

VI. Conclusion

This study identifies artists who left Hungary following the failed uprising in 1956 and Czechoslovakia as a result of the defeat of the 1968 Prague Spring, and continued to work as artists after they settled in the UK. The thesis investigates a period and geographical region which has so far been neglected in art in exile studies in Great Britain.¹ Although the social and political significance of the 1956 and the 1968 happenings is the subject of numerous academic studies, no research has considered the significance of these events in the context of émigré art. This thesis presents the first instance in which Hungarian and Czech refugee artists of the Cold War period are accounted for under a common framework and their work examined in the context of art in exile.

The Hungarian and Czech artists discussed in this study represent various aspects of visual cultural production, and are of different generations, gender and nationality. However, they share life experiences which affected their artistic philosophy and approach. They all experienced living under communist dictatorships, lived through turbulent social and political times, became refugees, were forced to adjust to a new milieu and a new value system in a foreign country and pursued artistic professions, at times under difficult conditions. This study investigates the traits which could be identified from the shared experiences of these artists and uses the findings to influence and inform the wider context of exile studies in visual culture.

1. Artistic Activities in Exile

The artists of this study have been affected by exile on both a personal and professional level. Apart from the difficulties generally associated with displacement, such as language and cultural barriers, the refugee artists had to accept the commercial aspect of art and become accustomed to the existence of a competitive art market in Britain. In their homeland, artists enjoyed relative security by receiving a regular income and other benefits in exchange for complying with the cultural policies of the state. However, such arrangements restricted the creative freedom of

¹ The majority of studies in the field of exile studies in visual culture focus on the achievements of Nazi refugees during the period of the 1930s and 1940s.

artists, and many chose freedom over security when decided to escape their home country.

It is debatable how much freedom there actually existed in the West and some artists, such as György Gordon, Josef Koudelka and Irena Sedlecka expressed their belief about the restrictive nature of commercialism stating that the art market forces artists to conform just as much as the communist system. However, artists could choose to ignore commercial expectations and create art according to their own ideals, which was the route Gordon purposefully followed. In some ways Koudelka epitomises the non-conformist artist who retained his artistic integrity and freedom both in communist Czechoslovakia and the capitalist West.

Exiled writers have the obvious difficulty of communicating with their new audience because of the existing language barrier. From this point of view, visual artists seem to be in a more favourable position. However, the artists of this study often found it difficult to successfully convey their ideas and feelings in their new environment. British viewers were not familiar with the cultural and artistic heritage that Hungarian and Czech artists based their work on which could lead to misinterpretations and problems with communication. Edma's case exemplifies how a genre and expression which was celebrated in Hungary was alien to British viewers. Gordon's art was too dark and disturbing for commercial acceptance and a number of Hungarian artists, including Szegedi and Herpai, struggled to establish themselves in their profession. The Czech artists of this study also had to adapt to a differing cultural scene and alter their artistic manner and expression, which affected the work of Luskacova, Büchler, Jan Brychta and Mirek Lang amongst others.

Success was never instant and even the artists who became acknowledged in their field had to battle for acceptance. Gordon only achieved critical acclaim near the end of his career; Ambrus, Acs, Sorel and Vasarhelyi had to complete their art education before they could start working as artists; Vas made a short film in 1959 (*Refuge England*) but it was not until 1964 that he directed his first feature documentary film for the BBC (*The Frontier*). For years, Sajo made craft objects in order to survive financially and Kaldor only started his painting career once he retired from his original profession, architecture. Jiricna was only able to realise her independent design ideals after a decade of working for various architectural offices in London. Jiri Borsky worked as a draughtsman before he was in a position to pursue his artistic aspirations. However, becoming an artist is a difficult and long

process anywhere in the world. Being refugee artists was not an advantage for the artists examined in this thesis. However, their exile status was not the only factor that affected their position in a competitive and ever-changing art world. From a generational point of view, the younger artists who did not have established careers before their exile found the transition into a new cultural milieu easier; the process of starting afresh was harder for artists, such as Edma, Gordon, Sajo, Gluck, Mirek Lang and Jan and Lida Brychta who left successful careers behind. However there are exceptions to the rule as younger artists, including Szegedi, Herpai and Koska were not able to gain high recognition in exile. Koudelka, the most well-known artist included in this thesis achieved international recognition without actively pursuing success. Time and time again, it becomes apparent that Josef Koudelka is a unique artist whose case represents the exception, rather than the norm when examining the artistic response to exile.

