer to Vietnam in his drawings, sculptures, and paintings, and in this series, he could condense his Chinese inspirations too.”¹⁹

- 15 *Travelogues (China, Korea, Vietnam)*, a travelling solo exhibition in Hungary: Exhibition Space of the Institute for Cultural Relations, Budapest, May 21 – June 21, 1958; Thúry György Museum, Nagykanizsa, July 3 – August 2, 1958; Medgyessy-room, Hódmezővásárhely, August 20 – September 14, 1958. According to the exhibition documentation, the exhibition later travelled to Italy, first to Rome and then to Milan's Galleria La Colonna. Later, Hincz's Vietnam-themed works reappeared at exhibitions with sculptor Aladár Farkas: *They Are Fighting for Life: Vietnam*, Csók Gallery, Budapest, February 1971; *Vietnam*, Galerie im Turm, Berlin, October 29 – November 29, 1971. (The latter exhibition later toured Dresden and Helsinki in 1972, followed by Stockholm, Paris, and Vienna in 1973.)
- 16 *Chinese National-Style Painting Exhibition*, Ernst Museum, Budapest, August 9–31, 1958. The exhibition was also presented at the Herman Ottó Museum in Miskolc later that year.
- 17 Gyula Hincz, “Jegyzetek a kínai nemzeti stílusú kiállításról” [Notes on the Chinese National-Style Exhibition], *Élet és Irodalom*, August 22, 1958, 11.
- 18 Dániel Solymári and István Tarrósy, “A magyar diplomácia újjászületése Afrikában. Déli nyitási kísérletek a magyar külpolitikában a 19–20. században: fókuszban az 1960–70-es évek” [The Rebirth of Hungarian Diplomacy in Africa. Attempts at a Southern Opening in Hungarian Foreign Policy in the 19th and 20th Centuries with the Focus on the 1960s and the 1970s], *Külgügyi Szemle* 20, no. 4 (2021): 154.
- 19 Miklós Losonci, *Hincz Gyula életműve* [The Oeuvre of Gyula Hincz] (Szentendre: Pest Megyei Múzeumok Igazgatósága, 1989), 125.

In June 1960, official photographs were taken of Hincz in his studio, now preserved in the National Photo Archive [Fig. 3]. The images show the artist surrounded by his most recent works, while the accompanying caption reads: “Kossuth Prize-winning painter Gyula Hincz models a sculpture in his studio. Recently, the artist has been working with ceramics after returning from his trip to the Far East.” Naturally, the photographs are staged—Hincz is not actually working on anything but rather examining completed pieces in an artistically chaotic studio setting.



3 A. B. Gyula Hincz in his studio, Budapest, June 3, 1960, Photo by Sándor Bojár, MTVA (National Photo Archive)



Gyula Hinczas savo studijoje, Budapeštas, 1960 m. birželio 3 d., Sándoro Bojáró nuotrauka

It is rare to gain such direct insight into Hincz’s studio, where, in addition to the works he was creating at the time, one can glimpse drawings, inspirational photographs on the walls, and books he was reading—or considered important enough to include in the frame. Among the mostly German-language books are ethnographic studies on the Xingu people of Brazil and African travelogues, reflecting his growing global interests. While it is evident that Hincz’s horizons broadened after his travels beyond Europe

and he started to experiment with new ideas, there is no record of him ever visiting the African continent in person.

When it comes to foreign politics during the Socialist period, Hungary, like other states in the Soviet bloc, followed the doctrines and general policy directives of Moscow. However, there were some specificities in Hungary's international relations, especially after the 1956 Hungarian Revolution.²⁰ Diplomatic ties between Hungary and (Sub-Saharan) Africa strengthened following a 1962 diplomatic mission by Gyula Kállai—then Deputy President of the Council of Ministers—which included visits to Guinea, Mali, Dahomey, Ghana, Nigeria, Algeria, and Morocco. This mission resulted in the signing of several cultural agreements. According to a legal analysis published in 2010, Hungary signed a total of twenty-six cultural agreements with African states between 1957 and 1993.²¹ While the guiding principles of these agreements were similar and followed the Soviet model—promoting friendship between peoples, mutual understanding, appreciation of cultural achievements, and the development of international cultural relations and cooperation—their nature varied. Some were more political in character, emphasizing non-interference in internal affairs, respect for national sovereignty, and full (legal) equality, while others were more technical, focusing on mutual benefits, such as visits by individuals and cultural delegations, scholarship programmes, diploma recognition, cultural promotion, and the exchange of informational materials.²²

It is important to note that studying Hungary's relations with African countries remains a relatively new area of scholarship,²³ and focusing

20 For further analysis see István Tarrósy and Dániel Solymári, "Relations with the Global South, Solidarity and Pragmatism in Hungarian Foreign Policy since the 1960s—A Focus on Africa," *Eastern Journal of European Studies* 13, no. 1 (2022): 106–122.

