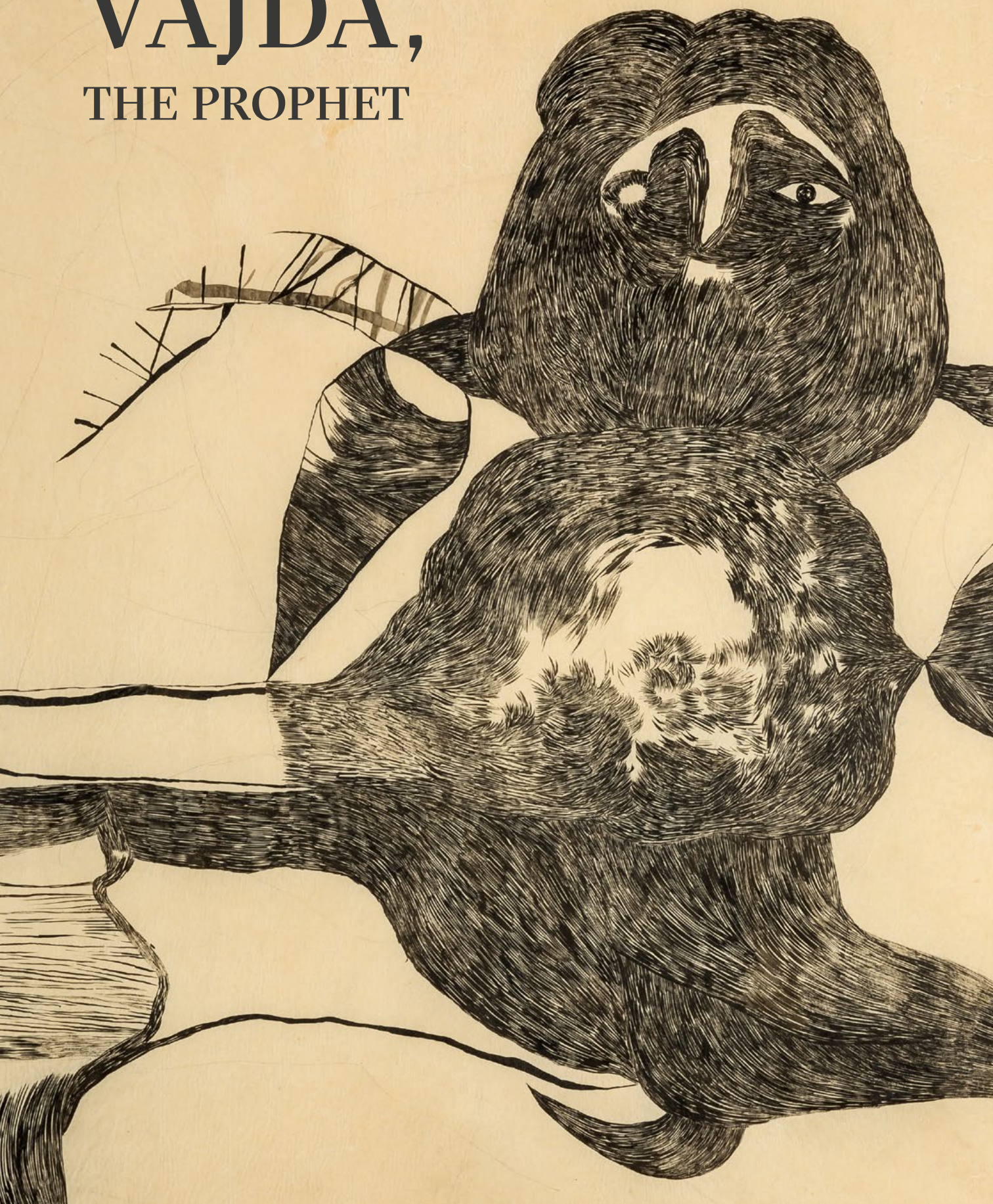


VAJDA, THE PROPHET



VAJDA,
THE PROPHET

VAJDA, THE PROPHET



*‘I’m one of those
who also think about
what they are doing’*

– LAJOS VAJDA



VAJDA THE PROPHET – REOPENING THE VAJDA MUSEUM. AN ATTEMPT AT UNDERSTANDING THE VISION OF LAJOS VAJDA, THE DRAUGHTSMAN.

The basic concept of the Vajda Museum, which reopens in April 2023, is to present a new exhibition every year, in order to unravel the periods in the oeuvre of Lajos Vajda (1908–1941), its connections to contemporaneous artistic trends, and the results of the latest research on the artist's work. Closed for almost a decade, the Vajda Museum now reopens with the exhibition *Vajda, the Prophet*. The show that will follow in the autumn of 2023 will explore Lajos Vajda's relationship to Szentendre, its manifestations in his motifs. In 2024, we will broaden our perspective and look at the influence of Vajda's art and ethos on the second half of the 20th century, through the evidence of the creative praxes of various (neo-) avant-garde and contemporary artists.

Though he died young, Lajos Vajda became the most important, most influential Hungarian artist of the 20th century, thanks to a work that consciously drew on traditions, which is then revitalized with a progressive approach. Informed by a desire to create a world view, his oeuvre was marked by coherence throughout its progress from constructivism and surrealism, through transparent drawings of a completely individual tone, to the organic abstract works of his last years. A few questions are worth asking, however. What makes Vajda's art pioneering? Why did he become a 'prophet' for the progressive European School after his death? What legends surrounded him during his life and after his death? And why was his art destined to be ignored and misunderstood for decades? With the works of the artist presented in three conceptual and thematic units, *Vajda, the Prophet* looks at the oeuvre's explorations of spatial representation, and their connections to contemporaneous developments in philosophy and history. The exhibition attempts to expose the roots of the artist's distinctive outlook as a draughtsman, of his concept of space without dimensions.

The structure of the exhibition does not follow a chronological order; assuming a certain synthesis, it begins with the presentation of works Vajda made towards the end of his life, before the rooms that follow shed light on



the observations and visual experiments that led him to the abstraction of the great charcoal drawings that put him ahead of his time. This short oeuvre, which spanned a mere fifteen years, is thus examined in its entirety and with a focus on the growth of Vajda's artistic vision, as the exhibition juxtaposes, and studies in parallel, the montages of the early 1930s, the line drawings from ca. 1936, and the visual abstraction that unfolded from 1939 on. Since Vajda did not originally provide these works with titles or signatures, the descriptive image titles coined later are not used in this exhibition, and the works on view are instead identified only with their catalogue numbers. As part of the elucidation of Vajda's working method, several two-sided works are placed on view, many of which have not been exhibited before.

Szentendre's Vajda Museum opened its doors in December 1986 with the aim of providing a permanent exhibition venue for Lajos Vajda, this outstanding artist of the 20th century. The Ferenczy Museum Center's impressive Vajda Collection comprises 110 works, 100 of which were made available to the Museum in 1983 by Júlia Vajda, the artist's widow and the caretaker of his estate, while the other ten were purchased by the institution.

