



ART OF THE 20TH CENTURY IN SLOVENIA

Teacher's Instructions

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TOPIC: Influence of Socio-Political Circumstances on Art Styles of the First Half of the 20th Century (Examples of Expressionism and Constructivism)

1. Learning Objectives from the Curriculum

The student will:

- Know and understand the historical development of visual arts
- Evaluate the role of visual arts in societal events
- Know key figures in world and Slovenian visual arts and assess their place in the development
- Develop a positive attitude towards cultural and artistic heritage
- Independently choose creative strategies
- Independently select drawing/painting materials and tools

After the introductory lesson and creative activities, the student will:

- Be able to analyze the development of modernism in Slovenia and the gradual emergence of abstraction
- Understand Slovenian expressionism as a response to the experience of World War I and post-war reality; identify the formal and thematic characteristics of expressionism and new realism
- Understand the use of strong colors and deformation of shapes as a specific expression of mood and spiritual experience (including inspiration from primitive and exotic art)
- Develop awareness of the internationally oriented Slovenian avant-garde despite its brief duration
- Understand constructivism as a movement emphasizing the connection between art and life
- Understand the idea behind constructivism as art being a construction of forces and tensions in space (the group advocated for the practical application of art in daily life through the use of new materials)
- Develop a sense for color balance and sensitivity in choosing lines, techniques, and colors according to the intended mood

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 SUMMARY

Overview of Circumstances

- The 20th century as a period of strengthening Slovenian national identity
- Following the development of modernism in Western Europe
- Preservation of the figurative basis of visual artwork
- Emergence of abstraction after World War II (became established only in the 1960s)
- Fragmented and dispersed image of visual art as a response to a rapidly changing world

Art Before and After World War I:

- Ephemeral nature
- Limited to a narrow circle of people
- International orientation
- Activity around the Tank group and multimedia integration of art forms into an artistic event
- Elements of constructivism and surrealism, early forms of abstract art
- Expressionism: art as a reaction to social events; strong colors and shape deformation as a personal expression of mood and spiritual experience; influence from primitive and exotic art
- Key features of modern and contemporary art: experimentation, autonomy of art, autonomy of artistic means
- Blurring boundaries between genres, use of new materials and techniques (collage, photomontage, land art)
- New concepts and functions of art (autonomy of art, art as provocation, art as propaganda)
- The establishment of new media and forms of art (graphic design and visual communication, industrial design, video, and film)

2.2 FOUNDATIONS OF 20TH-CENTURY ART

Deformation, the free use of color, new ways of depicting space, abstraction born out of lyrical gestures or geometrism, rejection of the "closed form," blending of forms, diversity of materials, and the dissolution of categories: all these come to mind when thinking about 20th-century art. Art as play, as protest, criticism, inspiration for reflection, an element that provokes: these functions were often mentioned. In the 20th century, art faced it all—rejection, ridicule, prohibition, and destruction, as well as celebration, glorification, use, and commercialization. There were countless transformations and shifts: they were rapid, dynamic, and contradictory. Art in the 20th century primarily conveys a personal relationship to a specific theme or issue in the background. It expresses this through artistic styles, techniques, materials, content, and principles articulated in manifestos and declarations.

Art draws inspiration from nature, so it can be chaotic, random, and unstructured, but on the other hand, it can also be based on systems built on geometric order. Art seeks to be both figurative and abstract simultaneously. Rigid systems and criteria give way to new rules and autonomy. These findings, at least partially, also apply to perception: art is neither unchangeable nor definitive, and it does not have a single face that everyone must accept—it is a reflection of its dynamic, complex, and contradictory century. In the following, we will present two movements that exemplify the characteristic trends and transformations that, despite the sharp breaks during both world wars, reveal the development of art as a dynamic process.

2.2.1 EXPRESSIONISM IN SLOVENIA

Expressionism was the first artistic phenomenon that fully expressed the restless spirit characteristic of the 20th century. The concept of expressionism cannot be defined unambiguously, as it encompasses complex efforts and various forms of visual expression.

What do we mean by "expressionism"?

