

LATVIAN ARTISTIC FIELD FROM THE ARTISTS' VIEWPOINT

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Abstract

The autonomy of artistic field is expressed in the degree to which the artist obeys the laws of action and changes in the field of power and social space. The work of a painter can be directly influenced by other actors in the artistic field, therefore, the opinion of other painters is analysed and compared to their own position in the art space.

The purpose of this article is to determine the viewpoint from which a painter sees the Latvian artistic field and himself/herself therein. The study is based on 28 author's interviews with Latvian painters. The article considers whether painters regard the artistic field as separated from the social space and whether they feel themselves and their colleagues as equal players.

The research indicates that the autonomy of the artistic field is not possible. Painters are equal players with other actors in the artistic field.

Keywords: *artistic field, painters.*

The sociology of art is closely related to the classical theories of sociology. Society also influences an individual's aesthetic choice or 'tastes' (J. Habermas, P. Bourdieu, M. Lamont, V. Zolberg). When sociologists talk about social structure, they refer to social models, rules, and resources such as E. Giddens. Sociologists, using various techniques, describe the types of social interaction, social roles and positions, social identity, inequality and distribution of resources, institutions and norms through which social activity is structured. Sociologists of art use concepts developed by sociologists to address issues such as why art becomes a separate category of cultural production in Western society.

The sociological perception of art is not just a neutral analysis in terms of the subject. The author uses the artistic field model proposed by P. Bourdieu [Bourdieu 1996], which has many similarities to H. Becker's idea of the art world [Becker 1984]. Both H. Becker and P. Bourdieu believe that the aesthetic belonging of convention

and ideology to the art world is shaped by their members, and the existing ideologies make the art and the art world possible. P. Bourdieu highlights the relationship between power and the fact that ideas in the artistic field are socially constructed. Each field (religion, art, science, economics, etc.), using certain regulation and depiction of its activities, offers the agents a legitimate form in terms of how to fulfil their intentions that are justified in a certain *illusio* form [Bourdieu 1996, 228]. The field of art itself is not an autonomous one, therefore French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu places it in the power field. Artists' discourses exist, because art must exist "for art's sake", and not to be driven by any economic reasons. Otherwise, it should not be considered as art. P. Bourdieu explains models of artists' behaviour and their exposition in society (for example, double-dealing with society and representatives of power) through the power field, where the artistic field is in a dominating position. The power field is the relationship space between the agents or institutions with sufficient capital to take a dominating position in various fields (especially political and cultural fields). This means a struggle between managers of various powers to support the transformation or freezing of the relative value of capital [Bourdieu 1996]. The principles of the external hierarchy, which determine the dominating temporary positions in the power (i.e., they are affected by temporary criteria of fortune: commercial success, "bad" reputation, publications, etc.) put artists in the public eye. On the other hand, principles of internal hierarchy exist when artists receive the recognition of their colleagues and gain positions in the artistic field, simultaneously ignoring the mood of society or demand. The autonomy of the artistic field is influenced by the extent and subordination of the principles of the external hierarchy to the principles of the internal hierarchy. The higher the degree of artistic field autonomy, the more symbolic relations there are among participants who are independent from economic demand and the power field. The autonomy of artistic field is expressed in the degree to which the artist obeys the laws of action and changes in the field of power and social space. The painter's work is directly affected by other participants of the artistic field.

Both inside and outside the artistic field, there is a belief that the artist is unique and talented, but the work of art is merely a product of individual inspiration. Sociologists, on the contrary, believe that the works of art are the products of certain historical, social and cultural events. Without denying that artists often have special qualities – perception, intellect and talent –, the sociologists point out that artists' talent and work are formed in historical processes and institutions. Thanks to these processes and institutions, the work of art is significant in society.

Therefore, it is important to find out the opinion of the artists themselves. The selection of painters to be interviewed consists of representatives of various age and painting techniques, and the unique opinions of each person were respected.

All interviewed artists are professionals who have acquired higher education in art and whose core artistic activity is painting. All 28 interviews were conducted by the author on year 2010. Transcriptions were done by preserving the way the interviewed person spoke, and ignoring pauses and repeating of words. It was assumed that painters' interviews could be analysed using methods that do not focus on the language and its use (such as linguistic analysis, discourse analysis or narrative analysis), but methods that focus instead on meaning. Obtained data were coded and used retaining confidentiality. The position of artists in the artistic field was examined in order to specify their participation in social space. For this purpose, P. Bourdieu's relational method was applied. P. Bourdieu's relational method was described and interpreted through various sociologist perception (M. Grenfell, J. D. Wacquant, N. Heinich). P. Bourdieu identifies the social life not through the substance, but through the mutual relations influenced by objective and subjective factors, which are invisible because they are overshadowed by mundane experiences and actions.

From the point of view of sociology, the artists are never "outside" society, even when they form different subcultures or identify themselves as separate from society [Rothenberg 2014]. P. Bourdieu emphasizes the power relations and how the ideas in the art world are socially constructed.

