

# The Tendency Towards Complicating Anthropologically Significant Elements of the Visual Form in the Fine Arts of the XX-XXI Centuries

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**Abstract**—The author analyzes the tendency of artistic perception to interpret abstract art forms in the search for mimetic equivalents and visual similarities in the surrounding world objects. One can see certain patterns in this process: there are tendencies towards constant complication of anthropologically significant elements of the visual form. The author reveals the consistent character of the discovery of new lines of perception, from the simplest perceptual stimuli endowed with anthropic properties to refined art objects found in unique plastic contexts each time. The significance of the topic is determined by the relevance of such tendencies in the fine arts of the XX-XXI centuries, which demonstrate great plastic potential to convey anthropological meanings, including existential ones.

**Keywords**—*mimesis; abstract art; art language; visual perception; anthropology of art*

## I. INTRODUCTION

"Art is the most explicit thing in the world, and there is no justification for those who cloud the minds of people seeking to learn as much as possible about it" [1]. According to Rudolf Arnheim, one of the reasons to create his most famous book called "Art and Visual Perception" was his strong rejection of mystifying art history and his fatigue of "incomprehensible, perplexing conversations about art, in which, claiming to be artistically and scientifically significant, they juggle with fashionable words and vulgar notions ... "[2].

The apology of "objective knowledge" about the meaning-generating potential of the visual form, declared by the American scientist, in the twentieth century was shared by representatives of a number of branches of art science: in the formal school (G. Wölfflin [3] and his followers), in receptive aesthetics (V. Camp and others), in iconology (E. Panofsky [4] and others), in semiotics (U. Eco [5] and others), in phenomenology (R. Ingarden [6] and others), in hermeneutics (G. Gadamer [7] and others).

In recent decades, Western experts have been analyzing patterns of meaning formation in the perception of various visual objects, which can be referred to the field of visual studies [8].

The fundamental work of the Russian art historian V.A. Kryuchkova "Mimesis in the era of abstraction" [9] is of great methodological importance: to examine the paintings of the second Parisian school artists, she uses the approach that allows detecting similarities or hints at them in the images radically breaking with the Aristotelian principle of imitation. The researcher skillfully "lifts" the pictorial motif from the "bottom" of the abstract painting [10].

The meaning-generating potential of both mimetic and non-figurative, abstract, ornamental visual forms helps to evaluate "plastic thinking" as a relevant notion of contemporary theoretical art history. Academician O.A. Krivtsov in his preface to the collective monograph "Plastic Thinking in Painting, Architecture, Cinema and Photography" indicates the intuitive, non-rational nature of this mode of creativity: "Plastic thinking is thinking by means of sensual forms, volumes, lines, colours, light, and shadow — that is, thinking by means of the full range of visual characteristics of the object "[11]. This refers to "neither verbal, nor conceptual thinking, but thinking in the material: for example, working with the texture of an oil canvas, adding up its visuality through the lines of drawings, spots, the ratio of volume, colour and light" [12].

A collective monograph "Anthropology of art: language of art and measure of human in the changing world." is dedicated to the issue of interpretation of anthropological meanings in various visual practices of the twentieth century and today [13].

The proposed article raises the question of semantic possibilities of conditionally non-mimetic art with an emphasis on anthropological, including existential, meanings. The objective of this work is to identify and hierarchize the types of images that implement a non-classical understanding of mimesis, taking into account multi-dimensional and multi-channel perception of the viewer.

## II. "HUMAN" IN THE PERCEPTION OF THE SIMPLEST VISUAL FORMS

Understanding structural components of an image as semantic and anthropological mediums involves examining the criteria of objectivity of such an interpretation in a

situation of individual perception. To what extent does the recipient fill an artistic form, which is extremely abstract from reality, with subjective meanings and associations? What are the possibilities of a work of art in representation (or translation) of "human" content in its various aspects — emotional, sensual, haptic, symbolic, cultural?

