

Regina Foschiová

Charles University in Prague

Confrontation of Identities. The artwork of Czechoslovakian exile artists between the years 1968 and 1989 in the German spoken countries

My dissertation deals with the topic of exile and migration in the context of the former Czechoslovakia in the second half of the twentieth century. It focuses on the artists (painters, sculptors and conceptualists) who emigrated from Czechoslovakia to the German spoken countries after 21st of August 1968. At the beginning of my research I had a group of 47 names alone in West Germany and Austria. For the purposes of my dissertation I selected 15 artists – 7 in Austria and 8 in West Germany whose life and work constitute a serie of case studies that represent the complex insight into this topic. The criteria for my selection were simple: gender, age, form of art. In Austria I chose following artists: František Lesák, Josef Symon, Zbyněk Sekal, Irena Ráček, Otakar Slavík, Ondřej Kohout, Jan Brabenec. In West Germany I chose these following artists: Jan Kotík, Jan Koblasa, Jiří Goerog Dokoupil, Milan Kunc, Ludmila Seefried Matějková, Michal Bielický, Jiří Hilmar, Ladislava Nouzecká.

I have already finished the Austrian part of my dissertation and now I am working on the West German part. The artists in Austria were all concentrated in Vienna. Vienna as a capital and a cultural center not only of Austria but also central Europe was for a lot of emigrants only a interchange station on a way to the western Europe or the USA so around the years 1968 and 69 there was a lot of people in the refugee camps waiting for permissions to continue their journey. Some of them decided to stay for good. Among them for example Josef Symon and Irena Ráček, a designer of jewellery and an illustrator of books for children. The rest of selected artists of my group arrived to Vienna much later, Zbyněk Sekal in 1970, Otakar Slavík in 1980, Ondřej Kohout in 1981 and Jan Brabenec in 1982. In general, emigrants who decided to leave Czechoslovakia after 1977 were often people who signed Charter 77, a document that criticised the czechoslovakian government for not implementing the human rights provisions. An exception in the group is František Lesák who on the other hand left Czechoslovakia already in 1964.

Each of the artists dealt with their situation after the emigration differently, although everybody managed to succeed in their field. Everyone was able to establish themselves as an artist and that could not be an easy task in an international competition. František Lesák, Josef Symon and Zbyněk Sekal became professors at the art academies (Lesák and Symon in Vienna and Sekal in Stuttgart), Slavík, Kohout and Ráček worked as free-lance artists and Jan Brabenec directs to these days his own gallery where he sells his work as well as work of other fellow artists. The great support for all the Czechoslovakian emigrants provided The Culture Club of Czechs and Slovaks in Vienna that organized cultural events for the Czechoslovakian community. Many of the artists also became members of prestigious association Künstlerhaus in Vienna (Josef Symon, Otakar Slavík, Ondřej Kohout).

The most interesting part of my research is to observe and track the impact of the emigration on the art works or the artists' style. Many artists addressed the topic directly, others hinted only in a subtle manner, depending also on the form of art they express themselves with. For example Milan Kunc titled one of his painting very explicitly – „*The Emigrant*“. A male figure in the foreground of the painting with a sad, melancholic expression in his face is looking directly at the viewer. Other artists conveyed their feelings in less noticeable ways, some of them not at all.

In the conclusion of my dissertation I would like to discover how the Czechoslovakian artists succeeded in German spoken countries, if or how they collaborated with other artist (local or international), how they fit in the Western society and culture and how the entire experience of an emigrant influenced their work. In order to do so I have to go through many written and oral sources, e. g. monographs, exhibition catalogues, personal correspondence, archive materials and interviews and so on.

Literature:

Dominguez, Christian, Marenzi, Luca, Ptáček, Jiří: *Dokoupil 100. Katalog k výstavě*, Praha 2010.

Štěpán, Petr: *Dokoupil. Nové religiózní obrazy. Katalog k výstavě*, Praha 2012.

Haenlein, Carl, Anhers, Carsten: *Jiří Gerog Dokoupil. Blick ins 21. Jahrhundert*, Bonn 2002.

Todoroff, Uli: *Jiri Georg Dokoupil. Something strange and fantastic*, Wien 1997.

Dickhoff, Wilfried, Fleck, Robert: *Dokoupil. Malerei im 21. Jahrhundert*, Hamburg 2005.

Nešlehová, Mahulena: *Jan Koblasa. Grafika – hlubotisky*, Praha 2010.

Koblasa, Jan: *Záznamy z let padesátých a šedesátých*. Brno 2002.

Kobalsá, Jan: *Emigrace. Vstávání z mrtvých se živým nedaří*. Praha 2011.

Linhartová, Věra, WAGNER Radan: *Jan Koblasa*. Katalog k výstavě. Praha 2012.

Hoffmann, Werner, Judlova, Marie, Sekal, Zbyněk: *Zbyěk Sekal. Práce za posledních pětapadesát let*. Praha 1997.

Rous, Jan: *Otakar Slavík*. Praha 2009.

Mladičová, Iva (ed.): *Jan Kotík 1916-2002*. Praha 2011.

Pánková, Marcela (ed.): *Jan Kotík. Texty 1939-1991*. Praha 1992.

Fuchs, Reiner, Zemánek, Jiří: *František Lesák. Konstrukce rekonstrukce. Katalog k výstavě*. Praha 1997.

Lesák, František: *...vidím jen to, co vím*. Praha 2013.

Vlček, Tomáš, Kuspit, Donald, Groys, Boris: *Milan Kunc*. Praha 2007.

Hájková, Michaela: *Bielický*. Kniha a DVD. Praha 2005

Hrdličková, Helena (ed.): *Šedá cihla exil 66/1994*. Katalog k výstavě. Klatovy 1994.

Barteček, Ivo, Hastík, Jiří: *České umění v exilu. Wien*. Katalog k výstavě. Olomouc 2010.

Šetlík, Jiří: *České umění v exilu*. In: Dějiny českého výtvarného umění VI/1 1958-2000. Kol. autorů. Praha 2007, S. 429-445.

Engler, Martin: *Die 80er. Figurative Malerei in der BRD*, Städel Museum Frankfurt am Main 2015.