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## INNOVATIVE POSSIBILITIES OF ACTIVITIES WITH VISUAL ART IN PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION

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**ABSTRACT:** *The paper deals with the interpretation of visual art and the presentation of the project entitled “Visual artists in nursery school” that was suggested and verified in practice of pre-primary education. The author pointed out the theoretical background of using of visual art in pre-primary education that is illustrated by practical examples – interpretation of artwork by Pablo Picasso Three Musicians. In conclusions of the paper, the author listed the reflection of the project and the recommendation for the practice of pre-primary education.*

**KEY WORDS:** *visual art, fine art, art education, nursery school, pre-primary education*

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## INTRODUCTION

The Art Education in pre-primary education is necessary not only for orientating towards the development of such skills as drawing, painting or sculpting, but also for the development of more complex skills. We especially mean creative thinking and visual literacy. In this research, creative thinking means looking at something in a new way. Creative thinkers are able to look at things in new, unorthodox ways and come up with solutions no one previously thought of.

According to Šupšáková (2004), visual literacy is part of a visual communication, and can be briefly defined as the ability of an individual to receive and produce visual information. Being visually literate means having a visual ability, the level of which is determined neurophysically (e.g., an excellent visual ability), by age (it is gradually worsening), through learning (it needs to be developed), by vocation (a professional notices the quality, whereas a layman does not see it). Giorgos, Johnson, Bonmono, and Colbert (1999, p. 146) defined visual literacy as "... the ability to construct meaning from visual images". When a child grows and develops, he gradually learns to transform a visual image into the information he needs. The child becomes visually literate, as well as verbally literate. They learn to recognise the pictorial code and understand its cultured determined language (Stonehill, 1998).

In the process of acquiring visual literacy, the child, by interpreting works of art, extends his knowledge, discovers new relationships and connections, and is initiated through his own thoughts to reveal references hidden in art. An interpretation of visual art also involves an influencing of the quality of the attitudes, values, emotional stability, interests and aspirations of the child, and so on, where art plays an irreplaceable role in this process. Also, effective coordination skills, fine motor skills and physical preconditions can be developed (Rochovská, Krupová, 2017).

According to Bowen and Kisida (2019), arts educational experiences can produce significant positive impacts on student academic and social development. Similarly, Dewey (2019) and Ruppert (2006) mentioned that arts education was seen as beneficial because it helped develop self-expression, creativity, and empathy.

Bowen, Greene, and Kisida (2014) found out that exposure to the arts had an effect on the ability of students to engage in critical thinking. Also according to Tomas (2019) there was an influence of experimental artwork classes on children's creativity and artistic skills. "There is a growing body of international research evidence that suggests those who participate with culture (art is included alongside dance, music, drama, as well as film, literature) experience good health and higher life satisfaction than those who do not" (Mowlah, Niblett, Blackburn and Harris, 2014).

In the presented research, we have focused precisely on an interpretation of the visual arts, because we consider such an encounter with a work of art as a unique way of developing all aspects of a child's personality. The interpretation of visual art that can be seen in two dimensions – verbal and visual. As an example of the interpretation of artwork we described in more details the project, in which children learned about the artwork by famous artists.

The research problem was to describe the process of the interpretation of visual art in nursery school. The qualitative research strategy was chosen.

Research questions:

RQ1: How the process of the interpretation of visual art can be processed in nursery school?

RQ2: Which objectives does the teacher fulfil?

RQ3: Which tasks does the teacher assign to children?

RQ4: How is the children's interest of the realized activities?

RQ5: Which problems does the teacher encounter?

One of the objectives of this research is to present a project aimed at bringing different types of visual art to children at a pre-school age, mainly through the interpretation of specific works of art. The project was verified at a nursery school in Pohorelá in Slovakia. We have chosen the aforementioned nursery school, because the children in there are used to creative work and an active participation in managing the learning process, where the learning experience prevails, and long-term projects for a given theme are being used. In the project, the children are acquainted with the works of world-renowned artists - Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn, Leonardo da Vinci, Vincent van Gogh, Claude Monet, Edvard Munch and Pablo Picasso, interpreting them both verbally and visually (Fig. 1).

