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Holocaust and remembrance in contemporary art from Hungary and Poland.

The topic of my PhD dissertation which I am conducting at the Doctoral School for Art History at the Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest is „Holocaust and remembrance in contemporary Hungarian and Polish art”. My dissertation is in some ways continuation of my previous research for the master thesis during which I analyzed such public art placed in Budapest which commemorates Holocaust or is closely connected to the history of the World War II. In my thesis which I have carried with the support of the International Visegrad Fund at the Research Institute for Art History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences I analyzed the various aspects of remembrance inherent in monuments and memorials placed around Hungary’s capital city (“Holocaust and remembrance in public art in Budapest”, supervisor: Prof. Piotr Piotrowski).

My PhD project oscillates around similar topic but is appointed in a broader context. I would like to analyze the whole spectrum of contemporary art commemorated to Holocaust and the problem of remembrance; and not only in Budapest or Hungary, but also involving Polish art. My aim is to compare Hungarian and Polish attitude towards this topic in contemporary art, to set up a specific case-study showing different aspects of remembering and ways of processing Holocaust in contemporary art.

In a research including remembrance a specific theoretical background is needed. There are different attitudes towards the problem of memory (theory), there are also different ways of remembering embodied into artist’s works (practice). Constructing introductory part of my dissertation I would like to use publications of: James E. Young, Dominick LaCapra, Pierre Nora, Marianne Hirsch, Piotr Piotrowski, Jan Assmann, Zygmunt Bauman, Katarzyna Bojarska. There shall be also a historical and political context involved, outlining the situation in Hungary and Poland. In both cases there are significant characteristics influencing nation’s remembrance in those countries. In Hungary one of those characteristics was Porajmos – Holocaust of Roma people. Also, as Hungary during the Second World War

joined The Third Reich, there is a problematic presence of Arrow Cross Party, guiltiness and awareness of the dark past. Also Poland is a specific case because of being a “place of crime”. A numerous number of European Jews was exterminated on the territory of Poland; Auschwitz, the former concentration camp, a metaphor of Holocaust, a 20th century’s biggest evil, is located in Poland. On the other hand it is this country where “Anti-Semitism without Jews” takes place. Why would there be an Anti-Semitism in a place marked with blood of so many Jewish lives? Those characteristic factors influence collective / national remembrance; thus they also influence the art. In my research I would like to focus particularly on the art that has risen from the 90’s, taking into consideration all artistic activities: paintings, sculptures, video-art and installations, monuments, etc . I would also like to take a look at institutions and concrete exhibitions that has been organized on the topic over last 20 years in Hungary and Poland. Analyzing all given factors shall bring the answer about how the process of dealing with the difficult past occurs, how does the collective memory work, and how to define nation’s memory concerning Holocaust in Hungary and Poland.