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VOJO RADOIČIĆ'S ARTWORK AS A STIMULUS FOR EARLY AND PRESCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN'S ARTISTIC CREATIVITY – CASE STUDY

Abstract

Art appreciation is an interactive experience, that leads to the development of artistic sensibility, but also encourages creative thinking. Therefore, it is important to expose children to a variety of artistic stimuli that also include artworks. In this paper, possibilities are being researched to use reproductions of Vojo Radoičić's artworks to encourage art expression in preschool children, as well as the impact of this kind of incentive on the development of creativity and motivation in the tested group of children. Vojo Radoičić is a famous artist from Rijeka and an unavoidable figure in the Croatian art scene of the second half of the 20th century. His art expression is characterised as poetic, playful and is well - known for its lively coloring, resulting in his art pieces to often be compared to spontaneous children art expression. The research results showed that the selected artworks as a stimulus for children's artistic expression had a positive impact on the development of art creativity and motivation in children who participated in the research. These positive qualitative changes can help preschool teachers in planning future art activities in kindergartens.

Key words: art appreciation, artwork, case study, children artistic expression.

DJELO VOJE RADOIČIĆA KAO POTICAJ ZA LIKOVNO STVARALAŠTVO DJECE PREDŠKOLSKE DOBI – STUDIJA SLUČAJA

Sažetak

Promatranje umjetničkih djela interaktivno je iskustvo koje dovodi do razvijanja umjetničkog senzibiliteta, ali i poticanja kreativnog mišljenja. Stoga je od najranijih dana važno izlagati djecu raznovrsnim umjetničkim poticajima koji uključuju (i) likovnoumjetnička djela. U ovome se radu istražuju mogućnosti uporabe umjetničkih reprodukcija Voje Radoičića u poticanju likovnog izražavanja djece predškolske dobi te utjecaj primjene ove vrste poticaja na razvoj dječje likovne kreativnosti i motivacije. Vojo Radoičić poznati je riječki umjetnik i nezaobilazna figura u hrvatskoj likovnoj umjetnosti druge polovice 20. stoljeća. Njegov likovni izraz karakterizira poetičnost, zaigranost i živi kolorit zbog čega se njegova djela često dovode u korelaciju sa spontanošću dječjeg likovnog stvaralaštva. Rezultati istraživanja pokazali su da su odabrana likovnoumjetnička djela kao poticaj za dječje likovno izražavanje pozitivno utjecala na razvoj likovne kreativnosti i motivacije kod djece koja su sudjelovala u istraživanju. Navedene pozitivne kvalitativne promjene mogu pomoći odgajateljima u daljnjem planiranju likovnih aktivnosti u vrtićima.

Ključne riječi: dječje likovno stvaralaštvo; likovna aprecijacija, studija slučaja; umjetničko djelo.

Introduction

Creativity is a mental process that comprises the spheres of emotion, motivation, and ability to create new ideas and solve problems in a new and unusual way. The roots of creativity go back to the earliest childhood when every child explores intensively the world around him in order to understand it better. Therefore, every child from the earliest age needs to be provided with a stimulating (interesting, comfortable, and relaxed) environment. (Slunjski, 2013). The children's creativity can be expressed in different ways, and one of the areas most stimulating and inspiring for children's expression is the visual arts area. Children can approach art through art activities, but also through observing artworks, through i.e. art appreciation. During the interaction between children and an artwork, the preschool teacher directs their attention to certain artistic phenomena and thus encourages them to notice artistic phenomena around them, to think, compare, ask questions, imagine, create associations and new ideas, develop artistic sensibility, as well as to develop higher-order cognitive activities such as analysis, synthesis, evaluation, critical thinking. In this way, the attention of the individual can be shifted from the initial awareness of art elements on an artwork (colors, lines, shapes ...) to noticing the relationship between these elements, as well as to the feeling that the observation of the work leaves on the individual, after which, in the last phase, newly acquired thoughts and impressions can be joined by previously acquired knowledge and experiences, creating new cognitive and affective constructs. In this complex process, it is necessary to combine intellectual and intuitive understanding, since understanding and experiencing of an artwork requires a holistic approach, i.e. the engagement of all human inner potentials, which have to be developed from the earliest days of life. Duh, Herzog, and Lazar (2016) state that the creative process is accompanied by categories such as absorption, inclination to imagination and daydreaming, which leads to the conclusion that an artwork cannot be perceived only rationally and analytically, but also by the activation of feelings, imagination, and intuition.

