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HOW THEY MADE US BELIEVE THEIR TRUTHS: MONUMENTAL ART IN PUBLIC SPACES BEFORE AND AFTER THE FALL OF COMMUNISM (THE CASE OF SLOVAKIA)[1]

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Abstract: This paper is concerned with monumental art in Slovakia before and after the fall of Communism in 1989. Generally, art in public spaces is important, because it influences the knowledge and feelings the people who use this space have about the past and the present, and thus influences the shared social construction of who we are as a social group. In this article we concentrate on the period of Communism and the formal and iconographic aspects that were essential to art at that time. We also look at the political use of art—the ways in which explicit and implicit meanings and ideas were communicated through art to the general public. We touch also on the present situation regarding the perception of "Communist art". In the final section we discuss the state of affairs of the last twenty years of chaotic freedom in the post-socialist era. On the one hand, since there is no real cultural politics or conception for artworks in public spaces at the level of the state many artworks simply disappear, often without public discussion, and on the other hand, some actors use their political power to build monuments that promote their private political views.

Keywords: monumental art; politics; Slovakia; Czechoslovakia; public space

Introduction

Art in public spaces is important, because it influences the knowledge and feelings the people who use and share this space have about the past and the present, and in this way it influences the shared social construction of who we are. It is through statues and monuments that children (and adults) learn about who we are as a social group, as a nation, as people living in a particular town, about who our heroes are, and who the best of those among us are. At different times and under different regimes different policies are followed. Should we remember and celebrate our great writers? Our soldiers? Partisans? Or the foreign soldiers

[1] In this text we sometimes refer to Slovakia and at other times to Czechoslovakia. This is because during socialism, the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic had two (in theory, federative) parts—the Czech and the Slovak Socialist Republics. Three years after the fall of Communism, in 1993, the by then Czecho-Slovak Federative Republic peacefully split into two separate states.

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who helped us at one time in the past (and should we still be friends with the nation(s) they were from)? Should we remember ordinary people "like us" or just a single important and haughty king or queen? Through monumental art people also learn about important positive moments or whole periods from the past that are worth commemorating. What are the tragic turning points that must be remembered so that they can never be allowed to happen again? Was a war that left thousands dead the worst time period ever? Or was it a regime more deadly for the mind and the spirit of the common people even if its effects were much slower and less obvious?

Of course, all this happens in a subtle way, in much the same way as public opinion is influenced by the media. The media provides space for certain themes, but not for others, and present things to us from a particular perspective: this is how they are able to influence the things people have opinions about even if they cannot influence the content of these opinions easily, or in a linear way. But in subtle ways the media can make us believe that some things are unthinkable, controversial, while yet others are ordinary and "normal" (Richardson 2007). The decision-makers in the media are the owners but also the individual journalists, influenced by their own opinion as well as by what they think about public opinion. And who are the decision-makers when it comes to art in public spaces? In order to make decisions about monuments, you have to have some political power—at the state or local level. Of course, all politicians, great and small have hidden agendas, but not all of them can also decide between a high quality, innovative and creative piece of art and a piece of kitsch.

As far as old monuments are concerned, the public is mostly used to what has been standing there for years and does not really see the work nor think about it; however, when a new monument is going to be built, public discussion can be quite lively, voicing all the different opinions on the identity questions above in the same way and at the same time. This was also the case with the recent controversy over the statue of Svätopluk (one of the first kings of the Slavs—forefathers of Slovaks and other Slavic nations), which was erected in front of Bratislava castle in 2010. The then Slovak Prime Minister, Robert Fico, fascinated by the historical period of Greater Moravia in the ninth century, decided to locate the statue of Svätopluk in one of the most important public spaces in the country—in front of the castle on castle hill in the capital city—without any public discussion. Nonetheless, public discussion there was, lasting for months and including a variety of participants such as opposition politicians, art theorists, historians and extreme right groups, along with unusual responses to art, including (small) demonstrations, public protests and police interventions.