Artistic field as a part of the power field

An artist's social trajectory is a series of positions taken by the painter or group of painters in the artistic field and social space. Since the position in a balanced situation in space affects the process of taking a position, then analysing opinions of several painters in the same period of history may identify overall tendencies in the artistic field and social space. Bourdieu notes that, in order to understand and explain the interaction between people and events, it is not sufficient to assess what has been said or what has happened, while it is significant to assess the social space of the interaction. Analysis of the social space means not only placing the object in a certain historical context, but also studying the process of how knowledge on the object was formed and the way interest has determined the emergence of this knowledge. In the part of the artistic field with a low degree of autonomy, a painter is exposed to stable market relations, where the involved participants have a good command of the existing demand, without looking for new ways of expression, but following the known orders to achieve commercial success instead. According to Bourdieu, the interest of artists in mutual cooperation in the field of art promotes the development of new artistic movements in the field of cultural production and social space. The confluence of power and art can be identified not only under conditions of strict censorship and repression, but in separate cases also in a democratic system.

It is easier to identify the position of those painters who are active in the artistic field of mass production, but who do not have the symbolic capital to affect the direction of the art environment, than to understand the not always consequent position of those painters who have symbolic capital at their disposal. It should be noted that a state-supported conjuncture is clearly visible, while the rules dictated by the market frequently fuse with the wishes of society at a particular time. The characterisation of painters' vision to affect social processes in the field of power may be divided into three categories: "Inability to affect", "Artist as a personality" and "Influence through art".

Many painters are sure of their inability to affect social processes, either with their work or civic activity. Such answers can be found in all age groups regardless of the position in the artistic field.

"They are not able to affect, and this has been proven by history, for example, in the medieval age" (No. 10);¹ "Nothing can be affected by creative work. If I was sitting in the Saeima or Riga City Council as a member of Parliament or the Council, maybe I would be able to affect something" (No. 26); "They cannot affect big processes. Only on a larger scale. Theatre, literature and cinema may make somebody think about something for a while, however, they cannot affect big processes" (No. 13); "Is it required? An artist is a man who frequently has a conditional link with the real world" (No. 7); "No. An artist can supplement something, make something more beautiful or uglier, but not affect, since there are different rules of the game" (No. 20).

Some respondents assume that the artist as a personality can create good quality changes in society. The function of art is the introduction of genuine, spirit-raising works into the cultural field, developing the human world of feelings and opening new development opportunities. Answers contain protest against pop-culture.

"Real art must be able to change something inside a human, to create good quality changes in the spiritual world. This is a thankless job" (No. 18); "Consumer society with so many temptations of pseudo-culture. Dan Brown's works will be read instead of real literature, and pop music has largely drowned in the basement what, in my opinion, is the only real music. Art has little opportunity to affect something – it is not a weapon of propaganda. At some point, it touches the string of a human soul, inspires, opens some horizons or develops subconsciousness. Man lives with dreams and fantasies – he feels support and emotional experience through art,

¹ Hereinafter the figure in brackets will denote a code assigned to an interview. See Appendices.

literature and music. Art is not able to deliver anything better than emotions and aesthetic satisfaction. Artworks do not need to be made just beautiful, they must contain some sort of accomplishment, there must be a 'missile', which makes change in one's mind" (No. 24).

It should be noted that percept of painters of the older generation regarding the personality's leading role in the social space relates to acquired cultural capital and purpose to serve for social interests, including promotion of the national awareness.

"It is the artist's task to go deep into his/her speciality, improve himself/herself by maximally improving skills and soul, since the importance of the artist's contribution to society also depends on his/her human size. Thus, the more an artist works with and thinks of himself/herself, the more valuable he/she will be for others" (No. 25); "Do not pollute the world with bad works, at least within the boundaries of self-made quality criteria. Nobody is protected from unrecognised mistakes the person is not aware of. Try to comply with the code of professional ethics every time you touch the higher levels" (No. 14); "One must want to be an artist and understand what it means: crafting skills plus attitude towards everything that goes on in your land. An ability to apply artificial means of expression is required" (No. 5).

Those painters who consider that the core task of art is to influence (including entertainment) society through increased positive emotions, characterise painting as a symbol of art or explain it with the unlimited possibilities of the means of expression thereof. The artist is perceived through the prism of professionalism, treating special education as such. An assessment of professionalism among colleagues is related to the rules of internal hierarchy of the artistic field, made by relative confirmation, support and recognition of other artists (at least at the beginning of activity) [Bourdieu 1996]. Painters without relevant education are not treated as equal players, and there is the opinion that their job is not to be related to the artistic field. The symbolic capital of competing agents is emphasized, dominated by the artist's individual responsibility and ability to continuously educate and enhance his or her skills. It is about the professional code of ethics.

