

Hungarian University of Fine Arts

Doctoral School

Moves in the Field

The Formation of the Artistic Orientations and Career Strategies
of Hungarian Generation Y Artists

DLA Dissertation

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Theses

1. The paradigm shift observable in the Hungarian art field since the mid-2010s coincided with the generational transition from Generation X to Generation Y. The turn away from the previously dominant conceptual orientation unfolded in parallel with the entry of a new generation of artists into the field, whose conception of art and career strategies developed along trajectories distinct from those of the preceding generation. For this reason, a complex art-sociological approach that moves beyond generational clichés provides an appropriate framework for examining the processes underlying this shift.
2. The paradigm shift can be understood through a broader chronological analysis of the field, tracing, along a generational continuum, the historical, social, and cultural-political processes that shaped the environment of professional socialisation for Hungarian Generation Y artists, as well as the internal dynamics of the art field that evolved in interaction with these processes. These dynamics were significantly shaped by the degree of autonomy and the range of resources within the field in a given period, the changing forms of symbolic capital, and the ways in which successive generations related to them.
3. The professional socialisation of Generation Y coincided with a major social, cultural-political, and institutional restructuring that destabilised the relative autonomy of the field. Interventions by a cultural policy seeking hegemony reinforced the symbolic capital attached to a position of “system opposition” inherited from previous generations. The resulting transformation of the field thus simultaneously displayed similarities to the centralised cultural governance of state socialism and incorporated neoliberal modes of operation, partly as a consequence of the boycott strategy that emerged in response.
4. This crisis fundamentally shaped the professional socialisation of Generation Y. Those members of the generation who were receptive to it adopted both the boycott strategy of Generation X and its conception of art as endowed with a social function, thereby further reinforcing the dominance of activist, politically engaged, and socially reflexive practices. At the same time, the crisis produced a dual process of selection, operating both through conformity to the dominant conception of art and through the ability to remain professionally active within the field.

5. Two dominant responses emerged to the neo-conceptual paradigm that had shaped the generation's professional socialisation. At one pole of artistic strategies, the conceptual dimension became increasingly concentrated, typically being absorbed into long-term, research-based artistic projects involving sustained engagement with a particular subject. At the other, meaning underwent a process of dissolution and transformation, retreating into deeper layers of the work and giving rise to atmospheric practices grounded in visuality and sensory experience.

6. The growing influence of the market, art management, and social media introduced new heteronomous forces into the field, further polarising its modes of operation. For artists, this increasingly became a difficult balancing act between maintaining a critical distance from cultural politics and pursuing market success without fully subordinating autonomous artistic criteria to it. In adapting to these conditions, Generation Y assumed a mediating role between the neo-conceptual-critical paradigm and the more form-oriented, platformised, and market-oriented modes of artistic operation that had emerged by the 2020s.

7. A distinctive feature of this generation is that, relatively early in its trajectory, while its position within the field was still actively taking shape, it became the object of multiple attempts at canonisation informed by both autonomous and heteronomous criteria. The legitimacy of these attempts generated conflicts within the field. Which of them will ultimately prove relevant and enduring—and whether Generation Y artists will be canonised along these lines at all—remains an open question, one that may only become clearer through the refractive perspective of the subsequent generation. The definitive contours of a generation are, after all, always drawn by posterity.