Not much research has been carried out that deals with the influence of an artist and his/her artworks on children's development in the area of visual arts, although a few interesting researches related to this issue have been conducted

in the region over the last decade (Brajčić, Kuščević, Katić, 2011; Duh, 2016; Novaković, 2015; Zupančič, Duh, 2009). In this paper, the authors explore the extent to which the artwork of the artist Vjekoslav Vojo Radoičić can influence the development of children's artistic creativity and motivation for artistic expression. Namely, the playful artistic expression and style of Vojo Radoičić's work is very close to the child's artistic expression, and for that very reason we decided to explore the influence of his work on the artistic creation of preschool-aged children.

Artwork as a stimulus for children's artistic creativity

The child experiences and feels aesthetic values from the earliest age. This is why children should be given the opportunity to establish a direct contact with artworks already in pre-school age. Getting acquainted with quality artworks will develop in children the sense of appreciation and ability to create and express themselves through artistic activities. In visual art education the perceptual-receptive dimension, i.e. art appreciation, is the component as important as the development of art expression (art production) (Duh, Zupančič, 2013). Art appreciation contributes to the development of artistic and aesthetic sensibility, verbal and communication skills, creative and critical thinking and a positive attitude towards cultural heritage and artistic values in general. In combining both processes, namely art reception and art production, the child's need for active cognition of the environment can be connected with the development of the ability to become aware and verbalize new experiences.

Some authors cite the fifth year as the lower threshold for art appreciation, which coincides with the stages of development of children's artistic expression and visual perception (Zlateva, Tineva-Gyurkovska, 2019). In this period of life, children observe paintings as a pleasant stimuli. They are generally not interested in other people's opinions, they do not evaluate artworks, and they do not have the need / ability to assess whether artworks are quality or not (Kuščević, 2016). Art production around the age of five and six is mostly still spontaneous; the child's perceptions of the world are strongly marked by imagination. The artistic expression is unpredictable and associated with play. However, various and interesting compositional solutions can be noticed in the

created works, since in that period children are more and more able to become aware of their own thoughts and feelings, i.e. to interpret them in a visual arts medium (Duh, Vrlič, 2003). Getting acquainted with quality artworks will encourage in children the release of inclinations and abilities for artistic creation and expression. Artworks will become a part of the child's consciousness and will also stimulate the imagination needed for creations in visual arts area (Grgurić, Jakubin, 1996). Therefore, artworks can be seen as an important didactic tool for acquiring artistic knowledge, stimulating imagination and creativity, and contributing to the expansion of children's experience and knowledge of the world around them (Selaković, 2017).

Visual artworks are part of historical and cultural heritage, which is an important contribution to the development of human society and civilization. From them, we can obtain important information about the human appearance as well as their appearance in the past, activities, trends, and everyday lives; their spiritual aspirations, ideals, and ideas. The experience and interpretation of an artwork depends on children's previous experience, as well as on the social, economic, and cultural determinants of the environment in which they grew up. The experience and understanding of an artwork begins with the observation. It is the skill that children acquire and develop step by step through practice. A very important dimension in the appreciation of visual art is the qualitative dimension, i.e., the moment when reception becomes a two-way activity, when it evokes in the observer mental and experiential sensations that result in new experiences – new thoughts, ideas, and emotions. Appreciation of artworks is an interactive experience that leads to the development or refinement of the existing artistic sensibility as well as to the encouragement of creative thinking; it enriches the individual's inner life and enhances his/her everyday life. For these reasons, it is of great importance to expose children from the earliest days to various stimuli that include artworks, not only by observing reproductions, but also by visiting places where original artworks are exhibited. In museums and galleries, children have an opportunity to come into contact with various new aspects of reality that are beyond the reach of their space and time (Nenadić-Bilan, 2015). While encountering and interacting with authentic artworks, children create a unique experience, which can encourage the development of their creativity, cultural identity and positive attitude towards arts.

In addition to visiting galleries and museums, children can get acquainted with artworks through art reproductions on posters, books, catalogs, etc. It is necessary to select works that meet high artistic criteria and which, through their appearance and message, are appropriate for a certain age and developmental stage of the child. Artwork can, apart from observation and analysis, serve as a motif or source of motifs in children's art creation and expression.

