

Denis Detling

Art and Regime



Key question



Art had nothing to do with politics. To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Topic

Political crisis following the assassination in the Assembly took the King towards the introduction of (personal) dictatorship. Integrated Yugoslav political persecution, censorship, restricting civil liberties, were some of the features of the dictatorship of King Alexander. If we add them and the bad economic situation, as a reflection of the Great Depression, we can talk about the basic features of what it was like in the 1930s in Yugoslavia. The key question is how did this affect the art and what was the relationship between art and the regime.

Although the issue is not sensitive or controversial, it is interesting due to the fact that a view to political topic comes from a different angle - art. The question of the relationship between art and the regime is seen in this case through the prism of the Group of 'Zemlja', Spring Exhibition in Belgrade, and two world-renowned artists - Antun Augustincic and Ivan Mestrovic. Although the arts (not only at that time) interested a small number of people and although it was concentrated in large centers - especially Zagreb and Belgrade, it is important because it is a reflection of the situation in the state and society, and it is a reflection of thought and actions of political and cultural elite.

The goal of the workshop is to show, with the help of few sources, a relationship between (visual) art and the regime of King Alexander in the 1930s and the idea of national Unitarianism, but also the relationship of the regime towards (visual) art. The purpose of the workshop is to attempt to achieve the goal of critical thinking with the help of historical

Learning outcomes

- Students will learn about the artist group 'Zemlja', Antun Augustincic, Ivan Mestrovic, Spring exhibitions in Belgrade in the 1930s in Kingdom of Yugoslavia
- They will be able to understand the position of artist towards the regime and vice versa
- They will be able to take their standpoint and express their opinion with arguments

Aims

- Make a critical analysis of historical sources.
- Give three perspectives to the topic Art and Regime using selected materials.
- Show relations between (visual) art and regime of King Alexander in the 1930s, an idea of national unitarism, bit also relation of the regime towards the Art.
- Show the position of an artist towards the regime.
- Use art as historical sources.
- Achieve critical thinking using historical sources and encourage discussion.

Teaching guideline

Students will acquire knowledge, understanding and insight of the topic through the selected materials – sources (pictures, written sources, maps) and prepared introduction texts. Selected material gives three various perspectives to the topic of art and regime. Work with sources and multiperspectivity should help to understand the topic and answer the key question.

STEP 1

Introduction - explanation of the workshop, and giving the key question: "Art had nothing to do with politics" To what extent do you agree with this statement?

STEP 2

Students are working in three groups with selected sources and additional help from texts or maps. They have four types of sources – written, pictures, maps and art reproductions. All three groups have the same task, but different claims – they should find out which of the enclosed claims are correct and they should provide arguments for their position.



45
minutes

Group 1

Sources: The talk between the King and Ivan Mestrovic; Olga Manojlović about the Glorification of the Rulers; Map of public monuments to King Alexander (and Peter) by Antun Augustincic; Monument to King Aleksandar in Varazdin and Tito in Kumrovec by Antun Augustincic; Sculpture 'The Drunks'

Claims:

Mestrovic and Augustincic were critical towards the regime.

Artistic work of Augustincic and Mestrovic was in service of the regime.

Mestrovic and Augustincic were politically engaged.

Artistic work of Augustincic and Mestrovic glorify the regime of the King.

Augustincic and Mestrovic were, first and foremost, excellent artists.

Group 2

Sources: Absence of some of the best artists in the Spring exhibition; Purchase of artworks according to the number of pieces and price; The names (titles) of the purchased artworks by the Palace (with additional map); The Palace proposal for the purchase of paintings and sculptures; Importance of artwork purchase

Claims:

Artist at the Spring exhibitions were promoting Yugoslav unity in art

Spring exhibitions were bringing together exceptional artists from all over Yugoslavia.

The Palace (The King) and the Ministry supported generously exhibitions in order to promote Yugoslav unity.

The Palace (The King), when purchasing artwork, took into account only the quality of the works.

Group 3

Sources: Program of Group 'Zemlja'; Tabakovic: Cult of idiotism (1929), Vanja Radaus: Confession (1932); Krsto Hegedusic: Requisition (1929); Antun Mezdjic: Garbage (1932); Oton Postruznik: Salutation (1932); Zeljko Hegedusic: 6.1 (1935)

¹ The title 6.1 implies the date 6th of January (1929), the day of commencement of King Alexander dictatorship (interpreter's remark)

Claims:

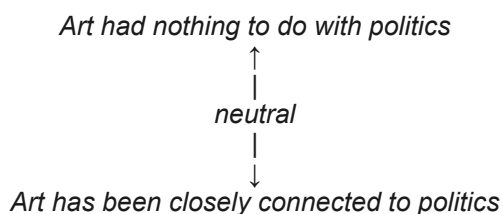
Artistic works of Group 'Zemlja' artists express criticism of social, political and economic conditions.

