MULTISENSORY TEACHING APPROACHES IN ART HISTORY LESSONS: INSIGHTS INTO THEORY AND PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

The paper aims to discuss the intersection of theoretical findings on multisensory approaches to teaching and learning art history with practices at the high school and the university level. Since the 19th century when the Vienna School of Art History introduced Formalism as the first paradigm of a "scientific discipline" with an emphasis on sight, art historians have considered the visual aspect as the only relevant in art historical research. New Art History paradigms of the second half of the 20th century laid stress on the necessity of reducing the monopoly of the logocentric perspective, as well as on the need to elucidate possibilities of engaging different senses that are necessary for holistic and integrative art history education. These new circumstances inevitably call for a shift from the linguistic transmission of knowledge to the transformative multisensory educational model.

KEYWORDS:

art history pedagogy, didactics, sensory turn, multisensory approach, holistic education

INTRODUCTION

While updating the study material for the art history pedagogy course, I came across an article written by Marice Rose and Tera Lee Hedrick regarding multisensory approaches in teaching medieval art.[1] They designed assignments aimed at undergraduate students providing them with not only the

1) Marice Rose and Tera Lee Hedrick, "Multisensory and Active Learning Approaches to Teaching Medieval Art," *Art History Pedagogy & Practice*, no. 3 (2018), accessed August 25, 2023, https://academicworks.cuny.edu/ahpp/vol3/iss1/4.

visual but also auditory and kinaesthetic experiences. These included drawing patterns, which evoked religious meditation, or designing medieval luxury objects with an intention to step into the artist's shoes. Their preliminary survey explored several curatorial practices and case studies discussing multisensory perception of medieval art. It was a major discovery for me, as I had already planned a chapter on engaging multiple senses in high-school art history lessons. Being aware of the increased cognitive impact that such methods could have, I had never before thought of them in a direct connection to the methodology within the discipline itself and only later did it become clear to me that they are inextricably linked.

The paper will reveal how and when the idea of the multisensory approach entered art history teaching and how it is positioned in the current art history pedagogy. The conclusions, connecting theoretical findings on the latest approaches to teaching and learning with the actual professional experiences, will emphasize the necessity of multisensory methods in teaching art history. Reducing the monopoly of the logocentric perspective will illuminate the possibilities of engaging different senses for holistic and integrative art history education.

THE LEGACY OF THE VIENNA SCHOOL OF ART HISTORY

In a pioneering text on the matter, Jenni Lauwrens defined the sensory turn as the latest in a series of paradigm-changing phenomena in humanities and social sciences that appeared in the 1990s.[2] As all other – linguistic, cultural, and pictorial turns – it challenged the logocentric interpretations of works of visual art. Seen as an actual *return* of the empiricist Aristotelian tradition, it

2) Jenni Lauwrens, "Welcome to the revolution: The sensory turn and art history," *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 7 (December 2012): 1–17.

negates Immanuel Kant's premise that sensuous pleasures are deceitful.[3] In art-historical writing, the sense of sight prevailed over all other senses at the turn of the 19th–20th century when the scholars of the Vienna School established Formalism as the first "scientific" paradigm of the discipline.[4]

Furthermore, formalists Alois Riegl and Heinrich Wölfflin examined *Kunstwollen*, the basic intrinsic creative drive that dictates which characteristics of art evolve in a certain era. Riegl outlined the evolution from works that functioned in a close-up aspect and in a more tactile manner to those that we observe from far away and that affect us more optically.[5] He singled out sight and consolidated its hegemony as the most reliable perceptual channel for art-historical inquiry.[6] Heinrich Wölfflin further explained that a tactile image had become a visual image and described this transformation as the most crucial shift in Western art.[7] Thus he created an ideological foundation for the prevalence of vision in the theory of Vienna Formalism.[8]

Throughout the 19th century, the beginnings of the Slovenian art history were limited to ekphrases in fictional literature, such as Josip Stritar's novel *Zorin* (1870), in which he described his synaesthetic encounter with the Parisian Louvre: "How could I even begin to express what I felt when I suddenly found myself