This article will concentrate on the period of Communism and the political use of art at that time; it will look at the way art is perceived now and, at the end of the article, it will touch on current developments regarding new monuments.

What is monumental art?

The term *monumental art* is understood to mean artistic production in public architectural spaces. In addition, in Slovakia the term *monumental decorative art*, used to describe non-figurative shapes and decorative artwork, has been around since 1960, when abstract shapes were introduced into public artwork. Unfortunately, today this term is mostly regarded as being synonymous with ideological art and, is consequently associated with art of low

artistic quality—such works are seen as relicts from the Communist past and the cultural policy of the time. Neither the general public nor experts are interested in these kinds of artistic work from the past, because they are considered "official artworks", having been financed by the state. This rather unreasonable attitude toward our own history has many negative consequences, resulting in the destruction of older artistic works, many of which are of artistic and financial value.

Monumental art is a distinctive and significant category within three-dimensional art in post-war Slovakia and all post-war artists were involved in its production. There were many practical reasons for this mass participation in the official state cultural policy.

First, producing art for public spaces was the only work freelance artists could obtain, as it was the only opportunity for an artist to earn money without being employed by an organization. There was no opportunity for artists who were not pro-regime to sell works through official trade organization or to be employed in pedagogical institutions, and so paradoxically many "unofficial" artists worked with the official cultural policy by producing art and design work for public spaces. Generally, it was these "unofficial artists", who created innovative artistic programmes and tried to keep to their own styles in public art too, so their monumental art production was formally innovative and should therefore be judged as part of Slovak modern art. The second reason for the mass participation of artists was of course the question of prestige and financial reward, which was related to the production of official artistic works for political purposes.

Political demand for political art was high; consequently, the production of monuments using the official iconography flourished and was a focal point for politicians, the press and the public. That is why today most people perceive monumental art to be the art of official monuments. But it should be stressed that the definition of monumental art is wider. It includes not only monuments, but also all artworks ordered by the state or state organizations to be displayed in their buildings—thus the term includes not only free artworks but works of applied art and design as well.

Monumental artworks are located in buildings of architectural significance built since the 1950s, especially those built in the 1970s and 1980s, when state construction work was at its peak. This boom in art produced for architectural spaces was supported in legislation, in art theory and in political decisions. The political commissions of the past have had a very negative impact on the present situation. As a result, simplistic popular judgments have meant that these artistic works are neglected, forgotten and generally viewed as being political and regressive in terms of both shape and idea. But we will show that there are many different shapes to be found in monumental art, and that some of the works are innovative both in shape and in terms of high artistic quality.

Monumental art and architecture

As monumental art includes all kinds of media—sculpture, painting, ceramic, textile, glass objects and design—it includes design works of a large variety—lamps, fountains, playgrounds for children and exterior components designed to hide the industrial aspects of buildings.

The standardization of architectural components in industry did not allow architects to design innovative projects, because they could use only prefabricated components and

Figure 1: “Victims’ warning” by J. Jankovič, Slovak National Uprising Monument in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, 1964-1969.

the only way around this inconvenience was to design architectural components as original pieces of art or design.

Monumental art was placed in architectural spaces for the purpose of creating a new kind of living space. Art was supposed to bring beauty and harmony to people's lives, so artistic works were to be displayed in all public spaces. In this way the cultural policy of the state attempted to persuade people of their new modern goals, intended to bring many positives to people's everyday lives and the Communist regime was keen to show its success by pointing out the quality of new architecture. The aim was to introduce a new dimension into architectural spaces and therefore artworks were placed in schools, hospitals, cultural houses, restaurants, factories as well as office buildings. Architects and artists were supposed to liaise and the final aim was to create organic architectural-artistic work, a synthesis of architecture and art.

Although according to the theory behind art, ideal architectural spaces were seen as essential to the main goal of this venture, cooperation sometimes existed only hypothetically and artworks were added to architectural spaces after the event. Sometimes where important buildings were concerned, architects and artists did in fact liaise, which produced some interesting results. The only example of total cooperation between the architect and artist is the Museum of Slovak National Uprising in Banská Bystrica, which is the result of a joint project between the architect D. Kuzma and the sculptor J. Jankovič (see Figure 1). In this case, the final result is real sculptural architecture.

