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**The question of gender identity in the modern Hungarian female
arts**

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The previously neglected areas of cultural arts and the arts dealing with the social role of the genders may have become the pillars of thinking at the end of the 20th century in the human sciences because civilisation had reached one of its deepest crises as a result of the elimination of the thousands of years long system of values of man and his surroundings. The previously silenced or despised female possibilities surfaced as alternative options in a civilisation dominated and organised by the males. A gender-based analysis of the history of the civilisation started in the course of which it was realised that the 'patriarchal culture' had downgraded the female values (*Luce Irigaray*), thus eliminating the knowledge and importance of the origins of the relationship of man and the world and allowing for the feeling of homelessness, deviation, the loss of the meaning of life, mechanisms alien to life which endangered many people and such artificial life that does not understand the complexity of life and its intricate connections.

The scientists dealing with this question come from such English and French-speaking countries, which differentiate between the male and female sex and understand the issues of the world as those bearing gender or neutral. They analyse language as one of the subareas of culture for which reason they see the deconstruction of language as one of the means to the female gender more and the reveal the new values of the female experience, reality and world. The Hungarian language is emancipated in this respect. The social traditions do not point to a subordination of the female values either. Their change can be linked to the more extensive and fast-paced social changes of the 19th century, urbanisation, embourgeoisement and the increased role of the public. According to *Griselda Pollock* this had happened the same way everywhere else. My dissertation also talks about how the role of women was outlined in the arts at the turn of the last century with the strengthening of the question of gender roles. An egalitarian view had developed by the end of the century in artistic life as a result of the inapplicability of traditions and the lost balance of the traditional role of genders in society. Women appeared in art schools and colonies of artists were founded. Based on equal abilities and possibilities alternative microsocieties were founded on the specificities of the creative process instead of the dissolved social, economic, cultural, religious and language communities. Art as an alternative to civilisation sometimes relied on patterns. Such types of society got selected out from culture and its history which had the type of a community and created and enlivened art. This was represented by the Gödöllő colony

of artists in Hungary from 1901. They created a new social tissue in the midst of the crisis of individualisation, and a society divided into classes and genders. Thanks to the main idea of their alternativity they did not think in contradicting terms such as matter and spirit, individual and society, man and woman, but they found a new, organic formation between them.

Just like their later avant-garde counterparts, avant-garde groups were formed by men even though without they lacked any hierarchy. Thanks to women developed the types of art connected to the foundation of the home including the planning and realisation of of industrial design and careful development of the children's environment. All this was in line with the universal changes happening in the arts, in which the value of female art increased from low to high art. Even if in the autonomous arts and oeuvres there were barely any female voices in the life-works, the picture of the woman was tinged in the art. Erotic, intellectually exciting women appeared in the classic branches for example in acts, portraits, conversation pieces or historical pieces, in natural connection with the so-called secession-style changes in the history of style in the pieces of *József Rippl-Rónai* and *István Csók*. Simultaneously the great previous topics of portaying women, the heroines who had changed the course of history with their individual female actions, noticeable in the works of *Soma Petrics*, *Viktor Madarász* and *Bertalan Székely*, disappeared. At the turn of the century the relationship of the woman and the world was established representatively beside the new way of the portayal of women.

Looking at the picturing of the woman in light of the communication between the sexes in the turn-of-the-centurty arts we are confronted with the questions of where the female artists had got stuck, why they had not broken through the invisible walls, why they had not turned into speaking, painting, drawing and modelling subjects from being only the subjects of art and why they had not made their views of the world public? Those female artists wo painted by the side of their husbands, in their families, who worked either in art groups or as individual industrial designers, were keen to show the outstanding women of the times, like *Ferenczné Pacska* or *Mária Undi* showed the actress *Mari Jászai*. They honoured independence, creative destiny and passion in these women, who, however, stood far from the bourgeois virtues, way of life and expectations and closer to the antique tragedies and the heroines of history, those who break laws and

subjugate the family ties to immense moral powers. The writings of *Laura Polányi and Rozina Mársits* highlight the roots of the differences between the genders and gender roles in the culture of the times, in the education system and the society ultimately. Therefore the turn-of-the-century female art can be viewed as the correlation of the universal, individual and the gender.