"'Everybody' is not an artist, he has access to the transcendental, and he must be able to generalize it to bring it to others and find connections. Furthermore, it must take place masterfully in the technique used by the artist, and, where there are both of these components, there is a great artist. Believing that everyone is an artist neglects the need for virtuosity and, at times, the need for knowledge. Art is frequently involved in reflection regarding the processes of science, discoveries, effects, and social matters. I believe that first of all art has to provide emotional and mental emotional experience – that is the function. Art is not for entertainment

or decorating a wall. The rest is entertainment industry or science at the level of amateurs, or craft at a high level. Beautified, but 'blank' painting – I would equal it to craft” (No. 18); “There are people who take it as their destiny and follow this path. An artist has talent and fatality in this direction, he/she does his/her job regardless of its ease or difficulty” (No. 12).

An artist has to hold his/her hand on the pulse of life all the time, even to be amazed. Therefore, craft, knowledge about painting and the history thereof are important for the painter to make himself/herself a general person of culture, who would have identified the highest achievements in his/her speciality. A young person, who wants to become an artist, must become a personality. Only a personality is able to supplement his/her contribution to what has been created.

Artistic field

The autonomy of artistic field is expressed in the degree to which the artist obeys the laws of action and changes in the field of power and social space. The actions of a painter may also be directly affected by other participants of the artistic field. When characterising the artistic field in Latvia, painters pay more attention to the events in the area of art and mention activity of art institutions and cooperation among them to a lesser extent. The characterisation of a painters' artistic field may be divided into three categories: “Open and progressive”, “Inert and closed” and “Variable and influential”.

The “Open and progressive” category reflects painters' appreciation of the art scene, where one can choose between different art events, different trends in painting, and depends on the interest and desire to creatively explore individual fields of activity and create unique artistic handwriting.

“Traditionally, art in Latvia has wide distribution and popularity. The type of activity of each artist is individual. Sometimes there is a wish to find persons with the same views, sometimes there are none. Everyone must develop his/her art, style. [...] Probably the art environment is rather active, however, I am not always satisfied with the directions of development. [...] How to support this diversity?” (No. 5); “[...] sufficiently varied and interesting. There is also a sufficient number of events. Events are with a good number of visitors” (No. 25).

The quality of the art processes and the large number of solo exhibitions by the artists were positively evaluated. The professional activity of painters was accentuated.

“Exhibitions are also being organised. Sometimes I am surprised that the organisation of exhibitions has not been interrupted in this situation, and that

exhibitions take place one by one, exhibition halls are engaged. [...] It points to the mentality of the artists” (No. 15); “I guess, everything is fine there, since it is approximately the same as everywhere and – the way it should be. [...] There are many artists. Furthermore, there are also many movements. The level is good. Many artists are talented, there are also some second-raters, but they are basically everywhere” (No. 1).

In the category “Inert and closed”, painters point to provincialism in art and its perception. The work of the painters takes place in closed and individual environment, it would be desirable to activate the most up-to-date art processes and promote the appearance of significant events in the Latvian art life.

“If consumers of art are also to be included in the art environment, these people are mostly poorly informed on the contexts of global art processes. From this the rest also follows. However, it does not take a snob towards society as a lover of art, artists also used to be lazy to explore and analyse events taking place elsewhere” (No. 14); “It seems it is starting to come back to life in the recent years, but alienation from global processes can also be observed. [...] Not many exhibitions of foreign artists have taken place in Riga. The self-sufficiency factor can be felt a little. It is important to see various things in the area of art, to be aware of everything that is going on in the world, instead of reinventing the wheel every time” (No. 23); “Art life? Unfortunately, lagging behind and provincial” (No. 7).

Compared to art events in other countries, painters highlight the independence of Latvian exhibitions from a wider context and criticize the lack of information on developments in the world.

“In my opinion, narrowed and not interesting. There are gallery exhibitions. There are museum exhibitions. There are several laboratories. Overall – very broad and varied. E-mail is full of activities around. [...] It is a different story that nothing original and of very good quality takes place. Our scene is varied, for Europe it is next to nothing” (No. 10).

Artists wish to see art environment around them, which creates convenient working conditions and provides development opportunities, however, at the same time, readiness to take the initiative and change current positions and distribution of roles in the artistic field is rare. According to Bourdieu, interaction between position and layout system in the field is directly inversed. Every *habitus* as a layout system may be implemented effectively from socially marked positions. Just the opposite, through the layout, which may be more or less regulated by specific positions, belonging to one or other position may be potentially mendaciously registered

[Bourdieu 1996]. Thus, the position taken in view of the equity capital of the artist not always determines the artist's layout in the artistic field. It is directly affected by the artist's *habitus* and skills in using his/her resources, as well as their ability of interaction with other players in the artistic field. This is also confirmed by the painters' assessment of art life in Latvia, which is comparatively closed environment. It shows separate events, and not the overall picture.

