

# Man in Art: Various Implementations in History

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**Abstract**—The question is considered: to what extent each new phenomenon of art resonates in a large culture and influences a person. The author shows how to realize his cognitive potential: European art brings it to the limit in the 17-18 centuries. Then artistic creativity in history gradually passes to the mastering of the abilities of a self-valuable and artistic principle, in other words, the immanent development of their artistic and expressive means. This process continues to this day. In any artistic movement, all complex and subtle ways of artistic expression are associated with a deeply human dimension. Such an ability of art as to make the invisible and completely unrecognizable visible and tangible is the most important line of influence of Art on Man.

**Keywords**—*artistic expression; plastic transformation in art; man in art*

## I. INTRODUCTION

I would like to raise the question of the extent to which each new phenomenon of art resonates in “Big C” culture. By “Big C” culture we will understand all the spiritual culture of the era. In addition to art itself, it includes science, philosophy, morality; as well as politics and religion. That is, we start the argument with the question of how any work of art is culturally and anthropologically oriented.

The problem that we are likely to face in the process of studying the ways in which art influences spiritual culture is the idea of the intrinsic value of art associated with the fundamental freedom of art creation. This is an aesthetic imperative that claims the “irreducibility” of any work of art. On the other hand, despite this imperative, the ability of art to influence any extra-artistic spheres cannot be doubted.

This ability is most evident in the phenomenon of mentality. In the history of culture in the second half of the twentieth century, an understanding of individual and collective mentality was established due to significant achievements in the development of this concept by French historians, namely, those of the Annales School. The concept of mentality seemed to replace the concept of public consciousness. Unlike public consciousness, the concept of mentality includes not only the conscious part of knowledge, meanings, but also the sphere of unconscious notions and emotional expressions. Thus, mentality includes not only rational knowledge, but also such subtle unconscious spheres as imagination, intuition, memory, and will. Mark Bloch [1]<sup>p.441</sup>, Lucien Febvre [7]<sup>p.629</sup>, Fernand Braudel [2]<sup>p.546</sup>, wrote a lot about it.

The great merit of the Annales School is that scientists investigated and substantiated the relative autonomy and continuity of mental processes in culture. A lot has been written about the need to create a “total history” that would combine data from related sciences to create an interdisciplinary synthesis. According to Mark Bloch, “in order to really learn something about the past, we must first of all strive to understand what people had in their minds” [1]<sup>p.71</sup>. A great contribution to the development of the “new historical science” of the second generation of the Annales school was also made by Emmanuel Le Roy-Laadoure [5]<sup>p.417</sup>, Jacques Le Goff [4]<sup>p.160</sup>, Marc Ferro [8]<sup>p.832</sup>, Roger Chartier [9]<sup>p.272</sup>.

## II. THE STUDY OF MAN IN ART: FROM ARTISTIC FACTS TO UNDERSTANDING THE STATES OF MENTALITY

What was the main discovery of the Annales school? Until recently, the history of culture was viewed mainly as the history of facts. Historians, including art historians, cataloged the events, arranged them in time, accurately described and analyzed them. However, with this approach, the history of art appeared as a kind of still, not quite “speaking” matter. The scientists of the Annales School set themselves the idea of finding a vector in the life of the human mentality. Lucien Febvre formulated it this way: we view history as merely a “chest for storing facts.” “Just think, we do not have a history of joy, a history of love, a history of ...” [11]<sup>p.412</sup>.

Does art participate in the formation of the historical vector of the human mentality? We will certainly answer yes to this question. Yes, art affects all forms of spiritual culture, both directly and indirectly.

The direct effect of art on culture is most evident when an artist demonstrates various patterns of behavior, the perception and analysis of which can easily bring us to ethical, philosophical, and religious connotations.

The ability of art to translate models of human behavior in its narratives is well known to film and literary critics. In the cinema and poetry, however, there are many expressive means that act not directly, but indirectly.

For example, film music. Perhaps the most vivid example is the music of Nino Roth to Federico Fellini’s films. It has long become intrinsically valuable. It is precisely because within the very fabric of this music a new type of man of the second half of the 20th century was artistically revealed. This

is such a special music in terms of melody, composition, rhythms and syncopations, that even outside the visual plan of the film it is distinguished by its exquisite content. This is the reason why Nino Rota's music for films has long won wide recognition in philharmonic halls as an independent phenomenon: symphony orchestras perform it with great success.

Meanwhile, plastic arts are also able to demonstrate patterns of behavior. Take expressionists, for example. In the Otto Dix's movie called "The Big City" (1928), the artist depicts a noisy party, full of cigarette smoke. Brightly dressed bourgeois are dancing newfangled dances to saxophone music. There is no direct edification in the film. However, the reproduced patterns of behavior of the so-called "masters of life" clearly express the artist's position. This is biting satire and mockery transmitted through exaggerated poses of the drunken people. The perception of what is happening produces a repulsive impression.