21 Gábor Hollósi, "Magyarország kulturális egyezményei afrikai államokkal (1957–1993)" [Hungary's Cultural Agreements with African States (1957–1993)], *Iustum Aequum Salutare* 6, no. 2 (2010): 45–59.

22 The chronological order of the agreements is as follows: Egypt (1957), Guinea (1960), Ghana (1961), Mali (1962), Dahomey (1962), Algeria (1964), Ethiopia (1965), Tanzania (1966), Tunisia (1966), Sudan (1967–69), Ghana (1971), Congo (1971), Morocco (1972), Upper Volta (1973), Nigeria (1973), Sierra Leone (1974), Somalia (1975), Libya (1978), Angola (1979), Ethiopia (1980), Mozambique (1980), Zambia (1980), Benin (1981), Zimbabwe (1986), Kenya (1987), South-Africa (1993). See Hollósi, *ibid.*, 59.

23 See, for example, Daniel Solymári, "Hungary's Pragmatic Diplomacy in the Age of Détente: The Case of the African Opening between 1956 and 1970," *Politics in Central Europe* 19, no. 2 (2023): 283–303.

specifically on cultural aspects is an even narrower field. As a result, information on how these cultural agreements were implemented in practice is sparse, especially in regard to cross-cultural art exchange.²⁴ Some research has been done on specific countries and topics, such as Zoltán Ginelli's work on Hungarian experts in Nkrumah's Ghana,²⁵ studies on state scholarships offered to African students to study medicine in Hungary,²⁶ or the transnational history of Eastern Europe and the Global South (as explored in the 2021 research exhibition *Transperiphery Movement. Global Eastern Europe and Global South*, organized by Eszter Szakács and Ginelli).²⁷ However, none of these studies focused specifically on artistic exchanges.

Although the Soviet Union and the socialist Eastern Bloc countries sought to establish diplomatic, political, military, economic, and cultural relations with the decolonized African states,²⁸ African art was still largely viewed and presented as material culture or ethnographic specimens.²⁹ As Francine Hirsch warns:

Ethnographic knowledge is never value-neutral, although it can appear to be so when it is obtained through scholarly or scientific inquiries. In fact, it is always the product of a series of decisions and judgements, and more often than not it embodies the assumptions and ambitions of those doing the collecting, classifying, and compiling.³⁰

- 24 Although I see this topic as a possible future continuation of this research, it will require archival research at the Institute for Cultural Relations at the National Archives of Hungary.
- 25 Zoltán Ginelli, "Hungarian Experts in Nkrumah's Ghana. Decolonization and Semiperipheral Postcoloniality in Socialist Hungary," *mezosfera*, May 2018, <http://mezosfera.org/hungarian-experts-in-nkrumahs-ghana/>.]
- 26 Tarrósy and Solymári, "Relations with the Global South," 113–115.
- 27 *Transperiphery Movement. Global Eastern Europe and Global South*, Fészek Művészklub, Budapest, April 23 – May 30, 2021 (Project of the 3rd OFF Biennale Budapest), <https://archive.offbiennale.hu/en/2021/projects/transperiferia-mozgalom.html>.
- 28 This topic was also addressed in an exhibition (along with accompanying programs such as film screenings, talks, and events) titled *Red Africa*, Calvert 22, London, February 4 – April 3, 2016. <https://contemporaryand.com/exhibition/red-africa/>.
- 29 On how the Cold War interest in Africa impacted the development of research into art and visual culture on the African continent, see Kate Cowcher, "Soviet Supersystems and American Frontiers: African Art Histories and the Cold War," *The Art Bulletin* 101, no. 3 (2019): 146–166.
- 30 Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations. Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 11.

However, this is a much broader topic than what this paper can cover, as African artefacts and relics have been included—usually without recording any details about their function and origin—in European collections and cabinets of curiosities since the Renaissance. While these early collections later found their way into national history museums, the memorabilia collected by early practitioners of science and members of the merchant class began to appear in newly established ethnographic museums across Europe with the rise of the colonial era. In the early 20th century, interest in African art—particularly sculptures from West and Central Africa—began to grow, largely due to the influence of members of the French avant-garde (such as Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Henri Matisse, André Derain, and Maurice de Vlaminck), which led to increasing attention from art historians and private galleries. Although important international conferences after WWII—such as the Hague Convention of 1954 and the UNESCO Convention of 1970—established a higher level of protection for cultural property and African states started to gain independence during this period, it still took a long time for African art to achieve visibility and proper representation in the art world.³¹

In Hungary, African art and culture were mostly presented in exhibitions organized by the Budapest Museum of Ethnography, showcasing various artifacts collected by Hungarian travellers and researchers since the 19th century. The first Hungarian-language book on African art was also written by an ethnographer, Tibor Bodrogi, who was the director of the Museum of Ethnography at the time.³² In April 1966, he visited the First World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar,³³ which he then reviewed in *Művészet*, introducing the two main exhibitions of the festival: one on traditional African art and the other on modern African art.³⁴ Aside from these sporadic articles and some reports on Hungarian artists living and working in Africa—such as sculptor Zoltán Borberek-Kovács and architect-painter Sándor Kónya—African art,

31 For more details on these transformations, see Aneta Pawłowska, “African Art: The Journey from Ethnological Collection to the Museum of Art,” *Muzeológia a kultúrne dedičstvo* 8, no. 4 (2020): 161–176.