"Huge resources are lost in this environment – due to lack of work organisation. [...] For example, in Latvia, events are frequently described post factum, while the global trend is to stir up viewers' interest and write about upcoming events" (No. 6); *"This environment is very close and small, if we talk about the high art as we would want to see it, because we cannot refer to these 4000 artists as our artistic field – frequently, they are for family traditions and not internal need"* (No. 20).

While artists are critical, when it comes to the artistic field, saying that most painters are not interested in development, leaving cooperation with art institutions adrift, criticism is not stressed in the assessment of art processes. This leads to the conclusion that the painters are less demanding in relation to the activities they participate in. The problems are related to the organisation of the art environment and weak interaction between painters and the national art institutions, which, in their turn, lack a clear future vision. There are indications on the importance of competition and professionalism in the work of curators and galleries appear.

"Exhibitions are good, but there is a problem with the management, the personnel that works with the exhibitions. [...] It should be considered how to organise time for an exhibition, how to sell better. Frequently, very interesting things are missed due to various political or other reasons" (No. 6); *"These 'real ones', who are, yes, very professional and with a great interest. However, there is excessive competition between artists, critics, and organisers, which actually only stops the dynamics in Latvian art. There is competition not only between artists, but also between galleries, curators and critics. Sometimes competition can help, however, such a small country like ours should stick together more, since the final goal is the same for everybody: to cross the borders of Latvia, since, in Latvia, when a specific high level has been reached, everything remains in this field. This may be done at the professional level only, which means joint recognition of talents and joint support thereof"* (No. 19).

Due to the lack of a full retrospective painting exposition, where the overall picture of Latvian art could be seen, young painters may not assess colleagues and cooperate mutually. Painters work in closed and chaotic environment.

“We have a sufficient number of exhibitions. Galleries uninterruptedly hold personal exhibitions of various artists. [...] It seems that a couple of generations of artists calmly get older, while young people hardly know them. One could wish for more in this regard” (No. 25); *“I can think of personal exhibitions of artists, I would say that activity in the field of exhibitions is high, while number of joint exhibitions, where one could mutually compare works of the artists, is lower than earlier”* (No. 5).

Assessment of art processes given by painters confirms that the artistic field is relatively stagnating. The dissatisfaction of painters with the organisation of art processes and lack of mutual interest has been indicated.

“This environment is very nervous and chaotic. It is paradoxical that the Latvian artists with the highest global achievements do not participate in this environment at all – to avoid wasting energy” (No. 6).

“Changing and vulnerable” artistic field. The art environment in Latvia is characterised as changing, as one that forms and adapts themselves to the social environment. Although a painter should be free in his/her activity, the artistic field should not be separated from the common social space, and the lack of national goals has been specified in this context. The role of national art institutions would be to support separate artistic movements and assign value to the artworks.

“Overall, the art environment is total chaos. Each person acts for himself/herself. There is a huge number of artists, and the environment is mixed – as is obvious in the galleries. Separate artists’ cliques appear. One in the academy, one in the Artists’ Union of Latvia, one in the State Culture Capital Foundation (SCCF), additionally, also applied arts – art craft, design. Although, there is no design without manufacture. There are no purchasers, either. The State wastes money again and ‘creates’ designers who are not needed” (No. 8).

When creating notions of the activity of artists and positioning in the artistic field, attention should be drawn to the artist’s *habitus*. Artists mutually compete and leave specific positions, taking into account two significant structures – objective structure (field, internal rules thereof, institutions), which enable taking a position and the integrating structure (*habitus*, which disposes a person to integrate in the field). The integrating structure includes the artist’s overall social position. This is the capital at the artist’s disposal, in good knowledge of rules of the game. The larger the capital is, the better the opportunities to compete in taking a more powerful position in the artistic field [Bourdieu 2002]. The possibilities for painters to affect processes nationwide depend on the taken position. It’s up to them to create socially active art or separate from social problems.

Painters in the artistic field

When determining a painter's position in the artistic field, the characteristics of the activity of his/her peers should be taken into account. Characterizations of painters for their colleagues may be divided into the following categories: "Contrast 'us and them'", "Market participants", "Vivid personalities".

In the category "Contrast 'us and them'", the disposition of painters in the artistic field shows the dominating position of a subjective vision, when a group of one's own people is separated by unequivocal division. It is interesting that the position "we" is always related to self-positioning in a limited field of production, while the position "they", although also permitted in a limited field of production, is placed in the field of wide production. The collision of boundaries of the field of wide production and limited field of production may be marked. Depending on the positioning of painters in the artistic field, answers may be both positive and negative. Painters with symbolic and economic capital are positive in relation to less successful colleagues.

"There is art and there is mediocre art. There are tops, personalities, and there is forest. But this forest is necessary. All this diversity, richness – I like to draw from all that. [...] I do not want to deny this. For example, in Edith Wigner's exhibition, some consequential people say: "There is kitsch". Or Tabaka Maija – kitsch" (No. 21).

