VARGA
SELECTED WORKS

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Ferenc Varga
1906 - 1989

The Twentieth Century barely reached the age to go to “kindergarten” when Ferenc Varga was born in Szekesfehervar on 29 of May 1906. Second of nine children, he had to start to work early to assist his parents. This was not uncommon in most family farms, vineyards or other small businesses throughout the world at that time. What was unusual is the Century itself which produced two world wars and many wonders, not least the fact that in spite of the turbulence, the moral standard prevailed and young Ferenc was raised to be, as other children, a good, tolerant, understanding human being and an artist to create beauty for all to enjoy.

The young child had ample opportunities at home to use his hands, to make things and to express his surprisingly advanced talent for drawings. Those early drawings attracted attention not only from family members and teachers but from a much wider circle in his hometown. The city was a proud bearer of past glories since the first king St.Stephen (1000 AD) and laden with history, art and Christian tradition gave the best nurturing environment for the young Varga.

While the historical and artistic treasures of the town were there to be seen by all, young Ferenc’s works, however, were severely edited at that time by his mother. The young artist was around ten years old when he put his mind to be a painter. As models, he used then some art works on the public places. He visited the museum and looked into art galleries to make fast sketches which he painted later at home, he copied and painted some beautiful nudes also but all those were collected by his mother and she hid them up in the attic. Many years passed before the young artist became free from such motherly protection and those early works were discovered. In spite of this, the love to paint has remained with him throughout his entire life.

His artistic ability earned him a place in the Academy of Fine Arts and after completing his secondary school he went to Budapest to study under professors Jeno Bory and Ferenc Sidlo. Bory the romantic admirer of the beauty of the human form and Sidlo, the master of the heroic pathos were inspirational to all their students in the Academy. It is not surprising that the art of Ferenc Varga expressed beauty and also majestic strength and dignity. With masterful simple lines, Ferenc Varga placed his own talent on his work, expressing the pent-up emotions and aspirations which the human soul is capable of, thus giving forceful movements and gentle beauty to his statues.

Ferenc Varga was admired not for his artistic ability alone, but he was loved for a rare combination of kindness, goodness and understanding toward other human beings. After graduating from the Academy, he became associate professor in his Alma Mater at the age of 22 and from 1928 to 1940 he was teaching with professor Bory. Teaching has remained his burden of love throughout his entire life. In his studios in Detroit or many years later in Delray Beach, students admired his artistic ability and loved and revered his kindness, empathy and warm personality.

His marriage to Anna Pazman in 1937 brought a new dimension to his life. The unity of love and support, a warm family life, were his strength in the darkest hours of his life during the war and when the family had to leave Hungary. Their only child Ferenc (Frank) junior, born in 1943, was his pride and constant pleasure both as a father and as an artist, since he considered the growing child a greater talent than himself. Consequently, he gave his son all he was able to give to nurture his ability.

Ferenc Varga was twenty years old when in a nationwide art exhibition he won the Grand Prize with his life size marble statue, “Eve” (1926), and from that time on he has participated in all important Exhibitions and national competitions in Hungary. Success was his loyal companion. He received the prestigious Lord Rothermere Award in 1928. His composition won him his first memorial for the dead of World War I in the town of Piszke. He won a scholarship for further study in Italy in 1937. During his stay, he exhibited his work, and the Italian government purchased a number of his statues. After, coming home, he received an invitation from Professor Elmer Schwartz to assist him in the newly initiated “Betlehem Mozelom” (a movement to popularize the Nativity in Christmas) to bring back the image of the Holy Family into the lives of the Hungarian families. Soon a number of life size statues depicting scenes of the Holy Family graced the squares and churches of Budapest. Two more war memorials followed (Kiskunfelegyaza in 1941 and Szatmar in 1942) and in the same year a new scholarship (Ede Ballo) took him to Rodin’s Paris. The following year, 1943 was a very important and productive year for the artist. First he won the open competition for a memorial to Aron Gabor, a famous figure in a war against the Habsburgs in 1848. For Budapest he completed Szt. Istvan (St. Stephen) and students in Carrara Marble in the same year and started to work on six near life size statues in wood for the church of the Cistercian Order in Buda. This series confirmed what Ferenc Varga already felt that his artistic style and human qualities uniquely enabled him to work with religious themes.
In the meantime the Hungarian government continued to collect Varga sculptures for the National Museum, the Budapest City Museum, and for the National Gallery. His popularity was as high as ever, his works were frequently reviewed in many periodicals and in the daily papers. He was elected to the St. Istvan Academy Of Arts, Letters and Sciences and the Varga statues could be found in the Vatican, Italian, Swiss and Belgian museums. Time, however, was running out for Hungary. The war raged all around her borders and the German occupation made the separation from his country inevitable. The last recognition in Hungary came in the form of the first prize he won in a competition to commemorate the great Hungarian painter, Rippl-Ronay. This prize was a parting farewell from one great artist to another.

