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## ACCESSIBLE ART

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### 1. Inclusive silence<sup>2</sup>

Silence of a large discovered, unknown space is enriched with a beauty of the human smile and satisfaction in learning about the world and pure enjoyment in the power of artistic expression. Through achieving the primal human need for creativity, we fulfill the right of every individual to self-realization as a whole personality. The inclusive movement was created with the aim to promote human rights in the broadest sense of diversity. The UN Convention of 2006, promotes the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of persons with disabilities. Implementation and enforcement of these rights requires substantial support of society based on the principles of inclusive philosophy and culture as a lifestyle. Otherwise, assertive but essentially partial approach, manifests in pity and conceals segregation of people with disabilities.

„Ne dodiruj eksponate“, rečenica koja je dugo vremena ostavljala osobe sa oštećenjem vida, slepe i slabovide, van muzeja i galerija, postaje deo prošlosti. Prilagođene izložbene postavke u galerijama omogućavaju osobama sa oštećenjem vida da dožive i uživaju u umetničkim delima jer mogu da ih taktilno oseću i da o njima saznaju više kroz stručno vođenje sa dostupnog audio pomagala. Tako uče o bogatoj nacionalnoj i svetskoj umetničkoj baštini.

In our society, inclusive practice is most represented in education and somewhere in the field of work opportunities for people with disabilities. The right to accessible and regular participation in cultural and artistic events becomes an integral part of the lives of these persons only in recent years. And so it is very important that cultural institutions (museums,

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<sup>1</sup> School onwards.

<sup>2</sup> Article was taken from the *Bulletin - Art as a way of socialization of people with disabilities*, published on the occasion of the Roundtable and the official opening of the tactile exhibition *Touch and feel - ten works of art from the collection of Pavle Beljanski*. Novi Sad, 2014.

galleries, libraries ...) are increasingly opening their doors to people with disabilities by adapting the space and by providing the availability of their contents.

The sentence - "Please do not touch the exhibits" which was leaving people with visual impairments, blind and visually impaired out of museums and galleries, finally becomes part of the past. Adapted exhibitions in galleries allow people with visual impairments to experience and enjoy the works of art because they may feel them by tactile sense and learn more about them through professional guidance with audio devices. So, they can learn about the rich national and world art heritage.

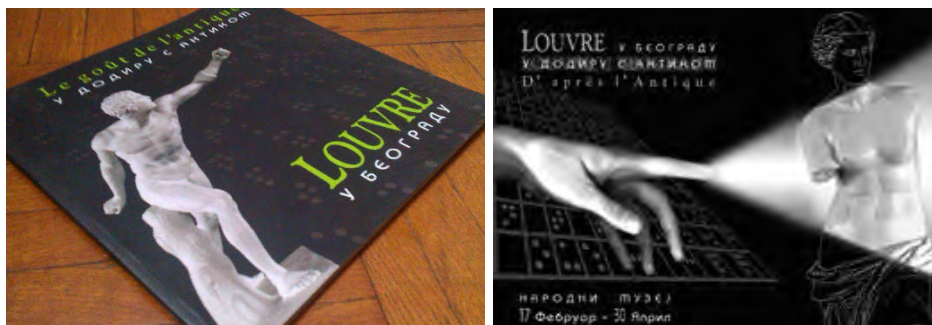
*MA Snežana Nikolić, special education teacher - peripathologist*

## 2. Overview of the beginning - How we learned

The experience of the authors, in the field of accessibility for all, have been achieved since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Firstly, through the introduction of the theory of Universal Design, which, in our community, has firstly been promoted through civil society organizations. A decade later it became a regular practice in the academic community.<sup>3</sup>

Outstanding examples of good practice like hosting international exhibitions such as "In touch with the Antique" of the Louvre Museum from Paris, at the National Museum in Belgrade 2006, strongly impacted this issue and had a supportive influence.

