

Art education online: Embracing beauty in the mundane

Dominika Halvová

Abstract: The study is presenting and reflecting upon distance art education programme strategy focused on stay-at-home activities for children and families designed by the Art Education Department of the Moravian Gallery in Brno. The activities inspired by the Gallery's art collections introduced various art works with emphasis on the personal experience and creative process instead of the result as an artistic object. The aim of the activities was to reinforce collaboration and connection within families and to stimulate creative thinking in the context of the everyday objects and situations.

Keywords: online, children, family, creativity, everyday objects, nature, new technology

Introduction

In the past twenty years the role of the gallery educator as the key mediator between the gallery and its visitors has gradually been established in the Czech environment. Gallery education has shifted from being perceived as an above-standard service to one of the main focus of galleries and museums. The educators in The Moravian Gallery in Brno are being consulted when there is an exhibition project being prepared in the institution and are able to operate with an autonomous budget when creating education programmes for public.

A new challenge arrived with the coronavirus pandemic. In March 2020 The Moravian Gallery in Brno, together with other cultural institutions, is shut down by the coronavirus measures adopted by Czech Ministry of Culture. This situation lasted until the mid May 2020.¹ New exhibition projects were paused and postponed and visiting current exhibitions wasn't possible anymore. The only way to engage with the gallery and the artworks was to participate in and follow the online content that has mostly been prepared by the Art Education Department.

Distance art mediation wasn't something that was a common part of department's focus until now. Due to its requirements on technology and advanced digital skills, it was certainly a challenge for us, but a welcomed one, making us research more channels for gallery education. This study will

¹ Moravian gallery re-opening was on 5/13 2020.

therefore discuss and reflect on the chosen strategy and it will introduce examples of the designed programmes.

1 Moravian gallery in Brno

The Moravian Gallery in Brno is an institution that collects and cares for objects of artistic and cultural values. Including fine arts, ie. painting, drawing, graphics and sculpture from the earliest period to the present, as well as photography, applied art, graphic design and architecture. It presents permanent and temporary exhibitions and programmes related to art and culture. Established by the Ministry of Culture, it is the second largest art museum in the Czech Republic after The National Gallery in Prague.

The art collections are distributed among several buildings owned by the Gallery. The Governor's Palace, which is one of the most remarkable Baroque buildings in the city of Brno, houses a collection with the oldest art. Since 2019, the Governor's Palace presents a new permanent exhibition called *Brno the suburbs of Vienna*, displays applied arts and fine arts from the 19th century. Exhibitions covering other artistic periods from Baroque to Gothic are being prepared. The ground floor of the building is being used for large-scale short-term exhibitions. In the Pražák Palace there is a permanent exhibition *ART IS HERE* which is divided into two parts – new art and modern art. Temporary exhibitions are curated here as well. The Museum of Applied Arts, which is currently undergoing extensive reconstruction, will present a new permanent exhibition in 2021 focused on the origin and development of Czech and Slovak design. The complex of three buildings located in close proximity to each other in the city centre is complemented by Jurkovič's villa. The villa presents the life and work of its architect Dušan Jurkovič and hosts short-term interventions and exhibitions of contemporary artists. The last building managed by Moravian gallery is the Museum of Josef Hoffmann, which can be found in Brtnice near Jihlava.

Since 2011, the Center for New Museum Presentation Strategies operates as a part of the Gallery. It mainly examines ways of exhibiting works of art and visual culture in a museum context. The aim of its activities is to create methodologies, and act as a counselling centre for researchers and museum institutions throughout the Czech Republic.

1.1 Art Education Department

The goal of the Gallery is to be a meeting place that offers the opportunity to spend quality free time and support the emergence and strengthening of local relationships and community. We mainly address the average visitor from the general public.

The Art Education Department has long offered a number of programmes designed for various groups, from school groups to individual visitors of all ages. Educational programmes for schools are designed to be able to meet interdisciplinary links and to be able to support creative activities, which can be used in further teaching. Education programmes are divided into four categories: Education programmes for kindergartens, programmes for the first and the second stage of elementary school and programmes for high schools.

