

MAKING AMBIGUITIES VISIBLE ... THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO APPROACH ART (HISTORY)

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ABSTRACT

Art history serves as a platform to challenge perceptions, fostering critical thinking and nuanced understanding. It requires close observation, "slow looking", and the skill of articulating impressions. This process engages not only analysis but also the sharing of subjective and collective interpretations, which enriches discussions by integrating ambiguity and personal reflection alongside factual narratives. This paper explores the pedagogical value of art history in teacher training and its application in museum education, particularly through participatory and interactive methods employed at Kunsthhaus Graz and Neue Galerie Graz. Emphasising ambiguity as a productive space, the paper details how art education encourages dialogue, reflection, and multiple viewpoints, thus nurturing democratic practices and a tolerance for diverse interpretations. Theoretical insights from Gombrich, Belting, Hessel, and Kemp, among others, underpin these approaches, highlighting the importance of the interaction between artwork, viewer, and context. Ultimately, through the practice of nuanced observation and interpretation, art history can cultivate creativity, sensitivity, and an openness to complexity essential for contemporary education and democratic society.

KEYWORDS:

ambiguity, art history, critical thinking, slow looking, education, interpretation, museum education

INTRODUCTION

Art history has the potential to question what we see and to encourage critical thinking. As an art historian, you learn to

observe closely, to look slowly, and to find the right words to describe a work of art. From this comes analysis and interpretation. Translating images into words, articulating visual impressions or physical perceptions, and sharing them with others promotes communication that is as much about the presumed and the ambiguous as it is about the concrete and the provable.

How can visual impressions be recorded objectively and discussed subjectively? Why is this relevant to teaching? Furthermore, what added value does reflection on works of art or objects bring? The following paper aims to discuss the importance of art history in the training of teachers and to relate this to experiences from the practice of art education in museums. It is important to show that it is worthwhile to engage with art history, cultural studies discourses and to make use of them. It is important to name a historical framework that gives the subject a foundation, but also allows creative, critical or craft impulses for one's own activities in the classroom. In art education at Kunsthaus Graz and Neue Galerie Graz, we take a different approach.¹ The aim is to connect the exhibitions and their works with the realities of people's lives using a variety of (participatory) methods and (interactive) formats. Resolving ambiguities, allowing them and enduring them is inscribed in the attitude of art education and is due to an understanding of the museum's educational mission, which aims to allow many opinions in a thoroughly democratic sense. Slow looking as a method of art education means taking the time to carefully observe more than meets the eye at first glance and in the next step to think and to share the experience with others.² In both cases – in teaching and mediating – the aim

1) See: Monika Holzer-Kernbichler, Markus Waitschacher and Anna Döcker, eds., *Living Alien. 20 Jahre Kunstvermittlung Kunsthaus Graz* [Living Alien. 20 Years of Arts Education at Kunsthaus Graz] (Graz: Universalmuseum Joanneum, 2023).

2) Shari Tishman, *Slow Looking: The Art and Practice of Learning Through Observation* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 106.

is to link art, art history and a concrete reference to the present, to current discourses and events. Essentially, everything revolves around many different answers to the central question: And what has that got to do with me?

A small museum in a suitcase was the starting point for the work with the university students. This method was drawn from the practice of cultural education. Objects from a private collection – not art, but historical, curious, beautiful, or banal – were found in the suitcase to be worked on together. Wearing white gloves – like those worn by restorers – we took the objects out of the case and removed the protective bubble wrap. We placed them on a large cloth for closer examination. The staging and the appreciation of what is spread out are important for drawing attention to the objects and arousing the curiosity of the viewer. At first it was just a matter of looking at them, a haptic experience, a subjective classification along with the consideration of a whole range of possible questions: What did you say these objects are? Is there any indication of their age? How old are they? Who might have used them? What is the historical context of these objects? What was going on politically in the world at the time? What do they say about gender roles? What do they tell us about craftsmanship? What is their design, their form? What does the design tell us about the time the object comes from? Does the value play a role? How is the material processed? Was the object made by a machine? What do you personally think about it?

What does the object tell you about a possible context? Was it a mass product? What happens when you put two objects together?