Artworks can be used as an incentive to work with children in many ways. Petrač (2015) states the following classification:

1. an artwork as a visual-linguistic and thematic quote - children observe and talk to the preschool teacher about artworks, based on which their interest in artistic expression is stimulated, where artworks can be a stimulus in terms of presented motif or elements of visual language;
2. visual-linguistic redefinition of an artwork - after observing an artwork, it can be redefined in various ways, from changing colors, changing sizes, adding new textures, drawing over existing colors and structures, etc.; in this way, children become aware of individual artistic elements, they notice the relationships between them and the different impressions that arise from changing individual elements. This method also develops various forms of creative thinking, such as originality, flexibility and fluency;
3. an artwork as a source of new motifs - an artwork can serve as an incentive to invent new motifs based on what is seen; this method also encourages the development of creative thinking;
4. artistic and compositional elements of an artwork as a stimulus for expression and creation - observation of a work of art can be focused on noticing the elements of visual arts language - colors, lines, shapes, textures, and their interrelationships: rhythm, contrast, balance, etc.; in that way children's attention is directed from the motif to the perception of the mentioned values and to the awareness of their use in their own artistic expression;
5. independence of the detail from the whole - this category refers to the observation of details within an art composition, where children focus

their attention on one part of the work, observe and analyze its structure, color form, etc., and then adapt the seen motif to their own interpretation in their own artistic expression; the process of observing an artwork can go the other way around.

Cox and Watts (2016) list some of the main reasons why an artwork should be used in education. The reasons are as follows:

1. an artwork affects children's development of awareness, understanding, and appreciation for the arts;
2. an artwork allows children to identify and to find the links between their work and the artwork;
3. an artwork encourages children to develop their critical thinking by looking at it.

Kuščević (2016, according to: Zupančič, 2006) states the following criteria for the selection of artworks in working with children: *importance / quality of the author and his work; the typicality of the author and his work* (representation of authors who are typical of a particular artistic style); *visibility of works, i.e. the possibility of clearly reading a way of artistic expression; content adequacy of artworks; content suitability of artworks* (artworks that enable children to enjoy and understand certain phenomena and tasks).

The role of preschool teachers in children's communication with artworks

The preschool teacher has a great role to play in promoting the development of children's creativity during early and pre-school age. A creative preschool teacher encourages the development of certain characteristics in children that contribute to the manifestation of their creative abilities. The preschool teacher should be competent to use contemporary creative educational methods and he/she should have a great love for his/her calling in general (Cvetković Lay, 2002; Brajčić, Kuščević, & Katić, 2011). This requires the possession of professional-methodical competencies for selecting stimuli in order to develop drawing, painting, graphic, space-plastic, and media communication skills (Grgurić, Jakubin, 1996). In order to assist the development and preserve

children's creative potential, the preschool teacher should neither impose his/her vision of reality on the child nor over-focus the attention on what he/she considers important since sometimes what seems important to us does not have to be important to the children. This task may sometimes appear arduous, because preschool teachers often think that directing the child in a certain direction is an essential part of their job, so they do it when this is required but also when it is not (Slunjski, 2013).

The purpose of visual arts is not only aesthetic, but also communicative, and the aim of the observer's communicating with an artwork is to decode and interpret its meaning (Gombrich, 1982). An artwork is considered a means of that communication, and its openness and ambiguity requires a developed ability to interpret its content. Therefore, the role of preschool teachers is to acquaint children with the basic possibilities of communication with artworks that, due to their complexity and layering, they themselves cannot fully understand (Kuščević, 2016). The preschool teacher has the role of a mediator in children's communication with an artwork. His/her task is to encourage the children to actively participate in observing the artwork by asking questions, comparing, imagining, recognizing, understanding, exploring, etc. By doing so, children can analyze a certain piece of artwork by recognizing the contents, comparing mutual relationships between the lines, shapes, colors, finding similarities and differences, drawing conclusions, etc. Kuščević (2016) cites Hickman's (1994) guidelines according to which children's spontaneity and sincerity should be taken into account in a child's contact with artworks. Their initial reactions should be used in order to create a new experience in a way more appropriate for the child. An appropriate conversation with a child significantly contributes to this. Questions such as: *What feelings and thoughts does this artwork arouse in you? What does it remind you of? What do you think...; What do you notice ...; How do you imagine ...; What would you change?* etc, help in encouraging the child to express his thoughts and feelings.

