

PERCEPTION OF NATURE IN CULTURE OF THE NEW AND CONTEMPORARY HISTORY. FROM KNOWLEDGE TO REFLECTION ON CONTEMPORARY WORLD

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ABSTRACT

The paper investigates the vision of nature in the culture of the New and Contemporary history, beginning with the Renaissance era until the present day, singling out the key periods of Baroque, Classicism, Romantic and Post-Modernism. The theory of cognition, perception of nature and its artistic reflection has always concerned researchers and is relevant at all times. It has been noted that in ancient times, a myth associated with the cult of this or that period, characteristically realized in art played a certain role in formation of the concept of "nature". In the Contemporary history, when myth had lost its dominant influence, the perception of nature and the depiction of animals were marked by its scientific cognition. Particularly this opened up new worldview horizons. In the general picture of sociocultural contradictions in the contemporary world and its global challenges, mind of the researcher sees nature in the perspective of their life values for future generations.

Keywords: *time, nature, perception, classical painter, modernity*

Introduction

Man's place in organic world, his relation with the environment and other life challenges placed the issue of nature as one of the top-of-mind. It was the genuine concern in the Old and Modern times and becomes even more sensitive in the contemporary era of post-modernity, taking into consideration tackling of global problems.

Researchers have been looking into the matter of nature in a loose philosophical sense and in a narrower more particular one, in terms of definite fields of expertise and scientific interests. In their arguments crucial is the problem of ecology, implying the relation of man and nature throughout the centuries-old history of humanity, which appeared relevant in the 20th century and formed into the concept, created by ecologically-oriented scholars. While Freeman et al. (2013), Newman (2005) and Morton (2007) disputing on environmental problems, bring up the important ethic problem of man's relationship with animals and caution man against overestimation of his role in the earth ecosystems. Such overestimation had led by the late 20th century to nature's dramatic transformation, which gives evidence of man's failed effort to dominate it. It is the concept of "nature" as cultural value that determines the human society's moral aspect. Aaltola (2012) demands, "What is the ethical significance of animals' sufferings?" She refers to the skepticism of man taking little notice of this sphere of relationship, and to the necessity for new ethic paradigm. Rothfels (2002) marks there is no civilization that has not been barbaric. Fraser (2005) rightly considers our thoughts and actions towards animals to be indicative of the human cultural level. Franklin (1999) calls the end of the 20th century the important historic period that brought up the issues of "animals' rights" and the value of their existence. In this vein Tichelar (2016) expresses the public opinion that such longtime occupation and entertainment as hunting is a cruel act and unacceptable in the civilized society. To the view of a contemporary artist of the post-industrial society, nature appears dramatically changed. Brown (2014),

Pollock and Rainwater (2016) name the wide audience of philosophers, literary scholars, cultural and art specialists who are destined to speak of the cultural prospects of the synergies between man and nature. Thus, Aftandilian (2007) offers not only a new paradigm in the animal study, but also a new understanding of the array of topics, including environment – the wildlife habitat, behavior of animals and the interpretation in fine art up to and including versatile postmodern movements.

Publications of Russian authors of the 1970s-1990s also emphasize the importance of this problem. Ikonnikov (1985) speaks of the development of urban environment and assigns to a crucial role to nature as the essential component of man's biological existence. Pictures of nature as if mask the present disharmony in the case of “nature-man”. Tikhanova (1990) sees the core of morality and ethical attitude toward nature in the very essence of animalistic art. She marks that in the diversity of means and techniques of expression, addressed by artists in the 20th century, there is a clear-cut understanding of wildlife preservation, an animal is treated as a capital imperative idea, associated with the goals of animalistic art now. Dolgov (1994) suggested the development of a separate “philosophic theory of man” that explores the problems of “man's cooperation with nature, people's attitude toward nature and its effect on man, the formation and development of human aesthetic sensibility and aesthetic consciousness, the artistic merit of nature. The heart of the cultural aspect of animalistic art's reality in the 20th century was artists' academic views, which were of value as they addressed contemporary issues concerning the world of wildlife and signified the importance of animalistic art. Masters' worldview builds a system of opinions, convictions and doctrines. They concern many issues and considerations on the problems of genre specificity, on value of ancient animalistic renderings, on methods of the animalier's work. Their ideological position, based on love and knowledge of wildlife, determined the creative attribute of the animalier in the 20th-century culture and directed public's attention to the primary importance of the environmental agenda.