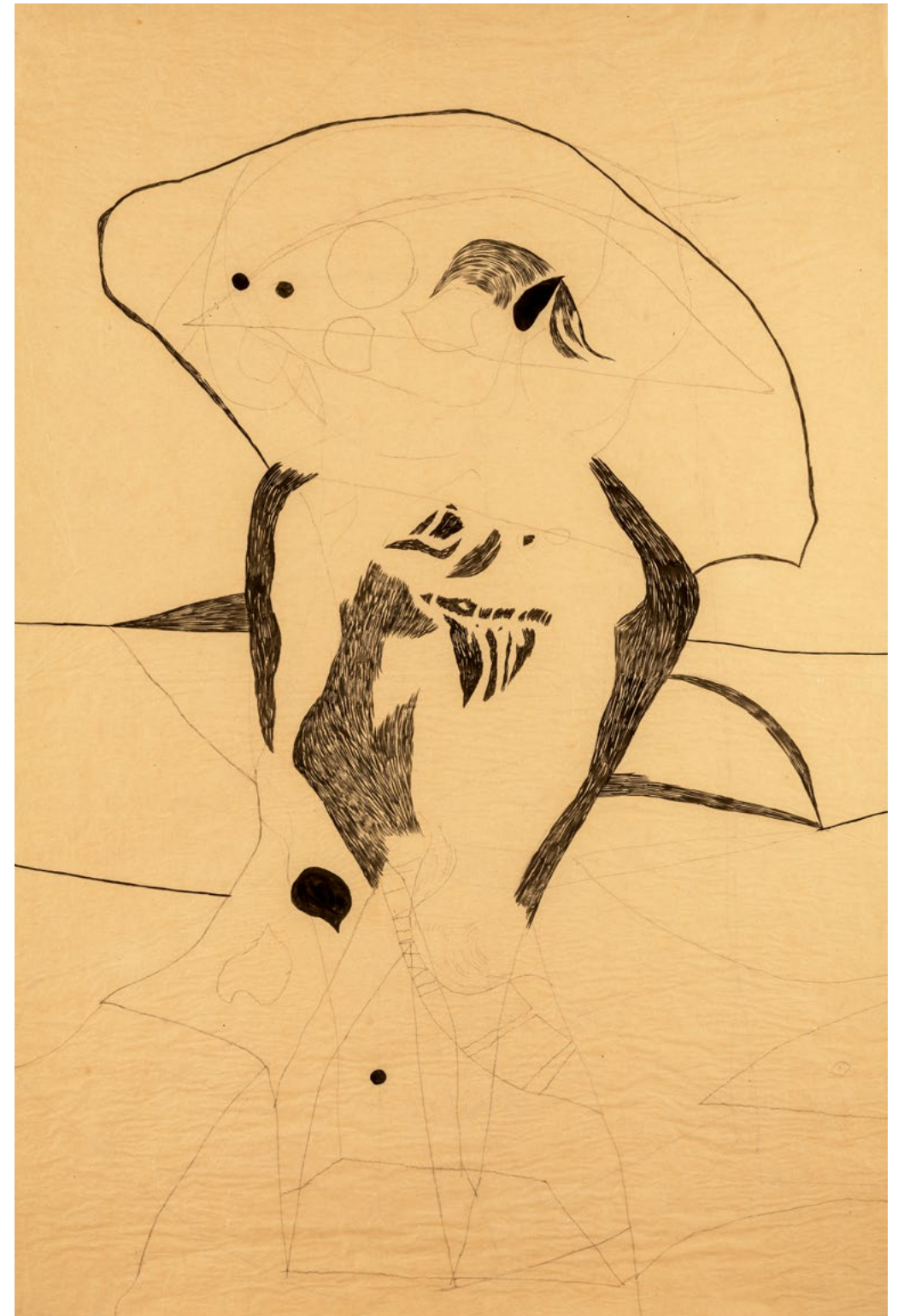


1939/38. | Owl-headed, 1939
ink, pencil on paper
823 × 660 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.73



1939/12. | Crystal Block, 1939
ink on paper
897 × 630 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.78





1938/48. | Giant Landscape Mask, 1938
pencil, ink, pastel on paper
950 × 610 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.69

1939/29. | Enormous Head with a lot of Lines in Pencil, 1939
pencil, ink, tracing paper
878 × 605 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.80



1940/23. | Water Creature, 1940
charcoal on paper
900 × 1260 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.95



1940/29. | Solid Form with Little White, 1940
charcoal on paper
900 × 1260 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.91



1940/20. | A Pair of Glowing Eyes, 1940
charcoal on paper
730 x 1078 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.20



1940/24. | Current (Composition), 1940
charcoal on paper
900 x 1260 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.99



1930-33/10. | Chinese Execution, 1930-33
photomontage on paper
628 x 498 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.7

KOZMIKUS ŐSERŐ
COSMIC PRIMORDIAL FORCE



A TÉR FOGALMÁNAK
RADIKÁLIS ÚJRAGONDOLÁSA
A RADICAL RETHINKING OF
THE CONCEPT OF SPACE

ALAK IS VÁLTOG
FIGURE AND REALITY

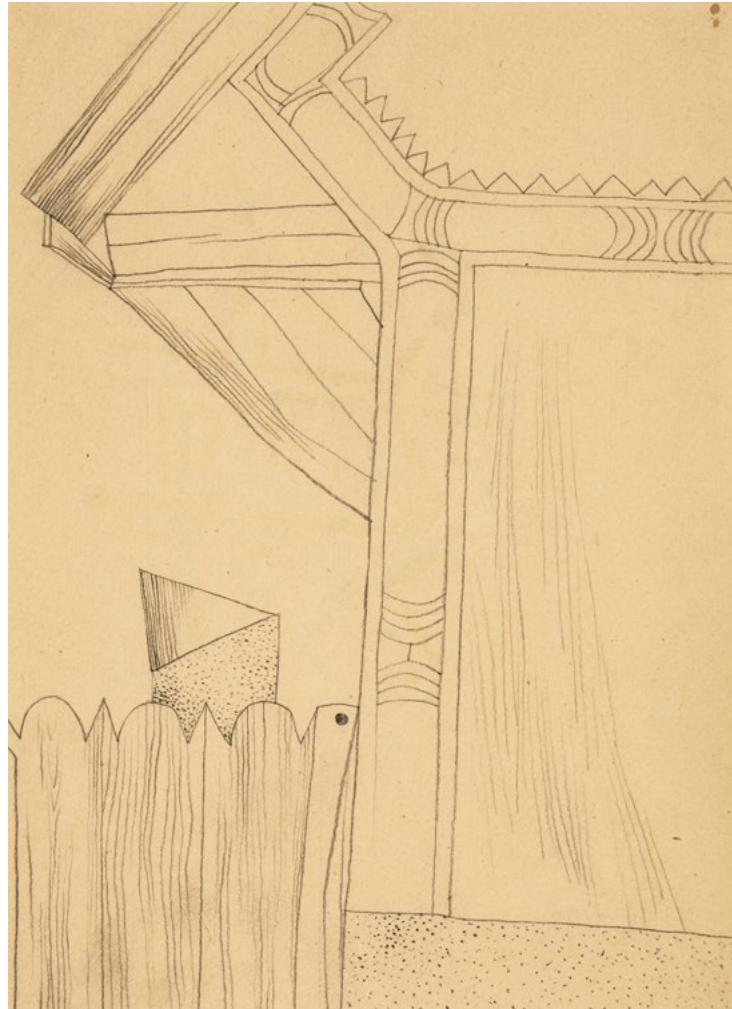




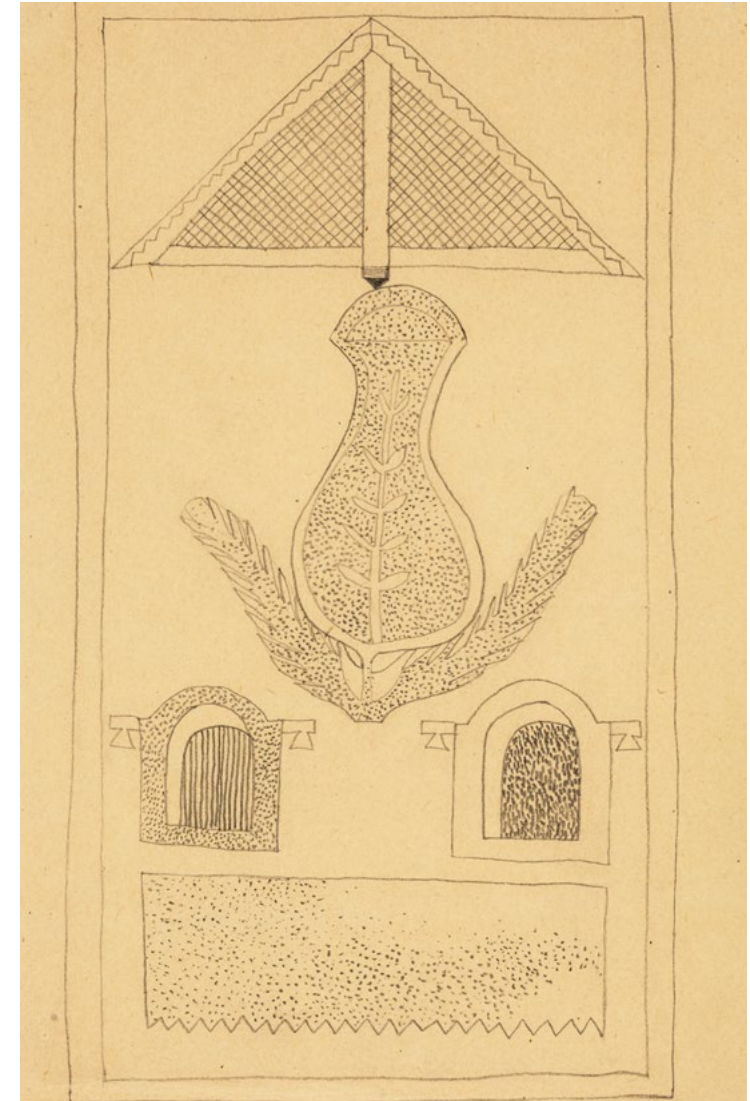
A RADICAL RETHINKING OF THE CONCEPT OF SPACE

One of the paradigm shifts that took place in Vajda's drawn oeuvre, which began to expand in 1935, was the use of a new construct and concept of time for the interpretation of landscapes, elements of nature and objects. As he put it in a letter in 1936: 'We continue to lay the main emphasis on constructivism, the spatial arrangement of the image. [...] The landscape is inorganic, and consequently incapable of expressing our message. What I'm now experimenting with is the impression that different objects, removed from different contexts, make when assembled on the same picture plane (constructive surrealist scheme).' Floating, hovering, penetrating each other, the motifs (objects) in his drawings from 1936–1937 have no body, no modelling, and thus no space, gravity, or point of reference, and the field of interpretation of the representation is not situated in space, but is provided by symbolic contexts. 'I like to work on white paper because white represents infinity,' Vajda wrote. With him, space is dense and infinite or empty and vacuum-like. Vajda fashioned his concept of the 'dimensionless' picture space on the model of

the Russian avant-garde, suprematism's irrational (Malevich, El Lissitzky) and constructivism's imaginary space. Introducing it in his photomontages of 1930–1933, he developed it further in the line drawings of 1936 and later. Vajda's deconstructive approach to space cannot be dissociated from the set of motifs with which he worked from 1936. Nevertheless, the function of folk relics, utilitarian objects and architectural elements collected from Szentendre and its surroundings, and the method of using them as integrated pictorial elements constantly changed in Vajda's art. While the Szentendre programme he developed with Korniss around 1936 had ethnographic motivations and sought to renew modern art by drawing on an 'unspoiled pure source,' Vajda's works in 1937 had already completely removed the collected motifs from their original context and meaning (including the Szentendre programme). Used repetitively, the building blocks of the images lost their symbolic meanings, the visual presence of objects turned into a complex system of signs and symbols (a drawn montage) on the blank sheet of paper.



