

Original article

## Artistic mediation in the promotion of visual arts with heritage values among university students



**La mediación artística en la promoción de las artes visuales con valores patrimoniales en estudiantes universitarios**

**Mediação artística na promoção das artes visuais com valores patrimoniais entre estudantes universitários**

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**Received:** 2/03/2025

**Accepted:** 1/06/2025

### ABSTRACT

Art is a generator of reflection; it is a subjective and significant construction because it is a product of human action. Artistic mediation is of great importance in universities, allowing for interaction between students and visual heritage. The objective of this article is to present a diagnosis of the process of appreciation of university cultural heritage among students of the Sociocultural Management for Development program at the University of Pinar del Río "Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca." The research used a dialectical-materialist method as its general approach. This, along with

theoretical methods such as historical-logical analysis and empirical methods such as documentary analysis, along with participant observation, interviews, and surveys, played a key role and allowed for the determination of indicators that characterize the object. The results related the object's background in its relationship with its context and were used to diagnose the current state of cultural heritage appreciation in the selected program, identifying the barriers that limit the understanding of the visual arts with heritage values, as well as the main regularities. The main conclusions focused on the need for transformation, both theoretically and practically, of the current model, as well as the conception of a participatory approach based on dialogue that allows cultural institutions to connect with universities, raising ethical and competitive levels in the face of the problems posed, with decision-making power over available resources and the evaluation of results.

**Keywords:** institution; visual arts; mediation; promotion; heritage.

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## RESUMEN

El arte es un generador de reflexiones, es una construcción subjetiva y significativa por ser producto de la acción humana. La mediación artística posee una gran importancia en la universidad, al permitir una interacción entre los estudiantes y el patrimonio visual. El objetivo del artículo es presentar un diagnóstico acerca del proceso de apreciación del patrimonio cultural universitario en los estudiantes de la carrera Gestión Sociocultural para el Desarrollo, de la Universidad de Pinar del Río "Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca". La investigación tuvo como método general el dialéctico-materialista, que, junto a métodos teóricos como el análisis histórico-lógico y empíricos como el análisis documental, unido a la observación participante, la entrevista y la encuesta, jugaron el papel principal y permitieron la determinación de indicadores de caracterización del objeto. Los resultados relacionaron los antecedentes del objeto en su relación con el contexto y estuvieron en el diagnóstico del estado actual de la apreciación del patrimonio cultural en la carrera seleccionada, la identificación de las barreras que limitan la comprensión de las artes visuales con valores patrimoniales, así como las principales regularidades. Las principales conclusiones estuvieron en la necesidad de transformación, tanto en el plano teórico como práctico, del modelo actuante, así como en la concepción de un enfoque participativo, basado en el diálogo que permita el acercamiento de las instituciones culturales a las universidades, elevando los niveles éticos y de competencia ante los problemas planteados, con poder de decisión sobre los recursos disponibles y la evaluación de los resultados.

**Palabras clave:** institución; artes visuales; mediación; promoción; patrimonio.

## RESUMO

A arte é geradora de reflexão; é uma construção subjetiva e significativa, pois é produto da ação humana. A mediação artística é de grande importância nas universidades, permitindo a interação entre os alunos e o patrimônio visual. O objetivo deste artigo é apresentar um diagnóstico do processo de valorização do patrimônio cultural universitário entre os alunos do programa de Gestão Sociocultural para o Desenvolvimento da Universidade Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca de Pinar del Río. A pesquisa utilizou o método dialético-materialista como abordagem geral. Este, juntamente com métodos teóricos como a análise histórico-lógica e métodos empíricos como a análise documental, juntamente com a observação participante, entrevistas e pesquisas, desempenhou um papel fundamental e permitiu a determinação de indicadores que caracterizam o objeto. Os resultados relacionaram a trajetória do objeto em relação ao seu contexto e foram utilizados para diagnosticar o estado atual da valorização do patrimônio cultural no programa selecionado, identificando as barreiras que limitam a compreensão das artes visuais com valores patrimoniais, bem como as principais regularidades. As principais conclusões centraram-se na necessidade de transformação, teórica e prática, do modelo atual, bem como no desenvolvimento de uma abordagem participativa, baseada no diálogo, que permita às instituições culturais conectarem-se com as universidades, elevando os níveis éticos e competitivos na abordagem das questões levantadas, com poder de decisão sobre os recursos disponíveis e na avaliação dos resultados.

