

*Film Text: Group Portrait with Explosives*

*Group Portrait with Explosives* connects the former nation of Czechoslovakia with South Armagh in Northern Ireland. Though not areas that one would normally associate with one another, through the vagaries of industrial manufacturing and international trade an inperceptable link was developed between the two.

Czechoslovakia came into being in 1918 when the country declared itself independent from the collapsing Austro-Hungarian Empire. Containing 80% of the industry of the Empire, the new country was built on a strong industrialised economic base. After generating profit from the mass production and export of weapons, Zbrojovka Brno, the former Austro-Hungarian artillery, moved into other forms of industrial production, such as cars, typewriters, aircraft engines and tractors. The Czechoslovak company Synthesia developed the plastic Semtex in the late 1950's, Hugely successful, it went into mass production in 1964.

South Armagh is located just north of the border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State that was drawn in 1922. A rural area, agriculture is the primary economic source in the region. It became notorious for it's violent resistance to the British presence in Northern Ireland throughout what became known as the Troubles. With the installment of numerous watch towers and cameras, by the early 1990s South Armagh had become one of the most heavily monitored parts of the world. It was the most dangerous place for a British soldier to be until British forces entered Afghanistan as part of Operation Enduring Freedom on October 7th, 2001.

With the development of cheap, lightweight tractors, Czechoslovak tractors began to appear in South Armagh in the early 1960's and radically altered farming in the region. By the early 1970's, as the Civil Rights movement collapsed into open conflict between the Provisional IRA and the occupying British forces, Czechoslovak weapons, and later Semtex, were also exported to the region and had a significant impact on events thereafter.

*Group Portrait with Explosives* ruminates on the historico-political narratives of these two places alongside personal recollections of South Armagh in the late 1970's and early 1980's where the artist spent much time in childhood.