The biological differences between the genders and their resulting roles were represented not just as topics (*Csontváry*) but also in the creative process, effecting the existence of the works of art. This essentialism was not of hierarchical nature just like *Gulácsy's* feeling of hopelessness, which embraced both sexes and pointed to its origin and spring from culture and society. Nevertheless, Elza Kalmár does away with the cultural and social patterns and visualises the men and women, acts and portraits full of movement, tranquility and belief in life. Therefore the female experience might be highly important in eras, just like the 20th century, when existence itself is in crisis.

After the period of the 19th century when art schools functioned for shorter or longer periods, the government founded an exemplary drawing school and a school open to both sexes to educate teachers of art specialising in drawing in 1871. During the years the school acquired an increasing number of female students and the teaching methods also changed. The turn of the century saw equal possibilities for both men and women to become artists. The women's movements of the 20th century (*The Feminists' Society, 1904*) regarded this type of equal opportunity as a fundamental principle in the development of equal rights for women. Nonetheless, they did not deal much with the field of art since its legal, economic and social questions were tiny and special compared with the problems of the whole fair sex.

In my work I review through those changes within the arts and artistic life which were caused by the appearance of female artists and I will present their work from the aspect of gender identity. The changes include tinging the concept of art, the dissolution of the previous hierarchical view of classifying art, the spreading of subjective type of work, and the appearance of new topics, tools and solutions of art together with its stylistic consequence and continuous dissolution of form. All of this happened in line with and reliance to the general changes in art and culture. The review of the connection between the world and man at the end of the 19th century was connected to the appearance of the

female voice in arts, which meant the manifestation of a new source of human power. The female artistic life of this era is viewed rich in Hungary. The period between the two WWs may be viewed as the second era, a time when female artists regarded art as a profession showing special tools in their works. In the period of the 1960s and 70s the artists found their identity, while the 90s met with the naturality of the female voice.

The search for and introduction of female artists was started by art historian *Magdolna Simon* in 1992 with a series of historical exhibitions beginning with the 19th century. Her study of history for female artists between the two WWs was continued by *Zoltán Gálig*. Later, at the Venice Biennial Festival, series of exhibitions and catalogues introducing the current female artists appeared at the Venice Biennial Festival in the Óbuda Gallery, Budapest in 1997. Having been rethought by feminist critics and philosophy, it was *Edit András*'s studies in the Hungarian Pavilion of the 47th Venice Biennial Festival, which communicated the meaning and importance of genders and gender rules to the Hungarian critics of art.

Introducing the female art of the 20s and 30s it is important to mention the women's movements and associations of those times. Those to be mentioned include *Valéria Dénes*, the first outstanding avant-garde artist and *Noémi Ferencz*, who embodied a type of female artistic individuality showing the traditional female virtues of manual work in her activity.

I will talk about the associations of female art between the two WWs and the way the role of women in society was upgraded in the 20s and 30s. They appeared in greater numbers at work and in other spheres of life. The change of female roles had an effect in the arts, too. The female painters were educated, intelligent, widely travelled and many spoke a number of foreign languages. They included successful artists in many branches of art. The female artists of the time can be characterised by greater self-awareness and independence, reflected in the great exhibitions of the associations. Their appearance on stage meant a new chapter of qualitative change in female art. Previously the importance and goal of female artist exhibitions was to show and present the artists of the fair sex since they were underrepresented in the great national exhibitions. The female artists were influenced by a variety of movements which had already parted from the antecedents of avant-garde. The urban woman and her surroundings were frequently

presented in the pictures alongside the classical topics such as the landscape, still life, acts, in accordance with the classicistic tendencies of the time, and out-of-context group photographs by *Piroska Márton Futásfalvi*, *Anna Bartoniek*, *Erzsébet Loránt* or *Angéla Szuly*. The presentation of independent female art gave way to such thematic and stylistic specificities which were only partially represented at the male-female exhibitions and which could now be presented to the audience to their fullest and could show the characteristics of the female aspect. Two types of paintings may be identified: the constructive, rougher versions presented by *Vilma Kiss* and *Józsa Járítz* and a lighter, softer versions in the works of *Anna Bartoniek* and *Margit Kampis*. Being members of associations, the female artists could now exhibit not just at home but also abroad. I will mention the importance of female roles, the results of the female point of view. Egzotic themes were recurrent in the female art of the period between the two WWs in the works of *Piroska Márton Futásfalvi*, *Vilma Kiss* and *Angéla Szuly* but especially *Józsa Járítz*, who pictured not just the Afro-Americans, Chinese, Egyptians and the Jews themselves but also the community they lived in. The female artists in their egzotic works looked for the roots and main experience of life and existence. *Margit Kampis* expresses the sophisticated profession of being a mother. The female artists brought new colours into art through their special topics and the nontraditional treatment of traditional types of iconography. The language of modern art seemed most useful to define themselves and express their views of the world. With them started a new chapter of Hungarian female art which reacted to the times quickly and sensitively simultaneously finding a way to the deepest depths of the subjects.

