

Secondary School Students' Response to Learning the Concept of the Destruction and Transformation of an Artwork into Another Artwork in the Visual Arts Class

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☞ This empirical study aimed to introduce the concept of destruction and transformation into secondary school art education as a potential way of incorporating conceptual and contemporary artistic practices. Experts have highlighted the absence of such content in art education, emphasising the responsibility of teachers to integrate it into the learning process thoughtfully. To encourage students to engage in profound thinking about destruction and internalise the essence of conceptual art through practical experiences, we conducted a study at a Ljubljana secondary school. Here, students created their initial artwork (ready-made), a prerequisite for its subsequent destruction and transformation into a new artwork. We included two first-year classes, exploring 1) their response to the presented artworks aligned with the researched concept, 2) their attitude towards destroying and transforming their initial artwork, and 3) their response to the concept of destruction and transformation through their creative practice. Over four school hours, we gathered data through both qualitative and quantitative research techniques. The results showed that in-depth discussions of conceptual foundations led to a predominantly positive student attitude towards contemporary artworks. They not only understood but also internalised the essence of these artworks, which was vividly reflected in their practical artistic expressions. In conclusion, the study effectively introduced the concept of destruction and transformation into secondary school art education, promoting a deeper understanding of contemporary art among students while cultivating their creative and critical thinking skills.

Keywords: art education, conceptual art, contemporary art practices, destruction, secondary school, transformation

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Odziv dijakov na spoznavanje koncepta destrukcije in transformacije dela v drugo delo pri pouku likovne umetnosti

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~ Cilj empirične raziskave je bil vpeljati koncept destrukcije in transformacije v pouk likovne umetnosti kot mogoč način vključevanja konceptualnih in sodobnih umetniških praks na srednješolski ravni izobraževanja. Strokovnjaki namreč opozarjajo na pomanjkanje tovrstnih vsebin v likovnopedagoški praksi in poudarjajo odgovornost učiteljev, da skozi premišljen pristop te vpeljujejo v učni proces. Da bi pri dijaki spodbudili poglobljeno razmišljanje o destrukciji in da bi prek likovne izkušnje ponotranjili bistvo konceptualne umetnosti, smo na srednji šoli v Ljubljani izvedli empirično raziskavo. V okviru te so dijaki ustvarili prvi likovni izdelek (angl. ready-made), ki je bil predpogoj za nadaljnje uničenje in preobrazbo v drugi likovni izdelek. V raziskavo smo vključili dva razreda dijakov prvih letnikov, pri čemer so nas zanimali: 1) njihov odziv na prikazana umetniška dela, ki sovpadajo z raziskovanim konceptom; 2) njihov odnos do uničenja in preobrazbe prvega likovnega izdelka; 3) njihov odziv na koncept destrukcije in transformacije skozi lastno ustvarjalno prakso. V obeh razredih smo izvedli štiri šolske ure, znotraj katerih smo zbirali podatke s pomočjo tehnik kvalitativnega in kvantitativnega raziskovanja. Ugotovili smo, da se je poglobljena obravnavna konceptualnih izhodišč skozi diskusijo odražala v večinsko pozitivnem odnosu dijakov do sodobnih umetniških del. Prikazanih del niso le razumeli, ampak so njihovo bistvo tudi ponotranjili, kar se je jasno odražalo v praktičnem likovnem izražanju dijakov. Sklenemo lahko, da je raziskava učinkovito vpeljala koncept destrukcije in transformacije v pouk likovne umetnosti na srednješolski ravni izobraževanja, saj je pri dijaki spodbudila globlje razumevanje sodobne umetnosti ter hkrati razvijala njihove sposobnosti ustvarjalnega in kritičnega mišljenja.

Ključne besede: pouk likovne umetnosti, konceptualna umetnost, sodobne umetniške prakse, destrukcija, srednja šola, transformacija

Introduction

Regarding the significance of implementing contemporary artistic practices in art education, Zupančič (2006) writes within the framework of the art-pedagogical concept, stating that art is taught to broaden and deepen our understanding of the cultural environment we inhabit. Due to their distinctiveness, heterogeneous nature, and connection to current social issues, contemporary art practices are attractive to students and serve as a source of motivation for them (Zupančič, 2006). An empirical study conducted by Zupančič and Velikonja (2017) also highlights the role of contemporary art in motivating students toward visual arts, finding that products stemming from contemporary artistic practices are complex and imaginative, engaging students in deep thinking, mental activity, and imaginative ideation. The curriculum for art education in secondary schools emphasises the artistic creativity and activity of students, deriving from their participatory role, along with an emphasis on independent and experimental work, through which students explore their own thoughts and feelings and express their ideas (Učni načrt. Gimnazija. Likovna umetnost, 2008).