3) Ibid., 7, 11–16.
4) Francis Halsall, "One Sense is Never Enough," *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, no. 2 (2004): 112, accessed August 25, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1386/jvap.3.2.103/0; Rebeka Vidrih, "Institucionalizacija umetnostnozgodovinske vede in formalizem kot njena prva paradigma" [Institutionalization of Art History and Formalism as its First Paradigm], *Philological studies*, no. 1 (2019), 3–4, accessed August 25, 2023, https://journals.ukim.mk/index.php/philologicalstudies/article/view/660/581; Lauwrens, "Welcome to the revolution," 6.
5) Alois Riegl, *Historische Grammatik der bildenden Künste* [Historical Grammar of the Visual Arts] (Mailand / Udine: Mimezis Verlag, 2017), 345.
6) Ibid., 341.
7) Heinrich Wölfflin, *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Das Problem der Stilentwicklung in der neueren Kunst* [Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art] (München: Hugo Bruckmann, 1917), 24.
8) Ibid., 25.

Fig 1. Titian, Assunta, 1516–1518, oil on panel, 690 cm × 360 cm, Basilica di Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice, Wikipedia, accessed August 25, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assumption_of_the_Virgin_(Titian).

among (these) famous ancient Greek statues!"[9] The situation slowly began to change after the founding of the University of Ljubljana in 1919, and establishing the art history study programme in 1920. Its first professors, Izidor Cankar and France Stele, inherited the ideas of the Vienna School.[10] Cankar himself wrote an essayistic novel *S poti* (On the Way, 1919) in which he articulated an ekphrasis of Titian's *Assunta* through words of the main character, a young art historian Fritz (**Fig. 1**).[11] His description, springing from the subjective sensual experiencing evolved into a logical and rational morphological analysis.[12] Through the following

9) Josip Stritar, *Zorin* [Zorin] (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1985), 15. All translations of the quotations are by the author. For more on the history of ekphrases, see Tomaž Brejc, *Realizem, impresionizem, postimpresionizem* [Realism, Impressionism, Post-Impressionism] (Ljubljana: Narodna galerija, 1988), 12–21.
10) Matej Klemenčič, "Oddelek za umetnostno zgodovino" [Department of Art History], in *Zbornik Filozofske fakultete Univerze v Ljubljani: 1919-2009*, eds. Valentin Bucik et al. (Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete UL, 2009), 469–478.
11) Izidor Cankar, *S poti* [On the Way] (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1986), 30–32.
12) Tomaž Brejc, "Assunta, Izidor Cankar in moderna umetnostna zgodovina" [Assunta, Izidor Cankar and Modern Art History], *Sodobnost*, no. 6/7 (1988): 670, 672, 674.

decades, scholarly interpretations of artworks were increasingly being presented as mere visual encounters. In the introduction to the second edition of Cankar's scholarly book *Uvod v umevanje likovne umetnosti: Sistematika stila (Introduction into the Visual Art: The Systematics of Style*, 1959) the author himself established the author himself established a premise that objective aesthetic judgments (as opposed to subjective ones) represent the core of scientific art history, emanating from the visible stylistic characteristics of artworks.[13]

In 1930, when art history emerged in the curriculum of the Slovenian classical grammar school, the priority of vision present within scholarly writing was also reflected in art history teaching right from the start, even though according to archive sources, multisensory activities were not ignored completely.[14] A document from 1945 expresses a request for field learning, arguing that art history lessons should not be stereotyped into a form of art-historical lectures.[15] In a draft curriculum from 1951, we find an illustrative guideline: "Students should visit art exhibitions and galleries with paintings under the guidance of an expert professor and discuss the visits and artwork in class."[16] After the Second World War, the promotion of field learning

13) Izidor Cankar, *Uvod v umevanje likovne umetnosti: Sistematika stila* [Introduction into Visual Art: The Systematics of Style] (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1959), 13; For more on Cankar's *Uvod v umevanje likovne umetnosti: Sistematika stila*, a fundamental book in Slovenian art history, see Rebeka Vidrih, "The Scope and Ambition of Izidor Cankar's 'Systematics of Style'," *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 22 (2020): 1–31, accessed August 25, 2023, https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/vidrih.pdf.