32 Tibor Bodrogi, *Afrika művészete* (Corvina, 1967).

33 Dezső Halácsi, “A Négrer Művészetek Első Világfesztiválja” [First World Festival of Negro Arts], *Világ Ifjúsága* 20, no. 9 (1966): 5.

34 Tibor Bodrogi, “Négrer képzőművészeti kiállítások Dakarban” [Negro Art Exhibitions in Dakar], *Művészet* 7, no. 7 (1966): 38–40.

especially modern and contemporary art, was rarely presented in Hungary at the time. Besides the Institute for Cultural Relations, *Műcsarnok* [Kunsthalle] Budapest played a prominent role in organizing exhibitions with an international focus. In 1952, it became a “national exhibition center” under the name *Kiállítási Intézmények* [Exhibition Institutions], similar to the Central Bureau of Artistic Exhibitions (at Zachęta) in Poland. This institution functioned as the central organizer of travelling exhibitions of visual arts both in Hungary and abroad.³⁵ During the Kádár-era, the African continent was only represented by Egyptian and Algerian contemporary art in Budapest. The Institute for Cultural Relations organized an exhibition in their gallery for the Egyptian sculptor Hassan Heshmat in 1957, another on Nubian monuments in 1966, and one on Algerian art in 1975. *Műcsarnok* hosted an exhibition of contemporary Egyptian art in 1957, while modern Egyptian ceramics were exhibited at Ernst Museum in 1969.³⁶

In this milieu, it is not surprising that artists of the period, such as Hincz, drew inspiration from ethnographic studies, travelogues, and their own travels, when permitted.³⁷ As mentioned before, although Hincz never visited the African continent, he was well-established as an artist and the rector of the Academy of Applied Arts, which allowed him to meet different

35 The archival material of all these official exhibitions can be accessed today at the Műcsarnok Library and Archive in Budapest. The documentation usually contains lists of exhibited artworks, invitations, posters of the show, press clippings, financial reports, typewritten documents, occasional small catalogues, and black-and-white photographs of the interior and/or the exhibited works. For more information on the history of the institution during the Socialist period, see János Frank, “A Műcsarnok negyven éve. 1950–1990” [Forty Years of Kunsthalle, 1950–1970], in *Műcsarnok* [Kunsthalle], ed. Katalin Keserű, Gabriella Nagy, and László Beke (Budapest: Műcsarnok, 1996), 67–118.

36 The Soviet-Egyptian cultural exchange started relatively early after the 1952 Egyptian revolution and affected how other Soviet Bloc countries shaped their relations with Egypt. For more details, see Maria Mileeva, “Imagined Solidarities: Cairo-Moscow and the Struggle for Realist Art,” *Art History* 45, No. 5 (2022): 975–995.

37 As in many other state socialist systems, where emigration was strictly limited, after 1949 it became nearly impossible to cross the borders of the Hungarian People’s Republic, even for travel within the Eastern Bloc. Although travel opportunities gradually increased after 1955, only selected—and thoroughly vetted—individuals, mostly politicians, athletes, and artists were permitted to travel. Before 1972, travellers had to apply for a one-time-use-only passport for each trip, while from 1972 onward, two different types of passports were in use: red passports permitted travel to other Socialist Bloc countries for a maximum of 30 days per trip, while blue passports allowed limited travel to Western countries once every three years (or once annually with an official invitation letter).

cultural delegations in Budapest. In search of information on his Africa-series, some archival photographs were found in the family archive, showing Hincz in the company of yet unidentified young (Sub-Saharan) African individuals [Fig. 4].



4. Gyula Hincz (in the middle) in the company of an unidentified couple, photography from the Hincz family archive

Gyula Hinczas (viduryje) su nežinoma pora, nuotrauka iš Hinczo šeimos archyvo

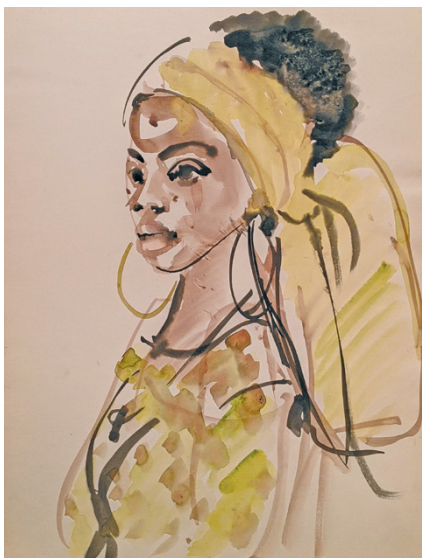
Judging by their attire—the women wearing (traditionally West African) *boubou*-like garments and the men in suits—the occasion seems to have been a semi-formal event. However, along with these photographs, a few sketches were discovered, one of which even mentions a name—Sosan or Shasa (though spelled incorrectly). It seems that the artist had time to sit down and draw during their meeting [Fig. 5]. Some sketches from the same series [Fig. 6] can also be found at the Hincz Collection in Vác, including one depicting a musician.