The role of an art educator and conceptualism strategies in art education

Motivated students are a prerequisite for successful art education (Tacol, 1999). Numerous authors (Cencič, 2014; Gorjanc & Črčinovič Rozman, 2015; Tacol, 1999) argue that flexibility is the key attribute of a teacher that can greatly motivate students. To encourage maximum motivation, the teacher must select topics that interest the students and offer various materials and techniques that arouse curiosity, interest, and imagination. In the context of architectural design in art education, Batič (2011) highlights the importance of students' direct experience with space, making them critical users and co-creators. The art classroom itself should also be an inspiring creative space where the art educator, in synergy with the students, transforms the subject of visual arts into an exciting adventure (Pataky, 2020). Contemporary culture has transformed the traditional relationship between teachers and students into a collaborative one, in which the teacher and students form a community that co-creates new knowledge (Tomšič Amon, 2020). Glogovec and Žagar (1992) add that in a warm, democratic, and relaxed environment, students become more curious and motivated, closely related to creativity. Tacol (2003) highlights that it is the teacher's task to provide each student with the opportunity to express

themselves in the most suitable way for them and allow for individual artistic expression. Duh (2004) and Marentič-Požarnik (2019) emphasise that during lessons, the teacher should present students with new challenges, dilemmas, and problems through open discussions. Sullivan (2002) also points out the importance of encouraging students' creative ideas, arguing that the complexity of art in today's visual culture world highlights the need for education based on a critically aware mind. The responsibility of the art educator is to shape the content of the lessons that reflect the broadness of contemporary cultural practices and encompass the depth of students' creative and critical abilities.

In this context, the concept of a teacher as a conceptual artist was also conceived and explored in a qualitative study by Bremmer et al. (2020). The essence of this construct is that the teacher's actions should directly stem from conceptual artistic approaches. The idea is based on the fundamental conceptual assumption that the primary function of art is to engage the mind rather than evoke aesthetic responses, emphasising the process rather than the final visual products. It is also important to blur the boundaries between art and everyday life, allowing art to manifest in any discipline and form (even a dematerialised one). Leuthold (1999) adds that students should not be required to create objects and master traditional artistic skills; traditional artistic concepts such as style, beauty, unity, skill, durability, expression, and conventionality should be replaced with an emphasis on ideas, which are the essence of conceptual art. Twardzik Ching (2015) highlights that doubt, which is also essential to conceptualism, has much in common with children's natural curiosity. By introducing conceptual artistic practices, students come to understand that their own rebellious or unconventional thinking is not necessarily negative, and if directed towards creation, it can result in an exceptionally powerful and self-reflective experience. The use of conceptualism strategies in art education is also discussed by Marshall (2008), who suggests two common approaches of expression in contemporary artistic practices: metaphor and conceptual collage. These two approaches offer coherent steps for developing concepts, meanings, and new ways of thinking by creating complex connections and enabling students to develop technical and conceptual skills simultaneously.

Incorporating contemporary artistic practices into art education can contribute to the complete artistic development of students (in cognitive, affective, and psychomotor fields). Experts emphasise the responsibility of art educators to thoughtfully integrate these practices into the learning process (Kemperl, 2013; Kozjek Varl & Duh, 2017; Vrlič & Čagran, 2003; Zupančič, 2006, 2011; Zupančič & Velikonja, 2017). The concept of contemporary art pedagogy is said to be founded on problem-based teaching, striving to establish a

balance among all three aforementioned fields, encouraging students towards lateral thinking, emotional learning, and creative expression (Pivec, 2022). Pivec (2022) highlights that solving artistic problems requires both emotional engagement and intellectual processing. This is particularly important when integrating contemporary artistic practices into art education, as they often rely on conceptual foundations and address current issues individuals encounter in personal and societal spaces (Kemperl, 2013). To foster students' sensitivity and active citizenship, encouraging critical and creative responses to current issues (Kemperl, 2013; Zupančič, 2006, 2011), experts suggest a systematic exploration and application of the principles of contemporary artistic practices in art education. This involves helping students understand and internalise the essence of these practices through explanation, discussion, and their own experiences (Kemperl, 2013; Kozjek Varl & Duh, 2017; Zupančič, 2006; Zupančič & Velikonja, 2017).