Expressionist art reflects an image of reality as perceived by the artist, using deformation, strong color contrasts, and emphasized brushstrokes, meaning that the artist's gesture is crucial. In the works of artists, we can see how spontaneous, unrestrained brushstrokes freely highlight



certain shapes and colors—thus expressing a personal, emotionally defined view of the subject. Artists wanted to determine and take responsibility for their artistic activity themselves. They sought to master and explain nature through art, which serves as "a bridge to the world of spirit" (Milovanović, 2018).

Rejecting rational methodology in favor of dramatic visual simplification; abandoning artistic conventions to allow emotions to flourish freely. Penetrating the outer shell of reality to reveal the inner states of being—resulting in the distortion and dissolution of forms to uncover their psychological or spiritual "interiority." Expressionism is more a state of mind than a style. It found fertile ground throughout Europe, where artists sought to free themselves from the old order (be it academic tradition or bourgeois society).

Expressionist imagery embodies tension and hints at premonitions of the time leading to the catastrophe of World War I, while also hinting at a "new world" emerging from it, promising freedom but also tainted by social injustice and inequality.

After World War I, expressionist ideas continued to influence visual arts, as well as literature, music, and film (Drury, 2018).

France Kralj (1895-1960) led the postwar anti-impressionist revolution in Slovenian art. He was also the greatest talent of expressionism in Slovenia. His work evolved through three developmental stages: the first lasting until about 1923, the second until 1928. In the first stage, Kralj was a programmatic expressionist, attempting to find new paths in multiple directions. His talent was highly exploratory, so formal issues predominated over thematic or content-related ones throughout his work. Despite his difficult, meditative nature, Kralj's work consistently reflected genuine Slovenian dreaminess, poetic idyll, humor, and love for the land. Despite appearances to the contrary, France Kralj deeply felt and expressed the suffering of his people in the postwar generation.



Image 1



Image 2

2.2.2 SLOVENIAN HISTORICAL AVANT-GARDE

The rise of avant-garde activities in the Slovenian space after World War I, which lasted throughout the 1920s and echoed in some aspects into the following decade, may seem surprising, especially considering how late Slovenian modern art with its institutions developed and how provincial and conservative the Slovenian cultural environment was at the time.



The scandalous nature of the avant-garde was not just in introducing new forms and materials into the art space but also in the fact that these new forms implied a completely different concept of art and its position in society, meaning that the avant-gardists advocated for a "new art" as much as they did for a "new world" and a "new human being" within it. Since the avant-garde perceived art as an interconnected element of a dynamic social whole, not as a separate, autonomous practice, it is understandable that it also challenged traditional genre divisions of art and aspired to a holistic work. Avant-gardists were marginalized in their time and sometimes even directly obstructed; later, the avant-garde was pushed out of public consciousness and especially out of national cultural canons.

With the rediscovery of the historical avant-garde, interest in it and its achievements in Slovenia grew. In this sense, we can see the avant-garde production of the 1920s with its ideas and practices as the beginning of a tradition that had at least two further important peaks in the late 1960s and early 1970s ("neo-avant-garde" and "retro-avant-garde").

Our main representative of visual arts was the painter and graphic artist Avgust Černigoj (1898-1985). He was born in Trieste, where he attended an arts and crafts school, and after World War I, he taught drawing in Postojna. From 1922, he studied at the Munich Becker-Gundahel Academy and the Hillerbrand School of Arts and Crafts.

He briefly studied at the Bauhaus in Weimar, where he became acquainted with the basics of constructivism. Bauhaus was synonymous with the avant-garde and socialism, a school that sought new ways of creating total works of art, from small objects to architecture or stage design. His exhibition at the Ljubljana Technical School in 1924 brought him into conflict with the political authorities of the time, which led to his departure from Ljubljana in 1925. He participated in the constructivist movement in Trieste and associated with equally versatile and avant-garde-minded artists (Tank!, 1999).

With advanced ideas and a strong creative drive, he influenced the development of Slovenian and Trieste art, and his oeuvre is considered one of the most important in the Slovenian avant-garde.



