

Žarko Aleksić

Faculty of Fine Arts Belgrade, University of Arts in Belgrade, Serbia

Образовање и Образовање. Artistic Intervention on a living Brain

Образовање и Образовање is a project that starts from a language game and, at first glance, ambiguously refers to *Образовање* as education (“the process of changing a personality in the desired direction by adopting different content depending on the age and needs of the individual”) and *Образовање* as an act of shaping, forming, composing, structuring and constructing.

The most important educational institutions are schools. This project re-examines the role of educational institutions in forming opinions, learning skills, production of knowledge, creating and understanding art in a narrow and broad sense, as well as the contexts in which the learned knowledge can be applied. The work is conceived as a total work of art/*Gesamtkunstwerk*, which, in an attempt to democratize knowledge and, through a critical attitude towards its elitism, seeks to destabilize the dichotomy between elitist and populist art, especially targeting the discursive aspects of the Artworld.

Knowledge and learning function as dominant ideological apparatuses of indoctrination, but also as tools of power are the subject of numerous critical reflections, including Documenta14, which raises the question “What we can learn from Athens?”. An equally important concern is that the focus should not be limited to the content of what can be learned. Rather, a deeper question emerges: what constitutes knowledge itself? This perspective challenges the standard epistemological definition of knowledge as justified true belief and invites a reconsideration of learning beyond discursive frameworks. Within a non-discursive context, knowledge may no longer be understood primarily as the acquisition of propositional content, but as a form of embodied, affective, perceptual, or experiential engagement with the world. Consequently, the question is not only what is learned, but also how learning occurs and what alternative modes of knowing become possible outside conventional linguistic and conceptual structures. Yes, this is written in English.

The project *Образовање и Образовање* is divided into two parts. The first part consists of the exhibited library and archive of faculty books, from the fundus of the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade, where I also work as an assistant professor, literature from the professor’s syllabus—books, texts, and periodicals contributed by the

participating students which were important for their own personal development. Internalized knowledge that is ‘stored’ in the brain through the process neuroplasticity literally participating in the formation of its physical structure, as Katharine Malabou says in the book *What Should We Do with Our Brains* which we read as preparation for the exhibition along other literature that includes *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* by Louis Althusser, *Cognitive Capitalism, Education and Digital Labor* edited by Michale Paters and Ergin Bulut and *Glossary of Cognitive Activism* by Warren Niedich. The most important tool in the offered toolkit is neuroplasticity, the brain’s lifelong ability to reorganize, grow, and form new neural connections through lived experiences rather than being ‘hard-wired’. After childhood, your brain rewires itself in response to learning new skills, adapting to environmental changes, or recovering from injuries. We need to keep that plastic ability in mind if we want to create new conditions and environments that will shape how we think. Partly with that comes responsibility, as the social and cultural environment will impact our brains and, therefore, our minds. This loop function, together with the almost proverb from pioneering neuroscientist Donald Hebb, “What Fires Together Wires Together”, is among the most important units of knowledge we have to learn and examine in the turbulent time we live in contemporary Serbia.

The books are arranged to form an opaque, non-transparent platform (only the edges of the books are visible) where one is able to move. Walking on this unstable platform produces a slight feeling of discomfort, especially in the stomach, which, in conjunction with proprioceptive sense, prompts reflection and critical review, inviting a re-examination of the position from which one stands and thinks.

The books are placed in such a way that they form an opaque, non-transparent platform (only the edges of the books are visible) on which it is necessary (floor is lava) to walk freely if you want to see the artworks, with a slight feeling of discomfort caused by the instability of the platform, which, in conjunction with the proprioceptive sense, calls for reflection and critical review, and produces a desire to reconsider the position on which one stands. The position, the platform, the fundus (from fundament) that one stands and walks on in order to enjoy the works, the unease in the stomach, this gut feeling of instability has to be re-examined. For the platform montage, we placed the drawing tables used during the entrance exam, just to bring this symbolic carrier of the institution into view. To comply with all the necessary safety procedures, we stationed three bouncers at the entrance to regulate the number of people allowed inside. At any given moment, only seven to eight visitors were permitted to be present in the space. This restriction was implemented to prevent accidents, such as injuries, falls, or damage to the books.