The implementation of the concept of destruction and transformation in art education is a potential way to incorporate contemporary art practices in secondary school

In the concept of destruction and transformation of an artwork into another artwork, we have recognised the potential for innovative incorporation of conceptual or contemporary artistic practices at the secondary school level.

Destruction is present in all areas of art and encompasses numerous elements that are key components of contemporary artistic practices, even though it is not explicitly defined as an art concept within the secondary school art curriculum (Učni načrt. Gimnazija. Likovna umetnost, 2008). Therefore, students are not familiarising themselves with it directly. It appears only indirectly in the context of other art concepts that students are expected to grasp (such as land art, installation, performance, photography, and conceptual art).

In the concept of destruction and transformation of an artwork into another artwork, the main art concepts that come together are destruction and conceptual art. The subject of our research was destruction as a consequence of a deliberate artistic strategy or concept incorporating transformation. The premise of this conceptual construct is that destruction enables liberation, inspiring new boundaries of creativity through the process of transformation. In the art world, this would entail the destruction of existing artwork, a necessary condition for its transformation into a new masterpiece. This process of destruction and transformation can take various forms, from physically altering an existing artwork to its complete disintegration and using fragments to create

something new. One key element of this concept is the idea of change. By destroying one artwork and transforming it into another, the artist creates something new and different. This can represent a change in the author's artistic path or comment on larger societal changes. The destruction of the original artwork can also be understood as a commentary on the transience of all things and the constant cycle of creation and destruction. Another aspect of this concept is the idea of preservation. By destroying one artwork and transforming it into another entity, the artist preserves the original artwork in a new materialised or dematerialised form (in an installation, performance, photograph, video, story, or idea). This preserves the legacy of the original artwork while allowing it to evolve and change over time. It also allows the artist to keep the original idea alive in a new form or replace the original idea with a new one as a commentary on the first. The researched concept is complex and multi-layered, and it can be used to comment on a wide range of themes and ideas. It encompasses both the symbolism of change, impermanence and the preservation of heritage. Furthermore, it can stimulate thinking and inspire new ways of understanding art and its role in our lives.

Research problem and research questions

Destruction and transformation are inherent aspects of all perishable objects and are part of our life experiences. Likewise, as conceptual tools, they appear through heterogeneous manifestations in contemporary artistic practices, for which experts warn that they are often insufficiently included in art education (Kemperl, 2013; Vrlič & Čagran, 2003; Zupančič, 2006, 2011). We conducted an empirical study to encourage students to engage in the in-depth contemplation of destruction and to internalise the essence of conceptual art through artistic experiences. This study aimed to introduce the idea of transforming artwork through destruction into another artwork to integrate contemporary art practices into secondary school education. We formulated three research questions to explore the diverse responses of students to the explored concept:

1. What is the students' response to the presented artworks that align with the concept of destruction and transformation?
2. How do students perceive the future destruction and transformation of their initial artwork?
3. What is the students' response to the concept of destruction and transformation through their creative practice?

Method

Participants

In the empirical study, we included two classes of first-year students (aged 15 and 16) from a secondary school in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in the 2022/23 academic year. The sample was purposive, and its selection resulted from the alignment of our research problem with the art curriculum in secondary school, which includes content related to contemporary art practices (ready-made, conceptual art). As the implementation took place in two separate sessions, differences arose in the number of students present at the first and second meetings. In one class, twenty-four students participated throughout the entire research process, while in the other class, there were seventeen.

Instruments

The study was conducted within the framework of classroom sessions with students from both classes (two sessions of two hours in each class, with one week between the first and second sessions), and the articulation of the lessons was carefully planned before each instructional process. The first meeting was dedicated to introducing the concept of the ready-made, which transformed the artist from a 'creator' into a 'chooser', laying the foundation for conceptual art. This was also connected to the first art assignment, for which the artwork was a prerequisite for the creation of the second artwork. The second meeting initially involved a discussion with the students about destruction and included a presentation of selected artworks that align with the researched concept (Robert Rauschenberg, *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, 1953; John Baldessari, *Cremation Project*, 1970; Heather Benning, *Death of a Dollhouse*, 2013; David Datuna, *Hungry*, 2019). These artworks served as a starting point for the students' subsequent practical work.

