

"We Play and Slaaay": Cosplay as a New Form of Art, even in Slovakia

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If someone had told me 15 years ago that the innocent hobby of dressing up as popular heroes from movies would turn into a global phenomenon, I probably would not have believed them. At the beginning of the millennium in Slovakia, only a select few knew the concept of cosplay. Even within pop culture festivals, which were held regularly at that time (since 2007), fans in costumes appeared only very sparingly. One of the breakthrough years was 2008 (specifically, *Animeshow 2008*), when a group of teenagers came onto the scene and decided that creating costumes from popular anime would become part of their fandom identity. Compared to today, the creation of costumes back then was mainly based on materials such as cardboard, cheap fabrics and repurposing old clothes. They did not even dream of wigs and contact lenses. Today's young, beginning cosplayer, on the other hand, is saturated with a huge number of available materials (thermoplastics, specialized paints, EVA foam, wigs, makeup materials, sfx materials) and free tutorials available on the Internet. These materials should make their work on the costume much easier. But is it so?

If the amount of effort that today's cosplayers must make when creating a costume, so that they are considered at least average within society and the fandom (we are talking about Slovakia and the Czech Republic), were to be compared to their predecessors, it is immeasurable. Mistakes are not tolerated very well in today's cosplay society. Fifteen years ago, it was enough for a person to have clothes that remotely resembled the imagined character, and other fans of the given fandom were excited about it. Sometimes, even then, there were individuals who excelled in the execution of the costume – they were considered no less than the cosplay gods of that time. If by some miracle a cosplayer from fifteen years ago teleported to the festival in 2022, they would probably wonder how much time has advanced and why no one wants to take a picture with them. However, the availability of materials and instructions is not the only thing that has changed. With the advent of social networks and the global connection of artists around the world, the reception of cosplay as a phenomenon associated with art has also changed. Today, cosplay is not only discussed by a narrow group of fans on social networks and the Internet, but also in public media and news.¹ Such publicity, of a small and narrow-profile fandom until then, opened the door to new possibilities of presenting oneself and one's art.

The public also became interested in cosplay, and artists from other industries began to enter cosplay competitions (Picture 1). That is why I like to talk about cosplay as a new art that combines elements from several classic arts. Cosplay could be the closest thing to musical art, which is also based on the very composition of the words *costume* and *roleplay*, where a prominent part is the very rendering of the character, the so-called role-play. The skit is often a mandatory part of cosplay competitions and is evaluated as one of the most important parts in the presentation and performance of the given character by the cosplayer. An inseparable part is also the creation of costumes, which I would certainly include in visual arts. Cosplayers use techniques and procedures from painting, sculpture, graphics, and photography.

Cosplay is a very interesting type of modern hobby that combines elements of classical arts and has become the primary source of livelihood for many cosplayers abroad. It is reasonable to believe that Slovak fans of this pop culture phenomenon will also be recognized in this direction in the coming years.

1 See: CVIK, A.: *Cosplayerka Asumi prezradila, ako na Comic Cone reprezentovala Slovensko | ROZHOVOR*. Released on 12th September 2019. [online]. [2022-11-20]. Available at: <<https://www.rewind.sk/asumi-rozhovor/>>.



Picture 1: Group photo of cosplayers at the convention AnimeShow 2019

Source: © Butterfly Creative, 2019.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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CVIK, A.: *Cosplayerka Asumi prezradila, ako na Comic Cone reprezentovala Slovensko | ROZHOVOR.* Released on 12th September 2019. [online]. [2022-11-20]. Available at: <<https://www.rewind.sk/asumi-rozhovor/>>.