To survive professionally, some of the artists had to alter their art or move into different areas of artistic production. Mirek Lang moved from documentary filmmaking into animation, Andras Kaldor turned from architecture to painting, Felix Gluck extended his activities into running a publishing house and Jan Brychta, unable to continue working in animation, has become known for his book illustrations. Ivan Kyncl, originally a photojournalist, became a sought after theatre photographer in Britain and Edma, a cartoonist and graphic artist in Hungary, found success as a ceramicist in exile.

1.1 Art's Function

The most significant aspect which distinguished the Cold War Refugee artists from their British contemporaries was the way in which they perceived the function of art in society. In Central Eastern Europe, the figure of the artist was surrounded by myths of heroism and integrity, which was determined by the historic conditions of the region. For centuries, during times of oppression and revolutions, artists were seen as spokespersons and role-models in society. This image was reinforced by the modernist belief in art's power to inspire profound social change and further enhanced by the function which artists, predominantly writers, fulfilled during the 1956 and 1968 happenings in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The artists discussed in this study brought their conviction of art's integrity to Britain where, by contrast, art was seen as a leisure activity and was appraised by commercial achievements. It is

evident from the career choices they made and the work which they produced in exile, that the Hungarian and Czech artists preserved their integrity in exile and retained a strong belief in art's higher function.

1.2 Response to Exile

The artists examined in this thesis all had an individual understanding of and response to exile. "Everyone's exile is different" claims Andre Aciman.² Some triumph over exile, others find displacement exciting and invigorating. Some can take it on and off as a costume, while others have never been able to shake it off.³ Aciman's assessment is applicable to the artists of this study. The majority of them triumphed over exile in a sense that they overcame initial difficulties stemming from cultural differences and made a living as artists in Britain. Exile had invigorating effects on some of their careers: Agathe Sorel was able to eliminate the rigidity of Socialist Realism and create in an abstract style which she was naturally predisposed to. The different climatic and atmospheric conditions in England altered Sajo's attitude towards landscape painting and as a result he extended and enriched his portfolio. Artists, such as Robert Vas, Jiri Borsky and Oldrich Asenbryl were able to build artistic careers abroad, something they were limited to do in their country of birth. For Jan Mladovsky, exile is a role which forms part of his constructed identities, or alter egos and he can be associated with various European arts scenes. However, exile did present a noticeable break in the careers of some of the artists, including Edma, Erno Szegedi, and to an extent Jan Brychta and Mirek Lang.

The experiences of the examined artists also testify to exile as a contradictory condition which can be a subject to a mixture of positive and negative influences. György Gordon, although seemingly happy and successful in his profession, created art which conveyed the sadness and anxiety associated with the uprooted existence. Even though exile allowed Vas to pursue filmmaking in Britain, the director never fully overcame the emotional loss of his home and cultural roots. Jiri Borsky, who is a commercially successful artist with a local significance, continues to produce melancholic recollections of his childhood memories.

² Andre Aciman, *Letters of Transit: Reflections on Exile, Identity, Language, and Loss* (New York: New Press; London: I. B. Tauris [distributor], 1999). p.9

³ Ibid. pp.9-10

1.3 Strategies

The artists of this thesis adopted various strategies to deal with the difficulties of becoming refugees. It is important to state that even a conscious decision by an artist to be seemingly indifferent to the subject of exile is a revealing response to the experience and can be considered as a way to adjust to the exile situation. The most obvious case is Gyula Sajo's; the painter severed all connections with his homeland after his exile and focused solely on establishing new roots and a new career in Britain. Sajo's philosophy to look ahead into the future and keep working to achieve his goals can be considered as a way of emotional self-protection in exile. Similarly, Josef Koudelka embraced the possibilities that exile could offer to him personally and professionally and adopted a nomadic and independent lifestyle. However, Koudelka's attitude towards exile is unusual as most refugee artists aimed to establish a new life and stability in exile.

Being part of a larger émigré community also helped artists to overcome the sense of isolation in Britain, especially at the beginning of their exile. A number of Hungarian artists gathered around the émigré paper *Irodalmi Újság* which fulfilled not only a cultural role, but also a social and political one. Artistic formations, such as the Taurus Group, made artists feel part of a wider artistic community. Endre Boszin and Felix Gluck were part of this formation, which emphasised the international aspect of art, a philosophy rooted in twentieth century avant-garde traditions.

