Student Participation in Gabrijel Stupica up Close: The Technology of Making and Preserving Works of Art Project

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1. Abstract

The topic of this presentation is the participation of the students from Academy of Fine Arts and Design, University of Ljubljana (UL ALUO) in the project Gabrijel Stupica up Close: The Technology of Making and Preserving Works of Art (2014).

The project involved collaboration of multiple institutions and was presented to the public with video and exhibition in Modern Gallery from April to August 2014. Students were involved in the project with painting technological studies of Stupica's paintings and by guiding through the exhibition.

2. Introduction: The author

Gabrijel Stupica was an important Slovenian artist who was known for his distinguished technology. Gabriel Stupica was born on 21st March 1913 in the village of Dražgoše in Gorenjska. When he finished 2nd real-gymnasium secondary school in Ljubljana in 1931 he went to study painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb where he studied drawing under professors Maksimilijan Vanka, Jozo Kraljevič and Omer Mujadžić. He finished his studies in 1937, his mentor was Ljubo Babić, who was considered to be a charismatic professor. After graduation he decided to stay in Zagreb where he worked with Radivoje Hudoklin, then in 1946 he returned to Ljubljana where he became the youngest professor at the newly established Academy of Fine Arts. In the years 1955 – 1957 and 1969 – 1971 he was the rector of the Academy of Fine Arts. He retired in 1977.1

He had solo and group exhibitions at home and abroad. He received many national and international awards. We would like to mention that he received four

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Prešeren Awards, three for individual works and the prize for lifetime achievement in 1981.²

He died in Ljubljana in 1990. He is buried at the cemetery Žale in Ljubljana.³

3. The project

As we celebrated 100th anniversary of Gabrijel Stupica’s birth in 2013 the artist’s retrospective exhibition was staged in Modern Gallery. The conservation project that accompanied the exhibition was titled Gabrijel Stupica up Close: The Technology of Making and Preserving Works of Art.

The project Gabrijel Stupica up Close, The Technology of Making and Preserving Works of Art (2014)⁴ resulted from the collaboration between Restoration-Conservation Department of Moderna galerija, the Restoration Department of the Academy of Fine Arts and Design at the University of Ljubljana (UL ALUO), the Restoration Center of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia, and the National Gallery of Slovenia. The project involved scientific research, examination, documentation, and restoration of more than 150 of Stupica’s works.⁵

3.1. Student participation

The project was unique in its manner to combine the results from scientific analysis with actual attempt to repeat some of the technical solutions the artist resorted to most frequently. This was an opportunity for undergraduate and graduate students from Academy of Fine Arts and Design, who, under the supervision of the project’s authors associate professors Tamara Trček Pečak, MA (UL ALUO) and Nada Madžarac, MA (Modern Gallery – MG+MSUM), to paint technological studies of number of details from Stupica’s paintings. Since very little was known about Stupica’s painting, this approach gave us some valuable insight into his thinking and creative work.

The students tested a number of materials Stupica used in his paintings, prepared different material mixtures and tested a variety of layer sequences in order to achieve different effects characteristic of his work. We prepared supports with dimensions of the order 21 × 20 cm and (based on results from preliminary scientific tests and guidelines from mentors) carried out tests and later on executed technological studies (Picture 1).

² Martina VOVK, Tomaž BREJC and others, 2014.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Authors of the project and the exhibition: Nada MADŽARAC, MA, Tamara TRČEK PEČAK, MA.
The results of the project’s research are presented in the following chapter and were disseminated to the public via video and the exhibition *Gabrijel Stupica up Close, The Technology of Making and Preserving Works of Art* which was staged in the *Modern Gallery* in Ljubljana from April to August 2014. During this period the students who were involved in the preparation of technological studies, were engaged to guide through the exhibition, explaining the technology of Stupica’s work, the conclusions of our research and ways of preserving his paintings (Picture 2). The public showed much interest in this concept of the exhibition and was eager to be further acquainted to the preventive care for paintings.

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*Picture 1:* Technological studies of details from Stupica’s paintings, painted by students from UL ALUO (Photo: Petra Juvan, April 2015).

*Picture 2:* Visitors at the exhibition are observing technological studies, painted by students under supervision of mentors (Photo: Matija Pavloveč, MG+SUM, June 2014).

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6 Authors of the video: Tamara TRČEK PEČAK, MA, Nada MADŽARAC, MA, Matevž STERLE.
4. Gabrijel Stupica's technology

Gabrijel Stupica’s oeuvre of painting ranges from realism to the decommissioning of uniform form, based on the principles of collage, where he experiments and tests different style combinations and then he returns again to the realistic image in the last years of his creation. 7

His deep knowledge of technology enabled him that in addition to drawings, gouache, watercolors, graphis art and oils, he also tested and intertwined painting materials with ordinary objects from everyday life (sand, buttons, textile, necklaces ...).8

He knew the characteristics of the materials and how they dried. He was using his knowledge to create different textures and patterns and he also created desired cracks and fictitious deterioration of the paint layers.9

Testing and experiments with materials did not allow him the construction of classical paintings construction because the painter carefully planned the treatment of the underpainting beforehand and adapted the thickness and the structure of the paint layer. To achieve the desired effect he used various fillers such as chalk, plaster, oil, lithopone, zinc white..., binders egg yolk, glue, oil and various glazes. The composition of the paint layers is very diverse. The painter adjusted composition with regard to the texture and the sheen which he wanted to achieve. The research by ultraviolet fluorescence showed the diversity of the binding agents and various glazes on the painting's surface.10

Gabriel Stupica created his paintings on various supports, besides canvas also on cardboard, paper and different panels. He didn't use only the brush to create his pictures. To create collages and assemblages he used scissors and various tools. By cutting paper, textile and other materials, by working on different layers of the surface and by combining all of them he achieved the final image of his paintings.