1935/3. | House of Szigetmonostor with a Board-fence, 1935
pencil on paper
315 x 224 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.26



1935/31. | House Wall in Szigetmonostor with a Dotted Ornament, 1935
pencil on paper
318 x 225 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.25



1935/6. | Tower, 1935
oil, collage on cardboard
520 x 292 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.27

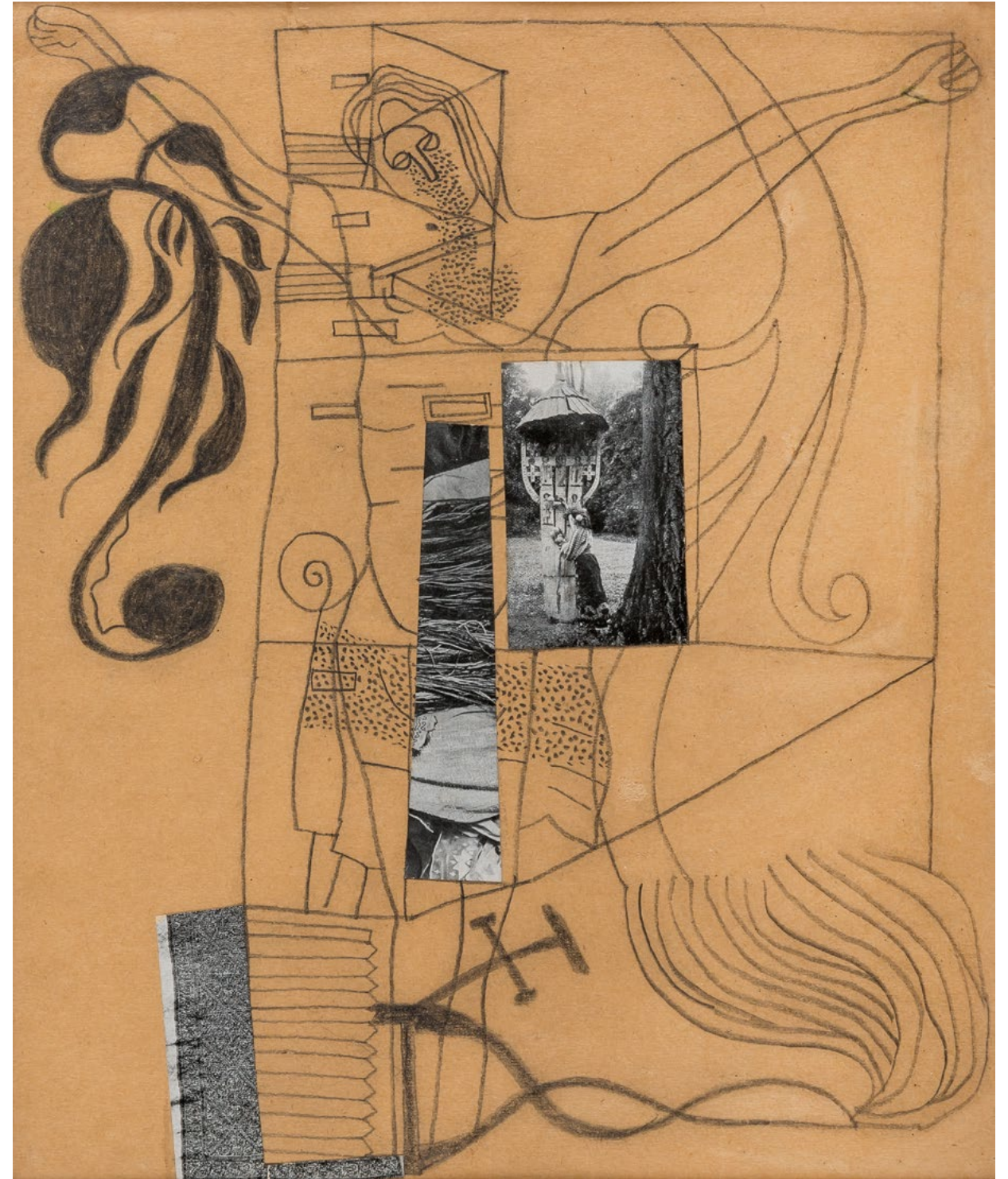
1936/40. | Dotted Rust-red Still-life, 1936
watercolor on paper
137 x 174 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.40



1930-33/14. | Montage with a Monk, 1930-33
photomontage on cardboard
646 x 492 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.8

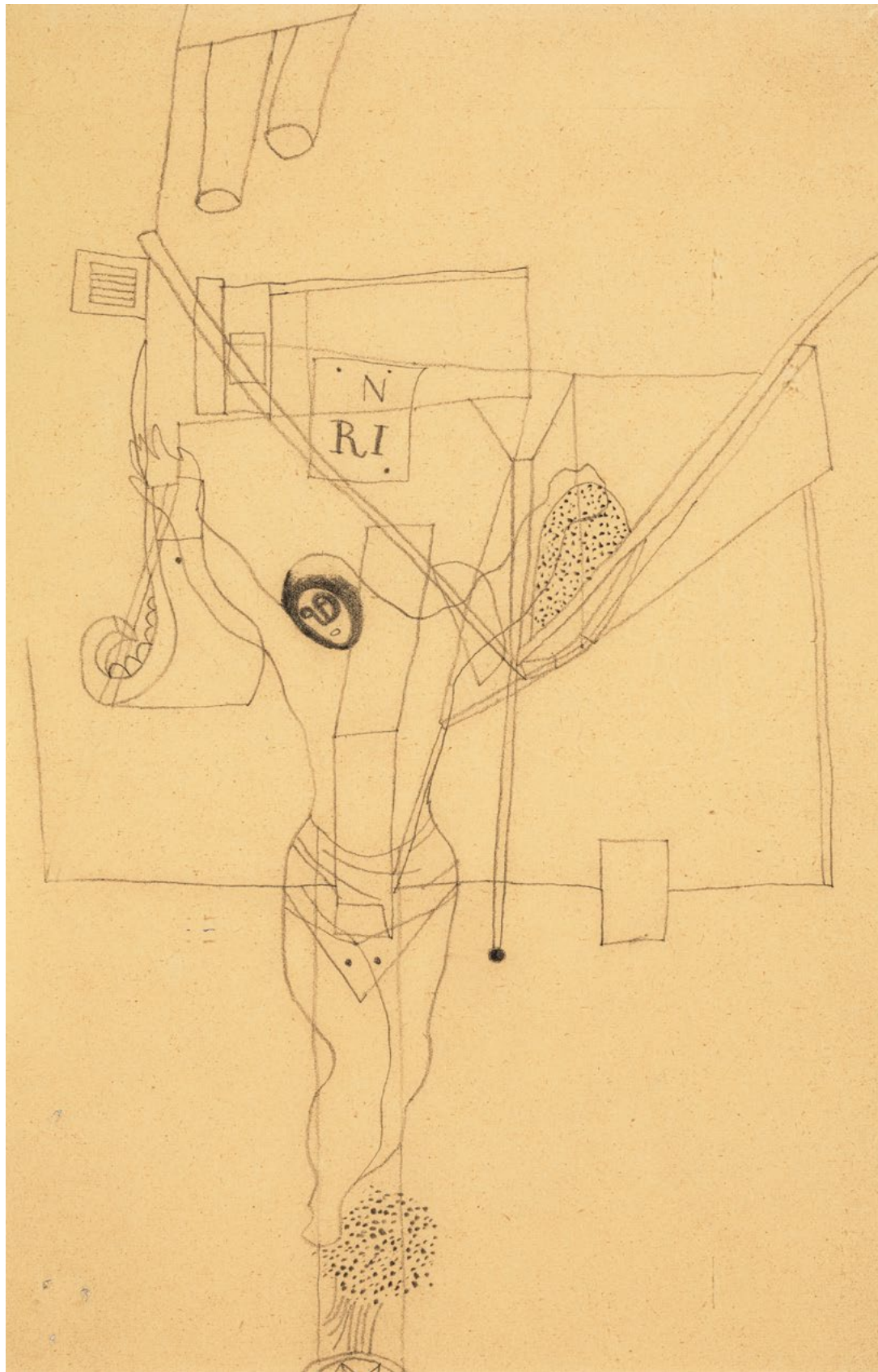


1937/28. | Szentendre Houses with Crucifix, 1937
 tempera, montage on cardboard
 460 x 630 mm
 Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
 inv: 83.56

