

Echoes 2006/1
Working Paper Series of the Echo Survey Institute



“PRIVATE ART” ON THE INTERNET
Fine Art and Taste in a Globalizing World

Ágnes Szanyi

© Copyright Echo Survey Institute, 2006

Echoes is the Working Paper Series of the Echo Survey Sociological Research Institute. It was started in 2004 to provide an additional opportunity for the Institute-based research activities to reach the international scientific community.

Working papers are works in progress, in most cases they offer preliminary results of ongoing researches. Therefore we ask not to cite these papers without contacting the author or authors first. Comments, feedback and critics about the papers are welcome.

If you would like to contact the Institute with respect to the working papers or the researches they cover, please do it via the info@echosurvey.hu e-mail address. Also, if you would prefer a hard copy of this paper, please contact the Institute.

The authors and the Echo Survey Institute retain full copyright over this paper.

Working Paper series editor: László J. Kulcsár, Kansas State University

The Echo Survey Institute on the web: www.echosurvey.hu

Abstract*

In my research I call “private art” the art that is defined as such by everyday people, and put on the Internet - this special medium to open up more truly and/or to hide behind another personality – as a kind of self-expression.

We know a lot about the fine art taste in the 70’s and 80’s. But since then an essential change has occurred. The Internet appeared as a new medium, and a new possibility of self-expression, available for many. Until now taste was mainly examined through questionnaires, and in-depth interviews, so in a more or less formal situation. Searching the web, we can find much more honest, and free manifestation of art taste.

In my paper I investigate, how the taste of people appear on the web, and I compare the fine art taste of the past 20 years, with what I find on the Internet. My special focus - among other Internet forums - is a small society of amateur artists on the web.

I presume that people still prefer figurative, and realistic paintings and images to abstract and contemporary art. My analysis is based on a collection of images, gathered on the net, and I use content and style-analysis. My finding is that art taste of people does not necessarily follow the improvement of contemporary pictorial art.

***This work was presented at the XVI ISA World Congress, Durban, South Africa, 23-29 July 2006**

Research on Fine Art Taste

During the forty years of socialist era in Eastern Europe researching the relation of society and culture was one of the few fields declared harmless to the system. Thanks to this, research projects investigating the social position of artists, fine art taste of people and perception of fine art works were supported.

Following the transition the attention turned to the previously banned or neglected questions like - among many others - poverty or ethnicity, and the research of arts, especially fine arts fell into the background. The situation has not changed since then, so most of our knowledge about the fine art taste of Hungarian people derives from the researches of the '70s and '80s.

These researches – conducted almost exclusively by Katalin S. Nagy - showed that the “limit of tolerance” of fine art taste ran along postimpressionism in the 70's. On the “experimental exhibitions”¹ the most preferred paintings were made before 1910, while the least preferred were made after 1910 (S. Nagy, 1974, 1975; S. Nagy – Nagy - Vitányi 1977a). Even among contemporary painters those who painted in neo-realist style were the most popular – as it turned out on the second experimental exhibition (S. Nagy, 1977b). The Hungarian people's favorite painter was Mihály Munkácsy, the great Hungarian realist master, learnt by everybody in school. Even those who couldn't name any other painter knew his name. Although this success proved to be quite superficial, since when researchers exhibited one of Munkácsy's less-known artwork without title and the name of the artist, most of the interviewed visitors could not identify it as a Munkácsy-painting, and classified it as one of ‘the least-preferred’ (S. Nagy – Nagy - Vitányi 1977a). Generally people preferred realist paintings, although researchers experienced moderate change in taste during the period towards the acceptance of impressionism (S. Nagy, 1993b). This can be most likely explained by a phenomenon observed by the researchers on the experimental exhibitions. As the interviewees had got acquainted with even more modern and neo-avant-garde artworks, the previously rejected modern art became acceptable for them (S. Nagy, 1993b). Grotesque, ugly elements on pictures were generally rejected, regardless of age, sex or education level (1970, 1978).

¹ „Experimental exhibitions” were organized for research purposes. Researchers invited directly people of different social background, and asked them about their preferences and their opinions about the exhibited paintings. The visitors did not get any information about the paintings (title, year, name of painter). They made observations about the behavior of visitors (movement through the exhibiting halls, during perception of the paintings, etc.) as well as they invited some visitors for visual tests, where they had to solve visual problems, and „play” with the paintings.

Generally modern art was more popular among young adults while landscapes were more preferred by older people. Slight difference appeared between the two sexes: men preferred modern art a bit more, while women impressionism (S. Nagy, 1993b, 1994).

The most significant differences appeared along education level. Both the education level of the respondent and that of his/her father correlated strongly with fine art taste. People with lower education level required reality in paintings more than people with higher education level. With the increase of education level, the fine arts knowledge grew as well, and people became more open for modern art and new art forms (S. Nagy, 1993b).