The reasoning behind this close examination of objects should lead to a more intensive discussion on the objects within the

group and can become the starting point for many stories and narratives. How do we look at objects? How can we describe them and place them into the historical context? What can we learn about their history? How do we describe the context, how do we evaluate possible narratives? What is the role of the material and the production of the object? The intention is to make a link to everyday life, to an environment. Who knows such objects, who has ideas to answer these questions? Close observation usually holds significant value in terms of knowledge, but how can we disclose the meaning of the objects? How many different descriptions, stories and interpretations are allowed? In the first discussion, there are no categories of right and wrong, everything that is discovered and named is relevant.

Art historical methods prove to be good tools in this exercise. Of course, the answers found are not simple but varied. Discussion will reveal that the objects offer opportunities for personal reflection. The aim of this introductory exercise is to show how quickly judgements are made and alternative views are excluded. It has been observed how quickly personal references are made, how many individual experiences and associations or memories emerge.

The choice of words, the inadequacies of linguistic expression, finding the “right” words for what is seen and experienced through one’s own perception is a process that requires a lot of attention and patience. However, it is so important for art education because it promotes communication within the group and sensitivity in expression. The path from the description through the analysis to the interpretation is not a straight line, but a path with many branches. It is through the spoken word that the range of expression and understanding, of sending and receiving, gets clearer. It is a process that includes and excludes many different meanings. It becomes evident that a description,

an analysis or an interpretation, no matter how much it tries to keep its distance, can never be neutral.³ It always reflects one's own attitude to the subject.

Things do not speak in themselves, but how we describe them says a lot about us. This is also true of how we perceive art. In museums, dealing with objects (including art objects) is fundamental because they are the basis for museum collections and thus for the museum itself. For an art historian, looking at things from many angles and not being satisfied with the first impression seems natural. Ernst Gombrich, who had a major influence on the development of art history, speaks of the ambiguity of art in his iconic 1950 work *The Story of Art*, emphasising that works of art can often have multiple meanings and that their interpretation depends on different factors such as the cultural background of the viewer, historical contextualisation and personal experience.⁴ Gombrich argues that the meaning of art lies not in the works themselves, but in the interaction between the work and the viewer. This ambiguity allows people to develop their own interpretations and connections with works of art. As he wrote a few years later in *Art and Illusion* (1960), no picture can be understood without supplementation on the part of the viewer.⁵ For Hans Belting, image competence is the central concept of the *Rezeptionsästhetik*, which follows the English concept of reader-response criticism. This refers to the viewer's ability to

3) "In our work as educators, we are not able to negotiate content neutrally, because we always include and exclude things when we speak and show." Monika Holzer-Kernbichler, "Museal Communication Spaces of Art Education," *Journal of Museum Education*, no. 3 (2023): 230.

4) Ernst H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art* (London: Phaidon Publishers, 1950).

5) "Kein Bild kann ohne Ergänzung von Seiten des Bechauers verstanden werden." Ernst H. Gombrich, *Kunst und Illusion. Zur Psychologie der bildlichen Darstellung* [Art and Illusion. A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation] (Berlin: Phaidon, 2004; sixth edition), 204.

engage with and understand works of art, with the perception of images playing a central role.⁶

In his approach to the aesthetics of reception in art history, Wolfgang Kemp also assumes that works of art, in their complexity, have the capacity to evoke divergent interpretations and to produce intellectual as well as emotional effects.⁷ The context the work comes from and the context in which it is exhibited are equally essential. This triangle of work, viewer and context extends the framework of meaning into a sphere of reception that is influenced by prior knowledge, experience or even cultural background which are all fundamental to understanding and seeing a work of art. The effect on the viewer is subjective, and so interpretations, emotions and perspectives can vary greatly. However, Kemp emphasises the dual role of reception aesthetics:

It processes the (internal) reception specifications with all the consequences for the work's own form, for the work-viewer relationship, for the constitution of the viewer-subject. But it also has to take into account the conditions of access that have been or will be set for the work in the architecture, the functional context, the reception situation.⁸

Starting from the relationship between the observer and the object, a clarification takes place based on verifiable facts. This

6) For example, see: Hans Belting, *Das echte Bild: Bildfragen als Glaubensfragen* [The True Image: Questions of Images as Questions of Faith] (München: C. H. Beck, 2006).

7) Wolfgang Kemp, "Kunstwissenschaft und Rezeptionsästhetik" [Art Studies and Reception Aesthetics], in *Der Betrachter ist im Bild. Kunstwissenschaft und Rezeptionsästhetik*, ed. Wolfgang Kemp (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1992), 24.

