

THE STUDENTS' WRITTEN REFLECTIONS AT THE POP ART ARTISTS' ARTWORKS AS A TOOL OF DEVELOPMENT OF CRITICAL THINKING

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Abstract: The paper deals with the results of the research, which identified attitudes of the students' of the study program "Teaching of Fine Arts in Combination" towards to the artistic creation of selected artists. The presented results are a part of the project aimed at identifying key strategies for developing the creativity and critical thinking of the future teachers. The results of qualitative research point to the appropriateness of student verbal reflection on the artworks, developing creativity as well as the ability to express and present their views during the realization.

Keywords: Fine arts, Education, Future teacher, Creativity, Critical thinking, Reflection.

1 Introduction

Very important part of didactic preparation for our students' pedagogic practice - the future teachers, is knowledge of the interesting artists. Through their creation we are able to inspire the students to think, reflect and interpret the artworks. At the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, we prepare the future teachers of fine art education for the second degree of primary schools, for high schools and for the fine art sections of art schools.

The basic competencies for the future teachers of fine art education are creativity and critical thinking. Through verbal and visual, practical and artistic interpretation of artworks, our students learn how to think critically about them and how to reflect on them. They have to say and write what they like or do not like about the artist. Then they create and write their reflections and listen to their classmates' opinions. We worked this way with the pop art artists Wladyslaw Hasiar and Andy Warhol.

At first, the students had to say what they had already known about them, then we looked at their photos and artworks on the Internet or in a book. We talked about them, thinking about their life and about form and content of their artworks. The students had to say their opinions about the artworks and also support them. According to our experiences, the students considered this task quite difficult. They can easily say if they like or don't like something, but they had trouble to explain why. To express our reason for opinions is for us the critical part of thinking. After the introductions, the reflective part of the lesson started, when the students wrote down their feelings and thoughts in a few sentences, inspired by the artworks of the artists.

2 Theory

L. B. Nilson (2016) finds a common basis of various theories of critical thinking in fact, that it includes cognitive interpretations and / or analyzes, often followed by evaluation. Critical thinking is difficult: we have natural tendency to selectively perceive and confirm what we "know" to be true.

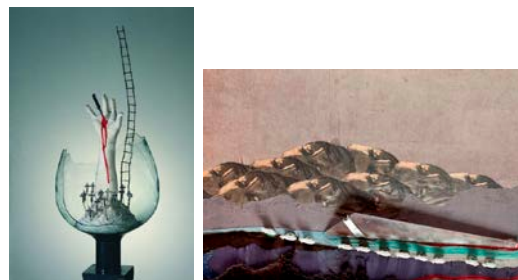
Critical thinking therefore involves not only knowledge but also the character of a personality that decides for personal development. Students must tend to prioritize the facts of prejudices, accept and overcome the challenges, commit themselves to fair assessment of their own thinking, and to abandon misconceptions by accepting and understanding new and more valid ways of thinking.

L. B. Nilson sets out common elements of teaching methods of critical thinking development: the ability to activate a student;

build on his previous experience; naturally encourage research, analysis and evaluation; stimulate students' curiosity; lead them to their own questions and explain them, and justify their arguments.

The official state web site of Poland art, Culture PL, considers Wladyslaw Hasiar as one of the most prolific contemporary Polish artists. He was an extraordinary personality, and a very colourful and magnetic individuality. In the West, he was hailed as "the most talented student of Rauschenberg and Warhol". In Poland, his work is considered as a precursor to pop art and assemblage. Hasiar regarded artistic activity as an intellectual and creative provocation. He entered the art world and soon became a "cult" artist for generations of the 60s and 70s. His work had shocked and delighted, aroused extreme emotions and judgement, and his controversial attitude compelled audiences to ask questions about the nature of art, and the artistic license of choosing the language of expression. Hasiar used degraded elements of technological civilization as art materials (Culture PL, 2018). The pictures 1 and 2 are from the same official web site.

