

VISUAL ESSAY

Artistic Art Education- Learning in Artistic Projects

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Artistic education is an alternative form of education. It aims to develop the individual creativity of each student. Thus it prefers forms of learning that emphasise exploration and experiment. The appropriate form of such learning is the project.

The aim of artistic education is to educate artistic thinking. Basic elements of such thinking are:

- Sensible perception
- productive imagination
- critical reflection
- will power
- manual skills

ARTISTIC EDUCATION

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In combining knowledge and creation, the artistic project seeks to develop these forms of holistic creative thinking. It is of relevance not only for artworks but for the art of living in a global, complex culture which challenges abilities like critical perception, distinction, judgment and imagination concerning individual and societal perspectives.

ARTISTIC PROJECT

Free and structured projects

One can distinguish between free and structured projects. In free projects, the participants have enough experience to follow their own paths of creative work. Structured projects are necessary when the participants are students that have to learn – skills, contents, problems of form. Such a project varies from traditional teaching parts to free experiments of the pupils. The role of the art educator varies from being a teacher to being a fostering companion in creative processes.

Basic structures of an artistic project

- Induction: The artistic project should begin with a task that enables the students to follow their own path to a creative solution. For that reason on one side the task should give enough information and criteria to challenge and to give orientation, and on the other side it should give enough freedom for individual perspectives.

- Experiment: The core element of an artistic project is the creation process. Starting from an inductive task it demands experiments of the students to discover their way of expression.

- Contextuality: This aspect has two parts. At first each artwork has relevant contexts that have to be explored – formal, technical aspects and aspects of the theme the students are working on. Beyond that contextuality in artistic projects means that the different parts and phases of the project are related to each other and thus differentiate the work on the topic.

Operative elements

-Research: In theme-related projects the students have to gather necessary knowledge. This can be done in traditional classroom-teaching if the knowledge is basic for everyone, or it can be done individually or in groups if the knowledge is necessary for individual works on the theme. Research in artistic projects also means the experiment and training of necessary skills.

- Construction: The different information the students collect are not yet a coherent narration. In order to combine parts of information that may even derive from different disciplines a critical reflection is required in order to construct coherent sense.

- Transformation: This is the center part of the artistic work. Here perceptions, intentions and knowledge are transformed into art-works. That also means a change of language – from words to images. The gap between these two languages cannot completely be bridged. That is a perpetual motive for constant movements between images and reflection. In these movements artistic learning takes place.

Example of an artistic project in schools: “Head with story”

I will document the project with photos and add comments that describe the phases and elements of artistic learning. It is a structured project I conducted with pupils in a class 8 of the Benedictine grammar school in Meschede / Germany. 35 boys and girls took part.

Pic. 1, 2, 3

Open beginning. Task: “Draw a head”. No further requirements. I wanted the pupils to draw spontaneously. Pinning some examples at the board we could examine many useful things concerning the ‘head’. Especially the ‘mistakes’ in comparison to the observation of real heads (the students looked at one another) gave interesting insights of something that everybody thought they know well. We discovered anatomical aspects of the head and its details, for instance: position of the eyes in the center of the adult head, form of the nose, expressions of the face.



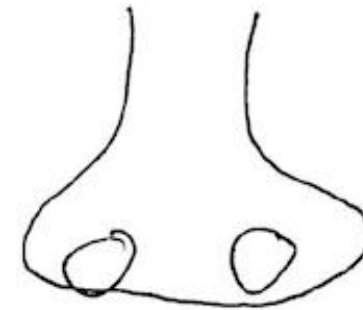
Typical nose-forms pupils draw. We found out that they were more similar to fish hooks, elephant-feet or paper-clips and observed anatomical details of real noses in the neighbor's faces.