8) "Sie erarbeitet die (inneren) Rezeptionsvorgaben mit allen Konsequenzen für die Eigengestalt des Werkes, für die Werk-Betrachter-Beziehung, für die Konstituierung des Betrachtersubjektes. Sie hat sich aber auch um die Zugangsbedingungen zu kümmern, die dem Werk in Architektur, Funktionszusammenhang, Rezeptionssituation gesetzt waren oder sind." Kemp, "Kunstwissenschaft und Rezeptionsästhetik," 24.

applies to the treatment of historical objects or works of art but can also be applied to everyday objects in a personal context.

The concept of art historical aesthetics of reception can, therefore, also be applied to the perception, analysis and interpretation of museum objects, even though an object is always just an object at the beginning. However, as soon as one gets involved and begins to participate as a viewer, asking questions and engaging in conversations about it, a comprehensive approach becomes possible, allowing for several different narrative strands. The message of the objects is essentially generated by the recipients. The objects studied have their own charisma, which is inimitable and, therefore, fundamental to human knowledge.⁹

In the museum, objects are used to develop narratives, to provoke a relationship between the visitor and the past. They take up a lot of space and are used in a way that is representative of a particular situation. In a museum setting, they create moods, generate experiences and become carriers of information. While works of art can function autonomously, cultural-historical objects have both a more factual knowledge as well as a sensory dimension. The sensory and scientific dimensions are experienced differently. While scientific knowledge is often conveyed through texts, the sensory dimension is primarily created through perception.

In the latter case, the scope for interpretation is usually greater for the viewer, who expects clear information from the accompanying text. If the viewer does not read the text and focuses on the visual image, personal associations and thoughts can be stimulated and perhaps more questions can be raised.

9) Thomas Thiemeyer, "Die Sprache der Dinge. Museumsobjekte zwischen Zeichen und Erscheinung" [The Language of Things: Museum Objects Between Sign and Appearance], *AlltagsKultur!*, October 2013, 3, accessed May 10, 2023, https://alltagskultur.info/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Alltagskultur-Archiv_red.pdf.

In the museum, things, such as works of art, are placed in very specific spatial relationships and used as references to social, historical, political, or scientific contexts. Objects are the reason for a museum's existence. The museum collects and preserves, exhibits and communicates the power of its objects "as a place of material encounter with the strange and temporally distant".¹⁰

Even though immersive museum spaces can do without material objects, they remain the silent witnesses or evidence of another time, culture or art. Their aura only becomes manifest through the staging and narration in the museum. The museum is the space where thinking and reflecting on cultural objects is part of everyday life. The negotiating space created there should use this expertise to discuss different world views.

Scientific narratives always have gaps, voids and uncertainties that are filled or explained in the interpretive space of disciplinary debate. Returning to the example of art history discussed earlier, the discipline of art history pursues the claim of scientific objectivity in relation to historical contexts and concepts. It proves, questions and records many things. For many years, for example, art history was told as a story of heroes or geniuses. It promoted the creation of myths and thus also underpinned certain notions of gender roles. This form of hegemonic historiography must be critically evaluated from today's perspective, especially since it favours certain perspectives, narratives, and interpretations, while others are neglected, omitted, or at least underrepresented. Hegemonic art historiography reflects the interests, values, and judgments of the dominant group, which inevitably seeks to maintain power relations and promotes a particular representation of the past. In art education, as in education in general, it is necessary to point out the significance

¹⁰) Museum as "Ort der materiellen Begegnung mit dem Fremden und zeitlich Fernen." Ibid., 105.

of constant critical questioning of texts, scientific treatments or historical narratives as well as of the supposedly simple objects thematised at the beginning. Art historical descriptions, analyses and interpretations change in the course of history. They are an expression of contemporary debates.

Thus, in her *The Story of Art without Men* (2022) Katy Hessel¹¹ exposes the long-cultivated art-historical canon presented in the earlier mentioned *The Story of Art* (1950), in which Gombrich does not include a single female artist, so she presents the one that does without men – understood as a supplement. She fills many gaps in the history of art that have not been closed for a long time, also because stories were and are told the same way over and over again. She has made it her mission to liberate art from the stigma of elitism and to counter the Western male narrative that has unjustly dominated art history for a very long time. The male hero narrative has been perpetuated not only because of the well cultivated cult of genius but because it is a subject of language and its use as well.