14) Marjana Dolšina Delač, "Umetnostnozgodovinski diskurz v procesih formalnega izobraževanja v Sloveniji" [Art History Discourse in Slovenia According to Official Curricula] (PhD diss., University of Ljubljana, 2020), 48.

15) Objasnilo o predlagani spremembi učnega načrta iz risanja v srednjih šolah [Explanation of the Proposed Change to the Drawing Curriculum in Secondary Schools], 1945, Box 5, SI AS 231, Ministrstvo za prosveto, Archives of the Republic of Slovenia, Ljubljana (hereafter cited as LJ Archives).

16) Učni načrt za risanje, lepopis in ročna dela za učiteljišča [Draft Curriculum for Drawing, Calligraphy, and Handicrafts in Schools for Teachers], 1951, Box 192, SI AS 231, Ministrstvo za prosveto, LJ Archives.

mirrored a general educational orientation towards pragmatism and problem-based learning.[17] It was also a consequence of the current resources and facilities, since according to a report from 1954 around two hundred Slovenian schools already had projection devices, but only in black and white.[18] A desire for pragmatism in art history education is expressed in many post-war archive documents, for example in the comments on the draft curriculum for grammar schools:

> In addition to more or less theoretical discussions about the elements of artistic language, we would like to emphasize the general aesthetic and educational approach causing students to develop a sense for a better understanding and aesthetic evaluation of not only paintings and sculptures, but also of handicraft products as well as everything else that surrounds us in everyday life (posters, textiles, furniture, tools, etc.). Above all, students should be able to know how to distinguish kitsch from real art. They should also familiarise themselves with the elements of architecture in order to be able to correctly assess the architectural value of buildings and the urban layout of cities.[19]

17) Stane Okoliš, *Zgodovina šolstva na Slovenskem* [History of Education in Slovenia] (Ljubljana: Slovenski šolski muzej, 2009), 116.
18) Poročilo o sestanku Aktiva zgodovinarjev in geografov Svetu za prosveto in kulturo LRS o uporabi barvnih diapozitivov [Report on the Meeting of Historians and Geographers to the Council for Education and Culture of the LRS on the Use of Colour Slides], 1954, Box 83, SI AS 249, Svet za kulturo in prosveto LRS, LJ Archives.
19) Pripombe inšpektorata za splošnoizobraževalno šolstvo k osnutku učnega načrta za gimnazije Zveznega zavoda za proučevanje šolskih in prosvetnih vprašanj [Comments of the General Education Inspectorate on the Draft Curriculum for High Schools of the Federal Institute for Education], 1958, Box 50, SI AS 250 Svet za šolstvo LRS 1956–1961, LJ Archives.

NO LONGER SOLELY SPECTATORS

Lauwrens explains *sensorium* as a social construct and claims that each culture and historical period shapes its own way of using and understanding bodily senses.[20] She agrees with Halsall's demands for an art-historical synaesthesia, since analyses of artworks should not focus exclusively on sight as the main channel for receiving information.[21]

The sensory turn first left its mark on curating exhibitions and on postmodern art installations. In the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, USA, Martina Bagnoli in 2016 curated the multisensory exhibition *A Feast for the Senses: Art and Experience in Medieval Europe*.[22] Lauwrens also mentions another exhibition entitled *Still Sounds* that had occurred four years earlier, in 2012, in The Crypt Gallery at St. Pancras Church in London. It touched her deeply as it was the collaboration of sight, sound,

Fig. 2. Delcy Morelos, Earthly Paradise, 2022, installation, Venice Biennale, Venice. Photograph by Marjana Dolšina Delač.

20) Lauwrens, "Welcome to the revolution," 4.
21) Ibid., 16; Halsall, "One Sense is Never Enough," 120.
22) Martina Bagnoli, Virginia Brilliant, Carla Casagrande, Emma Dillon, Barbara Newman and Christina Normore, *A Feast for the Senses: Art and Experience in Medieval Europe*, ed. Martina Bagnoli (Baltimore: The Walters Art Museum, 2016).

touch, and smell, united in a holistic bodily experience.[23] Since then, we have been following similar examples, including one of them at the Venice Biennale in 2022, where Delcy Morelos envisioned a soil labyrinth, through which visitors move and see each other only from the waist up – as if they have just grown out of the fertile ground (**Fig. 2**). "Visitors can smell the earth's aroma mixed with hay, cassava flour, cacao powder, and spices like cloves and cinnamon while sensing the soil's moisture, temperature, texture, and darkness."[24] The author delivered an idea of being an earthly being in a unique sensual environment.