Image 3

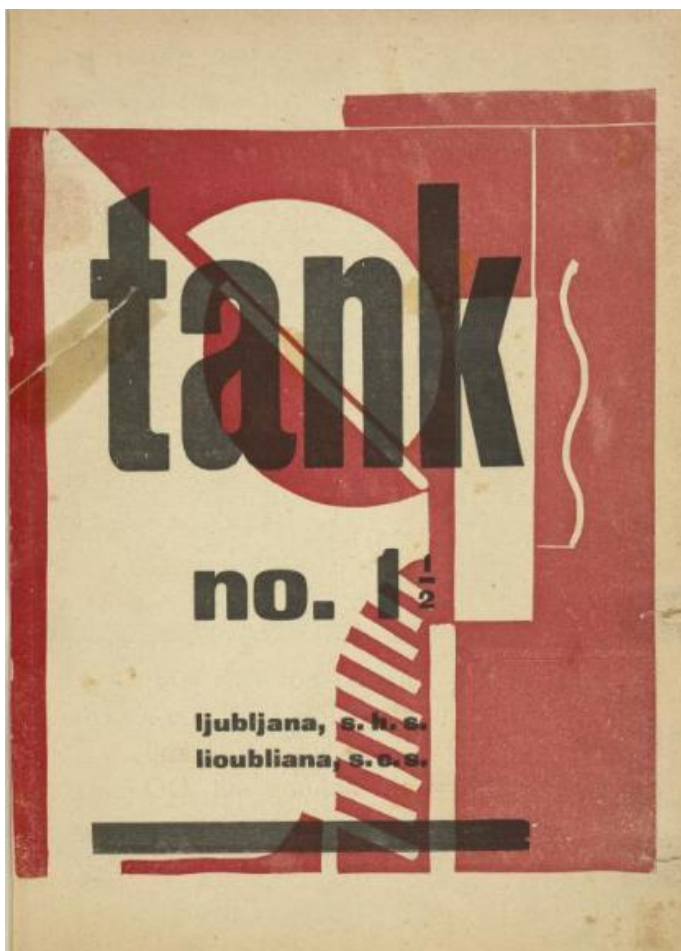


Image 4

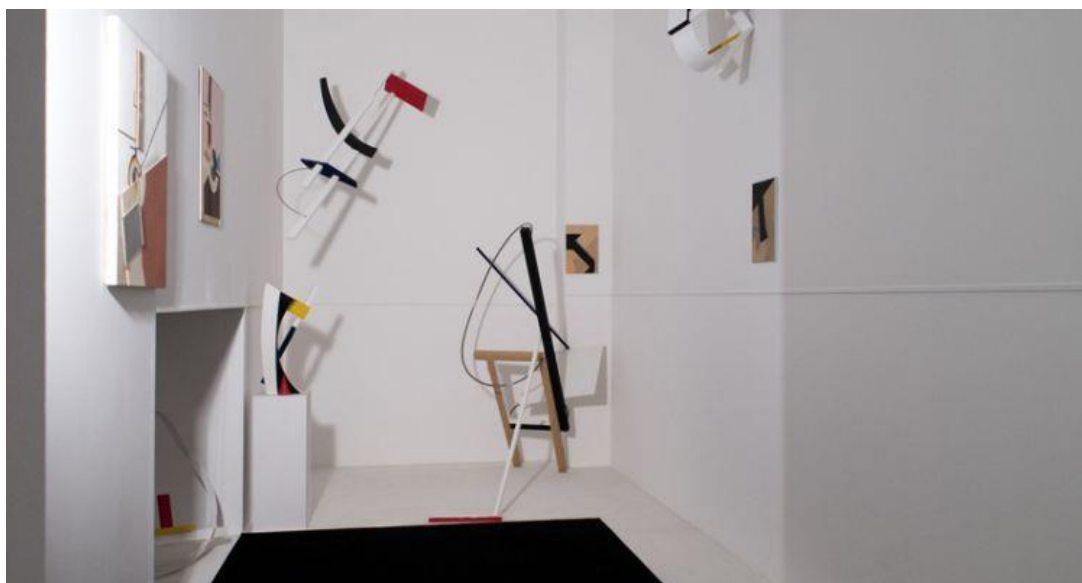


Image 5



3. Interdisciplinary Connections

Art history stands out as an interdisciplinary science. The subject at its core integrates important segments from a whole range of other disciplines. By connecting art history with other subjects, we can deepen our understanding of significant aspects of artistic work. This approach also illuminates the goals of other subject areas from a different perspective, thereby achieving numerous curricular connections.