These findings were in accordance with the international results, gained by – among others – Pierre Bourdieu and Yvonne Bernard also in that period (Bernard, 1978; Bourdieu, 1978, 1991). Among French people, though, already in the early 70s the impressionists were the most popular painters. This result was probably due to the great French art traditions, and the more “developed” visual taste of French people, as a consequence of this.

Bernard confirmed one very interesting finding of Katalin S. Nagy. People with the lowest education level as well as with the highest education level (that is with primary school education and university diploma) did not tend to conform to fashionable taste norms, while people with secondary education generally did. People with primary education tended to choose the great old masters of renaissance and baroque, or the old landscape painters, diploma-holders chose Greco, Claetz, Dürer, Van Eyck and modern art, while people with secondary education chose the most popular painters like the impressionists for example. (Bernard, 1978; S. Nagy, 1993b) According to S. Nagy’s explanation the two groups with the lowest and with the highest education level have nothing to loose with non-conforming to the norms, while the median group has interest in conforming to the rigid norms of its cultural level (S. Nagy, 1993b).

By the results of the French researches, Bernard also concluded that esthetic attitudes of people were more or less stable, older people seemed to preserve their attitudes from their younger age (Bernard, 1978).

S. Nagy and her colleagues conducted several researches among amateur artists and professional artists as well. They interviewed them through questionnaires and face-to-face interviews, with the aim of investigating their fine art taste. They chose the amateurs to interview either by a national registration, or by visiting art colonies and art circles.

As the results showed, the fine art taste of amateur artists was “more developed” than that of the audience. They were more open to modern art and even to contemporary art. They rejected only the newest endeavors of the young generation - like new-abstract and op-art - and similarly to the audience, the grotesque, ugly paintings (S. Nagy, 1970). After analyzing

their artworks, the researchers concluded that contrary to their “developed” fine art taste, on their own works they preferred to apply more traditional styles and forms. The most popular form was landscape, then rural interior, and depiction of work. Still lives and portraits were less popular. Most of them were painting in postimpressionist style, some was creating in avant-garde styles, and only a small group “got stuck into” realism or romanticism of the 19th century. The biggest differences between amateurs and professionals appeared in the applied technique. Most of them were using oil on canvas, or watercolor on paper.

Concerning the subjects, the researchers concluded that amateurs depicted smaller range of subjects than professionals. Most of them depicted the surrounding physical environment, and only few painters attempted to depict more abstract things like the great questions of life or spiritual life and the dreams of the individual (S. Nagy, 1976).

In the final conclusion they assessed, that amateurs seemed to have an important transmitter role between professionals, i.e. the world of art and the audience, thus, through personal relationships and examples they were preparing their audience for visual values (S. Nagy, 1976).

In 2005 together with my colleagues at Echo Survey Sociological Research Institute we conducted a preliminary nationwide survey to map the general level of fine art taste of the Hungarian society. We asked randomly selected 1000 person in the whole country, thus we gained data representative of the whole population. In the questionnaire we asked them to name their favorite painters and a painter whose art they do not like. We also asked them the approximate number of painters they know thinking of only those whose paintings – at least one – they can recall. Besides these, we asked them about their habits of visiting fine art exhibitions (how often, which exhibition did they saw last), and whether they had original artworks or copy of them in their flats. (Here I analyze only the choice of favorite painter, the rejected painters and the number of known painter.)

Considering the earlier findings, we formulated the hypothesis that fine art taste of Hungarian people have changed slightly in the past 25 years towards accepting postimpressionism, but most of them still cannot accept avant-garde or more modern styles, especially non-figurative art.

We found that most people do not have a favorite painter, only one third of them could name one or more. People with higher education level have favorite painter with higher probability than people with lower education level. Older people tend to have favorite painter rather than younger. 41.1 percent of people in the first age group and 30.9 percent in the fourth age-group have a favorite painter, while only 22.3 percent of young adults in the first and 29.2 percent in

the second age-group have favorite painter. (Age groups were the same in both of my researches: first age group - 18-29, second - 30-44, third - 45-59, fourth - 60 – and older.)

59.4 percent of those who had favorite painter, enumerated only one, 17.7 percent enumerated two painters, 12.6 percent three painters, 5 percent four painters, 3.9 percent five painters and 1.2 percent six painters. One respondent mentioned seven favorite painters (respondents could name maximum five favorite painters). By sex of the respondent no difference appeared in the number of favorite painters. Education level and age, though, influences the number of mentioned favorite painters. The more educated and the older one is, the more favorite painter one mentions.