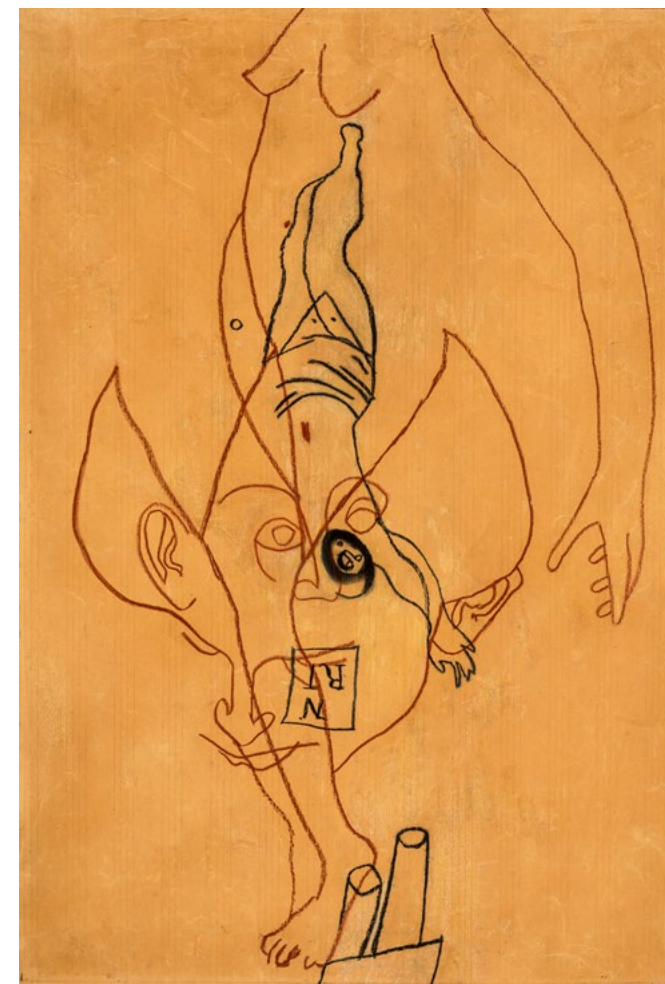


1937/41. | Collage Crucifix with a Willow Tree, reverse: Sepulchre
 with Statue of Standing Woman and Stoneware, 1937
 pencil, collage on paper
 315 x 270 mm
 Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
 inv: 83.48





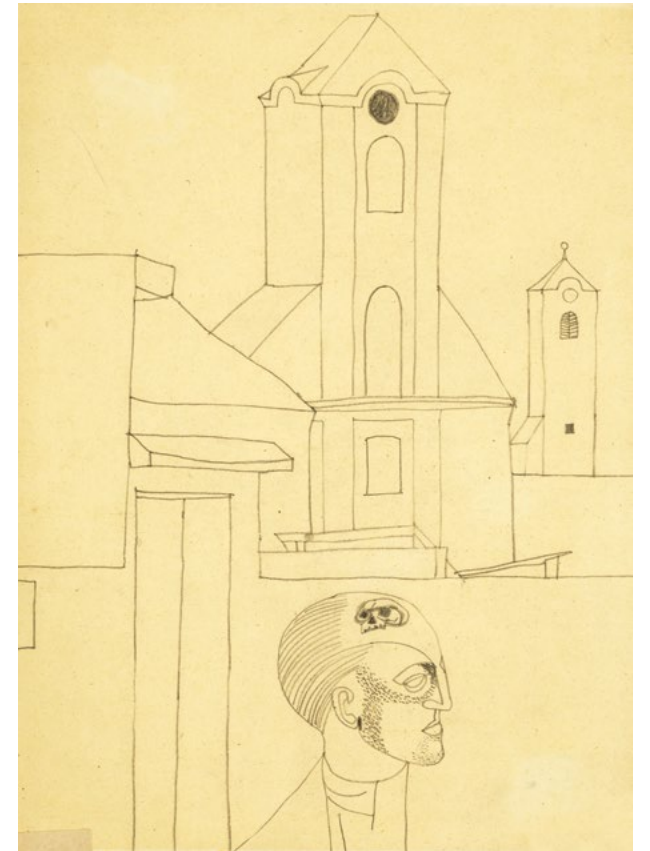
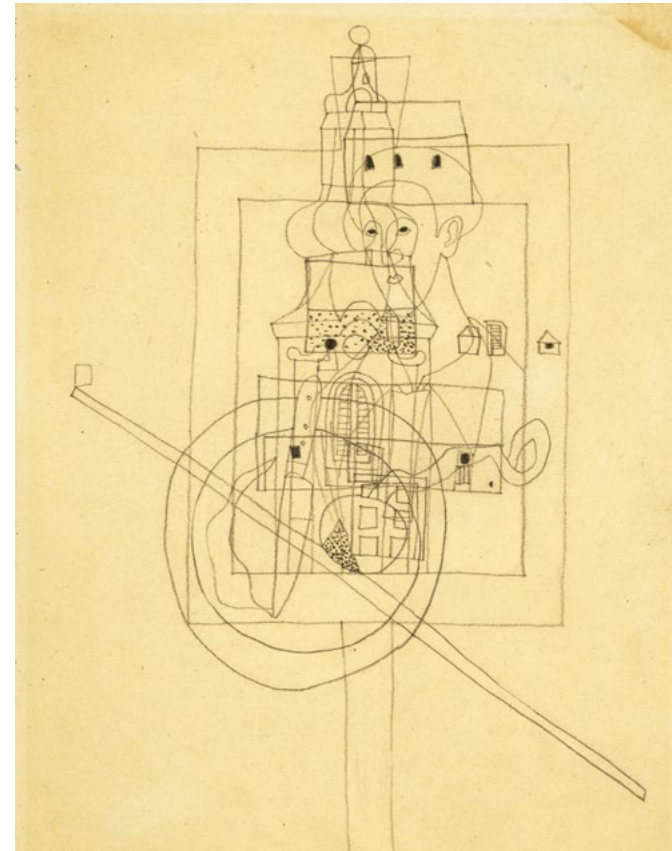
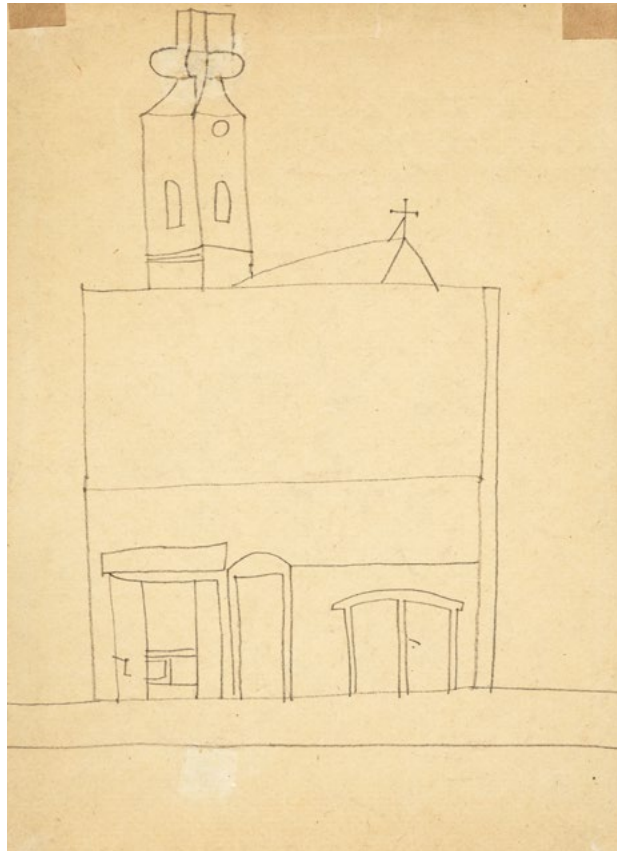
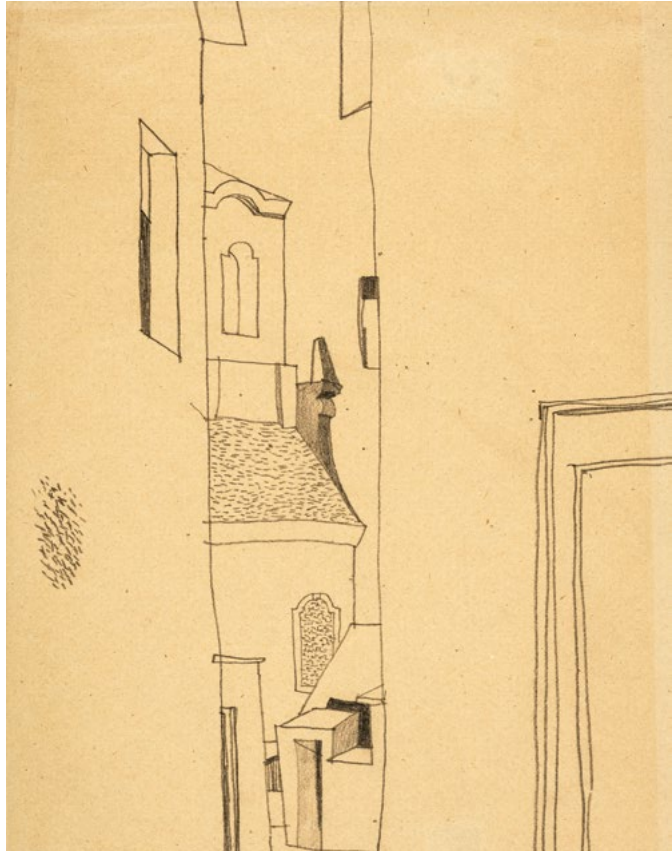
1936/16. | Tin Christ, 1936
pencil on paper
313 x 233 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.41