How changing the political backdrop changed socialist art

Monumental art in Slovakia is mostly seen as having been created on demand for the ruling power as art illustrating the main political ideas; nevertheless, we can observe how the political situation and changes in the attitude of the ruling party toward art directly influenced the opportunities available to artists to express their ideas. In the 1950s, there was a period of strict socialist realism, a result of the Stalinist influence on the politics of Czechoslovakia. Then, from the beginning of the 1960s, society, including the arts, underwent a period of liberalization, which brought different formal expressions. There then followed a period of strict cultural policy beginning in 1972, which encouraged a new wave of realistic and ideological monuments. Nonetheless, it was a time of relative formal freedom in semi-public spaces.

In general, Communist cultural policy emphasised realistic style that would be easily understood by the general public. Official demand for artistic works, especially monuments, was for an illustrative style and consequently all modern forms were banned as being bourgeois and formalistic. The style of socialist realism was not clearly defined theoretically, although there had been some attempts. Basically, it was the style of Soviet art from the Stalin era, which was slowly introduced into Russian cultural life from the 1930s onwards. In Czechoslovakia, almost all cultural professionals publicly supported the Communist Party in 1948.[2] Many artists, writers and other cultural professionals were left-wing thinkers and

[2] In 1948 the Communist party took power in Czechoslovakia, started nationalizing private property and transforming the hitherto more or less democratic way of government into something deeply different.

some of them were members of the Communist party. They believed deeply in the promised democratic organization of the Communist movement and thus they believed that there would be opportunities to create displays of new socialist art after 1948 as well. Of course, this opinion was very naive and it soon became clear that the only option would be to copy the Soviet model.

In general, the only definition used to guide artists towards socialist realism was the notion of a realistic form and a "socialist theme". The realistic form was reduced to idealised shapes of the human body and the "socialist theme" to official mythology: narratives and scenes showing heroic events from the past and an anticipated happy future. Socialist realism had very little in common with reality; it was based on an apparent appropriation of existing visual forms, but they were deformed by subjective expressions, sentiments, pathos and political opinion at the same time. Emotional images of stereotyped themes were realistic only in their formal appearance. The dominant role of pathos often caused an absurdity of expression and sometimes tended towards kitsch. Nevertheless, this style was officially requested by official bodies and cultural organizations. As there was no precise definition, artists attempted to produce the demanded forms rather haphazardly. Artistic works were judged by official committees and it was this process of ongoing evaluation which prescribed the acceptable forms. As judgments were dependent on the political situation at the time, which was in a constant state of flux, the acceptable formal style changed as well.

Official iconography

The official iconography used in visual art was intended to illustrate the political mythology of the Communist party. The official myths, mainly reinterpretations of the past, served of course to manipulate people and to conceal the reality behind idealised pictures. The role of the artist was simply to illustrate some preferred themes that would serve this goal and that had been selected to celebrate the Communist party: artistic works were to show the sad past, the decisive fight of the Communists against the capitalist terror (Fascism) and their victory in revolutionary battles, which had led to a happy and peaceful present. The most important motif of fighting for freedom was the Slovak National Uprising,[3] reduced to the figures of a partisan and a Communist. The official mythology allowed fighting soldiers to be shown, but all artistic renditions of this theme had to culminate in optimistic scenes and a standing, victorious hero was preferable to any other solution. The iconography was based on a fixed image of a soldier in a long coat with a hood and heavy boots, and a weapon in his hands. Usually, there were some representatives of the people standing next to the soldiers, typically a worker or a farmer, and the idea of a happy ending was stressed by smiling women with children and flowers in their hands (see Figure 2).