Mihály Munkácsy is still the most popular painter. 58.5 percent of those who named any favorite painter, mentioned him as well. We presume that some respondents, who do not have a favorite painter and are not interested in arts, but did not want to seem to be uneducated, mentioned Munkácsy – one of the very few artists they knew from school – as a favorite. These responses are probably biasing our data to some extent. However, if we do not count the responses of those who mentioned Munkácsy as the only favorite painter, the primacy of Munkácsy still remains.

Besides Munkácsy, as S. Nagy and her colleagues also experienced, other artists like Tivadar Csontváry Kosztka (postimpressionist, expressionist painter) and Pál Szinyei Merse (plein air painter) became accepted and even popular in time². About one tenth of those who named a favorite painter mentioned them (11.9 and 11.2 percent). Monet (8.5), Van Gogh (8.4), Picasso (8.4) and László Paál, a painter painting in Barbizon-style (8.3) got several mentions as well. Among the first ten most mentioned artists (in addition to the above enumerated ones: da Vinci (3.8), Victor Vasarely (3.2), Michelangelo (3.1)) only Vasarely was painting in non-figurative, op-art style. However, Vasarely was popular - especially among people with lower education – already in the 70s. Among the first ten artists we can find three realist painters and two classic painters, and half of them are impressionist, postimpressionist, avant-garde and modern painters. Realist painters still seem to dominate the preference-list, but the domination is getting weaker.

By sexes, we did not find any significant differences in the choices. Younger people tend to like Picasso more than older, and Van Gogh is also more popular in the first three age-groups than in the fourth, while Munkácsy is more frequently mentioned in the second, third and fourth age-group, than in the first. No significant relation appears between the education level of people and their choices, whilst the education level of the father of the respondent

² We have to emphasize here that S. Nagy investigated preferences, while we investigate 'favorite painters', thus we cannot make direct comparison between the findings.

influences the choices. Those whose father was more educated choose Munkácsy less frequently but Van Gogh more often than respondents having lower educated father.

Since the respondents mentioned more than hundred artists – 23 of which were unidentifiable - it seemed to be more useful to analyze the preferences by categories. After processing the data, we categorized the favorite painters in five categories by their style: classic (all styles until and inclusive baroque), realist styles of the 19th century (romanticism, realism, naturalism), impressionism, postimpressionism (including art nouveau) and modern art (including every modern style since the avant-garde movements). (Hereafter I refer to them as classic era, realism, impressionism, postimpressionism and modern art.)

The most popular era is realism again, 61.4 percent of those respondents who named one or more favorite painter, mentioned realist painter. The second most popular style is impressionism, 26.2 percent chose at least one impressionist painter. Postimpressionism is almost the same popular, 24.7 percent was the mentioning rate, and 21.2 percent mentioned at least one modern painter. Classic era is less popular (14.9 percent).

In some cases we could not detect significant relation between the chosen styles and sex, age or education level, thus our result cannot confirm all the earlier findings of other researchers. There is strong relation between age and the choice of realist painters. Older people choose realist painters more often than young people (32 percent in the first age-group, 71.4 percent in the fourth). People with higher education level tend to choose impressionist painter as favorite more often than people with lower education (3.1, 26.7 and 33.3 percent in the three education group). The education level of the father shows significant relation with the choices: people with higher educated father tend to choose realist painters less often but postimpressionists more often than people with lower educated father. Weaker relation appeared between age and the preference of modern art. Not surprisingly younger people choose a modern artist more frequently, than older people (28 percent in the first age group, 13.2 percent in the fourth).

Finally we could confirm that women like impressionism more than men: 30.7 percent of them mentioned at least one impressionist painter in contrast to the 20.7 percent of men.

Non-figurative art is still less preferred. 4.5 percent of those who named one or more favorite painter, mentioned non-figurative artist. The only dimension along which we could detect difference among people in the choice of non-figurative painters is age. Again younger people choose non-figurative artist as a favorite more often than older people.

12.2 percent of all respondents could name an artist whose art they did not like. We based this question on Bourdieu's concept suggesting that people who can even name a painter they do

not like have considerable art knowledge, and belong to upper classes, since art knowledge showed strong relation with the origin and education of the individual. Older people could name an artist here significantly more often than younger. Strong relation appears with education level as well. People with higher education level or of a more educated father can answer this question more likely.

Picasso is the most rejected artist. 58.5 percent of those, who named a painter they do not like, mentioned Picasso. The second most rejected painter was Dali, 9.4 percent mentioned him. We classified the artists in the same five categories, as above. According to this, the most rejected artists are modern artists, 82.4 percent of those who could name an artist they do not like mentioned one of them. Artists of other eras were rarely mentioned. Due to the small number of elements, we could not analyze the data deeper.

Finally we asked people about the approximate number of painters they know. We told them to think of only those painters whose paintings – at least one – they remember. Two thirds of all respondents know one or more painters, in average 10 by their own admission. The education level of the person and that of his/her father seem to have significant effect on the number of known painters. With the increase of the education level, the number of painters known also increases.