Stupica's collages (Pictures 3 and 4) are sometimes pasted on surface and other times only attached to it. The puncture holes on cut-out pieces with chalk marks, together with several deep and enlarged puncture marks on support evidence that the artist arranged and rearranged them on the canvas, exploring the painting compositions. It is hard to determine when the paintings are finished.11

7 Martina VOVK, Tomaž BREJC and others, 2014.
8 Tamara TRČEK PEČAK, Nada MADŽARAC, Matevž STERLE, Gabrijel Stupica up Close: The Technology of Making and Preserving Works of Art, the video, Ljubljana: Museum of Modern Art and Research Institute of UL ALUO, 2014.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
It is characteristic for the painter to make virtual fake collages, only an examination viewed through a microscope uncovers the painting solution.

This is a very masterful solution of the painter to make virtual collages which are carefully selected and put into the picture by fragments. In that way we can recognise the artist's message and the message of each fragment.

The fragments are carefully selected and have a deeper meaning. In the pictures we find small pictures, postcards, invoices, forms, architectural drawings, newspaper clippings, advertisements, inscriptions, etc. The author painted these fragments with great precision and they bear witness to the exceptional discipline of
the painter. Any additional fragments of the fake collage are added thoughtfully with consideration of technological legitimacy, although they may look as a coincidence.\textsuperscript{12}

One of the paintings with painted solution of collage is \textit{Girl with an image of a saint}, which was created in 1960, in the technique of tempera and collage on canvas. The painted fragments are so convincing that the viewer can only be sure that it is a painting and not stuck on parts when he is looking through a magnifying glass.

The image of a saint (Picture 6) and the newspaper fragments in this picture are the apparent added parts of the collage. They are not only accurately and convincingly portrayed but also level – adjusted and thus they increase doubt in the viewer.

If we look at the solution of visual collage from the point of view of conservation and restoration, this is as remarkable as the painting itself because there are no damages in the picture that would occur because of different tensions of the different materials that are stucked on.

When authors of this paper were the guides at the exhibition Gabrijel Stupica up Close, we had the opportunity to talk to the visitors about the ways how the fragments were painted and how persuasive they were. Most people were amazed at the masterly painted works and they claimed that the fragments were sticked on (Picture 5).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Picture5.jpg}
\caption{Gabrijel Stupica, \textit{Girl with an image of a saint}, 1960, tempera, collage on canvas, 130 × 119 cm, private collection, Ljubljana (Photo: Matija Pavlovec, MG+MSUM, June 2014). Visitors at the exhibition are observing the details of the painting, trying to find out whether they are looking at the collage or at the painted detail.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{12} Tamara TRČEK PEČAK, Nada MADŽARAC, Matevž STERLE, the video, 2014.
The students who participated at studying the making of the details of individual images for the mentioned exhibition, relied on the researches that had already been made and the data that were presented to us by the mentors. I came across a fake painted collage that was part of the architectural plan. In addition to the problem of accurate transmission of the issue there was also a question how to paint the plan. I tried a few versions and finally decided to use a wooden stick. In my case the text was written symbolically and in subsequent works the author also painted the text with such conviction and authenticity that the viewer was convinced that the fragment was glued.

Stupica’s drawing is therefore not observed only in the bottom layer of the paintings but also appears in variety of techniques and in all paint layers (Picture 4). It is drawn, painted, blurred, free (drawing), an architectural design, engraved, etc. While creating the drawings, the students had to consider different materials and approaches and sometimes even the layer beneath the drawing which Stupica frequently coated in order to achieve a precise drawing.

13 Tamara TRČEK PEČAK, Nada MADŽARAC, Matevž STERLE, the video, 2014.
5. Conclusion

Participation in Gabrijel Stupica project allowed the students to explore the variety of traditional painting materials in the manner Stupica used in his paintings. By testing and with the results from scientific analysis we attempted to paint technological studies in maximum similarity to the original in order to understand better the artist and his approach. We tried to create craquelires, intentionally made by the artist in his works, seemingly derogated paint layers, sgraffitos, fake collages, etc. In that way we did not only understand the artist better but also had an opportunity to test numerous materials in a variety of mixtures to create different visual effects.

The participation in the project supplemented the knowledge that the students already had. At the same time technological studies were able to be used to present Stupica's technology of making artworks to the public. During the exhibition the public could also look closely and touch the studies which can not be done with original artworks.

Although the painter's technology of making artworks can not be fully revealed nor repeated, a great step has been done toward understanding the artist which is important for conservators executing possible future interventions and preventive care.

6. References