1937/41. | Drawing Montage with Black-face Christ Figure, 1937
charcoal, red chalk on paper
768 x 528 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.54



1927/66. | Houses with Stairs, 1927
charcoal on paper
498 x 392 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.1

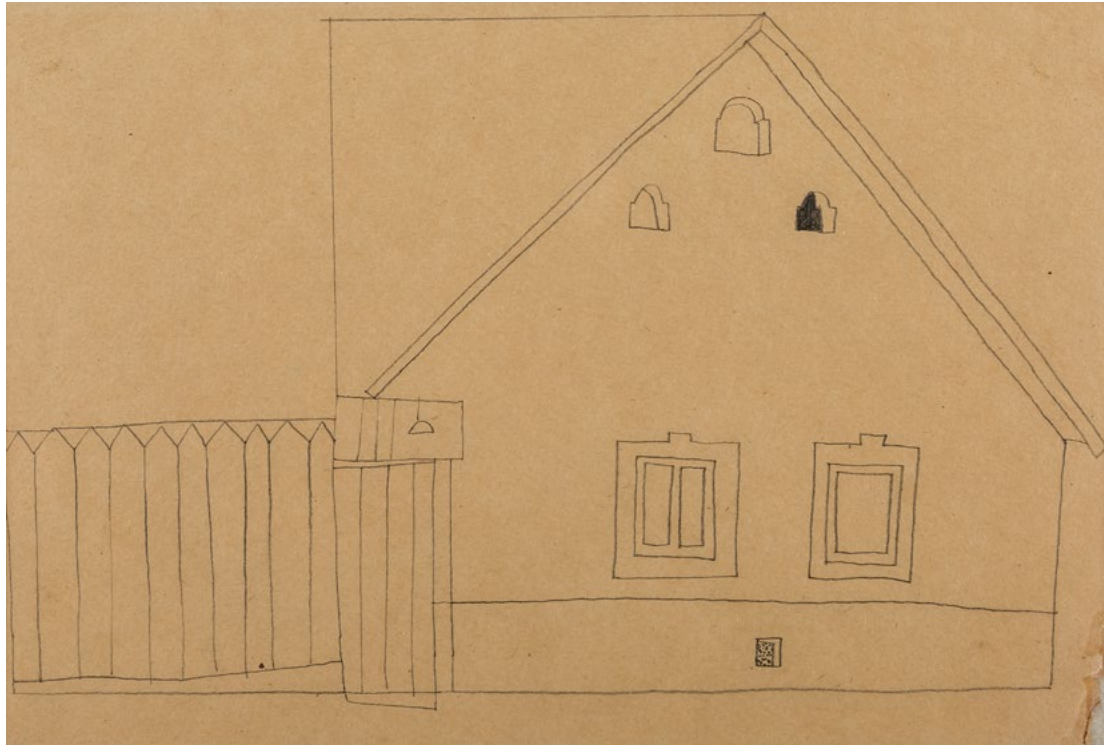


1935/2. | Alley with a Church, reverse: Church behind a House, 1935
pencil on paper
313 x 224 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.21

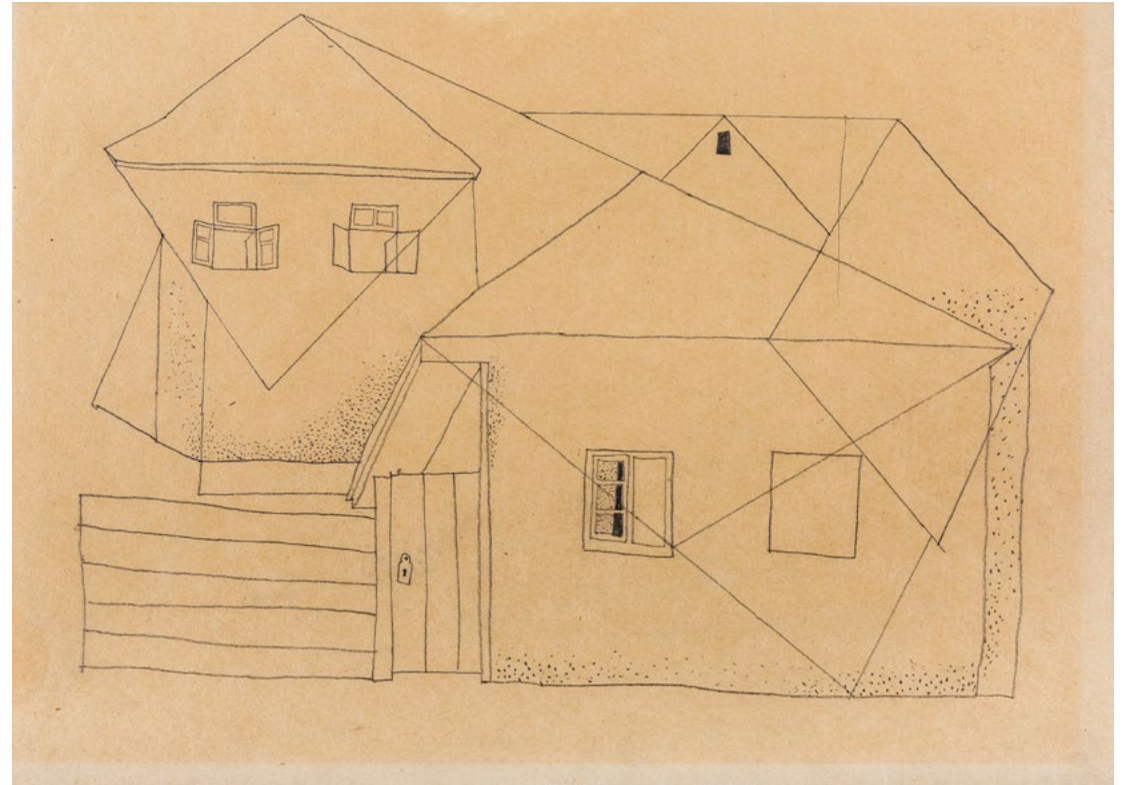
1937/21. | Drawing Montage with Self-portrait (1937),
reverse: Self-portrait with a Church (1935?)
pencil on paper
315 x 230 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.55



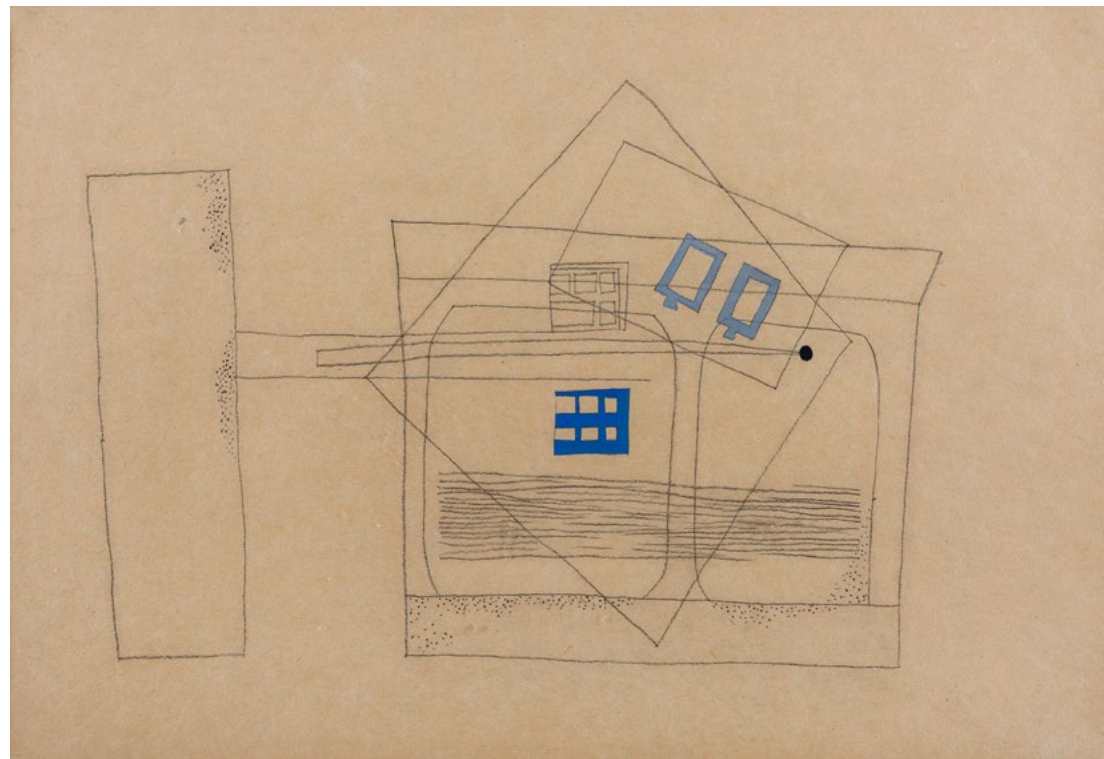
1935/29. | House in Szigetmonostor, 1935
tempera on paper
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv. 83.24



