

# THE ATTITUDE OF ART TEACHERS TOWARDS CONTEMPORARY FINE ARTS

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**Abstract** Students learn about the world in which they live through the subject of contemporary fine arts. They can form a range of views on the highlighted themes and develop their own critical thought by appropriately interpreting contemporary artwork. Because contemporary art is multifaceted, it also offers opportunities for encouraging artistic and creative work in the classroom. The role of the art teacher is crucial in this respect, because with the right approach, contemporary art can be successfully implemented in the curriculum. Such an approach, however, requires a committed and creative teacher who pursues continuous professional development. This paper deals with the attitude of art teachers towards contemporary art practices and how they follow contemporary art practices. This was done by looking for differences according to the respondents' age and work experience. The study was conducted on a non-randomized sample of primary school art teachers (n = 84) from all over Slovenia. The age and work experience of the teachers interviewed in the study did not emerge as an important factor in shaping their attitudes towards contemporary fine arts. In any case, the study reveals new issues related to the promotion of positive attitudes towards contemporary fine arts among art teachers.

**Keywords:**

contemporary fine arts, professional development, art teacher, primary school, individual approach

## 1 Introduction

Fine arts in general help us learn about life and give us opportunities to reflect on it. At the same time, the subject of contemporary fine arts, i.e., art that is happening now, as Kemperl (2013) says, distinctly thematises current social and political issues in everyday life. Through contemporary fine arts, we can learn about the world in which we live, explore our cultural environment, learn about and seek new possibilities of expression, and express our own views and beliefs (Kemperl, 2013; Herzog et al., 2017; Kozjek Varl & Duh, 2017). Today, art, through the content it addresses, is more integrated into our lives than ever before (Gompertz, 2019). Moreover, the sites for its presentation are often public. Artists seek their audience in city squares or shopping malls and address not only the professional public but also random passers-by with their conceptual content. People who encounter contemporary fine art accidentally or for the first time and are unfamiliar with such concepts, often have a negative or even dismissive attitude towards it (Bračun Sova, 2013). Contemporary art seems alien and difficult to understand (Venäläinen, 2012). The same can be said for young people. Students are insufficiently familiar with contemporary fine arts (Kozjek Varl & Herzog, 2018), as they hear little or nothing about the topic in primary school (Cakiroglu & Ince, 2015; Kozjek Varl & Duh, 2017; 2020). It is therefore important to bring young people closer to contemporary fine arts and teach them to understand the subject from an early age.

To develop a positive attitude towards contemporary fine arts and acquire lifelong competences (Bela knjiga o vzgoji in izobraževanju v Republiki Sloveniji, 2011), it is essential to include topics concerning contemporary fine arts in art class (Cole, 1996; Venäläinen, 2012). The importance of contemporary art practices and the need to connect the content of the classroom with current developments in the fine arts (Cole, 1996) are already highlighted in the postmodern curriculum through several concepts and ideas (Efland, 1992; Hardy, 2006). The school education system can interweave content from different subject areas with the content of contemporary fine arts through the standard curriculum, but this mostly depends on the autonomy of the teacher. Research shows (Herzog & Duh, 2013; Ching, 2015) that teachers seldom or never integrate contemporary art practices into their art lessons because of uncertainty or lack of knowledge (Vahter, 2016).

The curriculum for art education (Učni načrt, 2011) still emphasises traditional ways of artistic expression among its operational objectives and content, which means knowledge and practical work based on formal art language (Zupančič, 2006). However, one can already recognize the value of contemporary fine arts in the introductory note of the curriculum (Učni načrt, 2011, p. 4): “The fundamental task of art education is the development of the student’s artistic ability (competence), which is based on an understanding of the visual (natural, personal, social and cultural) space and is expressed in the active transformation of this space into an artistic space.” This shows the importance of contemporary fine arts, whose themes deal with everyday life and current space. Therefore, when preparing students for artistic and creative work, it is necessary to acquaint them with the artists that are creating today. The foundation of contemporary artwork is its conceptual/content-based design, which encourages students to relate it to their own experience (Duh & Kozjek Varl, 2017; Kozjek Varl & Herzog, 2018), to think, and to formulate their own ideas. However, since contemporary fine arts are multifaceted, they offer not only richness of content, but also many opportunities to stimulate artistic and creative work and to discover new ways of artistic and creative expression (Duh, 2004; Herzog, 2017; Vann, 2017). Since we aim to pursue the goals of the UN<sup>1</sup>, this should not be neglected when learning about contemporary artistic practices. Students can communicate their ideas verbally or through their own artistic expression (Kozjek Varl & Duh, 2020), where an interactive approach (Tomljenović, 2015) is indispensable.