Some answers contain turning against the painters who are in the power field and who have economic capital. This enables placing them in the positions of idealism as a contrast to an artist with material wishes.

"Artists are divided into at least two parts. Part of them, who are maybe naive and in the midst of their calling. They create under any circumstances. The other group, which is considered the contemporary ones, this could be put in quotation marks, who do a prepaid job, at a minimum, with paid materials" (No. 11).

Mutual assessments of the youngest painters show differences which have originated in the course of historical events. Artists of various generations are looking for opportunities to stabilise their economic situation.

"I guess they have disorientated themselves in time and space, and in political events. One part of them is searching for identity, because earlier they were soviet artists, others want to jump into the European and global market" (No. 6); "There is no uniform image of a Latvian artist, there are big differences – various generations, various ways of thinking. [...] Many of them have been affected by the changes of time" (No. 23).

Painters see the greatest contrasts in different principles of creative works.

“This is not possible – they are so different. Artists is such a category which may not be characterised as something common – they are too different. I cannot name anything common” (No. 18); *“Actually – that is a dreadful ‘nation’. They could be divided into several groups of interests, since I guess that artists get on better within the framework of one manner of painting. I think it is hard to accept the style of another person. An artist is generally an egoist with the right to consider that he/she is the best, to recognise a few classics, who have been maybe his/her sources of inspiration, while the rest may just be accepted as artists keeping his/her thoughts to himself/herself. Such an attitude is very typical for Latvians. In my opinion, this is very Latvian”* (No. 15).

Answers frequently contain reference to the importance of education in a painter’s creative work, as well as to the large number of professional artists in Latvia. Fragmentation of the artists’ environment and mutual isolation can be observed. An artist sees himself/herself as a loner. A contrast between generations can also be observed, which is explained by art tasks of various different ages or the inability of separate artists to adapt to more modern movements. Painters, whose artistic task is based on searching their personalities, strictly separate themselves and “their people” from the remaining artists or position themselves as a different phenomenon which does not belong to any group, which corresponds to the finding of Bourdieu that “[..] the value of each artist is determined in an analogous game of considered judgments supported by one to another: great knowledge of the game (whose laws are intended only for those, who have been excluded – and just because of this reason), in how to treat critics, traders, and other painters, what they need to be told, who should be met, who should be avoided, what places (especially, what exhibitions) should be attended, but which should be avoided, which more and more narrow groups should be joined – these circumstances form part of the conditions which are the most ideal for the accumulation of the entrusted value, which makes a human remarkable” [Bourdieu 2004].

“There are many artists in Latvia. Many of them are professionally well-prepared. This arises from the sufficient number of art schools and children’s art schools, which prepare for the higher educational institutions. Currently, there is a risk of ruining this system, thus losing quality in the future” (No. 25); *“They are united only by their involvement in art. However, this environment is very fragmented. We have approximately 4000 artists, if we assume that the academy graduates approximately 100 every year. [...] The number of those, who are involved in studying their social environment, are a handful, maybe 10, the rest are working*

in the artistic field only. How many thinking artists do we have in Latvia? And people?" (No. 20).

The inability of Latvian painters to work in teams impedes the solution of many creative problems. Painters want to unite in groups, however, if they succeed in doing this, the groups are made of small, mutually enclosed clusters, which continue fragmentation of the art environment.

"Artists are loners who have to fight for themselves. Currently there are circumstances in which an artist must paint works, organise an exhibition, invite an audience, including art historians, who write about him/her – all these problems must be solved by themselves. [...] If artists unite in groups, they have stronger power and greater opportunities" (No. 9); *"The inability to agree and work in teams, fear from public discussion on art processes – all that is typical for artists. The majority of artists do not even talk to each other, they would rather exclude the other artist from their circle for unpleasant criticism"* (No. 6).

Inclusion of Latvia in the status of a small country and the opinion that spirit of provincialism amplifies in Latvia, thus impeding integration into the global art environment, leads to the wish of the painters to expand their space of activity and integrate in a broader context.

"They are not different from artists anywhere else in the world. [...] The only difference is knowledge in the local language, as well as geographical location and political situation" (No. 3); *"Large nations do not need small nations, therefore, we cannot expect to be wanted. Globally the most recognisable artists are those who come from large nations, for example, Gustavs Klucis also gained recognisability as a Russian artist"* (No. 12); *"Artists tend to be too lazy to find out what is going on elsewhere"* (No. 14); *"Provincially. The majority, not all, of course. But this is the common fault of Latvia, it does not apply to artists only"* (No. 7); *"The self-sufficiency factor can be felt a little. It is important to see many various things in the area of art, to be aware of everything that is going on in the world, instead of reinventing the wheel every time"* (No. 23).

The majority of painters have an idealistic mood, and they relate to their profession with high goals. "Art is an openness, where a human must be" [Heidegger 1998]. "Art is one of the basic needs of a human, which helps to unite society" [Tolstoy 1997]. Code "Market participants" shows a separation of painters from some colleagues, who oblige market demands.