The extent of relaxation and freedom in children's artistic expression also depends on the preschool teacher's ability to listen and perceive the internal logic of children's visual language. Careful observation and monitoring of children's artistic expression enables the preschool teacher to create a relaxed

and stimulating environment for the development of children's creativity (Novaković, Tomljenović, Rončević, 2016). In this way, preschool teachers also reduce their potential need to direct the child's thinking and artistic expression, as well as the possibility of misinterpreting children's artwork, which can lead to inhibition of the development of children's creativity, curiosity and self-confidence. On the other hand, encouraging expression of any kind, from verbal to visual, as well as providing opportunities for children's comments and free expression of ideas, will contribute to the development of aforementioned abilities.

Methodology

Subject, purpose and objectives of the research

In the research carried out, the authors discussed the influence of artworks as a stimulus for preschool-aged children's artistic creativity. The work of Vojo Radoičić, a famous Rijeka artist, who marked the Rijeka and Croatian art scene of the second half of the 20th century, was selected as an inspiration for children's artistic expression. The purpose of the research was to identify some of the ways in which artwork can be a stimulus for the preschool-aged children's artistic expression. The first aim of the research was to discover how Vojo Radoičić's artwork, as a stimulus for the preschool-aged children's artistic expression, affects the children's artistic creativity and their motivation for work. The second aim of the research was also to examine the attitudes and opinions of the preschool teachers who participated in the research of the features of children's artistic expression inspired by Vojo Radoičić's artwork, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of this type of work.

Considering the set goals, the following research questions were formed:

1. *Does Vojo Radoičić's artwork affect children's artistic creativity in the kindergarten?*
2. *Does Vojo Radoičić's artwork affect children's motivation for artistic expression in the kindergarten?*

The research carried out **was** based on a qualitative research paradigm characterized by the methods of observation, description, and interpretation of phenomena, leading to new insights and reclassifications of data and an extension of our specific understanding, as opposed to generalizations and strict numerical classifications characteristic for quantitative research (Glaser, Strauss, 1967; Willis, 1978). The research covered three phases: data collection, content analysis, and comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The sample

Since qualitative research implies a specific and cautious selection of samples, as well as methods of data collection and processing, the sample of participants was thoughtfully planned. The research was conducted in a branch of the pre-school institution “Zamet” . 23 six and seven-year-old children were enrolled in the group. There were 10 girls and 13 boys in the group. All the children from this group participated in the research as well as their two preschool teachers, who had 8 and 13 years of work experience respectively .

Method of data collection and processing

The data were collected through a semi-structured interview with the preschool teachers. This is an interview that contains open-ended questions followed by their interpretation, explanation, and qualification of responses, thus avoiding the limitations of predetermined categories of responses (Cohen, Manion, Morrison, 2007). The interview was conducted at the end of June with both preschool teachers simultaneously and was recorded with a dictaphone, so that the data obtained could later be easily analyzed. The obtained data were generalized, classified, and categorized, which was followed by a structured story describing the contents of the interview (Cohen, Manion, Morrison, 2007).

The research process

The research was conducted in the kindergarten “Zamet”, Rijeka, in May 2018. In the group of children that participated in the research, three activities were conducted over three weeks, one activity per week. In the week preceding the activity and during the course of the research, children were offered picture books written by and/or illustrated by Vojo Radoičić. Examples of

his artworks, such as calendars, picture books, and announcements for various events were displayed on the walls for the children to see, as well as the board game “Parcheesi,” designed by Radoičić.

The first activity carried out was an individual activity with a girl named E., who had shown an artistic talent since an early age. The individual activity was conducted with the aim of evaluating whether there is a difference in the child’s experience of the process and the result of art activity in relation to the same categories during group activities with children. The preschool teachers were also aware that this girl is mostly motivated for painting when she can create based on a certain pattern/stimulus. That is the reason why this individual activity was carried out with that particular girl. The preschool teacher showed her the works of Vojo Radoičić on a tablet during the morning and after the conversation about the artist and his artworks, she chose some reproductions which she liked most. Then, the preschool teacher suggested she painted a picture of her own, to which she replied that she needed tempera paints and asked if she could paint outdoors. When asked what she wanted to paint, she replied that she wanted to paint a painting with the motifs that she liked the most. She chose a larger format for the painting than one usually used for children’s drawings and pictures. First, she drew the contours with a magic marker, after which she painted the shapes and added numerous details. The activity started after breakfast and lasted almost until lunch. Since the girl did not take an afternoon nap in the kindergarten, the picture was completed after lunch (Picture 1, Picture 2).



