

UDC 378.147:7](44+479.25):004.8

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FROM DISCIPLINARY FORMATION TO ARTISTIC AUTONOMY: HIGHER ART EDUCATION IN FRANCE AND ARMENIA IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Higher art education is undergoing a significant transformation as traditional models of disciplinary and technical formation increasingly intersect with artistic autonomy, research-oriented practice, interdisciplinary learning, and artificial intelligence (AI). The article examines how educational structures and institutional cultures shape the formation of artists and designers, focusing comparatively on France and Armenia. The relevance of the topic is determined by the need to understand how contemporary institutions organise the transition from disciplinary knowledge toward independent creative agency at a moment when AI is reshaping established understandings of technical skill, authorship, and artistic decision-making.

The aim of the study is to determine how different educational cultures shape the development of artistic autonomy, artistic identity, and research capacity in higher art education, and how these relationships might be transformed by artificial intelligence.

The research methods are based on a comparative socio-pedagogical approach combining documentary analysis, institutional observation, curriculum analysis, and qualitative interpretation. The empirical component draws primarily on field study conducted in Saint-Étienne, France, during 2024–2025, with particular attention to the École Supérieure d'Art et Design de Saint-Étienne (ESADSE) and Université Jean Monnet, while Armenian higher art education is examined as a comparative context. The analysis is informed by Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural production, Michel Foucault's understanding of disciplinary formation, and the concept of artistic research.

The scientific novelty of the study lies in the comparative socio-pedagogical analysis of French and Armenian higher art education as distinct educational cultures, in interpreting artistic formation as a movement from disciplinary learning toward increasing autonomy and research capacity, and in extending this framework to the relationship between artistic autonomy and artificial intelligence.

The results indicate that both French and Armenian systems recognise the importance of technical and professional competence but organise the transition toward artistic autonomy differently. The French programmes examined show a more explicit progression from foundational education toward specialisation, individual projects, experimentation, professional engagement, and research-oriented practice. Armenian higher art education retains a stronger continuity with systematic technical and disciplinary formation, while incorporating comparable Bachelor–Master–Doctoral structures.

Conclusions. Technical competence and artistic autonomy should not be treated as opposing educational objectives; contemporary art education requires a productive transition between disciplinary knowledge and independent creative agency. The emergence of AI further complicates this relationship by shifting attention from technical execution toward conceptual thinking, critical judgement, authorship, research capacity, and ethical responsibility. For Armenian higher art education, the findings suggest an approach based on adaptation rather than imitation, combining established traditions of technical formation with greater opportunities for specialisation, artistic research, professional practice, digital literacy, and responsible human–AI creative engagement.

Keywords: higher art education; artistic autonomy; France; Armenia; art pedagogy; artistic research; educational culture; professional formation; artificial intelligence; creative agency.

ВІД ДИСЦИПЛІНАРНОГО ФОРМУВАННЯ ДО ХУДОЖНЬОЇ АВТОНОМІЇ: ВИЩА МИСТЕЦЬКА ОСВІТА У ФРАНЦІЇ ТА ВІРМЕНІЇ В ДОБУ ШТУЧНОГО ІНТЕЛЕКТУ

Вища мистецька освіта переживає суттєву трансформацію: традиційні моделі дисциплінарної та технічної підготовки дедалі тісніше взаємодіють із художньою автономією, дослідницькою орієнтованою практикою, міждисциплінарним навчанням і штучним інтелектом (ШІ). У статті розглянуто, як освітні структури та інституційні культури впливають на формування митців і дизайнерів, у порівняльному аспекті на прикладі Франції та Вірменії. Актуальність теми зумовлена потребою зрозуміти, як сучасні заклади освіти організовують перехід від дисциплінарних знань до самостійної творчої суб'єктності в той момент, коли ШІ змінює усталені уявлення про технічну майстерність, авторство та ухвалення художніх рішень.

Мета дослідження — визначити, як різні освітні культури впливають на розвиток художньої автономії, мистецької ідентичності та дослідницької спроможності у вищій мистецькій освіті і як ці взаємозв'язки можуть трансформуватися під впливом штучного інтелекту.

Методи дослідження ґрунтуються на порівняльному соціально-педагогічному підході, що поєднує документальний аналіз, інституційне спостереження, аналіз освітніх програм та якісну інтерпретацію. Емпірична складова спирається переважно на польове дослідження, проведене в Сент-Етьєні (Франція) у 2024–2025 рр., з особливою увагою до Вищої школи мистецтва і дизайну Сент-Етьєна (ESADSE) та Університету Жана Монне; вищу мистецьку освіту Вірменії розглянуто як порівняльний контекст. Теоретичним підґрунтям аналізу слугують концепція культурного виробництва П'єра Бурдьє, розуміння дисциплінарного формування Мішеля Фуко та концепція художнього дослідження.

Наукова новизна дослідження полягає в порівняльному соціально-педагогічному аналізі французької та вірменської вищої мистецької освіти як відмінних освітніх культур, в інтерпретації художнього становлення як руху від дисциплінарного навчання до зростання автономії та дослідницької спроможності, а також у поширенні цієї концептуальної рамки на взаємозв'язок художньої автономії та штучного інтелекту.

Результати засвідчують, що і французька, і вірменська системи визнають важливість технічної та професійної компетентності, проте по-різному організовують перехід до художньої автономії. Розглянуті французькі програми демонструють чіткіше вибудовану послідовність — від базової освіти до спеціалізації, індивідуальних проєктів, експериментування, професійної залученості та дослідницько орієнтованої практики. Вірменська вища мистецька освіта зберігає тісніший зв'язок із системною технічною та дисциплінарною підготовкою, водночас запроваджуючи співставну структуру бакалаврат–магістратура–докторантура.