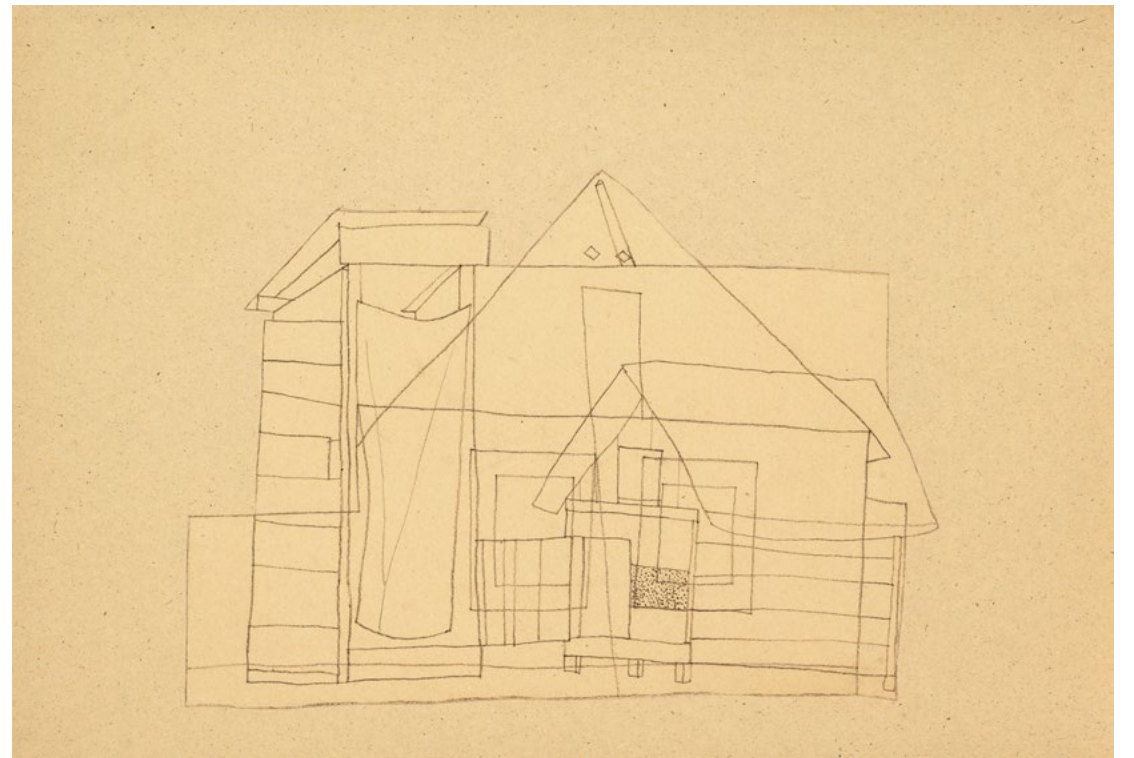
1937/50. | Variation to the Fiala House, 1937
pencil on paper
225 x 315 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.57



1936/30. | House Walls in Szentendre, 1936
pencil on paper
228 x 318 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.98



1936/43. | Blue and Grey Windows, 1936
pencil on paper
453 x 315 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.36



1937/26. | Hut beside a House, 1937
pencil on paper
310 x 450 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.10

ALAK ÉS VALÓSÁG
FIGURE AND REALITY





FIGURE AND REALITY

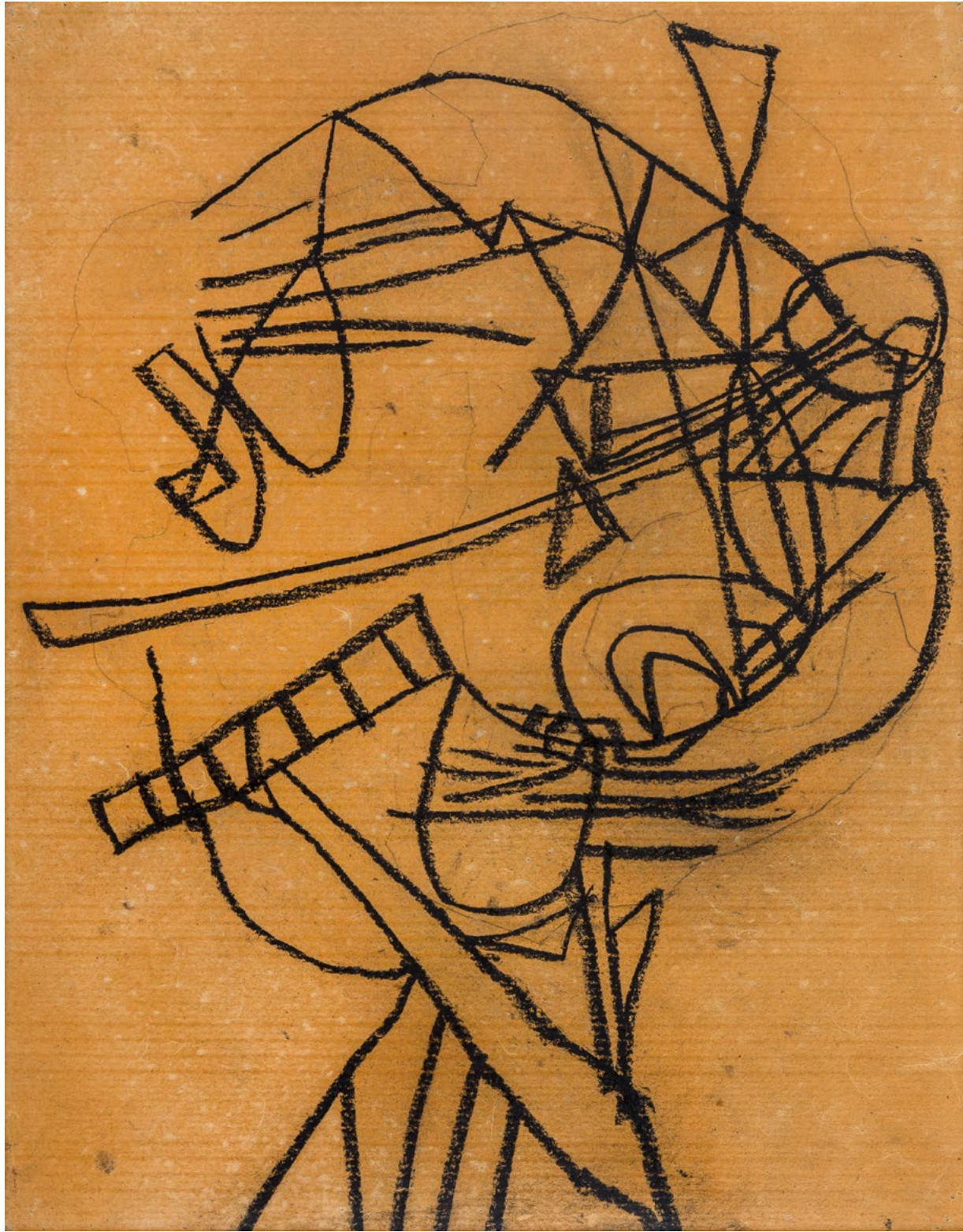
The question of figurativeness in Lajos Vajda's art can be approached from different angles. On the one hand, he uses the human body as a motif for the composition of images; cases in point include the tin-plate roadside Christs seen around Szentendre, and the figures he cut out of illustrated magazines for his montages (discus-throwing girl, monk), which became alienated by the gesture. From 1936, however, the problem of the representation of the human figure became central to Vajda's world view. Memories of his childhood in Serbia were reactivated by the Orthodox art seen in Szentendre, as well as by his readings, including Spengler's *The Decline of the West* and Berdyaev's *The New Middle Ages*. Vajda, who was convinced that different cultures enriched each other, found that he could perform a critique of individualism and dissolve the individual in community by drawing on the idea

of universalism, and along with it, the Byzantine tradition of icon painting. It is a basic tenet of Byzantine art that the image contributes to the experience of transcendence as a meditative tool. As Lazarev put it, 'they sought to dematerialize the figures depicted on the icon to the extreme, to eliminate any sensual element that might have hindered in the slightest degree the expression of perfect sublimity.' Several of the self-portraits Vajda made in 1936-1937 followed the predetermined, and in some respects abstract, formal order of icons, as well as their spirit of community. Once he had absorbed and reflected on the different cultural spheres—the subject of Szentendre, the human shape, the world of icons—Vajda moved on. From 1938, his figurative art drew on even more distant lands, primitive, tribal art and the world of the imagination.



