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CHANGING IMAGE

An Attempt to Expand Kinetic Art

Thesis of DLA dissertation

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Subject of the Research

The key to the title *Changing Image* lies in the word *change* itself. Change always refers to a process or a result that has come into being through a process. It can refer to a living organism or, as in our case, an object, or more specifically, an artwork undergoing transformation. The inherent temporality of change further enriches the conditions under which the works discussed in this thesis are understood. One of the most significant characteristics of optical and kinetic art, in my view, is that it opens a gateway to geometric, abstract, or contemporary art, in a broader sense, even for an audience unfamiliar with art. This ensures its continued relevance and legitimacy. These art forms, which are primarily rooted in science, physics, and optical phenomena, are capable of continuous renewal through the use of evolving materials and technologies, aligning with diverse artistic concepts. My research focuses on a form of optical art that is less known in Hungary and differs significantly from Vasarely's style. This form, which has played a major role in shaping my own artistic path, is primarily associated with South American artists and deserves special attention due to its interactivity. I explore the simultaneous presence of time, space, and movement, attempting to expand the definition of kinetic art. I aim to support my arguments partly through an analysis of the processes involved in art perception.

The perception of artworks depends on their type and can involve various mechanisms. I seek to examine a particular segment in which the meaning and understanding of the work emerge only through the movement of the observer. My research strives to explore the boundary between reality and illusion, as well as the visual representation of movement.

Objective of the Research

The objective of my research is to refine the definition of kinetic art and to redraw the boundaries of works belonging to this genre. With the emergence of optical art,

certain works—sometimes even entire oeuvres—that could be classified as optical art find themselves in an ambiguous space, being labeled as optical, kinetic, or both simultaneously. I aim to clarify this confusion by examining various criteria and providing justification for why certain works should be considered purely optical or purely kinetic.

As art historian Flóra Mészáros states: "For op art, movement is always part of a created world, a virtual, imagined outcome. Kineticism, on the other hand, draws from sculptural forms set in motion, although it also includes the illusion of movement created through reflections and light effects." She then continues the comparison: "Op art—unlike kinetic art—relies solely on optical illusions. This does not mean a loss of illusion but rather a conscious deception of perception, intended to reveal new dimensions of the artwork while prompting the viewer to re-evaluate their knowledge, vision, and perception. In optical art, perspective is always created and stylized, with forms either condensing or dispersing. The relationship between density and dispersion gives rise to the illusion of spatial depth."¹

In my thesis, I challenge Mészáros' classification of illusion and aim to prove that this distinction is misleading. While op art typically unfolds in illusions constructed on a two-dimensional plane, kineticism always extends into the third dimension², and this distinction should be the fundamental characteristic that differentiates the two fields. Whether kinetic works are based on the Victorian stereoscope³, simple form repetition, or the interference of different image layers, the movement of the observer always becomes the key to perception. While art history traditionally does not classify these non-moving works as kinetic, I argue against this view, as movement still plays a role—not within the artwork itself but in its interpretation, extending to the observer. This is always a result of artistic intent rather than coincidence. Therefore, I do not distinguish between works in which movement is

¹ Mészáros, 2020

² An exception may be the hologram, which is a flat, laser-recorded visual information on film.

³ Charles Wheatstone, mirror-stereoscope, 1838

manifested as a mechanized phenomenon and those where the kinetic relationship arises from the interaction between the artwork and its viewer.

Structure of the Research

The study focuses on the boundary between sculpture and image, where creation and observation cannot be entirely separated, and where the subject plays a crucial role. In a genre so deeply reliant on our senses, any analysis must be approached from an individual perspective.

The first section of the thesis categorizes *changing images* into three structural groups based on their composition, facilitating the reader's understanding of such works. Next, I examine perception from three aspects: first, by exploring the mechanisms of perception, drawing on the empirical experiments of François Molnár; second, by outlining the issues of primary and secondary perception, which are particularly relevant to the discussed types of works; and third, by analyzing the relationship between illusion and reality as evidence for categorizing certain works within kinetic art.

The fourth chapter addresses movement, its representation, and the art of Naum Gabo, as well as the circumstances and original purpose behind the birth of kinetic art.

The fifth section investigates playfulness, a crucial factor on both the artistic and the audience's side across all art forms, but especially significant in the case of *changing images*.

In the sixth chapter, I examine the materials of contemporary art, with a particular focus on transparency. Additionally, I delve into the artistic perception of glass, which is my primary medium. Finally, I summarize the perspectives discussed in the different chapters to refine and validate my claims.

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