Abstract

From the Euphoria of the Change of Political Regime to Today’s Reality:

Contemporary Hungarian Art Dealing, by way of the experience of artists, gallerists and collectors

This dissertation examines the workings of the Hungarian contemporary art trade, through interviews made with artists, gallerists and art collectors, from the era of political change in Hungary up to the present day. This work is an attempt to reveal the historical, social, economic causes, as well as those of national character and those typical of practice in Hungary, which impede a more effective functioning of the art market in Hungary. The primary question of this research is whether, since the era of political change in Hungary, when the first private galleries appeared in Hungary, a change occurred within the collaboration of artists – galleries – collectors.

The author of the dissertation – as the director of a private contemporary art exhibition space, as well as the caretaker of a contemporary art collection of more than 1000 pieces – herself plays a role on the Hungarian contemporary art scene; nevertheless, she does not play a role in art dealing.

The method of research was observation of the participants and analysis of the discourse, which was based on the structured interviews by the researcher with fourteen artists, the directors of nine commercial galleries, seven art collectors, and the director of (the art fair) Art Market Budapest.

The researcher selected her primary interview subjects from among the artists whose careers she followed closely for many years, and for whom she had organised multiple exhibitions and worked with on large-scale art projects. Within these circles, she also selected her interview subjects so that they offered the greatest spectrum of representation – in terms of gender, age, nationality, and current place of residence: among them, there are Hungarian minorities from outside the borders of Hungary, those who live in Budapest and the countryside, men and women, of a wide range of ages. As a consequence of collaborations spanning the course of many years, a longitudinal examination was also possible: did the viewpoints of the subjects with respect to the given questions change over time? Another large grouping of interviews was made with the directors of the galleries that had previously represented or currently represent the artist subjects. The selection of art collectors also was made via the artists, so that the work of the artist subjects was strongly represented in their collections.

The research reconfirms the hypothesis that that artist – gallery – collector triangle, within the free market system that has developed over the course of the twenty-five years that have passed since the political changes, has not been able to become fully functional. The art scene is not characterised by transparency, and the players often ignore the opinions of others, all of which can be traced back to socio-economic causes, and those related to national character, education and cultural politics. The state institutional system and support structure distort the market and competition. As a summary of experience, the political changes can be finally implemented within the contemporary art market by way of opening up internationally, and through successful representation abroad and those experiences.