The 20th century Hungarian female artists had different relationships to their place determined by tradition. Some of them accepted the social and artistic stereotypes which prevailed towards women. And they were accepted if they voluntarily entered the lower levels of applied arts and industrial arts in artistic hierarchy and the social woman. One extreme is represented by *Margit Kovács* on the one hand with her soft, sweet, easily understandable works connected to the women, full of clichés. On the other hand, *Anna Prinner*, who completely disagrees with the unconditional acceptance of female roles in her life and work, represented the other extreme. In the first half of the 20th century some female artists formed groups to fight for emancipation in art, including *Margit Anna*, *Júlia Vajda* and *Erzsébet Vaszkó*. Then I will try to briefly present the

female art from 1960 onwards including *Lili Ország, Ilona Keserű, El Kazovszkij, Csilla Kelecsényi, Orsolya Drozdik, Daniela Bikácsi, Anna Makovecz, Erzsébet Scháár, Ildikó Várnagy, Ildikó Bakos, Ágnes Deli, etc.* Following this I will summarise the Hungarian female artists, such as *Dóra Maurer, Lujza Gecser, Zsuzsa Szenes, Ilona Lovas, Anikó Bajkó, Margit Szilvitzky, Csilla Kelecsényi, Ágnes Németh, Mariann Imre, Emese Benczúr* and their international counterparts, for instance *Miriam Shapiro, Judy Chicago, Carolee Scherman, Barbara Kruger, Sherrie Levine, Janine Antoni* in reliance to the female symbols of identity connected to nature.

In the chapter titled *Feminism and Art* I will introduce the theoretical discourses on gender identity and the role of genders in society. I will also compare the artists, feminist teachings and ideas dealing with these topics on an international and national level. I will analyse how the Western European and differing American starting points together with the resulting artistic expression affected Hungarian art. I will venture to shed light on the categories that lie between feminism and art, the answers that artists gave to feminism between politics and poetry, content and form, feminists and women, feminism and “womanly”, thus identifying the fights and differences among the feminist artists of various generations.

Since men and women differ, their existence must be different as well without the knowledge of which we know very little about civilisation. This is the reason why the study of communication is so closely connected to existentialism. By communication we mean the ways people use to express their existence in the world and how they break through individualisation. Communicating about existence may help resolve the duality of coexisting subject and object, which came to being as a result of dual learning: external cognition and scientific thinking. The experience of existence presented an alternative to the duality of “learner” and “subject of learning” in cognition. This was introduced by the discovery of the fair sex which had underemphasised itself.

In my master work, a series of pictures, in the sizes of 30x40cm, 180x60cm, 60x60cm and 90x80 cm, called the *Shield*, I react to the above-mentioned topics. Creating my works I inspired from the world of forms of the matriarchal cultures. In addition, I would like to send a message through the varied texts, thoughts, fragments and pictures,

which are also embedded in my work. I have used a variety of techniques including oil, aquarell, marker and Indian ink.

My doctoral research and dissertation is closely connected to my master work as I present Hungarian as well as international artists, their works, trends and movements in line with my work. I have tried to refer to these works and artists extensively and present the prominent authors in my field. In the course of writing it was also my aim to narrow down my subject.

My works revolve around creation, myths of creation, cosmologies and I make use of natural materials like soil, ash and sawdust. At other places I made use of womanlike techniques such as weaving, sawing, glueing and knotting. Furthermore, repetition is a recurring phenomenon in my work and I use such signs of formality, which “correspond to the female essences like the circle, sphere, semi-sphere forms and central arrangements”(Miriam Shapiro´ and Judy Chicago´s “central core” hypothesis). Even though *Lucy R. Lippard*, theoretician of the first generation, did not accept this idea, she also seemed to discern a number of features characteristic for female art, for instance the lattic structure, the use of the net, repetitive or detailed patterns, layers, bundles, boxes and others, formal connections, counterpointing, inner and outer space, between in and out, the preference of internal closed palces, etc.