

133 Days: The Visual Culture of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, 1919

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During a period of only 133 days, the world's second Soviet Republic was established in parts of central and western Hungary, notably in the capital city of Budapest. From 21 March to 1 August 1919, amidst political chaos, this state produced an astonishing array of art, street decorations, floats, photographs and designs for an almost unbelievable quantity of publications, including books, brochures, flyers and posters. While not as adventurous aesthetically as their counterparts in the nascent Soviet Union, the artists who contributed to this barrage of revolutionary visuality established a distinctive aesthetic rooted both in the late Art Nouveau sensibility of Hungarian graphic design, and emerging from the pre-War artistic avant-garde, working through Cezanne and the Futurists, laid the groundwork for a revolutionary aesthetic they termed "Activism." In this paper we will gain an overview of this visual cultural production and attempt to define its key characteristics, as well as map out its effects on subsequent artistic production.