This work continues the thread of conversation about the vision of nature from the perspective of great historic art styles and contemporaneity. Acting as a certain cultural dominating idea of time, concentrating valuable ideas of the age, style is featuring the developed “worldview”, which includes nature. One can trace in it the key evaluation criteria. Representing the age, it brings into sharp focus the worldview sphere. This work identifies the key periods when nature was a paragon, a certain aesthetic model, and was endowed with ethic meaning.

Methodology

The historical and artistical analysis method allows depicting the natural “worldview” while evaluating the human attitude toward it, involving the two crucial components –aesthetic and moral, which can be considered in a broader, common to all mankind sense. Comprehension of the universe and nature translates into themes of works of art, into the choice of artistic tools. In the contemporary world, when human values are seriously reconsidered, the “man-nature” relation gets a new connotation.

The concept of “nature” in art of the new and contemporary history

The comprehension of nature as one, integral and self-developing system, reflects the culture of the Old, New and Contemporary history and is artistically interpreted by art. The culture of Old age gives many examples of understanding nature, its spiritualization by human thought. The purpose of this work is to follow the evolution of views of man, belonging to the New and Contemporary history, on natural world, and how, with the course of time, his values in understanding and study of wildlife were more emphasized. In the New age these values acquired the nature of a scientific understanding of the world, capable of cognizing the common factors of the natural world order, what crucially distinguishes them from the earlier periods of fostering the ideas of myth-making. The Contemporary history can be called kind of culminating. It has demonstrated the key positions in the relationship of man and nature. In the era of global changes, this natural world, largely studied and used in favour of man, increasingly demands its understanding and a broader presentation of environmental problems. In the context of present day global challenges, the concept of this article appears extremely timely, firstly, in the sociocultural context. Given dominant information technologies and new communication media, the problems of physical world preservation as an integral unique way of life prove to be crucial.

The sociocultural aspect of the animalier art comes to the forefront, especially in the context of the persistent ecological problematics. The necessity to consider this phenomenon is dictated not so much by the subject and the extent of knowledge as by the lack of conversation about this as a structural phenomenon in the interaction between the cultural and descriptive aspects. Secondly, important is the

artistic aspect. The world of nature and animals presents the key source of artists' inspiration in different art forms. It is meant to remain as such for succeeding generations. In the biblical understanding of nature, the human and the animal represent the "Creation" (means 'poem' translated from Greek) and they are originally beautiful as being artfully created. The concept of "nature" in the conscience of human of the early world is inherent in his convictions.

Antient thinkers saw in nature the universal cosmic belonging. In their realization nature manifests the law of order and beauty. Thus, such concepts as geometricity, proportion, the "golden section", which found their realization in ancient Greek art, stand out as living symbols of antique natural world order. It is no accident that Aristotle considered art to be a creative imitation of nature, while philosophers of ancient Greece were called the "physicists", after the Greek "nature". Frolov (1989) marks, "Ideal, worthy of a sage was considered to be life in harmony with nature. By this, basically, was substantiated the object of the scientific cognition of nature, which was first set by ancient thinkers and had been addressed by them in the framework of the physiophilosophy, through making notional suppositions".

Let us quote Gersten (1954), enunciating the ancient Greek concept of "nature" as an aesthetic unity of natural and divine: "The Greco-Roman world was realistic by superiority, it loved and respected nature. It went along with it (...) for it cosmos represented the truth, beyond which it saw nothing (...) The Greek, enlightened by a high aesthetic awareness, perfectly fathomed the expressiveness of the external, the mystery of the form, for him the divine was existing embodied in human beauty – though it nature was worshiped, and he did not go further this beauty..."