The department also provides art workshops for various age groups of children. These are Saturday Studios, Colors Morning, Family Afternoon and Nutrition. During the school holidays, weekly suburban camps for children are held. The basis of these workshops is the active and creative activity of children in direct connection with the exhibitions and collections of the gallery. The Art Education Department also prepares children vernissage with each exhibition opening, conducts programmes in collaboration with Artothek of the Moravian Gallery in Brno², organizes art history courses for teenagers and adults, workshops for seniors and for visitors with disabilities, painting courses, social events, presentations, excursions and other such events.

In coordination with the Production and Marketing Department, the Art Education Department publishes brochures offering education programmes for all exhibitions and promotes accompanying programmes on the internet via the web and social networks like Instagram and YouTube and especially on the Facebook pages *Moravian Gallery for Children* and *Moravian Gallery*.

At the Gallery, there are currently six people working in the Art Education Department - the head of the department Kateřina Minaříková, the coordinator of the accompanying programmes Anna Šimková, production manager Iveta Valášková, and the educators Michaela Gerichová, Romana Cásková and Dominika Halvová.

² The Artothek of the Moravian Gallery in Brno is a non-profit public art lending library. It was established in 2017 at the impetus of the Centre of New Strategies of Museum Presentation. See <https://artoteka.moravska-galerie.cz/pages/artoteka>

2 Activating creativity

It goes almost without saying that nowadays the content consumers are oversaturated with images and other various types of visual and information content. It is important to note that the audience of today is different to the one of the past, mainly due to influence of online media and new possibilities of participation in developing the content offered. What's more, contemporary perception of the world defies the idea of the one universal truth. Hence, in gallery education we strived to blend the art and the everyday life, giving due importance to the observer's voice and his personal experience. This gallery education is thus based on activities that initiate a dialogue aimed at ascertaining the value of the art works.

We followed the same approach in developing activities and content for online environment – creating a content that involves the audience. Instead of focusing on skill-based assignments, we've looked for ways to encourage creativity and engagement using basic household materials and we've worked with phenomena observable in the nature.

Not using the official fine art materials had its natural rationale in increased difficulty of obtaining artistic materials in times when most of the shops were closed but most of all, we tried to show that the creative process can be in motion (and the art can be created) irrespective of the external environment. Anything can become material for art. It also pushed us to use recycling and re-use the available materials, stressing the environmental aspect of production.

In the designed activities we therefore strived for initiating an action that might or might not result in a work of art, aiming to push the boundaries of creativity. Due to the above mentioned they do not respond to a specific exhibition project of the gallery.

What we aimed to reflect is that while the whole family spends the time at home together, as art educators we have the opportunity to suggest activities in a way that would enable and support meaningful ways to spend time together as the obvious benefit of art is that aside from learning about ones' self, it helps us examine our place in a community or a group; possibly binding us together. As stated above, the inseparable part of art is interaction and communication. At the same time, thinking about doing more together might be stressful while we are kept together in the limited space of our homes, but making these connections part of the rhythm of the day can be very helpful. That's why we also aimed to establish regularity within our content production, reserving specific type of content to specific days.

The goal of our programmes was thus to activate creativity using easily accessible materials, via activities that motivate the audience not by their utility outputs, but by a quality of the experience

itself. In doing so, our activities establish a certain challenge whose difficulty must be adjusted to the audience's abilities to triumph it. Too demanding the challenge, it can become a source of anxiety and frustration. Too easy on our abilities, it is liable to become boring. An ideal activity is thus the one that incorporates a real challenge that tests the abilities of its participants, but where the difficulty of the task is proportionate and the chances of achieving success are within the realm of possibilities.

3 The Audience

In mid-term concept of development, the Gallery set as its main goal for the period 2019–2023 to improve services to visitors by emphasizing the popularization and mediation of art to the general public. During the preparation of the project of online educational content, the Art Education Department aimed primarily at parents with children, whether they are regular visitors to the gallery or they live in different parts of the country. As already mentioned, the premise of activities is not knowledge of gallery exhibitions, or literacy in arts per se, but rather one's own curiosity and desire to create. By formulating instructions and visually documenting the activities, we tried to support the willingness of children to actively participate.