Being cut off from their native culture without the possibility to visit their home country was one of the most difficult aspects of exile for many of the examined artists. Jiri Borsky dealt with this loss and the feelings of homesickness by re-living his early memories in nostalgic and idealised paintings. Themes and subjects connected to their native culture also entered the work of Edma, Laszlo Acs, Jan Zalud and Endre Boszin.

To communicate feelings related to the historical traumas they witnessed and the subsequent refugee existence was a way to deal with such disturbing experiences. Victor Ambrus revealed that he only became free of the haunting memories of 1956 once he completed a series of artworks on the subject. György Gordon conveyed his feelings, such as uncertainty, displacement and anxiety, connected to the exile experience in his paintings. Memories of traumatic times in Hungary resurfaced in his work time and time again, often transformed from a

specific experience into a universal symbol of twentieth century turmoil. Robert Vas was involved in the creation of a number of projects which directly communicated his personal encounters with displacement. *Refuge England* and *The Frontier* assessed Vas' contradictory feelings about exile and helped him to come to terms with his status as a Hungarian filmmaker in Britain.

1.4 Themes of Exile

As a result of exile, new themes related to the experience entered the art of refugee artists. Works, such as *Refugees* by Gordon, *Bartók: Cantata Profana* by Acs, *Escape* by Boszin, *My Homeland* by Vas, the collection of drawings, *Emigration* by Edma and the photographs of the series *Exiles* by Koudelka belong to this category. However, not all artworks influenced by the experience present such a direct connection to exile. Many of Borsky's paintings (*Lemon Tea, Baking, Vyton Bridge*) and Mladovsky's conceptual works and exhibitions (*Bad Boss, Communism*) were inspired by the experience of being separated from Czech everyday life. Furthermore, artists in exile became more perceptive towards particular subjects related to the condition of the marginalised, and conveyed feelings such as isolation and displacement in their work. Edma's ceramic sculpture *The Outcast*, Gordon's painterly understanding of aging and solitude, Vas' non-establishment interpretation of the General Strike, Liba Taylor's preoccupation with refugee communities around the world and Luskacova's perceptive photographs of children and people on the margins of society show how exile influenced the outlook and creative understanding of these artists.

1.5 Connection to Cultural Heritage

A distinct and intimate connection to their native culture and artistic traditions is another trait which characterises the work of artists examined in the thesis. Victor Ambrus maintains that the foundation of his graphic style is rooted in his Hungarian art education and the drawing traditions of his country. Elements of Hungarian and Czech folk art influenced the artistic output of Edma (especially in ceramics) and Oldrich Asenbryl. The ideals of Czech Functionalism became the guiding inspiration to Jiricna's interior design and architectural projects in Britain, giving her work a distinctive style and approach. The influence of Central Eastern European Modernism is apparent on the work of a number of artists, including Gordon, Boszin,

Gluck, Sorel and Borsky. The stimulus of Hungarian landscape painting permeates Gyula Sajo's art, which can be seen as a fusion between Hungarian and English painting traditions.

2. Art and Politics

Because the subject of this study relates to the period of the Cold War and cultural production in former communist countries of Central Eastern Europe, the reciprocal relationship between art and politics is a principal theme of the thesis. Political happenings and changes affected all the examined artists – in their country of birth the political needs of the regimes dictated what was acceptable in the arts and what was forbidden. Most of these artists also fulfilled some political roles, either as early supporters of communist ideology (Gordon, Edma, Vas) or as opposition to the communist establishment (Sajo, Ambrus, Szegedi, Herpai, Büchler and Kyncl). After their emigration, the majority of artists had limited artistic or personal involvement in politics. Vas can be singled out as an artist whose social sensitivity connected him to left wing intellectual circles in the UK and whose art conveyed this stance. The subject matter which both Mladovksy and Büchler work with have clear political connotations, including Mladovsky's exhibitions which comment on the communist past of Czechoslovakia and Büchler's work that deals with the connection between the Eastern and Western political discourse, such as the exhibition *Red Flag* (1997) and the artist's book *Marx Angels* (1997).

Jiri Borsky's artistic representation of the consequences of the Yalta agreement provides a personal and thought-provoking response to the significant event which established the political division of Europe after the Second World War. Borsky is not an artist interested in politics, but his life was deeply influenced by the decision made in 1945. Borsky's case is mirrored in the fate of the other examined artists. Every life story discussed in this thesis underlines how great political happenings can have an irreversible impact on individual lives.