We collected data during the meetings with the students using qualitative techniques (participant observation, unstructured interviews, documents) and quantitative research (questionnaires). During observation, we paid attention to the immediate responses of the students to new content and their attitude toward the creative process. Throughout the frontal lessons and individual consultations during the creative process, unstructured interviews were conducted in the form of relaxed dialogues with the students, focusing on their opinions, thoughts, and justifications. Documents (photographs of the students' artworks) provided insight into how the students embraced the concept

of destruction and transformation and how they responded to it artistically, as their thoughts and creative processes were manifested in their artworks. The questionnaires aimed to capture concise records of ideas from all the resulting artworks and obtain direct responses regarding how the students perceived the implementation of the concept of destruction and transformation.

Research design

We used observation sheets to provide detailed descriptions of each session. These reports included data obtained through participant observation and unstructured interviews with all students. We made an arbitrary selection of artworks, which we analysed based on the criteria we provided for each phase of the creative process, while the additional results are derived from examining all the artworks created. We processed the questionnaires at the level of frequency distribution (f , $f\%$). Responses to open-ended questions were transcribed, categorised, and ranked in order by frequency. The synthesis was conducted at the level of understanding and explaining the characteristics of the studied phenomenon without generalising the findings to the entire population, but rather, they were related to our research questions.

In the interpretation, we integrated data obtained through various techniques within each research question, related the findings to those of other authors, and contextualised them within the framework of theoretical foundations.

Results

1. Students' response to artworks aligned with the concept of destruction and transformation

Participant observation and unstructured interviews

Based on discussions with the students, we found that the presented artworks were unfamiliar to them but captured their attention, as they actively engaged in dialogue and expressed their opinions without reservation. Most of the students showed a positive surprise toward presented artworks (they found them interesting, innovative, and different), while a few expressed a lack of understanding or their disapproval (they found them trivial and controversial). Further explanations of the conceptual backgrounds triggered heated discussions about the destruction of artworks and the boundaries of art.

Questionnaire

Within the questionnaire, students expressed their opinions on the presented artworks. We categorised students' responses based on their opinions and sorted them by frequency (Table 1).

Table 1

The number (f) and structural percentages (f %) of students' responses based on categories of opinions about the presented artworks that align with the concept of destruction and transformation

Rank	Category	Students responses	
		f	f %
1	Positive opinion	35	67
2	Negative opinion	4	8
3	Lack of understanding	3	6
4	No response	3	6
5	Other	7	13
Total		52	100

Students collectively provided fifty-two responses, the majority of which (67%) expressed a positive opinion about the presented artworks. Within this category, students most commonly wrote that they found them interesting, innovative, original, and different; individual students stated that they expressed good ideas that were fascinating, resourceful, beautiful, likeable, great, fine, or satisfactory. There were a few negative associations (8%), among which some students wrote that the artworks were strange, meaningless, unnecessary, and unlikable. A couple of students (6%) wrote that they needed help understanding the destruction of artworks; an equal percentage of students (6%) did not respond to the question. Other responses (13%) included associations such as destruction, release, assembly, design, and art.

2. Students' attitude towards future destruction and transformation of their initial artwork

Questionnaire

We collected data on students' attitudes toward the future destruction and transformation of their initial artwork using a questionnaire. The table below (Table 2) illustrates the percentage distribution based on their responses.

Table 2

Number (f) and structural percentages (f %) of students based on their attitude toward the future destruction and transformation of their initial artwork

Attitude toward the future destruction and transformation	Students	
	f	f %
They felt it would be a shame to destroy the initial artwork.	15	35
They were not satisfied with the initial artwork, so they were glad to be able to destroy and transform it.	12	28
They were surprised that they could destroy the first artwork, and they eagerly looked forward to future destruction and transformation.	11	26
They saw the first artwork as a starting point for the second artwork, so the process of destruction and transformation represented a new challenge to them.	3	7
Other	2	4
Total	43	100

The table shows that about a third (35%) of the students regretted destroying the first artwork. Meanwhile, over half of the students (54%) looked forward to future destruction and transformation, either because they were dissatisfied with the first artwork (28%) or because this possibility surprised them (26%). Very few students (7%) saw the process of destroying and transforming the first artwork as a new challenge. One student wrote under 'Other' that the destruction seemed unexpected and questionable, while another stated that he had wanted to destroy the first artwork.