1936/2. | Self-portrait with Skull, 1936
pencil, collage on paper
320 × 255 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.39

1936/31. | Icon-like Self-portrait, 1936
pastel on paper
900 × 600 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.35



1937/38. | Abstract Self-portrait, 1937
charcoal on paper
400×310 mm
Ferenczy Museum Centre, Szentendre
Inv.: 83.43



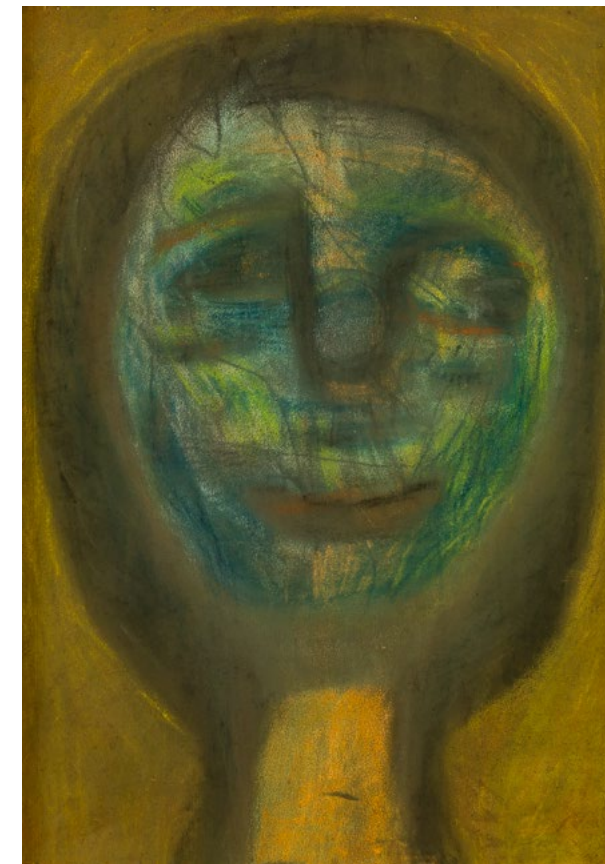
1935/1. | Dark Self-portrait, 1935
oil on cardboard
25,2 × 25,2 cm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv.: 83.22



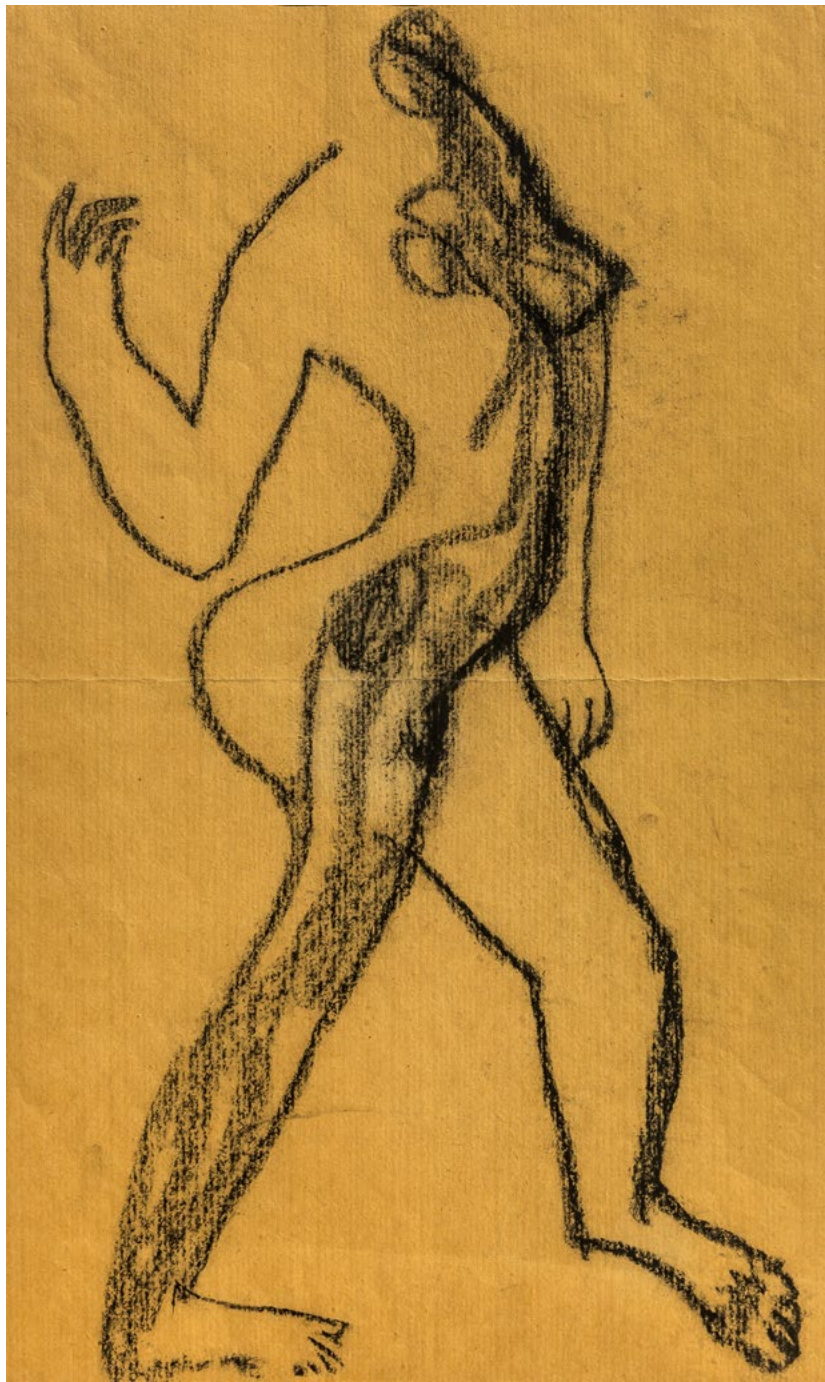
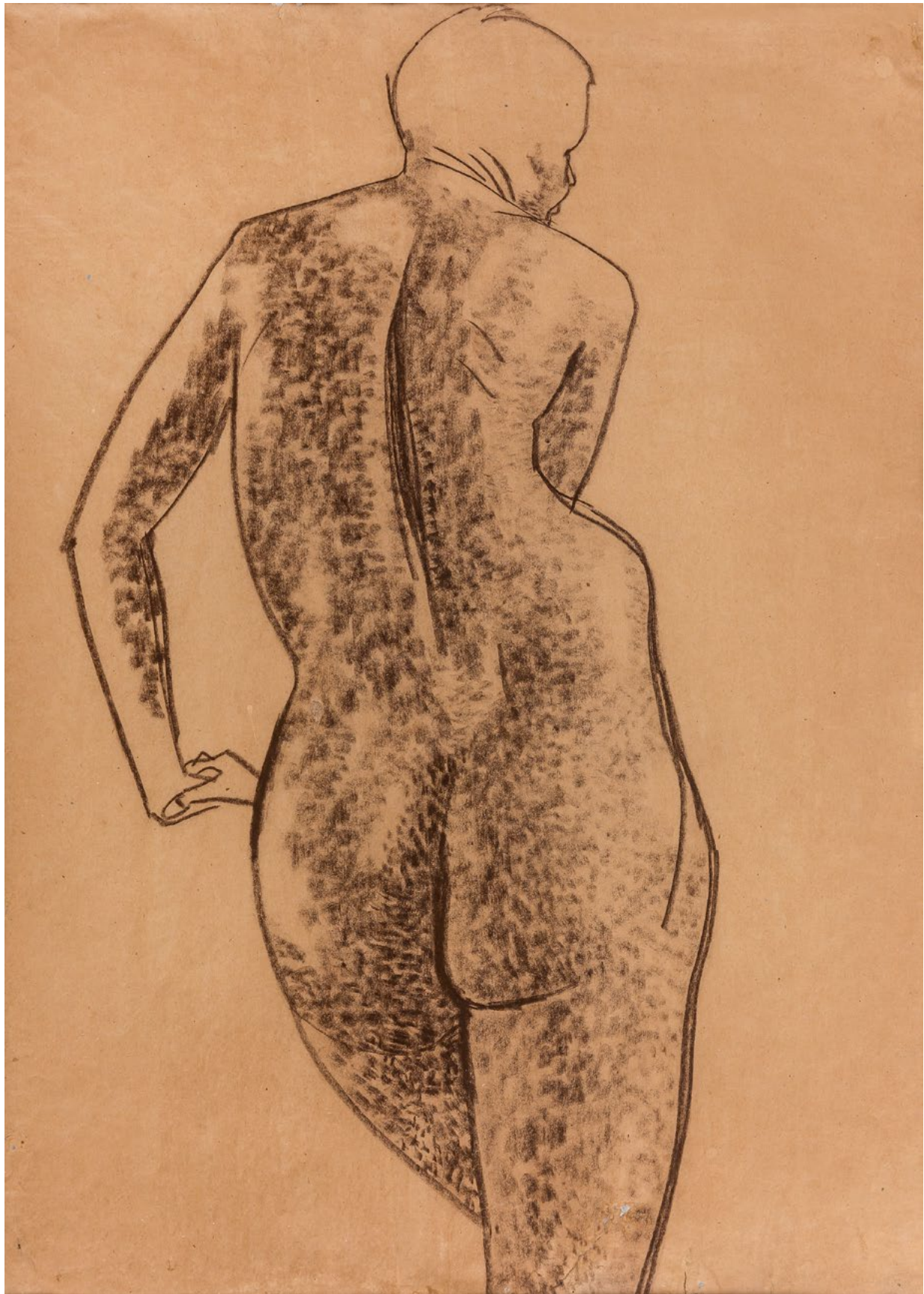
1938/22. | Rainbow Mask, 1938
pastel on paper
460 × 325 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.70