We can conclude that the fine art taste of Hungarian people did not change radically. Most of them still prefer realist painters, but significant minority like impressionist, postimpressionist and even avant-garde and modern painters as well. Non-figurative art could not gain much bigger popularity than 25 years ago. Age, education level, and the father's education level differentiate the choices. Younger people and people from more educated family seem to be more open for avant-garde and modern art, also people from more educated family as well as older people seem to have bigger art knowledge.

Our findings confirm most of the earlier findings and our hypothesis as well.

Nonetheless, I believe that survey as a method is not the best way of gaining knowledge about visual taste. We can only get know the surface. Visualization is more ancient and more subconscious and elemental capability of the brain than verbalization, and most of the visual experiences are unverbalizable (Nyíri). That is why sociologists and psychologists employ non-verbal tests, associational games, etc. to get closer to this part of the working of the brain. However, investigations always integrate pictures for helping the process (S. Nagy, Farkas). This encouraged me to search for other possibilities to investigate fine art taste.

Researching Fine Art Taste on the Internet

What is fine art taste actually? If it is changing, is it following - even if with a delay - the development of modern art? Can people ever accept non-figurative art forms? How do they choose if they have the possibility to get acquainted with a much wider range of art forms and styles, than the official high art of the museums?

These were the questions I concerned myself with, when I decided to conduct a research on “private art” on the Internet.

“Private art” refers to works – in my research paintings, drawings, graphics, collages, montages, all two dimensional pictorial works, except photos – that are put on the Internet by people as artworks.

In earlier Hungarian and international researches on fine art taste, people were asked directly through face-to-face in-depth interviews, questionnaires, or on the “experimental exhibitions” personally while walking along the exhibited pictures. The presence of the researcher created a formal situation. Moreover they often had to choose the preferred artworks or artists from a given set of paintings and painters. They had to tell their opinion about the showed or exhibited i.e. determined pieces of art, always high, official art.

I wanted to avoid the disadvantages of investigating visual phenomena by questionnaires, or getting false or ‘correct’ answers by asking people about their fine art taste in the name of a ‘scientific research’, and get closer to the unverbalizable visual experience - even if this means losing some information on the other side. I chose to explore visuality in a more direct way, by analyzing fine art put on the Internet by private individuals.

I presume that Internet provides freer medium for people to profess freely their art preferences in an informal way, where they are orientating at the most to other people’s expectations and opinions not to the researcher’s (Wallace, 1999). Thus Internet is creating the right conditions to an unobtrusive research. Besides this, Internet has other advantages concerning the research aims. By the pictures people put on the web, we can get closer to visual experience, in which verbalization would cause a disadvantage. Moreover surfing the net people can get now new artists, new art forms so they can choose among a much wider range of artworks than the official ‘museum’ art.

Though the biggest disadvantage of Internet research is that the data collected is not representative of the whole population, not even of the population using Internet – although we can gain representative data of certain groups -, I believe it can enrich our knowledge about fine art taste, and give interesting details about new trends.

Since my aim was to collect generalizable data at least to a group of people, the problem to solve was: how to collect data, moreover quantifiable data about the visual content on the Internet. I needed a quantitative method, within which I could quantify the qualitative aspects of the pictures (like style, subject, etc.). The methodological precision of visual content analysis seemed to be appropriate for the research purposes, so I decided to test this kind of mixed – both qualitative and quantitative – methodology on artworks (Lutz and Collins, 1993, quoted by Rose, 2001).

Visual content analysis is originally developed and mostly used for analyzing the content of photos and images. Philippe Bell describes content analysis in a Leeuwen's and Jewitt's *Handbook of Visual Analysis* as follows: “content analysis is empirical (observational) and objective procedure for quantifying recorded ‘audio-visual’ (including verbal) representation using reliable, explicitly defined categories (‘values’ on independent ‘variables’)” (Bell, 2001).

I call the research project experimental, because I attempt to analyze the collected visual material by a method developed from ‘visual content analysis’, which is by determining categories, and investigating and categorizing the collected data by them. The potential difficulties of applying the method can derive from the fact that it demands clearly and unambiguously defined categories, which may be difficult in the case of fine art works. This was a challenge lying in the research.

I decided to start the investigation of fine art taste with analyzing the artworks of amateur artists. I made this decision for several reasons. Amateur artists are widely represented on the Internet, regardless of age, sex, occupation, or origin, since they all have interest in appearing on the World Wide Web. Namely the web give them a unique opportunity to become known, to strengthen their identities as artists, to win more audience and maybe even customers, which are important for amateurs maybe even more than professionals, who are provided with these opportunities by other mediums. I presumed by the findings of earlier researches that the style, the form and the subject an amateur chooses, tells a lot about his/her fine art taste, and talent or painting skills usually do not prevent them from doing this. As we also know from previous researches the level of their fine art taste is somewhere between that of the audience and the professional artists. Moreover as we previously mentioned, they are kind of transmitters creating a bridge between ‘high’ art and laymen. Thus, investigating their pictures provides us with useful information of the visual and fine art taste of the society.