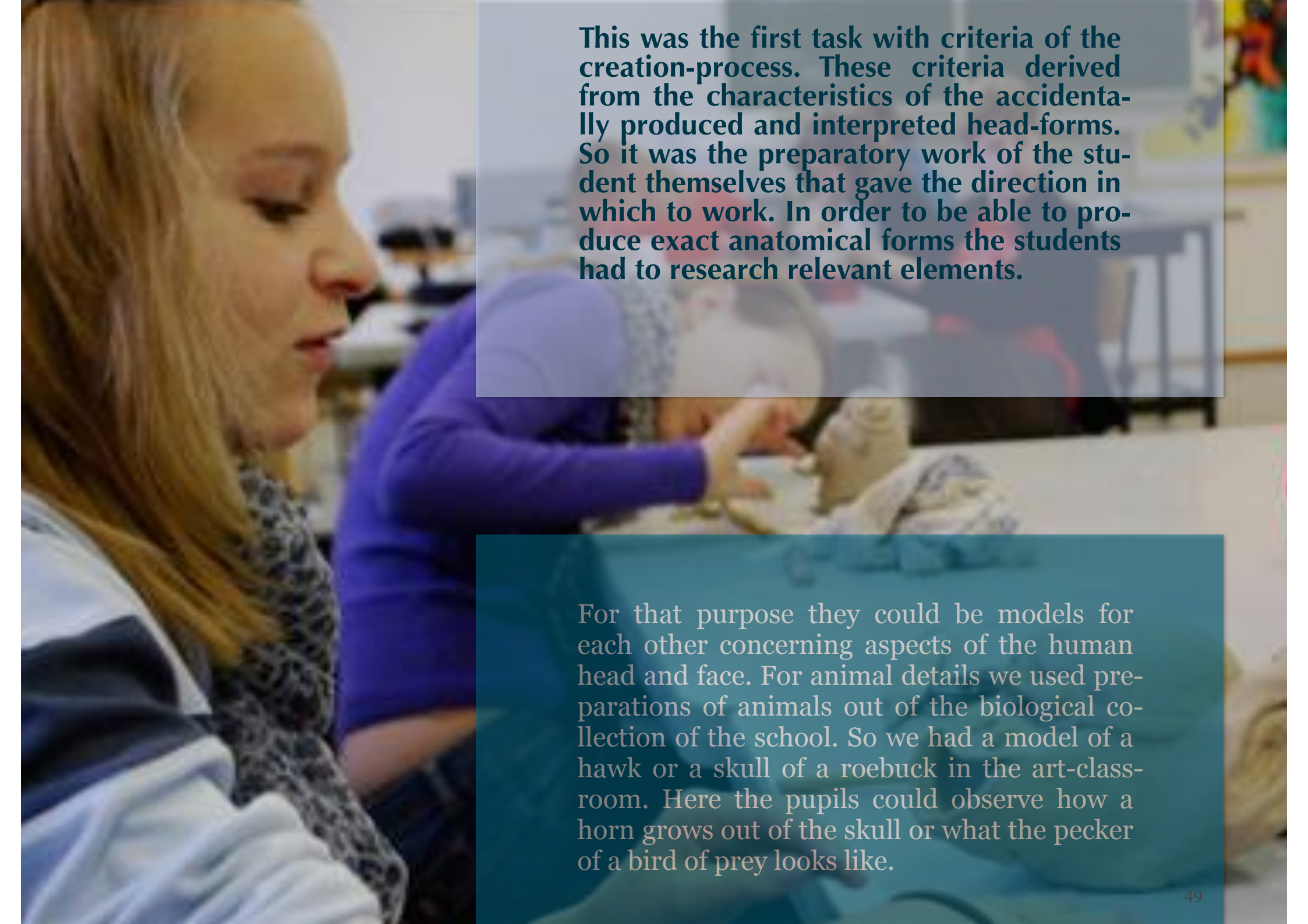
Pic. 4

Interpreting accidental structures. In order to inspire head-forms that overcome the clichés of the first drawings we playfully produced accidental forms in different ways: rubbing structures with pencils, creating spots by clashes of different colors, grabbing spontaneously into clay etc.. In those forms the students discovered faces and heads or elements of it. They should pick out these elements by drawing them. What we finally got were mostly hybrid forms of heads that combined human with animal elements.

Pic. 5, 6

Creating a sculpture of the hybrid head. Deriving from their discovered and interpreted head-forms the students were asked to create a sculpture that rather exactly showed anatomical details of it in a three-dimensional object. We chose clay as a common material because it allows quick corrections and all students could learn technical aspects of its handling together.