3. Differences between the Situation of the Hungarian and Czech Artists

A detailed examination of the 1956 and post-1968 exiles would conclude that the Czech émigrés integrated into the British arts world with more ease and success than their Hungarian counterparts. The Czech artists of this study had a significant influence in particular areas, such as photography, architecture, illustration and

animation and their achievements verify their adaptability and resilience. With the exception of Robert Vas, Victor Ambrus and to a degree, György Gordon, the significance of the Hungarian émigré artists was limited to specific fields of visual culture (for example stamp design and printmaking) and local arts scenes.

The noticeable difference between the position of the Hungarian and the Czech exiled artists can be explained by the differing social conditions of the 1950s and the 1960s. Both Hungarian and British society was more conventional and insular during the 1950s than in the 1960s, when public attitude became more tolerant and liberal. The Hungarian artists were also conditioned by the strict rules of the Socialist Realism of early communism and were culturally more isolated than the Czech artists of this study, who were allowed to travel and experience Western artistic trends during the period of the Prague Spring. As a result, the work of the Czech artists was more in line with artistic developments in Britain at the time of their arrival.

From a practical point of view, the Czech artists also had fewer difficulties with language barriers as the majority of them learnt English before their escape from Czechoslovakia. Almost none of the Hungarian artists spoke the language before they settled in Britain which prolonged their process of acceptance as professional artists in their chosen country.

Furthermore, the majority of the examined Czech artists belonged to a younger generation and had no established career before their emigration. By contrast, a number of Hungarian artists had to leave behind relatively successful careers. However, age and experience was not always a disadvantage: Irena Sedlecka was a successful sculptor in her home country and in exile she utilised her socialist realist training and experience to duplicate her success.

The different character of the Hungarian uprising and the Prague Spring also had an impact on the situation of the refugee artists of this study. The Hungarian artists shared the same dramatic experience of escaping their country illegally and arrived in Britain during a short space of time. In exile, they gathered around émigré papers and became part of a lively expatriate community, which was especially significant during the early years of exile. From my conversations with artists it seems that most of the Hungarian émigrés knew each other or at least knew of each other (the exception being Gyula Sajo). The situation was different for the Czech

artists of this thesis: they arrived at different times and very rarely developed close connections with each other or other members of their émigré community.

From a researcher's point of view it was easier to collect material related to the work of the Czech artists. This is mainly due to the increased information flow in recent years and the availability of Internet resources: for example many Czech artists discussed in the thesis have their own website which promotes their work.⁴ By contrast, material related to artistic activities of the 1950s is often difficult to find.

4. Women Artists

The two women artists discussed in detail provided an opportunity to examine the wider context of gender politics and compare the position of women in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Britain during the 1950s and 1960s. Edma and Eva Jiricna found communism more egalitarian in gender politics, as the system allowed women to succeed in male-dominated professions. In Britain, Edma suffered from a double disadvantage: she was not only a refugee from "Eastern Europe", but also an artist trying to establish herself in cartoon design, a field not traditionally associated with women. Jiricna feels that her gender was a barrier for professional advancement; however, she was eventually able to build a successful career in Britain, something Edma could not accomplish in exile. Eva Jiricna's success is partly due to the increased gender equality in society and partly allowed by Jiricna's lifestyle: because Jiricna did not have to raise a family, she was able to dedicate more time and effort to her professional ambitions.

5. The Contribution of the Exiled Artists to British Art

Edward Said viewed modern Western culture as largely created by exiles, émigrés and refugees.⁵ Culture in Britain has been enriched by the contribution of those who arrived from outside, often as refugees searching for safety and a better life, such as Jewish refugees from Russia, Nazi escapees, Cold War refugees or members of the former colonies. The artists of this study also made a contribution and influenced different fields of visual culture in Britain.

⁴ Jiri Borsky, Liba Taylor, Jan Zalud, Milan Ivanic, Oldrich Asenbryl and Eva Jiricna all have their own websites.

⁵ Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001). p. 173

Amongst the Hungarian artists, Robert Vas can be regarded as the one with the most distinguished career in Great Britain. Vas was accepted and respected by his peers as a member of the Free Cinema and BBC who also developed a unique vision and enriched British documentary filmmaking. Victor Ambrus is one of the most recognised graphic artists in the country and he is widely known for his television appearances in the programme *Time Team*. There are other Hungarian-born artists who made a substantial contribution to graphic arts and printmaking in Britain, including Laszlo Acs, Agathe Sorel and Gyula Vasarhelyi. Some artists, such as Gyula Sajo achieved significance on the local arts scene; Sajo also established an important local art school. Teaching art was another area where a number of Hungarian artists found a significant place and influenced new generations of artists, these include György Gordon, Felix Gluck and Edma.