Although the photographs (or sketches) lack information about when and where they were taken, a comparison with a similar photo of Hincz meeting a Korean delegation in 1962 suggests that the location was the Academy of Applied Arts [Fig. 7].

In 1979, on Hincz's 75th birthday, an extensive article by Márta Kádár was published, summarizing the stages of the artist's oeuvre so far.

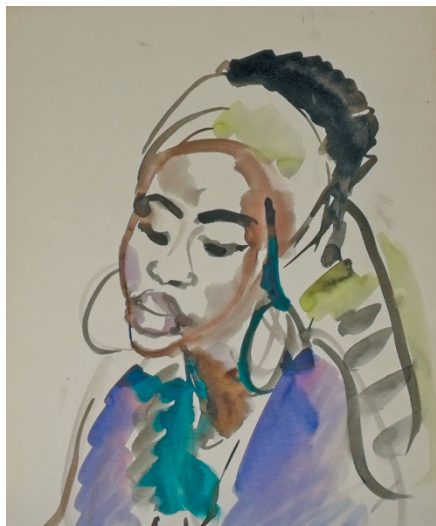
5 A, B, C. Photographs and sketches from the Hincz family archive. LATGA, Vilnius 2025

Nuotraukos ir eskizai iš Hinczo šeimos archyvo. LATGA, Vilnius 2025



6 A, B, C. Africa sketches from the Hincz Collection, TIM, Vác, H.91.2. LATGA, Vilnius 2025

Afrikos eskizai iš G. Hinczo kolekcijos.
LATGA, Vilnius 2025





7. Korean delegation at the Academy of Applied Arts, Budapest in 1962, with Eta Erdélyi and János Fajó (in the middle) and Hincz (on the right), photography from Antal Csipes's photo archive. LATGA, Vilnius 2025

Korėjos delegacija Budapešto taikomosios dailės akademijoje 1962 m. su Eta Erdélyi ir János Fajó (viduryje) bei Hinczu (dešinėje), nuotrauka iš Antalo Csipeso fotoarchyvo. LATGA, Vilnius 2025

The article also highlighted some of the key topics in Hincz's work, among them, the *Africa-series*. "That is why he raises his voice whenever the peace of humanity is in danger. His *Africa-series* is a protest against the war in Algeria—he depicts peoples of color in friendship and peace. His *Peace-series* agitates against war."³⁸ Even though Africa was listed as one of the central topics in the oeuvre in 1979, and was referred to as a series, the exact works are quite difficult to identify today. The exhibition documentations and catalogues do not confirm that he considered these works as one coherent series, although he did number some of the etchings he exhibited under the title *Africa*. His Africa-themed works that have been identified so far can be classified into four different groups: the so-called *Friendship of Peoples* works, graphic works (mostly etchings) exhibited in the 1960s, large oil paintings from the 1960s and 1970s, and various form studies (the above-mentioned sketches and some painted plaster heads and busts).³⁹

38 Márta Kádár, "Hincz Gyula 75 éves" [Gyula Hincz Is 75 Years Old], *Fejér Megyei Hírlap*, April 15, 1979, 9.

39 Although not a trained sculptor, Hincz started experimenting with plastic forms after his Asian trip. He modelled clay portraits and produced painted plaster casts from them. Due to the peculiarities of this technique, these works have not aged well and are now held in storage at the Hincz Collection in Vác due to their condition. Hincz also presented a selection of his terracotta and glazed ceramic statuettes at the 1970 Venice Biennale. His painted plaster portraits remain largely experimental by comparison.

The Friendship of Peoples works

The friendship of peoples or nations is a recurring theme in Hincz's art, the earliest and best-known example being the tapestry from 1956, which he designed in at least three slightly different versions (these were referred to under various titles: *Peace*, *Brotherhood of Peoples*, and *Friendship of Peoples*).⁴⁰ The composition—possibly inspired by the tapestries of Noémi Ferenczy⁴¹—depicts the hands of young boys, framed by flying doves, intertwined in front of red and blue flags, symbolizing friendship among different nations. As a contemporary newspaper review described it:

The 'Peace' tapestry was made in the weaving workshop of the Fine Arts Fund based on the design and direction of the painter Gyula Hincz. The white and black, yellow and Indian heads next to each other and the intertwined hands symbolize the friendship of the peoples, the common struggle for peace.⁴²