*In touch with the Antique* is an exhibition consisting of 24 copies of sculptures from the collections of the Louvre Museum. Copies of the significant ancient works, including the Venus de Milo, the Borghese Gladiator..., and three sculptures from the Serbian National Museum. Copies of the sculptures are made of plaster and synthetic resin, coated with glaze that repels dust and traces of touching. We learned from the curator that this material was chosen because it is warm, which is important for the experience through the finger. The exhibition is adapted to all persons, including wheelchair users. The distance between the pedestals is not less than 115 cm and its height is adjusted to the level of the eyes. Legends of the exhibits are printed in Braille and Cyrillic script in large print. The exhibition was a big success and had a huge attendance.



*In touch with the Antique, the Louvre in Belgrade, the cover of the exhibition catalog (2006)*

<sup>3</sup> Besides Faculty of Special Education and Rehabilitation in Belgrade and in Novi Sad, the subject "Universal Design Principles" is included in the curriculum of the Department of Architecture and Graphic Engineering and Design at the Faculty of Technical Sciences of the University in Novi Sad, in 2012.



*The Exhibits*

This was followed by the introduction and participation in projects that are implemented by the museums and galleries in partnership with the NGOs and associations of persons with disabilities - where the Union of Blind and Visually Impaired Persons stands out. On the other hand, very important are all the experiences that have contributed to introducing practices in the region and beyond, by study visits to reference institutions with a rich history like Typhological Museum in Zagreb, or the institutions which work for the accessibility of persons with visual impairment in the digital sphere, as Geodetic Institute from Ljubljana, who excels in the development of accessible applications and tactile map.

We point out three important exhibitions:

1. Educational tactile exhibition *The Art of the Raska School* - National Museum, Belgrade (2006).

The exhibition was organized thanks to the training of tactile accessibility for museum curators, which was realized thanks to the organization “Cultural Heritage without Borders” from Sweden. Through the project, the museum got a device for making tactile diagrams on microencapsulated paper. Also, through this cooperation the Balkan Regional Museum Network was established. Within the Network there is the Workgroup for the museum accessibility. The exhibition has fulfilled its educational role and there were a lot of visitors in all Serbian cities where the exhibition was held.



*The Art of the Raska School in Vrbas, 2015.*

The exhibition *The Art of the Raska School* is an example of using existing materials for inclusive exhibitions, intended primarily for visually impaired people and their families. Part of the exhibition material is simply adapted for touching and part of the material is specifically designed to be tactile. Mr Ivan Krucicanin, curator of the National Museum in Belgrade and also being the adviser and consultant in the Workgroup for the museum accessibility, participated in creating the exhibition.

## 2. Project *Art for all* - Gallery of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences (SANU).

Accessibility of the contents is achieved through alternative channels of communication through the multimedia presentation of the exhibition.

"In the framework of the project *Art for All*, performed by the NGO "Center for Development of Inclusive Society Serbia", with the support of Eurobank EFG, SANU Gallery has received a multimedia guide designed for blind and visually impaired persons. It was created in the form of app, and can be used by all devices which can be used to surf the Internet. This guide are characterizes by an absolute compatibility with text to speech software, used on computers, and smart phones. The creation of such a guide was aimed at a blind person. When person comes to the exhibit that is exposed, via their mobile phone, from which they are already signed to the Internet, they can hear all about this work of art as is written in catalog or in the place where it visitors can see. Blind visitor does not have to go in order from the exhibit to exhibit, because a description of each of them has a special link, so that blind people can directly access the exhibit. Of course, the title of each work is written in Braille, so blind person can always know which exhibit to look at the app. We were delighted with so simple and so good solution. Satisfaction is to seen exhibits and at the same time to hear about them. One of the advantages of this way of presenting works of art is that the device can be used by all people, and you need not look any special solutions for the blind, that this guide can be used in full equality, as well as seeing."<sup>2</sup>

*Branka Brkić, Secretary of Union of Serbian Blind and Visually Impaired Persons with coworkers Goran Pećanac and MA Tihomir Nikolić*



*Project Art for all. <sup>4</sup> Photographs from the opening 2013*

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.crid.org.rs/umetnost-za-sve-2/>

Union of Serbian Blind and Visually Impaired Persons established cooperation with the National Museum, Gallery of Frescoes, the Ethnographic Museum, the Museum of Yugoslav History and the Natural History Museum. The common goal was to make exhibitions accessible to the blind and visually impaired through tactile and audio guide and map.

