

ARTISTIC CREATIVITY AND VISUAL THINKING

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Visual thinking is a type of non-verbal thinking. Visual thinking also helps us to ontologize the results of abstract verbal thinking so that an abstract essence becomes intellectually visible. Using it to examine and analyze various works can yield new insights and a more complete understanding in fields ranging from scientific to artistic. A painting will be taken as an example for this purpose, though results of this research may be extrapolated on other kinds of arts. Andrei Pozdeev is one of the greatest Russian artists of the 20th century. The master's creative heritage is amazingly cohesive. Nevertheless, it can be easily divided into several independent groups which are not dependent on factors of chronology or genre, but on attributively crucial characteristics.

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Visual thinking is a human activity, which results with new images, new visual forms. These forms make visible the meanings of abstract concepts. While mediating verbal thinking and practice, images of visual thinking are comparatively free in correspondence to objects of perception. They have an ability to reflect in themselves practically any categorial relations of reality – spatial, temporal, attributive, causal, teleological, existential and so on. But they reflect these relations not by means of word's expression, but through expression of them in spatial-temporal structures, in transformations and dynamics of sensual images.

A general theory of visual thinking is to be extrapolated on arts. A. Baumgarten, the father of Aesthetics, classically defined this branch of philosophy as a theory of sensual cognition. This definition is right in general if to understand *cognition* in its categorial meaning. Some philosophers described aesthetical cognition as the lowest level of human cognition, but some of them, on the contrary (Shelling, for example), have seen in Aesthetics the top of human knowledge. *Cognition* is cognition, it is a process of penetrating into roots, essences, nature of things. If to explain an aesthetical attitude towards a world not only as plain sensations and presentations (as sense-data), but as visual thinking, then an aesthetical image may be briefly denoted as *Visible Essence*.

Simply speaking, a world around us may be divided on two parts. One part is directly visible, it is a surface of phenomenons. We can see it, touch it, smell it, etc. But the second part is invisible.

Philosophers used to call it «essence» of the objects of our perception. If the «essence» is not known, it seems dangerous and hostile to man. So it is necessary to understand the «essence» to express it in terms of sensual images. We believe that the aesthetic attitude is nothing but an expression of rationally knowable entity in structures transformed perceptions and representations, that is, in the forms of visual imagery thinking.

Aesthetical attitude is a human ability to express essences ideally, i.e. via ontologized and sensual representatives of these essences. That is why, while aesthetically expressing some deep essences, men subjectively make them known and not so dangerous; such a kind of visual thinking is accompanied with a feeling of pleasure, admiration, relief, reliability and so on positive emotions. Aesthetic attitude is a person's ability to express the essence of the ideal, that is, sensuous ontologized and representatives of these entities. That is why, while aesthetically express some deep essence, men subjectively make them known and not very dangerous, this kind of visual thinking is accompanied by feelings of pleasure, excitement, relief, reliability and so on positive emotions.

There are two sides of a work of pictorial art, mutually tied. The first side we call naturalistic tendency, the second – symbolistic tendency. Proportions of these tendencies are very different in various art works. According to his philosophical and artistic program a painter may prefer one tendency more than another, consequently one painter may be called, in general, naturalist, another – symbolist. Still two aspects of a picture, naturalistic and symbolistic, are its attributes. In order to communicate with a painter, a spectator must recognize, more or less, natural-geometric forms and shapes of a painted artistic object. So the first plan of an art work (its surface) is a naturalistic (imitationistic) key, by means of which one can enter into an author's intention, conception. Some historical and conditional details are helpful for this purpose, especially when a spectator has a good artistic experience and taste. But a real work of art has some other levels, situated within its inner plans. The more profound an artist is, the more number of these levels one can find in his picture. These levels express symbolically author's artistic conception of a human relationship towards the world, towards different aspects of reality. Author's and spectator's visual thinking starts on these levels.

Now we want to illustrate and to prove just a little this sketched conception of visual thinking in arts.

Now let us offer you explanations of several great art masterpieces from the point of view of two correlated tendencies, naturalistic and symbolistic. «Diskoflingerl» of ancient Greek sculpturer Miron is well known. But a few people can see in this sculpture not simply a sportsman, but a visible essence of Apollo – the god of peace and war. Miron expressed geometrically in his work the harmonical theory of Heraclitus, the philosophy of symmetry of peace and war forces, which are in a mutual struggle eternally. Natural lines of a human figure are subordinated to the main idea of antique dialectics. Lines of hands, shoulders and so on are the mental key to recognize a bow and an arrow in a battle position. Just the same lines with additional of a head and some other body lines are embodied an ancient Greek lyre, a musical instrument of a silver-bow god Appolo.