Artistic works of Group 'Zemlja' artists were supporting the regime policy.

Group 'Zemlja' program reflected its willingness to criticize the current situation and therefore the Group was prohibited.

STEP 3

Representatives of each group should make a mark on a line/span (between two extreme claims: Art had nothing to do with politics / Art has been closely connected to politics) reflecting the arguments from respective group work.



STEP 4

Final debate about the key question.

Group 1

Claims

Which of the following claims are correct? Explain with the help of sources!

- Mestrovic and Augustincic were critical towards the regime.
- Artistic work of Augustincic and Mestrovic was in service of the regime.
- Mestrovic and Augustincic were politically engaged.

Context

Antun Augustincic and Ivan Mestrovic were among the most significant sculptors in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia between the two wars, and on top of that, artists of world's fame. In the example of the two sculptors, it is possible to partially show the relation of art towards the regime of King Alexander.

Ivan Mestrovic was the most famous Croatian sculptor and one of the greatest contemporary artists in the world in the 20th century. While he was politically engaged until the end of the WW1, working on the Yugoslav idea, Mestrovic skilfully evaded direct political conflicts in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

In the beginning of 1930s he exhibited his works in Zagreb and Belgrade (among others also at 2nd and 4th Spring exhibitions), in Europe (London, Paris, Berlin, Prague, Manchester, Leeds, Belfast, Munich, Valencia, Barcelona, Vienna, Zurich, Brussels...) and the US (Chicago, New York).

Along with Mestrovic, Antun Augustincic was certainly the most significant Croatian sculptor of the 20th century, also world famous for his monuments made all around the world. Augustincic was one of the founders of the artist's Group 'Zemlja', which he abandoned in 1933. Since 1930s he intensified his work on public monuments. Participating in and often winning at numerous public tenders for monuments, in Yugoslavia and abroad, he received a reputation of a 'monument master', especially with figures of horses involved, which brought him the status among his colleagues of the first state sculptor.

Source 1

The talk between the King and Ivan Mestrovic

This talk took place during the posing for making of the bust, after the Zagreb magazine (very pro-Yugoslav) Nova Europa, published by Dr. Milan Curcin, in its edition of 26 January 1929 published a statement titled 'The new state' signed by: Dr. Laza Popovic, Dr. Ivan Politeo, Dr. Ivan Belin, Dr. Milan Curcin and Mestrovic. The statement criticized the establishment of dictatorship as a non-democratic way of solving the problems. That issue of Nova Europa was prohibited due to that statement.

"And what is he doing, this Curcin of yours? Can he not see that this is not England and that things here cannot be treated as in England?... I will lock him up. I will put him on court.

- If so, then we all have to go before the court, all of us who signed the statement.

- Not necessarily. If some of you I don't want to put in prison, you for example, but others I want to lock up, who can do anything about it?

- Well, yes, he wrote the statement, but all of us other signed it, too. He read us the statement, and we, with minor comments, agreed and signed it. Thus I think it right – if it is right – we should all stand for it equally, if we are accountable.

The King remained silent for a long while, and then he smiled and said:

- We shall see what will be with that. This time he chose a good company, but, unless he comes back to reason, nothing will help him.

- Dr. Curcin wishes good to our country, at least as much as anybody.

- I am inclined to believe that, but there are others who wish good to our country, yet they need to be silenced, for how they would like to help the country, does not go, and what does not go is no good.

- Then we moved on to business. He sat quietly and we did not talk much during that first posing."

Ivan Mestrović, Uspomene na političke ljude i događaje, Nakladni zavod Matice hrvatske, Zagreb, 1993., 185

Source 2

Olga Manojlovic about the Glorification of the Rulers

"And so, in the period before breakout of the WW2 – the time of the most vigorous political conflicts and demands for decentralization of the state, glorification of persons of kings Peter and Alexander affirmed the idea of state centralism and national monolithness, in almost identical way as glorification of the reigning person was realized in the time of socialist Yugoslavia, particularly in the last decade of its existence."