At the end of the 1950s, the demand was for civic themes because many new civic buildings were being constructed. This new architecture was dedicated to the people and their everyday lives, and the art placed in these new spaces was to emphasise this happy time. The civic iconography had the same purpose as the military equivalent—to show the

[3] At the end of the Second World War, mainly in 1944-1945.

Figure 2: “Monument of appreciation and victory” by A. Racko, Humenné, Slovakia, 1985.

advantages of the Communist system. It was based on a few typical scenes showing the life of men living in peace, since the motifs of peace were to underline the peaceful character of Communist policy. Often it showed working men—workers, farmers, scientists, and doctors; and scenes of a happy family life—children playing and happy families—were frequent as well. The theme of cosmonauts and space exploration was typical, because it showed scientific progress and the success of the Soviet Union in space.

Figure 3: “Family” by J. Hučko, Bratislava, Slovakia, 1981.

From the 1970s onwards, scenes of a happy present dominated. The scenes that were under demand were those expressed not only through figurative art, but also through many forms of symbolism. For this reason, a number of symbols such as a pigeon, a hand, a flower, a tree, a house, a woman with child, and so on, were officially adopted (see Figure 3). These motifs were combined randomly without any logical relation or deeper thought.

In general we can say that socialist realism was mostly based on official iconography, which did not change very quickly and stayed constant throughout the Communist era. The only change was in the force of expression—the militant language of the early 1950s slowly turned into the more civic, rather peaceful iconography which dominated the 1970s and 1980s.

Official organizations of artistic life

All artists in the socialist Czechoslovak state had to be members of an official artists' organization called Visual Artists Association. In order to participate in the design process for public spaces, artists had to be members of, or at least registered, with this organization.

In the Slovak Republic, monumental art and design was controlled by an official state agency, the *Slovak Fund of Visual Arts* (SFVA). This organization was responsible for everything relating to monumental art. All orders for artistic works were sent to the SFVA and the artistic committees within the SFVA for each medium (three-dimensional art, painting, the applied arts and later on also for graphic design) judged all the projects. In each committee there were artists, architects, art historians and members of political organizations and they examined the proposals in terms of their artistic and ideological quality. The SFVA raised money for the artwork, paid for the materials and all the organizational fees, distributed salaries to artists and received 10 percent of the value of the piece to cover its costs.

The pressure to exert ideological control was strongest in the 1950s, later all those involved tried to find a way around the strict rules. In fact, each case was unique—everything always depended on the individual people and their personal attitudes. Each committee had to declare that the artwork had been created in agreement with the cultural policy of the Communist state and in the style of socialist realism. In the 1970s and 1980s in many cases these were just empty words, and did not reflect actual practice. Of course, important orders from the government or the Party were under the direct control of the Ideological Committee of the Ministry of Culture. This supervision meant that all the memorials constructed in the 1970s and 1980s were conservative, despite some artists attempting to avoid the official style.

Changes over time

Forms of monumental art changed in line with the political situation of the time. The strongest need for monumental art with a political message was in the 1950s when the Communist party needed to legitimate its absolute power. The most important kind of artwork in this period was a war memorial. These monuments were dedicated to the memory of soldiers who had lost their lives during the war, especially in the Slovak National Uprising, or to Russian soldiers, and on rare occasions to the civilian victims of battles. The main function of these monuments was to underline the role of the Communist party in the fight against the Nazis and to celebrate the Communist hero, a partisan. The basic composition of these monuments was an architectural base with a statue or a relief placed upon it, the form was inspired by historical shapes like pylons or different pyramidal forms, and the sculptural forms were rather conservative, dominated by socialist realism.

In the1950s, some artworks were also displayed in civic buildings. Themes used for this purpose included celebrating the new modern family and a peaceful life. All the different

forms used were created using traditional techniques—statues and reliefs, and sgraffitos, mosaics and vitrages. In the first half of the 1950s all works were figurative, in the style of socialist realism, but by the beginning of the 1960s some stylizations and abstractions had begun to appear. The younger generation of artists looked for other means of expressing their ideas and with the slow process of liberalization in cultural policy, sculptures created using geometrical abstraction, new figurative, and modernist and stylized forms were mounted in the streets and buildings. This shift was also evident in the production of war memorials—the classical bases, with a statue or relief were slowly abandoned.