In this paper I present the findings and experiences gained from analyzing the pictures of amateur artists.

Method

The double aim of the research was to gain information about the fine art taste of amateur artists, and to test the method with artworks.

I chose a homepage – www.festomuvesz.hu/www.painter.hu³ - of 539 artists for the purpose of analysis. It is a web page containing artworks - paintings, drawings, collages, montages, computer / digital art and pictures made with some special techniques - of both amateur and professional artists, usually completed with a short introduction of the artist. The introductions are not standardized, the artists decide themselves what they find important to tell about themselves and their art. The artworks on this page - except the few carvings and sculptures - became the units of random sampling, and direct analysis, the artists became the units of analysis. To draw conclusions regarding the creators' fine art taste from the analysis of the style and content of their artworks is only possible if we presume that amateur artists are creating in the style and form they prefer, so their artworks express their preferences.

The methodology of the research is based on the methodology of visual content analysis. In order to reduce the ambiguity of different aspects of pictures I attempted to create the most objective categories possible, which still satisfy the criteria of confirming or falsifying the hypotheses.

Hypotheses

Considering the findings of earlier researches of amateur artists I formulated hypotheses as follows:

1. The amateur pictures are made mostly in postmodern and modern style, modern style artworks (modern refers to all the avant-garde styles, and the modern styles following them) are the most frequent.
2. The pictures of professional artists are more 'contemporary' i.e. are painted in modern style in larger proportion than the pictures of amateurs.
3. Non-figurative and grotesque pictures are still rare, both non-figurative art and grotesque elements appears on less than 10 percent of the pictures of amateurs.

Indicators, Variables, Values

To gain quantifiable data, I had to create strictly defined categories, i.e. variables and mutually exclusive and exhaustive values to categorize the artworks. The indicators derived

³ Though the name of the web page is 'painter.hu', we can find graphic artists, few sculptor, a photographer, and applied artists as well.

from the hypotheses on the basis of which I could create variables were ‘style of the picture’, ‘professionalism of the artist’, ‘non-figurativity’ and ‘grotesqueness’. The indicators helped to create the most important variables: ‘style’ of the picture (according to fine art styles), ‘qualification’ of the artist, whether the picture is ‘figurative or non-figurative’ and whether there is a ‘grotesque element’ on the picture. In order to compare the results with earlier findings of Katalin S. Nagy, and to have a controllable documentation, I created some more variables, like the ‘subject’, the ‘name of the artist’, the ‘sex of the artist’, the ‘age of the artist’, the ‘title of the picture’, and whether the picture contains ‘surrealistic elements’ or ‘expressivity’.

Since quantitative analysis requires clearly defined variables to avoid inconsistency in the coding process, I defined the ambiguous variables and values. The values of ‘style’ variable were ‘realism of the 19th century’ (the painter tries to depict the subject in a realistic, even naturalistic way, only the subject is important the way of painting is not), ‘impressionism’ (the painter attempts to catch and depict the moment, the momentary lights and the impressions, the subject is usually the nature, people in nature, or buildings, rarely still life and the emphasis is on the way of depiction rather than on the subject itself), ‘postimpressionism’ (neither the precise depiction of the subject, nor the depiction of the moment and the lights are important, but the painter start to analyze the sight, the structure and the colors become important, but the picture is not yet classifiable as avant-garde), ‘modern art’(all the styles following postimpressionism, the emphasis is usually on the message of the artist and the subject itself is mostly a tool to transmit it, the artist is reconstructing the sight according to his way of seeing). This categorization of artistic styles – in my opinion - represents well the most important tendencies of the development of modern art, and the development of European artists’ way of seeing. During the data process, I had to create three more values for ‘style’ variable: ‘naive’ (pictures which emits a kind of childlike style and approach either intentionally or because of the lack of skills of the artist), ‘classic’ (pictures that are copies of other artworks painted in any style before realism), ‘fantasy and tale’ (it was necessary to separate a category for those several artworks, which were either realistic, romantic or dreamlike – but not classifiable according to any of the previously enumerated art styles - depicting creatures and a fantasy world; artworks depicting characters of tales and stories - like princes and knights or personalized animals - were also coded here). For categorization of the pictures by art styles these definitions are certainly not exhaustive, they just help the coder. Categorization requires art historical knowledge.