4 Designed programmes: practical examples

As a premise for our long-distance educational activities for children, we have decided to work with art works from the Gallery collections that are available online and follow our established programmes, already known to our audience, in the new format.³ For this purpose we decided to stick with the names we use for workshops for children on-site. Long-distance educational programmes for schools that were closed and had their ordinary curriculum exchanged for a conceptual long-distance education, were not developed by the Department. The created educational content was then published under a #moravskagaleriedoma hashtag on the web, on Facebook, Instagram and the YouTube channel of the Gallery.

The designed activities should meet the following characteristics (requirements): work with universally available means including natural resources, engaging participant's creative thinking, the manual dexterity is individually scalable, and the activity encourages connection within families or communities. New activities for children were published online three to four times a week. One lecturer was always responsible for one activity per week testing the activity on herself first and consulting with the others in the team.

³ The online collection entails over 220 thousand art works. See: sbirky.moravska-galerie.cz.

The following section introduces for each programme its on-site programme target group, on-site and online frequency, online platform it was distributed with and its original accompanying text that followed its publication. The examples of the activities were selected to represent different sides of our focus.

4.1 Colors morning (Barevné dopoledne)

Target group: parents and children 2 – 6 of age

On-site frequency: each Thursday

Online frequency: each Thursday

Online platform: Facebook, activities being published within event *Barevné dopoledne* on Facebook page *Moravská galerie dětem*

The activity is presented in the form of a written instruction accompanied by helpful photo-illustrations of the activity. It builds on a specific work accessible from the online collections of the Moravian Gallery in Brno.

4.1.1 Stone Ceremony, Home Ceremony (Kamenný rituál, domácí rituál)

Inspired by: *Stone Ceremony* 1971, happening, Milan Knížák

Focus: community, self-awareness

Tools: household items

Activity description, introduction: “The work of artist, musician and performer Milan Knížák is exhibited in the permanent exhibition ART IS HERE. However, you can also view his work in our online collections. Milan Knížák organized a number of events in which he tried to connect art and everyday life. Some of them took place in the form of a ceremony. In 1971, for example, he organized a stone ceremony, which consisted of forming circles of stones in an abandoned quarry. The circle around each participant was a magical protection and a place to observe oneself, as well as a footprint that one leaves in place. You too can create your own little ritual with your children, for example on a walk in the woods or at home in the living room. Choose items that are important to you for some reason (favourite toys, books, stones ...) and make a circle around them. Involve the whole family and watch what the circles of others are arranged from, how big they are or where they

are. You can show us a photo record of the ritual in the comments, and be sure to take a look at what our educators surround themselves with.”⁴

4.1.2 Nature, the Artist (Příroda, umělec)

Inspired by: *The hens are painting I pet the dog* 1999, happening, Marian Palla

Focus: nature, associations

Tools: canvas, nature

Activity description, introduction: “When Marian Palla placed a canvas for a work of art in his backyard, he had no idea that his hens had anything to say about it. With their feet covered with mud, they trampled the canvas, creating a distinctive work of art. Marian Palla is an artist who constantly works in the context of conceptual art. It examines everyday reality and randomness of the natural or urban environment in which we live. Now we too will address nature and invite it to the creative process. All we need for this is a piece of natural canvas (ideally linen or cotton). Take the canvas out with you and place it in the woods or meadows so that you remember where you left it. You can throw leaves, plants, the surrounding soil on the canvas and finally sprinkle it with water if there is no rain going to happen. The painting is done within a week. You can complete the painting created by nature yourself at home.”⁵

4.1.3 One-eyed portrait (Jednooký portrét)

Inspired by: *Reduced Portrait* 1978, photography, Dalibor Chatrný

Focus: new media, digital tools

Tools: mobile app, desktop webcam app or a graphic programme

Activity description, introduction: “Painter, graphic artist and tireless experimenter – this all was Dalibor Chatrný. In 1978, he made a series of one-eyed photography portraits of famous Brno personalities. He researched how far one could go in editing photographs, so that it was still possible to know who was captured in the photograph. Why not to try this ourselves? It's simple. Take a portrait on your mobile phone and crop it so that you have a photo with only the right half of your face. Then paste this edited photo into any collage application. In this application, select a composition so that two identical photos of the halves of the face are next to each other, and then

⁴ The original text published on Facebook.

