Application for Membership of the Board of Trustees of the Foundation for Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design

Dear Members of the Selection Committee,

MOME is a special institution to me. I have great affection and respect for what it has achieved: the way it has, over the past decades, become an internationally recognized hub of Hungarian design culture, nurturing generations of people who create and think. This is why I am applying: I would like to help MOME regain its independence during the transitional year ahead and, in dialogue with all those concerned, help shape a governance structure that can set the university on a path toward global excellence in the medium term. I would like to serve an institution whose students respond to the challenges of our shared future with sensitivity and beauty.

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First and foremost, I am a designer. I developed Prezi as a designer, initially for my own presentations: the product experience and visual language grew out of my own creative needs. Later, Péter Árvai and Péter Halácsy joined me, and together, as co-founders, we succeeded in turning a visual idea into a global success. Today, Prezi is one of the best-known products to have originated in Hungary, with approximately 150 million users, a particularly large proportion of whom are students and teachers. I believe this way of thinking is close to how MOME itself works: I approach problems primarily as a designer and creator, rather than as an entrepreneur. Alongside this, as a media artist I have exhibited four times at the Venice Biennale of Architecture, most recently in 2025 as part of a family exhibition in the Hungarian Pavilion. My work has been covered, among others, by Wired, The New York Times, the Financial Times, Forbes, and CNN. I live in a family of designers: my wife is an architect, and our children are finding their own paths toward design and the visual arts.

In parallel with my work as a designer, for twenty years I have also served Prezi as an owner and board member. I have followed every stage of building, maturing, and strategically transforming an international company, and therefore know the responsibilities and tools of board work from first-hand experience. Over the past two decades, Prezi's team has typically ranged between 100 and 300 people, making it, in size, a comparable organization to MOME's community of faculty and staff. I therefore know from the inside the workings, dynamics, and leadership responsibilities of communities of this scale.

I have also built institutions. Kitchen Budapest, the media lab, was born from an idea of mine, and as its founder and program director, together with Péter Halácsy, Péter György, and Robin Nagy, we brought it to international recognition in less than a year. At the heart of the model was interdisciplinary teamwork and a creative sense of ownership: everyone was a passionate owner of their own project, while creating as part of a community and in collaboration with

others. I am particularly pleased that the lab remains a living point of reference within the MOME community to this day. I was also a co-founder of Bridge Budapest and took part in the founding of Budapest School. I have taught and lectured at leading design and architecture universities around the world, from KTH in Stockholm to the Royal College of Art in London and the MIT Media Lab. In 2024, at the Cumulus Conference organized by MOME, I spoke about the future of design education as a plenary speaker representing the international association of design educational institutions.

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I see the work of the Board of Trustees as a collaborative endeavor. I look forward to learning about the intentions and ideas of my fellow trustees, the university community, and the ministry, and to working together with them. At the same time, I believe it is important to share in advance the principles I would bring to this collaborative process. There are three in particular.

The first is academic freedom. The university must be independent of the political actors of the day. At the same time, the state, as owner, has an important role in ensuring that the highest ethical and legal standards are upheld, setting a benchmark that goes beyond the self-regulation of internal collegiality. I believe this is, in part, precisely the role of the governing body representing the owner. There is an important nuance here: I believe in high ethical standards, but not in public shaming or cancel culture. People should be given the opportunity to recognize their mistakes, apologize, learn, and change; the standard itself, however, must remain firm.

This also includes social diversity. One third of Hungary's population lives under conditions of material deprivation, while strong and original ideas in art and design often emerge from unexpected corners of society and from a wide range of personal stories. I believe the state should set clear expectations that publicly funded institutions actively work to ensure that people from the broadest possible range of social backgrounds can find their way to them. This is not only a matter of fairness; it is also a source of creative vitality.

The second is professional excellence. I believe the atmosphere and ambition of the university should be defined by the pursuit of the highest possible standards in art, design, culture, and all related forms of creative work: by strong engagement with the forefront of international discourse and a genuine impact on the global conversation, while remaining deeply rooted in local values, customs, and histories. Most of the tasks, challenges, and cultural contexts in which MOME students will create will be international and interdisciplinary. I would therefore strongly support an approach in which the university engages with international knowledge exchange in a professionally relevant, credible, and open way: inviting, participating, exchanging, and learning.

The third is openness to the future. A large proportion of students at an applied arts and design university will go on to work as practicing creators, in fields that are transforming before our

eyes at an unprecedented pace in the age of AI. I see a major opportunity for MOME in this. I would like to support a governance structure that makes the institution agile: capable of responding thoughtfully and quickly to changes in the world, while confidently expanding into new areas by building on its strengths, and keeping the academic community as the natural owner of academic decisions.

This is where I believe I can contribute the most, because my career has been about making innovation happen: from the continuous renewal of Prezi's product to leading its transition in recent years toward an AI-native platform, and to building Kitchen Budapest. What I have learned from these experiences is that renewal takes root where good intentions are supported by good structures.

There is also one open question I think is important to articulate, because it is not entirely clear from the call for applications, and I believe good cooperation begins with the parties having a shared understanding of their role. The Board of Trustees may primarily have a legal and guarantor role: ensuring a lawful and orderly transition, while the development of the new governance structure is a joint undertaking of the university and the ministry. But the role could also be broader: an active and constructive contribution to ensuring that MOME begins its next chapter with the best possible governance structure.

Both interpretations are legitimate. For my part, I see greater potential in the latter and I believe that is where I could be of greatest value. I would consider it important to establish clarity about the role before the appointments are made.

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I am fully aware that the appointment is for a fixed term of one year, and this is precisely the task I am prepared to undertake: personal and active participation in the work of the Board of Trustees; ensuring the university's uninterrupted operation; supporting the orderly return of the rights of the maintainer to the institution; and responsibly contributing to the lawful and transparent dissolution of the foundation, in close cooperation with the Senate, the Rector, and the ministry exercising the founder's rights.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my application. It would be an honor to serve the MOME community with my experience during this important year.

Budapest, July 18, 2026
Ádám Szabolcs Somlai-Fischer