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SOME ASPECTS OF REALISM IN MODERN ART

The problem of realism in art plays a major role in the evolution of artistic thinking and is of great interest for art researchers and the public at large-numerous art lovers.

The skill of using the means of figurative art in creating artistic images which give the most complete rendering of the world man lives in, combining its outward characteristics and inner nature, has made it possible for all the genres of plastic arts to become the most superb and accomplished works of man's creation. The organic linkage between arts and realities is responsible for the emergence of magnificent works the art lover watches as the description of this or that form that exists objectively in nature.

In meeting today's ideological and social needs, realistic art has produced quite a few works which over the entire history of figurative art reveal the inner nature of man's realities through their outward forms in an aesthetic manner. Realism, however, never implies that nature should be just copied. The artist reproduces his realities after re-thinking and processing them. "Artistic image is a composite and streamlined reality which is correlated to the existing realities through the dialectics of correspondence and non-correspondence, analysis and synthesis, acceptance and rejection, rather than through the simple links of similarity".

Over the entire history of art realistic representation in art has come a long way. In opposing the various schools of



artistic modernism, the realistic art of the day continues to progress, displaying its new potentialities and actively influencing the general evolution of the global artistic process.

The basis of realism lies in the very nature of representational art, but it should not be viewed as the plain copying of the outward realities' characteristics. Representational arts have specific phenomena which entail a more profound interpretation of realism in artistic activities.

Painting and engraved printing, also known as non-spatial arts, deal with flat surfaces (those of a wall, board and book page) and, as such, they render the branches of figurative art conditional. While they are unable to convey the characteristics of time and space, they possess their own means of conditionality producing the illusory impression of the third dimension, volume and length of action in time.

The repetitive description of one and the same figure in medieval artistic compositions executed to convey the various stages of action is the linear expression of a desire (we find a bit naive today) to overcome the limited opportunities in describing the characteristics of time.

The description of external realities and of the impressions and emotions they produce is one of the causes encouraging the production of representational works. The nature of every work of art is shaped, above all, by a real basis or existing realities.

The characteristics of an object are real and existing outside ourselves: they are objective data our senses can cognize. But at the same time our impressions are also real and



they undergo changes generated by specific situations. This makes it possible to produce infinitely diverse realistic descriptions of existing realities, as demanded by the needs of the day. Being an important theoretical problem, realism is a historical category. Over the entire history of artistic evolution it had undergone changes, but its *raison d'être* remains unchanged.

Realistic are the works of the Italian quattrocento showing the impressive power of realistically describing the central and peripheral details. The desire to give the most realistic rendition of an object is translated into formal drawing executed in a forceful and clear manner, producing the illusion of tangible forms. The characteristics that exist objectively (that is, independent of transient situations) are stressed. The joy of "discovering" the world, a living and diversified entity, evinces one's desire to "touch" everything with one's own hands and to analyze the real structure of the forms.

Rembrandt's works are also realistic, even though the structure of his forms is concealed. The reality of the impression one gets is conveyed through his forms under specific conditions. Pitch dark at night is cut through by a stream of blazing light that blinds one and enables the viewer to catch the glimpse of hazy silhouettes or forms as if melted by the light. Thus, the impressions emerging as illusory sights of realities are conveyed. But Rembrandt's realism could never be so deep-reaching or it could never leave such an impact on the evolution of art, did it not create those representations for a greater purpose, one of conveying most intricate emotional dramas while having no means of verbal comment (which is the basic tool of expression in literary works). The painter uses different means and tools:



special techniques of lighting employed to put the heart of the drama in high relief.

thus, our emotions and experiences generated by objective causes are also realities the art of painting describes by means of its own artistic techniques for want of verbal comment based on the transmission of sound.

Having drawn on the best of tradition and experience gained in times long gone, the method of socialist realism has unlimited artistic techniques and it has expanded and made more meaningful the concept of category of realism and the realistic description of reality.

Of truly artistic value are works which by their very nature make use of special techniques not as an end in itself, but rather as a means with which the artist can convey realities perceived in the context of historical conditions. Those are the works destined to stay with us forever, even though they may have been misunderstood or underestimated initially and came to be recognized for their true worth with the passage of time.

Now we take up some of the works of Soviet Georgian figurative art for the purpose of illustration. There was a time the uninitiated could not grasp the realistic basis of David Kakabadze's Imeretian landscape paintings. Now it is a recognized fact that it is the artist's genius that could give such a powerful rendition of his hometown landscapes which when seen from a bird's eye view, are represented as a combination of mountains' silhouettes and rectangular fields. That is, what you get is a perfectly real impression similar to one you get



while looking down through a plane's window and watching the terrain's criss-crossing outlines growing more conspicuous with smaller details blurred. However, the tangible impression you perceive from above, cannot serve as the exhaustive characteristic of a work executed in what is defined as realistic representation in the true sense of the definition. By virtue of the artistic effect the painter produces, the work's message is conveyed in a more meaningful manner: he enlarges the space, blowing up the expansiveness of the object he works on intentionally, and comes up with a "generalized image" of his homeland.

In comprehending and interpreting realities, the painter displays his originality and individuality, which help the painter grow more accomplished in his own style and attain complete artistic fulfillment. Realities are the inexhaustible source of the artistic truth expressed and of the painter's individual talent applied. This, however, does not imply that a work of art is a carbon copy of nature, reproducing realities line for line. Every painter depicts realities on the canvass according to man-made laws, showing the truth of "man's presence".