On October 18, 2017 at the Research Institute of Theory and History of Fine Arts of the Russian Academy of Arts, a round table "Portrait Art: Existential Dimensions" was held at the Art Theory Department of the Institute. The discussion showed that even the artist's intentional destruction of the links between the model that served as a prototype of the original plastic form and the product of the creative act, leaves a large field for anthropologically oriented interpretations: canvases or sheets of graphics continue to store significant details of the underlying cause of their creation - the image of man tries to escape, but does not vanish completely.

In conditionally non-mimetic (non-figurative, abstract) art, the situation is fundamentally different: the perceiving consciousness is offered only a complex of expressive means with non-obvious internal relations, which sometimes become clearer (or, on the contrary, even more confusing) due to the "guiding" title. At the basic level of perception of elementary geometric forms and their details, colour tones, contrasts, textures, at least in European eyes, a relative perceptual stability could be observed. The study of the fundamental components of the visual form (lines, spots, colour, texture, contour, volume, closed and open figure, etc.) and the principles of their organization (rhythm, composition, relations of detail and the whole) in the universal invariant mode reveals the presence of relatively stable mechanisms of visual perception. Emphasizing the exceptional importance of the context in each case of the unique "decoding" of the proposed visual stimulus, it is worth pointing out the archetypal nature of the structural components of the image: visual "hieroglyphs", although they do not exist outside of a specific "optical situation", one way or another appeal to the a priori psycho-visual abilities of homo sapiens.

Modern psychologists have experimentally proved that a person examines an object not following a random trajectory, but consistently "feeling" with his eyes the most significant elements of a figure: "Regular trajectories of examination are formed only with the active interaction of visual and motor components... Records of eye movements show that in the process of examination the observer's eye usually lingers only on those elements which carry information allowing to reveal the content of the image. Depending on the content of the object and the visual tasks facing a person at the moment of perception, there is a distribution of points of focus on the object, a sequence in which the eye moves from one point of focus to another and the duration of the focus. Visual tasks include detection, recognition, and identification. When an object is detected, only its presence is recorded; when it is recognized, it is classified as an object (based on the generalized characteristics of the class), and when the object is identified, it is compared with a specific reference model stored in memory" [14].

It is also known that the reduction in the flow of information from the external environment has an adverse effect on perception: "Sensory deprivation (isolation from external influences with the help of special devices) leads to changes in perception of colour, shape, size and distance, as well as to increased sensitivity" [15].

The process of visual image recognition by the human brain implies objective phasing. In psychology it is customary to distinguish four consecutive levels of "assembling" an image in the perceptive consciousness. At the same time, the way of classifying the perceived visual information is determined by the recipient's preliminary visual experience: subjective perception invariably reduces the object to the familiar one. Anthropomorphic meanings, given to the integral visual image (Gestalt) by its constituent elements, are based on objective properties of a person's optical apparatus, which endows the perceptual image with such relatively independent characteristics as constancy, objectivity, integrity and generalization.

Within this work considering possibilities of semantic and anthropological interpretation of visual images, special importance is given to the typical perceptual schemes that have been discovered by psychologists and allow to treat three-dimensional objects or images as comfortable and harmonious or, on the contrary, as "inconvenient" and uncomfortable. This issue is the subject of Alexander Lapin's study "Plane and Space, or Life as a Square" [16] providing convincing examples of the objective emotional impact of certain combinations of geometric shapes. Among other things, the author notes that an image containing too many elements to recognize can be perceived as "aggressive", "attacking", and "disturbing". Subconscious discomfort is also caused by the perception of ambiguous figures, unequivocal three-dimensional interpretation of which is impossible.

Objective laws of visual perception, consciously or unconsciously, become an instrument of influence in the hands of masters of art - painting, graphics, sculpture, architecture, photography, cinema, video art. The constants of visual perception increase the anthropologically significant potential of line, colour, texture, rhythm, which, in addition to thematic and symbolic meanings, brings a number of anthropological meanings difficult to verbalize.