The Antique culture acts somewhat as boundary between the Old and New World. Chronologically, this is still the Old age, however, if to proceed from the ancient Greek's universal idea of the worldview, his vision of the Cosmos, nature, his cultural being is ahead of time to a large extent. Nature gets the highest appreciation; it is equivalent to the Cosmos. The myth supplements this vision. The poetic picture of Greek mythology, as an inescapable part of the Antique culture, offers no separate attractive guide for reading – it makes, as known, the essence of the entire Antique worldview. It already gave the primordial definitions of the world, which is throughout natural. At the time of the Renaissance man continues to find in nature the source of aesthetic inspiration. Landscape in works of Leonardo da Vinci, Raffaele, Giorgione and other masters of the 16th century is distinguished by a particular enlightenment and reflects nature's potential holiness. There is nothing negative in it, no destructions; it takes part in human being, it is its aid. In this is the moral principle of culture, nature is understood as a great gift. The successive periods of historical development demonstrate the multiplicity of views on nature.

In the 17th-18th centuries, environment appears dynamic, potent, full of energy of the earth and heavens in the whirling of natural manifestations. Its emotional sensitivity is unrestrained, the changing states are transitory like in the pictures of the 17th-century Flemish masters P. Rubens and F. Snyders. It seems nothing can stop this powerful charge of energy. This part of the natural life, which is cultivated by the Baroque, mostly reflects the view of life of the man himself, turned to the great spaces of universe, endeavoring to get insight into the unknownness of the worlds. Time passes, the perception changes. The Baroque is succeeded by Classicism – the kingdom of reason, cognition and logical sequences. Nature now appears sublime, in the spirit of the antique ideal. Nature is sentient in works of 18th-century French painters N. Poussin and C. Lorrain, sometimes even detached and a stranger to live manifestations, but always appears in a proud inerrancy and as if suspended in this state. Numerous expeditions, undertaken by naturalists, in which visual artists took active part, contributed to the accumulation of factual information. They were sketching known and little known to science species of animals and plants, directly contacting with the natural world. This can be demonstrated by the large collection of the so called "naturals" of the Kunstkamera, Russia's first scientific museum. It contains the water-color drawings of plants and insects by Maria Sybilla Merian, the 18th-century German painter, entomologist, scientific illustrator and publisher of *Metamorphosis insectorum Surinamensium*, acquired for the Kunstkamera; the drawings by Georg and Maria Dorothea Gsell, who worked with the Academy of Sciences on invitation of Peter the Great; botanical sketches by German naturalist J. Ch. Buxbaum, who became the first botanist-member of the St. Petersburg Academy of Arts and Sciences, recommended by Peter the Great for the description of Russian plant life; and the works of Russian masters. Furthermore, "a considerable number of young people of Russian nation were exercising themselves in life drawing" (Pekarsky, 1873). This is referred to drawings of students of the Academy's Chambers of Arts and Etching. Here worked academic and private Russian pupils of the Gsells: F. Cherkasov, A.A. Grekov, P. Pagin, A.

Malinkovkin and M. Nekrasov, who excellently painted in watercolors (Stetskevich, 1997), continuing their work in the middle of the century.

The drawings clearly demonstrate the first experiments in the animal art, the methods of studying and depicting the subject-matter, namely, the vision of the animated nature, which had crystallized into a definite concept. Its backbone consisted in a comprehensive view of the subject, involving a detailed recording of all its properties, as of a certain natural, scientifically important, treasure. Indeed, zoological illustrations, finding application in science, formed on the basis of such drawings. To begin with, these renderings, made from life, were aimed to serve the needs of the young science, which required accuracy.

Therefore, concerning the objective cognition and observation of nature developed the concept of "wolf life". If the necessity in natural descriptions in the early 18th century was explained by the emerging science's exigencies, the propagation of animalistic renderings in the subsequent period was determined by its cultural sensitivities, in particular, by the response of European and Russian fine art to new themes and motives.