In 2006, Bissera Pentcheva published the article "The Performative Icon", in which she presents the context of the Byzantine religious ceremony: "... the icon is in fact a surface that resonates with sound, wind, light, touch, and smell. ... a synaesthetic experience in which the whole body is engaged."[25] By taking a walk through all five senses, she explains their role in the performance of a holy object in front of a worshipper and convincingly argues as to why the icon, in her words, "stages the most sensually rich experience of divine presence."[26] The most obvious shift from focusing on sight to embodying all senses was probably done by Herbert Leon Kessler, who upgraded the title of his book *Seeing Medieval Art* to *Experiencing Medieval Art*.[27]

Following the evolution of the discipline itself, art history pedagogy has embraced the sensory turn and the emergence

23) Lauwrens, "Welcome to the revolution," 1. In "Multisensory and Active Learning Approaches" Rose and Hedrick list other examples of multisensory exhibitions which led to the implementation of the sensory turn in scholarly art history discourse.
24) Manuela Hansen, *Delcy Morelos*, accessed August 25, 2023, https://www.labiennale.org/en/art/2022/milk-dreams/delcy-morelos.
25) Bissera V. Pentcheva, "The Performative Icon," *The Art Bulletin*, no. 4 (2006): 631–655.
26) Ibid., 651.
27) Herbert Leon Kessler, *Seeing Medieval Art* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2004); Herbert Leon Kessler, *Experiencing Medieval Art* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019).

of active learning methods, arising from the cognitive-constructivist model of education.[28] Already in 2000, Jacqueline Chanda and Ashlee Basinger seized an inquiry-based approach to teaching aimed at a contextual understanding of African art.[29] They refused having to concentrate on remembering names, dates, and historical periods as they recognised the potential of inquiry-based learning for revitalising art history education.[30]

At higher levels of education, the long-established slide lecture that set the pace in traditional art history pedagogy, as "striding about the stage, the professor pointed to areas of the projected slide, revealing to the captivated audience hitherto unseen mysteries"[31] was at first enriched with elements of *problem-based learning* (PBL).[32] In 2005, Molly Lindner pointed out that students' experiences and life expectations have radically changed, hence a conventional method of *compare and*

28) Charles C. Bonwell and James A. Eison, *Active Learning: Creating Excitement in the Classroom* (Washington, DC: School of Education and Human Development, George Washington University, 1991).
Marie Gasper-Hulvat, "Active Learning in Art History: A Review of Formal Literature," *Art History Pedagogy & Practice*, no. 2 (2017), 4–6, accessed August 25, 2023, https://academicworks.cuny.edu/ahpp/vol2/iss1/2. For the historiography of art history pedagogy in Slovenian neighbouring countries, see: Roberto Sani, *La storia dell'arte come disciplina scolastica: dal primo Novecento al secondo dopoguerra* [Art History as a School Subject: From the Early Twentieth Century to the Post-Second World War Period] (Macerata: EUM – Edizioni Università di Macerata, 2022); Susanne Adina Meyer, *Cenerentola a scuola. Il dibattito sull'insegnamento della storia dell'arte nei licei (1900-1943)* [Cinderella at School. The Debate on Teaching Art History in High Schools (1900-1943)] (Macerata: EUM – Edizioni Università di Macerata, 2023); Jadranka Damjanov, *Umjetnost avantura: bilježnica* [Art Adventure: Notebook] (Zagreb: Hermes izdavaštvo, 1998).
29) Jacqueline Chanda and Ashlee M. Basinger, "Understanding the Cultural Meaning of Selected African Ndop Statues: The Use of Art History Constructivist Inquiry Methods," *Studies in Art Education*, no. 1 (2000): 67–82.
30) See also Jacqueline Chanda, "Art History Inquiry Methods: Three Options for Art Education," *Art Education*, no. 5 (1998): 17–24.
31) Kelly Donahue-Wallace, Laetitia Amelia La Follette and Andrea Pappas, "Introduction," in *Teaching Art History with New Technologies: Reflections and Case Studies*, eds. Kelly Donahue-Wallace, Laetitia Amelia La Follette and Andrea Pappas (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 1–12.
32) Gasper-Hulvat, "Active Learning in Art History," 8–9.