Ferenc Varga left Hungary with his family in 1948. And after spending a short time in Belgium, went to Canada and then to the United States. In a relatively short two years in Canada, Ferenc Varga was working in a number of small jobs, among them as a plasterer for various builders. At the same time he exhibited, and the Windsor Star wrote on May 12, 1951 that the work of Ferenc Varga dominated an exhibit of foreign born artists only two years after arriving to the new world.

Sensing the limited possibilities at that time in Canada, Ferenc Varga moved “ across the bridge” to the United States and opened his first Studio in Detroit. The first few years were very difficult but he gave his soul and his heart. His talent and his name became known and his art proved to be his best representative and soon commissions arrived. Among those were the “Peace”, the 39 feet high figure of Christ for the Allegheny Cemetery in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; the 28 feet high stone relief of St. Joseph for St. Joseph Church, Wyandotte, Michigan. Soon he completed a series of 14 feet high white marble figures of the twelve apostles and of the “Good Shepherd” among others for Fort Lincoln Cemetery in Brentwood Maryland; the feet 10 high granite archangels and the 18 feet statue of “Queen of Heaven” for the cemetery of the same name in Chicago, Illinois. These were followed by the 8 feet high St. Francis and other figures in stone and mahogany for the St. Francis Retreat House in Dewitt, Michigan and also an 8 feet tall Pieta for St. Juliana Convent in Detroit, Michigan.

Ferenc Varga relocated his studio in Delray Beach Florida in 1970 and he not only continued to receive commissions both for religious and non-religious works but he was also teaching in an ever increasing number of students.

Statues of Casmir Pulaski, the astronomer Nikolas Copernicus graced Detroit together with the heroic size bust of Ferenc Liszt in the Ford Auditorium. The nearby city of Hamtramck received the nine feet tall figure of Pope John Paul II. The life size bronze statue of Cardinal Mindszenty was completed for New Brunswick, New Jersey.

There are other cities, among them Toledo (Ohio), Buffalo (N.Y.), Dallas (Texas), Belle Glade, Delray Beach, Highland Beach (all in Florida), or the Canadian cities of Toronto, Windsor and Chatam which commissioned similar life size or heroic size works of Ferenc Varga.

The National Sculpture Review dedicated its Fall 1977 issue to foreign born artists, among them Ferenc Varga. It wrote “the foreign born and foreign educated American lives with a duality of feelings, reaction and thinking. He has a second language as well as a second heritage...... an underlying nostalgia remains and an inner longing which surface now and then to the perplexity of the native American “, (pp. 16 - 17). A foreign born artist, especially a refugee, a displaced person is facing more than “perplexity” in trying to adjust different customs, different expectations in life and in art. Ferenc Varga’s greatness is assured that his work was sought after throughout North America. His humanity and warm personality were loved by all who knew him.

Most of his small statues are in private collections, in museums and in the various galleries from Budapest, Hungary throughout Europe and North America. These carry the same human spirit as his large statues and many of them
display a refreshing humor and light hearted whimsicality too. The’” Janko”, one of his early works from Budapest, depicts a little boy with an angelic smile who tries to hide his father’s long stemmed pipe behind his back or the much later created “Stork and the baby” shows a new born child hanging onto the Stork’s body and neck. Ferenc Varga’s statues, monumental or the very small all express a serene calmness but also an impressive strength, a refreshing spirituality and comforting security in a time when life is full of tragedies, chaos and desperation.

If anything more it should be said that a very unique feature or Varga’s sculptures is the special care given to the hands which “carries the soul”. Those hands have carried his soul and the soul of humanity.

His health failing, he still was teaching until the very last few weeks. The family around him he gave his noble soul back to his Maker on September 3, 1989 when accepted his last commission to beautify Heaven.