To successfully integrate the above, Zupančič (2006) proposes a method with an artistic and pedagogical concept, the essence of which is “to integrate artistic work with the interests of the students” (p. 29). This means that we bring students closer to topics that are close to them (Vrlič, 2002), as young people might otherwise find contemporary art irrelevant. If students do not see connections between the work of contemporary artists and the things that interest them (Cole, 1996; Zupančič, 2006), they will not relate to the work (Kozjek Varl & Duh, 2020). The right choice of artwork, however, might generate more student interest. As a result, the students could be more intrinsically motivated to create art on their own (Kozjek Varl & Duh, 2020), although they may be additionally limited in terms of tapping into their creative potential (Zupančič, 2006), since they rarely or never encounter new,

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<sup>1</sup> UN = Učni načrt/The Curriculum of Art Education

contemporary modes of artistic expression when a different artistic expression emerges (Kozjek Varl & Herzog, 2018). For these reasons, it is important for the teacher to have a good knowledge of contemporary artwork and varied approaches (Ching, 2017), which means regularly monitoring developments in contemporary art practices. If the teacher is aware of the diversity and multifaceted nature of contemporary art, they will be able to select appropriate works of art and integrate them into the teaching process accordingly.

However, as Zupančič (2006) states, when selecting works of art, it is necessary to consider (at least) certain criteria: a) the importance of the artist and their work, b) the typicality of the artist and their work, c) the illustrative nature of the work, d) the contextual appropriateness of the work, and e) the practical-performance appropriateness of the work.

With the appropriate interpretation of selected contemporary artwork, students can therefore form varied views on the highlighted themes and develop their own critical thought, while at the same time creating art. This can be influenced by appropriate approaches and suitably designed art assignments. The role of the art teacher is crucial in this regard (Ching, 2017), since with the right approach, contemporary fine arts can be successfully implemented in the curriculum. Part of the appropriate approach that helps to create a positive attitude towards contemporary fine arts is the transferral of activities from the teacher to the student (Tomljenović, 2015). This interaction is based on conversation (Vahter, 2016) or equivalent dialogue (Vrlič, 2002), with the teacher guiding the student's thought process and research. This approach requires an engaged and creative teacher who keeps abreast of current developments and engages in regular professional development in their professional field.

Previous research (Zupančič, 2006; Vahter, 2016; Kozjek Varl & Duh, 2017; 2020; Vann, 2017; Zupančič & Velikonja 2017) has shown a positive impact in terms of students' attitudes towards contemporary fine arts and the content itself, but in Slovenia, we face a lack of integration of contemporary fine arts in the classroom (Herzog & Duh, 2013). Since an engaged teacher can be successful in implementing contemporary art practices in art lessons and can thus stimulate interest in contemporary fine arts among students, the authors were interested in the attitudes of art teachers towards contemporary art practices. They sought to explore whether

and in what ways art teachers follow contemporary art practices, looking for differences in terms of the teachers' age and work experience. By analysing the responses of art teachers in Slovenian primary schools, the authors obtained information on their opinion, beliefs, knowledge, and competences in terms of their awareness of contemporary art practices and perceived attitudes towards the topics covered. The obtained data can be used for the design of professional training in the integration of contemporary art practices and further research in this field.

In the following, the authors present the results of the questionnaire survey, which provide insight into the current state of art teachers' attitudes towards contemporary art practices.

## **2 Methodology**

The study is based on a descriptive and causal-non-experimental method of empirical pedagogical research. The respondents' answers were analysed at the descriptive level and with the help of inferential statistics. The differences between groups were determined using non-parametric tests. The responses to open-ended questions were analysed using a range of categories.

### **2.1 The Purpose and Objectives of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to examine the attitudes of primary school art teachers towards contemporary art practices and to establish whether they follow current developments in this field. Another purpose of the study is to raise awareness on the importance and pedagogical value of contemporary art practices for their inclusion in the primary school curriculum in the subject of art.