contrast in a dimmed room does not do the trick anymore.[33] Instead of lecturing, she came up with some "problems" that students researched and gave oral presentations on, and finally they handed in their written assignments.[34]

The next step in introducing multisensory methods has been reached with *object-based learning* (OBL) which, according to Lidija Tavčar, originates in museum pedagogy. With teaching and learning centring on a physical object, a museum artefact assumes the role of a primary learning source.[35] Since OBL requires original artworks for learning activities to be carried out, it does not sit well with the conventional school environment. However, the idea of giving the same validity to information, gathered through different senses, classifies OBL as a multisensory method.

NEW ART HISTORY DEMANDS NEW PEDAGOGY

Nevertheless, it is necessary to examine why adopting new educational strategies is essential if our, now almost mythical, "art in the dark" methods have worked for generations. During my study of art history, lectures were exciting rather than tedious, filled with aha moments and with professors skilfully pulling together threads of data, then weaving them into patches of knowledge created and exposed in front of students' eyes.

33) Molly M. Lindner, "Problem-Based Learning in the Art-History Survey Course," *Newsletter of the College Art Association (CAANews)*, September, 2005, 7–9, 41–43, accessed August 25, 2023, https://www.collegeart.org/pdf/caa-news-print-archive/caa-news-09-05.pdf. Geoffrey Simmins, "Motivating Participation in Online Art History Courses: Issues and Ideas," in *Teaching Art History with New Technologies: Reflections and Case Studies*, eds. Kelly Donahue-Wallace, Laetitia Amelia La Follette and Andrea Pappas (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 119–129.
34) Lindner, "Problem-Based Learning," 8.
35) Hulvat, "Active Learning in Art History," 6–8. Lidija Tavčar, *Homo spectator: Uvod v muzejsko pedagogiko* [*Homo Spectator*: An Introduction to Museum Pedagogy] (Ljubljana: Pedagoški inštitut, 2009), 84–88.

If the first two paradigms – formalism and iconography – have functioned well with the prevalence of sight, the third one is radically different. Bringing together various approaches in the discipline,[36] New Art History seeks to explore the context and often borrows unorthodox methodologies from other disciplines such as linguistics or anthropology.[37] "What was previously puzzled over as a mystery has now come to be understood as the task of fitting a work to a particular task, to a particular set of describable historical conditions,"[38] stated Svetlana Alpers, who used the term New Art History for the first time in 1972.[39] However, context has a broader meaning that extends beyond mere historical background and includes material, social, intellectual, and spiritual conditions, imbued with author's personal experiences. We therefore do art an injustice when we reduce it to a visual medium, since it is originally supposed to engage all the senses.[40] In 1934, John Dewey proposed an answer to the question as to why we forget to seek for the holistic experience and rely solely on the isolated visual aspect: "When an art product once attains classic status, it somehow becomes isolated from the human conditions under which it was brought into being and from the human consequences it engenders in actual life-experience."[41] He offers a theory of

36) Marxist art history, feminist art history, psychoanalysis, deconstruction semiotics, etc. Stephen Addis and Mary Erickson, *Art History and Education. Disciplines in Art Education: Contexts of Understanding*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 45–69.
37) Addis and Erickson, *Art History and Education*, 69; Jure Mikuž, *Pogledati – gledati, videti – uvideti: zgodovinsko-antropološke študije* [To Look – to Observe, to See – to Perceive: Historical-Anthropological Studies] (Ljubljana: Narodna galerija, 2011), 15.
38) Svetlana Alpers, "Is Art History?," *Daedalus*, no. 3, *Discoveries and Interpretations: Studies in Contemporary Scholarship*, vol. 1 (1977): 1–13.
39) Mikuž, *Pogledati – gledati, videti – uvideti*, 18. For more on the development of art history in the 20th century, see Udo Kultermann, *The History of Art History* (New York: Abaris Books, 1993), 227–251.
40) Addis and Erickson, *Art History and Education*, XVI.
41) John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Perigee Books, 1980), 3.