1936/8. | Melon Head, 1936
oil on cardboard
53,5 × 44 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.29

1938/50. | Green Clown Mask, 1938
pastel on paper
430 × 305 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.72





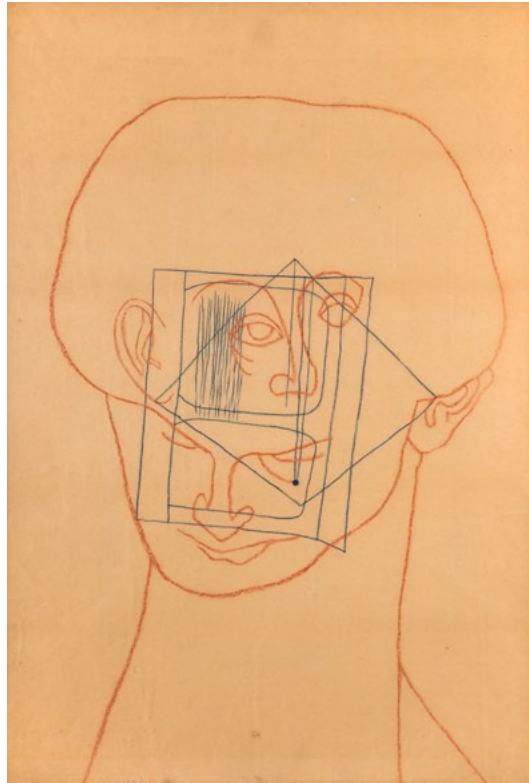


1934/10. | Female Nude from the Back, 1934
sepia on paper
624 × 456 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.16

1937/19. | Nude Stepping, 1937
sepia on paper
585 × 315 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.49



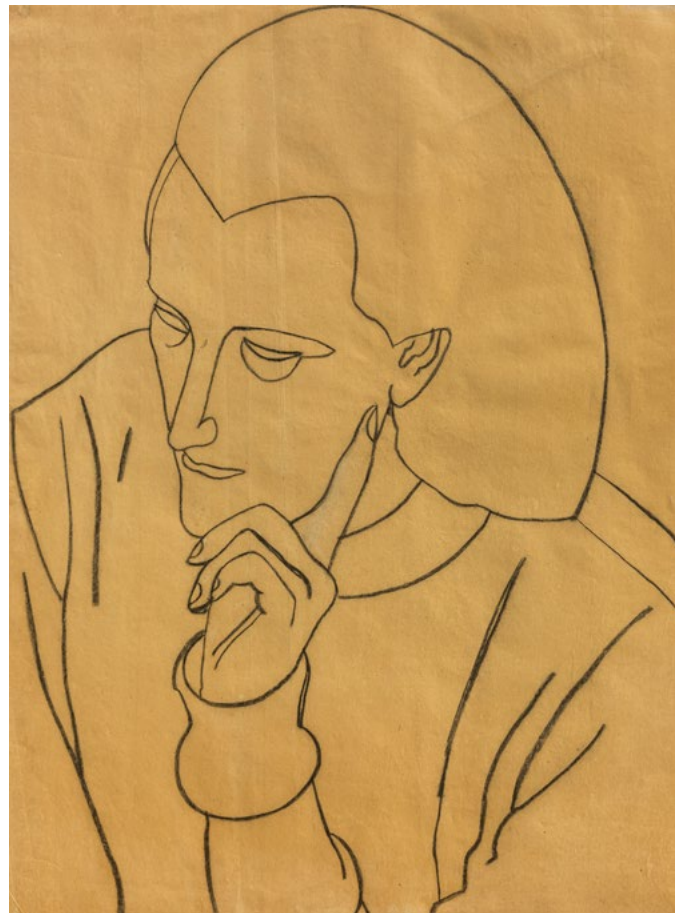
1930-33/15. | Gustave Fleury, 1930-33
photomontage on paper
645 x 505 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.5



1937/10. | Double Portrait, 1937
blue and red chalk on paper
610 x 445 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.46

1934/5. | Head Study, 1934
charcoal on paper
620 x 460 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 69.38

1937/29. | Unshaven Self-portrait, 1937
pencil on paper
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.59





1939/5. | Composition in Vermilion I., reverse: Composition in Vermilion II., 1939
charcoal, pastel on paper
629 x 940 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.77

LIST OF EXHIBITED WORKS

1939/38. | Owl-headed, 1939
ink, pencil on paper
823 × 660 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.73

1939/12. | Crystal Block, 1939
ink on paper
897 × 630 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.78

1938/48. | Giant Landscape Mask, 1938
pencil, ink, pastel on paper
950 × 610 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.69

1939/29. | Enormous Head with
a lot of Lines in Pencil, 1939
pencil, ink, tracing paper
878 × 605 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.80

1940/23. | Water Creature, 1940
charcoal on paper
900 × 1260 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.95

1940/20. | A Pair of Glowing Eyes, 1940
charcoal on paper
730 × 1078 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.20

1940/29. | Solid Form with little White, 1940
charcoal on paper
900 × 1260 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.91

1940/24. | Current (Composition), 1940
charcoal on paper
900 × 1260 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.99

1930–33/10. | Chinese Execution, 1930–33
photomontage on paper
628 × 498 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.7

1935/3. | House of Szigetmonostor
with a Board-fence, 1935
pencil on paper
315 × 224 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.26

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with a Dotted Ornament, 1935
pencil on paper
318 × 225 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.25

1935/6. | Tower, 1935
oil, collage on cardboard
520 × 292 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.27

1936/40. | Dotted Rust-red Still-life, 1936
watercolor on paper
137 × 174 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.40

1930–33/14. | Montage with a Monk, 1930–33
photomontage on cardboard
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Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.8

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tempera, montage on cardboard
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inv: 83.56

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reverse: Sepulchre with Statue of Standing
Woman and Stoneware, 1937
pencil, collage on paper
315 × 270 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.48

1936/16. | Tin Christ, 1936
pencil on paper
313 × 233 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.41

1937/41. | Drawing Montage with Black-face
Christ Figurel, 1937
charcoal, red chalk on paper
768 × 528 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.54

1927/66. | Houses with Stairs, 1927
charcoal on paper
498 × 392 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.1

1935/2. | Alley with a Church, reverse: Church
behind a House, 1935
pencil on paper
313 × 224 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.21

1937/21. | Drawing Montage with
Self-portrait (1937), reverse:
Self-portrait with a Church (1935?)
pencil on paper
315 × 230 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.55

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tempera on paper
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inv: 83.24

1937/50. | Variation to the Fiala House, 1937
pencil on paper
225 × 315 mm
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inv: 83.57

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pencil on paper
453 × 315 mm
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inv: 83.36

1936/30. | House Walls in Szentendre, 1936
pencil on paper
228 × 318 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.98

1937/26. | Hut beside a House, 1937
pencil on paper
310 × 450 mm
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1938/22. | Rainbow Mask, 1938
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1936/8. | Melon Head, 1936
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sepia on paper
585 × 315 mm
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1930–33/15. | Gustave Fleury, 1930–33
photomontage on paper
645 × 505 mm
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blue and red chalk on paper
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620 × 460 mm
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1937/29. | Unshaven Self-portrait, 1937
pencil on paper
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.59

1939/5. | Composition in Vermilion I., reverse:
Composition in Vermilion II., 1939
charcoal, pastel on paper
629 × 940 mm
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
inv: 83.77







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Vajda the Prophet – Reopening the Vajda Museum,
Ferenczy Museum Center, Szentendre
30 April – 1 October 2023

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On the cover:
1939/38. | Owl-headed, 1939

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VAJDA
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