

# Progress and Regress: the Current Status of Art in Two Post-Communist Countries

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## Abstract

The idea of progress is strongly associated with the Enlightenment belief that humanity is capable of improving its condition through reason. "Progress" is the central concept of the 19th century, whose importance diminishes in the 20th century and is disappearing from contemporary social discourse. My paper examines the position of the idea of progress and the related system of ideas in the current political discourse of two post-communist countries, along with the way in which this is reflected in the results of artistic activity. In Romania, progress represents a legitimate, but not central and dominant, idea for politics, while the political leadership of Hungary views progress and its ideological context as harmful and favours a view centred upon the nation, which is oriented towards the past and builds exclusively upon tradition. In Romania, due to the fragmented political spectrum, there is no coherent political position relating to art or a developed and uniform support system; thus, artists have to organize themselves. The Hungarian government has recognized the potential propagandistic value of art and therefore centralized its organisation and financial support through the Hungarian Academy of Arts. Although one might think that a better organization and financial support would strengthen art, we find that while the Romanian art scene is in full bloom, Hungarian art is having trouble finding its place on the international arena.

**Keywords:** progress, anti-progress attitude, Hungarian Academy of Art, The Paintbrush Factory