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Reflexion of Totalitarian Past in The Contemporary Art of Central Europe

My professional and academic career is linked with the post-war art history of Central Europe. My deep interest lies in the topic of how the communist regime is imprinted in the art of the past decades. Borrowing the words of Eda Čufer, I believe communism stood behind the narrative of the twentieth century in Europe, and behind the narrative of the century following stands its ruin. In my work, I explore art and its history through this phenomenon; I am interested in how the ideology influenced, transformed and invaded art approaches.

The aim of the project is to analyze a changing society in the regional context seen by a prism of the artistic practice of that area. The basic premise is that history forms the present and present is reflected by art. Art is an important tool, capturing actual state of a society. Literally, it depicts certain society in certain time. It can express its feelings, anxieties, progress, failures. Art is the product of a community, and thus its mirror.

I specialize my research on the Central European region: Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland. These countries of the so-called Visegrad group are associated not only by a geographical setting, but by deeper historical, and cultural and social basis. This project thus explores how is this common experience projected into artistic milieu and visual work of particular countries, and to show common or different features of the artistic production. Further research will focus on general reflection of society changes in the art context.

My current Ph.D. project on Prague Charles University is focused on reflection of the socialist past in the work of contemporary visual artists. On the background of political and cultural changes, the influence on art production of each country is considered, and on this base common or different features are found. I am trying to organise such artistic activities into several categories (e.g. artists dealing with a landscape and architecture of socmodernism, recontextualization of public space, archives and documents of the past, visual codes and anticodes of the era etc.). Selected artists of my interest (e.g. Paulina Ołowska, Tomáš Džadoň, Zsolt Keserue, Svätopluk Mikyta, David Možný and others) belong to younger generation, born in the seventies, so they've spent most of their childhood and adolescence in the communist totality. However, their artistic education was completed after the revolution, they are thus the first ones allowed to work freely. They stand in the borderline between two worlds and two different points of view. A common feature of their work is also a perception of a local space in its historical connotations,

exploring of historical contents, reception of causality and time-space orientation of a man. They focus on collective memory, its metamorphosis and processes.

Using space with its physical and symbolical expression is their strategy; a specific interest is a process of searching, changing or losing the identity in a historically complicated area of Central Europe.

The necessary part of this topic is exploring the phenomenon of post-communist nostalgia in the context of the so-called historiographical turn in contemporary art.

On the background of these basic approaches, the project focuses on both diversity and common features of the work of those artists. The topics enable further comparison and finding new lines, links and strategies.

There are three principle research procedures: historical-theoretical, comparative and descriptive. Main method of the qualitative research is the cultural – historical one.

The research result is an original multidisciplinary study presenting relations between collective memory, identity, personality and historical causality in the space of contemporary Central Europe captured in the artistic reflection.