“The organist is a woman” writes Evke Rulffes in her book *Die Erfindung der Hausfrau – Geschichte einer Entwertung* (The Invention of the Housewife – History of a Devaluation) (2021), pointing to a 1568 woodcut by Jost Amman, titled *Der Organist* (The Organist).¹² A young woman in an elegant dress can be seen moving her fingers over the keys, playing the organ.

11) Katy Hessel, *The Story of Art Without Men. Große Künstlerinnen und ihre Werke* [The Story of Art Without Men. Great Women Artists and Their Works] (München: Piper, 2022).

12) The woodcut is one of the illustrations in the book *Eygentliche Beschreibung aller Stände auff Erden, hoher und nidriger, geistlicher und weltlicher, aller Künsten, Handwercken und Händeln Durch d. weitberümpften Hans Sachsen gantz fleissig beschrieben u. in teutsche Reim en gefasset* [True Description of All Estates on Earth, High and Low, Spiritual and Secular, of All Arts, Crafts, and Trades, Diligently Described by the Renowned Hans Sachsen and Rendered into German Verse] (Frankfurt am Main, 1568). For the woodcut see: Wikimedia Commons, accessed March 5, 2025, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:St%C3%A4nde_Amman_Der_Organist.png.

Rulfes elaborates on the problem of German as a patriarchal language (the word *organist* is a masculine noun in the German language), but also judges it in terms of the history of science: “The disappearance of women from history is also due to the fact that university historiography was exclusively male in its beginnings in the 19th century.”¹³ In her book, she explains how the stereotype of the housewife and good mother emerged in the 1800s and why it has remained so effective to this day. In short, language has the potential to falsify history, to create ideas that, in a certain sense, distort the content, because the reader is also in the text.¹⁴

These newer positions make it clear that art history cannot be told in isolation, but only embedded in current debates. This aspect has been discussed at least since 1983, when Belting questioned the independence of art history by recognising the new methods and perspectives of the then-young image sciences.¹⁵ Nevertheless, history is being retold only very slowly, if at all, because the hegemonic patterns mentioned above are deeply ingrained and seem very difficult to dissolve. Art history, however, can no longer be perpetuated in its own tradition, but must face up to contemporary debates. Art museums have an important role to play in this. They have the sovereignty of interpretation, which puts them in a powerful position to transmit or deconstruct facts, patterns, or even stereotypes.

13) “Das Verschwinden der Frauen aus der Geschichte liegt auch darin begründet, dass die universitäre Geschichtsschreibung in ihren Anfängen im 19. Jahrhundert ausschließlich von Männern betrieben wurde.” Evke Rulfes, *Die Erfindung der Hausfrau – Geschichte einer Entwertung* [The Invention of the Housewife – History of a Devaluation] (Hamburg: Harper Collins, 2021), 23.

14) The starting point for the *Rezeptionsästhetik* is literary studies, for example Susan Rubin Suleiman and Inge Crosman, eds., *The Reader in the Text. Essays on Audience and Interpretation* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980).

15) Jörg Scheller, *Hans Belting. Der gute Konservative* [Hans Belting. The Good Conservative], *Die Zeit*, January 14, 2023, accessed May 10, 2023, https://www.zeit.de/kultur/2023-01/hans-belting-kunsthistoriker-kunst-bild-nachruf?utm_referer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.at%2F.

While the boundaries between contemporary art and the everyday are fluid and thus seem more difficult to negotiate for the audience, the old art seems to be easier to understand. In other words – the musealized-autonomous work seems more accessible through its figurativeness, perhaps also more unambiguous and clearer, but in any case traditional in its aesthetic uniqueness, with which the object fixes itself in its narrative from a constant perspective. However, the world around is changing due to new findings and events, transforming the sciences. Art history has lost its unambiguity through numerous heterogeneous and critical readings, filled gaps and discussions of restitution. How should art history be written? For whom, and to what end, are cultural studies conducted? “Who speaks?”¹⁶ one might ask in the context of museum art education, which also critically questions the arc of interpretive sovereignty in this context.