Some of, but by no means all of his works, are shown in this book. Still more are known around the world. Through these, Ferenc Varga, the man and artist, speaks most eloquently to us.
Paintings - Ferenc Varga twelve years old
Adam - Bronze Life Size 1928 - Budapest, Hungary
Visitation - Terra Cotte1928, Hungarian National Gallery - Budapest, Hungary
Poor Madonna - Wood 2 Feet 1930, Hungarian National Gallery - Budapest, Hungary
Goose Boy - Stone 4 Feet, 1932 Budapest, Hungary
Corn Harvest - Terra Cotta 1 Foot, 1932 - Zurich, Switzerland
Sorrow - Marble Life Size, 1932 - Budapest, Hungary
Stevedore - Plaster 2 Feet, Hungarian National Gallery - Budapest Hungary
Judas - Terra Cotta 1.5 Feet, Hungarian National Gallery - Budapest Hungary
Saint Antony - Marble 2 Feet, Hungarian National Gallery - Budapest Hungary
Virgins of Vesta - Terra Cotta 3 Feet - Budapest, Hungary
Saint Emerich - Lime Stone 15 Feet, 1936 Gyor, Hungary
Woman and Child - Bronze 2.5 Feet, Italian Government Collection - Rome, Italy
Nativity in Grotto - Terra Cotta, Life Size. Destroyed in World War II
Students Memorial - King Stephen - Marble 10 Feet, 1938 High School Mall - Székesfehérvár, Hungary
War Memorial - Bronze 30 Feet 1940 - Kiskunfelegyhaza, Hungary
Relief on War Memorial
Construction Workers - Terra Cotta 16 Inches, Hungarian National Gallery - Budapest, Hungary
Lazlo Burian - Bronze Life Size - Budapest Hungary
Gabor Aron Memorial - Cast Stone 19 Feet, 1942 Transylvania
Destroyed by the Russian Army
Nativity with Angels - Terra Cotta 1ft x 1.5ft 1942, Hungarian National Gallery
Budapest, Hungary
Talking - Terra Cotta 2 Feet, 1943 City Museum, Budapest, Hungary
Savonarola - Walnut 2 Feet, Budapest Hungary - Private Collection
Madonna - Wood 5 Feet, 1946 Saint Emerich Church, Budapest, Hungary
Modern Madonna - Terra Cotta 1 Foot, 1946 Hungary - Private Collection
Saint Teresa of the Little - Wood 5 Feet, Saint Emerich Church, Budapest, Hungary
Saint Anthony - Wood 5 Feet, 1947 Saint Emerich Church, Budapest, Hungary
Anna Varga - Oil on Canvas 30x23 Inches, 1948 Studio Collection
Ostonde - Oil on Canvas 25x19 Inches, 1948 Studio Collection
Saint Bernard - Terra Cotta 2 Feet, Brussels, Belgium - Private Collection
Christ - Wood 5.5 Feet, 1950 First Lutheran Church, Windsor (Ontario), Canada
Robert Burns - Cast Bronze, 1950 Jackson Park, Windsor (Ontario), Canada
Why Lord? - Terra Cotta 2 Feet 1951 Detroit, Michigan - Art Group Collection
Flight to Egypt - Terra Cotta 18 Inches, 1952 Detroit, Michigan - Private Collection
Annunciation - Terra Cotta 2 Feet, 1952 Studio Collection
Symphony - Terra Cotta 1 Foot, Lansing, Michigan - Private Collection
Angels at the Crib - Terra Cotta 2.5 Feet, 1952 Studio Collection
Saint Bernard - Terra Cotta 3 Feet, Artist Collection
Fighting Bulls - Terra Cotta 1x3 Feet, Studio Collection
Wrestlers - Terra Cotta Foot, 1953 Studio Collection
Anna Varga - Bronze Life Size, Studio Collection
Nymph - Cast Stone 6 Feet, 1953 Windsor (Ontario), Canada
Saint Peregrin - Stone 4 Feet, 1954 Saint Berchman Church, Detroit, Michigan
Congressman Louis Rabaut - Terra Cotta Life Size, Detroit, Michigan - Private Collection
Pieta - Cast Stone 8x3 Feet, 1955 Saint Julianna Convent, Detroit, Michigan
Annunciation - Cast Stone 8x3 Feet, 1955 Saint Julianna Convent, Detroit, Michigan
Holy Family - Cast Stone 8x3 Feet, 1955 Saint Julianna Convent, Detroit, Michigan