⁵ The original text published on Facebook.

mirror the left photo. Done! Our lecturers also decided to experiment a bit, following the example of Dalibor Chatrný. Which one of us will you recognize?⁶

4.2. Saturday Studio (Sobotní ateliér)

Target group: children 5 – 12 of age

On-site frequency: twice a month on Saturday

Online frequency: every Saturday

Online platform: YouTube, activities presented via Facebook

Video-instructions with subtitles. It builds on an artwork accessible from the online collections of the Moravian Gallery in Brno.

4.2.1. Tea board (Čajová tabule)

Inspired by: *Board, registering blue, blue-violet, red-violet and brown-red* 1967, painting, Jan Kotík

Focus: household items, abstract art

Tools: tea bags, paper, scissors

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SJuAHV-KMbQ&list=PLolgnSkSqOrz44PIAVhuRxa6DpO_yXAU&index=4&ab_channel=Moravsk%C3%A1galerievBrn%C4%9B

Introduction: “On White Saturday, we should clean up our homes and get rid of the things unused so we can start the following day afresh. So how about helping our parents and consuming supplies of old teas? Not only are they delicious, but you can also paint with them! We will be inspired by the painting *Board, registering blue, blue-violet, red-violet and brown-red* by the painter Jan Kotík, a member of Group 42, whose work from the 1960s was characterized by spontaneous and rapid application of colors to the painting, which were allowed to flow freely. You can view the work on the online collections of the Moravian Gallery or get inspired by the video below. The Art Education Department of the Moravian Gallery wishes you all Happy Easter!”⁷

⁶ The original text published on Facebook.

⁷ The original text published on Facebook.

4.2.2 Sensing the Arts (Mysli smysly)

Inspiration: No specific artwork. In a series of activities, every chapter covers a specific sense and the possibilities of using it to discover and enter art. The activity consists of a specially designed game.

Focus: art as an experience, senses, gameplay

Tools: variable

Link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xRsx2t1m3OI&ab_channel=Moravsk%C3%A1galerievBrn%C4%9B

Introduction: “Although we cannot literally feel or hear objects and scenes in paintings, artists often encourage us to use different senses when examining works of art - they encourage us to imagine the textures, smells and even tastes of what is depicted. Using colors, structures and shapes. For example, did you know that colors affect how we perceive tastes and vice versa? In this series, we will try to enter the works of art and gradually experience them with all our senses.”⁸

4.3 And why? A Book Club (A proč? Book Club)

Target group: parents and children 2 – 7 of age

On-site frequency: twice a month on Wednesday

Online frequency: twice a month on Wednesday

Online platform: YouTube, activities published on *Moravská galerie v Brně* YouTube channel and Facebook page *Moravská galerie dětem*

Reading group for parents and children with a follow-up art workshop. It focuses on foreign language art books for children, which are also available for loan at the library of The Moravian Gallery in Brno. This program is provided by an external lecturer.

4.3.1 How to Catch a Star

Inspired by: How to Catch a Star by Oliver Jeffers

Focus: foreign language

Tools: paper, colours, tinfoil

⁸ The original text published on Facebook.

Link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUSW8MtLoPc&list=PLolgnoSkSqOrz44PIAVhuRxa6DpO_yXAU&index=2&ab_channel=Moravsk%C3%A1galerieVBrn%C4%9B

Introduction: “Once there was a boy, and that boy loved stars very much. So much so that he decided to catch one of his very own. But how? A really adorable book with a great message: reach for your biggest dreams and never give up!”⁹

6. Reflection and further steps

An inseparable part of our programmes were the artworks in the Gallery collections that inspired us in creating our educational content. Both the children and the adult audience – their parents – have thus smoothly familiarised themselves with key pieces of art from the collections and with their authors. Online collections were an immense help in this education.

As soon as an artwork is introduced to the online environment, the possibilities of its presentation skyrocket, which is liable to raise some “questions”, especially regarding its reproduction. It is necessary to note that the shown is not the end-goal; instead it serves, ideally, as a means to finding a possible path to the source of ones’ own creativity. The art motivates us towards our own creative artistic expression. From here we then can aim to acquire and develop a specific set of skills, in order to be able to express ourselves on a way towards our own personal goal.