**Palavras-chave:** instituição; artes visuais; mediação; promoção; patrimônio.

## INTRODUCTION

The constant changes society is experiencing in the workplace, social, economic, aesthetic, artistic, and, above all, educational spheres demand that cultural institutions and universities produce comprehensively prepared students. Their education must incorporate the foundations of science, technology, aesthetics, culture, and the arts.

Regarding comprehensive education, it is emphasized that the university population must be able to appreciate the different manifestations of the arts. Artistic mediation is a broad and complex field that has developed at various levels and dimensions, which has led to its formulation as an intersubjective, efficient, and practical term for the collective construction of knowledge about cultural heritage, its protection, and how to preserve it for its efficient promotion in universities.

From this perspective, the study contributes to overcoming, both theoretically and practically, the view of the promotion of artistic heritage in collections as a process that implicitly involves the participation of those involved, without questioning its functions and scope; especially in the central area of promotion, regarding the democratic expansion of its audience in exhibition spaces and universities.

Moreno (2016) refers to mediations as strategies and analyzes communication processes from the local culture, understanding mediation as a social practice in which a community is involved in a collective symbolic act. The concept of mediation is understood here as the set of interactions that come from the person's mind and the sociocultural context of which they are part. This raises a new arrival in artistic promotion, a different perspective on institutions from mediation, which has to do with that sensitivity understood as an interpersonal and collective dimension that escapes institutional rationality, including that of the media and information technologies, and that is inspired and guided by other rationalities, other sensibilities such as those underlying affections, in the constitution of identity.

From and with this new sensitivity, the active participation of the community population is becoming possible, not only in galleries, but also as a new way of promoting art in different spaces, integrating them into the effort to understand visual creation and culture; where cultural expressiveness demonstrates the need to approach artistic mediation exercises from the perspective of sensibilities, the relationship with community contexts, and social and cultural interaction as essential determinants in the development of knowledge.

Artistic mediation constitutes a necessary bridge between art and the public, it is understood as a critical device that generates experiences:

artistic mediation is not simply a tool to generate and/or attract communities or new audiences. Above all, it is a critical device that seeks to project, reflect on, and transform the ways we think about common space in and with art. It does so by

generating varied and unique experiences among the observer, the artwork, and the others who participate (Nicolás, 2021).

For these authors, artistic mediation creates a space for potential and safe experimentation, develops resilience, promotes empowerment, enables symbolization processes, and is a form of mediation in conflict resolution. In the community setting, the argument goes, "In this context, mediation maintains a distance from the formation of spectators and/or audiences, as it not only seeks mere cultural consumption but also attempts to provoke critical reflection" (Palma, 2019, p. 55).

Other researchers point out that cultural promotion constantly calls for reflection and analysis on the best ways to conduct research, bring about substantial transformations, and evaluate impacts (Gordillo et al., 2021). This process involves using artistic mediation as a powerful tool in the comprehensive development of human beings, where art constitutes an important avenue for the formation of highly qualified professionals. Thus, arts education is essential in preparing students for the social, political, and technological challenges posed by modernity.

The socialization of artistic work is a means of communication and a cultural proposal. This is what Deriche and Martín (2006) assume when they express that cultural promotion is, by nature, a way of connecting the population and culture, oriented toward its sustained growth; each of these actions implies a way of connecting the population with culture, which is why we understand it as a communicative and participatory process" (p. 43).

In the Latin American context, diverse experiences can be found at universities, especially in academic programs that address participatory mediation in the visual arts, with a marked focus on heritage values, particularly in Social Sciences programs, which connect faculty and students with local cultural institutions and spaces.

In Chile, the "Tomé" project stands out, which worked with students linking mediation with knowledge of territorial heritage. Another experience is the PACE program, a training plan in Art Mediation, aimed at undergraduate students.