"To orientate to a private buyer means a harder situation than in the soviet era. Taste and criteria of society decline. National importance of an artist also

declines, since the large joint exhibitions have disappeared, the participation in which was a matter of prestige and where each painter was able to find his place in the current level. Attention from the media and criticism was expected. There is just a weak reflection of historically popular Days of Art and Autumn exhibitions. I do not understand the “institute of curators”, exhibitions frequently end up in not too competent hands” (No. 5); “Typical commercialisation can be observed among artists” (No. 27); “The goals of investment of money are frequently temporary, and they are related to politics and fashion. There is nothing bad, but it reminds of the same colour in clothing or design” (No. 11).

Artists tend to position themselves as being free from the influence of the social space and power field, meanwhile characterising their colleagues as exposed to market conditions. Following the conditions of the art market equals artistic activity to craft, which does not necessarily mean good quality art. According to Bourdieu, the tendency to position oneself in risky positions, the ability and capacity to hold such positions without gaining short-term economic benefit mostly depends on manageable economic and symbolic capital [Bourdieu 1993]. This is why economic capital provides the circumstances in which survival is not the primary condition. Personal income becomes the best replacement for the sale of artwork.

“About the time of independence. At the first moment we, painters, thought – now we are going to work for our country, pay all our taxes, which will be at the disposal of our nation, etc. As time went by, we found that taxes and the attitude of the state towards art were not for the benefit of creative work. An absolute inability of public clerks to see the difference between professional art and amateurs. Lack of cultural policy. There is no common cultural policy, and the state does not assign funds for the expansion of museum funds. The painters are forced to orient themselves to private buyers. Regular work and the ability to purchase materials for painting requires a regular income” (No. 5).

Answers in “Vivid personalities” provide a positive assessment of the common art scene environment and professional skills of colleagues. The current status of painters is characterised by Ivars Heinrihsons, Professor of the Art Academy and painter, in interview by Vilnis Vējš: “Once, painting was very elitist. Now, painting is one of the sectors. The priority is a person with ideas. Furthermore, socially active and ready for various projects. Without these, no support is available. This is the factor which has supplemented the tradition.”

“I have worked in the Art Academy, and I can say that Latvians are very talented in the arts, and we have a dense culture-capable layer” (No. 12); “Very, very well. Very professional, and many talented, too” (No. 2).

Answers highlight the professionalism of Latvian painters and set against painters from other countries. Artists aged above 50, who have prizes and awards in Latvia and abroad, associate the history of Latvian art with vivid personalities in the artistic field at the beginning of the 20th century. The named artists were mentioned as impulse for the development of national art and as evidence for the abilities of the painter to interpret and distribute elements of national identity to society.

“Very high! Latvians have one wonderful quality [...]. Latvians as a nation are artificially talented in both the sense of shape, colour and style, thus they extremely splendidly act towards any direction, no matter whether it is baroque or art nouveau, or the twenties to thirties (Grosvalds, Tone, Kazaks, early Ubāns). They did it splendidly, and more beautifully in terms of colours. And this will continue to nowadays” (No. 12); “Growing the young generation of painters also develops towards the direction of easier training. Many professional skills are no longer taught. Foreign methods are not good for us, and it seems unlikely that it is so easy to abandon everything that we have managed to preserve during the soviet era. How did we differ? By the understanding of the specific character of painting. If once we were recognised on a global scale, then for this. These notions coming from Europe and America are not good for us today, we should preserve and develop a strict professional school and sense of painting. Also, the decisive auction houses and factors determining painting fashion – how much does it apply to us? We should remember that we are a nation of weavers and painters” (No. 5).

Painters are not independent, their activity is affected by the economic and social space, they are related to the collective string of structures, processes and institutions, from the first materialisation of an idea of art work up to the moment when the work is exposed to public [Bourdieu 1993]. If there is lack of materials – paint, canvas, frames – a painting cannot be created; it cannot be exhibited and analysed without the interest of curators, designers, heads of galleries and critics, which, in turn, impedes the sale of the painting. The painter's position in the artistic field is revealed, determining the activities that are offered by the respective situation. Pursuant to P. Bourdieu, *habitus* is not only a connection between the past, present and future, but also a connection between the objective and subjective, structure and agent. Individuality and difference from the rest are expressed – they can be determined in a socially particular way. The personal style is a direction accepted by the particular period.

Consumer of artwork

When assessing participants of the artistic field, painters accentuate the role of viewers in the process of creative work. Feedback between the artist and viewer, the viewer's understanding of art and meaning of assessment has been included in

Bourdieu's idea that the decisive person of value of an artwork is not the artist himself/herself, but the artistic field in the field of cultural products, which maintains the value of artwork as fetish, distributing ideas of the artist's creative spirit [Bourdieu 1996]. Although art exhibitions have always been well attended in Latvia, answers given by the painters show that they are not relating to their viewer, and mutual feedback is minimal.