### III. TOWARDS THE MIMETIC: MODES OF RECOGNITION

The meaning-generating process is obviously complicated when the viewer is offered not a discrete visual object, but a whole complex of visual stimuli. The process of perception of works of art, deliberately breaking with geometry and plasticity of the visible world, is especially dramatic. In Suprematism, Rayonism, geometric abstraction, Tachisme, Informalism, partly in Hard-edge painting and other directions of fine arts of the twentieth century, duration, rhythms, coloring, stroke density and other fundamental means of artistic explanation become extremely important. The non-mimetic, in an anthropological context, appears as an appeal to the emotional apparatus of the perceiver - at the level of perception, but with the involvement of individual

associative chains. The perception of such forms appeals not to conceptual and cognitive, but to intuitive and intonational mental abilities of a person. One could draw a parallel here with music with its non-visual and non-icological nature, which is, at the same time, deeply anthropic. In the absence of a sign and a symbol, music is rightly interpreted not only as the essence of art itself, but also as a modus of the human spirit ultimate existence.

We also encounter a similar mechanism of meaning generation in radically non-mimetic fine arts, when an artist influences a viewer at the level of primary distinction (a concept actively developed by the domestic aesthetician O.V. Bepalov [17]).

Standing in front of Anselm Kiefer's large-scale canvas "Waldsteig (for Adalbert Stifter) (Forest Path)" (2014), it is unnecessary to refer to the tragic suicide story of the Austrian writer. Cold, deliberately dirty colours with lightened tin pale areas, and sharp texture strokes, which can be read as sharp plant stems and waving a straight razor, immerse the viewer into a severe emotional state that seems to keep the traces of the extreme existential situation, where pain, despair and determination to end it all rule.

Moving towards the mimetic, an art theorist has to deal with the works in which anthropological content manifests itself not only at the stage of perceptual responses, but also at rational and reflexive levels. The access to these layers of perception is demonstrated by the graphic sheet of the contemporary Russian-Spanish artist Muhadin Kishev from the cycle "Anxious Times" (XII, 2003). The motif of a formidable foreboding is revealed through anthropocentrism of the visual form itself. Kishev provides the serrated pieces of staples, literally stuck into the canvas in the manner of fishing hooks, with the feeling of nervousness, taunting, annoying inflammatory pain, eruption and piercing. Sharp, rhythmic lines casting shadows resemble cracks in the wall. The rhythmic organization of the composition is also extremely important: homogeneity and mechanism at the level of sensation transmit the idea of totality and mechanization of physical destruction.

In this paper, the principle of recognition and symbolization of similarities in the perceiving consciousness becomes an important aspect of communication between the work of art and the recipient. The viewer feels almost at home - on the threshold of the familiar object world, in the cultural space.

Building a hierarchical system of images between the abstract and the mimetic, it is worth paying attention to the peculiar visual attractions — the illusionist shape-shifting works, which expand the possibilities of our perception and imagination.

In 2015, the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts hosted an exhibition of Dmitry Gutov entitled "Rembrandt. Another perspective. Works of Rembrandt Harmens van Rijn and Dmitry Gutov". The Moscow sculptor presented welded holograms, which from one particular point of view reveal recognizable Rembrandt motifs to the recipient, but from

other angles (including the position "from within") — illustrate the poetics of openness and incompleteness [18].

A year earlier, a dynamic sculpture "The Head of Franz Kafka" by a Czech artist David Czerny was installed in Prague. The head, made up of solid metal plates, is in constant motion, collapsing in a series of abstract art objects and then returning to the outline of the most mysterious writer of the twentieth century. Kafka's "transformation" is wittily allegorized by the incessant transitions from chaos to construction and from a recognizable object to a new scattering: from something acquired, reflexive, and "human" to the material of art and the pure eventness of the non-mimetic.

Both Gutov and Czerny in this case set up several channels of the viewer's perception at once, potentiating the creative consciousness of both the artist and the viewer.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The study of the meaning-generating possibilities of an art form remains one of the main tasks of various branches of art science of the twentieth century and today. The semantic potential of a visual image perceived both in its integrity and in its fragmentariness should be assessed taking into account the objective mechanisms of visual perception, including the basic perceptual level, and considering the understanding of the sequence of complication of semantic characteristics of the objects being studied on the way from the abstract to mimetic, where each new stage opens up additional channels of perception and encourages the viewer's active co-creation.

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