Another example is Ernst Kirchner's painting "Berlin Street Scene" (1914). There are no special social meanings. Yet, there is a solution to an interesting plastic problem. The composition of the painting is sloping, decentral, slightly extended upwards. The citizens are walking down the street, as if swaying from side to side. Kirchner seeks to create a lively, expressive picture. The gravity of the painting forms its internal drama and mutual tension. In this canvas, the artist's desire to paint for the sake of painting itself is clearly felt. He makes you willing just to watch the painting. He has come up with his own expressive plastic-dramatic trick and this trick is impressive!

The differentiation of the paintings makes it clear that each piece of work is good in its own. From the end of the Middle Ages and up to the triumph of the Renaissance, the ability of art to skillfully transform the human life environment was highly appreciated, as well as its ability to develop cognitive interest in nature, and to enhance awareness of everyday secular motifs that are the essence of life and that decide the fate of people.

However, with the accumulation of art skills in the implementation of artistic and cognitive images, people started losing interest in the skillful image of nature as such, and the creators came to appreciate what could be the quintessence of artistry on canvas. This quintessence of artistry is difficult to determine. But, in general terms, the painters sought to ensure that the significance of the picture now implied not simply the ability of the artist to reflect the phenomena of the surrounding world, but also demonstrating a certain intrinsic value of the work as an original art creation.

This is when artistic Vermeer appears with his grand and hitherto unprecedented work with light! The striking shots of selective illumination of the canvas created a special attitude, gave the picture an unusual volume, and formed the depth. Light streams, leaving flashes on the canvas, expressive local light spots in the depth of the image. Let us take as examples such masterpieces as "Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window" (1659), "The Music Lesson" (1665), "The Milkmaid" (1658). In each of these paintings one can see

amazing light-color findings, which never existed before Vermeer. Another remarkable painter Rembrandt is also known for his artistic skills. His "The Night Watch" is an inventive theatrical scenography of an outstanding European painter!

All the above mentioned examples raise the issue of art being neither a function nor a reflex. In fact, art is an original creative sphere immanently developing according to its own laws.

### III. CONTINUITY OF PLASTIC TRANSFORMATION IN ART

Let us remember one crucial observation made by Wolfflin. He claims that starting from the 17th century; the mutual influence of some works on others has become a more important factor in combining new styles than that of direct perception of the actual reality [3]<sup>p.87</sup>.

Such cultural and historical impulses, demanded by artists, are sure to be found in Cezanne's still life paintings, where the accented materiality of apples, pears, and a snow-white tablecloth is revealed. Here it takes a lot of effort for the space of any picture to keep its integrity. Many followers of Cezanne from Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque to representatives of "The Jack of Diamonds" - Ilya Mashkov, Petr Konchalovsky, Robert Falk used this method of lapidary, material and physical painting. I believe that post-impressionist trends of the "new materiality", of the realization of Being itself beyond the "culture filters" demonstrate a clear desire to get rid of any ideology, of all serious ideas in order to reveal the very triumph of painting.

Fast forward another 40 years later. Remember Arcady Plastov's painting called "Spring" (1954). As you know, during the first show at the exhibition it was criticized as being nothing but something accidental and insignificant. It was accused of deviating from the principles of socialist realism. However, time has won. Current views at a painting feel the hymn to the eternal rebirth. It is the image of the most fruitful life with a capital letter, which does not refer to anything except itself.

Impressionists once again showed that the essence of art is in multiplying the joy and beauty of the world. They demonstrated that such an occupation cannot be considered less significant than the expression of deep existential meanings by means of art. Moreover, I dare say that the race of sunbeams on the canvases of Claude Monet or Auguste Renoir is an example of the most profound existential meanings. This is one of the expressions of the VITALITY of art.

It is necessary to determine what artistic meanings imply. I would suggest the following. It has long been the custom that we take the meaning of the work as something invisible, something that is behind, "on the other side" of the text. One of the prejudices rooted in aesthetics is the opposition of expressive-linguistic and symbolic in art. However, an artistic image can be a self-contained and self-valuable sensual space, a triumph of its materiality. Therefore, the meaning of a work of art also involves the experience of the very atmosphere of the work of art, the feeling of emanation of this work, and the feeling of its environmental impact. All

the listed emotional and psychological effects are no less important than its symbolism and the implication of the work.

