

# What Connects a Jacket, a Horse and a Weaving Loom? Visual Art-Based Interventions in the Courtyard of the New Storage Facility of the Ethnographic Museum on 9/2 Kačićeva Street

The opening of the museum storage facility on 9/2 Kačićeva Street, provided the Ethnographic Museum Zagreb (EMZ), after more than a hundred years since its founding, with adequate conditions for the storage, preventive conservation and restoration of the material. The museum storage building was renovated, and the courtyard of the museum storage facility, on the other hand, was not fully affected by the renovation project. Upon completion, a discrepancy was noticed in the appearance of the newly renovated building and the old, dilapidated brick walls. Nevertheless, the need for an artistic intervention that will aesthetically and visually enrich the courtyard space resulted in a good example from the practice of cross-sectoral co-operation that took place in partnership between the Ethnographic Museum Zagreb and the Academy of Fine Arts.

## ABOUT THE PROJECT OF VISUAL ART-BASED INTERVENTION IN THE COURTYARD SPACE

Walking west of the British Square, at the first crossroads from Ilica, you turn into Kačićeva Street, where you soon see number 9 on the left.

If you go through the passage at this house number on the right, you will see three murals painted on metal plates and placed on a brick wall, which introduce you to the contents of the building in front of you – the storage facilities of the Ethnographic Museum Zagreb (EMZ). These murals are the works by students and alumni of the Academy of Fine Arts (ALU). Nevertheless, before I explain in more detail the motifs of the works and the process of making them, for the purposes of this presentation and explanation of the visual art-based intervention, something needs to be said about probably the largest project of the Ethnographic Museum Zagreb since its foundation.



Figure 1. Wall in the courtyard of the storage facility before the visual arts intervention, photo by: Mia Čujkević-Plečko



Figure 2. The senior curator Gordana Viljetić during professional education – guided tour, photo by: Matija Meštrić

The opening of the storage facility on 9/2 Kačićeva Street, after more than a hundred years since its founding, provided the Ethnographic Museum Zagreb with the adequate conditions for the storage, preventive conservation and restoration of the material. The museum storage is also specific in that it will be open to the public for viewing with expert guidance and it is a pioneer of open depots in the Republic of Croatia.

The storage facility is located in the building of the former Royal National Exemplary Brewery, which the Ethnographic Museum was provided in 2015, and with the help of the EU funding and those of the City of Zagreb, the building was renovated and equipped according to the standards of the museum profession. The storage facility was officially opened on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2024.

On the other hand, the courtyard of the storage facility was not completely affected by the renovation project and its parts retained their original appearance, and upon completion of the renovation, a discrepancy was observed in the appearance of the newly renovated building and the old, dilapidated brick walls (Figure 1). However, the need for a visual art-based intervention



Figure 3. Items from the holdings of the Ethnographic Museum Zagreb stored in the storage facility, photographed by alumni and students, photo by: Matija Meštrić, Fran Petrić, Mia Maraković

that would aesthetically and visually enrich the courtyard space resulted in a good example from the practice of cross-sectoral co-operation.

In August 2023, a co-operation between the Ethnographic Museum Zagreb and the Academy of Fine Arts (ALU) was agreed and devised upon the initiative of the director of the Ethnographic Museum, Zvezdana Antoš, PhD. In addition to defining a visual art-based intervention that will harmonise the courtyard space and the storage facility, one of the goals of the project was to involve young artists in rethinking ethnographic heritage and tradition.

Project manager by the Academy of Fine Arts, Mia Maraković, master's degree holder in Arts, brought about the alumni Anđela Zanki and Matija Meštrić and students of the Academy of Fine Arts Helena Birin, Majda Vukalović and Fran Petrić who participated in the project of visual art-based intervention.

The project comprised of two phases - the first phase provided professional education, while the second phase was reserved for mural creation. The project started in March 2024.