3. Students' response to the concept of destruction and transformation through their creative practice

Documents

The first assignment required students to create a ready-made, expressing a certain idea by choosing everyday objects,³ and juxtaposing and combining them. These objects reflected their interests, issues, or critical views on the chosen topic. The resulting ready-mades and ideas served as the basis for the second assignment, which required students to destroy and transform their first artwork into another. Through destruction and transformation, they replaced the original idea with a new one, which could either comment on the first idea or completely alter the concept.

3 The initial selection included around 200 everyday objects, among which were objects commonly found in the kitchen, bathroom, office, living room, fashion-related items, personal belongings, decorative objects, board games and toys, electronic devices, etc.

We evaluated the success of the first artworks based on the following criteria: 1) creating a ready-made (juxtaposition/combination of approximately three selected everyday objects), 2) the idea reflects the student's interests/problems/critique and is clearly expressed in the artwork, 3) presentation of the creative process, and 4) originality.

We assessed the success of the second artworks using the following criteria: 1) creating a conceptual artwork (concept and the process of destruction and transformation, transformation of the idea), 2) presentation of the creative process, and 3) originality.

In the following sections, selected artworks are presented and analysed, while further findings are based on the analysis of all the created artworks.

Selected artworks:

The first ready-made, titled 'Time Machine' (Figure 1), combines a glass, a wristwatch, a keychain, and a paper label. When creating the first artwork, the author slightly altered some objects (cut the label and keychain). The work addresses time travel, as the time machine allows us to return to the past or glimpse the future. The unusual combination and juxtaposition of objects that seemingly do not belong together testify to the author's imagination, who, through visual means, contemplated and expressed complex questions regarding the relativity of time.

In the second artwork, 'Flood of Time' (Figure 2), the author transformed the first artwork by removing the label, turning the glass, placing the keychain and watch inside, and filling it with water. With minimal means, they effectively commented on the initial idea by turning everything into water. The author aimed to convey through this transformation that all things change. The work is highly original, as it was the only one that incorporated the element of water, which, through the slow transformation of things, leads to their decay, degradation, and, ultimately, death. The previously dynamic visual image disappears in the serene act of submersion, where the countdown to its end begins.

Figure 1
Time Machine



Figure 2
Flood of Time



The title of the second ready-made (Figure 3) is 'Frying in Information', by which the author aimed to draw attention to the problem of the information society, which is constantly bombarded with abundant data. To express this idea, the author juxtaposed a frying rack and a brown string. The string alludes to complex and massive information and the chaos and preoccupation of people drowning in excessive information, just like food in a deep fryer. The innovative combination of these two disparate objects carries a critical commentary on current events. In the second creative phase (Figure 4), the author retained the initially selected items and twisted the rack, while the strings within simultaneously became entangled. The second message (people are burnt out from too much information) represents a continuation of the first message, evident in the destructive final state.

Figure 3
Frying in Information



Figure 4
Untitled



The third selected ready-made (Figure 5) includes a wooden cutting board, a dining knife, and a rubber band. With a hammer, the author drove the knife into the cutting board and attached a red rubber band near the incision. The title of the artwork ('Beef') references a colloquially used term for when two people are in conflict ('they have beef'). In contrast, the phrase 'burying the hatchet' means that two people reconcile. The work creatively combines two phrases reflected in the aesthetically refined artwork. The rubber band and the knife incision allude to a wound. You can hurt someone with words, actions, or a knife, and even if you later apologise, the scar always remains. The author's second artwork is 'Life' (Figure 6). From the original ready-made, the author removed the knife and, in its place, glued a string to the board. Upon closer examination of the artwork, we can see that the beginning of the string is burned. The author's new idea was that life is slowly slipping away, so reconciliation is necessary, while this represents a commentary on the initial idea. What seems particularly innovative is the depiction of life with a string, which announces its complexity and transience with its twists and a burned end.