### **2.2 Research Hypotheses**

The study was based on the following general research hypothesis:

*H<sub>SP1</sub>: We anticipate that most teachers will show a positive attitude towards contemporary fine arts.*

In terms of identifying differences in both the age of the respondents and their work experience, the following specific research hypotheses were used:

Based on age:

*H<sub>S1</sub>: Teachers are equally committed to following contemporary fine arts regardless of age.*

*H<sub>S2</sub>: There will be differences in the way teachers follow contemporary fine arts; we predict that younger teachers will be more likely to use literature, articles and current periodicals.*

Based on work experience:

*H<sub>DI1</sub>: We anticipate that more experienced teachers will show a greater engagement with contemporary fine arts.*

*H<sub>DI2</sub>: Teachers follow contemporary fine arts in similar ways regardless of work experience.*

## **2.3 Research Methods and Data Processing**

### **2.3.1 Instruments**

The data were collected using an online survey questionnaire for teachers of art in primary schools in Slovenia. The survey was conducted via the 1KA online environment, individually, voluntarily, and anonymously. The questionnaire was conducted between June 30, 2020 and July 30, 2020. The results are presented in tabular form; frequency distributions (f, f%), non-parametric test ( $\chi^2$ -test) and the Kruskal-Wallis test were used to test for differences according to age and years of experience.

### **2.3.2 Research Sample**

The study was conducted on a non-random sample of teachers from across Slovenia. The questionnaire was completed by 122 teachers, and only fully completed answers were included in the analysis (n = 84). *Table 1* presents the frequency distribution of the research sample in terms of gender, age, and work experience.

**Table 1: Number (f) and structural percentages (f%) of teachers surveyed in terms of gender, age, and work experience**

| <b>Gender</b>          | <b>f</b>  | <b>f%</b>    |
|------------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Men                    | 14        | 16.7         |
| Women                  | 70        | 83.3         |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>84</b> | <b>100.0</b> |
| <b>Age</b>             | <b>f</b>  | <b>f%</b>    |
| Up to 30 years         | 0         | 0            |
| Between 31 and 40      | 18        | 21.4         |
| Between 41 and 50      | 27        | 32.1         |
| 51 and over            | 39        | 46.4         |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>84</b> | <b>100.0</b> |
| <b>Work experience</b> | <b>f</b>  | <b>f%</b>    |
| 1 – 5 years            | 10        | 11.9         |
| 6 – 10 years           | 7         | 8.3          |
| 11 – 15 years          | 11        | 13.1         |
| 16 – 20 years          | 8         | 9.5          |
| 21 – 30 years          | 19        | 22.6         |
| 30 years and over      | 29        | 34.5         |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>84</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

*Table 1* shows that the majority of the participating art teachers were female (83.3%), while only 16.7% were male. When analysing age, the authors found that no participating teacher was under 30 years of age, and that almost half the teachers were 51 or older (46.4%). At the same time, the distribution of teachers in terms of work experience was fairly even. Most teachers had been teaching for 30 years or more (34.5%), followed by teachers who had been teaching between 21 and 30 years (22.6%), followed by teachers who had been teaching between 11 and 15 years (13.1%), then those that had been teaching between 1 and 5 years (11.9%), 9.5% of teachers had been teaching between 16 and 20 years, and 8.3% of teachers between 6 and 10 years.

Apart from gender, which was not statistically treated in the survey, the survey sample can be said to be evenly distributed, balanced in both other variables (age and work experience). Given the problem of the employability of art teachers in the Slovenian education system, the authors were interested in the variables of age and work experience separately, since a teacher's higher age does not mean more work experience.

### 3 Results and Discussion

The results will be presented in three parts. In the first part, the authors will present the results related to the attitude towards contemporary fine arts from the point of view of the respondents' age, and in the second part, from the point of view of the respondents' work experience. In the third part, the authors will present an analysis of the open-ended questions, which were not statistically compared in terms of differences, but analysed by means of a ranked series of categories.

The term “attitude towards contemporary fine arts” includes questions which, in addition to the respondents' attitudes towards contemporary fine arts, also cover the ways in which they follow what is happening in the field of contemporary art practices and their assessment of, or attitude towards, contemporary art practices. The authors estimate that the age and work experience of the respondents could be an important factor in forming a position on or an assessment of the respondents' attitudes towards contemporary fine arts.

#### 3.1 Analysis of Results in Terms of the Respondents' Age

The authors began by asking the respondents whether they followed contemporary fine arts. The results are presented in *Table 2*, in terms of frequency, rank and differences between the age groups of the respondents.

