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Making sense of the Historical, the Modern and the Contemporary Art – an Educational Challenge

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The contents of Arts Education have continually been defined in the cultural climate influenced by the contemporary art. The links between the modern art and the pre-modern artistic period seem to be clear and Visual Arts Education has been able to use both of them and to develop both classical skills in sense of the renaissance tradition as well as to use the impulses of the modern forms. In the contemporary art, these inner links target much stronger in the area of the current visual culture, without tangible links to the traditional old art. We are grounding our theorizing in practical experiences with teaching high school students to propose that there are three principal areas which a teacher can address in Visual Arts Education. The contemporary art employs our life experiences and cultural contexts of our lifetime and is disposed to be relatively easily understood through personal interpretations and associations. The old art is associated with a narrative that facilitates its interpretations. The modern art, in common sense, is as little understood today as it has been in the period of its creation. The current practice of Czech Visual Arts Education is aiming at creating space for the students' expressing of their social engagement, using general visual communication and straightforward expressivity. Its links to the contemporary art are grounded in the similarity of creative processes and their results. We present research findings of two years' observations, focused on the principles of understanding the visual arts in high school education.