### 3. Project *Touch and feel* - Pavle Beljanski Memorial Collection, Novi Sad (2011-2014)

The idea for the project dates back to 2007. Inspired by the exhibition "Touch of the antiquity", Snezana Nikolic, working as a teacher - peripathologist, socially active as vice-president of the Union of the Blind of Vojvodina continuously addressed renowned museums and galleries in Novi Sad to open their doors to people with visual impairments. The idea was accepted by Pavle Beljanski Memorial Collection, a venue specially built for the museum in the center of Novi Sad which preserves and exhibits a representative collection of Yugoslav modern art. However, the path to the realization of these settings lasted several years.

With the support of Telenor Foundation and the National Office of the President of the Republic of Serbia, an exhibition where certain exhibits from the Gallery had tactile presentation, was opened in 2011 in Belgrade in the Gallery of the Army, marking the fiftieth anniversary of the Pavle Beljanski Memorial.<sup>5</sup> Two-dimensional works of art were presented by tactile diagrams and Branka Pijanac, typo-technician working at the School participated in their production together with Snezana Nikolic. The project was supported by the Union of the Blind of Vojvodina and Serbia, with the resources from their audio libraries, and tactile paths for the exhibition were provided by NGO Altea.

This exhibition consists of a "touch and sound" tour. Besides the tactile paths, tactile diagrams, legends in Braille, copy of sculptures, audio-guide on Daisy flash players enables to "see" the content and form, to "see" and to "recognize" the sculpture. Tactile diagrams are made for pictures of Jevta Peric, *Still Life* (1939) and Jovan Bijelic, *A girl with a book* (1929); two additional diagrams are correlated with a copy of the sculpture of Natasa Boskovic by Sreten Stojanovic, (1930).

The second phase of the project, when 10 replicas of the sculptures were produced, was realized in 2014.<sup>6</sup> For that occasion, part of the gallery building was adapted and the tactile catalog was printed. After that, the exhibition was moved to several towns in Serbia and had a large number of visitors. This exhibition opened the door to the audience with disabilities who had previously been denied for cultural events in the field of fine arts. Supporting educational programs, the exhibition was aimed to increase sensitizing of students to the needs of people with disabilities.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.pavle-beljanski.museum/ovih-dana-strana.php?id=119>

<sup>6</sup> [http://rtv.rs/sr\\_ci/zivot/kultura/umetnicka-dela-dostupna-i-slabovidima\\_549125.html](http://rtv.rs/sr_ci/zivot/kultura/umetnicka-dela-dostupna-i-slabovidima_549125.html)



*Touch and feel, catalogue cover, 2014.*



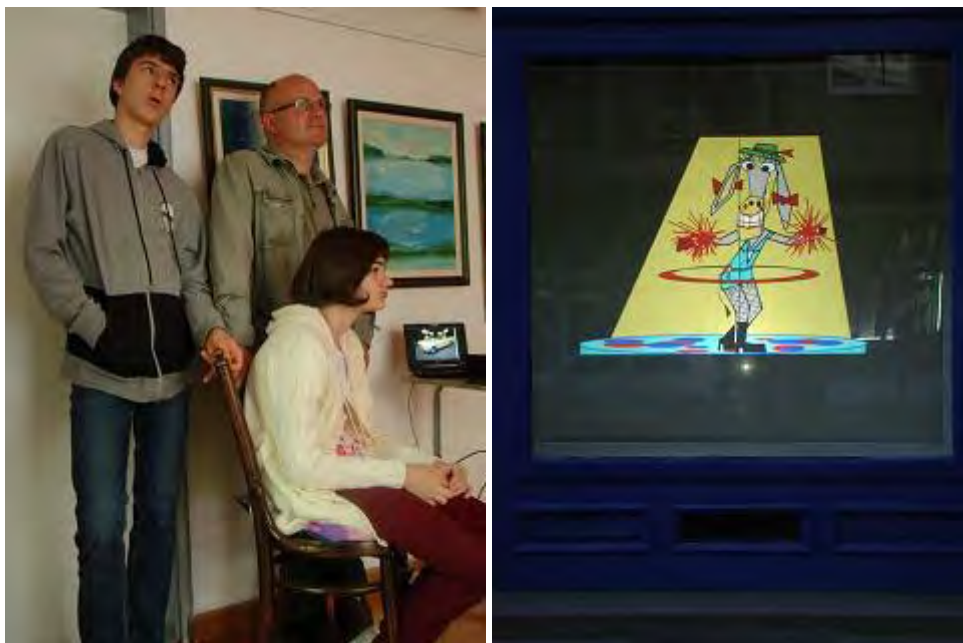
*The exhibition Touch and feel (Novi Sad, 2014) visitors, authors and curators on the Roundtable event, Mr. Peter Beckley, donator of microcapsuled paper from UK*

