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El Kazovsky revisited: LGBT and Queer Themes in Visual Arts in a Socialist and Post-Socialist Context

In the forthcoming research, I undertake the reinterpretation of El Kazovsky's (1948-2008) oeuvre as an example of queer art practice in socialist and post-socialist Hungary in the context of the Central and Eastern European region. Kazovsky is among the most prominent artists in the history of Hungarian art, whose unique life work continuously carried explicit manifestations of LGBT or „queer“ subjects and criticism of traditional gender concepts from the mid 1970s. After his public coming out as a gay transgender man in 1991, in his published interviews Kazovsky frequently mentioned his identity and gave an exhaustive list of personally important cultural references, which examples in most cases carry explicit or implicit gay or queer purport. Despite these clear statements, the artist's self-imposed identity, his sphere of interests and their manifestation in the artworks, no art historian has taken the critical aspects of gender or sexuality as the fundamental base for interpretation. The main goal of the proposed research is to find possible strategies to read LGBT-related and gender-critical art in the socialist and post-socialist Hungarian cultural scene, taking the present oeuvre as a starting point. Following the principles of social art history I will combine classical methods of art history, such as formalistic analysis, iconography and semiotics, with oral history and the intersectional fields of critical theories, such as cultural materialism, gender, gay and queer studies, with the aim of arriving at a detailed picture of the complex situatedness of El Kazovsky's oeuvre.

The research will incorporate additional subtopics, such as the stance of the permissive socialist cultural authorities, the factors that influenced the formation of the established Kazovsky-narrative after the system change, the legitimation of discussing identity-based art in the Socialist Bloc, the circulation and transformation of information between Western and Eastern Bloc LGBT communities and individuals as well as among socialist countries, etc. The results will hopefully become an integral part of the image of the cultural and LGBT history of the CEE region.