The theme was one of the characteristic and much-repeated topoi of the Soviet era. At first glance, it appeared idyllic and serene—as Hincz's tapestry also suggests—but it was actually burdened with traumatic undertones [Fig. 8]. Following the Bolshevik Revolution, the primary goal of the Soviet regime was the abolition of class society. The 1924 constitution and propaganda texts presented this concept as the brotherhood of peoples, positioning it in contrast to Western bourgeois cosmopolitanism. During the late 1920s, the ethnic map of the multi-ethnic Soviet Union was outlined and redrawn, leading to the establishment of national republics, districts, and regions—changes that were accompanied by the deportations and

40 The three variations of Hincz's tapestry titled *Brotherhood of Peoples I-II-III* were exhibited in Bratislava (Czechoslovakia) from August 11 to September 1, 1957, in a joint exhibition with painter László Holló. Although the tapestries were initially planned to be showcased at the Hungarian Pavilion of the 1958 Brussels World's Fair, Hincz was ultimately not selected to participate. One variation is currently held in the Kiscelli Museum – Municipal Gallery, the fine art collection of the Budapest History Museum. A reproduction of the finished tapestry was published in the newspaper of the Union of Working Youth *Szabad Ifjúság* under the title *Peace*. See "Béke gobelin" [Peace Tapestry], *Szabad Ifjúság*, September 7, 1956, 4.

41 Noémi Ferenczy (1890–1957) was a painter and textile artist, best known for her hand-woven tapestries. Her major retrospective exhibition was held from September 22 to October 28, 1956, at the Nemzeti Szalon in Budapest.

42 "Béke gobelin," 4.

violent ethnic cleansing of the peoples living in the western border areas.⁴³ With the adoption of the 1936 constitution, the earlier idea of brotherhood was replaced by friendship, signaling a shift in the communist social practices from kinship-based solidarity to one grounded in chosen bonds. After 1945, the friendship of peoples became a fundamental concept of Soviet society, supporting the image of a multinational (socialist) community in which all peoples were to live in unity and equality.⁴⁴

The tapestry depicts four racial groups that were often distinguished in Soviet Russia: Black people, Southeast Asians, Muslims, and White people, visually emphasizing the Stalinist dictum that “all nations and races have equal rights.” While official ideology denied the existence of racism in Soviet Russia and insisted that the regime did not engage in racial politics, the very inclusion of race in such representations reveals that racial categories did exist.⁴⁵



8. *Friendship of Peoples*, 1956, wool tapestry, 76 × 132 cm, photo from the Hincz family archive. LATGA, Vilnius 2025

Tautų draugystė, 1956, gobelenas, vilna, 76 × 132 cm, nuotrauka iš Hinczo šeimos archyvo. LATGA, Vilnius 2025

Although the theme is monumental, the scale of Hincz’s tapestry is relatively small. It was one of his earliest ventures into tapestry design, a medium in which he would later receive numerous monumental

43 Francine Hirsch, “Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of Soviet National Identities,” *The Russian Review* 59, no. 2 (2000): 201–226.

44 Isabel Kim Dzitac and Andrei Nesterov, “De Jure and De Facto: An Examination of the ‘Friendship of the Peoples’ Policy and the 1937 Koryo Saram Deportation,” *geohistory.today*, April 15, 2015, <https://geohistory.today/koryo-saram-friendship-ussr/>.

45 Francine Hirsch, “Race without the Practice of Racial Politics,” *Slavic Review* 61, no. 1 (2002): 30–43.

commissions.⁴⁶ In 1975, a solo exhibition of his latest works opened at the House of Culture in Érd, an occasion that also marked the inauguration of yet another *Friendship of Peoples* tapestry [Fig. 9].⁴⁷ This abstract large-scale composition contains colorful elements referring to both the arts and cultural diversity—featuring symbols of different artistic disciplines and the community of various nations. The motif of intertwining hands on the left, which Hincz referred to as a “globe of hands,” forms the central motif of the composition and also serves as an homage to El Lissitzky.⁴⁸



9. *Friendship of Peoples*, 1975, wool tapestry,
203 × 358 cm, Szepes Gyula Művelődési
Központ, Érd. LATGA, Vilnius 2025

Tautų draugystė, 1975, gobelenas, vilna,
203 × 358 cm. LATGA, Vilnius 2025

46 For more details, see Barbara Dudás, “A ‘Hincz-jelenség’ nyomában. Kádár-kori muráliák kortárs olvasata” [In the Wake of the ‘Hincz-Phenomenon.’ A Contemporary Reading of Kádár-era Murals], in *Látkép 2021–Művészettörténeti Tanulmányok. Látkép 03 / Alkotói életstratégiák* [Látkép 2021—Art History Studies. Látkép 03 / Creative Life Strategies], eds. Kitty Árvai-Józsa et al. (Budapest: BTK–Művészettörténeti Intézet, 2022). See also Barbara Dudás, “Socialist (Modernist) Artworks Recycled: On the Fate of Monumental Works by Gyula Hincz,” *Studies in Visual Arts and Communication – An International Journal* 8, no. 2 (2021): 45–53.

