

Chambers of Art and Wonder: A Teaching Project on Decontextualizing Artifacts and Crafting New Narratives

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This presentation introduces participants to a studio-based class designed for teacher training, focusing on conceptual creative thinking in contemporary art, with an emphasis on decontextualization. I argue that this form of creative thinking is crucial for teacher preparation, as it highlights the role of art in the process of meaning-making, where craftsmanship is employed for expressive purposes.

The goal of this presentation is to analyze and explore the development of students' conceptual creative abilities within an undergraduate art studio course. Throughout the academic semester, students engaged in an in-depth exploration of studio art expression and the inherent meaning-making processes in both art practice and craftsmanship.

Attendees will be introduced to the practice and medium of collection in contemporary art, alongside various types of museum collections, including those of natural history, archaeology, and the Chambers of Art and Wonder (Wunderkammern). Historically, Wunderkammern displayed artifacts and natural items to depict the macrocosm in miniature, where the notions of 'art' and 'wonder' became synonymous. I will discuss the significance of contextual information in art as a key factor in creating meaning and introduce the creative strategy of decontextualization in art as a pedagogical method for art learners to draw new meanings, envision fresh understandings, and pose questions about the world.

The teaching project, conducted in an undergraduate art studio class, included a field trip to the Athanasakio Archaeological Museum of Volos, where students explored the Neolithic Civilization section. Working in small groups, students were tasked with creating a collection representing an imaginary culture. Drawing inspiration from various modes of museum collections, they crafted 3D objects using techniques such as ceramics, modeling clay, and other natural materials. They then collaborated to determine the presentation format for their collections.

I will showcase the students' small museum collections and 3D artworks, inspired by cultural and natural history artifacts, which explore themes such as ecological concerns, gender, and identity issues. These collections demonstrate how students generated compelling narratives by decontextualizing their artworks and artifacts. I conclude that the medium of collection offers students a powerful tool to expand the meaning of their creations and that decontextualization allows them to understand the interdependent relationship between craftsmanship and meaning-making.

Attendees will have the opportunity to explore the decontextualization of ceramic techniques, artifacts, and cultural items, addressing issues relevant to our Symbiocene era. Overall, this presentation seeks to broaden the understanding of art and design curricula in teacher

preparation, contributing to the ongoing discourse on teacher education by emphasizing the importance of conceptual creative thinking within the framework of contemporary art.

References

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Bio

Maria Letsiou is an Assistant Professor of Visual Arts Education at the University of Thessaly. She previously taught at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (2011-2023) and holds a painting degree from the same institution (1996). She earned her doctoral degree from the Athens School of Fine Arts (2010) and completed postdoctoral research at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (2015). Letsiou has received a Fulbright Visiting Scholar Program scholarship (2015-2016) and a Greek Scholarship Foundation (IKY) doctoral thesis scholarship (2005-2009). Her work has been showcased at the 9th Biennale of Young European Artists (Rome, 1999) and the Luleå Art Biennial (Sweden, 2011). Her research interests include digital media in art education, visual and material culture education and arts-based methodology with publications in international journals and conference proceedings.