Most of the introductions of the artists contained information regarding their ‘qualification’. I classified as ‘amateur’ the artists, who do not have a painter diploma, graphic artist or teacher

of arts diploma from art academies, universities or colleges, and as ‘professional’ those, who have. I made this division, because in my opinion since art higher education acquaints the artists with the newest art forms, and movements, develop their visual culture, and thus motivate them to use the achievements of modern art. Working together with many other artists influence them in the same way. Amateur artists, even if they learn to paint from professionals, or in art circles and art colonies do not gain this kind of experience.

‘*Figurativity - non-figurativity*’ referred to whether the picture depicted recognizable objects, humans or other living creatures, or not. ‘*Grotesque elements*’ referred to ugly or disfigured elements on the artwork, while ‘*surrealistic elements*’ referred to strange, impossible composition of objects, and elements on the artwork. By ‘*expressivity*’ I meant unnaturally strong, pure and unmixed colors, dynamic brushwork, deformed shapes and figures, intentionally sketchy picture.

One more variable needs explanation. The values of the ‘*subject*’ variable I borrowed mostly from S. Nagy, and during the testing I added some complementary categories. During the data collection it had many values like ‘landscape’, ‘depiction of animals and hunting scenes’, ‘depiction of the spiritual life, emotions, dreams’, ‘religious theme’, etc. Since this was the most ambiguous variable, I attempted to reduce ambiguity by recoding the values into two main values: the subject is either the material, physical world, objects, events, or it is an abstract phenomenon, like religion, emotions, thoughts, fantasies, abstract structures. The variable still remained slightly ambiguous.

Not knowing any precedent research of this kind, I had to create some of the values by ‘trial and error’ method: I created the possible values, then made a try on the sampled pictures, and completed the list of values if it was necessary. Some of the values I borrowed from the researches of Katalin S. Nagy.

Sampling and Data Analysis

The aim was to take a random sample of the artworks that can be found on the webpage. The most ideal way would have been to take all the artworks and choose randomly a sample giving each picture the same chance to get into the sample. But since it would have been a very complicated process due to the structure of the webpage, and I presumed that one randomly selected artwork can represent the artist, I decided to select one artwork of each artist, using random number generator. This way I gained a sample of 507 artworks, which I considered representative of all the artists on this webpage. I did not sample carvings and sculptures.

All the pictures were coded along the above-mentioned variables in an SPSS table. Since there was only one coder, the consistency of coding is presumable. During the statistical analysis, I used mainly descriptive statistics.

Findings

67.1 percent of the artworks are created by amateurs, 18.9 percent by professionals. In the case of the 14 percent of the artworks the qualification of the artist was not determinable. Hereafter I focus on the artworks, created by amateurs, though I will make comparisons between the artworks of amateurs and professionals.

More than half, 56 percent of the amateur artworks were painted by men, 44 by women. Since there was one artwork selected by each artist, this proportion refers to the proportion of the sex of artist as well. This proportion is better, i.e. more balanced than 30 years ago, when this proportion was 61 and 39 percent. The average age of the creators of the artworks is 44,5, the creators are between the age of 18 and 106. This underpins the presumption that the representation of amateurs on the Internet is quite balanced by age and sex.

	Amateur artists	Professional artists
Percentage among the creators of artworks	67.1	18.9
Men among the creators	56	67
Women among the creators	44	33
The average age of creators	44,5	48

Analyzing the artworks by subject I found that the most frequent subject is landscape (27 percent of the amateur pictures depicts a landscape). Still life is also common, 10 percent of the pictures is a still life. Among the more abstract subjects the depiction of emotions, dreams, and spiritual life is the most frequent (they are coded together), 25 percent of the artworks depicts these. If we investigate the subject of the pictures by the two larger categories – that is whether they depicts only the physical world, or rather the abstract world of thoughts, emotions, religion, etc. – it turns out that depiction of nature, people, objects, so of the physical world is typical of the two third of the pictures, while depicting abstract phenomena of one third.

The style of the artworks is quite diverse.

Classical style	2.3
Realism	22.3
Impressionism	8.2
Postimpressionism	21.6
Modern art	35.7
Naïve art	6.3
Fantasy and tale	3.4

I found that though realist and postimpressionist artworks are still common among the pictures, modern art is the most frequent style. I can also detect the appearance of fantasy art among amateur pictures. To consider fantasy art as fine art is probably a new tendency - there was a respondent in the research of fine art taste of Hungarian people, who mentioned Boris Valejo, a well-known fantasy artist, as his favorite painter. Among the amateur pictures at least three kinds of fantasy art is represented, including for example dark-fantasy.

Comparing to the pictures of the amateur painters in the 70s, the amateurs of this website made more realist and less postimpressionist pictures, although they created much more modern artworks.