Figure 5
Beef



Figure 6
Life



The fourth ready-made, titled 'Grave - The Home of the Dead' (Figure 7), incorporates everyday objects such as a picture frame, a dishwashing sponge, rulers, cables, and strings. The author made slight alterations to the objects (broken rulers thrust into the sponge, connected by strings, cables piercing the sponge) whilst all being placed on a sterile white picture frame. The author noted that the softness of the sponge represents a grave from which the souls of the dead crawl into hell, linked by the bad thoughts that race through their heads. The artwork is exceptionally innovative and imaginative, both in concept and execution. The

complementary contrast of red and green stands out, intensifying and supporting the theatricality of the artwork. In the second creative phase, the author created an artwork titled 'Evidence of Soul Slaughter' (Figure 8) by transforming the three-dimensional ready-made into a two-dimensional artwork. They inserted pieces of rulers and shredded parts of the sponge into the picture frame and attached brown strips around it. The concept continues the original story. The author explained that the substance in the middle represents evidence found in the house of the murdered soul. The second artwork serves as a hint that the dead souls climbing into hell (depicted in the first artwork) have killed their victims. Interestingly, the student transformed the visual appearance of the artwork almost beyond recognition while maintaining the narrative. The work indicates the author's exceptional artistic sensitivity and imagination.

Figure 7

Grave – The Home of the Dead

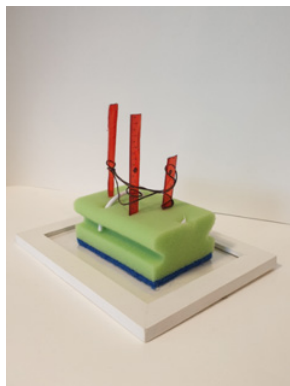


Figure 8

Evidence of Soul Slaughter



As seen in all the first artworks created, we can observe that students chose approximately the same number of everyday objects (two to five objects). Additionally, almost every student juxtaposed and combined objects that are not functionally compatible and are not typically found together in daily life. This approach allowed them to detach the objects from any preconceived meaning and express their ideas through innovative compositions and altered appearances of objects, titles, and stories. Most students connected objects with cables, strings, adhesive tape, or glue, while a few juxtaposed the chosen objects. Likewise, the majority did not significantly alter the objects, while the most common alterations were cuts that allowed students to join individual elements. Their messages were diverse, unusual, and interesting. The ideas fell into three main categories: contemplative and personal (45%), critical and current

(35%), and banal and ironic (20%). In general, the first creative phase produced aesthetically considered, visually clean, and conceptually original artworks that provided a quality starting point for the next creative phase.

Based on the analysis of all the second artworks, we find that the majority included all the initially selected objects, while a few students removed or added certain elements of the ready-made. The degree of destruction and transformation varied from high to low, with the couple transforming the first artworks to near unrecognisability. Students also employed similar methods, with common actions, such as objects being smashed, cut, twisted, or minimally altered. Some destruction methods were specific to the objects contained in the ready-made, such as burning a cigarette, submerging objects in a glass of water, sharpening a pencil, and bursting a balloon. Regarding the transformation of ideas, the majority (68%) commented on the first idea with their second idea, while approximately one-third of students (32%) opted for a complete transformation of the concept.

Participant observation and unstructured interviews

Within the first creative phase, we found that the students mostly chose objects from the selection based on personal preference or whichever objects intuitively caught their attention. Students who were initially indecisive about their object choices or needed help conceptualising ideas were encouraged to include objects that they found interesting or unusual. We suggested they first experiment with combining these objects and that the idea would develop during the creative process. We pointed out that their ideas could be banal, humorous, topical, critical, thoughtful, or personal. This encouragement helped the students approach the assignment more freely and spontaneously. During the creative process, the students showed interest in making ready-made objects, experimented, played, contemplated, and enthusiastically articulated their ideas.

A similar attitude was observed in the second creative phase, where the students were evidently more relaxed. It seemed that destruction excited them, provided satisfaction, served as a release, and for some, even presented a challenge to see how thoroughly they could destroy the objects. Conversely, some students approached the process of destruction and transformation more gently, making minimal interventions in the objects that aligned with their newly conceived ideas. Throughout the entire creative process, students assisted each other, creating a dynamic and productive atmosphere. It appeared that the unconventional art assignment had captivated the students, and during the evaluation phase, they enthusiastically explained their creative thought process.