**Table 2: Results of the Kruskal-Wallis test (K-W test) for differences in teachers' responses on following contemporary fine arts**

|                                       | Age               | n  | R̄    | K-W test |      |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|----|-------|----------|------|
|                                       |                   |    |       | $\chi^2$ | P    |
| Do you follow contemporary fine arts? | Up to 30 years    | 0  | 0     | 2.620    | .270 |
|                                       | Between 31 and 40 | 17 | 43.88 |          |      |
|                                       | Between 41 and 50 | 25 | 41.74 |          |      |
|                                       | 51 and over       | 36 | 35.88 |          |      |
|                                       | Total             | 78 |       |          |      |

*\*Only fully completed responses were included in the statistical processing*

The age of the respondents did not emerge as a key factor in following contemporary fine arts. However, there are slightly more positive answers to this question in the group of teachers aged 31-40 compared to the oldest group (51+). Based on the given answers one may estimate that interest in contemporary art is evenly



distributed across the age groups. These results confirm hypothesis H<sub>S1</sub>: *Teachers are equally engaged in following contemporary fine arts regardless of age.*

The authors were also interested in the ways in which interest in contemporary fine arts is reflected. They offered the respondents answers such as: going to exhibitions, following the media, reading literature and periodicals. The results are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Results of the Kruskal-Wallis test (K-W test) for differences in responses on indicating the methods of following contemporary fine arts**

|  | Age               | n  | $\bar{R}$ | K-W test |      |
|--|-------------------|----|-----------|----------|------|
|  |                   |    |           | $\chi^2$ | P    |
| By visiting exhibitions                                    | Up to 30 years    | 0  | 0         | 1.919    | .383 |
|  | Between 31 and 40 | 9  | 26.17     |          |      |
|  | Between 41 and 50 | 15 | 29.00     |          |      |
|  | 51 and over       | 27 | 24.28     |          |      |
|  | Total             | 51 |           |          |      |
| By following it in the media                               | Up to 30 years    | 0  | 0         | 0.374    | .830 |
|  | Between 31 and 40 | 9  | 26.17     |          |      |
|  | Between 41 and 50 | 15 | 27.30     |          |      |
|  | 51 and over       | 27 | 25.22     |          |      |
|  | Total             | 51 |           |          |      |
| By reading literature, articles, current periodicals, etc. | Up to 30 years    | 0  | 0         | 4.506    | .105 |
|  | Between 31 and 40 | 9  | 32.56     |          |      |
|  | Between 41 and 50 | 15 | 28.20     |          |      |
|  | 51 and over       | 27 | 22.59     |          |      |
|  | Total             | 51 |           |          |      |

*\*Only fully completed responses were included in the statistical processing*

The answers regarding the method of following contemporary fine arts show minor differences between groups that are not statistically significant. Teachers between the ages of 41 and 50 attended the most exhibitions. The same group of teachers most often followed contemporary fine arts through the media, while teachers aged between 31 and 40 most often followed contemporary fine arts by reading literature, articles, and current periodicals. The biggest difference appeared between the groups 31-40 ( $\bar{R} = 32.56$ ) and 51+ ( $\bar{R} = 22.59$ ), namely in following contemporary art by reading literature, articles, and current periodicals. Otherwise, the answers were fairly evenly distributed across all age groups. With the obtained data we must refute research hypothesis H<sub>S2</sub>: *There will be differences in teachers' way of following contemporary fine arts, as we predict that younger teachers are more likely to use literature, articles and current periodicals.*

Contemporary fine arts are not limited to the local environment but are much more intensively and widely present in the international space, where the conditions for manifesting contemporary art practices are also quite different than in the local environment. Therefore, the authors were interested in whether the respondents had also attended international exhibitions. The results are presented in *Table 4*.

**Table 4: Results of the Kruskal-Wallis test (K-W test) for differences between teachers' answers on attendance to international exhibitions of contemporary fine arts**

|  | Age               | n  | $\bar{R}$ | K-W test |      |
|--|-------------------|----|-----------|----------|------|
|  |                   |    |           | $\chi^2$ | P    |
| Do you attend any international exhibitions of contemporary fine arts? | Up to 30 years    | 0  | 0         | 3.977    | .137 |
|  | Between 31 and 40 | 17 | 42.38     |          |      |
|  | Between 41 and 50 | 24 | 39.88     |          |      |
|  | 51 and over       | 32 | 31.98     |          |      |
|  | Total             | 73 |           |          |      |

*\*Only fully completed responses were included in the statistical processing*

For the question *Do you attend any international exhibitions of contemporary fine arts?* the authors also observed no statistically significant differences, although the frequency of responses shows the greatest differences between the youngest participants (between 31 and 40;  $\bar{R} = 42.38$ ) and the oldest group (51 and over;  $\bar{R} = 31.98$ ). It can be concluded that younger teachers attended international contemporary art exhibitions slightly more often. This result was also expected, as it is somewhat in line with the assessment that younger respondents might be more skilled at organizing such trips.

### 3.2 Analysis of Results in Terms of Work Experience

Results related to the comparison of the respondents' work experience can undoubtedly have an impact on how an individual will recognize the pedagogical value of a particular subject and, in the interests of professional development, participate in events and follow up on related content. For this reason, the authors were interested in the following of contemporary fine arts from the perspective of work experience. The results are presented in *Table 5*.