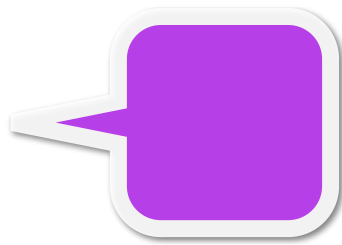


This was the first task with criteria of the creation-process. These criteria derived from the characteristics of the accidentally produced and interpreted head-forms. So it was the preparatory work of the student themselves that gave the direction in which to work. In order to be able to produce exact anatomical forms the students had to research relevant elements.

For that purpose they could be models for each other concerning aspects of the human head and face. For animal details we used preparations of animals out of the biological collection of the school. So we had a model of a hawk or a skull of a roebuck in the art-classroom. Here the pupils could observe how a horn grows out of the skull or what the pecker of a bird of prey looks like.



Intermediary consideration:



Observing the accidental forms, the anatomic forms of the biological models and the developing forms of their head-sculptures cultivates the sensible perception of the students.

Aspects of learning artistic thinking

Observing the accidental forms, the anatomic forms of the biological models and the developing forms of their head-sculptures cultivates the sensible perception of the students. Interpreting the accidental forms and creating a hybrid head out of their inspirations by draft drawings and by elaborated sculptures exercises productive imagination. Gathering knowledge about anatomic details, technical skills and formal expression adds important aspects for a critical reflection of the observed and of the produced forms. Bringing the head-sculpture to a satisfactory state challenges the motivation, the will power, and demands exercises in manual skills.

Examining images. While the students were working on their head-sculptures we also analyzed images of art, media and design that show hybrid heads. One was the gothic painting of Mi-

chael Pacher: "Augustinus and the Devil". The devil appears as a figure of evil, his head and body are combinations of human parts and dangerous elements of animals. The devil returns in popular contemporary media productions. For instance the "'Orks' in "Lord of the Rings" are such demons, like the devil they come from under the earth and are hybrid beings between man and animal. Another example of a hybrid being is 'Darth Vader' out of "Starwars". It is a new kind of demon, a combination of man and machine. The black helmet of the evil lord and his face reminding of a skull are symbolic elements taken from the Nazi organization "SS", a troop with the permission to kill. Finally we discovered the evil look and the teeth of a predator in the headlamps and the radiator in the front part of an 'Audi'. Design obviously uses the demon forms for psychological effects of a powerful car.

Examining those images embeds the creation work of the pupils in the wider contexts of cultural relations. Research and construction of these contexts take place in classroom-teaching or can be introduced by presentations of groups of students. Thus artistic projects combine and work in the interaction of production and reception, of creating and analyzing images and – if necessary – texts.

Follow-up phases differentiate the work on the theme

Drawing a figure. After the head sculpture was done the project on hybrid heads did not yet come to its end. We only have walked half the way yet. The heads were incomplete. They demanded a body. Drawing a complete figure inspired by the head was the subsequent task. The imagination was challenged to create a being with an appropriate body, with certain clothes and utensils.





**interaction of
production and
reception**



Make the figures alive in a story. In addition the students should give their figures names which makes them more familiar. Then they should write a story about an adventure in which the character and the abilities of the figure come into action. We decided that two or three classmates could write a story together because that gave the chance to inspire each other with a story where different characters interact.

Create images of the figure's action. The logical consequence was now the changing from the written imagination to the production of images where dramatic highlights of the story should become visible. We didn't have enough time to put the whole story into pictures because the time of the project was half a year, and we had a lesson of 90 minutes in the week. The didactic aim of the written story was to give more life, more imagination to the figure and inspiring images where the life of the figure is in action. Now the students could freely choose the medium. Some made paintings, others digital montages on the PC, two male students produced a short animation film.

Again reception of images. The first draft drawings of the action-pictures did not show any action or drama at all. Draft drawings are very important for the dialogue of student and teacher about the developing ideas. Without having something to look at the imaginations of what is intended may differ a lot. Many of the first drawings of the pupils showed rather immobile small figures standing on a line anywhere in the space of the picture. So we tried to find out crucial aspects of dramatizing images. We analyzed Caravaggio's painting "The Calling of St. Matthew" and found elements like 'zooming' close to the acting figures, showing them in movements and actions related to one another, the scenery illuminated by a spotlight that came from the direction of Christ.