What is it that makes Lado Gudiashvili's decoratively stylized compositions depicting old Tbilisi's colorful Bohemian scenes studded with unique Kinto personages, so understandable to the modern viewer? It is the dynamic plastic lines which render the Georgian style of painting so plastic. Incidentally, plasticity is also typical of Georgian national dances famous for their powerful choreography. And apart from plasticity the Kinto image rich in its bright costumes, figures and body movements is executed in a stylized manner. While he overstates



the "real" basis of the life and image of Kinto, the painter's attention is centred on Kinto's basic traits and characteristics rendering them comprehensible to the modern audience.

The painter is called upon to center his attention on the basics. He develops the basic characteristics the ordinary viewer's eye can perceive only vaguely without realizing their fuller meaning. And it is the realism of those basics discovered by the artist, by virtue of which Lado Gudiashvili's uniquely nationalistic paintings effect such a forceful impact on the viewer.

Realistic art comes up with the in-depth interpretation of nature, rather than simply produces replicas, and it unearths both a superficial and inner truth. Disclosing the nature of an object through its appearance is a basic quality of realistic art and this never implies copying nature. "I perceive the whole truth and not the part of it that is visible to a human eye. I admit that the painter watches nature differently than the ordinary mortal, because his sense of perception discovers an inner truth under the outward appearance", says Auguste Rodin. These words of his are also interesting: "I interpret nature the way I see it according to my temperament and my sensibility in harmony with the emotions it excites in me".

Naturally, realistic art does not necessarily call for the exact reproduction of the outward "natural" appearance of an object painted. What is important is an in-depth comprehension the painter attains in describing an object or a unique piece of nature. However, the problem of achieving resemblance is not a minor one in realistic art, though, and we want to repeat it again, the idea is how to discover the inner nature of an object



or of a phenomenon, rather than come up with the exact replicas of an object's outward appearance.

If one refuses to depict the outward appearance of an object as closely as one can solely in a desire to show off his individuality, one indulges himself in nothing but sheer eccentricity. "The sine qua non of the artist's success is, in the final analysis, a totally selfless interest in, and utter devotion to, an object and the profound perception of the nature of being".

Let us cite yet another example of Soviet Georgian art; N. Ignatov's monumental canvasses with seemingly disparate episodes mounted on them in a daring manner. Without delving into such ornamentation adorning his compositions, we should like to say that his painting techniques draw heavily on the realistic method rich in numerous potentialities. They show both realities and the painter's approach to them, while conveying the spirit of the day. Various details worked out most exquisitely, may not fit in with the narrative composition mainly because of their generalized forms and stylized execution effected with a view to making the interior more decorative by exploiting the wall's flat surface. These disparate fragments are blended into a monumental message one approaches as a poetic lay about the painter's homeland (the Pitsunda fresco) or as old Tbilisi's romantic and colorful setting generating tremendous patriotic fervor in the modern viewer, or as a paen to man-worker and creator (Pirosmani).

N. Ignatov's artistic realism stems from life itself and reveals a profound meaning, proving the artist's love of life and of all the good deeds man performs.

What we have expounded so far should not convey the idea



that it is the ideological and social dimensions of art alone, isolated from the forms and techniques of art, that make up realism. The approach would be too narrow-minded.

The illustrations we have just quoted from Soviet Georgian figurative art enable us to refer to other general problems realistic art faces. These few examples, perhaps far from being classical ones, render it possible for us to analyze the artist's interrelations and his individualistic approach toward the comprehension of realities.

The practices of figurative art prove that the loyal rendition of the forms of life is not tantamount to the photographic copying of realities, or to achieving the formal plausibility of art, or to producing the exact replicas of realities. "Art always deals with the reflection, reproduction and description of reality, but it has nothing to do with the production of its replicas, reproducing it in the literary sense of the word".

Therefore, changes in real forms and conditionality are not what the art of realism should stay away from. The conditional transference of real forms does not entail a breakaway from the accurate reproduction of realities, even though not every study the artist undertakes, can be approached as meaningfully conditional. For the conditional rendition of real forms should not be equated with such changes which destroy the forms and blurr the message of a work. The demonstration or discovery of the genuine truth of nature through the emphasized stylization, hyperbolization or simplification of forms is, in some measure, a deviation from reality. However, this is also a departure effected in good faith with the nature of artistic images presented in good faith too. "This is the good faith inherent in the artificial realities of art, good faith deviation,



good faith conditionality, good faith simplification and stylization appearing as forms worked out to discover truth".

There is yet another trend involving the problem of reflection of reality that has emerged in the 20th century art.

In various nations many people are now obsessed with a desire to create a "new" work of art at all costs. Everybody cries for new, progressive oriented artists and the most rabid champions of modernism alike. The problem of New is a major one. But the overt eccentricity indulged in for the sake of new is never able to supersede the correct interpretation of "new" as an organic extension of the artistic experience gained, which experience embraces a critical re-appraisal of values, a newly-devised reflection of realities and "the measure of the adequate truth of objective realities".

The idea of creating "new" whatever the cost, yields most diverse results often viewed as a break from realism. And now that the fundamentals of realistic art are being confronted with the emergence of an object-free art praised as a truly liberating art, the art critics and scholars have come to face the lofty mission of upholding the rich tradition and intellectual values th contemporary generation of artists have inherited from the past. The dialectic evolution of the very conception of realistic art is increasingly instrumental in evaluating numerous phenomena of figurative art in a correct manner.

The role art critique has to play is, indeed, a momentous one.

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