Expressivity, non-figurativity, grotesque and surrealistic elements are still not typical of amateur artworks. 14 percent of the pictures can be classified as expressive, 11 percent as non-figurative. Only 10 percent of the pictures contain surrealistic elements, while grotesqueness is observable on only 6 percent of the artworks.

The sex of the creator of the amateur artwork is not determining whether it contains grotesque elements or not, or whether it depicts the physical world, or abstract phenomena, it is neither determining the non-figurativity or the expressiveness of the picture. Although differences of style of the paintings made by men and women are not statistically significant, a slight difference can be detected. Artworks created by women are more likely to be impressionist and postimpressionist than artworks of men, while these are more likely to be of modern styles than artworks of women. The only feature that seems to be determined by the sex of the artist is the presence of surrealistic elements on the artwork. The artworks of women amateur artists are less likely to be surrealistic than that of men amateurs.

We can find stronger, significant⁴ relation between the age of the amateur artist and two features of the artwork. The artworks of older amateurs tend to depict the physical world rather than more abstract phenomena, while the tendency is the opposite at the works of

⁴ Significancy refers to significancy at the 0.05 level.

young amateurs. 60 percent of the pictures made by amateur artist in the first age-group depict abstract phenomena, like emotions, thoughts, dreams, etc., while this is only typical of 7 percent of the artworks of amateurs in the fourth age-group⁵.

The other significant difference appears in the style of the amateur artworks. Postimpressionism and impressionism is more typical of the artworks of older amateurs, while modern art styles are significantly more typical of the artworks of young artists (62 percent of the artworks of young artist in the first age group, 17 percent of the artworks of artist in the fourth age-group is made in modern style).

Finally let us investigate what differences appear between the artworks of the professional and that of the amateur artists. The artworks of professionals tend to depict abstract phenomena rather than the physical world, while as we saw already nearly two third of the amateur pictures are depicting the physical world. Non-figurativity is also more typical of the professional artworks. These differences are significant.

	Amateur artists	Professional artists
Artworks depicting the 'physical world'	62	47
Artworks depicting abstract phenomena (emotions, feelings, thoughts, dreams, etc.)	38	53
Percentage of non-figurative artworks	11	20

Surrealistic elements also seem to be more applied on professional pictures than on amateurs, though the statistical analysis could not find significant difference.

Regarding the style we can find significant relation between the qualification of the artist of the picture and the style of the picture.

	Amateur artists	Professional artists
Classical style	2.3	2.2
Realism	22.3	10.8
Impressionism	8.2	7.5
Postimpressionism	21.6	22.6
Modern art	35.7	54.8
Naïve art	6.3	1.1

⁵ The age-groups are the same as in the citizen research.

Fantasy and tale	3.4	1.1
------------------	-----	-----

Modern styles seem to be more typical of the artworks of professional artists than that of amateurs. The difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Along other variables no significant difference appeared between the pictures of amateurs and the pictures of professionals.

Conclusions and Experiences

After analyzing 507 artworks randomly selected from the www.painter.hu webpage, and presuming that amateur artists are creating in the style and form they prefer, so their artworks express their preferences, we can conclude that a significant change is detectable in the use of art styles on the amateur pictures compared to 30 years ago. Amateurs are more confident in using modern styles. This finding partly confirms our first hypothesis, since the use of realist style on the pictures is still common, the same common as postimpressionism. The other detectable difference compared to 30 years ago is the increased confidence in depicting abstract phenomena on the pictures.

The same tendency appears on this webpage as experienced in all the researches concerning fine art taste: age is determining the style preferences, and the subject of the pictures as well. Non-figurativity is still not common on the amateurs' pictures - around 10 percent of the artists are creating in a non-figurative style. Grotesque elements are even less frequently depicted. This confirms the third hypothesis.

Although I do not have any statistical basis to compare the fine art preferences of the amateurs and the audience, I can draw the cautious conclusion that amateurs seem to have a slightly more modern art taste than the audience. They accept modern art more, and according to results regarding the level of the art taste of professionals, I consider it confirmed that the level of fine art taste of the amateurs is somewhere between that of the audience and the professionals.

The appearance of a new art form and style - what I call 'fantasy art' - is probably the biggest curiosity of the research, which raises questions for further consideration and investigation.

Regarding the experimental methodology we can briefly draw some useful conclusions as well. My experiences with defining strict variables and values regarding artworks, and the fails show that applying the methodology of visual content analysis on artworks requires a lot of careful consideration.

Since most of the artworks found on this webpage were made in the styles of the fine art history, it was possible to use this kind of classification. But this was due to the fact that many of amateurs on this page learnt the art of painting from professional artists, or from art books, and albums of great masters. Some of the pictures, though, were made in a style that was not classifiable according to the given fine art styles (for example realistic paintings for decoration purposes, but without any of the characteristics of the realism of the 19th century). The necessity of creating three more values for the 'style' variable during the data processing was a good example of the problems of the definitions and categorizations.