47 *Gyula Hincz’s solo exhibition*, March 22 – April 7, 1975. House of Culture, Érd. After the exhibition closed, the tapestry remained in the collection of the institution, where it is still kept today. In a 2007 anniversary publication of the institution (*House of Communities*. Érd, 2007, 22), the work is simply referred to as *Friendship*, possibly to separate it from the negative connotations associated with the Soviet-era “friendship of peoples” topos. In 2024, an exhibition was organized here to mark the artist’s 120th birthday (*Kaleido-*

Hincz's *Friendship of Peoples* works – whether figurative and didactic or more abstract—aligned quite closely with the Soviet propaganda surrounding the concept. Promoting friendly relations with other socialist countries was an extension of this idea, and, as previously mentioned, Hungary was no exception in this regard.

Graphic works exhibited in the 1960s

During the 1960s, Hincz was particularly active in the field of graphic arts, exhibiting almost exclusively graphic works throughout the decade. A recent major research and exhibition project on the history of Hungarian graphic arts examined the first decade of the Miskolc Biennale of Graphic Arts—still one of the most important events for graphic arts in Hungary—with special focus on the grand prize winners at the biennale each year and the works they submitted.⁴⁹ (The biennale did not impose thematic limitations; instead, artists were selected by a jury, while the selected artists decided which pieces to submit.)⁵⁰ In this regard, Hincz was a key figure: he was the first artist to receive the grand prize in 1961, and thus featured in a dedicated (solo) section at the following biennale. He also participated in almost all subsequent biennales during this eventful decade.⁵¹ Hincz took part in nearly fifty exhibitions, including the Miskolc Biennale, where his Africa-themed works were frequently listed, though rarely accompanied by images or detailed commentary. His recurring themes included peace, the

scope – Gyula Hincz 120, curated by Fruzsina Czifka and Barbara Dudás, April 12 – July 13, 2024). On this occasion, the tapestry was also restored. For more details, see *Kaleidoscope* – Gyula Hincz 120, exhibition catalogue (Szepes Gyula Művelődési Központ, 2024).

- 48 Zsuzsa D. Fehér, *Portrait of Gyula Hincz, Mű és vallomás* [Artwork and Testimony], television program, 1976. Transcript: KEMKI-ADK (previously: Archive of the Hungarian National Gallery) 21633/1982.
- 49 *The Decade of Hungarian Graphics 1961–1971*, Miskolc Gallery, September 24 – October 30, 2022. Accompanying edited volume: *A magyar grafika évtizede 1961–1971* [The Decade of Hungarian Graphics 1961–1971], ed. Katalin Nagy T. (Herman Ottó Múzeum – Miskolci Galéria, 2023).
- 50 For more details on the jury process and different experiences, see interviews with János Szurcsik, Líviusz Gyulai, Dóra Maurer, Imre Kovács, and Gabriella Sulyok in the above-mentioned volume (*A magyar grafika évtizede 1961–1971*), 171–210.
- 51 For more details on his participations at the biennale, see Barbara Dudás, “az adott világ varázslainak mérnöke – Hincz Gyula grafikai munkássága a hatvanas években” [“The Engineer of Enchantments of the World”—Graphic Works of Gyula Hincz from the 1960s], in *A magyar grafika évtizede 1961–1971*, 28–39.

friendship of peoples, mother with child, Africa (mostly treated as a general concept rather than referring to specific countries), and the Far East (a term commonly used at the time, meaning in that context Vietnam, China, and North Korea). Other recurring motifs included the nuclear test ban, an abstract series dedicated to Leonardo da Vinci, and his book illustrations—such as those for the Hungarian poet Attila József's collection of poems, the Hungarian edition of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, and various Hungarian editions of Louis Aragon's works.

In 1960, Hincz exhibited alongside Gyula Feledy at the 2nd International Biennial Exhibition of Print in Tokyo. According to the list of works, he presented an etching titled *Africa* (1959) and another titled *Study of Heads* (1959). Only the latter was reproduced in the exhibition catalogue [Fig. 10], which allowed for its identification—a version of this print is held in both the Graphic Collection of the Hungarian National Gallery and the Hincz Collection in Vác. As its title suggests, the work is a color study exploring various racial characteristics. While it is noteworthy as a study, it is not considered an outstanding print, especially in an international context.



10. *Study of Heads*, 1959, etching,
41.5 × 31.5 cm, Hincz Collection, TIM,
Vác, H.90.34.1. LATGA, Vilnius 2025

Galvų studija, 1959, ofortas, 41,5 × 31,5 cm,
G. Hinczo kolekcija. LATGA, Vilnius 2025

As previously mentioned, Hincz was a regular participant at the Miskolc Biennale of Graphic Arts. In 1963, he presented a large selection of recent graphic works, including a color etching titled *Africa*. Although the work has not yet been definitively identified, it may correspond to one of the prints he exhibited under the titles *Africa I.* and *II.* [Fig. 11, 12] at his solo show at the Dürer Hall in Budapest in early 1964.⁵²



11. *Africa I*, etching, 40 × 30 cm, Hincz Collection, TIM, Vác, H.229.1. LATGA, Vilnius 2025