It is also important to mention, that before this project the children recognized the regional artists and their artworks, and then this world-renowned artists followed

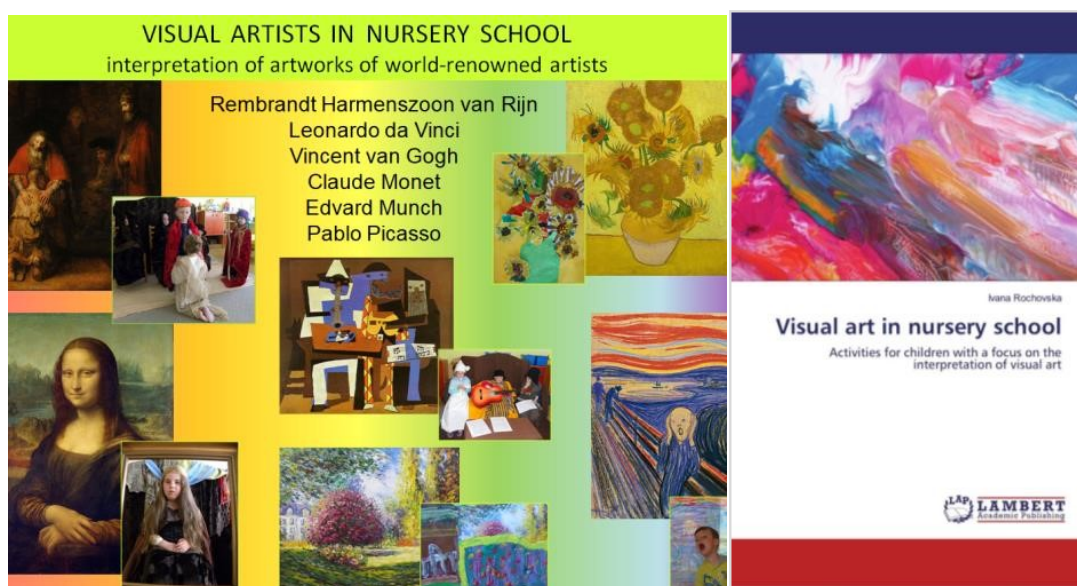


Figure 1 Project Visual Artist in Nursery School

## INTERPRETATION OF VISUAL ART.

The interpretation of artwork can be seen in two dimensions – as verbal and visual interpretation.

**Verbal interpretation** in nursery school is mainly about appropriate questions. One of the possibilities of a verbal interpretation of the work of visual art is described by Pondelíková and Martinčová-Garajová (2010, cit., according to Pondelíková, 2015, p. 15-18). According to the authors, an analysis of the content and the formal aspect of the artwork can be divided into four categories. For each category, we can ask questions about the analysed artwork:

1. a personal (subjective) view of the artwork (What do you bring to the artwork? What do you know about the artwork?)
2. object (What can you see?)
3. the subject and its meaning (What is the artwork about?)
4. art in context (Effects, which are shaping the artwork and an overall view of the artwork) (Martinčová-Garajová, Pondelíková 2010; Pondelíková, 2015, p. 15-18)

**Visual interpretation** is an artistic process based on a reflection of art through arts, artistic works through artistic work, using a wide variety of other

artistic procedures such as allusion, citation, invocation, camouflage, repainting, reinterpretation, etc. (Rochovská, Krupová, 2017).

## RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Three Musicians (Figs. 2,3) is the name of two similar works of art by Pablo Picasso, the most famous Cubist figure.



**Figure 2** Three Musicians I  
(Source: Wikipedia)



**Figure 3** Three Musicians II  
(Source: Wikipedia)<sup>1</sup>

Objectives of the activity were (RQ2, RQ3):

- O1: In one's own words, describe the Three Musicians paintings.
- O2: Say in what way do the paintings differ and how do they look alike.
- O3: Find geometric shapes within the paintings.
- O4: Put together a painting from the cut up parts (puzzle).
- O5: Visually interpret (stage) the painting, Three Musicians.

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<sup>1</sup> Information about the content of the artwork: Picasso created a collage of himself and his friends in the guise of three musicians - he was inspired by one popular theatre, which actually existed in Italy.

