

In Memory of Andrew Fekete

Liz Fekete

Text of speech made at the Szekesfehervar exhibition, Magyar Király Hotel, Székesfehérvár Saturday, 7th September, 2013.

Andrew died in 1986. So why an exhibition now? Twenty-seven years is a long gestation and if this exhibition was a baby, it would have been a very hard labour and the midwives would have cause for serious concern!

And it's not as though we didn't want this baby - we promised that to Andrew - it's just that it was a problem baby, and it needed a lot of coaxing.

Andrew's untimely death, aged just 32, was a hard blow. There is, as the Bible says, a time for everything under heaven, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance. All things in life are a matter of timing. Nothing should be forced.

Today, is the right time to begin the process of celebrating Andrew's art. Paintings that once made us sad when we looked at them, and made us feel heavy inside, now make us feel immensely proud and bring much happiness. For as Lady Julia Carter the Patron of the Andrew Fekete Retrospective reminds us:

'That Andrew's personal story is painful and tragic should not detract from our admiration of the beauty of what he achieved.

Yes, we always wanted to be parents to this exhibition. But like all loving parents, we needed to find the right home for our newborn. We found that place today, thanks to Ari Kupsus.

In order to explain why this venue is one hundred per cent Andrew, let me tell you a little bit about his roots and the soil in which his talent was nurtured.

Andrew as the first born of my parents, Andrew and Elizabeth, who were Hungarians displaced by the ravages of the second world war, both of whom were eventually resettled in the UK, where they met, married and started a family. In those days, there was no safety net, and my parents, like the Hungarian diaspora scattered all over Europe, Canada and the US had to start their lives all over again, from scratch, taking any work that was available, learning a new language, pooling together to make ends meet. These economic hardships and the need to provide security for their rapidly expanding family, meant that they had no time to develop their own talents - my mother was a gifted artist in her own right, and my father had a keen interest in politics and history, and would have loved to have been a writer.

But while our initial background was one of economic hardship, it was also one of cultural riches and a pot pourri of cultural references. While we were anchored in London, our imagination often drifted elsewhere, to Budapest, Transylvania, Cluj/Kolozsvár, Salzburg and Vienna. We were schooled in and very much part of the culture of central Europe. The paintings of Renoir, Picasso, Pissarro hung on our walls. We listened to Rimsky-Korsakov's Scheherazade and Firebird suite, Liszt and Kodaly's Háy János was a firm family favourite, for obvious reasons, as our parents were story-loving people from a culture which still had an oral tradition.

Peter asked me to share some memories about Andrew, to tell you what he was like as a brother and as a young adult.

Andrew was five years older than me, and four years older than Peter, and that's a huge difference when you are a little child. I remember Andrew then as the one who made things happen, who organised outings. We never felt that we missed out on holidays abroad, because Andrew would gather us siblings up, and take us on the bus, up to London for the day for sight-seeing and visiting exhibitions. One thing that the exhibition does not cover is Andrew's architectural drawings. Because Andrew was not just an artist, he was also an architect, and a draftsman, and the two were in conflict and unison.

One of my clearest memories - I must have been about five - was Andrew taking Peter to a quiet London square, close to the river Thames and the Houses of Parliament. In the middle - a huge imposing church, considered a masterpiece of English Baroque architecture. Andrew sat down took out his pencil and paper and started to draw the church. He brushed us aside, and told us to entertain ourselves. We took to just running and running around the church, and I thought it was immensely funny, to run around in circles becoming dizzier and dizzier, But dizziness and laughter were combined with a sensation of awe. Each time I made a circle, and popped my head over Andrew's shoulder the drawing had achieved a greater complexity. The building had been captured and transposed to paper. I just couldn't believe that was humanly possible and I wondered if my brother had secret magic powers. I felt doubly-dizzy!