Those three exhibitions, as well as other authentic initiatives of persons with disabilities who claimed their rights in all aspects of life, made a big difference in the professional audience. Also, the reflection of those events in the media resulted in more and more attention that is being paid to removing barriers in cultural institutions of national importance - National Museum, Museum of contemporary art, the Ethnographic Museum, Gallery of the Matica srpska, Museum of Vojvodina, Memorial collection of Pavle Beljanski, and regional museums like the National Museum in Zajecar and others.

### 3. ESBS Milan Petrovic<sup>7</sup> in inclusive arts projects

Elementary and secondary boarding school "Milan Petrovic" is the biggest, unique institution in the region with more than 50 years long history. Our mission is to bring up, educate, support and empower children and adults with all kinds of disabilities following their needs through numerous contemporary and innovative programmes and activities.

We are involved in education, social welfare and health care of our beneficiaries and we apply multidisciplinary approach to help their inclusion into the society throughout their life time. We have more than 1200 beneficiaries, aged 1 to 65. Our programs include pre-school education and elementary education aimed at children. Also, we have secondary vocational school where we work with adolescents as well as adult's education, day care centres and supported living in the community for adults. Our Service Support Centre, amongst other, provides Parent's support and Family support services. We have been conducting numerous workshops and projects targeted at our beneficiaries and their families regarding their social welfare and health care.



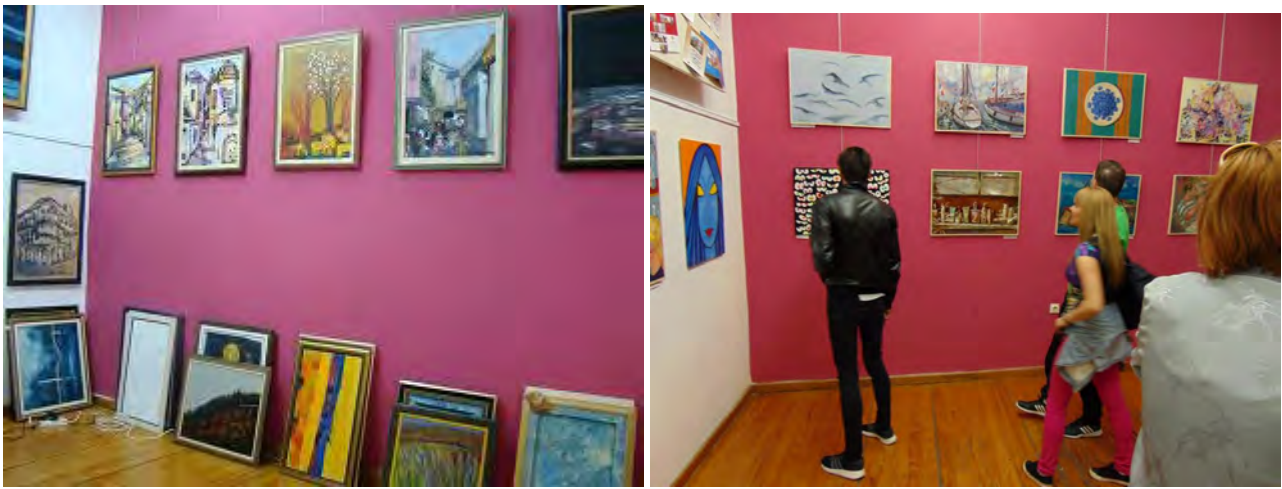
*Video projection of students works (authors Srdjan Vucelja, Anamarija Brasnjo, Jelena Damnjanović) on the shopwindow of the School's gallery "Atelier MP" during Museum Night (May 2012)*