aesthetic experience as the highest form of experience relying on the senses.[42]

MULTISENSORY ART HISTORY TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching and learning in Slovenian schools have so firmly stuck to the visual and auditory that even physical space is mainly arranged to support these two modalities. Pupils' desks are arranged in rows and oriented towards a blackboard and a teacher, who, sometimes even sitting, serves as the source of information, most of which students receive through seeing and hearing. Older school interiors even have a raised platform, resembling a stage, so everything can be clearly seen and heard. Meanwhile, there is no room for kinaesthetic activities and moving around.

Fig. 3. Jan van Eyck, The Arnolfini Portrait, 1434, oil on oak panel, 82.2 cm × 60 cm, National Gallery, London, Wikipedia, accessed August 25, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arnolfini_Portrait.

In 1998, Chanda thematised three options for inquiry-based art education using Jan van Eyck's *Giovanni Arnolfini and his wife* (**Fig. 3**) as an example. Two of the options, iconography and iconology, are still bound to visual perception, while social art history as the

42) Ibid., 22. See also Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 2.

third one already focuses on the context, potentially extending into the field of multisensory. Firstly, Chanda invites children to identify and list the objects in the painting, compare them to the photographs of real things and categorise them into groups. Secondly, they speculate about the meaning of symbols and prepare interpretations based on the actual historical context they glean from the given sources.[43]

Yet, children could also effectively grasp the context by smelling oranges that we find on the windowsill, filling the room with a distinct aroma or observing a lit candle that leaves a smoke trail in a wealthy bourgeois home. They could feel the softness of the materials by touching different surfaces, for example (artificial) fur that was originally an indication of prestige for its warm, pleasant touch, not for its appearance. Finally, they could listen to the barking of a little dog depicted out front, an ancestor of the breed now known as the Brussels griffon.[44] Acting in this manner could establish a meaningful link with a scene from the 15th century. Making a more casual and intimate comment, art historian Frances Lee relates to the depicted scene by trying to informally imagine the dog in her world of the 21st century:

> It is charming for me to think that people loved cute little dogs in the 15th century just as much as I love cute little dogs now. In Jan van Eyck's 1434 *Arnolfini Wedding*, I am so entranced by the fluffy brown dog on the floor standing just between the man and woman. She would not be out of place in my 21st-century, dog-loving household; I can see her cuddling with my sister on the couch, barking at the UPS truck, and playing with my other dogs. When I look at this

43) Chanda, "Art History Inquiry Methods," 20–24.
44) Anne Bass, "Arnolfini's Best Friend: Fellowship and Familiarity in Jan van Eyck's 'Arnolfini Portrait'," *Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art / Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek Online*, no. 1 (2020): 20–47, accessed August 25, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1163/22145966-07001003.

> pup, I forget what my art history education has taught me (dogs mean fidelity!! dogs mean lust!! dogs mean wealth!! dogs mean fidelity, lust, AND wealth, all at the same time in the same painting!!). I forget about 'disguised symbolism'. I forget about the complicated marriage customs of the 15th-century Netherlands and how a dog could possibly fit into that context. All I can think about is how soft her fur must be. Maybe she's not simply a tool for the artist to deliver some higher symbolic meaning. Maybe she's a cute little dog hanging out with her humans. I value moments of realization and connection to the past like this so much. Ultimately, I don't relate to these static, long-dead people until I think about them doting over a lap dog.[45]

Certain questions regarding the social dimensions of the scene could now be posed: Who was the patron of the painting? Why did he commission the painting? What was the social setting, i.e. "information about the time, place, and social and economic conditions in which the work of art was created?"[46]

Lidija Tavčar has already been carrying out multisensory activities in the National Gallery in Ljubljana, explaining art historical concepts, such as simulating the *chiaroscuro* by lighting a candle or using a flashlight in a darkened room to observe how drastically illumination changes the image of objects and children's faces. After this empirical part of the programme, even five-year-olds can understand what *chiaroscuro* means and easily recognise it when present in paintings.[47]