The trouble with traditional art studies is that it most often defines the word "meaning" as subtext only. That is - the background of a work of art that is hidden from the eyes, but in which one must be able to penetrate, one must comprehend. But what about the foreground? I mean the very "substance of a painting", which acts, of course, as a goal, and not as a means. What about the singing materiality of "The Jack of Diamonds"? How to evaluate the complex, expressive color compositions of Henri Matisse? It can be argued that the very texture of the painting takes part in the formation of the meaning.

Roberto Matta, a modern architect and thinker, does not consider himself an artist. He speaks modestly about his method of painting: "I try to give a plastic form to mental constructions" [6]<sup>p.8</sup>. I feel it necessary to point out that this task is very ambitious. Let us think about how boldly it is spoken: to give form to mental constructions. That is, to give an external pictorial form to the INTERNAL. That is to make invisible tangible. This is not only the local goal of Roberto Matt - it is also an attempt of the entire art creation of the last century to find a picturesque FORM that would be invisible, pre-perceived. That is, it would keep the artist from breaking through to the metaphysical, to the intuitive, to the inexpressible in words.

This is the ability of painting - to make visible and tangible invisible and completely unrecognizable. This is the most important line of influence of art on a person.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would like to focus on one important issue. At the beginning of the twentieth century, there appeared many portraits of brooding people in art. People are doing nothing; they are just sitting silently, meditating, and contemplating. They are often alone. Remember "The Smoker" by Paul Cezanne (1892), "Absinthe lover" by Pablo Picasso (1901). Here you can add a few wonderful paintings by American artists: "Young Woman in Green" (1915) by William Glackens, George Bellows' "Self-portrait" (1921).

These works alone allow us to see that painting starts speaking highly of human leisure, and now can see some special significance in conveying the state of human contemplation. It is not by chance that Hermann Hesse wrote the following epigraph to his novel: "Idleness is the mother of psychology". These are not frivolous, but very wise words. We are talking about such idleness, doing nothing, about silent leisure, when some signs of self-understanding appear within a person, when some kind of connection between the human micro world and the macrocosm is simply established. Being able to feel this connection is a great value for a person. It means for them to escape from the bustle of existence and turn to Cosmos, to the big wide world.

Thus, it can be assumed that the existential direction in painting was discovered long before the concept of problematic and limited human existence became the subject of philosophy for Sartre and Camus, other existentialists. I think that this is an understanding of the significance of the

time when a person is left alone. That state of thoughtfulness is nothing more than a reflection on the place of one's own self. Staying on his own, a person gets an opportunity to integrate his personal inner world.

It is not by chance that I have given all the above mentioned examples of the works of painting, reflecting moments of reverie, self-immersion of a person of the late 19th and early 20th century. Notice the fact that it was precisely at the beginning of the twentieth century that the craving for the study of the phenomenon of reflection in culture broke out in the humanities. I will draw special attention to this. What is reflection? Reflection is self-directed consciousness, an ability to talk to oneself, understand one's inner world, dive into oneself meditate.

In literature, Marcel Proust was one of the first to demonstrate such a brilliant ability in the multivolume essay "In Search of Lost Time" (the novel was published in France between 1913 and 1927). This was followed by a series of plastic, musical, and theatrical variations which innovatively presented the forms of human reflection: M. Maeterlinck, G. Ibsen, A. White, R. M. Rilke, C. Debussy, M. Ravel, A. Platonov. This relatively unknown topic is still to be explored.

Of course, the history of painting varies. There are works that focus on the plot, and there are works in which composition, paints, lines, and volumes themselves are expressive - that is, the entire pictorial world of the painting acts as the primary importance, independent of the mimetic basis of the work.

I would argue that in the history of painting, beginning with the Renaissance, the following two lines coexisted: on the one hand, art valuable for depicting life as it was, and another art valuable for its ability to skillfully organize its own pictorial life within itself. The latter is the art which we appreciate not for the "joy of recognition" of life realities, but for enjoying the solution to an interesting pictorial task, to which we, as the audience, have found the key. We have understood the artist's plan.

They may ask me about the currently popular idea that "art should be useful". The fact is that art can be useful only by remaining as free as possible, when an artist does not forget about an absolutely impartial nature of art creation, when an author does not seek to appeal to anyone.

Thus, the humanity of art is shown in its meanings, which are far from being reduced to cognitive, educational, verbally expressed, distinctly rational. Art has an impact on the mentality of a person, even without direct inclusions in the "plot of his life". Emotional and psychological changes, often unexplained and highly mediated, the impact of which we feel due to art, demonstrate its power. This is the way it was and always will be. An artistic and expressive gesture will always involve something unidentified that is ahead of thought and any rational interpretation.

Therefore, in conclusion, I would like to cite one very true theoretical maxim: "While philosophy seeks truth, a work of art already encloses it in itself."

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