In this regard, Moreno (2016) identifies two major perspectives: one focused on artistic workshops with social objectives and another on mediation in museum contexts to bring art closer to citizens.

A key reference in this field is the Kunstcoop group, formed by women artists and mediators in Berlin in the late 1990s. Kunstcoop established itself as a cultural project that works from a critical pedagogy perspective.

These approaches allow for a step-by-step mapping of not only knowledge gaps but also the institutional and sociocultural factors that affect the appreciation of artistic heritage:

- First stage: galleries as a center for the exhibition of plastic works in closed spaces (2015-2020).
- Second stage: art galleries as teaching units (mediators) of universities (2020 to present).

This approach reveals that cultural promotion is a dynamic and continuous process that connects different cultural times and realities to foster development and active participation in culture. It interprets promotion as a communication activity to coordinate actions based on the needs, interests, and preferences of the public in each space.

From this stems its educational impact, and one of the responsibilities of promotional work is precisely to anticipate potential outcomes when implementing actions in diverse spaces and targeting groups or sectors, especially university students. Promotional actions require talent, skill, a sufficient accumulation of knowledge, agility of thought, perseverance, and, above all, an adequate prior research process that ensures the construction of knowledge according to clearly defined purposes.

Problems related to the promotion of artistic values must arise, moreover, from the interests and needs of each institution; however, this reality is forgotten or denied. What dominates is the theory of the answer, when it should be the theory of the question.

This research considers artistic mediation as a tool for promoting university visual heritage. Authors such as Hernández et al. (2022), Santana and Jiménez (2021, 2022) address University Cultural Heritage (UCH), highlighting it as an emerging field within cultural heritage studies. These authors view the UCH as a resource and innovative setting in the educational process, while also projecting its management and promotion. Through institutional integration and multidisciplinary, a new university community can be built that is integrative, developing, creative, and above all supportive, a successful promotional and heritage conservation strategy for all. The objective of this article is to share a diagnosis of the process of appreciating University Cultural Heritage among students of the Sociocultural Management for Development program at the University of Pinar del Río "Hermanos

Saíz Montes de Oca." This will allow us to identify the main limitations of artistic mediation in promoting visual arts with heritage values.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research was based on a qualitative approach, which allowed for the analysis of the main references of artistic mediation from a participatory and socializing perspective, as well as the diagnosis of the current state of the students of the Sociocultural Management for Development program at the University of Pinar del Río "Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca", using the dialectical-materialist method.

Various theoretical methods were used to collect data, such as historical-logical analysis and logical thought procedures: analysis, synthesis, induction and deduction.

Beyond the theoretical and conceptual contributions on artistic mediation, promotion, cultural promotion, and cultural heritage and visual arts, the terms participation and sensitivity were also reviewed.

Various participatory research methods were used, the knowledge and use of which helped to address the limitations noted, such as participant observation.

The use of the empirical documentary analysis method was valid for verifying the current state of artistic mediation in the promotion of visual arts with heritage values in the Sociocultural Management for Development degree at the University of Pinar del Río "Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca", through the analysis of: subject programs of the base curriculum of the Bachelor's Degree in Sociocultural Management for Development, Law 155/2022 "Law for the Protection of Cultural Heritage and Natural Heritage", Regulation 32/2023 for the implementation of Law 155 and the MES projections on this law.

The research population consisted of 40 students, from the first to fourth years of the program, and 14 faculty members. The sample was random, probabilistic, and represented 93% of the sample. The sample was comprised of 14 faculty members, representing 51.85% of the sample. The following methods were used:

- Participant observation of five activities was used to verify the impact of these initiatives in direct interaction with artists, cultural managers, and community members.
- Interviews with teachers, using the interview guide, were used to investigate how artistic mediation is introduced into subject curricula to promote visual arts with heritage values.
- The survey, based on the questionnaire administered to students, was used as a key tool to explore subjective perspectives and open questions to students, which allowed capturing opinions, experiences and detailed narratives, using intentional samples.

The indicators used to guide the study were the following:

- Development of the artistic mediation process for the promotion of visual arts with heritage values among university students.
- Development of the impact assessment process, artistic mediation for the promotion of visual arts with heritage values among university students.