The variable of 'subject' and its values, as defined in the research is too ambiguous for the purpose of categorization, thus, consistent coding can hardly be guaranteed.

The most usable variables were those, where one special characteristic was the subject of a 'yes-no' question, like 'does the picture contain grotesque elements?'. If the characteristic is well defined this information can be quite usable and useful. We may be even able to use it for describing or dividing styles by certain information.

Although many of the decisions made during the categorization are debatable, they can be useful in attempting to make a more appropriate variable list, and I believe thus we can get closer to a more useful methodology.

Here I summarized only the main experiences and remarks regarding the research experiences, further analysis could be the subject of an other paper. I believe that the advantages of such quantification are worth further attempts to improve a better method to analyze artworks.

At the next stage of the research I am planning to collect images of artworks from Internet forums and private websites and analyze them with a similar methodology.

References

- Bell, Philippe (2001): Content analysis of visual images. In: Theo van Leeuwen, Carey Jewitt: Handbook of Visual Analysis, SAGE Publications
- Bernard, Yvonne (1978): Az esztétikai választások társadalmi meghatározói. In: Művészetszociológia. (Szerk.: Józsa Péter) KJK, Budapest
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1978): A művészeti észlelés szociológiai elméletének elemei. In: Művészetszociológia. (Szerk.: Józsa Péter) KJK, Budapest
- Bourdieu, Pierre – Darbel, Alain (1991): The Love of Art : European Art Museums and their Public. transl.by Caroline Beattie, Nick Merriman Cambridge : Polity Press
- Farkas András (1998a):Az esztétikai preferenciát meghatározó I.: jelentés, figurativitás, hasonlóság. Pszichológia, 1998/1 137-189.
- Farkas András (1998b): Az esztétikai preferenciát meghatározó II.: stílustipikusság és vetélkedő kategóriák. Pszichológia, 1998/3 261-303.
- Farkas András – Giannini, A. M. (2001): Viszonyulási mintázatok az esztétikai ítéletek különbözőségéhez: egy kultúraközi ízlésvizsgálat. Pszichológia, 2001/4 309-352.
- Farkas András (2003): A figurativitás iránti igény: az előítéletekről egy angol-magyar összehasonlító vizsgálat kapcsán. Pszichológia, 2003/2 139-161.
- Farkas András (2004): Fejlődik-e a vizuális ízlés? – Újabb adatok a tömegművészet és a múzeumi művészet összehasonlításáról. Pszichológia. 2004/2 163-192.
- Nyíri Kristóf (2000): A gondolkodás képelmélete. <http://mek.oszk.hu/00500/00587/html/>
- Nyíri Kristóf (2001): Szavak, képek, tudásegész. Világosság, 2001/7-9.
- Rose, Gillian (2001): Visual Methodologies. An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials. SAGE Publications
- S. Nagy, Katalin (1970): Kísérleti felmérés a művészeti ízlésről. Valóság 1970/5 57-63.
- S. Nagy, Katalin (1974): Munkácsy - Csontváry - Vasarely. Kultúra és Közösség 1974/2 89-99.
- S. Nagy, Katalin (1975): Választások és elutasítások. Kultúra és közösség 1975/1 80-88.
- S. Nagy, Katalin (1976): Amatőr képzőművészet. Népművelés, 1976/1, 2, 3
- S. Nagy, Katalin - Nagy Károly - Vitányi Iván(1977a): Szociológiai vizsgálat a Magyar Nemzeti Galéria I. kísérleti kiállításán. In: Múzeum és közönség. Múzeumi Restaurátor- és Módszertani Központ, Budapest
- S. Nagy, Katalin(1977b): Kortárs magyar festészet - szociológiai vizsgálat a Magyar Nemzeti Galéria II. kísérleti kiállításán. In: Múzeum és közönség. Múzeumi Restaurátor- és Módszertani Központ, Budapest

- S. Nagy, Katalin(1978a): Adalékok a festészeti ízléshez. Festmény és nézője. Népművelési Intézet
- S. Nagy, Katalin(1991a): Bevezető. In: Művészetszociológia-szöveggyűjtemény I-II. (Vizuális kommunikáció) Tankönyvkiadó, Budapest
- S. Nagy, Katalin(1993a): A látvány, amelyben élünk. Műegyetemi Kiadó
- S. Nagy, Katalin(1993b): Mű - művészek - befogadás. /nagydoktori disszertáció/ Kézirat.
- S. Nagy, Katalin(1994): A festészet és a befogadói magatartás. Társadalmi Szemle 1994/10 63-68.
- Wallace, Patricia (1999): The Psychology of the Internet. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press