The information about Andy Warhol are taken out the official website of a 501 ©3 Non-profit Organization for Educators (<https://www.theartstory.org/artist-warhol-andy.htm>, 2018). Andy Warhol was the most successful and highly paid commercial illustrator in New York. His screenprinted images of Marilyn Monroe, soup cans, and sensational newspaper stories, quickly became synonymous with Pop art. His crowning achievement was the elevation of his own persona to the level of a popular icon, representing a new kind of fame and celebrity for a fine artist. Warhol learned how to handle with popular tastes and his drawings were often comic and decorative. Some of his pictures show frank expressions of his sorrow at public events. Warhol's paintings from the early 1960s were important in pioneering these developments. The pictures of Andy Warhol's (picture 3) art are taken out the official website of Andy Warhol Museum of Modern Art in Medzilaborce (2018), founded in 1991, now dealing mainly with current tendencies in contemporary art and especially the life and work of Andy Warhol (<https://www.muzeumaw.sk/>).



1. Picture 1. Wladyslaw Hasiar, Golgotha III, 1972, assamblage 93x35, from the collection of National Museum in Wroclaw, photo: photographic studio MNW. Online: <https://culture.pl/en/artist/wladyslaw-hasiar>
Picture 2. Wladyslaw Hasiar, Inquietudes (detail), 1966, assamblage 100 x 200, private collection, photo: not named. Online: <https://culture.pl/en/artist/wladyslaw-hasiar>

3 Research

Aim of the study

To discover, if and how the students' reflections of the art works develop the critical thinking.

Hypotheses

According to the principles of qualitative research (Strauss, Corbinová, 1999), we don't have any hypotheses, we only assume some results, based on our previous experiences.

Material

We get research material from the students during the didactic disciplines: Didactics of Fine Arts Education I., and Methodics of Fine Arts Education, which are included in the Master's study program „Teaching of Fine Arts in Combination“ in the first and the second year of study. There were 15 students reflecting on the art of W. Hasior, two of them were boys, and 17 students reflecting on the art of A. Warhol, three of them were boys.

Research plan

In November 2016 we reacted at the Polish artist Wladyslaw Hasior, in November 2017 at an American artist Andy Warhol. We collected the art works from the students from November 2016 until November 2017, and we did the analysis during Summer 2018.

Methods

The methods of data collection was written reflections from the students. Processing method was qualitative content analysis of the written students' reflections.

4 Research material

We present the students' written reflections in order in which we have received them, and in order in which we have worked with the authors: at first W. Hasior, the second A. Warhol.

Students' written reflections of Wladyslaw Hasior's artworks:

„His works require a longer observation. Their real nature can be discovered only after closer observation of details. Basing on several scary scenes we can conclude that the author experienced trauma, such as a war, in his childhood. His works are both very personal and at a high technical level.“

„His art makes me sad. In his works I noticed signs of child's drawing as if the author had a childhood trauma. Some of his works combine children's drawings with horror scenes. The artist's work seems bleak.“

„Hasior's works are very interesting. Personally, I can see the consequences of war because artworks are a little morbid and in their creation are used unusual materials (hair, rusty metal). I appreciate using it.“

„Hasior's works evoke me a kind of mirror of society – artist reflects the problems of society by his works. I think that in the past he went through something that inspired him to do it, respectively something gave him an inner need to get it out from him just by artworks. Although his artworks seem very strange, they hid some mystery. Artworks are made in a very interesting and attractive way, which impels to think about their substance and structure. In my opinion, art should be just about that.“

„His art seems gently morbid with a touch of child's drawing. Used shapes were maybe formed impulsively, without thinking, and then they are completed with specific forms. My overall impression does not cause negative feelings, I am rather interested in this art.“

„Wladyslaw Hasior is apparently an accomplished author with severe life story and the dark memories. It seems like he researched the life and death and found the link between them. Author's artworks look cold and melancholic but I observe them with interest. They evoke a lot of feelings and I think it is really important in visual arts.“

