

UNIVERSITY OF PÉCS, FACULTY OF MUSIC AND VISUAL ARTS
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UNDER THE SKIN

Synchronous perceptions in art, using glass

Thesis of DLA dissertation

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The subject of the research

The title *Under the Skin*¹ has a complex meaning. On the one hand, it refers to the glass itself as a material, the main property of which is its transparency. This material allows us to see inside the sculpture, thus we can gain an insight into an unusual inner world. On the other hand, it refers to the importance of other senses in addition to sight, to the research of the invisible. It is commonplace to "see behind things", however, in a certain sense, vision is considered a superficial modality, with which we are only able to perceive the surface, the external side of things. Complex perception is natural, but we are often not aware of it. The pair of visible and invisible concepts, although it seems that they are not opposites of each other, as according to phenomenology², they are actually connected in the process of perception. The presence of multimodality gives us a sense of security, and its absence provokes a desperate reaction in us, like when there is no solid ground under one's feet.

In connection with the examination of the reception of the work, I research the perception created by the stimulation of the senses; my topic is the joint, i.e. simultaneous, operation of our senses during the reception of works of art, and how this affects perception. In my research, I focus on connecting visual and auditory as well as haptic impressions, and beyond that, I present my subject based on the experiences gained through my works. I assigned an art theory background to the questions that arose during my practical work, so this empirical research determines the structure and framework of the dissertation.

¹ The inspiration for the title "Under the Skin" is composer Mica Levi's album "Under the skin", which was made for the 2014 film of the same name.

² The study of phenomena as we experience things. Phenomenology comes from the Greek word *phainomenon*, meaning 'what appears' and *logos*, meaning 'study'.

My claims and the purpose of the research

The aim of the thesis is to dispel stereotypes related to glass, as well as to broaden the perspectives inherent in glass. A creative attitude promoting the hegemony of the eye is clearly present in glass art, which is based only on visuality and appeals to the decorative nature of the material. My aspirations are not against visuality, rather I argue for the involvement of the other senses and direct attention to them. My design approach, which I acquired due to my background in applied arts, also contributes to the fact that my interest was directed towards the importance of perception affecting the complex senses. After all, the function makes the relationship between the person and the object even more direct. With a utility object, it is natural that tactility is involved in perception. Through this, it informs about the different surfaces, textures, temperature, quality and ergonomics of the object. However, it is equally important to take into account the human body in visual arts, so that the person is not present as a disembodied observer³ during perception. What role can glass play in this?

- The visual perception of the reflective and transparent properties of glass is not based solely on the visual dominant sense, but on actual bodily experience through other senses. This means in a general sense that the glass cannot be interpreted in its entirety through the gaze. Our previously acquired experiential knowledge in the case of glass is not necessarily sufficient. We all know the illusion-creating ability of glass.
- In connection with the reception of the work, the simultaneous presence of several senses can expand the experiential knowledge. The interactive work in the exhibition space changes the relationship between the viewer and the work, the process of reception. Since there is no artwork without a recipient, the artwork is created by the recipient, in this case it is not only an intellectual but also a physical interaction. By involving the senses, through the act of

³ Heidegger blames the nihilistic view for preventing body-centered unified world experiences, because it separates the sensual and spiritual dimensions. In: Pallasmaa: Eyes of the skin, 2005.

perception, the field of receiving art expands, and its complex process and experience can be enriched.

- The extension of the visual stimulus with the direct sensual stimuli reacts and, in fact, directly determines the perception. Sound feedback combined with action changes the aesthetic experience and expands the space of the work of art. In other words, the glass and the computer can create an interface, the essence of which is actually multisensory. During the multisensory experience, a concentrated state of self-reflective attention, a feeling of presence, is created in the recipient.

The structure of the research

In the first part of my dissertation, I deal with the permanent material of my creations, glass, and I explain the significance of the material and materiality of the art object itself. In order to clarify the concept of glass art, which moves on the border between industry and fine art - and to make its assessment in contemporary fine art understandable - a historical overview of the development of glass art, then the studio glass movement affecting our days, today's trends and the possibilities for development is necessary. After describing the physical properties of glass, I discuss the relationship between the material and the concept. After that, in relation to the spirit of modernism, I examine the most defining property of glass, transparency. For the theoretical approach of transparency, I draw on the idea of Colin Rowe, Robert Slutzky and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, where transparency includes the depth of both physical space and psychological space, for example material-immaterial, literal-phenomenal and visible-invisible interactions.⁴ At the end of the chapter, I present the interaction of the artistic concept and the dedicated use of materials through the works of Hungarian glass artists

⁴ Eunki Kang and Eun Joo Park [2021] Phenomenological Transparency through Depth of “Inside/Outside” for a Sustainable Architectural Environment, <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/13/16/9046/html#B23-sustainability-13-09046> download time: 03.07.2020

and describe my creative approach to glass and transparency.

In the third chapter, I deal with visuality and its multisensory nature. After a brief historical overview of the approach to the senses, I will discuss the reasons for the dominance of vision, and then I will present some theoretical approaches to the critical formulation of vision-centricity. In this chapter, I take as a basis the insights of the Finnish architect Juhanni Pallasmaa, which he explains in his article *The eyes of the skin*. According to his claim, the general bias towards vision dominates our perception, and the additional sensory and sensual qualities of feeling have been almost erased from the arts and architecture. In my research, I examine this proposal of Pallasmaa in relation to contemporary, glass-based works of art, with particular regard to the contradictions in the material that is glass. Sight can also activate our other sense organs, so I will present the possible ways of evoking the senses through visuality through additional examples, paying special attention to tactility.

In the next chapter, I focus on the interaction of hearing and visuality. The chapter begins with the definition of multimediality and intermediality, and then, as a continuation, I present the comparison of hearing and visuality through the oculo-centric approach of Hans Jonas. Although Jonas's critical expression in the direction of hearing has since lost its validity, I still consider it important, because his analysis points to the inherent characteristics and importance of the sensory organ. It is also important to examine temporality, in the case of works where the process or historicity is specifically a feature of the medium, such as in the case of motion pictures or music. Therefore, in relation to temporality, I will discuss the problem of representation of movement in art. After that, I will present Sergej Mihalovich Eisenstein's view on the synthesis of the senses and the connections between art forms. Instead of an approach that strives for totality, my thesis continues by focusing on the dialogue of the senses. The relationship between sound and fine art is mostly rooted in flux, so it is important to mention the changes that took place during this period. Next, I will deal with the segment of sound art, which includes those audiovisual works where the ratio of sound and visuality is of equal importance, i.e. it is present in a similar proportion in the work of art, and glass

also plays a prominent role in the concept. I present the relationship between sound and glass through various artistic examples. At the end of the chapter, I present the results of my empirical research.

In the last chapter, I specifically focus on the relationship between visuality, touch and hearing, and consequently on interaction. I present the connection between perception and action through the ecological approach of James Jerome Gibson and Alva Noé. Since the visual stimuli around us are constantly changing, the use and inclusion of new technologies in the work of art can open new channels for the reception of the work. Computer programs provide an opportunity for experimentation, creating a connection between visuality and the auditory sense, for example by transforming sound into a visual image. In this part of my paper, I deal with those works of art where computer systems function primarily as sensory converters and as interfaces⁵ that can enable interaction between the work and the recipient. At the end of the dissertation, I will present my works from the Sensorivm exhibition as a masterpiece, in connection with which I will draw the final conclusions.

⁵ A unit connecting two elements, a connection interface. It enables physical and logical matching between units, as well as coordinated operation.

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