Jan Mladovksy and Pavel Büchler are the Czech-born artists who have had a considerable impact in academic circles through their lecturing positions in Norwich and Manchester respectively. Jan and Alex Brychta and Mirek and Peter Lang had a considerable influence in the fields of illustration and animation. For example, the successful animated series *Ludwig* represents a characteristically Czech approach to animated film and demonstrates a stance against the popular Disney-style methods of filmmaking. Eva Jiricna and Jan Kaplicky are amongst the most recognised architects in Britain and they both enriched their field with their distinctive approach to interior and architectural design. Jiri Borsky is an example of an artist who is respected and celebrated locally but his influence reaches to a national level. Wales based artists Oldrich Asenbryl and Jaroslav Mykisa occupy a valuable position in the Welsh arts scene. Photography is another area where Czech émigré artists have distinguished achievements. Undoubtedly, Josef Koudelka is the most recognised and celebrated artist discussed in this thesis. Koudelka's significance extends beyond national boundaries and even though he only spent a short period of his life in Britain, his contribution to British art is significant.

5.1 The Function of Exiled Artists

Arthur Koestler, a naturalised émigré, described the artist in exile as one “who has a mission of unparalleled responsibility; he represents the continuity of the captive nation's culture, he is the keeper of the legacy of the past; he defends this legacy's

true essence against its falsifiers present and past”.⁶ The 1956 and post-1968 émigrés fulfilled such responsibilities as they preserved the progressive traditions of their cultures and kept the revolutionary ideals of the Hungarian uprising and the Prague Spring alive. Their artistic contribution to émigré publications, such as the *Irodalmi Újság* and books published by Sixty-Eight Publishers took on a political significance. To a point, they also represented their country of origin abroad and this was especially significant in the case of Koudelka who continued to be categorised as a Czech photographer, despite his long absence from the Czech arts scene.

1989 changed the role and perception of émigré artists; they no longer represented opposition to the totalitarian system. The change in the political situation of Central Eastern Europe also allowed artists to return and join in the artistic revitalisation of their country, which was the path that Jan Mladovsky, Marketa Luskacova, Eva Jiricna and Josef Koudelka chose.

6. The Contribution of the Thesis to Art in Exile Studies

Exile altered not only the life but also the creativity of the exiled artists. They experienced the displaced condition differently and their artworks, created in exile reflected a unique perception of the condition. The work of the examined artists relate to particular concepts, such as otherness, belonging, outsider status and identity, which are associated with geographical and cultural dislocation. These works offer not only an insight into the specific refugee experience but also contribute towards the wider understanding of exile and the displaced existence.

6.1 Otherness

The artists examined in the thesis belonged to different generations, gender and worked in various media. However, as a group, they also differed from British artists. Their shared experiences, arrival, initial refugee status and their profound connection to Central Eastern European history and traditions distinguished them from their British counterparts. The artists of this study were united not only because they were all refugees from communism, but also the difference which they represented in Britain unified them. In his study on Polish exiled artists, Douglas Hall argues that

⁶Quoted in Congdon, *Seeing Red : Hungarian Intellectuals in Exile and the Challenge of Communism*. p.117

difference itself can be a unifying factor and the diversity that exiled artists represent need to be “addressed and celebrated in this multicultural yet ever more globalised world we live in”.⁷ Hall’s assessment is relevant for this thesis which commemorates the diversity and achievements of refugee artists who came to Britain from a region in Europe seldom accounted for in art historical studies.

6.2 *Belonging and Outsider Status*

The difference which distinguished the Hungarian and Czech artists of this thesis also made them outsiders in British culture. Arriving as refugees, these artists had to learn to relate to British life and negotiate their position between their native and adopted culture. The artists reacted to their outsider status in different ways and were affected by it to various degrees. Artists, such as Szegedi and Edma remained outsiders in the British arts world and struggled to overcome this barrier. Vas’ films testify that despite the recognition he achieved, the director remained “culturally homeless”⁸ and Hungarian at heart. For some artists, being an outsider provided advantages. Sajo approached the English landscape with the eyes of a stranger which helped him to develop a unique painterly interpretation of his environment. Jan Mladovsky’s case proves how an artist can utilise the clear-sightedness and detachment associated with the outsider condition in his art. Maldovksy, who does not fully belong to any culture, but can move in and out of various arts scenes with ease, has been making perceptive and relevant observations about modern society in Britain, Germany, Italy and the Czech Republic.