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<sup>7</sup> [www.smp.edu.rs](http://www.smp.edu.rs)

#### 4. Schools Gallery<sup>8</sup>

Our institution developed a strong relations with a huge number of visual artist and art institutions / NGO`s in local (and wider) community. Since 1997, the School has been organizing humanitarian Art Summit „Beetwen two bridges“ where we introduce artist with life of persons with disabilities. The result is the School`s Gallery with more then 100 object of contemporary art (beside the income from humanitarian auction of art which we used to improve our educational resources as well). Some of these artist were inspired to create a accessible pieces of artwork, and others started to include persons with disabilities (from our institution) in their respective art project.



*Atelier MP, School Gallery (2015)*



*School "Milan Petrovic" - Main hall as Gallery of Art*

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/Atelje-MP-1699139350322178/?fref=ts>





*An inclusive exhibition „Additional classes of drawing” produced by Sok zadruga (Shock Alliance) showing co-works of art made by members of the association and beneficiary from the School, painted and drawn together on the same canvases. Photo from the Moderna galerija in Nis (August 2016)*



*“Something nice in you” - Retrospective 2005-2010 in the framework of the project “Art and Inclusion” produced by Per.Art Association, Gallery of the Matica srpska” (February 2010)*

## **5. Art workshops at the School**

The establishment of *Art Workshop* within the school Work Centre is the result of the tendency to promote people with disabilities as authentic visual artists, recognized by the art community as equals. The Art Workshop brings together talented young people with disabilities who chose visual arts as their vocation. These young artists have gained artistic practice and participation in the

projects of several art associations. Highlights: ten-year project *Art and Inclusion*<sup>9</sup> Association Per.Art; *Reciklart*<sup>10</sup> project that lasted for three years in cooperation with the Academy of Arts; *At the same task* accomplished in the years-long artistic exchange with the group Led Art (now Shock zadruga); fruitful cooperation with the Memorial collection of Pavle Beljanski - institution of culture which is the leader in the field of museum accessibility and which repeatedly exhibits art work of our students and beneficiaries.



A large collection of art works created during these projects are now exhibited in the corridors of our secondary school, paying tribute to their talent and hard work.



The first exhibition of the newly formed Art workshop was opened on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2016 - during the Conference on the employment of persons with disabilities in the Provincial Government's Educational Center.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/PerArt-132080216888687/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://akademija.uns.ac.rs/tag/izlozbe/page/10/?lang=lat>



*The Exhibition of Art Workshop, Novi Sad, Educational Centre (2016)*

## **5. Nikola Dzafo`s Art**

We strongly emphasize the artistic “Accessibility for all” concept of renowned contemporary artist Nikola Dzafo (1950). The School has a long-term cooperation with him, and his two large instalations make the central point of the School`s art collection.

Dzafo describes his vision of interaction:

Interactive art breaks down the barrier between art and consumer. It unmaskes common perception of visual art being available from a distance. Permissible and obligatory moment of joint participation enhances visual arts. It provides an opportunity for a new approach and experimentation when creating objects thus bringing a work of art closer to people with physical or mental disabilities, which are thought not to need this kind of art.



Mechanical installation *Rabbit Field* was premiered at Nikola Džafo's solo exhibition *Lepus in fabula*, organized in the Museum of Contemporary Art, in the spring 2011. The author has received the prestigious *Politika's Award* for this exhibition and the *Lepus in fabula* was named the best exhibition in Serbia in 2011.

The installation consists of three fields: in the each field there are 36 rabbits (108 figures in total) which, when the shafts rotate, "come to life" thus creating an impression of them racing. The rabbits also move the front and hind legs and ears. There is also a sound-producing mechanism that "scare" rabbits and makes them run away. The artwork establishes communication. The ability to participate transforms observers into stakeholders, it intrigues, thought-provokes, cases action or a game and creates good feelings.