Contemporaries of Heraclitus and Miron did understand this visual rational image because they were accustomed to a mythological kind of thinking and highly experienced in arts. But modern people mostly see in this sculpture only a physical body, and art critics notice in it many mistakes from the point of view of anatomy of a human body. Miron's «Diskoflingerl» is an eternal masterpiece, which visually expressed a great idea in a very laconical and perfect geometrical form.

During many decades of his fruitful life, the great Russian artist of the 20th century, Andrei Gennadyevich Pozdeev (1926–1998) created many remarkable compositions, including hundreds of illustrations, engravings, watercolours and pictorial paintings. The master's creative heritage is amazingly cohesive. Nevertheless, it is quite freely differentiated into several independent spheres, volumes or groups, within the boundaries of which, the compositions community is not dependant on chronology or factors of genre, but on attributively crucial characteristics.

Another, rather integral group of his paintings presents pictorial generalizations, in effect, the summing up of the previous efforts, landmarks the development of the artist's subjective language illustrating his progress. The landmark pictures summarizing what has been achieved carry in a nutshell with the artist is subsequently infolding in large and small series and cycles pictures.

The painting *The Chalice* (1989) belongs to the artist's etalon masterpieces, which show Andrei Pozdeev to be a painter who creates not from himself, but through himself, as an intermediary between the divine forces and people.

He can be seen as a prophet, sensually showing what heaven-born is.

Trying to define the peculiarity of such favourites, Immanuel Kant called those people who possess charisma, «God's speaking-trumpets».

The painting *The Chalice* is the most original mandala because it visualizes the way an ecumenical spiritual wisdom condenses into a gracious elixir, appealing to helping a human soul restore the religious relation of the finite with the infinite, which was destroyed during the Fall of Adam and Eve. The composition demonstrates ecumenical ways which reintegrate the Macrocosm into the condition that existed before the division of the one whole human creature into the male and female hypostases. This division resulted in the excision of a finite man from the infinite Absolute, of human souls from the ecumenical Spirit.

As a mandala, *The Chalice* is created according to the row emanation principle of flat horizontal layers that simultaneously converge from the periphery towards the centre. That is why the painting is not so freely pictorial but simply graphically linear. The image of *The Chalice* is structured from a row of geometrically equal circles, crosses, squares and triangles, shown both in their separate symbolic meaning, and in symbolic correlation with each other. In such a case, numeric monad symbolism, symbolism of duads, triads, tetrads, pentads, hexads, heptads, octads and enneads play a fundamental role in the painting.

In the painting *The Chalice* the structure of ten circles shows the correspondence between the nine planets of the Solar system and the Sun (Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranium, Neptune, Pluto) and the ten divine emanations of the good qualities of the Universe (Glory, Wisdom, Discernment, Compassion, Severity, Radiance, Infinity, Acknowledgment, Foundation, Kingdom) into the ten parts of Adam Qadmon's body. Such correspondence first of all confirms the resemblance between the planetary structure of the Universal macrocosmic and the macrocosmic of primeval man. Secondly, it demonstrates the geometrical elements of Adam Qadmon as the initial structure of human perfection, which was lost at the Fall. But, through the communion of the divinely spiritual and the united male and female, human spiritual energy can be regenerated.

In *The Chalice* there are astrology and Masonry, alchemical and tantric signs, symbols and emblems, but this does not mean that magical content of Cabbala or Theosophy, Christianity or Gentoo is split into separate pieces. The essence of *The Chalice* tenderly leads the viewer to the Macrocosmic. This artistic bridge

contributes to the revival of the true integration of Man and the Macrocosmic, but not one that is confessionally isolated or religious in its essence. This integration is that which existed at the beginning of the Creation, when Man was not male or female. In the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, it is said, «There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither bond nor free; there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus» (3: 28).

The Lord's Supper, which Andrei Pozdeev painted in 1990, is structured from several expressive layers, which gradually reveal their essence in a step-by-step process.