Figure 4. Sketches of works by alumni and students

## PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

Professional education was held in March 2024, which included viewing and photographing the items stored in the storage facility to provide the alumni and students with the opportunity to become acquainted with the storage facility and the collections it stores. The professional education was provided by museum employees – the director and museum advisor Zvezdana Antoš, PhD, senior curator Gordana Viljetic and curator Mia Čujkević-Plečko<sup>1</sup> (Figure 2). Professional education included an insight into the items of textile collections and collections of household inventory, textile tools, textile furnishings, painted gourds, basketry and country estate. During the visit, the artists were able to photograph the objects so that they could later use them to create a sketch of the mural (Figure 3).<sup>2</sup>

At the end of the visit to the storage facility, during April, the alumni and students made five sketches that they would paint in the form of a mural (Figure 4).

1 During the professional education, the museum advisor Aida Brenko, PhD, and the restorer Ljiljana Japćec also shared some interesting information, and I would hereby like to express my gratitude to them.

2 The photographed objects are also interesting because they give us valuable information about what the alumni and the students were particularly interested in when visiting the storage facility and this provides some feedback for the professional staff.



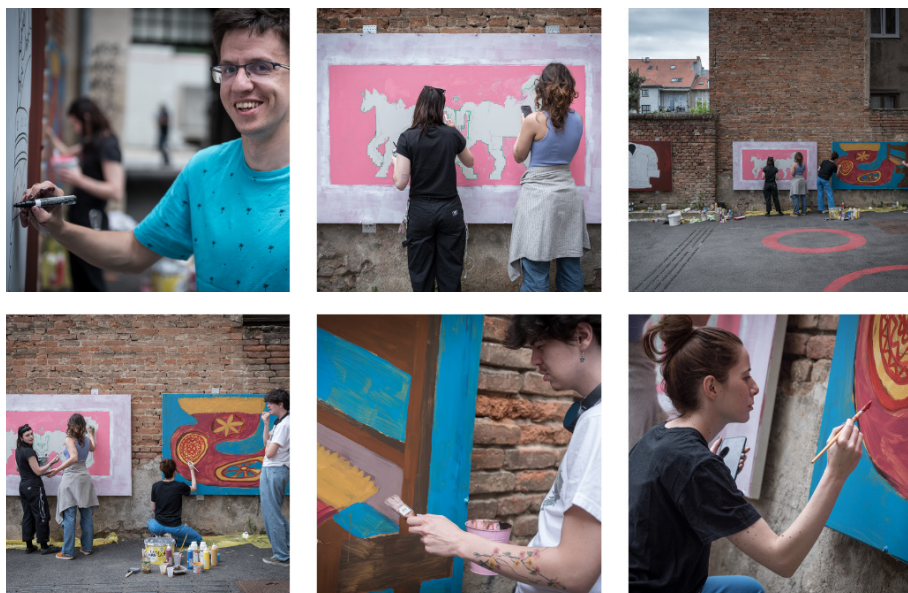


Figure 5. Visual arts intervention action during May 2024, photo by: Matija Dronjić

## PAINTING

In May, the second phase of the visual art-based intervention project began, which included painting metal panels placed on a brick wall in the courtyard of the storage facility.<sup>3</sup> In two working days, the murals were completed, and the pace of work mostly depended on the weather (Figure 5).

Five sketches were painted on three panels in such a way that four sketches were incorporated into two larger works, while one sketch formed a separate mural. The compositional works are set up to form a visually harmonious whole, especially considering colours and contrasts.

## AUTHOR'S WORKS AND COMMENTS

When they finished painting, the authors had the opportunity to present their works, and short interviews were conducted striving to collect information about their impressions after visiting the storage facility.

Matija Meštrić painted a separate mural (Figure 6), and he said the following about his work:

“During the tour of the storage facility of the Ethnographic Museum, I was most impressed

- 3 During the reflection on the sustainability of mural works, a decision was made to place frames on the brick wall on which the murals would be made for the purpose of maintenance and the possibility of repeated visual art-based actions. In this way, the frames can be removed from the wall as needed, and the murals will be preserved. Three metal plates were given to the Ethnographic Museum Zagreb by Primat logistika, the museum equipment supplier that equipped the storage facility in Kačićeva Street, and the metal frames were made by a locksmith.