When discussing significant political and social conditions in Slovenia before and after World War I, we can draw strong connections with subjects such as history and geography regarding more in-depth explanations of the time and space in which artists operated. Lastly, we can also include philosophy to better explain the various mentalities of the time and their origins, as well as psychology for a better understanding of the psychological reactions of artists (and society), which manifest through strokes, lines, and the selection of motifs.

4. Didactic Recommendations

Teaching art history is conducted in various learning forms and with the use of different methods. It is also important that students, while theoretically exploring art history, engage in artistic creation themselves, as this places their knowledge and education in a new light.

The fundamental goal of teaching remains to provide a rounded understanding of key content, conveyed through appropriate visual materials. Students should actively participate in various ways, including their own creations.

Through visual stimuli (artworks) and historical explanations of the socio-political conditions in the early 20th century, students can more easily feel the emotions of the ordinary person of that time. Later, during the art task, they can further identify with and realize how to express a particular feeling through lines and colors in a specific style.

5. Materials and Methods of Artistic Creation

Artistic creation is a specific area that offers students the opportunity to explore and experience the creative process from concept to realization and reflection.

The essential purpose of artistic creation is to develop the student's creativity, perception, and understanding of visual art, engage with contemporary artistic practices, and raise awareness of the applicability of art in personal, social, and professional life.

Key tasks to achieve these goals include:

- Practical artistic expression and creation
- The use of diverse creative thinking strategies, activities, processes, and materials
- Connecting problem-based tasks to the issues of visual art and contemporary visual culture

5.1 MATERIALS

- A3 drawing paper, collage paper, magazines
- Scissors, glue
- Tempera paints, brushes, palettes
- Cards with written artistic movements, emotions/concepts

5.2 PROCEDURE

- Divide students in the classroom into groups of six.
- Each group receives a common card with a written artistic direction (all individuals in the group will approach their task in the same artistic manner).
- Each individual in the group receives their own card with a feeling/concept.
- Each will visually represent the feeling/concept they received, but within the framework of the artistic direction they have as a group (e.g., students in a group focused on Constructivism will all present the concepts they received on their cards in a Constructivist manner).
- Suggested techniques for expressing different directions:
 - CONSTRUCTIVISM: collage, drawing with markers, painting in monochromatic shades
 - EXPRESSIONISM: drawing with markers, painting with tempera paints



ART MOVEMENTS

EXPRESSIONISM	CONSTRUCTIVISM
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EMOTIONS/FEELINGS/CONCEPTS

JOY	DESPAIR	ENVY
LOVE	SADNESS	GENEROSITY
PEACE	HORROR	INTERPERSONAL HELP
FRIENDSHIP	HATRED	COMPETITIVENESS
TOLERANCE	ANXIETY	FEAR

6. Key Guidelines for the Teacher

- The teacher must emphasize the value of creative thinking and artistic expression to the students and the importance of this practice for their future paths.
- The teacher must evaluate the significance of the idea and effort in contrast to the value of the aesthetic quality of the final product.
- Within the art task and conceptual problem, the student should find their own way of expression within their abilities, which will bring them joy.

7. Literature

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- G. Milovanovič, J. Dahlmanns, R. Simonišek, et al., *Faces of Expressionism/Imprints of the Spirit*, exhibition catalog, Galerija Božidar Jakac, 2018
- M. Prevodnik, Nina Ostan, et al., *Visual Art, Curriculum*, Ljubljana 2008
- Shug, *Our Era*, DZS, Ljubljana 1970
- Slovenian Biography: [Slovenian Biography](#)
- Slovenian Biography: [Slovenian Biography](#)

8. Visual Resources

- IMAGE 1:
- IMAGE 2:
- IMAGE 3:
- IMAGE 4:
- IMAGE 5: Second reconstruction of the Trieste Constructivist environment (1927) [Museum of Modern Art Ljubljana](#) (March 29, 2024)



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