**Table 5: Results of the Kruskal-Wallis test for differences in teachers' responses on following contemporary fine arts**

|                                       | Work experience   | n  | $\bar{R}$ | K-W test |      |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|----|-----------|----------|------|
|                                       |                   |    |           | $\chi^2$ | P    |
| Do you follow contemporary fine arts? | 1-5 years         | 10 | 48.80     | 3.658    | .600 |
|                                       | 6-10 years        | 7  | 36.86     |          |      |
|                                       | 11-15 years       | 10 | 37.40     |          |      |
|                                       | 16-20 years       | 8  | 41.94     |          |      |
|                                       | 21-30 years       | 17 | 40.21     |          |      |
|                                       | 30 years and over | 26 | 36.23     |          |      |
|                                       | Total             | 78 |           |          |      |

*\*Only fully completed responses were included in the statistical processing*

In terms of work experience the authors found no statistically significant differences when analysing the following of contemporary fine arts. However, they noticed that there were slightly more positive answers to this question in the group of teachers with 1 to 5 years of experience. They were followed by teachers with 16-20 years of experience, and then by those with 21-30 years of experience. Among the other three groups the distribution is even. The authors estimate that the interest in contemporary art is fairly evenly distributed according to the respondents' work experience. The results reject research hypothesis  $H_{D11}$ : *We predict that teachers with more years of experience will be more engaged in contemporary fine art.*

The following section consists of the results related to the method of following contemporary fine arts in terms of the respondents' work experience and the differences between the groups. The results are presented in *Table 6*.

No statistically significant differences can be detected in terms of the way in which contemporary fine arts are followed and possible differences between the length of work experience. Teachers with 16-20 and 6-10 years of experience attended exhibitions more often, while teachers with the least amount of experience (1-5 years) were least likely to do so. The group of teachers with 16-20 years of experience was also the most likely to follow contemporary fine arts through the media. In *Table 6* we can see that teachers with longer experience (16-20 years, 21-30 years, 30+) on average followed contemporary fine arts less frequently by reading literature, articles, and current periodicals. The variations are small, so one can say that the answers are evenly distributed across all groups. The results are also in line with those related to the age of the respondents and are somewhat expected. These results confirm the

research hypothesis  $H_{D12}$ : *Teachers follow contemporary fine arts in similar ways regardless of their work experience.*

**Table 6: Results of the Kruskal-Wallis test for differences in responses on indicating the methods of following contemporary fine arts**

|  | Work experience  | n                 | $\bar{R}$ | K-W test |       |      |
|--|--|-------------------|-----------|----------|-------|------|
|  |  |                   |           | $\chi^2$ | P     |      |
| How do you follow contemporary fine art? | By visiting exhibitions                                    | 1-5 years         | 4         | 20.50    | 7.569 | .182 |
|  |  | 6-10 years        | 5         | 30.70    |       |      |
|  |  | 11-15 years       | 7         | 27.79    |       |      |
|  |  | 16-20 years       | 5         | 30.70    |       |      |
|  |  | 21-30 years       | 11        | 29.77    |       |      |
|  |  | 30 years and over | 19        | 21.84    |       |      |
|  | By following it in the media                               | 1-5 years         | 4         | 26.88    | 2.213 | .819 |
|  |  | 6-10 years        | 5         | 25.60    |       |      |
|  |  | 11-15 years       | 7         | 27.79    |       |      |
|  |  | 16-20 years       | 5         | 30.70    |       |      |
|  |  | 21-30 years       | 11        | 22.82    |       |      |
|  |  | 30 years and over | 19        | 25.87    |       |      |
|  | By reading literature, articles, current periodicals, etc. | 1-5 years         | 4         | 25.75    | 5.897 | .316 |
|  |  | 6-10 years        | 5         | 33.10    |       |      |
|  |  | 11-15 years       | 7         | 34.50    |       |      |
|  |  | 16-20 years       | 5         | 23.30    |       |      |
|  |  | 21-30 years       | 11        | 23.55    |       |      |
|  |  | 30 years and over | 19        | 23.18    |       |      |

*\*Only fully completed answers were included in the statistical processing; n = 51*

The analysis of the data related to attending foreign international exhibitions of contemporary fine arts is presented in *Table 7*.

Again, no statistically significant differences were detected. However, the greatest difference can be seen between the groups with the most work experience (30 years and older;  $\bar{R} = 30.54$ ) compared to the group with 16-20 years of experience ( $\bar{R} = 45.14$ ). On this basis, it can be concluded that teachers with the most experience, in this case we assume that they are also among the oldest, do not visit international contemporary exhibitions as often as the other teachers. These results are consistent with the results of the data analysis in terms of the age of the respondents.