But this period of relative freedom was short. At the beginning of the 1970s, when normalization began, many of the projects that had been launched at the end of the1960s were still in progress. Thus innovative forms did not disappear all at once and the renaissance of socialist realism as the official style was not absolute. Nevertheless, realistic forms were of course demanded for very important monuments, located mostly in city centres and in government or party buildings. In the 1970s some of the works from the 1960s were destroyed for being too formalistic and inappropriate for public spaces.

In the 1970s and 1980s, construction and reconstruction work on buildings led to a high demand for artistic work in architecture as "culture houses", cinemas, wedding halls and funeral parlours were constructed in villages across the country. It was in the countryside, in local areas, where many of the avant-garde, abstract or contemporary non-regressive forms were able to survive, hidden from the eye of the censors.

It is generally agreed that monumental art is rather dull. But in the 1970s and 1980s there was a plurality of artistic forms in the architectural space of Czechoslovakia. The diversity was absolute—there were works in the style of socialist realism, modified and stylized realism, stylized modernist forms, various forms of abstraction, innovative and creative solutions in the style of pop art, op-art, kinetic art, etc. Of course, the mainstream dominated—e.g. different forms of modernist stylization, especially cubist forms, which appeared in the late 1950s, were very popular till the end of the 1980s as the decorative style of the "official artists". The illustrative style of socialist realism appeared sporadically, but there was less pathos and sentiment in the expressions of figures, and some kinds of stylization, at least in the silhouettes of figures.

This plurality of styles was the result of a range of demands on art, different opportunities for displaying artistic works in a variety of buildings and, particularly, in different locations. This depended on the members of the relevant committee and their ability to justify their positions regarding each case discussed. For this reason in some areas we find ideological realistic pieces and new forms of artistic expression in others, all from the same time period.

This diversity was not only a consequence of the variety of artistic personalities, but in many cases there was a kind of schizophrenia amongst the artists. Many artists were able to create any artistic work, depending on what the investors ordered and on local political conditions. Some of them created progressive abstract works and regressive realistic figures at the same time for different locations.

But there were also artists with their own artistic programme and style, personalities who tried to stick to their own way of expressing their ideas. In these cases we can find rare and interesting solutions to artistic problems and a correspondence between free art and the monumental artworks of an artist—these have tended to be of high artistic quality.

In the 1970s there was an increase in design for public spaces, because new public spaces, especially interiors demanded particular kinds of furniture and fittings. The interior walls were intended as surfaces for artworks and most of them qualify as interdisciplinary works, lying somewhere between art and design. Some of them used motifs appropriate to their investor, so they can be seen as a kind of logo or branding. The same is true of special walls within interiors, which divided the space—they are free artworks and interior design items at the same time. Designer lamps and lighting systems were also very popular and they represent the most interesting design pieces from this period.

Artists also produced typography, pictograms, navigation systems and signs for the interiors and exteriors of buildings; outside there were fountains and children's playgrounds, which were created by artists as original projects for different places, and lie somewhere between sculptural or spatial art and design. Design products were the projects of free artists, often by "non-official" artists who took this as an opportunity to express their ideas.

Today, the monumental art from the socialist period is regarded as a not very interesting consequence of official state cultural policy and this attitude has led to the destruction of many works, either because of their supposed ideological character or simply because they are perceived as being passé. Many monumental artworks were created by good artists and are the results of their own individual style, but since monumental artworks do not have the status of historic monuments or legislative support for their preservation, they are often destroyed, barley noticed by the public, and regardless of the rights of the author.