Picture 1: the first artistic activity - drawing in a felt-tip pen and the beginning of paper paintin



Picture 2: the first artistic activity, performed in the art technique of tempera

The second activity was carried out in the following week. The motif was “The city I live in.” The art technique employed was the graphic technique of monotype printmaking. This technique was chosen in order for children to try to work in some of the graphic techniques, that are quite neglected in working with children of early and preschool age. On the other hand, monotype is one of the simplest and safest graphic techniques, and as such is very suitable for use in kindergartens. It is characterized, as the name suggests, by printing only one print from the stencil, and a simple and fast way of making a drawing / image on the background (stencil) using tempera, watercolors or similar art material. Therefore, this technique can also be spoken of as a unique process, in which painting and printing are combined (Ayres, 1991). The researcher gathered the children and talked to them about where they lived, what their neighborhood looked like and what can be found there. At the same time, picture books were shown to the children in which they could see and comment how the artist Vojo Radoičić saw his city and how he painted it, as well as what kind of colors, shapes, and spatial relationships he used. After the conversation, tempera paints were offered to the children as well as white paper and transparent foil paper. They were asked how the foil could be used. One girl said that she could paint on that foil, so she did it on the suggestion of the researcher. The children decided by themselves to place the offered picture books on the table and started to paint houses, pets, and outdoor spaces on the foils, stimulated by the previous conversation. Finished paintings were printed onto the paper. Initially, fewer children were included in the activity, and as each of the children finished up their work, other children joined in the activity. Eventually, nearly all the children participated in the described activity (Picture 3).



Picture 3: the second artistic activity, performed in the graphic technique of monotypes

The third conducted activity involved three-dimensional modelling. Due to its specificity and complexity, it was carried out in two parts. First, the researcher started the conversation with the children about Vojo Radoičić as an artist and a man who loved children, worked with them and for them. They also talked about what artists can do for children. The children recalled past activities when they studied Radoičić's sculptures in the book "Radoičić: The Dream" and linked them with illustrations in his picture books. During the conversation, the children expressed their desire to try to make sculptures, which was the reason for considering how to make them, i.e., which materials might be used and

what children can do to create their own sculpture. At the end of the conversation, different sizes of wooden planks were offered to the children. All children were involved in this activity, and the interest which some boys showed was extremely high. In the initial phase of sculpting, the children combined smaller planks, and they worked in pairs and smaller groups. In order to finish the sculptures, the researcher and the preschool teachers glued the pieces of wood with hot glue according to the children's instructions. They also tried to stick the pieces together by themselves under the supervision of the researcher and the preschool teacher. Finished objects were placed on a cabinet and the first part of the activity was completed. The following week the children painted their sculptures with tempera paints. After a few days, some of the children discovered that the tiny details on their sculptures were missing, because they could not be painted with tempera paints, so they drew them with markers. In this way, the second part of the activity was finished (Picture 4, Picture 5).



Picture 4: third artistic activity, modelling in wood, creation of compositions made by adding wooden pieces of various shapes



Picture 5: the third artistic activity, performed in modelling and tempera painting

Upon the completion of the children's artistic activities, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the two preschool teachers who participated in the research. We wanted to determine the preschool teachers' impressions and opinions about the conducted activities as well as about the advantages and disadvantages of the activities. During the interview, the researcher asked open-ended questions, and the preschool teachers verbally presented their observations.

Results and Discussion

Preschool teachers' opinions of the conducted children's artistic activities

The preschool teachers approached the research activities with a lot of enthusiasm. At the beginning of the interview, both of them noted that the children reacted very positively to the artist's artwork. They thought that the reason for it was in the fact that Radoičić's artistic style is relatable to children so that they feel competent to critically comment on his artworks. Namely, one of the preschool teachers stated that some children commented on Radoičić's works with the words "Did a child do that?", "It crossed his line a bit", which showed their critical opinion, but also their interest in the artist's work. Both preschool teachers also agreed that the children were especially interested in artistic activities that involved sculpting, and that almost all of them were included in the mentioned activities. One of the preschool teachers pointed out that the children reacted very well to sculpting, since the children had not yet participated in this art technique. The second preschool teacher added that in the upcoming months the children continued with similar activities; they took all the wooden cubes they had in the group and glued them together with wood glue. She also pointed out that children did not choose only the usual, standard shapes (cubes, pyramids) to create their homes, but "weird buildings", constructed by more elaborated ideas. Both preschool teachers stated that, after the conducted activities, the children often returned to modelling activities, thereby independently exploring and finding ways to model and construct.