Afrika I, ofortas, 40 × 30 cm, G. Hinczo kolekcija. LATGA, Vilnius 2025



12. *Africa II*, etching, 23 × 20 cm, private collection. LATGA, Vilnius 2025

Afrika II, ofortas, 23 × 20 cm, privati kolekcija. LATGA, Vilnius 2025

Both prints entered museum registers under different titles. *Africa I.* is catalogued as part of Hincz's *Peace-series* in the collection of the Hungarian National Gallery, yet it also appeared—interestingly—as an illustration for an article titled “On Cuba’s Celebration”⁵³ in a December 1963 issue of the Hungarian weekly *Élet és Irodalom*. *Africa II.* is registered under the title *Mothers* at the Hungarian National Gallery, though in other museums and art galleries it was consistently referred to as *Family*. In a comprehensive

⁵² Gyula Hincz's exhibition of prints, January 29 – February 12, 1964. Dürer Hall, Budapest.

⁵³ Pál Pándi, “Kuba ünnepe,” *Élet és Irodalom*, December 28, 1963, 3.

1979 article on Hincz's work, the print was once again published under the title *Africa*.⁵⁴ Some of these works were widely distributed through the centralized state-run art gallery company *Képcsarnok Vállalat* (established in 1948 and officially operating until 2013, though it lost its exclusive position around the time of the regime change). This system required conformity to various period-specific criteria—such as style, subject matter, and size—which likely contributed to the changes of the titles over time.

Stylistically and thematically, the etching known as *Conversation*—featured in several international group exhibitions in the mid-1960s⁵⁵—can also be considered as part of Hincz's Africa-related series. While the list of works and catalogues from this period refer to the piece as *Conversation*, the Hungarian National Gallery registered it under the title *Africa*. Meanwhile, the family archive preserves several versions of the work, all signed as *Friendship of Peoples* [Fig. 13]. Hincz's solo exhibition in Paris in 1969,⁵⁶ as well as his contribution to the 1st International Painting Festival in Cagnes-sur-Mer,⁵⁷ included a work titled *Friendship of Peoples*, which was likely the same print previously exhibited as *Conversation*. The revised title subtly hints at USSR propaganda surrounding the notion, tailored for the French audience.



13. *Friendship of Peoples* (*Conversation*), etching, 28 × 37.5 cm, from the Hincz family archive. LATGA, Vilnius 2025

Tautų draugystė (Pokalbis), ofortas, 28 × 37,5 cm, Hinczo šeimos archyvas. LATGA, Vilnius 2025

- 54 Nóra Aradi, "A kortárs művészet közegében" [In the Environment of Contemporary Art], *Művészet* 20, no. 3 (1979): 16.
- 55 *Graphic and Plastic Art from Hungary*, December 4–25, 1964. Simu Museum, Bucharest. *Graphics and Statuettes from Hungary*, March – April, 1965. Neue Berliner Galerie, Berlin.
- 56 Gyula Hincz's solo exhibition, January 9 – February 1, 1969. Galerie de Saxe, Paris.
- 57 *Festival International de la Peinture*, April 8 – July 15, 1969. Cagnes-sur-Mer.

Oil paintings from the 1960s and 1970s

As mentioned earlier, Hincz primarily exhibited his graphic works during this period; however, he also produced large-scale oil paintings, which he first presented to the public at his exhibition at the 1970 Venice Biennale. These were mostly abstract paintings, with titles such as *Cosmos* (1965) or *Space Has No End* (1968), and bore no direct reference to Africa-related themes. According to Lánicz's article, Hincz did create several Africa-inspired pieces—among them *Senegalese Girl*, *Friendship of Peoples*, and one titled *Lumumba*—though these are not known to have been exhibited. They appear to have ended up either in private collections or in public collections under different titles. A large-scale work, for example, now held in the Hincz Collection in Vác, may be one such case. A label on the reverse refers to the piece as *The Song of Africa* (1964, oil on canvas, 150×220 cm), but the painting itself is currently obscured by another canvas loosely stretched over the same frame, and awaits professional removal and restoration.

On the occasion of Hincz's solo exhibition at the House of Culture in Érd in 1975—coinciding with the inauguration of his second *Friendship of Peoples* tapestry—a review by his first monographer, Miklós Losonci, appeared in a daily newspaper. After praising the newly unveiled tapestry, Losonci shortly mentioned that the exhibition aimed to present Hincz's organically structured visual program to the audience. "His passionate sense of justice," he wrote, "is voiced in a pictorial cry for *Chile's* bloody pain; *Africa* exults with fragments of elephants and birds in his painting, and he conveys the neutral rhythm of the Sea."⁵⁸

The article included a black-and-white reproduction titled again as *Africa*, depicting a work now housed in the Hincz Collection in Vác under the title *Africa III* [Fig. 14]. This warm-toned, abstract painting features organic, amoeba-like fluid forms incorporating a sun motif and a human face, blending elements of Hincz's early surrealist style from the late 1920s with the mature yet still experimental language of his later painting.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Africa theme continued to appear in several comprehensive articles on Hincz's work, such as Márta Kádár's piece honoring the artist's 75th birthday. Later, in his monograph, Miklós