"I cannot get through to my viewers. [...] There is lack of discussion and exchange of opinions on art. There are no really professional discussions after the exhibitions, even among colleagues" (No. 14); "Usually I do not see them. I see those people who attend the opening of the exhibition – friends and relatives" (No. 2); "People are very different, it depends on the place. Friends – they definitely attend my exhibitions. I am glad if some of them like it, but anyone can attend – social group does not matter" (No. 22); "These are anonymous people, I don't know them. [...] But I always want to hear from acquaintances who express their opinions about my works, something more than just "like" or "dislike", something characterising, some kind of aspect which is perceived by the viewer, which I have formulated for myself or even thought about that – this is the most interesting thing" (No. 16).

Painters want to see visitors of exhibitions as professionally prepared in art, intelligent, with positive attitude and good taste. These criteria are most frequently represented by colleagues. The opportunity to view paintings intuitively without prior art education is highlighted.

"Sometimes there have been very pleasant surprises from the viewers. [...] These are people with good taste – that is what we all would like to think" (No. 17); "There are very different people – intelligent, positive" (No. 6); "Visitors are different. When working with students and taking them to the museum, I noticed that on the days when there was free admission for pensioners and schoolchildren in the museum, the most interesting and real audience came. My exhibitions are mostly attended by friends and colleagues – painters, interested persons and former students. I have noticed that viewers have a positive attitude towards my works even if they are not able to perceive painting qualities and follow the literary ones. I like the people who know what they are coming to see" (No. 5).

Being aware of the actual complicity of perceiving of painting, professional artists hope for at least a partially understanding audience, which strives for the understanding of art.

"This person is someone, who has seen something from the art. Not totally from a side, but with a certain notion about painting. Someone who watches and assesses

what is good and what is bad. This is not a person totally unrelated to art, because such people usually think that there is something scribbled there. [...] I've seen this abroad, that people come closer to study, and even other artists, and I like that. They come closer to study how this has been made" (No. 1); "With the exception of people really interested in my paintings, visitors of exhibitions may be searching and growing, maybe not yet understanding their reason for attendance, but they become more understanding every time they come. There may be a part of society which comes because they consider themselves as consumers of culture. They also have hope to someday understand the pleasures of painting" (No. 25).

Painters of all generations admit that it is important for an artist to feel needed. The attitude of viewers reflexively affects creative work. A painter without symbolic capital puts a greater accent on this.

"[...] there is someone needed, who demands and expects. Without this feeling, it is hard to do something. It takes strong motivation to work regardless of anything" (No. 16); "I am grateful to my viewers who have shown me great favour and lots of love. One of my basic tasks – I want to paint joy. I assume that this is the reason people like my paintings" (No. 12).

Sometimes painters idealize the viewer – just the opposite – consider him/her an accidental passer. An artist does not expect an assessment of work from art lovers and accidental viewers, but trusts the references of colleagues and specialists instead.

"This definitely differs from reality. This is what has been imagined or concluded, or even idealized... I don't know. I could tell more about those people I have talked with, from whom I have heard good replies or something like that. Usually, they have been overjoyed people with their internal energy, able to perceive some vibrations. People who are able to perceive the environment emotionally. Circles of various people, but the main thing is – art may be perceived by anyone, but the person who wants it, I don't know, – this person does not reach everything. But the person who notices – I always feel that this person always continues to maintain this link in some way" (No. 3); "Accidental foreigner or professional. Art lover, not necessarily a buyer" (No. 11); "These are other artists, also people, who are looking for something, travellers in time and space" (No. 23).

Most frequently painters contact viewers of their own generation. These are fellow-students, friends, this is the life experience in common. However, the author does not represent the interests of just one age group. There are situations when representatives of other generations are admirers or deniers of the artist.

“Accidental arrivals, artists, admirers and purchasers between 35–45 who do not advertise themselves” (No. 10); “Viewers – they are aged between 30–50 years, maybe younger, well educated, both male and female, vital and open people. Their material situation is not that significant” (No. 20); “I have had reference books in my exhibitions, and a rather great part of the entries were made by people of the older generation, the generation of my parents. [...] This is the broadest circle. There are also my contemporaries and a large number of young people. The least part is formed by people aged 50–60. This generation is represented only by people who are related to the art. This is the generation which currently holds the reins of power and is responsible for what is going on here, to some extent. A rather opaque generation, I guess” (No. 18).

The painters’ belief in painting as the most comprehensive form of art provides guarantee about their capacity to interpret and disseminate the values of national identity. The artists classify their impact onto society as provision of knowledge, through which the categories of thinking can be transformed.