- *Picasso* is portrayed as a musician, who is called Harlequin. In the first painting (Fig. 2), he plays a guitar, and in the second one (Fig. 3), he plays the violin. He is dressed in a yellow-orange patterned costume.
- Picasso's friend, a poet and critic, Guillaume Apollinaire, is portrayed as the second musician, who is called *Pierrot*. In the first painting (Fig. 2), he plays flute, in the second one (Fig. 3), he has a clarinet. He is dressed in a white and blue suit and behind him is his dog.
- Another of Picasso's friend, the poet Max Jacob, is portrayed as a *Franciscan monk*. In the first painting (Fig. 1), he is a singer, in the second painting (Fig. 2), he plays the accordion (Three Musicians, in the Philadelphia Museum of Art).

O6: Artfully interpret (by a collage, a drawing, a painting) the painting of the Three Musicians.

According to the Bloom's Taxonomy, the teacher has set the levels of educational objectives in a following way: understanding (O1), analyzis (O2, O3), synthesis (O4), creation (O5, O6).

**Material didactic equipment:** a reproduction of the Three Musicians, PowerPoint presentation (Rochovská, Krupová, 2017), interactive whiteboard, musical instruments (e.g. piano, guitar, flute or instrument from Orff instruments), textiles for creating clothes for the musicians, digital camera, geometric shapes cut out from coloured papers and magazines, glue, coloured pencils, watercolours, brushes, cards, glasses filled with water.

**The course of the activity (RQ1):**

Before the teacher started the activity, she prepared a place for the interpretation of the painting - she has created the background by covering the furniture with a dark brown textile cover, in front of which she put a table and chairs, while each piece of furniture was covered with a similar textile cover. Musical notes were laid on the table.

The children sat in front of an interactive whiteboard on which they saw the panting, Three Musicians. The first response by the children was:

CH: *I don't know that.*

CH: *I don't understand that.*

CH: *I don't understand that either.*

T: *You don't have to be sad that you don't understand it.*

CH: *There it is, some trousers, some kind of guitar and some kind of monster.*

CH: *Yes, some kind of monster.*

T: *That is right, dear children. It is about that. You just look at it well, watch, the whole painting from right to left, from the bottom all the way up, slowly all over everywhere, and you will see how much you like the painting. Before we talk about the painting, I will show you Pablo Picasso.*

Later, the teacher was addressing the history of the creation of the artwork. The children learned that about one hundred years ago, a big artist, Pablo Picasso, lived and worked, who portrayed things and people in his paintings as if they were made up from different geometric shapes. They looked at his self-portrait and the photograph of the teacher together with a wax dummy from the Madame

Tussauds Museum, in Amsterdam (Fig. 4). The teacher also told the children that Picasso painted two similar paintings and both of them are exhibited in America.<sup>2</sup>



**Figure 4** Multimedia Presentation for the Interpretation of Painting I (Source: Wikipedia, Dagmar Krupová)



**Figure 5** Multimedia Presentation for the Interpretation of Painting II (Source: Wikipedia)

The interpretation of the content of the work of art began with its observation, without the children knowing the title of the artwork. They were

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<sup>2</sup> More precisely, it can be stated that one of these is located at the Museum of Modern Art, in New York (Fig. 5 in the presentation on the left) and one at the Museum of Art, in Philadelphia (Fig. 5 in the presentation on the right).

first supposed to say what they saw in the painting (RQ3), while taking up the whole of the projection area there was the first painting, to begin with, and then the second one.

The teacher has invited the children to say what they see in the painting (RQ3), one after another:

CH: *This weird monster.* (The child showed the flute that the musician on the left had).

T: *And what can you see on that monster?*

CH: *So many eyes.*

T: *Does it seem that it has a lot of eyes?*

CH: *And here are its ears. And the arms here.*

T: *It is probably holding something. Does it hold its eyes, do you think?*

CH: *No, he has a kind of whistle.*

T: *You think that it is a whistle? So what is it then children. A whistle or a monster?*

CH: *Whistle.*

CH: *Whistle.*

CH: *Whistle.*

CH: *A monster, because it looks like eyes.*

CH: *Who agrees with Samuel, that it is a whistle?*

CH: *Me.*

CH: *I agree with Samuel.*

T: *Some of you agree with Samuel. John, come and tell us what can you see?*

CH: *It has eyes here, here it doesn't. But here he has a black mask.*

T: *Yes. Excellent.*

CH: *And here is another monster.*

CH: *May I as well?*

T: *Betka, show me what can you see?*

CH: *He has eyes here, but here not, because this is a whistle. And this is a guitar.  
And musical notes.*

T: *Peter.*

CH: *I can see legs here.*

T: *What colour legs can you see?*

CH: *White.*

T: *How many legs are there?*



CH: Two.