58 Miklós Losonci, "Érd vendége: Hincz Gyula" [The Guest of Érd: Gyula Hincz], *Pest Megyei Hírlap*, March 22, 1975, 5.



14. *Africa III*, 1969–71, oil on canvas, 150 × 120 cm, Hincz Collection, TIM, Vác, H.76.1. LATGA, Vilnius 2025

Afrika III, 1969–1971, drobė, aliejus, 150 × 120 cm, G. Hinczo kolekcija. LATGA, Vilnius 2025

Losonci also touches on the Africa theme, albeit in vague terms, when comparing Hincz with some of his contemporaries. “On several occasions,” Losonci writes, that “they reached the shore together, Tihamér Gyarmathy, Menyhért Tóth, and Hincz found Africa with a green animal, a rhinoceros archetype and an elephant trunk. Together—though still independently.”⁵⁹ Although these references do mention specific countries, political events, and figures, it seems that Hincz’s Africa works are primarily expressions of a modernist artist’s interest in diverse cultures, created within a (socialist) political context where peace, solidarity, and the friendship of peoples were among the central themes in state propaganda.

Conclusion

Gyula Hincz was a prominent figure of his time, admired not only by his peers and students for his artistic prowess but also by key cultural and political figures of the period for his ability to convey the correct (socialist) message to the right audience. His extensive body of work encompasses a wide range of periods, themes, and series, all deserving thorough examination. While Hincz's genuine interest in Africa is evident—particularly in his fascination with the abstract, conceptual approach to the human form found in African art—his engagement with Africa can and should be understood as a political statement, crafted to resonate within the political context of his time. Although Hincz's views on Africa and African characters—evidenced by his works identified so far—reflect general solidarity with African people, they primarily align with the ethnographic representation style that was the dominant form at the time.

Expanding the research beyond Hincz's work offers an opportunity to gain a more comprehensive understanding of African influences in Hungarian socialist art and the political implications of these cultural exchanges. Comparative studies involving other Hungarian and Eastern European artists who engaged with African themes might illuminate broader artistic and ideological trends of the period. Moreover, delving deeper into archival records of cultural agreements and exhibitions could reveal the extent to which these diplomatic initiatives shaped artistic production and representation. Ultimately, this study highlights the need for continued exploration of cross-cultural artistic dialogues in the socialist era, which, while underexplored, remain pivotal to understanding the complexities of Cold War-era cultural diplomacy.

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Santrauka

Tautų draugystė. Afrika kaip solidarumo tema socialistiniame vengrų mene – Gyulos Hinczo darbai

Barbara Dudás

Reikšminiai žodžiai: vengrų menas, socializmas, Afrikos laikotarpis, solidarumas, sovietų diplomatija.

Šiame straipsnyje pristatoma garsaus vengrų socialistinio modernizmo krypties menininko Gyulos Hinczo (1904–1986) ir jo menkai žinomo 7 deš. *Afrikos ciklo* atvejo analizė. Skirtingai nuo šio menininko Azijos įkvėptų darbų, kuriuos galima susieti su konkrečia, gerai dokumentuota tiriamąja kelione į Šiaurės Korėją, Vietnamą ir Kiniją 1957–1958 m., jo Afrikos inspiruotus kūrinius gana sunku net atpažinti. Kaip liudija archyvuose ir kataloguose esantys kūrinių sąrašai bei paminėjimai to meto recenzijose ir straipsniuose, tokie grafikos kūriniai, gobelenai, statulėlės ir didelio formato aliejiniai paveikslai buvo dažnai eksponuojami parodose, tačiau šaltiniuose retai publikuoti patys vaizdai. Bandoma identifikuoti šiuos kūrinius, atskiriant juos nuo Hinczo *Taikos ciklo*, jų galimus įkvėpimo šaltinius bei kai kurias fotoarchyvuose rastas nuotraukas, ir juos išnagrinėti.

Straipsnyje pristatomi su Afrika susiję Hinczo darbai, kuriuos galima suskirstyti į keturias grupes: 1) vadinamieji „Tautų draugystės“ kūriniai, atitinkantys SSRS propagandos siekius užmegzti draugiškus santykius su kitomis (socialistinėmis) šalimis; 2) 7 deš. eksponuoti grafikos darbai (daugiausia ofortai) su afrikietiškų tipažų studijomis; 3) didelio formato 7–8 deš. aliejiniai paveikslai, kurių iki šiol identifiukuota tik keletas, ir 4) įvairios formų studijos (akvareliniai eskizai ir ištapytos gipso statulėlės). Bandant atskleisti, kodėl Afrikos tema menininkui buvo svarbi, siekiama geriau suprasti, kaip Afrika ir Afrikos kultūra buvo suvokiama ir interpretuojama 7 deš. socialistinėje Vengrijoje.