Regarding the requirements for the implementation of the activities themselves, the preschool teachers concluded that the artistic activities carried out with the children weren't more difficult than their usual artistic activities. They also pointed out that during the activities the children showed greater artistic creativity and motivation for work. One preschool teacher said that the activities were saturated with colors, that the children liked using bright colors in painting, which motivated them to be creative and use the color palette also in later artistic activities that were not related to Radoičić. She thereby noticed a positive influence of Vojo Radoičić's artwork and believed that the children had the need to integrate the new experience into their own artistic expression, in

their own way, especially in the use of bright colors, which she herself called "Vojo's colors". Similar results have been obtained and described in some other studies that have addressed this issue (Zlateva, Tineva-Gyurkovska, 2019). Considering the children's motivation for artistic activities, one of the preschool teachers stated that some children were more and some less motivated. As an example, she pointed out a girl, whose motivation for the offered activities was exceptionally high and thinks that Radoičić's artwork has left the greatest impression on her. The second preschool teacher added that this girl had been looking often for inspiration in other children's work, so she felt encouraged to create a picture stimulated by the examples of the offered artworks. The preschool teacher also pointed out that the conducted artistic activities had a strong influence on the development of the girl's self-confidence and the creation of a positive self-image. That also seemed to be a big encouragement for her before enrolling at elementary school because she is usually quite self-critical. On the other hand, although all the children participated in the activities, some of them were almost indifferent during the work. One of the preschool teachers observed that this probably happened because these children are not particularly interested in art given and that their interests are manifested in some other areas.

The preschool teachers also compared the first individual artistic activity with other two group activities. The first activity was evaluated as "better" because of the fact that, during the individual activity, it was easier to direct the child's attention to what the preschool teachers considered important, to talk to the child about color mixing and all details in a more effective way, which can result in better paintings. The preschool teachers think that possibilities for individual interaction in group work are significantly smaller. One preschool teacher believes that, in group work, there is always the possibility that some child will copy the other and will not use their own creativity and imagination to make a picture, and that individual work is in many ways superior to group work. She sees the value of the individual activity, and can see how much work and quality can be achieved through such activities. The preschool teachers evaluated the individual work as being better than group work, but they also emphasized that both modes of work have their qualities and advantages, which are listed in the next section. When comparing individual activity with group work, one of the preschool teachers concluded that every form of work

has its own benefits and that the preschool teacher is the one who, depending on the goal to be achieved, decides which form to choose.

Both preschool teachers agreed that the artwork of Vojo Radočić has left a large and powerful impression on certain children. They pointed out that a few girls believe they have been greatly influenced by the artist's artwork. On the other hand, they pointed out that the influence of observing the artworks was not that great on some other children. One of the preschool teachers believes that the influence was more pronounced in girls than in boys. She mentioned the example of a boy who enjoyed art-modelling with wood, i.e., constructing, but showed less motivation in other activities. This preschool teacher believes that the boys in that group are more oriented to construction in general. Although they do not want to generalize and create gender differences, both preschool teachers agreed that girls are more interested in artistic activities than boys and that they also react better to artistic stimuli. They also said that creative or artistic stimuli were sometimes the only way in which they could attract and activate some girls in different projects. As an example, one of the preschool teachers cites the project named "Power," which some girls showed no interest in unless "they could paint using electricity."

At the end of the conversation, the preschool teachers pointed out that the children were very impressed by the literature in which they had access to information about the artist's life and work. The big impression on most of the children was made especially by the monograph "Radočić: The Dream," through which the children, by looking at the photos, became familiarized with Radočić as an artist who often worked with children and for the children. The children in the educational group who participated in the research asked the researcher if they could look again at "that book of that artist" every time she arrived to the kindergarden, which shows that the artist and his artwork truly left a big impression on them. The preschool teachers also noticed the influence of Radočić's artwork on children's artistic expression in the children's interest to use colors which he used in his work. This is especially noticeable in later activities that were self-initiated by the children, which were inspired by the carried out activities, as described in more detail earlier in t.