We compared the dramatic elements of the baroque painting with popular media productions like comics or computer games and found out that they use similar strategies to put their figures into the action of a drama.

Observing the accidental forms, the anatomic forms of the biological models and the developing forms of their head-sculptures cultivates the sensible perception of the students. rent problems which required research, construction of relations and transformative experiments. They had to put their figures into action. The classmates were models where they could study appropriate movements. They had to find information about the surroundings where the figures act. Pictures of landscapes or details of architecture had to be examined, they could be used for inspiring painting or as elements of digital montage.

While the painters had to exercise technical skills of painting details they wanted to show, the producers of digital images could tell their stories in a small series of pictures. For that purpose they had



sion and content.

to solve problems of different positions of the figures in the space of the image and of subsequent chronological phases or events of the action. Many students had to learn certain functions of the program we used (Photoshop elements) for manipulating the details. Here often those with more experience assisted the others so that the teacher could concentrate more on dialogues about form, expres-

Again it is obvious that the elements of artistic thinking are cultivated. The sensitive perception of aesthetic strategies, the expression of the analyzed and the produced images. The imagination of the story of the figures and of their dramatic action in the picture. The critical reflection of relevant contexts: using aesthetic strategies of an image with lively action for one's own intentions, critical perception and judgment of the developing form and content of the work, research of relevant information for details of the picture and their transformation into the work. Here the inherent interdisciplinary character of an artistic narration shows up. The students had to combine aspects of anatomy (hybrid forms of the head and the figure, movements of the bodies), of art history (baroque strategies of dramatic images), media culture (hybrid figures, their character and symbolic elements), studies of geography, architecture and history, if necessary, for their work. To complement the elements, an effort of will is required in order to bring the work to an expressive result and the exercise of manual and technical skills to achieve the result the work demands.

Artistic education and the role of the teacher

Artistic education requires art-related forms of learning. In the artistic project all learning processes are centered around the creation-process of the students, they start from there and come back to it in order to inspire the transformation-work. In the case of this structured project all phases followed logically one another. After the first steps have been done it is not necessarily the teacher who gives the impulses for the next steps. The students gain insight into the logic of the contexts such a



project can display. So it is an aspect of the learning as well to experience that one form can cause the other, that a quick solution has not yet carried the perspectives of the topic to its end. Creating a figure out of the head and involve it into a story were developments we worked out in discussing and deciding what could be done next. Since the students needed common learning, I decided that all move together into the same next phase. So the teacher in artistic projects is somehow a creator of a work. He creates the shapes and the learning-perspectives of such a project by making didactic decisions between polarities. Some of them are: Classroom-teaching or individual experiment, production and reception of images, open tasks and choices of media or more restricted, concentrated learning processes, thematic research and discussion and transformative work of the image.

A teacher who is able to initiate, to accompany and to foster artistic learning processes has to have artistic experience her- or himself. Otherwise the teacher is not able to understand what specific problems arise in a process of artistic creation and what options of learning are connected with it. Moreover the art-educator has to be a kind of 'universal' scientist. History of art and theory of media-culture are basic elements required for teaching in this field, educational sciences as well. Philosophy of art is a very important and often underestimated aspect of the qualification of art-teachers. Philosophy is dealing with the basic qualities of art and deriving from there the educational options and chances of art can be explored. Furthermore art is philosophy with other means. That is its difference from popular media productions which mostly repeat and vary forms and contents that have been created in the history of art and philosophical ideas.

An artwork is a narration for which an individual author is responsible. That is why we can expect unusual perspectives and insights of reality from it. That is also why it is an exceptional space where cultivating basic elements of an existential creativity can take place. Crucial elements of such an anthropological creativity are the elements of artistic thinking that an artistic project can foster. Before art-teachers can teach these elements they have to cultivate such thinking for themselves. That demands studies of art education as an interdisciplinary art on its own. But that is another topic.