Pozdeev's method of depiction appears to be the only correct method. The painting's content is presented neither too abstractly, nor too realistically. Such an artistic interpretation of the religious event avoids exterior demonstrativeness and adheres to that mixing of form and content, which allows the spectator to pass on quite easily from the observed to the less obvious. The viewer can ascend freely from indexical and iconic sign-oriented notions to symbols. He is able to speculatively contemplate several levels of the essence. The colourful and substantial elements of the painting have different meanings. Such polysemanticity should be considered a regular phenomenon, as far as symbolic mutation represents an attributive feature of the artistic language of the master. Signs, meanings and symbols are born not outside the process of viewer's communication with the artist's creation, but they are fundamental to their interrelation.

Initially the painting discloses the essence of *The Lord's Supper*. It vividly presents one of the main events in the last days of Jesus Christ in his earthly guise. Therefore, the composition shows the most important moment of the secret meeting of the Teacher with his twelve closest followers. The Messiah institutes the sacramental mystery, or oblation, as a gracious means of uniting the faithful with Christ – the oblation of His Body and Blood as the true Holy Lamb, taking upon himself the sins of the world.

The sacral act is presented in a square chamber, cut off from the rest of the world by the hoop of the sacral circular line. The Son of the God is depicted sitting in the centre, his head wreathed by a sky-blue aureole. Near the Saviour, observing the mirror symmetry are six future apostles – three on the each side of Messiah. On the other side of the table are six more followers of Christ, in whose company the figure of Judas Iscariot is underlined. While the heads of the Teacher and His eleven apostles are white, the arch-traitor is depicted with a black-coloured head.

Here we should note that in *The Lord's Supper*, one of the dominating themes is the

symbolic motive of a grain or a seed. The grain form is appropriate for the head of Jesus Christ because the Son of God is the grain of bread, sent by the Highest Power to humanity to fulfill the mission of the promised Saviour and world Re-newer. It is not by chance that in the New Testament Jesus Christ is called the Apostle. «Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him that appointed him» (Eph. 3:1, 2). In addressing his followers, the Teacher affirmed, «I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give you is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world» (In. 6:51).

Presenting the story's essence, Pozdeev's *The Lord's Supper*, provides an opportunity to comprehend the meaning of the white crosses, placed in the corners of the painting. On the one hand, these are the signs of four canonical Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, whose texts narrate the Last Supper's events. On the other hand, the crosses, oriented to all the cardinal points, symbolize those apostolic paths, which the loyal followers of Christ have followed to christen people. The crosses are a stable religious symbol of the unity between the finite and the infinite.

Pozdeev's painting presents the sacramental mystery in the form of a scene of the Last Judgment at the moment of the second Advent of Jesus Christ, who has come for the judgment of the sinners. «I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance» (Mat. 9:13). In this case the event is shown as a court consisting of God's Son and the righteous saints. «For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son... And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man» (Jhn. 5:22, 27).

Judas Iscariot, after betraying Christ, disappeared – which meant that a new righteous man was needed in replacement. «And they gave forth their lots, and the lot fell upon Matthew, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles» (Acts 1:26). But, in Pozdeev's painting the event differs. The compositional structure of the painting unequivocally underlines the significance of the sinner Judas, who, having recognized his sin and repented it, managed to rise above it. It is not by chance that it is said in the Holy Scriptures, «Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying: I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood» (Mat. 27:3, 4).

Andrei Posdeev's *The Last Supper* is truly religious, if we understand religion as the con-

nection of man with the fullness of existence. The painting makes visible a sacral meeting of people with the Almighty. The essence of this creation is the following: only a man who has gone beyond his sin and atoned for it by his sufferings is worthy of becoming a connecting link between infinite God and finite people. It is not by chance that the figure of the sinner Judas is presented in the form of the crucifix; it recognizes the hero's sacrifice and the forgiveness of his sins. Responding to the content of the composition, the famous prayer before the oblation is as follows: «Today, at the Lord's Supper, Son of God, receive me, the oblationer».

Knowledge of essence (natural or social) can teach or can't teach people – a basic alternative for artistic discussions also. We would not continue further on this topic; you see already the revealed logic of history of arts and historical dialogues among distinguished artists. It is very important to give freedom for all principal artistic tendencies. Only then arts, taken totally, are developing normally and effectively. Suppression of any principal artistic program leads to a disharmony in artistic creativity.

Thus every great master finds his own original form of visual thinking and materializes this form in an art masterpiece, eternally alive.

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