How does this loss of unambiguity in science relate to a simultaneously diagnosed loss of ambiguity “in the world”? Perhaps this question, too, requires a brief historical review in order to better identify the major ruptures. Bringing “art” and “life” closer together was a frequently expressed goal of art movements around 1900. The increasing processes of individualisation and internationalisation not only make it easier to admit ambiguity, but also to differentiate concepts of culture. In 1991, Zygmunt Baumann ascribed to modernity as an epoch an increasing ambiguity permeating all areas of life.¹⁷ Uncertainty and ambiguity replaced clear rules and unambiguous answers,

16) See: Beatrice Jaschke, Charlotte Martinz-Turek and Nora Sternfeld, eds., *Wer spricht? Autorität und Autorschaft in Ausstellungen* [Who Speaks? Authority and Authorship in Exhibitions] (Wien: Verlag Turia + Kant, 2005).

17) Zygmunt Bauman, *Moderne und Ambivalenz. Das Ende der Eindeutigkeit* [Modernity and Ambivalence. The End of Clarity] (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2005, first English edition 1991).

leading to insecurity and fear, but also to greater flexibility and individual freedom. For Baumann, ambiguity describes the complexity of modern society, which must be recognised in its ambiguity rather than being reduced to simple answers or fixed identities. However, the resulting disorder causes “the intense discomfort we feel when we are unable to read the situation correctly and choose between alternative actions.”¹⁸

Since the 1990s, this unease has been joined by a desire for a “unification of the world”, accompanied by a significant loss of diversity, which can be explained by dominant global developments. As early as 1925, Stefan Zweig described the dark side of globalisation in his essay *Die Monotonisierung der Welt* (The Monotonisation of the World): “Everything is becoming more uniform in the external forms of life, everything is levelling out into a uniform cultural scheme. The individual customs of peoples are being eroded, costumes are becoming uniform, customs are becoming international. More and more countries seem to be pushed into each other, as it were, people act and live according to a scheme, more and more the cities resemble each other.”¹⁹ Thomas Bauer, quoting Zweig like many others,²⁰ notes the standardisation of the world by global

18) “(...) das heftige Unbehagen, das wir empfinden, wenn wir außerstande sind, die Situation richtig zu lesen und zwischen alternativen Handlungen zu wählen”, Baumann, *Moderne und Ambivalenz*, 11.

19) “Alles wird gleichförmiger in den äußeren Lebensformen, alles nivelliert sich auf ein einheitliches kulturelles Schema. Die individuellen Gebräuche der Völker schleifen sich ab, die Trachten werden uniform, die Sitten international. Immer mehr scheinen die Länder gleichsam ineinandergeschoben, die Menschen nach einem Schema tätig und lebendig, immer mehr die Städte einander ähnlich.” Cited in Thomas Bauer, *Die Vereindeutigung der Welt. Über den Verlust an Mehrdeutigkeit und Vielfalt*. [Was bedeutet das alles?] [The Simplification of the World: On the Loss of Ambiguity and Diversity. /What Does It All Mean?/] (Stuttgart: Reclam Verlag, 2018), 11.

20) Claudia Lenz, *Ambiguitätstoleranz – ein zentrales Konzept für Demokratiebildung in diversen Gesellschaften* [Ambiguity Tolerance – A Central Concept for Democracy Education in Diverse Societies], ufuq.de, accessed May 10, 2023, <https://www.ufuq.de/aktuelles/ambiguitaetstoleranz-ein-zentrales-konzept-fuer-demokratiebildung-in-diversen-gesellschaften/#>.

capitalism, describes the standardisation of agriculture and the loss of biodiversity. At the same time, his thesis is that “our time is a time of low tolerance for ambiguity. In many areas of life (...) offers that promise salvation from the inevitable ambiguity of the world therefore appear attractive.”²¹ He explores the reduction of diversity, complexity and plurality in many areas of life, between the poles of indifference and fundamentalism, with many understandable connections to everyday phenomena from food culture to science.

Recent debates in cultural studies question and relativise the ideas and principles of modernity, as Baumann still describes them, by turning away from the idea of a duality of nature and culture,²² by questioning the notions of objective truth and linear progress.²³ Through Bauer’s observations, it can be seen that the turning away from the idea of “modernity” is also successively accompanied by a process of “unification of the world”. The cause of this change is digitalisation, which has given globalisation a completely new meaning and is driving global standardisation in many areas. At the same time, it is becoming increasingly difficult for individuals to make sense of the information they find. Simple messages have an easier time getting through to the masses. A completely transformed interplay of image and text in digital messages requires different forms of image literacy, as well as a new understanding of critical judgement to avoid believing everything that is spread through social channels.