**Table 7: Results of the Kruskal-Wallis test (K-W test) for differences between answers on attending international contemporary fine arts exhibitions**

|  | Work experience   | n  | $\bar{R}$ | K-W test |      |
|--|-------------------|----|-----------|----------|------|
|  |                   |    |           | $\chi^2$ | P    |
| Do you attend any international exhibitions of contemporary fine arts? | 1-5 years         | 9  | 43.67     | 5.437    | .365 |
|  | 6-10 years        | 7  | 36.36     |          |      |
|  | 11-15 years       | 10 | 35.05     |          |      |
|  | 16-20 years       | 7  | 45.14     |          |      |
|  | 21-30 years       | 17 | 40.26     |          |      |
|  | 30 years and over | 23 | 30.54     |          |      |
| Total  | 73                |    |           |          |      |

*\*Only fully completed responses were included in the statistical processing*

### 3.2 Results of Open-Ended Questions

Through the open-ended questions, where the respondents wrote down their thoughts, the authors gained a broader perspective on the research issue, which allowed them to analyse the data more objectively and draw conclusions.

They were thus interested in which international exhibitions or events the respondents had visited. The obtained data are presented in *Table 8*.

**Table 8: Numbers (f) and structural percentages (f %) of responses on the visited exhibitions**

| Venice Biennale |      | International Graphic Biennale |      | Vienna |     | Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb |     | Other |      | Total |       |
|-----------------|------|--------------------------------|------|--------|-----|-----------------------------------|-----|-------|------|-------|-------|
| f               | f %  | f                              | f %  | f      | f % | f                                 | f % | f     | f %  | f     | f %   |
| 18              | 48.6 | 4                              | 10.8 | 3      | 7.1 | 2                                 | 5.4 | 10    | 27.0 | 37    | 100.0 |

*\*Only fully completed responses were included in the statistical processing*

*Table 8* shows the frequency distribution of responses by the surveyed teachers. Not all teachers gave an answer, but the most frequently visited event was the Venice Biennale of contemporary fine arts (48.64%), which is the closest of contemporary fine arts event of its kind for Slovenian teachers. The Venice Biennale was followed by the International Graphic Biennale in Ljubljana (10.8%), and then the cities of Vienna and Zagreb. A few teachers mentioned several exhibition venues that they visited occasionally: the Maribor Art Gallery, the Museum of Modern Art Ljubljana, the National Gallery of Slovenia, the Museum of Architecture and Design Ljubljana, etc. However, also two other important exhibitions in the European context were mentioned in the answers: the Documenta in Kassel, a contemporary art exhibit that

takes place every 5 years, and the sculpture exhibition in Münster, which is held every 10 years (both in Germany). Since the monitoring of contemporary art practices is indispensable for quality teaching, especially in updating approaches to art and creative work, one would have expected a higher proportion of responses from the teachers surveyed at this point. One might also have expected more frequent mention of galleries in Slovenia, which also host international contemporary exhibitions annually.

The frequency of the respondents' viewing of international art exhibitions are presented in *Table 9*.

**Table 9: Frequency of visiting international art exhibitions**

| Rank | Categories           | f  |
|------|----------------------|----|
| 1    | Every two years      | 11 |
| 2    | At least once a year | 8  |
| 3    | Once a year          | 3  |

The frequency of the answers given in *Table 9* can be compared to the answers given in *Table 8*. Given that the most frequent choice was the Venice Biennale of contemporary art, the frequency of the answer that the surveyed teachers visit international contemporary exhibitions every two years (Rank 1) is also appropriate. It is also encouraging that the teachers go to contemporary fine arts exhibitions at least once a year (Rank 2), which indicates that teachers are very active in attending contemporary fine arts exhibitions.

The authors were also interested in the respondents' attitudes towards contemporary fine arts. The obtained results are given in *Table 10*.

