

PROFFORMANCE+ International Higher Education Teacher Award 2024/25

Symbols in Art: Bridging the Past and Present

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Main topics

Art communicates through symbols and images—the fundamental elements of thought—bridging the past, illuminating the present, and envisioning the future across cultures and centuries.



- Exploration of the historical and cultural significance of symbols in ancient, medieval, and modern art
- Cross-cultural analysis of geometric, cosmic, and natural symbols in sacred and ritual contexts
- Reinterpretation of traditional symbols through drawing, painting, and digital tools
- Development of critical and creative student projects on symbolic meanings and transformations
- Creation of digital exhibits showcasing intercultural and interdisciplinary interpretations of symbolism

Challenge/problem / objective

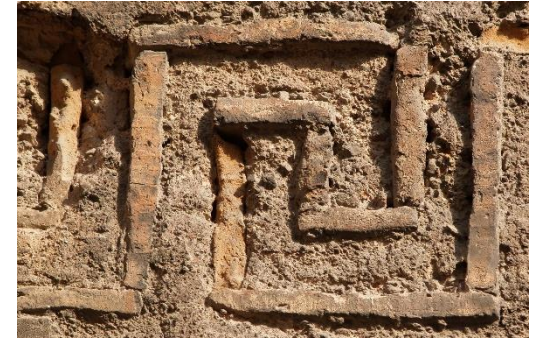
Challenges

- Engaging students with complex symbolic systems across different cultures and time periods
- Integrating traditional and digital art techniques within interdisciplinary learning environments
- Fostering meaningful collaboration among international participants in hybrid settings



Problems

- Limited awareness of symbolic literacy in contemporary art education
- Underrepresentation of non-Western symbolic systems in mainstream curricula
- Lack of accessible platforms for creative experimentation with ancient symbols



Objectives

- Enhance students' critical understanding of symbolism through art historical and cultural analysis
- Promote cross-cultural dialogue and inclusive approaches to interpreting symbols
- Develop hybrid methodologies combining artistic practice and digital technologies in education

Implementation methodology



- Thematic modules on symbolism in art history, architecture, and cultural practices
- Interdisciplinary teaching: theory, critical writing, and creative practice
- Integration of traditional media and digital tools modeling)
- Collaborative workshops and student projects on symbol reinterpretation
- Creation of digital exhibitions for cross-institutional sharing
- Successfully piloted (2021/22), continued (2022/23, 2023/24), now open to Erasmus+ students via University of Kragujevac course list

Tools and technologies used



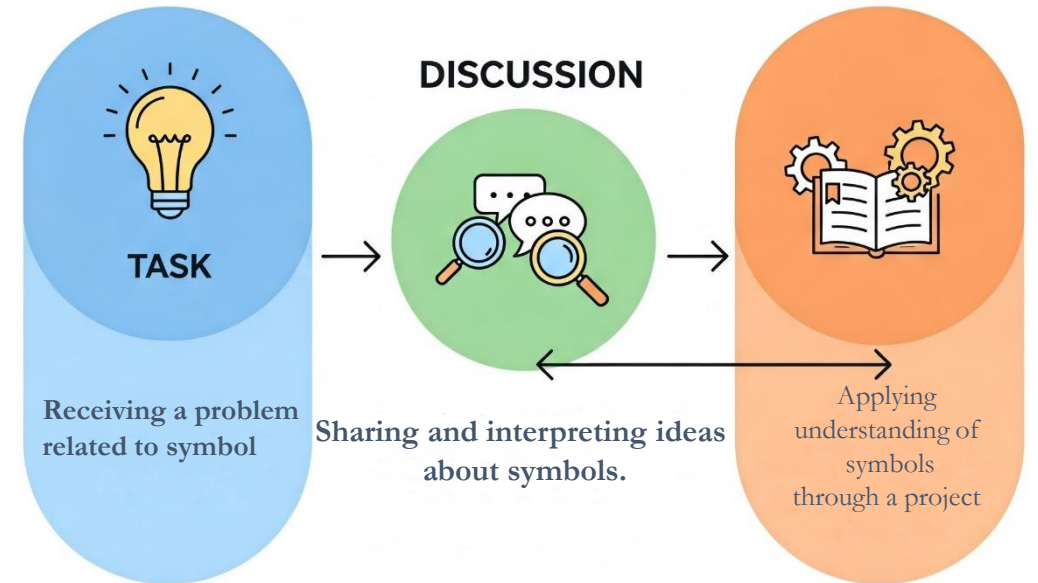
- Traditional art techniques (drawing, painting, collage)
- Digital design software (Photoshop, Illustrator, Procreate)
- **SketchUp; V Ray**
- Moodle platform with custom-built modules and collaborative tools
- Google Classroom, Teachy (for digital course delivery and coordination)

