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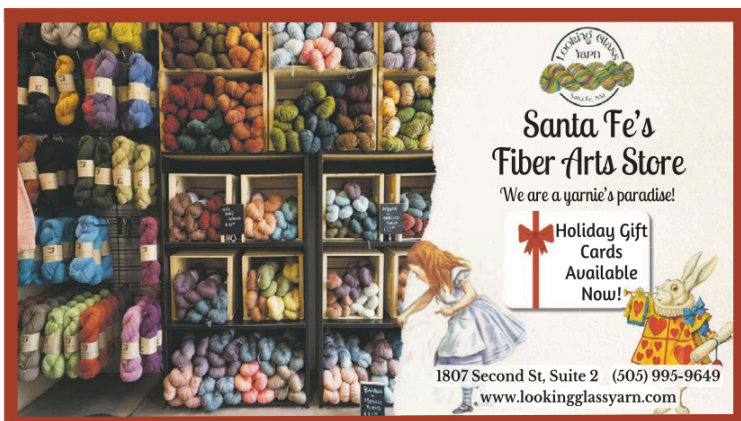
Katherine Meyer
"Fire Break"
Charcoal on paper (46" x 36")



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EDITOR'S NOTE

Beware the Glögg

I have a knack for living in countries (or regions) with extremist governments, or corrupt leaders, or psychopath and sociopath leaders, or all of the above. India with Narendra Modi. Hong Kong with Beijing's puppet, Carrie Lam. Poland with its own Soviet puppet and Soviet GRU agent, Wojciech Jaruzelski (although in my defense, I didn't have a say in where I was to be born). Italy with Silvio Berlusconi. Even French Canada (Québec) with Premier Jacques Parizeau and his nationalist party packed with xenophobia and anti-immigration slander.

And I have a knack for hanging out in other such countries, like in Zimbabwe under Robert Mugabe's rule of fear and death. (Read Peter Godwin's *The Fear*)

Which reminds me of that time I moved to Hungary and discovered two things: Christmas Markets and Viktor Orbán.

During my first three years in Budapest, I lived in a 19th-century building, a block from the Grand Boulevard (Teréz körút) and across from Nyugati Pályaudvar, the Western Train Station, an 1877 marvel built by the Gustave Eiffel Company. My building was 15 minutes on foot from the Museum of Terror where you could take selfies with tanks from the 1956 revolution and hear victims of torture tell their stories. It was also on the border with the 5th district, part of which is known as the Jewish Ghetto.

The Danube and its Margit Sziget (island) were a 10-minute walk away in the other direction, and the Hungarian parliament, a sight for sore eyes, a few more blocks from Margit Hid (bridge) down the riverfront.

It's near the parliament that the capital's most famous Christmas Market opens every late November, on Vörösmarty Tér, and runs until after the holidays. It's also where I downed my first glögg wine from a souvenir cup and where I bought a few (tipsy) moments later, that first Christmas in Hungary — and despite still struggling financially after having lived through Zambia's high inflation era — a large, heavy (yet portable) puppet theater from an artisan who had traveled from Lake Balaton.

I did not need and had no space for the theater, but I dragged it anyway in a bit of a haze back home on the subway, only to emerge onto the plaza next to my building and come face to face with a line of skinheads and a row of police officers between them and a small group of Orthodox Jews who hoped to light candles on a large, also portable, menorah.

Skinheads in Europe, but also elsewhere, are a bit like politicized storm troopers who've been recruited by neo-Nazi organizations (and political parties) to cause mayhem. They were there at that time, on the tiny Nyugati Tér some 100 yards from my building's entrance, to scare members of the local Jewish community who had taken to using the small plaza to celebrate religious holidays like Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur and Passover. And now Hanukkah.

That evening, with my wooden puppet theater weighing on my arms, which now sounds like a bad metaphor, I saw for the first time the beginning of what would become Viktor Orbán's own Hungary: a place of fear, of hatred, of fewer universities, of government-run media.

The same Orbán who is buddies with president-elect Donald Trump. Which reminds me of the time I moved to America from Hong Kong in 2019 and hoped that this move would be different.

And what became of the puppet theater, as I navigated strange politics and ultimately left Hungary? I donated it to a nonprofit for kids.



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