The second component of the project focused on student works. Importantly, the selection process was not determined by the teacher; rather, the students themselves decided which works would be exhibited. As part of the broader process of initialization and positioning within existing power relations, I was required to accept their choices rather than impose my own curatorial criteria. This redistribution

of decision-making authority formed an integral aspect of the project's methodology. The selected works addressed a wide range of topics. Some explored practices of self-discipline and self-regulation, the time needed to study and engage with art, and AI tools used in artistic productions, while others engaged with forms of institutional critique. Several works examined the acquisition and cultivation of skills, questioning prevailing models of learning and professional development and prevalent modes of art creating and consumption, addressing, for example, the so-called creative industry. Other projects challenged the media-based organization of the academy into distinct departments, interrogating the assumptions and hierarchies embedded within such structures, raising the question of "what after?" More broadly, many of the works critically reflected on the institution of art itself. Together, they addressed both specific and broader contextual issues, ranging from immediate educational conditions to wider social, cultural, and institutional frameworks.

Although the exhibition took place during a particularly turbulent political period in Serbia, it did not directly address current political events. Furthermore, given that the project had already been realized in Katowice in 2017, I assumed that its presentation in this context would not generate significant controversy. That is the reason I did not anticipate the extent of discomfort, tension, and institutional unease that ultimately emerged around the project. The reactions it provoked revealed that even works that do not explicitly engage with contemporary political developments can become entangled in broader social and political dynamics, particularly when they challenge established institutional structures, pedagogical norms, or relations of authority. What ultimately restored my confidence (faith in art) was the realization that art can destabilize not only the viewer's affective experience in relation to an artwork but also existing organizational structures themselves. Rather than operating solely at the level of perception or interpretation, the artistic practice can intervene in and unsettle established regimes of organization, authority, and power. Namely, after the opening with numerous guests and professors from the Faculty of Fine Arts, a colleague of mine from the curatorial department reported me to the Ministry of Culture under the official accusation that I am "destroying rare and old books" and unofficially that I advocate "burning the books". I immediately remembered the fate of John Latham's project with Clement Greenberg's book *Art and Culture*, which he did with his students. The commission of nine people from the Ministry showed up several days later to examine the books bureaucratically and practically, so we had to shut down the show. Within only a few days it became evident that representatives of the Ministry were unable to identify any procedural irregularities. The books had been handled, used, and preserved in accordance with the established institutional regulations, and no violations were found. Consequently, the exhibition was 'allowed' to continue. In the aftermath of these events, the faculty organized a public forum featuring invited speakers. The discussion extended beyond the immediate circumstances of the exhibition and became a broader reflection on the role of education, the functions of cultural and academic institutions, and the complex relationship among

artistic practice, public discourse, institutional authority, and cultural heritage. The controversy itself thus became an opportunity for critical debate, generating conversations that reached far beyond the original scope of the exhibition.

On the one hand, the conclusion is that, ontologically speaking, the discursivity of the artworld is inseparable from its affective aspects and that both need to be addressed as they operate in this binding process. On the other hand, several questions appeared. Is it still possible to develop a new, better, and more precise understanding of what art is and what it can be in the current regime of Cognitive Capitalism or the Informational Economy? Does art possess a specific social, cultural, or political function, and if so, what might that function be? It is also important to acknowledge the ideological framework we use as a pretext when we use the term 'art' as well as the role of educational institutions in the participating dialogue. Ultimately, my greatest fear as a professor is that I may do nothing more than reproduce the very conditions that make my current position necessary.

"What fires together wires together" works for neurons and for people.

Artists: Sanja Lazic, Sofija Stevanovic, Đorđe Tufegdžić, Uroš Ignjatović, Andreja Stanković, Luka Joksimović, Jelisaveta Kabaš, Simona Radojković, Uglješa Cvejić, Ana Stojković, Jelena Rendulić, Anđela Tasić, Katarina Maricić, Kosta Aralica, Andrea Žuljević, Mila Runjajić, Bojana Popović, Vanja Dolganov, Tijana Zurković, Milica Janković

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All the visual examples have the same signature:

Exhibition view. Žarko Aleksić, *Образовање и Образовање*, Galerija FLU, Belgrade, 2026. Photographs by Danilo Bursać. Courtesy of Žarko Aleksić.