Integration of Theory and Practice through Workshops and Student Projects

© **Ognjen Pavlović** (MA candidate, Interior Architecture, University of Kragujevac, Faculty of Philology and Arts), *Lounge Area in a Business Setting: Decorative Panels with Swastika and Solar Disc Motifs*, 2024.

Outputs, outcomes, and impact

- Development of interdisciplinary course modules on symbolism in art and architecture
- Creation of student-led digital and physical exhibitions
- Enhanced critical and creative competencies through hybrid learning
- Increased digital literacy
- Promotion of cultural heritage awareness through symbolic interpretation
- Contribution to innovative teaching models in art history and heritage studies



Lessons learned: success factors, common pitfalls



© *Lounge Area in a Business Setting: Decorative Panels with Swastika and Solar Disc Motifs*, Ognjen Pavlović (MA candidate, Interior Architecture, University of Kragujevac, Faculty of Philology and Arts), 2024.

Success Factors

- Strong interdisciplinary collaboration across departments and institutions
- Effective use of digital tools for immersive learning experiences
- Clear integration of theory and practice through workshops and student projects
- Active participation from students in cross-institutional collaborations
- Continual feedback loops to improve course content and delivery

Common pitfalls:

- Balanced approach between digital representation of symbols and academic writing, ensuring mastery of academic skills and engagement with recent literature on symbolism
- Difficulty in aligning course content with diverse cultural and academic backgrounds
- Ensuring that students maintain academic integrity and properly incorporate recent literature into their seminar papers while also exploring digital representations of symbols

Adaptability and transferability to other disciplines



Byzantine Versus Modern: Integration of Heritage Motifs in Contemporary Interior Design; The design integrates these symbolic elements into contemporary lounge areas within open office environments, using partition panels to evoke both historical depth and modern functionality (Design: © Ognjen Pavlović, 2024)



- **Interdisciplinary Relevance:** The course framework is designed to be adaptable across various fields, including interior architecture, graphic design, painting, graphic arts, and book design.
- **Cross-Disciplinary Learning:** Students from different disciplines engage with the core themes of symbols in art, enabling them to reinterpret ancient symbols within their specific creative contexts.
- **Transferability of Skills:** The critical thinking, creative reimagining, and technical skills gained through the course are transferable to other fields, offering students the ability to apply symbolic analysis and digital design techniques to their respective disciplines.
- **Collaborative Potential:** The collaborative nature of the course, including digital exhibitions and cross-institutional sharing, fosters an environment for multi-disciplinary interaction, which can be expanded to other fields such as visual communication, digital media, and interactive design.

©Jasmina S. Ćirić (photographs of the brickwork solar disc motif and swastika pattern from the apse of the Church of St. John the Forerunner / Fenari Isa Mosque, Istanbul)

Final reflections

- **Symbols as a Universal Language:** The course highlights the power of symbols as a universal language that transcends cultural and temporal boundaries, offering students a deeper understanding of their historical, cultural, and spiritual significance in various artistic forms.
- **Critical Thinking and Creativity:** The focus on critical writing, research, and creative projects equips students with essential academic and creative skills, enabling them to explore, reinterpret, and apply symbolic themes in contemporary art and design.
- **Collaboration and Interdisciplinary Engagement:** With the integration of the Erasmus+ program and the digital tools used in the course, the project has expanded its reach to external students, fostering international collaboration and creating a global platform for sharing artistic and academic work.
- **Final Reflection:** The project successfully merges the rich traditions of symbolism in art with modern digital innovation, creating an inclusive and dynamic learning experience. It serves as a model for how interdisciplinary teaching, the use of digital technologies, and global collaboration can reshape how we approach art history, design, and cultural studies in the 21st century.



Thank you —  Danke —  Děkuji —  Hvala —  Хвала —  Köszönöm