Висновки. Технічну компетентність і художню автономію не слід розглядати як протилежні освітні цілі: сучасна мистецька освіта потребує продуктивного переходу від дисциплінарних знань до самостійної творчої суб'єктності. Поява ШІ ще більше ускладнює це співвідношення, зміщуючи увагу з технічного виконання на концептуальне мислення, критичне судження, авторство, дослідницьку спроможність та етичну відповідальність. Для вищої мистецької освіти Вірменії результати дослідження вказують на підхід, заснований на адаптації, а не на наслідуванні, що поєднує усталені традиції технічної підготовки з ширшими можливостями для спеціалізації, художнього дослідження, професійної практики, цифрової грамотності та відповідальної творчої взаємодії людини і ШІ.

Ключові слова: вища мистецька освіта; художня автономія; Франція; Вірменія; мистецька педагогіка; художнє дослідження; освітня культура; професійне становлення; штучний інтелект; творча суб'єктність.

Formulation of the problem and its relation to important scientific or practical tasks. Higher art education has traditionally focused on the transmission of disciplinary knowledge, technical skills, and established artistic practices. Within this model, becoming an artist is closely associated with mastering the techniques, materials, conventions, and professional practices of a particular discipline. This foundation remains essential, but contemporary art education increasingly places greater emphasis on experimentation, interdisciplinarity, individual practice, critical reflection, and research.

This shift changes the purpose of educating an artist. Higher art education increasingly seeks to create conditions in which students can formulate their own artistic questions, experiment with different approaches, develop individual positions, and critically examine their practices. The student consequently moves from being primarily a recipient of established knowledge toward becoming an active participant in artistic and cultural production. Art education thus becomes not only professional training but also a process of intellectual, cultural, and personal formation.

The distinction is particularly relevant to the organization of contemporary art and design education. The present study, based on field research conducted in Saint-Étienne, examines the educational structures of the École Supérieure d'Art et Design de Saint-Étienne (ESADSE) and Université Jean Monnet alongside comparable structures in Armenian higher art education. The French programmes examined in the study demonstrate a progression from broader foundational education toward differentiated areas of Art and Design, with individual projects, experimentation, theoretical reflection, and research becoming increasingly important at advanced levels. This raises a central pedagogical question: how does the structure and culture of an educational institution contribute to the development of artistic autonomy?

An art university is therefore simultaneously a place of instruction, evaluation, socialization, experimentation, professional preparation, and identity formation. Students learn not only to produce artistic work but also to discuss, contextualize, present, defend, and critically evaluate it. The institution consequently shapes relationships between the artist, knowledge, authority, society, and artistic practice.

The development of **artistic research** further expands this role. At postgraduate and doctoral lev-

els, artistic practice can become a means of investigation and knowledge production rather than simply the outcome of previously acquired skills (Borgdorff, 2012). The relationship between artistic or design projects, experimentation, and theoretical reflection observed in the French context suggests that advanced artistic formation increasingly requires students to investigate, question, interpret, and generate knowledge through practice.

A further transformation is emerging through artificial intelligence (AI). Generative AI can produce or transform text, images, sound, video, and other creative content, challenging established understandings of technical skill, authorship, originality, and artistic decision-making. UNESCO has emphasized the need for a human-centred approach to generative AI in education and research, including attention to its opportunities, limitations, and ethical implications (Miao & Holmes, 2023). Recent research in art education similarly highlights questions of creativity, authorship, critical thinking, dependency, and the changing role of educators in AI-supported creative environments (Cox & Davey, 2026; Jiang et al., 2026).

AI therefore introduces more than another technological tool into art education. It potentially changes the relationship between technical competence and artistic agency. As computational systems increasingly assist with ideation, visual experimentation, and production, conceptual thinking, critical judgement, reflection, artistic intention, and individual positioning may become even more important. The broader trajectory can consequently be understood as:

Disciplinary Formation → Specialization → Artistic
Autonomy → Artistic Research → Human-AI Creative
Practice

This trajectory does not make technical formation obsolete. Rather, it suggests a changing relationship between technical knowledge and artistic agency. Contemporary students need both disciplinary competence and the capacity to make independent conceptual, critical, and ethical decisions about how knowledge and technologies are used.

The present study examines this transformation through a comparative analysis of higher art education in **France and Armenia**. Rather than treating the two systems simply as alternative curricular models, it approaches them as educational cultures that organize differently the relationships among specialization, authority, technical formation,

individual practice, research, and artistic autonomy.

Analysis of basic research and publications. Higher art education can be understood not only as the transmission of artistic knowledge and technical skills but also as an institutional environment in which students develop professional identities, modes of expression, and relationships to artistic knowledge. Art universities therefore occupy a complex position between instruction and autonomy: they establish curricula, disciplinary expectations, assessment procedures, and professional standards while encouraging students to develop individual artistic positions.

This tension can be examined through Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the **field of cultural production**. From this perspective, art education forms part of a wider cultural field in which students acquire cultural capital, learn professional codes, encounter established artistic values, and gradually learn to position themselves within the art world (Bourdieu, 1993). Educational institutions consequently do more than transmit technical knowledge; they introduce students to particular understandings of artistic legitimacy, competence, originality, and recognition.

Michel Foucault's analysis of disciplinary institutions provides a complementary perspective. Educational institutions organize time, space, observation, evaluation, and behavioural expectations, contributing to the formation of particular kinds of subjects (Foucault, 1995). In art education, however, this disciplinary dimension produces a distinctive paradox: students are expected to master established techniques and conventions while also learning to question them, experiment, and develop an autonomous artistic position. Artistic education can therefore be understood as a movement from **disciplinary formation toward self-directed practice**.

Artistic autonomy should not be understood as complete independence from institutions or traditions. Rather, it refers to the developing capacity to formulate artistic questions, make informed creative decisions, respond critically to feedback, and establish a distinctive relationship between artistic practice and wider cultural contexts. Autonomy is thus developed through education, but cannot be reduced to the reproduction of what has already been taught.