This artwork takes on a new role as a focal point in the space of the entrance hall in the secondary school and thus the provokes youngest population with incentives and support.



Another important Dzafo`s artwork in the School is also provided thanks to the support of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Serbia. This is another interactive object - painting on an old school blackboard called interactive teaching tool "Look, art does not bite."<sup>11</sup> The work was created

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<sup>11</sup> (...) The surrounding world is open to our haptic Sense only when the body comes into contact with objects. The primary sensory material haptic senses as such is what the act of touching and handling objects creates an impression that is different from all other impressions of our senses. (...) It is known that a man about 90% of the information from the surrounding world receives the right sense of vision, but also it is known that there is a compensation process, which allows us to perceive things and phenomena through other senses. One need only recall the maxim that contain the essence of what I'm saying, for example: The eyes see, the brain sees. Or: It seems not to see, to be brain in a jar. The first time I Nikola Džafo put forward the idea of images for the blind I was pleasantly surprised and, why not say, enthusiastic. At no point did not doubt the success of this enterprise, because a good idea means half success. This exhibition should draw attention to the work of fine artists but also, and to the needs of blind persons, which are no less art lovers from the rest of the population.

Velibor Pilic, editor of the newspaper for the blind

(...) The basic principle is contained in the recommendation "see by touch without hesitation," and all visitors are required to explore the exhibits by touching. The goal of the project is multiple: improving the quality of life of people with disabilities, tolerance and dialogue between the two groups of people who are often restrained in their mutual contacts, convergence and habituation people without disabilities at the presence "of disabled", that society often labeled as "second-class citizens". The art of touching breaks down the barriers between art and consumer, unmask and exposes the common perception of visual art that is accessible from a distance, which is kept behind glass or displayed at a safe distance restricted with a gallery ribbon. Permissible and obligatory tactile moment enhances the visual arts, provides an opportunity for a new approach and experimentation when creating objects, installations and paintings. This approach to art is known in the developed world and is called the "trust of the living image". It is available in special departments of the museum where the visual arts, through relief and sound package, approaching the blind people.

in the period 2002-2010. It belongs to a series of educational tools. It consists of 30 parts, each representing a head of an angry dog. Each head has one letter of Braille, which can be explored by tapping, a visitor / user will have the opportunity to play, trying to find appropriate places on the board following 30 letters of Braille. It is designed for the visually impaired and blind, with a note "explore by touch, without hesitation."



*Nikola Dzafo, Look, art does not bite, 2010*



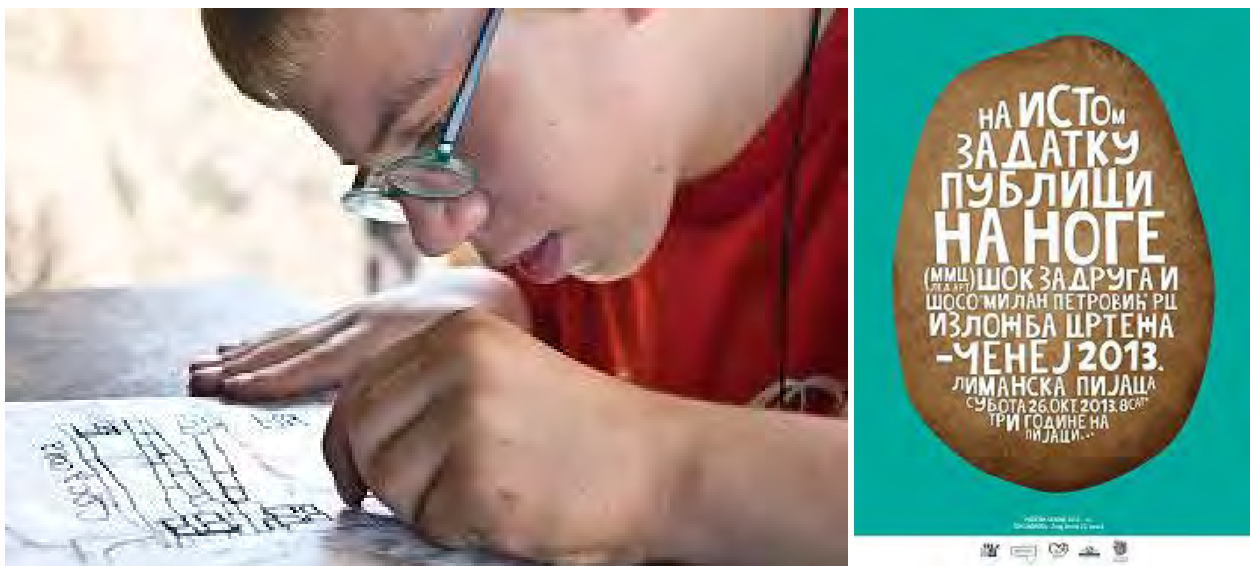
*Nikola Dzafo, Look, art does not bite, detail*