**Table 10: Respondents' attitude towards contemporary fine arts**

| Rank | Categories             | f  |
|------|------------------------|----|
| 1    | Positive               | 51 |
| 2    | Negative               | 6  |
| 3    | Undecided/ No attitude | 6  |

Most of the respondents expressed positive attitudes towards contemporary fine arts, with positive attitudes also meaning acceptance of content with a negative message. Then, in order of frequency of responses, the following categories were

equally represented: negative and undecided or unformed attitudes. In addition to the ranked categories, the authors would like to highlight a few more statements that indicated a positive attitude towards contemporary fine arts, at the same time encompassing the fundamental goals of contemporary fine arts, and above all describing the purpose of including contemporary fine arts in the primary school curriculum:

*“It is important for the development of society, education, awareness and the search for the essence of life.”*

*“It requires the viewer to make a critical assessment of quality, message, and address.”*

*“I consider contemporary art a necessary part of society; it is the face of a nation. I don’t always understand it, but I have a respectful attitude towards it.”*

*“I have a positive attitude towards art. But I always keep in mind that one does not have to agree with all the ideas or concepts presented.”*

*“It always opens new perspectives on and horizons of how an artist can express himself even with non-classical approaches.”*

*“I am attracted to contemporary art because of its confessional, interpretive and multifaceted nature.”*

*“I am very interested in it for its new reflections and messages, technical approaches, in search of inspiration for my own creative work and approaches in the teaching process.”*

*“I am interested, I don’t always understand it, but I am aware that if I don’t understand something at first sight, I don’t have the right to judge whether it is good or not (but I can have a personal opinion or like it).”*

In contrast, some teachers who had a negative attitude towards contemporary fine arts described their position vividly:

*“I find contemporary art intrusive, shouting, no quality is recognized. It forces you to think too much. It doesn’t allow the simple satisfaction of just looking at it.”*

*“There is a lot of rubbish that is not art at all. In a few years’ time, some of the ‘art’ will be forgotten.”*

Teachers who had not developed an attitude towards contemporary fine arts were modest in their statements – in their recording of attitudes:

*“I don’t have a particular attitude, because professionally I am not convinced by it.”*

*‘I’m not too interested in it; I don’t see anything new, of quality.’*

The authors were delighted by the statements from teachers who expressed positive attitudes towards contemporary fine arts. They also agree with the teachers who described their negative attitudes, but we cannot overlook the fact that it is the teacher who receives the impulses and selects them according to their appropriateness in accordance with the pedagogical process. In conclusion, teachers who have a completely negative attitude or have not formed an opinion about contemporary fine arts lack insight into contemporary fine arts practice; thus, little experience, or possibly a negative experience has developed into a general, negative belief. In this respect, there exists a similarity with students who, because of their lack of knowledge, are unable to form an attitude towards contemporary fine arts. Nevertheless, the results confirm the research hypothesis  $H_{SP1}$ : *We anticipate that most teachers will show a positive attitude towards contemporary fine arts.*

The authors were also interested in what attracted or repelled respondents the most about contemporary fine arts exhibitions. The categories of answers are presented in *Table 11*.

**Table 11: Ranking of attraction toward contemporary fine arts exhibitions**

| Rank | Categories       | f  |
|------|------------------|----|
| 1    | Positive message | 42 |
| 2    | Negative message | 15 |
| 3    | Neutrality       | 15 |

Respondents most often pointed out the positive message that appealed to them in contemporary fine arts, followed by two categories that are equally represented in terms of frequency: negative messages and neutrality. The authors categorised the open-ended questions into positive or negative messages and neutral responses. To give a better picture, the following are some of the characteristics/features that attracted the teachers surveyed to contemporary art:

*“New ideas, especially the author’s vision of the world; creativity, aesthetics, ingenuity; interesting conceptual ideas; unusualness; diversity of views on art; finding new opportunities for expression; provocativeness; a different view on the same topic; new approaches and media in artistic expression; articulating ideas and attitudes towards modern life, problems and challenges; a critical portrayal of our society; experimenting with*



*techniques; meaningful audacity; work with space and body; the context of the origin of the work;*”

and those that repelled them:

*“Vulgarity; half-finished work; absurdity and excessive brutality; bizarreness; art pour art nonsense; painful and suffering presentations – performances; when the works are an end in themselves; when there is no discernible message; superficiality; videos, especially if they are long, very strange, obscure; senseless boldness; repetition of what has been seen before and emptiness of the mind (without an idea);”*

Here are some more interesting opinions and statements from the respondents:

*“It depends on the work that appeals to me.”*

*“I find the work short-lived. In the variety of different works, what is good gets lost.”*

*“Sometimes the realisation is hidden behind the concept; I think both are very important.”*

*“Sometimes the artwork draws you in; sometimes it has the opposite effect on you with its expressiveness and you don't know what it is that attracts you. Honesty ...”*

*“I am attracted or not attracted by the sense of humour and the concept, the idea. After some deliberation, I decide whether I agree with the idea (I like it) or not.”*

*“Sometimes I don't understand what the artist is trying to say. But that doesn't mean it doesn't attract me.”*