This perspective also changes the understanding of the teacher–student relationship. In a predominantly technical model, the teacher may function primarily as an expert who demonstrates methods and evaluates their mastery. In a more autonomy-

oriented model, the teacher increasingly acts as tutor, critic, researcher, or interlocutor, supporting students in developing independent artistic positions. The pedagogical relationship consequently shifts from straightforward transmission toward **guided independence**.

From Technical Formation to Artistic Research and AI-Assisted Creativity. Contemporary art education has increasingly strengthened the relationship between artistic practice and research. Artistic research does not simply add academic theory to studio practice; it considers artistic processes themselves as potential sites of inquiry and knowledge production (Borgdorff, 2012). The artwork can therefore function simultaneously as an artistic outcome and as part of an investigative process involving experimentation, documentation, reflection, and contextual analysis.

This transformation is particularly relevant at advanced levels of education. Undergraduate study generally provides foundational technical and conceptual competencies, while postgraduate education can progressively emphasize independent projects, interdisciplinary investigation, critical reflection, and the development of individual research positions. This progression is particularly visible in the French programmes examined in this study, where specialization and independent artistic or design projects become increasingly prominent at advanced stages.

The emergence of **artificial intelligence (AI)** introduces a further transformation. Generative AI systems can participate in image generation, text production, ideation, visual variation, editing, and other creative processes. Their significance for art education therefore extends beyond learning another digital tool. AI raises questions concerning authorship, originality, technical competence, artistic intention, intellectual property, and human judgement. Recent research in visual and art education has identified opportunities for creative exploration and engagement while also raising concerns about dependency, critical thinking, originality, and authorship (Abad Gómez & Valverde Martínez, 2026; Cox & Davey, 2026; Jiang et al., 2026; Lee et al., 2026).

The educational question is consequently not simply whether students should learn to use AI, but **which forms of artistic competence remain essential when technological systems can perform an increasing range of production tasks**. As aspects of technical execution become partially automated,

the capacity to formulate meaningful questions, evaluate results, establish conceptual direction, understand cultural context, and assume responsibility for creative decisions may become increasingly important.

AI therefore intensifies rather than eliminates the question of artistic autonomy. Uncritical reliance on generative systems may encourage the reproduction of technological conventions, whereas critical and intentional use can make AI an instrument for experimentation. The important distinction is consequently not between technology and human creativity, but between **passive technological dependence and critically directed human-AI collaboration**.

For higher art education, this suggests a continuing trajectory:

Disciplinary Formation → Specialization → Artistic
Autonomy → Artistic Research → Human-AI Creative
Practice

This trajectory—from disciplinary formation toward increasingly autonomous, research-oriented, and technologically mediated creative practice—provides the conceptual basis for the comparative analysis.

Technical formation consequently remains essential, but its relationship to artistic agency is changing. Contemporary art students need disciplinary competence alongside the ability to make independent conceptual, critical, and ethical decisions about knowledge and technology.

This framework provides the basis for examining **France and Armenia** not as hierarchical alternatives, but as different institutional and cultural configurations through which artistic knowledge, professional identity, autonomy, and research capacity are constructed. The comparison therefore focuses on how educational cultures shape the transition from technical and disciplinary formation toward increasingly autonomous artistic and research practice.

Formulation of the goals and objectives of the article. Artistic autonomy is not determined by curriculum alone. It is also shaped by the educational culture in which learning takes place: when students specialize, how teachers guide them, how artistic work is assessed, how much responsibility students assume for their projects, how theory is connected to practice, and whether experimentation is treated as a legitimate part of learning. These dimensions provide a basis for comparing France and Armenia without reducing their differences to a simple

opposition between “modern” and “traditional” education.

The research is based on a field study conducted in Saint-Étienne during **2024–2025**, focusing principally on ESADSE and, as a complementary university context, Université Jean Monnet. It examines the organization of art and design programmes, their progression from general formation toward specialization, and the relationship between practical education, theoretical reflection, individual projects, and postgraduate research. These observations are considered alongside comparable structures and practices in Armenian higher art education.

The study therefore addresses the following central question:

How do different educational cultures shape the development of artistic autonomy, artistic identity, and research capacity in higher art education, and how might these relationships be transformed by artificial intelligence?

Three research questions guide the investigation:

RQ1. How do French and Armenian higher art education systems differ in the organization of disciplinary formation, specialization, and student autonomy?

RQ2. How do pedagogical relationships, institutional cultures, and approaches to artistic research influence the development of the autonomous artist?

RQ3. How might AI-assisted creative practices challenge or transform existing relationships between artistic education, technical competence, creativity, and autonomy?

The first two questions emerge from the comparative examination of French and Armenian educational contexts. The study identifies, in the French art-school context, a broader initial formation followed by more differentiated specializations and, at advanced levels, greater emphasis on individual projects, experimentation, and theoretical approaches. The Armenian comparison provides a contextual basis for considering how different educational structures may shape disciplinary identity, artistic agency, and research capacity.

The third question extends the discussion into the contemporary technological context. AI is not treated as an independent subject or as a means of measuring the effectiveness of particular tools. Instead, it provides a new context for reconsidering established assumptions about artistic education. If technological systems increasingly participate in cre-

ative production, the question arises whether models centred primarily on technical competence remain sufficient, or whether greater emphasis must be placed on critical judgement, authorship, conceptual direction, and human agency. Recent studies indicate that AI-assisted art education raises precisely these questions, particularly concerning creator identity, autonomy, authorship, and ethical awareness (Jiang et al., 2026; Lee et al., 2026).

The contribution of the article is threefold. First, it provides a comparative account of higher art education in **France and Armenia**, grounded in an institutional examination of art and design education in Saint-Étienne. Second, it develops a socio-pedagogical interpretation in which artistic formation is understood as a movement from disciplinary learning toward increasing autonomy and research capacity. Third, it extends this framework to the relationship between artistic autonomy and AI, examining how human agency, critical judgement, and artistic identity may be maintained and redefined in increasingly AI-mediated creative environments.