Our Lady of the Sea - Cast Stone 12 Feet, Star of the Sea Church, Gross Point Woods, Michigan
Twelve Apostles - Marble 9.5 Feet, 1966 Fort Lincoln Memorial Cemetery - Brentwood, Maryland
Saint Bartholomew - Marble, Detail of Twelve Apostles
Saint Mathew - Marble, Detail of Twelve Apostles
Saint Francis - Cast Stone 9 Feet, Franciscan Retreat House, DeWitt, Michigan
Lincoln - Fiberglass 1 x 1 Foot, 1959 Detroit Michigab - Private Collection
Hunyadi and Capistrano - Terra Cotta 2 Feet, 1956 Studio Collection
Saint Stephen of Hungary - Cast Stone 10 Feet, 1957 St. Stephen of Hungary Church, Toledo, Ohio
The Ascension - Cast Bronze 50 Feet, Fort Lincoln Cemetery - Washington, D.C.
Ballerina - Oil on Canvas 48x31 Inches, 1959 Studio Collection
The Pieta - Stone 1 1/2 Life Size, 1958 Franciscan Retreat House
Dewitt, Michigan
Saint Joseph - Panels: Flight to Egypt, Nativity, Carpenter - Cast Stone 29x6 Feet - Main Figure - 1959 Saint Joseph Church, Wyandotte, Michigan
**Resurrection** - Marble 11x8 Feet, 1959 Fort Lincoln Cemetery, Washington, DC
Saint Joseph with Jesus - Gray Granite 11 Feet, 1959 Mount Elliot Cemetery Detroit, Michigan
Falling Angels - Oil on Canvas 24x12 Inches, 1960 Calgary, Canada - Private Collection
The Clown - Oil on Canvas 27x24 Inches, 1960 Ontarion, Canada - Private Collection
Behold the Man - Wood 7 Feet, 1960 Detroit Michigan - Private Collection
Pax - Wood 8 Feet, 1960 Toronto, Canada - Private Collection
Saint Raphael - Granite 8 Feet, 1960 Queen of Heaven Cemetery, Chicago, Illinois
The Golfer - Cast Bronze 4 Feet, 1982 Lockmore Country Club - Grosse Pointe, Michigan
Chrysanthemum - Oil on Canvas 44x33 Inches, 1961 Studio Collection
Christ and Pilate - Wood 6 Feet, 1963 Chicago, Illinois - Private Collection
President Kennedy - Bronze Life Size, 1964 Kennedy Family
Our Lady Queen of Heaven - Granite 18 Feet, 1964 Queen of Heaven Cemetery
Chicago, Illinois
Hands - Terra Cotta 26 Inches, 1965 Studio and Private Collections
General Pulaski - Bronze 9 Feet, 1966 City of Detroit, Michigan
Peace - Bronze 39 Feet, 1968 Garden of Peace Cemetery, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Dream - Marble 3 Feet, 1970 Palm Beach, Florida - Private Collection
Storm - Marble 18 Inches, 1971 Palm Beach, Florida - Private Collection
Fountain Memorial to Douglas Lawrence - Cast Bronze
1975 Fort Wayne, Indiana
Pope John Paul II - Cast Bronze Life Size, 1980 Vatican Collection - Rome, Italy
Geisha - Marble 1.6 Feet, 1971 Saint Petersburg, Florida - Private Collection
Leda - Marble 2 Feet, 1971 Studio Collection
General Kovats - Bronze 1 Foot, 1972 Hungarian Heritage Museum, New Brunswick, NJ
Clown - Cast Stone 18 Inches - 1972 Studio Collection
Procession - Oil on Canvas 24x20 Inches, Paradise Valley, Arizona - Private Collection
Barefoot Mailman - Cast Bronze 7 Feet, 1975 City Hall Hillsboro Beach, Florida
Hurricane Memorial - Bronze 7.5 Feet, 1976 Belle Glade, Florida
Cardinal Mindszenty - Bronze 8 Feet, 1976 New Brunswick, New Jersey
The Holy Family with Rabbi - Terra Cotta 2.5 Feet, 1952 Palm Beach, Florida
Private Collection
Mary and Joseph - Wood 4 Feet, 1982 Studio Collection
Pope John Paul II - Bronze 30 Feet, 1982 Hamtramck, Michigan
Marquis De Lafayette - Bronze 8 Feet, 1983 Fayetteville, North Carolina
Sea - Oil on Canvas 40x36 Inches, Paradise Valley, Arizona - Private Collection