When dealing with multisensory explanations in class, students start with a simple term *contrapposto* that can be explained

45) Frances Lee, *The Dog in Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Wedding*, accessed August 25, 2023, https://millsapshooksproject.wordpress.com/art-hooks/the-dog-in-jan-van-eycks-arnolfini-wedding-1434.
46) Chanda, "Art History Inquiry Methods," 23.
47) Tavčar, *Homo spectator*, 79.

in three different ways, each of them emphasizing one modality. In order to stress visual perception, we look at a series of pictures, representing human figures leaning on one leg. To receive information via an auditory channel, we read aloud the definition from a textbook. Finally, as shown in **Fig. 4**, we recreate *contrapposto* kinaesthetically, with our own bodies and feel the unevenly distributed weight, the tension of certain muscles, while some others remain relaxed, creating a sensation of a curved body that rests in perfect balance.

Fig. 4. High-school students illustrating the contrapposto, 2023, photograph by Marjana Dolšina Delač.

Jari Martikainen went further with more complex activities, no longer alienating a single sense but inseparably uniting them into distinct sensory experiences. He gave his students assignments to modernise classical works of art through their own artistic creations with concepts adapted to the contemporary world, as he believed they "involve students more directly in the learning process."[48]

While traditional education used art history as an introduction, a theoretical foundation or a narrative framework for students'

48) Jari Martikainen, "Making Pictures, Writing about Pictures, Discussing Pictures and Lecture-Discussion as Teaching Methods in Art History," *Art History Pedagogy & Practice*, no. 1 (2017): 3, accessed August 25, 2023, http://academicworks.cuny.edu/ahpp/vol2/iss1/4.

own artistic creativity, Martikainen turned it the other way around and utilised artistic practice to attain an understanding of the non-discursive dimension of art: "Making pictures was understood as a means of visual thinking or thinking through and with pictures, which provides an alternative to the mere verbal processing of art historical topics and can integrate affects and emotions with profound learning processes."[49] Simple multisensory tasks work well at all levels of education, regardless of age, prior knowledge, or interests of learners, since as children we explore our world with all the available senses. Whenever we talk about a certain sound, we hear it in our minds, whenever we watch a movement, we relive it on the inside, so why not actually use all the sensory richness available to us?

Fig. 5 and Fig. 6. High-school students illustrating Romanesque and Gothic arches, 2023, photograph by Marjana Dolšina Delač.

49) Martikainen, "Making Pictures," 10.

My second example comes from teaching master's students. Within the art history pedagogy course, they prepare a lesson and simulate it in front of other students. Their lesson plan has to include at least one multisensory activity.[50] Every year, an array of original solutions comes up. Weight transfer in stone skeletons of Gothic cathedrals can be experienced through the tension of the muscles in the body, leaning against a wall in a form of a semi-arch, which burdens the muscles differently, depending on the size of the arch's span (**Fig. 5**, **Fig. 6**).[51] Furthermore, an Impressionist's desire to observe and depict the never-the-same reality depending on the changing light and colours is recreated by taking pictures of the selfsame object or a scene, but through different transparent colour foils or by using digital filters.[52] In the discussion that follows we thematise how a certain colour-scheme creates a particular mood, a sentiment, or even an attitude that we perceive in photos taken by students. Not only when discussing peers' assignments, but also in short anonymous end-of-semester surveys, the activities that at least at some point stimulate more than one sense are rated by most students as the best activities of the classes.