The comparison does not seek to establish a hierarchy between French and Armenian educational systems. Instead, it examines how different institutional arrangements create different conditions for artistic formation. The purpose is not to transfer one national model directly into another, but to identify educational principles that may be reconsidered within their respective cultural and institutional contexts.

The central proposition is therefore that the future of higher art education depends less on choosing between technical formation and artistic freedom than on connecting **technical competence, individual autonomy, critical reflection, artistic research, and responsible engagement with emerging technologies**. In the age of AI, this connection becomes particularly important: if generative systems can increasingly perform aspects of creative production, the artist's role may place greater emphasis on formulating questions, interpreting results, making critical selections, establishing conceptual direction, and assuming responsibility for creative decisions.

Higher art education can consequently be understood as a dynamic process of formation in which students learn not only **how to make art**, but also how to determine **why, for whom, through what means, and with what critical responsibility** they make it.

Presentation of the basic material and its

results. Comparative Socio-Pedagogical Research Design. This study adopts a **comparative socio-pedagogical research design** to examine how institutional structures and educational cultures influence the formation of artists and designers in higher education. Rather than viewing educational systems as neutral frameworks for transmitting professional knowledge, the study approaches them as cultural and institutional environments that shape students' relationships with discipline, specialization, experimentation, autonomy, research, and professional practice.

The comparison focuses on the relationship between educational structure and artistic formation, with particular attention to programme organization, the transition from foundational study to specialization, individual projects, student-supervisor relationships, opportunities for experimentation and professional practice, and the role of theoretical and research-oriented approaches.

France and Armenia are not treated as hierarchical alternatives. The comparison instead identifies differences in educational organization and institutional culture and considers how these may contribute to different trajectories of artistic development. Both systems operate within broader European higher-education frameworks while retaining distinct historical and cultural traditions.

The study combines **documentary analysis, institutional observation, comparative curriculum analysis, and qualitative interpretation**. These approaches connect observable educational structures with the broader concepts of artistic autonomy, professional identity, artistic research, and creative agency. The aim is therefore to move beyond describing curricula and examine what educational environments implicitly expect students to become as artists, designers, and researchers. Because the empirical component is primarily based on direct examination of institutions in Saint-Étienne, the comparative observations concerning Armenia are interpretive rather than the result of an equivalent field study.

Field Study in Saint-Étienne: ESADSE and Université Jean Monnet. The empirical component is based primarily on field study conducted in **Saint-Étienne, France, during 2024–2025**, focusing on the **École Supérieure d'Art et Design de Saint-Étienne (ESADSE)** and **Université Jean Monnet (UJM)**. These institutions provide complementary settings for examining professional art and design education along-

side university-based theoretical and research-oriented study.

At ESADSE, the analysis examines the progression from foundational education toward Art and Design pathways and advanced study. Particular attention is given to the transition from general training to specialization, the increasing importance of individual artistic and design projects, critical engagement, and research-oriented activity. ESADSE's published curriculum describes a five-year trajectory leading to national art and postgraduate diplomas, while its research cycle provides further opportunities for project-based and theoretical research (ESADSE, 2025).

Université Jean Monnet provides a complementary academic context through programmes in the humanities, arts, aesthetics, and doctoral research. Its current academic structure includes doctoral study in Arts plastiques within the Arts, Letters and Languages field, as well as broader research structures supporting artistic and humanistic inquiry (Université Jean Monnet, 2026). This makes the university relevant for examining how practical artistic education intersects with theoretical and research-based academic environments.

The field study involved examination of educational programmes and institutional structures, observation of educational practices, and consultation with specialists and academic participants. Particular attention was given to student supervision, opportunities for independent work, professional placements, and the relationship between practical production and theoretical reflection.

The French observations are considered alongside the author's knowledge and analysis of Armenian higher art education. The Armenian component therefore serves as a **comparative context rather than an equivalent second field site**. This distinction is methodologically important: the study is grounded primarily in direct examination of French institutions, while Armenian structures are interpreted comparatively through the author's academic and professional experience.

Comparative Analytical Framework. To ensure analytical consistency, the study examines the French and Armenian contexts through five interconnected dimensions: **educational structure, specialization, artistic autonomy, research orientation, and professional preparation**.

Educational structure refers to the organization of foundational and advanced study and the

transition from general training toward specialized disciplines. **Specialization** concerns when and how students develop a particular field of artistic or design practice. **Artistic autonomy** examines the extent to which students formulate individual projects, develop independent positions, and make creative decisions beyond prescribed technical exercises.

Research orientation addresses the relationship between artistic production, theoretical reflection, experimentation, and knowledge production. **Professional preparation** considers internships, practical experience, engagement with professional environments, and competencies relevant to artistic and design careers.

These dimensions are interpreted through the theoretical framework established above. Bourdieu's concept of cultural production helps explain how educational institutions introduce students to particular artistic fields and professional cultures, while Foucault's analysis of disciplinary formation draws attention to the institutional structures through which competencies, behaviours, and professional identities are developed (Bourdieu, 1993; Foucault, 1995). The concept of artistic autonomy connects these perspectives by examining how institutional discipline can coexist with the expectation of individual creative agency.

The framework also incorporates the emerging context of **artificial intelligence**. AI is not treated as an independent technological subject but as a condition affecting all five dimensions: curriculum and skills, specialization, autonomy and authorship, artistic research, and professional practice. This approach allows the study to consider whether technical mastery alone remains sufficient when generative technologies increasingly participate in creative production.

The analysis therefore seeks to identify not simply differences between French and Armenian educational structures, but the underlying **educational trajectories through which students are formed as artists and designers**. It proceeds from institutional structure to educational culture, from educational culture to artistic agency, and ultimately to the changing conditions of creative practice.