6.3 *Identity*

The notion of identity became a prevalent theme in the works of the discussed artists after their arrival in Britain. Edma’s self portrait as Kafka’s *Hunger Artist* (1957), Gordon’s *Self Portrait* (1965) and *Standing Self Portrait* (1971), Vas’ films *England Refuge* (1959) and *The Frontier* (1965), Borsky’s painting *The Wanderer* (1969), Mladovsky’s piece *Home* which accompanied the exhibition *Communism* (2000) and

⁷ Douglas Hall, *Art in Exile: Polish Painters in Post-War Britain* (Bristol: Sansom & Company, 2008).

⁸ Adriana Kiss-Davies, "Conversation with John Berger," ed. John Berger (Paris / Aberystwyth: 2007).

Alex Brychta's illustration of his life story⁹ are the obvious examples. Koudelka's desolate landscapes of the *Exiles* series echo the photographer's conception of displacement and reflect his situation (identity) in the world. Ambrus' lithographs recalling the events of 1956 talk about the artist's revolutionary past and identity, but from the perspective of elapsed time and the émigré existence.

The preoccupation with the theme of identity was a natural response to the situation which the Hungarian and Czech artists of this study experienced because in exile, without the presence of national and cultural roots, their identity became uncertain. In various artworks, these artists explored their changing self-image and tried to reassert and redefine their new identity as refugees and exiles. Gordon's series of self portraits from the 1960s and 1970s present how the artist's perception of himself varied at different stages of his life. Gordon's identity was not certain and constant, and was conditioned by the artist's position and circumstances. If we compare the self-representation of other exiled artists at different times, we see a similar pattern emerging. Edma's representation of herself varied from content to disillusioned artist, and from intimidated refugee to a happy and loving mother. A number of Borsky's images talk about his idealised childhood, while other artworks situate him as a rootless migrant and an artist who profoundly understands the pain of not belonging. While all the mentioned works express the outlook and struggles of individual artists, they also confirm how identity can be constructed and changed, mirroring the understanding of theorists, such as Stuart Hall, Iain Chambers and Jonathan Rutherford.

6.4 Mythology

The cases of Gyula Sajo and Josef Koudelka demonstrate how society's mythmaking process can affect the position and perception of individual exiled artists and even add to their success. The myths created in the local press made Sajo a celebrity in Worthing; Koudelka's worldwide image is obscured by the legends, largely created in the international press, which surround his persona. Even though neither of these artists actively supported the creation of these myths, they never openly contradicted them.

⁹ Roderick; Brychta Hunt, Alex, *True Stories: Alex Brychta: The Story of an Illustrator*, Oxford Reading Tree (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Robert Vas was an artist who systematically challenged society's mythmaking in his interrogatory and confrontational documentary films. Vas demolished the accepted myths about the General Strike, the glory of the 1956 revolution and the figure of the heroic Hungarian freedom fighter and refugee. The work of other émigré artists also question deep rooted myths in society. Gordon's and Ambrus' raw representation of fighting and death is devoid of the glorification of the 1956 uprising. Mladovsky's and Büchler's projects inspired by politics, rely on using stereotypes, such as red flags and party committee rooms as symbols of communism, but they also interrogate the deeper and hidden meanings of these symbols.

7. Life Stories

Hungarian-born English poet, George Szirtes believes that under each of his poems and stories lies a deeper myth of identity and history.¹⁰ Szirtes, like the artists of this study is situated on the borders of two different cultures and his works reveal elements of this twofold existence. Similarly, the work of the émigré artists relates both to their national histories and individual stories, exposing aspects of social crisis and personal loss. However, these connotations only become apparent once the viewers are aware of the artist's story and exile fate. From this perspective, it is essential to know the biographical details that the artworks relate to – without this data it is impossible to gain a full comprehension of the works which are inspired by the artists' personal encounter with history, social turmoil and dislocation. This is the reason why the individual stories form such a significant aspect of this thesis.

When closely examined, all the researched artists have fascinating stories to tell and their words and artworks add interesting and insightful elements to the study of exile. The stories of the Hungarian and Czech artists of this study testify to their resilience, inventiveness, creativity and sometimes tragedy. Their life and work can serve as an inspiration and their contribution to the arts deserve to be commemorated and celebrated.

¹⁰ George Szirtes, "Fables of Home," *The Dublin Review* Winter 2001-2002, no. 5 (2001).