Benefits of the conducted children's artistic activities according to the preschool teachers' opinion

The preschool teachers see several positive effects on the artistic activities of those children who participated in the research. The greatest emphasis is placed on the positive influence not only on children's artistic development but also on many other areas of children's development, especially on their socio-emotional development. While describing some examples, they emphasized a strong influence on the development of children's self-confidence as well as on the development of a positive self-image. The preschool teachers also pointed out how much the activities had stimulated co-operation among the children, especially because this is the element to which they pay a great deal of attention in their work with children.

Disadvantages of the conducted children's artistic activities according to the preschool teachers' opinion

The preschool teachers also pointed out some disadvantages they observed in the overall research process. One of them suggested that it might have been better if there had been more activities, because in that case the influence of the artist's artwork on the children's activities would have been more obvious. The second preschool teacher added that, if the research had been implemented as a project, the children would have been given much more opportunities for expression in the broader sense, not just in the area of the visual arts. In the end, she pointed it as an idea for further work and research, not actually as a real disadvantage. The preschool teachers saw another disadvantage in the organisation of group work, in which children sometimes do not have complete freedom (for example, when mixing colors, since several children use the same palette and in doing so, they are adding their color to a clean one, and are thereby changing the existing color). However, in this case it is more about the material conditions of the educational institution, than the lack related to group work of children.

We can conclude, that the answer to the first research question (*Does Vojo Radoičić's artwork affect the children's artistic creativity in the kindergarten?*) is positive. After studying Radoičić's artworks, the children talked about them and presented unusual ideas in elaborating and making their artwork, not only

in painting, but also in three-dimensional modeling and construction, which led to unusual shapes and compositions of their artworks. The children showed the ability to recognize more color tones and use them in their artwork. They were more stimulated compared to regular colouring experience, which led to more detailed and interesting artworks. Radoičić's artwork triggered their imagination, and the response was visible in a free, spontaneous, and creative approach to the followed art activities. The results of the conducted activities were also visible in using more elaborated and unusual ideas, and richer color palette in subsequent children's art activities. The children's response to the activities in new material and technique (sculpting) was also very creative, which brings us to the conclusion that it is very important to offer visual arts stimuli in various art areas (painting, drawing, modelling...) as much as possible, so that every child could find out what his favorable materials and way of working are.

We can also conclude that the answer to the second research question (*Does Vojo Radoičić's artwork affect children's motivation for artistic expression in kindergarten?*) is positive. Most children showed a great interest in Vojo Radoičić's artwork. This was observed, among other things, in the children's interest in looking at the photos of the artist surrounded with children and in asking questions such as: "What can he do for children?", "Why is he sitting with the children?" etc. Also, the increased children's motivation for work and artistic creativity is observed in the use of larger forms of papers or cardboards for painting, as well as in the use and combination of various art materials in the art activities. In other words, children came "out of the box" with more courage and security, i.e., they overcame the limitations through the frequent use of common art techniques and formats. It was found that children used more color tones and stronger colors in their artistic expression than before. It was also found that they paid more attention to detail, which is why their artworks seemed more elaborate than before. Some children who participated in the research also made progress in the socio-emotional area, which was reflected in greater confidence, perseverance, and pride in their achievements.

The positive developments are due to the careful planning of art activities by preschool teachers, where in interaction with children they took into account the way children observe, perceive and react to the presented artworks. By

asking questions and encouraging children to verbally express their impressions, they encouraged children's immersion in activities and their independent artistic expression and research. A strong positive reaction to the presented artworks was noticed in most children, as well as the desire to actively communicate with preschool teachers about the experienced artworks and to react to them in the visual arts medium. In the communication with children the preschool teachers' attention was focused on each individual child, and each individual could express his opinion and impressions. In this way, the children got a feeling that their opinion was important, and thus their self-confidence was strengthened both in conversation and in artistic expression. Research by some other authors also shows that children are successful and confident in artistic expression when they are supported by a preschool teacher, with whom they can share their experience and who supports that experience (Anderson, 2000; Cutcher, Boyd, 2018). An individual approach throughout the process is another very important component of art activities at preschool age, which results in a better development of the child's socio-emotional structure, as well as his creative thinking and expression.