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The primary sensory material haptic senses is what the act of touching and handling objects creates an impression that is different from all other impressions of our senses, explains Pilic. Džafo dogs, rabbits and penguins are not ordinary animals. They took us out of the art world of pure aesthetics and introduced in the region of perception and understanding. We looked, and we have not seen. We heard, but not understood. Tap and, sure Džafo, we'll find. Svetozar Postic (from the Review)

## 6. Establishing Inclusive Gallery

Close cooperation with the artistic circle around Nikola Džafo, assembled in Šok Zadruga (*Shock Alliance*) association, has resulted in the establishment of *Shok School gallery* within the School. Shock Alliance had the idea to dislocate art from the city center and the elite venues of culture. They achieved their goal by establishing several "mini" galleries which are located in the different spaces in residential neighborhoods. The young, socially engaged artists are well aware of the social context of their work. Therefore, the exhibition spaces were found in the atmosphere where no one expected - and are intended for audience from non-gallery consumers population. One of the goals is to achieve the right attitude towards art and actively involve persons with disabilities as equal authors.



Therefore, the artist Dejan Jankov donated his mobile gallery (object size 2,5x2,5x2,5) specifically for the Inclusive gallery in the School. The first exhibition in this space will be organized by the end of January 2017, within a Project for accessible artwork:

What is art for all? Who is it for?

Everyone, but primarily for those

- Who can not see, but can touch and can smell
- Who can not hear, but feel the vibrations
- Who understand when they are explained
- Who are happy when they have a chance

Accessible art allows direct communication with his audience.

Accessible art meets all the senses.

Accessible art can be viewed, listened to, touched, smelled, felt, intuited ...



*Dejan Jankov, Mobile Gallery (2014-16) Preparation for the tactile exhibition*

## 7. Plans for the Future



In part of the program of the European capital of culture (which will be realized in our city in the year 2021) our plan is to achieve significant improvement in accessibility of the museums and galleries. Our objective is better accessibility of cultural heritage for people with disability through the project „Let`s Meet the Cultural Heritage Using All the Senses“<sup>12</sup>. The project is aimed at formation of permanent multi-sensory museum exhibits created on the Universal design principles. This project will enable children with disabilities to start to nurture desire for art, to develop culture and to better and easier understand history, from an early age. It will let the whole population to experience visual culture using other senses and therefore contemplating it from multiple aspects. The outcome of this project is to continuously sensitize local community and visitors of the cultural needs of every member of society.



*Inclusive Creative Center is a of ESBS “Milan Petrovic”, Novi Sad*

<sup>12</sup> <http://novisad2021.rs/en/bidbook/?jez=lat>



About the Authors:

**MA Snezana Nikolic** is the special education teacher – peripathologist in ESBS “Milan Petrovic” since 1998. Ms. Nikolic is dedicated to working with the youngest children with visual impairment, and she also coordinates the School’s service for the early childhood development. Ms. Nikolic serves as a vice-president of Union of Blind and Visually Impaired Persons of Vojvodina Province, where she promotes principles of Universal design and Accessibility for All.

**Mirjana Isakov** has a degree in fine arts, but has been professionally engaged as an art teacher and a designer. She has been working in the ESBS “Milan Petrovic” since 2000 as a program coordinator in the vocational education. Besides that, Ms. Isakov is actively involved in the field of assistive technology and IT, and takes care of accessibility in the School.

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