Specialization, Educational Culture and the Development of Artistic Autonomy. The comparative examination of higher art education in France and Armenia indicates that the organization of educational trajectories is closely related to the development of students' artistic autonomy. One of the

most significant differences concerns the transition from general or foundational education toward specialized artistic practice.

In the French context examined through ESADSE, the educational trajectory is progressively structured. Students initially encounter a common foundational period and different artistic and design approaches before moving toward more specialized areas of study (ESADSE, 2025). This organization allows students to explore diverse practices before making increasingly specific decisions about their artistic or professional direction. Specialization therefore functions not simply as restriction, but as a progressive process through which individual interests can be identified and developed.

At advanced levels, individual projects become increasingly important. Students are not limited to demonstrating the correct application of previously learned techniques; they are expected to define subjects, establish artistic approaches, experiment with appropriate methods, and present their work within critical and professional contexts (ESADSE, 2025). The capacity to make independent decisions consequently becomes an important component of educational development.

This structure creates a particular relationship between institutional guidance and individual freedom. The institution establishes the framework, while students progressively assume responsibility for the direction of their own work. Artistic autonomy can therefore be understood as a **gradual educational achievement rather than an initial condition**.

The Armenian context demonstrates a related but differently organized trajectory. Since joining the Bologna Process in 2005, Armenia has progressively aligned its higher education system with the Bachelor–Master–Doctorate cycle structure (EHEA, 2026). However, structural reform has not necessarily produced an equivalent transformation in pedagogical culture. In the comparative interpretation presented here, systematic technical training, historical knowledge, and established disciplinary methods appear to retain an important position in Armenian higher art education.

This distinction is particularly significant for the formation of artistic identity. Technical competence provides an essential foundation, but technical mastery alone does not necessarily establish an individual artistic position. Such a position requires opportunities for experimentation, dialogue, indepen-

dent decision-making, and critical reflection. The central difference is therefore not whether technical education exists, but **how technical education is connected to subsequent processes of individual artistic development**.

The comparison reveals two interconnected dimensions of artistic formation. The first is **disciplinary formation**, through which students acquire technical knowledge, historical understanding, professional vocabulary, and practical competencies. The second is **autonomous formation**, through which they progressively learn to determine their own artistic questions and approaches. Contemporary art education must negotiate these dimensions rather than treating them as alternatives.

Technical Formation, Professional Practice and Artistic Research. The observations also indicate differences in the relationship between technical education, professional experience, and research-oriented practice. In the French institutions examined, professional placements and engagement with external environments formed part of the broader educational trajectory observed in the study, providing opportunities to encounter professional expectations beyond the classroom and studio (ESADSE, 2025).

Professional practice is significant because artistic education does not occur independently of the social and cultural fields in which artists and designers eventually work. Exhibitions, collaborations, internships, presentations, critiques, and interactions with professionals expose students to forms of communication and evaluation that differ from purely academic assessment. These experiences can contribute to professional identity and a broader understanding of the social position of artistic work.

At advanced levels, the relationship between practical production and theoretical reflection also becomes more pronounced. In the programmes examined, artistic and design projects can function as vehicles for experimentation and inquiry rather than simply as demonstrations of technical ability. This creates a shift from questions such as **“How can I produce this?”** toward **“Why am I producing it?”**, **“What does it communicate?”**, and **“How can the artistic process itself generate knowledge?”**

This transition is central to artistic research. Practice becomes not merely an outcome but also a means of investigation, connecting experimentation with reflection, documentation, and contextual interpretation. The artwork, design object, visual ex-

periment, or performance can consequently function both as creative production and as part of a broader process of inquiry (Borgdorff, 2012).

The Armenian context contains comparable elements, particularly at Master's and Doctoral levels, where theoretical and research components become increasingly important. Nevertheless, the comparative analysis suggests a different configuration of practice and inquiry. Historical knowledge, factual information, and professional analysis remain significant, while approaches emphasizing aesthetics, philosophy, conceptual experimentation, and individually formulated research questions may receive comparatively less emphasis.

This difference should not be interpreted as a simple opposition between practice and theory. Both contexts recognize the importance of technical competence, professional knowledge, and academic study. The distinction lies more substantially in **how these elements are connected within the student's educational trajectory**. When technical education remains relatively separate from independent inquiry, students may develop considerable competence within established practices without necessarily articulating an individual research position. When technical formation is combined with experimentation and critical reflection, it can become a foundation for autonomous artistic practice.

The findings therefore suggest that professional preparation and artistic research should not be treated as separate objectives. Professional experience provides contexts in which students can test their ideas, while research-oriented practice provides the conceptual capacity to interpret and transform those experiences. Their interaction contributes to the formation of an artist or designer who operates both as a practitioner and as a potential producer of knowledge.

Comparative Synthesis: Two Trajectories of Artistic Formation. The comparison between the French and Armenian contexts can be synthesized through two broad trajectories of artistic formation. These should not be understood as fixed national models, but as analytical tendencies emerging from the educational structures and practices examined.

The first may be described as **formation through disciplinary mastery**. Here, technical knowledge, established artistic disciplines, historical understanding, and professional competencies constitute the primary foundations of education. Indi-

vidual development takes place within these structures and progressively incorporates personal expression and specialization.

The second may be described as **formation through progressive autonomy**. Foundational knowledge remains important, but the educational process increasingly shifts toward specialization, individual projects, experimentation, critical reflection, research, and independent decision-making. Development consequently moves from acquiring established competencies toward defining and defending an individual artistic position.

The French institutions examined in this study show more pronounced characteristics of the second trajectory, particularly at advanced levels, while retaining substantial elements of disciplinary formation. The Armenian context contains both trajectories, but the comparative analysis indicates stronger continuity of technical and disciplinary formation.

The significance of this distinction becomes clearer in relation to contemporary artistic practice. Artists and designers increasingly work across disciplines, engage in research, collaborate with professional communities, and encounter rapidly changing digital technologies. Under these conditions, the ability to operate autonomously becomes increasingly significant.