Olga Manojlović Pintar, "Tito je stena" (dis)kontinuitet vladarskih predstavljanja u Jugoslaviji i Srbiji 20. veka, Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju, 2-3-, 2004., 86-87

Source 3

Map of public monuments to King Alexander (and Peter) by Antun Augustincic



Antun Augustincic - monuments to King Alexander (and Petar)

Blue color - realized monuments (and demolished in WWII)

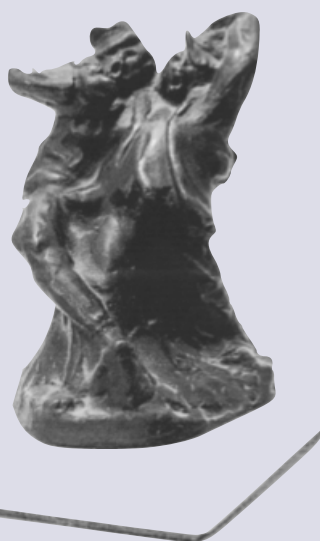
Red color - sketch for a monument

Data taken from Gallery of A. Augustincic in Klanjac, map produced by Denis Detling.

Source 5

Sculpture 'The Drunks'

Sculpture 'The Drunks' by Antun Augustincic presents in full figure two male characters – a skinny gendarme and a fat money-man (personification of regime) – embraced, staggering and singing. As none of his any other sculpture known to us, The Drunks so clearly express the spirit of the group 'Zemlja' (Augustincic was one of the founders in 1929, and a member until 1933), more vigorously than his engaged drawings with which he participated in 'Zemlja' exhibitions. The fact that The Drunks were not exposed in that time and the clearness of the artistic expression encourages us in the belief that they were made as Augustincic's reaction to political ban of all actions of 'Zemlja' group in April 1935. It coincides with the statement of the present owner that the original owner, Ms. Ksenija Kantoci, also dated the sculpture in 1935.



an expertise of the Curator of A. Augustincic gallery in Klanjac, Mr. Bozidar Perkovic; photo of the sculpture: Davorin Vujicic

Source 4

Monument to King Aleksandar in Varazdin and Tito in Kumrovec by Antun Augustincic

The monument to Alexander I the Unifier was erected in 1935 in Varazdin (destroyed in 1941). Monument to Josip Broz Tito was erected in Kumrovec in 1948.



Gradski muzej Varaždin 61552 /
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Tito_spomenik1.jpg

Group 2

Claims

Which of the following claims are correct? Explain with the help of sources!

- Artists at the Spring exhibitions were promoting Yugoslav unity through art
- Spring exhibitions were bringing together exceptional artists from all over Yugoslavia.
- Palace (The King) and the Ministry generously supported exhibitions in order to promote Yugoslav unity.
- Palace (The King), when purchasing works of art, took into account only the quality of the works.

Context

Organized by the art society 'Cvijeta Zuzoric', the so called 'Spring exhibitions' have been held in Belgrade since 1929. They were a continuation of so called 'Yugoslav exhibitions' that used to be organized since 1904.

Source 1

Absence of some of the best artists at the Spring exhibition

Not only many of the best artists who are currently abroad are absent from the exhibition (the first Spring exhibition) – Milunovic, Dobrovic, Sumanovic, Uzelac – whose absence is understood and justified, but a large number of artists who are at home are also absent. Almost all Belgrade artists are present, from Slovenia barely three-four, and for Croatia – the best are missing, the very artists whose work was impatiently expected: there were no Mestrovic, Krsinic, Babic, Mis, Augustincic, Becic. They were 'represented', in a bunch, by far weaker artists, only a few of which would be able to participate in the exhibition, and with a far lower number of works."

M. Kašanin, *Umetničke kritike*, Beograd 1968, str. 143-144. u R. Vučetić: *Cvijeta Zuzorić i kulturni život Beograda 1918–1941.*, Beograd, 2003.

Source 2

Purchase of artworks according to the number of pieces and price

Purchaser/Exhibition	Ministry of Education	Municipal authorities	The King's Court	Private individuals
Second exhibition in 1930	23	26	0	12
Third exhibition in 1931.	28 (101 000 din)	4	28 (72 900 din)	8
Fifth exhibition in 1933.	No data	No data	No data on number, only the total amount (80 000 din)	1

Podaci preuzeti iz R. Vučetić, *Cvijeta Zuzorić i kulturni život Beograda 1918–1941.*, Beograd, 2003., str.712. (AJ, 66-376-614; AJ, 74-350-182; AJ, 74-494-199)

Optional question:

- Who was the biggest purchaser?
- What do you think why?
- Try to explain why the number of works purchased by the private persons was decreasing?
- What do you think, does it have anything to do with the quality of exhibited works?