It can be concluded that artwork as a stimulus in children's art activities has a positive impact on the artistic and general development of preschool children if it is selected in accordance with the preferences of children of a certain age. It has also been found that artwork affects children differently, and the way and intensity of that influence depends on the children's level of interest in art, on the way of presenting and analyzing the artwork, and on the offered stimuli or activities. Preschool children prefer artworks with recognizable figural motifs and bright, clean colors (Kušević, Kardum, Brajčić, 2014; Zlateva, Tineva-Gyurkovska, 2019). The artwork of Vojo Radoičić was chosen because of the playfulness and imagination in the presentation of motifs, as well as strong, vivid colors in his artistic expression, which is very close to children's artistic expression and the sensibility of preschool children. Although the ability to talk about one's own experience of artworks develops in children around the age of five, the reception of artworks can begin earlier. At the earlier ages of a child's life, the reception of artworks can only refer to the observation of quality artworks without direct conversation about them. Just being in the environment, which offers quality artistic stimuli, can indirectly provoke a certain emotional

experience in the child, as an unconscious / subconscious experience that accumulates, which at a later stage of the child's development can serve as a quality foundation for further development of artistic sensibility, artistic and aesthetic sensitivity and creative and critical thinking. However, the organization of artistic stimulation in a kindergarten environment requires the preschool teachers' expertise in the art area, their knowledge of the basics of art history and creative processes, understanding of children's art development and methodical planning of art activities. The stimulating environment also implies providing the child with the conditions to respond to artistic stimuli, depending on his individual preferences and abilities (Novaković, 2015). The research of the mentioned author showed that there is a statistically significant correlation between preschool teachers' attitudes to personal knowledge of the basics of art history and the frequency of using artworks as a stimulus for children's art activities in kindergarten. It also showed that most preschool teachers in Croatian preschool institutions do not apply modern methods which are based on independent research, experimentation and problem solving to a sufficient extent in art activities with children. Namely, in kindergarten practice, the traditional concept of art activities with children is still prevalent by instructing them what and how to draw or paint, with the art product becoming more important than the art process. In order to be able to gain authentic experiences through their own activities and spontaneous play, children should be involved in the so-called *work on a project*, i.e. activities through which children study a topic or a problem more deeply, with an emphasis on the purposefulness of the activity, and less on its outcome. Working through project activities enables preschool teachers to develop depth and breadth of understanding in children; it also enables developing of children's learning, their ability to apply knowledge in practice, their independent problem solving, a self-regulation of their learning, and harmonization of the topic choice with children's developmental needs and differences of (Slunjski, 2013).

Conclusion

The use of artworks as a stimulus for artistic expression of preschool children is still an insufficiently analyzed, but also a challenging area of research. In order to determine some of the ways in which artwork could be used as a stimulus for preschool-aged children's artistic activities, qualitative research was carried out, which examined how the artwork of Vjekoslav Vojo Radočić can influence the development of artistic creativity and motivation for artistic creation in children. The results of this research have shown that artwork as a stimulus for preschool-aged children's artistic activities has a positive impact on the development of artistic creativity and motivation for artistic creation in preschool-aged children. By analyzing the collected data, certain qualitative changes have been identified in children's artistic work, as well as in their socio-emotional development. They are manifested in the self-initiated children's artistic activities in which some children demonstrated new painting skills. The influence of the artist's artwork was evident in two-dimensional as well as in three-dimensional children's work. It was found that the children used more color tones and stronger colors than they used to use before, and that they paid more attention to details – they become as important as any other element of their artworks. The research also indicated that the children had unusual ideas for painting and modelling after observing Radočić's artworks and talking about them, which resulted in unusual and original forms and compositions. Positive socio-emotional changes in children were visible in children's mutual co-operation as well as in a more frequent presentation of their own thoughts and ideas. Further research in this area can go in various directions: it would be interesting, for example, to explore in which way observed artworks influence the choice of colors, shapes or motifs in children's artistic expression, and how artistic appreciation can influence the development of creative and critical opinions as well as emotional competencies in children. Research can also go in the direction of designing and implementing project activities within which various, not only artistic areas, will be integrated, with an aim of ensuring situations in which learning is connected with a meaningful context, i.e. a real life. The conducted research can inspire preschool teachers to include artists and their artworks more often in their educational work, especially as a stimulus for

new ways of work and expression that will influence the overall children's development in an innovative and creative way.

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