The third example comes from my teaching practice in a vocational high school, where sixteen-year-olds prepared multisensory activities for preschool children. We started the course in the National Gallery in Ljubljana where students walked through the permanent exhibition of Slovenian art from the Middle Ages to the 19th century in order to choose a particularly interesting artwork. A museum curator acquainted them with the gallery's educational programmes and pedagogical approaches for preschool children. After their fieldwork,

50) See also Marjana Dolšina Delač, Olga Paulič and Nataša Golob, *Učbenik za didaktiko umetnostne zgodovine* [Art History Didactics Textbook] (Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete UL, 2023), 73–87.
51) Envisioned by MA student Domen Šega in 2021.
52) Envisioned by MA student Klara Zupančič in 2017.

students prepared oral presentations on the artworks with multisensory activities for preschool children. It was quite a difficult task, but some of them came up with original solutions. A student, who analysed a Biedermeier portrait of the Slovenian poet *Luiza Pesjak* from the middle of the 19th century, firstly noted the surname of the artist Mihael Stroj translated to *The Machine* in English. She also read about his fashionable bourgeois portraits being mostly painted in advance, using a prearranged set-up, which appears to be similar in most of his depictions of wealthy 19th-century ladies.53 After gaining factual knowledge, she envisioned a special machine for making portraits – a box that, when a handle is turned, produces replicas of Stroj's artworks, and then demonstrated its functioning in class (**Fig. 7**).54 This paved the way for preschool children to establish associative links between the name of the artist, his work, and the machine-like process of painting the early 19th-century Biedermeier portraits.

Fig. 7. High-school student presenting a Biedermeier portrait of Luiza Pesjak with an activity for preschool children, 2023, photograph by Marjana Dolšina Delač.

53) Mihael Stroj, accessed August 25, 2023, https://www.ng-slo.si/en/304/mihael-stroj?tab=collections&authorId=507.
54) Envisioned by high-school student Špela Zdravje in 2023.

CONCLUSION

At the end of the 20th century, the sensory turn not only resided in art historical exhibitions and scholarly discourse but also influenced art history pedagogy, emphasizing a sensual experience of art. Moreover, a percept of art is now understood not merely as a visual episode or a sequence of various sensory stimuli, but in a form of concomitant sensation, a synaesthetic knot, which provides information beyond the boundaries of the discursive. Implementing multisensory activities in our high schools and universities has always been difficult. The tradition of sitting silently and listening to lessons is deeply rooted as it ensures structure, discipline and, as a result, enables teaching larger classes.

In a fast-changing world, education needs to concentrate on procedural instead of factual knowledge, an in-depth understanding of processes instead of shallow verbatim memorisation, which inevitably brings us to active learning methods and the structure of knowledge that comes from within. A synaesthetic complexity of sensory teaching and learning provides various types of information and therefore helps us focus on the links between concepts rather than their bare meanings. As already stated by Hoffmann and Cavalier in their discussion on mind mapping, this leads to a *meaningful learning* which is no longer static but interactive and builds upon prior knowledge.[55] With multisensory methods, we bring art closer to students as we make sense of it; they understand it more easily by experiencing a specific historical situation through their own senses. This kind of perceptual richness is also

55) Eva Hoffmann and Christine Cavalier, "ARTIFACT: Mapping a Global Survey of the History of Art," in *Teaching Art History with New Technologies: Reflections and Case Studies*, eds. Kelly Donahue-Wallace, Laetitia Amelia La Follette and Andrea Pappas (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 82.

a postulate of the latest art historical paradigm. New Art History has seized contextualisation as the basic methodological path for analysing and interpreting art so it cannot be overlooked.

In the future, new technologies will probably disclose fresh ways of bringing all the five senses back to life. Witcombe predicts the emergence of digitally created environments – classrooms where walls and ceilings convert into large digital surfaces and enable us to move across a staged space that addresses our senses visually, auditorily, and kinaesthetically.[56] Despite the unimaginable possibilities of creating virtual worlds, we are now – more than ever – aware of the irreplaceable value of an *in situ* encounter with an actual original, bringing its message in an authentic materialised form. As Tomaž Brejc puts it: "And that's what it is all about: I'm not diminishing the importance of textual interpretations at all, but everything starts with a painting, with the sensual charm of the original, with a direct experience, without which the delicately chosen words would be just empty professional craft."[57]

56) Christopher L. C. E. Witcombe, "Bye bye, Slides/Bye Bye Carousels/Hello, Internet/I Think I am a Gonna Cry-y" in *Teaching Art History with New Technologies: Reflections and Case Studies*, eds. Kelly Donahue-Wallace, Laetitia Amelia La Follette and Andrea Pappas (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 21.
57) Brejc, *Realizem, impresionizem, postimpresionizem*, 9.