Discussion

The first research question related to the students' response to the presented artworks that align with the concept of destruction and transformation. Based on participant observation and conversations with the students, we found that the presented works were unfamiliar to them, but their conceptual foundations captured their attention. They actively participated in dialogue and expressed their varied opinions without hesitation. The majority showed a positive surprise toward the works (finding them interesting, innovative, original, and different), while some students expressed a lack of understanding or disapproval (finding them banal, meaningless, and controversial), which was also confirmed by data obtained from questionnaires. The initial negative attitude toward contemporary art was already noted in previous research reports (Kozjek Varl & Duh, 2017; Zupančič & Velikonja, 2017). The authors found that students are often unfamiliar with contemporary artworks and that these do not align with students' preconceptions of art. In this context, destruction, as the opposite of creation, stands out even more, as it may *a priori* seem controversial, especially without an understanding of the meaning and purpose of destructive artistic acts. Zupančič (2011) emphasises that the exclusion of controversial works from art education is not the ultimate solution; instead, there is a need for an in-depth examination of these works, focusing on illuminating their conceptual backgrounds through discussions with students.

In the context of the second research question, we were interested in the students' attitudes toward the forthcoming destruction and transformation of their first artwork. Based on the obtained data, we found that their attitudes were quite diverse. The majority looked forward to the future transformation of their ready-made, either because they were dissatisfied with their first creation or because the prospect of destruction surprised and excited them. However, a considerable number of students initially were not inclined toward destroying their artworks. While the majority recognised destruction as a starting point for creating something new in the previously presented artworks, very few students perceived the process of destruction and transformation of their first artwork as a new challenge. In general, we observed that the students' attitude towards the second creative phase was mostly based on either satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their first artwork, rather than enthusiasm or resistance to the process of destruction itself, which could have brought them a new artistic experience. Based on this, it can be concluded that there is a need to emphasise to students more persistently the importance of direct and emotional engagement in the artistic creation process (Bremmer et al., 2020) to achieve

a comprehensive understanding of the role of art in personal and societal contexts (Učni načrt. Gimnazija. Likovna umetnost, 2008).

Within the framework of the third research question, we were interested in the students' response to the concept of destruction and transformation through their creative practice. Based on participant observation, we found that in the first creative phase, students needed some encouragement to identify with the contemporary way of creating. Through dialogue, we discovered that conceptualising the initial ideas was the most challenging aspect for students. However, with persistent emphasis that ideas could be diverse, as seen in the examples of presented artworks, students created visually engaging, aesthetically thoughtful, and conceptually original ready-mades, which provided a high-quality starting point for the second creative phase. In the latter, students were more relaxed from the beginning, and reshaping ideas was no longer an issue but rather a challenge and an opportunity to embody newly formed concepts in the process of destruction and transformation. While creating their second artwork, students showed no reluctance towards the destruction of their first artwork. They enthusiastically experimented with the transformative potential of objects, and the various levels and methods of destruction were aligned with the altered concepts. The resulting artworks demonstrated creative content both in formal solutions and ideas, indicating that students understood the presented artworks and the assignments. Their motivation was evident, as the atmosphere was dynamic, industrious, and collaborative. From this, we conclude that the unconventional artistic assignments engaged the students, as they enthusiastically explained their creative and thought processes. Similar conclusions have been reached by other authors (Kemperl, 2013; Kozjek Varl & Duh, 2017; Zupančič, 2006; Zupančič & Velikonja, 2017), indicating that artistic assignments stemming from contemporary art practices appeal to students due to their distinctiveness. Students understand the essence of the concepts and can express them in their creations (Kozjek Varl & Duh, 2017), their products are complex, students immerse themselves in the work, and they express their worldview with enthusiasm (Zupančič & Velikonja, 2017), thus actively and critically engaging with the social environment (Kemperl, 2013; Zupančič, 2006). Results from foreign empirical studies also point out that incorporating contemporary artistic practices in the classroom develops cognitive skills (Twardzik Ching, 2015, 2017), broadens understanding of art (Downing & Watson, 2004), enables the construction of students' own identities and the verbalisation of them to others (Herne, 2015), nurtures empathy and self-esteem (Herne, 2015; Twardzik Ching, 2015), promotes risk-taking in creative endeavours and encourages the expression of creativity (Twardzik Ching, 2015). Therefore, experts emphasise the need to allow students to establish a positive

attitude towards contemporary art through their own experience, enriching them in terms of sensitivity, critical thinking, and individual expression (Downing & Watson, 2004; Herne, 2015; Kemperl, 2013; Kozjek Varl & Duh, 2017; Twardzik Ching, 2015, 2017; Zupančič, 2006; Zupančič & Velikonja, 2017).