The central finding is therefore not that one trajectory should replace the other. **Technical formation and artistic autonomy are complementary dimensions of higher art education**. Students require sufficient disciplinary knowledge to understand and control their medium, while also developing the autonomy to question established practices, formulate meaningful problems, and construct independent responses.

This relationship becomes particularly important in the context of artificial intelligence. As technological systems facilitate increasing aspects of technical production, the educational importance of conceptual judgement, critical reflection, cultural awareness, authorship, and research capacity may become more prominent. The question for contemporary art education is therefore not whether technical skills remain necessary, but **how technical competence can be integrated with the higher-order capacities required for independent artistic practice**.

The comparative findings consequently support a broader understanding of higher art education: not simply as the transmission of artistic tech-

niques or professional competencies, but as a progressive process through which students move from **learning established forms of practice toward becoming autonomous participants in the production, interpretation, and transformation of artistic knowledge.**

From Disciplinary Formation to Artistic Autonomy. The findings suggest that the central issue in contemporary higher art education is not an opposition between technical training and individual creativity, but the relationship established between them. Technical and disciplinary formation remains fundamental because students need knowledge of materials, techniques, visual language, historical context, and professional methods. These competencies, however, acquire a different educational significance when they become the basis for independent artistic inquiry.

From a Bourdieusian perspective, the art university functions as a site where students acquire the cultural and professional resources necessary to participate in the field of artistic production. They learn not only how to produce artistic work but also how it is discussed, evaluated, exhibited, justified, and positioned within a broader cultural field (Bourdieu, 1993). Artistic identity can therefore be understood partly as a process of socialization: students gradually learn the codes of the field while attempting to establish an individual position within it.

Foucault's concept of disciplinary formation adds another dimension to this interpretation. Educational institutions organize learning through curricula, assessment, supervision, schedules, and institutional expectations. Such structures inevitably introduce forms of discipline and normalization (Foucault, 1995). Art education nevertheless contains a distinctive tension: institutions use structured pedagogical mechanisms to prepare students for creative practices that are expected to demonstrate originality and independence.

This tension is not necessarily a weakness. Artistic autonomy does not emerge from the complete absence of institutional structures; rather, it develops when students acquire sufficient knowledge of existing structures to understand, reinterpret, challenge, or extend them. Autonomy can therefore be understood as a **transformation of disciplinary knowledge rather than its rejection.**

The comparison between France and Armenia illustrates the importance of this transition. The French programmes examined in the study demon-

strate a relatively explicit progression from foundational education toward specialization, individual projects, experimentation, and research (ESADSE, 2025). Armenian higher art education, while incorporating the Bachelor–Master–Doctoral structure and maintaining substantial professional and theoretical components, continues to place considerable emphasis on systematic disciplinary and technical formation. The difference therefore concerns not simply what students learn, but **when they are expected to become autonomous and how autonomy is pedagogically constructed.**

These implications extend to assessment. If artistic autonomy is an educational objective, evaluating only technical correctness or conformity to established standards may privilege reproduction over exploration. An autonomy-oriented approach can instead consider the coherence of the artistic question, the development of the project, experimentation, responsiveness to criticism, and the ability to articulate and defend creative decisions. Assessment thus becomes part of the process through which artistic agency is developed rather than merely a mechanism for measuring technical achievement.

The Art University as a Space of Socialization, Research and Creative Agency. The findings further indicate that an art university should be understood as more than a place where artistic techniques are taught. It is simultaneously a **social, cultural, professional, and research environment** in which students encounter teachers, peers, exhibitions, professional practices, theoretical discourses, and forms of public evaluation. These interactions contribute to professional identity and influence how students understand their future roles as artists or designers.

The social dimension of artistic education is particularly important because the transition from student to professional does not occur simply when a particular technical level has been reached. Students must also learn to communicate their work, formulate positions, participate in critique, collaborate with others, respond to institutional contexts, and understand the cultural environment in which their practice operates. From this perspective, artistic education involves socialization into professional and cultural practices as well as the acquisition of technical skills (Bourdieu, 1993).

Artistic research strengthens this intellectual and social dimension. When students are encouraged to formulate questions rather than merely com-

plete assignments, the university becomes a space in which artistic practice can generate knowledge. The student consequently moves from being primarily a recipient of established knowledge toward becoming a participant in its production (Borgdorff, 2012).

This transition also changes the meaning of **creative agency**. Agency involves more than freedom to choose a subject or visual style. It includes the capacity to determine the direction of a project, select appropriate methods, evaluate alternatives, revise decisions, and understand the consequences of artistic choices. Educational structures can support such agency when they provide sufficient guidance without removing the student's responsibility for decision-making.

The comparison therefore points toward a pedagogical balance between **structure and freedom**. Excessive structure may restrict experimentation, while an absence of structure may provide insufficient support for developing competence and critical judgement. A productive educational environment lies between these extremes: students receive strong disciplinary foundations while progressively assuming responsibility for their artistic and research processes.

For Armenian higher art education, this perspective does not imply abandoning established traditions or technical standards. The systematic professional formation characteristic of Armenian art education can instead provide a strong foundation for developing greater artistic autonomy. The principal challenge is to create stronger connections between technical mastery, individual experimentation, theoretical reflection, research, and professional practice.

Artistic Autonomy in the Age of Artificial Intelligence. Artificial intelligence introduces a new dimension to the relationship between discipline and autonomy. Generative systems increasingly participate in visual production, textual development, ideation, image transformation, and experimentation. As a result, the traditional association between artistic competence and manual or technical execution is becoming more complex (Abad Gómez & Valverde Martínez, 2026; Cox & Davey, 2026; Jiang et al., 2026; Lee et al., 2026).