Conclusions

Latvian painters are sure that visual art is relatively autonomous from external influence (from politics, ideology, economics, administrative control). In the visual “artistic field”, where various actors interact and compete, painters with their specific *habitus* and dispositions, and the idea that art resources are unlimited to implement one’s ideas regardless of external influence. The painters’ answers show that they are related to the social space and power field. Painters are equal players with other actors. However, at the same time, they want to see them as an independent player in the social space.

A painter’s social identity and symbolic capital determines the possible movements of his/her activity. A painter’s position in the artistic field is identified by determining the activities offered by the particular situation. A painter’s *habitus* unites society and the individual, since every life can be unique in a particular context. However, at the same time, it is joined with other lives in the same structure. Personal style is no more than a movement accepted by the particular period. Frequently, the artistic, not the social value, is more valuable for the artists. It arises from the painting specifics that in cases when the painter starts to ingratiate with a specific audience, the presence of art is jeopardised. If a painting exists as far as it is perceived, it is clear that the satisfaction associated with its deciphering is only available to those who are inclined to receive it because they attach value to it.

The answers indicate that the autonomy of the artistic field is not possible. The artistic field is directly related to the power field. The symbolic capital of national

art institutions is significantly important, since the symbolic power is acquired by following internal field rules, which is the opposite to all heteronomous powers which artists and other holders of culture capital may attempt to assign to themselves as lookalikes for technical or symbolic services, offered by them as dominating, especially by distributing the current symbolic order. The mutual competition and disagreements between painters, which impedes artistic development, has been stressed in interviews. Latvian art is comparatively isolated and international recognition is important for painters, but it may be acquired by occasional work visits abroad. Separation from the Latvian artistic field means that the internal mechanisms of activity are thereof not able to provide the participants with the necessary resources. Activity models which would comply with all the requirements of artists have not been created in Latvia. Working in a space which is not related to the artistic field of the particular nation is a signal that warns of transformation of notions. This is a testimony to a strengthening of new identity in society.

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Appendices

- 1 – man, 53 years old, painter, is not pedagogue, regular exhibition in Latvia and abroad, CS+;
- 2 – woman, 40 years old, painter, pedagogue, has no regular exhibition in Latvia and abroad, CS+;
- 3 – man, 41 years old, painter, is not pedagogue, regular exhibition in Latvia and abroad, CS–;
- 4 – man, 66 years old, painter, pedagogue, has no regular exhibition in Latvia and abroad, CS+;
- 5 – man, 74 years old, painter, pedagogue, regular exhibition in Latvia and abroad, CS+;
- 6 – man, 34 years old, painter, pedagogue, regular exhibition in Latvia and abroad, CS+;
- 7 – woman, 38 years old, painter, is not pedagogue, regular exhibition in Latvia and abroad, CS–;
- 8 – woman, 43 years old, painter, is not pedagogue, has no regular exhibition in Latvia and abroad, CS–;
- 9 – woman, 40 years old, painter, is not pedagogue, has no regular exhibition in Latvia and abroad, CS–;
- 10 – man, 64 years old, painter, pedagogue, regular exhibition in Latvia and abroad, CS+;
- 11 – woman, 61 years old, painter, is not pedagogue, regular exhibition in Latvia and abroad, CS+;
- 12 – man, 75 years old, painter, is not pedagogue, regular exhibition in Latvia and abroad, CS+;
- 13 – man, 33 years old, painter, is not pedagogue, regular exhibition in Latvia and abroad, CS–;
- 14 – woman, 52 years old, painter, is not pedagogue, regular exhibition in Latvia and abroad, CS–;

- 15 – man, 47 years old, painter, pedagogue, regular exhibition in Latvia and abroad, CS+;
- 16 – man, 52 years old, painter, is not pedagogue, has no regular exhibition in Latvia and abroad, CS-;
- 17 – woman, 38 years old, painter, is not pedagogue, regular exhibition in Latvia and abroad, CS-;
- 18 – man, 39 years old, painter, is not pedagogue, regular exhibition in Latvia and abroad, CS+;
- 19 – woman, 29 years old, painter, is not pedagogue, regular exhibition in Latvia and abroad, CS-;
- 20 – man, 38 years old, painter, is not pedagogue, regular exhibition in Latvia and abroad, CS+;
- 21 – woman, 84 years old, painter, is not pedagogue, regular exhibition in Latvia and abroad, CS+;
- 22 – woman, 47 years old, painter, is not pedagogue, has no regular exhibition in Latvia and abroad, CS-;
- 23 – woman, 32 years old, painter, is not pedagogue, regular exhibition in Latvia and abroad, CS-;
- 24 – man, 57 years old, painter, is not pedagogue, has no regular exhibition in Latvia and abroad, CS+;
- 25 – woman 63 years old, painter, pedagogue, regular exhibition in Latvia and abroad, CS+;
- 26 – man, 72 years old, painter, pedagogue, has no regular exhibition in Latvia and abroad, CS+;
- 27 – man, 65 years old, painter, pedagogue, has no regular exhibition in Latvia and abroad, CS-.