T: Two legs. There is one person, where those white legs are. Martin, come and show us.

CH: Here is a guitar.

T: You can see a guitar very well. Simon you come as well.

CH: Here is a giraffe, here a man and here is a monster and here is another monster.

T: And where does the giraffe have its legs? Show me.

CH: Here.

T: And how many of the giraffe's legs can you see?

CH: Two.

T: Two. What about the others, do you agree that this is a giraffe?

CH: No.

CH: Yes.

CH: Yes.

CH: No.

The children were shouting over each other.

T: So you don't agree. Thank you Simon. We will see what the others will say as well, and then we will assess it. Betka, you as well, come and show us.

CH: Musical notes.

T: Christne, you come, too.

CH: That is a zebra, but again I cannot see its tail and head.

T: Do you think that it is a zebra? And do you think that the zebra is playing a guitar?

CH: Maybe... I know, because the giraffe doesn't have arms, it has legs...

CH: Me...

T: Yes, Betka.

CH: He is playing the guitar.

T: Do you think that he plays guitar?

CH: Yes.

T: And do you think that it is a man, this one on the side?

CH: Yes.

T: And what is he wearing?

CH: Black clothes.

T: Does he have a skirt?

CH: Yes, a skirt.

CH: A cloak.

T: Yes, he has a cloak. Radka also wanted to show us something.

CH: I want to also show something Dáška (Note: teacher's name) - this one has musical notes.

CH: And the giraffe is holding the guitar, because this one has musical notes.

CH: The guitar and also some musical notes.

T: Does he have arms there?

CH: No. Because if he won't hold it... if he won't hold it...

CH: Dáška, I already found out...

The children were shouting over each other.

CH: This is dark and this is light.

T: Children, do you want to know what it is really like?

CH: Yes.

T: So, in this painting, the artist also painted himself and two of his friends. We see three figures in the painting. Here's one figure, here's the second figure, but you've determined that the third character is an animal.

CH: I know that it is without a head.

T: And this, children, this is painted by the artist. He had two friends. In Italy, there was such a music group, in which three musicians played. Picasso liked the musicians so much that he painted himself and his two friends as musicians. Do you remember when you had a carnival?

CH: Yes.

T: Did you change into something?

CH: Yes.

CH: I have...

T: Did you have masks on your faces?

CH: Yes.

T: Children, Picasso painted his friends in masks. This is a monk that has a long cloak, he also has a cap and here he has a...

CH: Beard.

T: Yes, here he has a beard and these are his eyes. And here we have found his hands?

CH: *This is one poet to whom Pablo Picasso painted a flute. And he also has a mask over his eyes. You were very right when you said that he has white clothes. And he also has a white hat. And here he painted hands.*

CH: *Here it is darker, here lighter and here also lighter.*

T: *Yes, children, he painted it in such a way that it is lighter where the light falls, and where the light doesn't fall, there is shadow and thus it is darker. Here is the darker area, can you see? And here is the lighter area.*

CH: *The cloak is also brighter.*

T: *And what kind of carpet is painted here?*

CH: *A killed bear.*

T: *Yes, that's the skin from the animal.*

CH: *A bear.*

CH: *That is the skin.*

T: *Children, you said that there is an animal in the painting. Try also to find an animal in this painting.*

CH: *Here.*

CH: *Here.*

CH: *Here.*

CH: *German shepherd!*

CH: *German shepherd!*

CH: *German shepherd!*

T: *Yes.*

CH: *German shepherd!*

CH: *German shepherd!*

After the verbal description of the first painting, Three Musicians, the teacher also showed the children a second painting with the same title. The children were supposed to have a close look at the paintings and tell them in what way they are similar and in what way do they differ (RQ3).