This development does not make technical education irrelevant. Understanding materials, composition, visual language, design principles, and artistic processes remains important because such knowledge enables students to formulate meaningful intentions and critically evaluate technological outputs. At

the same time, AI makes it increasingly difficult to define artistic competence solely through the ability to execute a technical procedure.

The educational emphasis may therefore need to move toward a broader conception of authorship. In human-AI creative practice, authorship can involve defining the conceptual problem, selecting and modifying generated material, combining different processes, rejecting inappropriate results, contextualizing the work, and taking responsibility for the final outcome. The central educational question becomes not simply **who produced the image**, but **who formulated the artistic intention, directed the process, exercised critical judgement, and assumed responsibility for the resulting work**.

This development reinforces rather than diminishes the importance of artistic autonomy. When AI can rapidly generate numerous visual or conceptual possibilities, the student's distinctive contribution may increasingly lie in establishing criteria for selection, interpretation, and transformation. Critical judgement, cultural knowledge, conceptual thinking, ethical awareness, and the capacity to formulate meaningful questions therefore become increasingly important dimensions of artistic education (Abad Gómez & Valverde Martínez, 2026; Cox & Davey, 2026; Jiang et al., 2026; Lee et al., 2026).

AI also creates new pedagogical challenges. Students need to understand the limitations and biases of generative systems, questions of authorship and intellectual property, the provenance of training data, and the cultural implications of automated image and text production. These issues cannot be addressed effectively through technical instruction alone; they require dialogue across art theory, aesthetics, ethics, technology, and cultural studies.

For this reason, AI should not be introduced into art education merely as an additional software skill. It should be integrated into a broader pedagogical framework concerned with **human creative agency**. The objective is to prepare artists and designers who can employ emerging technologies while retaining conceptual and ethical responsibility for their work.

The resulting educational model can therefore be understood as a progression from **technical competence to critical competence**. Traditional artistic skills remain necessary, but increasingly operate alongside research capacity, conceptual autonomy, interdisciplinary knowledge, digital literacy, and ethical judgement. The future art university is conse-

quently not simply a place where students learn to produce images, objects, performances, or designs; it is a space in which they learn how to **formulate questions, construct knowledge, engage critically with technologies, and make responsible creative decisions**.

Toward a Hybrid Model of Artistic Education. The comparative findings suggest that the development of Armenian higher art education could benefit from a model that combines the strengths of systematic disciplinary formation with a stronger emphasis on artistic autonomy, experimentation, research, and emerging technologies. The following proposals are interpretive implications of the comparative findings rather than empirically tested interventions. Such a model should not replace technical and professional education but should extend its objectives.

The first component of this approach is the preservation of **strong foundational training**. Drawing, composition, colour, materials, artistic techniques, design principles, art history, and other disciplinary competencies remain essential to the formation of artists and designers. A reduction of technical education in the name of creativity would therefore not constitute an effective modernization strategy. Instead, technical competence should become the foundation from which students can progressively develop independent artistic positions.

The second component is a more clearly structured transition toward **specialization and individual practice**. Students could be given increasing opportunities to select themes, methods, media, and research questions as they progress through their studies. Rather than maintaining the same pedagogical relationship throughout all years of education, programmes could gradually transfer responsibility from teacher-directed exercises toward student-directed projects.

A third component concerns the integration of **artistic research** into advanced education. Master's and doctoral programmes can provide stronger connections between practical production and theoretical inquiry. Students could be encouraged to document their creative processes, formulate research questions, engage with relevant theoretical literature, and understand artistic practice as a potential form of knowledge production. This would strengthen the relationship between studio work and academic research without transforming artistic education into exclusively theoretical study.

The fourth component is **professional and social engagement**. Internships, collaborations, exhibitions, workshops, interdisciplinary projects, and interaction with cultural institutions can provide students with experiences beyond the university environment. Such activities can help connect academic education with the professional realities of contemporary artistic and design practice and can contribute to the development of professional identity.

Finally, contemporary curricula should incorporate **digital and AI literacy** as part of broader artistic competence. Students should learn not only how to operate AI-based tools but also how to evaluate their outputs, understand their limitations, address questions of authorship and intellectual property, and maintain human conceptual responsibility throughout the creative process. AI education should therefore be connected to artistic theory, ethics, research methodology, and critical thinking rather than treated as a purely technical specialization.

Together, these components suggest a hybrid educational model based on the sequence:

Foundational Knowledge → Specialization → Individual Practice → Artistic Research → Professional Engagement
→ Human-AI Creative Practice.

Such a model could provide continuity between traditional artistic education and contemporary forms of creative practice while allowing students to develop progressively greater autonomy.

Adaptation Rather Than Imitation. The comparative analysis should not be interpreted as an argument for directly transferring the French educational model to Armenia. Educational systems are embedded within specific historical, cultural, institutional, and social contexts. A pedagogical structure that functions effectively within one national system cannot necessarily be reproduced unchanged within another.

The relevant objective is therefore **adaptation rather than imitation**. The experience of French art education can provide comparative perspectives concerning curriculum organization, specialization, individual projects, artistic research, professional placements, and the progressive development of student autonomy. These elements can be critically examined and selectively adapted to Armenian institutional conditions.

Such adaptation also requires recognition of the particular strengths of Armenian artistic education. Armenia possesses established traditions of drawing, painting, sculpture, applied arts, archi-

texture, art history, and professional studio training. These traditions constitute significant cultural and educational resources. Modernization should therefore not be understood as replacing traditional competencies with new pedagogical approaches, but as establishing new relationships between inherited knowledge and contemporary forms of artistic practice.

A possible Armenian model could consequently combine **technical mastery, cultural heritage, critical theory, individual artistic development, research, professional practice, and digital competence**. Within this model, traditional disciplines would provide the foundation, while students would progressively acquire greater responsibility for defining their artistic questions and methods.

