

## Personal Statement

The subject of this thesis has a particular relationship with my personal circumstances. Hungarian by nationality, I was born and brought up in Czechoslovakia and have been resident in the UK since 1998. Living in Czechoslovakia as a member of the large Hungarian minority there meant that I had early experience of the foundation and context of three different cultures: Hungarian, Slovak and Czech.

I grew up under communism in a small town in the south of Slovakia. When I was young, I knew nothing about politics, only what I was told in school. I heard little of the events of 1956 and even less of 1968. I recall that when I was about twelve, my geography teacher made a reference to 1968. Not one person in the class of 30 knew what she meant. The citizens of Czechoslovakia lived in a state of enforced collective amnesia at the time. I have realised since, mainly as a result of my research on the subject, that the tragic events of 1968 profoundly affected my early life. The post-1968 normalisation process created a rigid and joyless society characterised by suspicion, ignorance and closed-mindedness. It was not until 1989 that I heard about Charta 77 and saw Vaclav Havel interviewed on Hungarian television. I am proud of being one of the many students who participated in the Velvet Revolution which ended the reign of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia in 1989.

After graduation I lived in the Netherlands and Hungary for a while before becoming a British resident. I came to Britain because of personal reasons not as a refugee, but the adjustment to a different cultural milieu was not an easy process for me and I feel that I can identify with the common problems exiles and refugees encounter in their host countries. I became interested in the work of émigré art during my MA studies when I researched the arrival of Hungarian refugee artists in Britain during the 1930s and 1940s. The current thesis is a natural continuation of my initial exploration of art created in exile, but considers the subject from the perspective of the Cold War period. The topic of this study offered me a chance to utilise my language skills and insider knowledge related to life under communism and art production in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The most exciting part of my PhD

work was the process of identifying Hungarian and Czech Cold War refugee artists – many of these artists are obscure and rarely considered in academic studies. However, their stories, life experiences and artistic output are testimonies of creativity, adaptability and endurance. This thesis wishes not only to evaluate their contribution but also commemorate their struggles and successes.