A sad conclusion: art in public spaces and its political (dis)use after 1989

After 1989, with the end of the Communist regime, art lost its privileged status due to changes in cultural policy. The Communist regime saw art as a means of representing its ideas and the new politicians wanted to dissociate themselves entirely from anything to do with the past. Unfortunately, they rejected official art altogether and its support system, but did not create an alternative system. Since 1989 there has been no official cultural politics with a clear sense of direction; there are no visions. Any artistic manifestation of culture occurs mostly by chance or is dependent on the personal aims of politicians.

Visual art occupies the weakest position of all artistic production and its audience is very small, since a basic knowledge of the art and the ability to interpret it is required. As there is no education in schools which would provide an understanding of visual art, there are few new customers amongst the younger generation and only a few art galleries try to compensate for the lack of art history education by having their own programmes.

In many countries art is perceived as an integral part of state cultural policy. For example, the French government disseminates French culture and visual art through French cultural institutes across the whole world; its art represents the country abroad. But in Slovakia politicians seem not to understand this process at all. There are also no laws which might stimulate art production and raise interest amongst the public and potential patrons. Although in other countries there are tax benefits which encourage patrons to invest in art, in Slovakia no such legislation has been introduced in the last twenty years. In France, Germany, Holland and other countries there are laws about art in public architecture. In Slovakia, this law was abolished in 1990, because it was seen as a relic of the Communist regime, but no alternative was created.

Figure 4: “Gate to freedom” by P. Meszároš, Bratislava, Slovakia, 2005.

Without rules, only anarchy exists. Local politicians make unilateral decisions on art in public spaces—art in public spaces is not examined by professionals and it simply appears suddenly (see also Hushégyi 2008). Sometimes professionals (art historians, art theorists, etc.) protest, but they are ignored, because apparently they do not represent the majority of the public. The low level of art history education amongst the general public means that mostly artworks of low quality are accepted, and as the politicians go along with people’s tastes, their gestures are not aimed at reviving and supporting culture, but at attracting more votes in the next elections.

This situation is very common in local politics, but it affects the capital, too. In the last few years, Bratislava has become crowded with kitsch sculptures of very low artistic quality, mostly there to attract tourists. They simply love them, but the artworks do not rise above the level of Disneyland attractions, and have no real value or message.

In the last twenty years, no real monument has been built in any central public space in the capital. Bratislava has no monument to the victims of Communism and no monument to the Velvet Revolution (the peaceful end of Communism in Czechoslovakia). There is only one monument of high artistic quality and with a clear political message—on the outskirts of Bratislava—a monument to the people shot dead trying to cross the Iron Curtain to Austria during the Communist regime (see Figure 4). We interpret this situation in the sense that the Slovak society is apparently not prepared to examine its recent history, nor the ideas on which it is now based.

This absence of cultural politics and visions is visible throughout the country. Some local politicians support art in public places, but mostly just to support their own political ideas.

For example in the last few years, many statues dedicated to nineteenth and early twentieth century Slovak politicians have been built around Žilina (a city in the north of Slovakia known also for its high percentage of nationalist voters). This could be interpreted as an attempt to educate and to revive the political and historical memory and pride of the local inhabitants in a broader sense, but in fact, we are convinced that these statues simply reflect the very narrow and elitist nationalist politics of the former mayor of Žilina, Jan Slota, the leader of the Slovak National Party. Furthermore, all these new statues were designed by Jozef Berak, who created most of Communist monuments in the region before 1989 and whose work is considered to be of poor artistic quality.

The political use of monuments is also evident in the capital, Bratislava; the controversial statue of Svätopluk in front of Bratislava castle mentioned earlier being an example. Again, the commissioner of the artwork, the then Prime Minister, Robert Fico, was accused of trying to cast his simplistic ideas about the past literally in stone. These ideas relate to the history of what is now Slovak territory (from the fifth to the tenth century) on which there is no consensus amongst historians—Fico's version aims to bolster the more nationalist account, and in this way attract voters who identify with such political views. Furthermore, since 1989, the author, Jan Kulich, a renowned sculptor during the Communist era, has been ignored by art professionals, because he collaborated openly with the Communist regime, both as an artist and in public life. Although his early works from the 1960s are interesting in their conservative character, his later works are considered sentimental and descriptive.