## RESULTS

The diagnosis carried out in the research through the application of methods, techniques and instruments mentioned above, supported a deeper explanation of the object and allowed the identification of the main regularities.

The survey found that only 15 (37.5%) reported receiving training in aspects related to the knowledge and promotion of visual arts with heritage values, while the remaining 25 (62.5%) reported not having received any relevant topics; an issue that requires priority attention.

Only 11 (27.5%) were able to mention any of the works of visual arts and artists in the collection that are part of the cultural heritage, and none mentioned artistic mediation as a tool for communication and the acquisition of knowledge through promotion through different channels, an emerging field in local and national identity.

In the documentary analysis carried out on the subject programs of the base curriculum of the career, Law 155 and Regulation 92, the Guidelines of the MES and the University of Pinar del Río for the National Program of University Cultural Heritage, it was possible to appreciate that:



Law 155, Regulation 92, and the MES Guidelines contemplate the appreciation of University Cultural Heritage through curricular and extracurricular means. For this purpose, the University of Pinar del Río makes a referral from the National University Extension Programs. This program holds the "Jesús Horta Ruíz" Honorary Chair, which introduces students to intangible heritage. They also participate in the Honorary Chairs of University Cultural Heritage and the Los Hermanos Saíz Chairs, where students participate in heritage routes and guided tours that introduce them to the cultural heritage of their university.

In the Sociocultural Management professional model, there is a potential for incorporating topics related to regional and traditional popular culture, as well as an appreciation for avant-garde artistic works. Some courses address aspects of the visual arts with a mediating perspective from the specialty's professors; however, they also integrate practical workshops with local works to connect heritage and everyday life. Visits to cultural institutions do not fully utilize the opportunities for cultural promotion within the courses.

In general, it was possible to appreciate that artistic mediation is aimed at the development of aesthetics and ethics based on the development of a general culture, aspects that could be enhanced through participatory artistic mediation, where students and teachers are protagonists of the horizontal and democratic construction of knowledge around the visual arts and the importance of promoting artistic creation, cultural traditions, artistic manifestations, the work of socializing exhibitions in galleries and their contribution to the promotion of their collections.

The examination of the core subjects in the curriculum of the program revealed gaps in the topic, despite the fact that the curriculum of the program includes appropriate courses for addressing the topic. Similarly, these subjects fail to take advantage of the potential offered by galleries and museums as educational settings, due to the limited time they occupy in the curriculum, a significant weakness.

Respondents believe there are gaps in student engagement and participation in spaces and events that contribute to the program, such as: openings of visual arts exhibitions, contemporary art exhibitions, theoretical and art criticism events, and participation in promotional processes and curatorial projects. They also point to the need to create teaching units in galleries and museums where study and research on mediation and artistic promotion, visual art collections with heritage value, and the creation of spaces for activities related to the topic can be realized.

Interviews with teachers revealed that there are still challenges with artistic mediation in promoting the visual arts with heritage values within curriculum programs. To be effective, artistic mediation must be systematically integrated and coordinated with curricular objectives and the educational context.

Artistic mediation is understood as a process that facilitates active participation, creativity, and personal expression, but its incorporation into teaching requires specific methodologies and pedagogically trained mediators who can connect the artwork with students' experiences and learning.

This study allowed us to verify the difficulties students have in the appreciation of art and cultural heritage, due to:

- Educational barriers, manifested in the lack of specific training in local art heritage or history, limiting the contextualization of works.
- Traditional pedagogical methods that do not encourage critical reflection or emotional connection with art.
- Limited expansion into cultural spaces (museums, galleries) due to limitations in dissemination.

Likewise, the results obtained showed a lack of knowledge about the main legislation for the preservation of cultural heritage at the international level and in Cuba, since, of the 40 students, only 14 (35%) could mention Law number 155 "General Law for the Protection of Cultural Heritage and Natural Heritage", while 32 (65%) showed no knowledge about it.

## DISCUSSION

Artistic knowledge and mediation to promote visual arts on university campuses and visits to city galleries were of vital importance to the university community, which revealed a lack of awareness of general aspects of heritage values that every university student should be aware of.

