

ústí nad labem house of arts  
faculty of art and design  
at jan evangelista purkyně university



## Csaba Nemes Fall in...

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Curator:  
Michal Koleček

Exhibition Opening  
14/12 at 6 pm  
Ústí nad Labem  
House of Arts

Open  
TUE–SAT  
10 am–6 pm  
Free entry every  
Wednesday.

## Csaba Nemes Fall in...

The Hungarian artist Csaba Nemes (1966) has been dealing with the medium of painting and he focuses especially on various visualization principles and technical and aesthetic approaches. His main goal is to explore new possible ways of communication between a traditional hanging picture and the current political and social context.

Csaba Nemes belongs to the middle generation of Hungarian artists that is currently going through a deep disillusionment with the present social development. After the successful first decade full of excitement after the disintegration of the totalitarian system all over the Central Europe, a number of Hungarian authors and curators won recognition in the international institutional environment and, mainly after 2000, started to positively form the national cultural milieu. This development was abruptly interrupted by the economic depression in 2008, the effect of which was intensified in Hungary by the crisis of the banking segment, especially the credit sector, and the devaluation of the national currency – forint. As a consequence of the economic slump, among others, the nationalistic tendencies arose and so the FIDESZ party of the populist leader Viktor Orbán won the elections repeatedly. Under the leadership of such person and through many constitutional changes and amendments, the Hungarian political system is gradually transforming into an illiberal democracy in which the power is centralized and the human rights and civil initiatives are eroded. Political processes are accompanied by attempts to seize control over the cultural institutions; this is reflected in the sharp change in the official cultural politics and as a result, the works of the authentic topical art are being dislodged from the official institutions into the grey area of non-profit independent organizations that defy the regime. The only sector that is still capable of opposing the Orbánian regime, even though with limited efficacy, is the academia. Even here, however, one can see the attempts for permanent emasculation, fragmentation and finally takeover of this sector.

It is essential to perceive the series of paintings and drawings presented as a part of the exhibition **FALL IN...** in the Ústí nad Labem House of Arts into a broader perspective – the current situation of Hungary. The main accent is put on the latest works of Csaba Nemes; these are put into perspective by his previous works in several lines, though. What connects the individual themes are the overlapping intimate digressions, a kind of subjective reconnaissance of the author's immediate, often family surrounding and the participating, though profoundly critical, visual interpretations of destructive social processes, with an emphasis put on their manifestation in the public space.

The beginning of this painful journey of self-examination is captured in several works from the vast series **Father's Name: Csaba Nemes** the theme of which goes thematically back to the time of author's childhood spent in the country in the 1970s in Hungary. Scenes, often set on large canvas, almost factually depict the rural life in the then Hungary, indoctrinated by the communist ideology, as well as the effort to modernize the life in such remote agricultural areas. At the same time, however, Csaba Nemes integrates these historical sequences into the current discourse of economic and political crisis that occurred at the end of the first decade of the new millennium and finds the connections between the onset of the Great Hungarian nationalism back then and the current processes undermining the very principles of democratic society. The coherence of the exhibition collection is ensured by the presentation of works from series that were created between 2012 and 2014 and reflected the changes in public space, often directly affected by the onset of the Orbánian political regime (**Evening Demonstration**, 2013). The disturbing pictures of anti-regime protests are accompanied by drawings illustrating the newly emerging spaces and organizations in which, on the boundary of legality, the representatives of independent culture, marginalised by the society, and non-profit organizations unite (**Utopia Ruin Pub**, 2011-2013).

The focal point of the exhibition presentation of Csaba Nemes in the Ústí nad Labem House of Arts is the series created in the last two years (2015-2016) the focus of which is put on the reflection on the events connected with the migrant crisis. The hysterical reaction of the essential part of the Hungarian society and mainly Orbán's cabinet to the despair of the refugees trapped on the Hungarian territory fully revealed the xenophobic and totalitarian character of the local political regime. Csaba Nemes depicts the situation in the streets of Budapest (for instance **Making a Fresco**, 2015) or on the south border of Hungary (**Side Sectional View**, 2015-2016) in uneasy and expressive painting compositions in order to draw attention to the absurdity of the deadlock state policy and violence done on human beings hovering on the brink of death. This analysis of the denial of ethical principles initiated by the regime reaches its peak in the series of drawings called **In the Footsteps of Henry Moore** from 2016. These drawings interpret Moore's famous sketches from the wartime London tube and project wandering groups of refugees or local homeless people on the declining urban structure of Budapest, devastated by the deep crisis of local economy as well as its own identity.

A series of paintings of collapsing churches that also gave the title to the exhibition (**Fall**, 2016) represents the metaphorical closure of the author's subjective report on the twilight of our dreams and illusions about the world order, opened to the polyphony of voices of all the participants. It is obvious that the author raises an acute question concerning the basis of our culture and the destructive processes that endanger and arise, paradoxically, more from our failures and doubts than from the surroundings.

Face to face with the paintings of Csaba Nemes, it is more than obvious that the situation in Central Europe is, already for a long time, heading towards a deep crisis. Such situation brings the danger of the return of non-democratic social trends and political procedures infamous from the totalitarian time. To mention some of the significant demonstrations representing such neo-totalitarian tendencies, let's take for instance the anti-Islamic movement Pegida in Dresden, the Czech "pro-Putin" president Miloš Zeman, the steps of the new Polish cabinet controlled by the Law and Justice Party restricting democracy, the xenophobic extremely right-wing People's Party – Our Slovakia of Marian Kotleba sitting in the Slovakian parliament and of course the authoritative regime under the leadership of Viktor Orbán's FIDESZ in Hungary mentioned above. Culture and mainly art has the ability to face the negative social processes, name them and maybe at least partially weaken the destructive impact. Yet other options are presented: to maintain one's dignity, faith towards future and cautious joy spurting from the awareness of the beauty resisting the unkindness of the world even through the hard times.

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