Source 3

Importance of artworks purchase

The association 'Cvijeta Zuzoric', organizer of Spring exhibitions, in its correspondence to the Ministry of Education stressed the significance of purchasing.

"... thus far the greatest buyer at Spring exhibitions were H.M. the King and Ministry of Education, for the reason that in these representative exhibitions artists from the whole country take part."

Radina Vučetić, *Jugoslavenstvo u umjetnosti i kulturi – od zavodljivog mita do okrutne realnosti (Jugoslavenske izložbe od 1904.-1940.)*, Časopis za suvremenu povijest, br 3., Zagreb, 2009., 712.; prema Arhiv Jugoslavije, 66-113-366

Optional question:

- What was the reason, in the opinion of 'Cvijeta Zuzoric', that the King and MoE were the biggest buyers of paintings?

Source 4

Letter to Minister of Education

After completed Second Spring Exhibition, painters Jovan Bijelic and Vaso Pomorisac, in May 1930, write to Minister of Education to say that the joint exhibition was a success 'both with high level of exhibited works, but even more with another feature – namely: when all national forces united for the good of the homeland, in that time the pioneers of the Yugoslav idea gathered together.'

Radina Vučetić, Jugoslavenstvo u umjetnosti i kulturi – od zavodljivog mita do okrutne realnosti (Jugoslavenske izložbe od 1904.-1940.), Časopis za suvremenu povijest, br 3., Zagreb, 2009., 71o.; prema Arhiv Jugoslavije, 66-381-617

Optional question:

- What do the painters consider a greater success of the Second exhibition: High level of exhibited works, or the fact that the exhibition gathered those who advocated Yugoslav unity?

Source 5

Titles of some artworks purchased by the Palace (with additional map)

During the purchases made by the Court, it was noted that mostly purchased works were with the nature motif, or are referring to various parts of Yugoslavia, which can be seen from their titles:

A motif from Ohrid

By the sea

Dalmatian houses

Veles

In the vicinity of Tetovo

Korcula island

From Hvar

A view on the square in Prizren

Maglaj in Bosnia

R. Vučetić, Cvijeta Zuzorić i kulturni život Beograda 1918–1941., Beograd, 2003., str.712,713 (Arhiv Jugoslavije, 66-376-614);

Optional question:

- In your opinion, why they paid attention during the paintings purchase that they were tied to various parts of Yugoslavia?

Source 6

Palace proposal for the purchase of paintings and sculptures

Proposal for paintings and sculpture purchase made for the Court contained full name of the author and should contain characteristics of exhibited work. In reality it looked like this:

Vidmar Nande, a Slovenian from Ljubljana. Takes motifs from peoples' life.

Kralj France – from Ljubljana, leader of the generation that appeared after the liberation.

Palavicni Petar – Dalmatian by origin. Lives and works in Belgrade.

Ruzicka Kamilo – a painter from Zagreb; takes part in all Yugoslav exhibitions.

Uzelac Milivoj – born in Mostar, lives in Paris. Considered to be one of main representatives of our contemporary art. He has a good reputation abroad.

R. Vučetić, Cvijeta Zuzorić i kulturni život Beograda 1918–1941., Beograd, 2003., str. 713; prema Arhiv Jugoslavije, 74-243-366

Optional question:

- Does the purchase proposal say anything about the characteristics of the work of art? What did the Court consider important for the purchase?



Group 3

Claims

Which of the following claims are correct? Explain with the help of sources!

- Artistic works of Group 'Zemlja' artists expressed criticism of social, political and economic conditions.
- Artistic works of Group 'Zemlja' artists were supporting the regime policy.
- Group 'Zemlja' program reflected its willingness to criticize the current situation and therefore the Group was prohibited.

Context

Group 'Zemlja' (full name Association of artists Zemlja) was a statutory association of engaged, politically left oriented artists that worked from 1929 to 1935.

The Group was established in the time of economic crisis, death of Stjepan Radic and establishment of dictatorship. Great indirect influence to the group 'Zemlja' had: writer Miroslav Krleža, German painter Georg Grosz and German art group New Reality (Neue Sachlichkeit).

Members of 'Zemlja' advocated art that was not a purpose to itself, but is socially and politically engaged and available to wide population (which will influence founding of Croatian naïve painting school by Krsto Hegedusic). Themes and motifs they were taking from their own area, their country of origin (hence the name – 'Zemlja' (country)), and they mostly dealt with problems of Croatian village. The Group was critical, polemic, skilful in evading censorship and very careful not to provoke the reaction of the regime.