A part of these skills is the ability to use new technologies. As far as the demands we placed on the targeted age group are concerned, we worked with basic mental skills and ordinary level of knowledge of digital technologies. In particular, the importance of digital technologies in the educational process cannot be ignored. They are useful tools for raising and further supporting an active audience. The differences between ordinary education and interest-driven education are principal: Three differences are especially important. The first is that interest-driven art-making and performance, especially creations that employ digital technologies and refer heavily to popular media, are inherently inter-disciplinary, that is, they use more than one art form. The second is that young people produce self-directed arts projects solely because they want to; they are motivated not by what outsiders think or want, but by the young person’s own pride in the work and curiosity or passion for the medium. (...) Third, interest driven art-making is fuelled to a large degree by the surge

⁹ The original text published on Facebook.

in new technologies, which have radically transformed the ability to collaborate, share and publish work, affecting the modes, genres, and ways of art-making today (Peppler, 2013).

The situation might create pressure on educators to learn more advanced skills in digital technologies. As we needed to respond to the new situation as soon as possible, already working in home-office regime, we needed to adapt quickly and learn how to employ and work with a limited amount of available tools that help us prepare online content and find ways to compensate possible lack of experience.

Most individuals, be it the audience or the educator, are defined by various set of interest and capabilities. More diverse intersectional cooperation (science, technology, drama etc.) and institutional cooperation may prove beneficial when it comes to addressing and working with audience online. With the times to come, collaborations are likely to become more useful than ever, even if it's hard for them to garner direct attention and funding.

A great advantage of online environment is its independence on physical space. A space for educational programmes in the Gallery has its limits that, however, don't apply online. The locations or space are no longer an issue and at the same time online everybody has a front row seat. It is cheaper as well.

Online we were able to reach out to a larger number and variety of people at the same time than we've ever been able to on-site. More online activity is also a natural consequence of kids spending their days at home. With the Art Education Department publishing more new content than ever before, the views of the Gallery media skyrocketed. According to google analytics data, a Facebook post reach increased by 484 percent and an interest in the posts increased by 120 percent. A number of views on videos rose by a hardly-believable 9160 percent.

Who are the people this increase represents? We don't know for sure as the feedback, designed in a way of documenting ones' own work on the motives of our educational content was small, even though a call to share was a part of every activity. What we take from this situation is the need to try to create more paths for participation.

7. Conclusion

The study dealt with stay-at-home activities for children and families designed by the Art Education Department of the Moravian Gallery in Brno. The activities were inspired by the Gallery's art collections. We strived to develop such online content that would actively involve the audience.

Instead of focusing on skill-based assignments, we've looked for ways to encourage creativity and engagement using basic household materials or nature resources. What we aimed for was to inspire creative thinking in the context of the everyday objects and situations. The study introduced the specific examples of the activities highlighting different sides of the online education programme strategy. While the online engagement with our audience grew rapidly, our task for the future is to explore more options of online communication with the interested groups preferably using more of advanced digital tools to further enhance interest-driven learning.

The paper and its more coherent passages have not been published and have not been submitted for publication in another journal, proceeding or monograph

Bibliography

Bohumelová, M. (Ed.). (2015). *Rituál múzea v digitálnom veku*. Academic Press.

Horáček, R. (1998). *Galerijní animace a zprostředkování umění*. CERM.

Kesner, L. (2000). *Muzeum umění v digitální době: vnímání obrazů a prožitky umění v soudobé společnosti*. Argo.

Peppler, K. (2013). *New opportunities for interest-driven arts I in a digital age*. Wallace Foundation. Available at: <<https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/New-Opportunities-for-Interest-Driven-Arts-Learning-in-a-Digital-Age.pdf>> [Accessed 15 September 2020].

Annual report of The Moravian Gallery in Brno for 2019. Available at: <http://www.moravska-galerie.cz/media/2192793/vyrocní_zpráva_moravske_galerie_za_rok_2019.pdf> [Accessed 14 September 2020].

Author

Mgr. et Mgr. Dominika Halvová

Art Education Department, The Moravian Gallery in Brno, Brno, Czech republic

dominika.halvova@moravska-galerie.cz