„I liked the artworks, although I suppose it's rather a feeling of author's state of mind. In my opinion, the author tried to cope with his experiences. The works did not seem depressive to me, rather I felt sorrow from them.“

„Author Wladyslaw Hasior creates artworks which, from my point of view, seem to be sorrowful to general public. At first glance I thought the same about them, too, but when I looked closer and thought again of his work, I changed my mind. I think

the author is trying to give the image of a real fear of death and war. His works are trying to show these topics in a simple nakedness without hiding.“

„I think the works of artist are created in that way because of the war, they look somber and they cause some discomfort in me, but nevertheless I think they are interesting and someone can enjoy them.“

„The Polish artist Wladyslaw Hasior and his art makes me gloomy, I think the themes of his works are based on the Holocaust. These are the personal experiences which are based on the internal state of mind of the author. In general, I liked his artwork, but I feel very intensive kind of sadness.“

„Looking at some of the works (gun, hair, human face) I automatically connected his art with Polish trauma of war. I feel sadness from them but also they seem bitter and hilarious (peacocks, animals). Thematically, it seems to be critical to society but also looks as an internal help how to copy with life. I like that the author goes through various media (painting, assemblage, sculpture).“

„Author makes me very melancholic under the pressure of the environment appearing in his works. The environment does not have any light, any touch of the sun... It does not influence me negatively or positively but I like his artworks.“

„Within the works of author Wladyslaw Hasior, I noticed symbolic motives that have associated me in connection with the Holocaust. The feeling inside me intensified after discovery that the author is from Poland, which is for me a country that has been affected badly by Holocaust.“

„Polish author Hasior's art seems to be rather negative, but it does not make me feel bad. I can see the child naivete and at the same time dark elements linked to the death and tragedy. His assemblages evoke very intense feelings and make me reflect the author's life and mind-set.“

„The artist's works look surreal and controversial, they are full of contradictions. Author captures the depressing site of tragic history of his culture through the symbols.“

Student's written reflections of the Andy Warhol's artworks:

„I like the artistic creation of Andy Warhol, because he portrayed the society with both its positive and negative aspects, which he transformed into his pictures.“

„Andy Warhol is interesting, because he brought a new air into art.“

„He used a lot of colours in his works, that's why I perceive his artworks as merry.“

„I like Andy Warhol, because he has brought a new style of displaying things and brought a new touch to art.“

„I like his creative style and his use of colours.“

„Warhol is a prominent figure, because he created a new artistic style - pop art.“

„Although I do not like this artistic style, I appreciate his ability to criticize a consumerist society. I appreciate this expression in art and, in my view, thus art has moved one step further.“

„I like Andy Warhol, because he used colours which cause images are popping out to space.“

„His works are depressive and daunting, because they portray the themes which are deterrent for me – violence, consume, conflicts...“

„I consider his works as uninteresting, because they did not touch me.“

„Andy was, in my opinion, a product of a society. I wonder if he had actually been without a public pressure, how he would have expressed in another time.“

„I like his paintings, because of the use of a pure colour on the large surfaces.“

„He is original, because he moved art into the advertising consumer goods.“

„He displayed the ordinary things and I like how he portrayed Marylin in various colours.“

„He was able to wipe off the borders between art and the mass-produced objects through the reproduction of his artworks.“

„Warhol seems to be a silent extrovert, but he puts his feelings in his artworks, which seem crazy for me, but they are also interesting.“

„I have mixed feelings for Andy Warhol, because his works cause me negative emotions, but on the other hand I like his critical attitude towards society.“

5 Research results

The written students' reflections of Wladyslaw Hasior's artworks display variety of motives, techniques, emotions and thoughts.

Motives: war, signs of child's drawing, gun, hair, human face, hilarious peacocks and animals, symbols, scary scenes, horror scenes, no light, no touch of the sun, dark elements.

Techniques: unusual materials (hair, rusty metal), made in a very interesting and attractive way, various media (painting, assemblage, sculpture), high technical level.