On another of these trips, Andrew decided to take us to see an example of more classical architecture in the Georgian style - I think it was a square somewhere behind Oxford Street. We stood outside one particular house for so long that the owner, who had been staring at us through the window, came out and invited these three little urchins in. He proceeded to give us a tour of the house.

For a long time I didn't want to read Andrew's diaries. It wasn't easy growing up alongside someone like Andrew, who experienced visions, painted in trances, experimented with the reality function, treated his brother and sister as his public, his audience. But you know I read the diaries now and they make me laugh, particularly when he speaks of himself as a

'man of great practical common sense and balance'. He doesn't intend to be funny, but it's the earnestness and self-contemplation of youth, and it is very funny in retrospect.

Andrew loved stylish clothes, and he wanted to own only beautiful things. He seldom had enough money, and he wasn't adverse to looking in my purse, and Peter's, and mothers', Uncle Andrew's, anyone's, in fact he wasn't that fussy. For if Andrew devoted himself to art, he expected the rest of his relations to devote themselves to Andrew. He was a twentieth-century man who would have been at home in a nineteenth century cafe-cosmopolitan culture, a *flaneur*, a dandy, a stroller, who would have liked to be assured of an income without having to work. At yet at the , same time, and here was the contradiction, he worked immensely hard - sometimes he literally wouldn't sleep for days, just working continuously on paintings that seemed to pour out of him. In his late twenties, he was employed as a designer architect on several prestigious projects. He got close to his goal of professional acclaim - but every time he got close, he pulled back - the 'unravelling force' of his imagination demanded that he go deeper to explore, in his own words the 'panoramic force' which was his unconscious.

Andrew was both a culturally conservative and culturally radical, at one and the same time - a bundle of contradictions. He was a cultural conservative in the sense that he wanted to conserve tradition and the authority of the past - because he loved the past, the 'form and the structure' handed down by our ancestors which he saw embodied in beautiful buildings, in architecture.

Memories, more than anything, my memories of Andrew are material. When I get the opportunity to travel, when I am in a new city and walking around, it comes like a lightning bolt - the realisation that I'm not looking at some beautiful building with my eyes, but with Andrew's eyes. Andrew lives on in me, just as our father, who sadly passed away nearly three years ago, lives on in Kirsti, the second wife he found in Finland and in their daughter Kriistina, *our* sister, another gifted artist who today represent the Finnish roots of this family. English, Finnish, Hungarian, Indian - a family with roots in Hungary but offshoots everywhere! More the United Nations, than the Feketes!

Andrew was also a cultural radical, in that he wanted to innovate, improvise in much the way jazz improvises. He describes in his diaries how his paintings 'burst upon me in a completely spontaneous way'. This is something very close to music, or poetry, what he called 'lyrical abstract expressionism'. On each canvas he sought to capture the 'impalpable, transparent wall'¹ of his consciousness, and the images, symbols, metaphors and archetypes that lay deep in the forest of his unconscious, are woven into his paintings, as lyrics are to song.

If Andrew had lived, who knows how his contradictions would have unravelled, and in which direction he would have moved. What is on display today is the fine art of a young adult, works which for me display what the Germans call *innigkeit* (inwardness, introversion). It's an introversion that belongs to youth, that intensely often lonely period of self-discovery and self-contemplation, the painfulness and rawness of which we as adults forget.

Andrew, aged 32, died as a young adult, vulnerable, fragile and exposed at the 'sudden opening at the threshold to other worlds'.

It only remains to thank Peter for taking Andrew's work across another threshold - into the public arena, and into your consciousness. Now, Andrew has the audience he always craved. Given Peter's enormous talents, curating this exhibition was an act of brotherly love and devotion that I believe should be celebrated in its own right.

¹ 'Self-discovery is above all the realization that we are alone: it is the opening of an impalpable, transparent wall - that of our consciousness - between the world and ourselves'. Octavio Paz, 'The Labyrinth of Solitude', Penguin Books, 1985, p.9