*“Contemporary art is a mirror of today's society, of any social phenomenon and of any layer, so it can repel, shock, shout at and influence the individual and their reactions.”*

*“I am attracted by the strangeness, the materials, the humour, the spatial layout. Too much philosophizing, which I may not understand, does not attract me. But it doesn't sit well with me as a visual art thing at all.”*

In view of the above, it can be concluded that the teachers' opinions and writings encourage evidence that teachers who have formed positive attitudes towards contemporary art also accept those artworks that have negative messages. This shows that they accept contemporary fine arts and give it the opportunity to speak to them and to establish a more objective attitude towards it. The characteristics highlighted as not attractive to the respondents are themes/issues about which the teacher needs to think carefully before presenting them in the classroom. Based on the respondents' statements, the authors conclude that the teacher's critical attitude

towards certain topics is crucial in deciding which topics to present to students. Critical and open-minded art educators are an indispensable factor in contemporary art education practice.

#### **4 Conclusion**

The questionnaire for teachers was used to obtain information about the teachers' personal interest in following contemporary art practice, the ways in which they follow it, and their attitudes towards and opinions about contemporary fine arts. The first part of the survey was dedicated to personal interest, ways of following and attendance at international exhibitions of contemporary fine arts in terms of identifying differences between the age group and work experience of the respondents. In the analysis of the open-ended answers, the authors were interested in a deeper perspective, i.e., the respondents' opinion on the topic. The findings regarding the teachers' engagement with contemporary fine arts show that teachers were equally engaged in following contemporary fine arts, regardless of age. Perhaps slightly greater interest was shown by the younger group (31-40 years). A similar finding is observed for the groups of teachers according to their work experience. The analysis shows a proportional distribution of responses, which means that there are no differences between the groups of teachers on this variable either and that interest in contemporary art is fairly evenly distributed according to the work experience of the respondents. At the same time, one may again observe that slightly more interest was expressed in the group of teachers with the least work experience (1-5 years).

In terms of the way they follow contemporary fine arts, the teachers' answers do not differ either by age or by work experience. The teachers followed developments in contemporary fine arts by visiting exhibitions, through the media, and by reading literature, articles and current periodicals, with younger teachers being slightly more likely to use the latter method. At the same time, this group of teachers was slightly more likely to attend international contemporary exhibitions. It can be concluded that younger teachers, who consequently have less experience, are slightly more attracted to contemporary fine arts than the other groups.

The authors found that most teachers showed positive attitudes towards contemporary fine arts, which they justified with statements describing their attitudes. Interesting conceptual ideas, a critical portrayal of society, accepting a different view on a certain topic, and finding new approaches and media in artistic expression are the goals pursued in art lessons when incorporating contemporary fine arts. This does not mean that teachers have a positive attitude towards all examples of contemporary art practices. Teachers are bothered by absurdity, excessive brutality, unrecognisable messages, superficiality, vagueness, etc. The results of the survey show that the teachers were open to the variety of expressive and contextual possibilities offered by contemporary fine arts, making their own judgements about what appealed to them and what did not, which work spoke to them and which didn't. Teachers' openness is important for the ability to exercise judgement in the selection of artwork and to guide the appropriate design of the art assignment in art lessons.

Even though most teachers showed a positive attitude towards contemporary fine arts, a small percentage of teachers did not like it, had a negative attitude, or had no attitude at all towards contemporary fine arts. Their opinion was that contemporary art was intrusive, loud, and did not give pleasure at the mere sight of it. An art teacher should be receptive to a variety of artistic practices and not generalize based on a possibly bad experience. They should also recognize the qualitative communicative and formal value of a work of art, discover interesting content, look for possibilities for didactic transfer, think about ways of implementing contemporary art in the art classroom, and establish an objective attitude towards the work of art.

It can be therefore concluded that most of the teachers surveyed, while having a positive attitude towards contemporary fine arts, had a good appreciation of the positive value of contemporary fine arts and recognized the pedagogical and didactic value in the artwork, which is the basis for its implementation in the artistic and pedagogical process. However, this is not a matter of personal interest but of pedagogical competences that art teachers must have.

The study has raised new questions, which relate mainly to a more detailed analysis of the situation of art teachers in terms of integrating contemporary art practices into the pedagogical process, more specifically in what ways and how often (if at all) they do so. The study also raised questions on a detailed analysis of the presence of

interdisciplinary integration in contemporary fine arts. In any case, the present results point us in positive directions in promoting the integration of contemporary art practices into the primary school curriculum. There should be no obstacles for art teachers, as the results show since contemporary fine arts are well accepted by teachers in terms of following and positive attitudes towards the content covered.

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