21) “Meine These lautet nun, dass unsere Zeit eine Zeit geringer Ambiguitätstoleranz ist. In vielen Lebensbereichen (...) erscheinen deshalb Angebote als attraktiv, die Erlösung von der unhintergehbaren Ambiguität der Welt versprechen.” Bauer, *Die Vereindeutigung der Welt*, 30.

22) For example Bruno Latour, *Wir sind nie modern gewesen. Versuch einer symmetrischen Anthropologie* [We Have Never Been Modern. Attempt at a Symmetrical Anthropology], translated by Gustav Roßler (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2008).

23) For example Donna J. Haraways, *Unruhig bleiben. Die Verwandtschaft der Arten im Chthuluzän* [Staying Restless: The Kinship of Species in the Chthulucene], translated by Karin Harrasser (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2018).

This brings us back to the everyday lives of trainees, who need to be made aware of this point and encouraged to take their time and think critically. Shortening content often involves simplification, but it also carries the risk of ambiguity. This is why awareness of ambiguity has taken on a whole new meaning since the 1990s. The key is preserving and communicating added value.

However, people tend to be what psychologists call ambiguity intolerant; they tend to avoid ambiguous, unclear, vague, contradictory situations. Applied to an increasingly diverse society, however, tolerance of ambiguity becomes a central concept for building democracy. In this context, the unambiguity of the world often goes hand in hand with the desire for a “simple”, “clear”, *de facto* mostly authoritarian political structure. Recent forms of communication, transformed by social media, promote short, simple messages that hide complexity, as it cannot be grasped at the speed of scrolling. Simple language and simple answers have many adherents in a world that is becoming increasingly complex in its global interconnectedness. “Simple answers calm us down instead of relieving our worries. They cloud our thinking,” write Alex Karp, Jan Hiesserich and Paula Cipierre in their book *Von Artificial zu Augmented Intelligence* (From Artificial to Augmented Intelligence, 2003).²⁴ There, they defend the concept of ambiguity, not for political reasons, but from the point of view of a large software company, arguing that “unambiguity takes away the breeding ground for any creative solution. (...) We want to show that the greatest opportunity

24) “Die zunehmende Vereindeutigung der Welt unterdrückt ansonsten den Diskurs und entzieht jeder konstruktiven, jeder kreativen Lösung den Nährboden, derer sie aber bedarf. (...) Wir wollen zeigen, dass die größte Chance unserer Zeit nicht in der Vereindeutigung der Welt, sondern gerade in der Uneindeutigkeit, in der Unschärfe, in der Ambiguität liegt.” Alexander Karp, Jan Hiesserich and Paula Cipierre, *Von Artificial zu Augmented Intelligence. Was wir von der Kunst lernen können, um mit Software die Zukunft zu gestalten* [From Artificial to Augmented Intelligence. What We Can Learn from Art to Shape the Future with Software] (Frankfurt / New York: Transcript Verlag, 2023), 8.

of our time does not lie in unifying the world, but precisely in vagueness, in fuzziness, in ambiguity.”²⁵ Human creativity could be a great asset in the future, distinguishing us from artificial intelligence. Encouraging it is fundamental – especially in the processes involving design or product development.

CONCLUSION

As shown at the beginning, art has a high potential for ambiguity through its visual appearance. By applying the methods of art history and cultural studies, tolerance for ambiguity can be increased. The practice of describing, interpreting and analysing also provokes differentiated approaches to viewing and processing cultural objects. Sensitivity to “the other” increases. In a discussion about the meaning of a simple object, differing opinions are more easily tolerated than in political or very private issues. Viewing art or objects, but also art itself, can help develop a kind of tolerance for ambiguity – the ability to tolerate contradictions and to develop a sophisticated emotional culture. The importance of these skills for a creative, tolerant and democratic society is often mentioned, but their loss can only be prevented by actively promoting such processes.

The museum’s educational mission provides the framework for art education to work multi-perspectively and critically with heterogeneous audiences, while remaining committed to ambiguity. In the training of art teachers, the processes described above not only promote aesthetic self-education and a sense of community through the methods mentioned, but also foster a critical approach to other social issues by promoting the acceptance of the other in its difference. Reflection and

25) Ibid.

thinking in broader contexts can be encouraged through the humanistic methods described. Creativity in looking at the objects in terms of their design, history or materiality encourages group discussion as well as recognition of the links between technology, ecology, economy and society. The effectiveness of a language that reflects its own basic attitude – and perhaps even feels committed to ambiguity in the future – can be seen in this.