The role of academic staff would also require reconsideration. Teachers would continue to serve as specialists and transmitters of disciplinary knowledge, but they could increasingly function as mentors, critics, research supervisors, and facilitators of independent practice. This would not diminish academic authority; rather, it would transform its function from primarily transmitting established solutions toward supporting students in developing their own questions and solutions.

Curriculum reform could similarly be approached progressively. Rather than attempting comprehensive institutional transformation at once, individual programmes could introduce greater flexibility in project-based learning, interdisciplinary collaboration, research components, professional placements, and responsible AI use. The outcomes of such initiatives could then inform broader curricular development.

The broader implication is that the modernization of Armenian higher art education should be understood as a **process of pedagogical rebalancing**. The objective is not to move from tradition to innovation, or from teacher authority to complete student freedom, but to establish a more productive relationship between knowledge and autonomy, discipline and experimentation, technical mastery and conceptual development.

In this sense, the French experience provides a comparative reference rather than a prescribed model. Its principal value for Armenian higher art education lies in demonstrating how institutional structures can progressively create conditions in which students move from acquiring established competencies toward developing independent

artistic, research, and professional identities. The emerging challenge of artificial intelligence makes this transition increasingly significant, because the future value of artistic education will depend not only on what students can technically produce, but also on their capacity to determine **why, how, and with what critical responsibility** they produce it.

Conclusions. This study has examined how higher art education in France and Armenia organizes the relationship between disciplinary formation and artistic autonomy. Both contexts show that becoming an artist or designer involves more than acquiring technical and disciplinary competencies. Higher art education functions simultaneously as a process of professional formation, cultural socialization, identity development, experimentation, and increasingly, artistic research. The way these elements are organized influences how students understand their roles as creative practitioners and develop independent artistic positions.

The study identifies a significant transition from **disciplinary formation toward artistic autonomy**. Technical mastery remains an essential foundation, but contemporary educational environments increasingly require students to move beyond reproducing established methods toward independent project development, critical reflection, experimentation, and research. The French and Armenian contexts demonstrate that these dimensions can coexist, although their relationship is shaped by institutional structures and educational cultures.

The examination of ESADSE and Université Jean Monnet in Saint-Étienne highlights the importance of progressive specialization, individual projects, professional engagement, and research-oriented approaches at advanced levels (ESADSE, 2025; Université Jean Monnet, 2026). The Armenian context, while incorporating comparable degree structures and maintaining strong professional and theoretical traditions, demonstrates greater continuity with disciplinary and technical models of formation. The comparison therefore indicates different configurations of the relationship between structured knowledge and individual artistic development rather than a hierarchy between the two systems.

From a socio-pedagogical perspective, the art university can consequently be understood as a space in which students learn both **how to practice art and how to position themselves as artists**. The institution provides disciplinary knowledge and professional frameworks while creating conditions in

which students progressively assume responsibility for their artistic decisions. Artistic autonomy is therefore not equivalent to freedom from educational structures; it develops through a movement from guided learning toward independent creative and research practice (Borgdorff, 2012; Bourdieu, 1993; Foucault, 1995).

Artificial intelligence adds a further dimension to this transformation. As AI systems increasingly participate in creative processes, technical execution alone becomes less sufficient as a basis for defining artistic competence. Conceptual thinking, critical judgement, cultural awareness, research capacity, ethical responsibility, and the ability to direct and evaluate technological processes become increasingly significant (Abad Gómez & Valverde Martínez, 2026; Cox & Davey, 2026; Jiang et al., 2026; Lee et al., 2026). The challenge for higher art education is therefore not simply to teach students how to use AI tools, but to preserve meaningful **human creative agency** in technologically mediated artistic practice.

For Armenian higher art education, the findings support an approach based on **adaptation rather than imitation**. International educational experiences can provide useful perspectives for reconsidering specialization, individual practice, artistic research, professional engagement, and digital competence, but these elements should be integrated with Armenia's established traditions of technical

and disciplinary artistic education. A productive future model would connect foundational mastery with artistic autonomy, research, professional practice, and responsible engagement with emerging technologies.

Ultimately, contemporary higher art education can be understood as the formation of practitioners capable not only of producing artistic work but also of **formulating questions, developing independent positions, generating knowledge through practice, engaging critically with society and technology, and assuming responsibility for their creative decisions**. The transformation of art education is therefore not a movement away from disciplinary knowledge, but a reconfiguration of how knowledge, autonomy, research, and technology can work together in the formation of the contemporary artist and designer.

Prospects for further research and recommendations. Further research should include an equivalent field study of Armenian art universities – programme analysis, observation, and interviews with students and teachers – in order to verify the comparative interpretations proposed here. A further direction is the empirical examination of how AI-assisted creative practices affect students' authorship, critical judgement, and artistic autonomy, together with the piloting of project-based and research-oriented modules within Armenian Bachelor's and Master's programmes.

Фінансування / Funding

Дослідження здійснено без залучення зовнішнього фінансування.

Використання Штучного Інтелекту / Use of Artificial Intelligence

Автор використовував ChatGPT і Gemini під час підготовки рукопису для допомоги в перекладі з вірменської та французької мов англійською та для добору відповідної методологічної термінології. Автор переглянув, доопрацював і відредагував отриманий текст і несе повну відповідальність за зміст і остаточну версію рукопису.

Конфлікт інтересів / Conflict of Interest

Автор підтверджує відсутність будь-якого конфлікту інтересів — фінансового, особистого, авторського чи іншого, — який міг би позначитися на проведенні дослідження або на викладених у статті результатах.

Надійшла до редакції / Received: 27.08.2026

Прорецензовано / Peer-reviewed: 23.09.2026

Рекомендовано до публікації / Accepted for publication: 01.10.2026

СПИСОК ЛІТЕРАТУРИ

Abad Gómez, R., & Valverde Martínez, C. (2026). Generative artificial intelligence in art education: Pedagogical and ethical implications in higher education. *Revista Complutense de Educación*, 37(3), 483–502. <https://doi.org/10.5209/rced.103892>

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