Conclusions

This study aimed to introduce students to the concepts of destruction and transformation within the realm of conceptual art, encouraging deep thinking about destruction, and highlighting the importance of the creative and cognitive processes. The research findings demonstrated that familiarising students with artworks aligned with the explored concept sparked their interest, enhanced their critical thinking abilities, and encouraged them to express their opinions (Kemperl, 2013; Zupančič, 2011). In-depth discussions about conceptual foundations resulted in a predominantly positive attitude among students towards the presented contemporary artworks (Vrlič & Čagran, 2003; Zupančič, 2006). Furthermore, the understanding and internalisation of the essence of these artworks manifested comprehensively in the practical artistic expressions of the students (Kozjek Varl & Duh, 2017; Zupančič & Velikonja, 2017).

The direct experience of destroying their artwork emotionally and intellectually engaged the students (Pivec, 2020), consequently altering their perception of destruction itself. While some students expressed reluctance towards destruction at the beginning of the second creative phase, they later found excitement in the act of destruction during the creative process. It provided them with a sense of release and simultaneously posed a challenge of imbuing the act of destruction with meaning through their ideas. As numerous theorists have pointed out (Bremmer et al., 2020; Leuthold, 1999; Marshall, 2008; Sullivan, 2002; Zupančič, 2006), this is particularly important because it allows students to simultaneously develop conceptual and technical skills, enabling them to express themselves creatively and individually. In general, the implementation of the concept of destruction and transformation in art education motivated students, encouraged their experimentation with contemporary modes of expression and fostered a deep and diverse approach to creation. Moreover, it promoted the development of key future skills such as creativity, imagination, divergent thinking, and innovative ideas, as noted by other authors regarding art assignments derived from contemporary art practices (Kozjek Varl & Duh, 2017; Marshall, 2008; Zupančič, 2006; Zupančič & Velikonja, 2017).

In conclusion, we find that we can gain much through an approach directly derived from the creative process of contemporary artists (Sullivan,

2002), provided we illuminate the complex nature of contemporary artworks to students (Kemperl, 2013; Zupančič, 2006, 2011), strategically confront them with dilemmas and challenges (Duh, 2004; Marentič-Požarnik, 2019), and continuously operate within a democratic and relaxed environment (Bremmer et al., 2020; Glogovec & Žagar, 1992; Tacol, 2003), where art education becomes an exciting experience (Pataky, 2020).

We recognise the potential for further research in connecting destruction with themes related to the preservation of cultural heritage, which, as Potočnik (2020) notes, are also often insufficiently integrated into art education. Potočnik (2020) suggests that informed art educators should 'guide students to become active and responsible citizens capable of understanding the issues and expressing their sensitivity and respect for cultural heritage and caring for it' (p. 50). Destruction can thus emphasise the fragility and temporality of cultural heritage, while preservation concerns its sustainability and the preservation of memory of the past. The connection between destruction and the preservation of cultural heritage is complex and enables students to explore different interpretations and understand how opposites can unite and complement each other in the context of art.

The duality of opposites (destruction and creation) was also highlighted in this research, in which we aimed to contribute to the development of contemporary art education practices through a specific thematic activity. The research also has practical value in the field of art education, as it contributes to the development of new approaches and methods while encouraging art educators to explore and recognise possible ways to incorporate conceptual artistic practices into the learning process. We suggest that more thematic activities in art education should stem from existential human problems and experiences, which can also be observed in contemporary art practices. Above all, we must be mindful and attentive to how we can open the eyes of young learners to see and recognise the power that conceptual art can hold. To do this, we need to be willing to find a way out of Plato's cave, in other words, be philosophically courageous and pedagogically responsible (Gaarder, 1997).

Regarding the research limitations, we would highlight the small sample of participating students, preventing the generalisation of results to a broader population. Additionally, the monitoring of students' attitudes towards destruction and transformation occurred within the scope of two sessions, a consequence of the limited time allocated to the visual arts subject in secondary school. This limitation in the number of hours poses a challenge for conducting research over an extended period, impacting the scope and depth of the analysis.

Potential extensions of the study could involve a larger number of students from various Slovenian secondary schools and investigating alternative approaches to destruction and transformation (e.g., students working in pairs; they would destroy and transform each other's artistic creations). This would deepen the understanding of their attitudes towards destruction, providing fresh insights into the psychological, emotional, and societal aspects of this process.

Disclosure statement

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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