T: *Are the images different or the same?*

CH: *No.*

CH: *No.*

CH: *No.*

T: *Do you think they are not similar in anything?*

CH: *I know.*

CH: *I know. Musical notes.*

T: *There are musical notes... Are there more musicians than in the first painting?*

CH: *One, two, three.*

T: *So how many are there?*

CH: *Also.*

CH: *Three.*

T: *Peter, what are you saying, what else is the same?*

CH: *Those clothes.*

T: *Children, in the previous painting, the artist painted himself in the middle. But in this painting he painted himself here. He is no longer in the middle, but he has kept the same patterned clothes.*

CH: *And this is a piano.*

T: *Look. There is another musical instrument. Excellent! What musical instruments can we see there?*

CH: *And also a guitar... Violin!*

CH: *Violin!*

T: *And also?*

CH: *Also a whistle.*

CH: *But a different colour.*

CH: *Here is a violin.*

They have been working on the form of the artwork.<sup>3</sup> The teacher said to the children that the painting had a height and width of approximately two metres. She compared it to the height of an adult man. By a visual demonstration,

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<sup>3</sup> The artwork, *Three Musicians*, was created by combining a collage and an oil painting. The children were also supposed to guess how big Picasso's painting is. The exact size of the painting in New York is 200.7 x 222.9 cm and the painting in Philadelphia is 204.5 x 188.3 cm.

she showed them the painting in a presentation from the New York Museum of Modern Art, where they could compare the size of the painting and the height of an adult man (Fig. 6).



**Figure 6** Multimedia Presentation for the Interpretation of Painting IV (Source: <http://www.pablocicasso.org/three-musicians.jsp>)

In an interview about the form of the artwork, the children were supposed to find out which geometric shapes are in the painting (RQ3). They found triangles, rectangles, circles, semicircles and other geometric shapes.

The role of the children was also to figure out what title the painting might have (RQ3). The children suggested the titles such as *Musical instruments*, *Musical instrument in Paris*, *Schoolchildren*, *Parisian Musicians*. The teacher finally told them that the title is *Three Musicians*.

There then followed a visual interpretation of the artwork accompanied by several activities (RQ3).

*A puzzle from the painting.* The children were divided into several groups or pairs. Each group has chosen a space for playing (table, floor ...). The puzzles

were made in three levels of difficulty - the first containing the largest parts, the second smaller and the third the smallest parts.

*A performance of the Three Musicians.* During the puzzle game, the teacher was preparing chairs for the children in the role of the audience and props. The children dished out the roles (Fig. 7,8). The teacher had to take care of the interests of all of the children, because most of them demanded to perform the musician with the guitar. The children were happy to hear that the play on the musicians would be repeated several times. Therefore, in further repetitions, the teacher selected more children, who were performing as the musicians (Fig. 9). The children were creating clothes for the musicians from coloured textiles, they divided the musical instruments - the guitar, flute, the Orff instruments, and handed out musical notes (Figs 8,9). They were very patient when dressing up, they were advising each other. It was important for them to have enough material to create characters (for the monk to have a dark long cloak, a dark hat; for the musician in white and blue clothes, a white hat; for the musician dressed in textiles with geometric shapes).

They were also thinking about what song the musicians could play (sad or happy, fast or slow, etc.).

The staging was performed in the form of a theatre, so the children were not only the actors, but also the audience. The teacher announced the start of the show with a bell. She introduced the musicians with the musical instruments, and she also said the name of the musical composition that she had chosen herself.

The teacher chose three songs as a music accompaniment: *Turkish March* from W. A. Mozart, *Humoresque* by A. Dvořák and *For Elise* by L. van Beethoven.

In the musical component, it was essential that at each repetition of the play, a different piece of music was played by the three musicians. After playing three performances with three different compositions, the children themselves chose which song they want to have as an accompaniment of their further performance (RQ3), because on the fourth repetition the second class children were also invited. They chose a song from W. A. Mozart, *The Turkish March*.

The dramatic performance of the *Three Musicians* was enriched by the audience dancing. The children expressed the mood of the artwork, and spontaneously responded to the music, while the teacher became one of the actors involved in the dance performance of the musical composition. They

danced in pairs, individually or in groups. Although this activity was repeated several times, the children always experienced it very intensely, not only in the role of the main actors - the musicians, but also in the role of the audience and later the dancers (RQ4).