Figure 6. Mural by Matija Meštrić, photo by: Matija Dronjić

by the footwear and clothing of the Croatian peasant. The starting point of my work “Cool Jacket” is the traditional costume. I used an illustrative drawing to point out the design and the ornaments that appear in the form of patches on the jacket. The jacket is placed in the centre, surrounded by red, a clear contrast between colour and shape has been created. The result is the garment you would like to wear.”

Helena Birin and Majda Vukalović jointly participated in the painting of the mural (Figure 7), and concerning their work they pointed out as follows:

“Looking around the Storage facility of the Ethnographic Museum, two things caught our eye: a beautiful white towel with a red embroidered motif of a horse and painted gourds of different shapes and sizes. The mural painted by my colleague Majda Vukalović and I, contains these two motifs. The centre of the mural is filled with two motifs of horses, their mirror image. The corners of the mural depict stylised motifs taken from the gourds.”

Anđela Zanki and Fran Petrić also painted a mural together (Figure 8), and they found inspiration in the motif of the weaving loom that:

“(…) inspired by our shared love for textile design since we are both connected with the Textile Design Department at the School of Applied Arts and Design (ŠPUD). The colours are simplified without any motif shaping.”



Figure 7. Mural by Helena Birin and Majda Vukalović, photo by: Matija Dronjić



Figure 8. Mural by Andela Zanki and Fran Petrić, photo by: Matija Dronjić





Figure 9. View of the storage facility of the Ethnographic Museum Zagreb, photo by: Goran Vranić

## ABOUT THE VISIT TO THE STORAGE FACILITY

Working with the audience or visitors is one of the most important segments of work in a museum. As museum workers, in addition to working on collections, researching and preparing exhibitions, we must also be familiar with who we are doing it for so that we can adapt the content, if necessary, since it will still be consumed by the general public, and not exclusively by museum workers or colleagues.

Working in the storage facility is a part of the museum's everyday life for curators, restorers and other museum staff and it is sometimes challenging to put yourself in the role of visitors and their interests and possible questions.

The alumni and the students were among the first visitors to the storage facility of the Ethnographic Museum Zagreb in Kačićeva Street, so it was interesting to find out what particularly impressed them. In addition to the size of the storage facility and the number of objects that made an impression on all the authors, Matija Meštrić was surprised:

“(...) how nicely it is packaged in those white tea bags. And that's actually raw cotton fabric. And I like that contrast with the modern because it looks like a laboratory, but in fact old things are kept inside. That really surprised me. (...)”

A visit to the storage facility will provide the general public with an insight into the work of the museum and show them that it includes much more than a permanent collection and exhibitions – such as restoration and preventive conservation of objects.



The concept of an open storage facility, which can be visited with expert guidance, gives visitors the opportunity to see the size of the museum's holdings, which is difficult to imagine when visiting a museum where only a small part is exhibited. Helena Birin summed up her experience of the storage facility as follows:

“(...) It was a special experience to be able to see it somehow up close in a more intimate atmosphere, and not in a museum behind the glass. And in that regard, you somehow feel more connected with the people who used to use it.”

In addition to the role of storing and protecting objects, the storage facility is truly an immediate experience of the heritage it stores.

## CLOSING REMARKS ABOUT THE PROJECT

The artistic intervention visually embellished the dilapidated brick wall of the yard, which even the tenants of the neighbouring building pointed out to the author of the text as a positive change, and successfully incorporated the appearance of the newly renovated building of the storage facility with the space that was not affected by the renovation (Figure 9).

Finally, it needs to be mentioned that the co-operation between the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb and the Academy of Fine Arts on the project “Visual Art-Based Interventions in the Courtyard of the New Storage Facility of the Ethnographic Museum on 9/2 Kačićeva Street” is an example of good practice within the framework of cross-sectoral co-operation, which can serve as an incentive for the continuation of such co-operation on projects involving experts from different sectors. New perspectives and views from different perspectives can undoubtedly contribute to a better presentation and visibility of the Ethnographic Museum Zagreb.