Artistic mediation, as a concept used in the art world, specifically for audiences and their development, constitutes a fundamental tool for the socialization of artistic work. However, it involves including both the work itself and those who circulate it, such as cultural institutions, artists, and managers.

Various authors, when studying this process of artistic mediation and promotion in particular, analyze it as a dialectical unity that links instruction and education, knowledge and communication. The fundamental objective of practicing artistic mediation in the field of promotion is to raise the level of appreciation for the development of participatory, reflective, and critical individuals, who need to understand artistic promotion as a process and not as a static event, in constant motion (Martín, 2006). We agree with this author in understanding that success in cultural promotion will depend on the concern for permanently addressing, in an orderly and active manner, the individualities of each spectator, their needs, and the essence of each situation. The above corroborates the results obtained in the research and ratifies the need to promote the visual arts in universities, and the necessary connection with creation and also with the public, who interpret and in fact influence and integrate into the artist's creative process.

Research recognizes that the process of cultural production culminates when those who receive cultural events and products -that is, the community population- receive, evaluate, interpret content, and consolidate messages. In other words, work with university students in their necessary interaction with related cultural institutions must be systematic, prioritizing cultural promotion and hierarchies, with a formative approach.

Mediation also constitutes an instrument for adapting and attracting audiences unprepared or unskilled in the appreciation of the visual arts to a plural context subject to constant change and in an environment that is continually being dynamically constructed.

In turn, Moreno (2016) suggests a distinction between mediation in two senses: on the one hand, as a model of artistic education for social intervention through art and, on the other, as an intervention in museum contexts between works and the public. For Moreno (2022), the visual arts are a valuable and useful tool for working in social and community contexts, in which subjects are involved in creative processes. All of the above corroborates the importance of developing artistic mediation in university students.

For Nicolás (2021, 2022), art mediation is developed through different artistic languages with the goal of learning art, although initially, free workshops are held. Art mediation seeks not only to teach the technical aspects of art, but also uses artistic activity as an educational tool to foster autonomy, social inclusion, and processes of individual and community transformation.

The author's definition broadly corresponds to what has been described about art mediation in the research, conceived as a process developed from different artistic languages for learning art. It reflects a broad and contemporary vision of art mediation, aligning with perspectives that understand it as professional support in creative processes, with the goals of well-being, inclusion, and community development.

From an integrative perspective, other authors consider artistic mediation as a dynamic and participatory process, with a focus on social and educational transformation through multiple artistic languages. Analyzed in this way, the authors' proposal corroborates the results obtained, considering artistic mediation as a tool that allows us to reflect on realities through the visual arts, ceasing to consider them as an accompaniment to social and/or political processes, highlighting their capacity to propose reflections and reflect on reality.

This approach contributes to a deeper cultural democratization of art and its social context. The authors show how this type of practice can result, on the one hand, in the formation of horizontal spaces in which there is no central discourse, but rather a socialization of the artistic, personal, and social content present in the works-visitors-mediator circuit. On the other hand, it can result in the collective construction of knowledge and (re)cognition around the arts, drawing on dialogue and subjective dimensions, with a view to cognitive processes that go beyond the historical-formal dimension of the works and their authors.

The study revealed that participatory, reflective, and critical artistic mediation for the promotion of visual arts with heritage values must be integrated into the teaching-learning process in the courses included in the Sociocultural Management for Development program. To achieve this, students must be involved in artistic promotion processes, and their integration into pedagogical strategies will foster identity building and a sense of belonging.

In this sense, art with heritage values stands as a powerful tool for reflection and strengthening of cultural awareness in the university environment, where participatory models of artistic mediation encourage interaction between students and visual heritage, generating significant learning and dynamic. From this perspective, comprehensive training is guaranteed, tailored to the current needs of cultural institutions, in addition to expanding professional performance methods that guarantee efficient and competent work in the field of artistic and heritage promotion.

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### Conflict of interest

Authors declare no conflict of interests.

### Authors' contribution

The authors participated in the design and writing of the article, in the search and analysis of the information contained in the consulted bibliography.



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