Emotions: sad, bleak, morbid, cold, melancholic, sorrowful, fear of death and war, somber, gloomy, intensive sadness, bitter, depressing.

Thoughts (conclusions): strange, mystery, mirror of a society, childhood trauma, severe life story, dark memory, link between life and death, simple nakedness without hiding, Holocaust, Polish trauma of war, critical to society, internal help how to copy with life, the child naivete, death and tragedy, surreal, controversial, contradictions, tragic history.

The written student's reflections of the Andy Warhol's artworks are interesting, too, and they include descriptions, motives, techniques, emotions and thoughts, too, but they are shorter and not so deep.

Motives: portrayed Marylin in various colours, violence, consume, conflicts, displayed the ordinary things, advertising consumer goods.

Techniques: a lot of colours, his use of colours, images are popping out to space, pure colour on the large surfaces.

Emotions: merry, depressive and daunting, deterrent for me, crazy, I have mixed feelings, cause me negative emotions.

Thoughts (conclusions): he brought a new air into art, a new touch to art, creative style, art has moved one step further, he created a new artistic style - pop art, he is original, able to wipe off the borders between art and the mass-produced objects through the reproduction, a product of a society, public pressure, he portrayed the society with both its positive and negative aspects, ability to criticize a consumerist society, his critical attitude towards society, a prominent figure, seems to be a silent extrovert, he puts his feelings in his artworks.

Beside the appreciation, that the artist created the new style, the students commented the author's ability to criticize society, and they tried to describe his personality. One of the reflections told us, that the art works are „uninteresting, because they did not touch me“.

6 Discussion

At first glance, we can see the difference between two dimensions of the reflections: the first is the size, the second it the depth of the reflections. Both are bigger (stronger) in the first reflections (on W. Hasior). There are two possible reasons: the first is that the students have already known the art of A. Warhol and it was not so inspirative for them anymore, but they did know anything about W. Hasior, so it was new and interesting for them. The second reason might be, that the art of W. Hasior is more controversive, more intense. Of course, also in art of A. Warhol there are the motives of death and suffering (The Electric Chair, The Green Disaster...), but maybe the power of their social critical message is covered by his other art works. On the other hand, the students thought about the artistic style and about the place of A. Warhol in history of art. Although we think the meeting with the art works of W. Hasior is not easy, they touched the students personally and deeply, inspired them to interesting thoughts and to the vivid discussion. We can say without doubts, that these type of reaction on art can develop critical thinking - it is included in every self-expression of the students, it explains the opinion, and it is highly individual.

Of course, we are aware this type of qualitative research brings the knowledge of the specific group in a specific environment, and the research process could be affected by another circumstances, also the results could be interpreted another way as we did, but we consider all that as a normal characteristic of the qualitative research.

7 Conclusion

Creative and critical thinking is essential for art, the same time for teaching of art. We could think all artistic work is creative, but it is not, because a creation is not the same as creativity. Both, creative and critical thinking, are the basic competencies of the future teachers of fine art education. At the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, the very important part of didactic preparation for pedagogical practice for our students – the future teachers, is the knowledge of many important, inspirational and interesting artists. Through their artworks the students learn how to think about them and how to reflect them (Récka, 2017a, 2017b, 2018). They are thinking about what they like and don't like about the artists, they create and write their reflections, listen to the different opinions, talk about them. The students are inspired by the form and content of the artworks. Thus art is a tool of development of student's personality. That is important, because the future teacher should be able to think critically, to create originally, to speak wisely, to be tolerant of another opinions, to stand for his/her opinion, but other time to be flexible and change the opinion after listening to good arguments. We can say, the representatives of pop art are very proper for the students' reflections, because they can start the discussion about current social problems, so we consider this method as a perfect one. The presented artworks inspired our student to interesting ideas and in accordance to our previous experiences we suppose they will transfer their obtained skills to their pupils, so the process of personality development will continue. These types of challenges are inspirative not only for the students but also for the teachers.

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