Another activity was the artistic interpretation of the painting, Three Musicians, through *combined techniques* - collages, drawings and paintings (RQ3). The children created figures of three musicians from the geometric shapes cut out of newspapers and colour paper sheets, with the crayons they drew their musical instruments and finished the backgrounds with aniline paints (Fig. 10). The children used A<sub>4</sub> sheets of card. It was important for them to have a wide variety of geometric shapes. They were also able to use parts of the puzzle to create the body of the musicians (Fig. 10 on the top left).



**Figure 7** Preparation for a Visual Interpretation of the Painting



**Figure 8** A Visual Interpretation of Painting I



**Figure 9** A Visual Interpretation of Painting II





**Figure 10** The Artwork of the Children.

On the described example we have tried to outline how to develop the visual literacy of pre-school children through the use of activities, oriented to the interpretation of visual art.

When using the interpretation of visual art with children in nursery school, the artwork becomes both the starting point and the objective of the activities. It is important that teacher did not offer too much theoretical information to the children; rather it was advisable to spontaneously discuss the artwork with them and how they perceive it (RQ1).

According to Rochovská and Krupová (2017), it is not possible to strictly define an algorithm for the interpretation of artwork in pre-primary education. Stemming from the research, teacher applied both the verbal and visual interpretation of the artwork.

The described activity and procedures were largely based on the children's creative initiative (RQ4). The teacher was the one who motivated, moderately directed, encouraged, but mostly stimulated and activated.

By verifying the project aimed at an interpretation of visual art, we have discovered that the children have an enormous interest in activities of this nature and it encourages them towards their creative self-expression (RQ4).

On the other hand, the proposed activities are very challenging for the teacher, not only in terms of material and the technical security of the project, but also in terms of constantly motivating the children to do things, creating an atmosphere in which they can relax, in order to shift the boundaries of their creativity and imagination in the desired direction. Sometimes, it may seem that there is no discipline and order in the classroom, however, these may in many cases be detrimental for interpretive activities. The children need to create such an environment and put themselves in situations, so that they can, as it were, “come out of themselves” and freely express themselves (RQ5).

In all artistic, work and dramatic activities, it is necessary for the children to have enough time for their implementation, in order to develop their creative possibilities (RQ5).

The children's responses are a certain signal to the teacher of how to continue asking questions to get to the desired objective with the children, and so they would be able to understand the artwork on the basis of their own abilities and so that they do not lose interest in its verbal interpretation (RQ3, RQ4, RQ5).

A pedagogical mastery by the teacher is a basic attribute in working with children. Being able to motivate them and inspire them towards action is not always easy, and with today's children it is getting more and more challenging (RQ5). That is why children today are rather interested in the non-traditional forms and methods of the educational process, in which works of art certainly belong to (RQ4). If a teacher is able to bring a certain amount of excitement to the child right from the beginning, the expectation of what she has prepared for them, if she brings in a surprise atmosphere, she has won. Then the children respond to the presented artwork with interest and they willingly talk about the artwork (RQ4).

## **CONCLUSION**

In the process of acquiring visual literacy, the child, by interpreting works of art, extends his knowledge, discovers new relationships and connections,

and is initiated through his own thoughts to reveal references hidden in art. An interpretation of visual art also involves an influencing of the quality of the attitudes, values, emotional stability, interests and aspirations of the child, and so on, where art plays an irreplaceable role in this process. Also, effective coordination skills, fine motor skills and physical preconditions can be developed.

The interpretation of visual art offers many stimuli that can enormously enrich the emotional world of the children. In addition to getting to know a lot of theoretical information, they are getting to know great artists and their work; they learn about various art techniques, through interpretive activities, they may experience adventures, which may resonate in them for a long time.

Our intention was to point out that art education in nursery schools should not only be limited to products of the child's aesthetic activities, but to bring it closer to art, making the work of art a starting point and the objective of the activities carried out. At the forefront should mainly be experiences that the children get through their activities and the recognition that discovering art can become an unforgettable adventure.

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