In general, the commission and public display of the statue was the private decision of the Prime Minister and a manifestation of his arrogant power. The heated public discussion, which ensued immediately after the statue was unveiled, provoked much debate as to levels of knowledge of the facts concerning the history of the Slovak nation, and about ascribing meaning to a handful of facts in order to construct particular versions of the past as well as about the use of history for political reasons, but it also pointed to another problem in Slovak society.

Slovaks apparently have no clear ideas about which time periods, which personalities and which events are important to them and worthy of being commemorated by art. This idea has already been raised from a socio-psychological, sociological and historical point of view, when the Slovaks were described as a nation with a blurred identity and missing anchor points[4] (e.g. Krekovičová 2005). It seems there is almost no subject or theme the whole of society might have clear positive emotions towards and could identify with. For instance, the public's attitude towards the Communist totalitarian regime and its victims should be clear and united, but it seems that politicians purposefully employ less unequivocal themes, which are important only to them and their narrow political aims.

[4] Being a typical example of a small central-eastern European nation, what is now Slovakia was until 1918 part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire with all the imaginable consequences for Slovak identity. It then became part of the democratic Czechoslovak Republic, and during the Second World War was ostensibly an "independent" state but was in reality dependent on its Nazi protectors. After the war it again became part of the Czechoslovak Republic, only this time round it was socialist and only since 1993 has it been a state of its own.

In contrast to the majority society, which has no clear ideas as to its values and consequently does not know what artistic works should be created to represent its views about itself, there is a group of Slovak citizens with much clearer ideas. Gabor Hushégyi, a Slovak art historian of ethnic Hungarian origin mapped all the monuments that were installed in public spaces in 600 municipalities in the south of Slovakia after 1989 for a museum exhibition (Hushégyi 2011)[5]. The south of Slovakia is an ethnically mixed territory where the Hungarian minority lives—this minority comprises around 10 percent of the population, but as they live mostly in this part of the state, they form a majority in some municipalities. Gabor Hushégyi observes that the local politicians apparently encourage new artistic works on a large scale—he has documented more than 2500 new monuments. They are large and small, of varied genres and artistic expressions, some are of high artistic quality, some are very simplistic kitsch, some were created by amateurs, and others by official artists. The themes used, he cautions, are those that are important only to the Hungarian minority and some of the works are even openly nationalist e.g. referring to the Treaty of Trianon[6]. The situation is made even more complicated by the coexistence of at least two quite opposing concepts of territorial history (*ibid.*). Of course, artworks referring to either of these historical canons have the capacity to inflame the other side. As there have already been several public scandals in this region, where monuments in public spaces have been accused of having nationalistic undertones, he warns that when monuments are used to mark a territory symbolically, as is the case here, they tend to divide the population along ethnic lines in reality as well. Thus the monuments he has mapped mostly document national exclusion and the division between the majority and minority. Sadly there seem to be no monuments referring to the important turning points in history that could be shared by both the Slovak and Hungarian populations of the territory, for instance, the fall of Communism in 1989 or the invasion of 1968, and in general there are no monuments where Slovaks and Hungarians can meet peacefully.

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[5] See a video with his own explanations on the findings (in Slovak) and a written English version of his presentation at http://artycok.tv/lang/cs-cz/7525/znaky-v-priestore-%E2%80%93-nase-nove-monumentysymbols-in-space-%E2%80%93-our-new-monuments

[6] As a consequence of the Treaty of Trianon, at the end of the First World War the Hungarian part of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire lost the majority of its territory, including almost the whole of what is now Slovakia, a large section of current Romania and a small part of the current territory of Austria. Evoking the Trianon theme generally involves an implicit (and sometimes explicit) claim to all the lost lands.

in Slovakia. Video document about the exhibition available at http://artycok.tv/lang/cs-cz/7525/znaky-v-priestore-%E2%80%93-nase-nove-monume.

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