Many of significant Croat artists were members of group 'Zemlja', and among them were Drago Ibler (president), Antun Augustincic, Krsto Hegedusic, Frano Krsinic, Marijan Detoni, Ivan Generalic, Zeljko Hegedusic. The Group organized 6 exhibitions, where members exposed their engaged works, but also guests of the Group.

Source 1

Program of Group 'Zemlja'

"One should live a life his time
Should create in the spirit of his time
Modern life is affected by social ideas and collectivity issues are dominant
An artist cannot refute the demands of a new society and stand outside the collective
For art is an expression of the world view
For art and life are one."

Publicly published program of the group 'Zemlja' was carefully formulated due to the censorship. Although the group, in its actions and formulation of the program, skilfully evaded the censorship and paid attention not to provoke reaction of the regime in public, the regime lost its patience in 1935 and work of the Group was prohibited without explanation.

Izložba Udruženja umjetnika Zemlja, Zagreb, 1929.

Source 2

Ivan Tabakovic: Cult of idiotism (1929)

*Izložba Udruženja umjetnika
Zemlja, Zagreb, 1929.*



Optional question:

1. What do you see in the picture?
2. A cult marks respect of someone or something. What did the author want to convey with the title of his work?

Source 3

Vanja Radaus:
Confession (1932)

*Izložba Zemlja u
Umjetničkom paviljonu,
Zagreb, 1932.*



Optional question:

- What is the image of the priest, and what of the confessing woman?

Source 4

Krsto Hegedusic: Requisition (1929)



Izložba udruženja umjetnika Zemlja, Zagreb, 1929.; <http://www.ipress.hr/kultura/izlozba-krste-hegedusica-za-deset-godina-galerije-adris-14514.html>

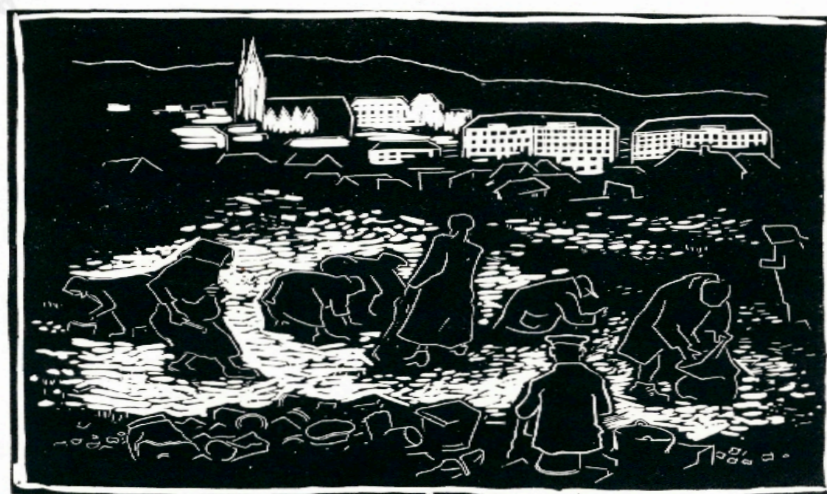
Optional question:

1. What is shown in the painting?
2. Requisition means forceful, i.e. provisional taking of property with compensation, usually for war purposes.
3. What do you think, will the peasants from the painting be getting compensation?

Source 5

Antun Mezdjic: Garbage (1932)

*Izložba Zemlja u Umjetničkom
paviljonu, Zagreb, 1932.*



Optional question:

1. In the background is the city of Zagreb, but what does the image show?
2. What is the relation with the title of the exhibition?

Source 6

**Oton Postruznik:
Salutation (1932)**

*Izložba Zemlja u
Umjetničkom paviljonu,
Zagreb, 1932.*

Optional question:

1. A flag is a symbol of a state. How would you hold the flag of your country if someone was to salute it?
2. How is it shown here?
3. How many persons are in the picture, and how many faces can you see?
4. With the faces you do see, is it a concrete person, or, perhaps, it represents someone?

Source 7

**Zeljko Hegedusic:
6.1 (1935)**



*Moderna galerija
Zagreb, MG-2891;
photo by Goran Vranic.*

Optional question:

1. The title is 6.1. What happened on 6 January 1929?
2. All characters in this painting walk towards a stone with inscription 6.1 on it. What do you think was the message of the author?
3. Look at all characters in the painting. How are they shown?
4. Do they represent real persons or those characters represent certain groups?
5. If they represent certain groups, what is the attitude of the author towards them?
6. What do you think about it? Is there Death somewhere in the back?
7. What preceded the event of 6 January 1929?
8. In your opinion, based on the painting, what was the attitude of the author towards the event of 6 January 1929?