In the 19th century, in the Romanticism era, nature and animality as if were filled with vibrant energies, their physical vigour was as though fared from the roots of the earth. They always seemed novel, there was no place for the mundanity. "The Romantic painters were masterfully attracted by phantasy, folk tales, folklore, and they were lured by far-off lands and previous historic times, by living of tribes and peoples not yet affected by the European civilization, by the wonderful and glorious natural world. Being in love with nature, Romantic painters hauntingly painted its life. They found earlier unknown artistic devices, new sounds and colors to capture the beauty and grandeur of these free elements" (Gurevich, 1980). If in the age of Classicism, aggrandizing the Great Human Mind, man seems to determine the being of nature already, the time of Romanticism takes him back to the wilds and contradistinguishes the natural and human forces.

The approach to the wild world as a biological social medium, bound up in man's life and indivisible with him in many respects, became possible in the time of dizzying scientific discoveries, when the animal's place in human society had been reconceptualized. At that moment the development of ecological thinking, based on ethical and aesthetic attitude towards nature with its outstanding value, is now becoming a reality. Man's research interest in the first half of the 20th century resulted in a situation where the boundaries of interaction between man and nature become more symbiotic. Such dialogue brought to a concrete and a more person's subjective understanding of the animal; nature itself was endowed with thought and feelings, which, undoubtedly, inspired high moral feeling. In actuality, this was an important task that determined the art and cultural concept of the 20th century – the integration of contemporary issues with the past, the ontological pursuance of the reality of the being, which seem to bring human thought back to those times of natural harmony, in particular, to the beginning of the Old Testament ancestry. Reasoning on this topic, Bakushinski (1981) assumed that "the new spiritual fabric of life", built on "the agonies of the past pathway" should return "the humanity to the pristine origins of life, its experiences, to those last simplicity and inartificial ways that are the signs of sheng, and to the resolution of the previously existing fundamental tragedy in its final purgatorian action". "The more complex, contradictory and intense is man's life in the contemporary society," wrote Dolgov (1994), "the more often he directs his eyes to nature and culture, attempting to find in them at least some kind of respite from travails, from a meaningless existence, harmony and beauty, gone in distant and very close times. In such conditions man is forced to turn to his "beginnings": to the pristine nature where it has been preserved, or where it represents an idealized form, to classical culture, not yet deformed by contemporary barbarians."

Nonetheless, the animalier art along with other fine art genres, extremely loudly and, if anything, quite fully reflected the established "world picture" of its epoch. Urvanov (1793) was writing about this in his day.

Having compared the "animal type" of the painting to "floral", "landscape", "portrait", "battle" and "great history", he saw in all this a certain universalism of the world, the harvest of "the work of God and man" (Urvanov, 1793). The further study of the physical world around resulted in the inception of new images that were enriching the genre and expanding the concept of "wild life"...

With the course of time, it was increasingly understood in a broad sense as the universal category.

The epic insight into nature, when a concrete content is realized indirectly, in a special poetic conceptual form, presents one of such tendencies. Specifically, looking through late animalistic works, as the most close to nature, one may notice painters' special tendency to a poetic interpretation of landscape, ornamentality and decorativeness of the image itself. Sculpture, painting or printmaking seem to intertwine together, forming a certain polyphonic modus of expressive means. Emerges

synthesis, when animals, plants and water fuse, and the integral living nature rejoices. The epic image has its own proportion of artistic conventionality – from poetic to symbolic. The tendency for a poetic-philosophical allusion pronouncedly dominates in works of the animal painters. This presents the important regularity of contemporary animalistic exhibitions, stemming from the historical and philosophical conceptualization of the gained experience. To make an animal one's ally for love to nature – this is what attracts painters.

In the 1990's and 2000's this process was getting more dynamic, the life material more complex, while the problematique became more relevant in the social and ethic context. Nature began to be fancied as a compound temple with own structure, where sounds, colors, fragrances have different "codes". The whole world is perceived according to the principle of "text", as a chain of signs of various substances, in which the thought is expressed. In the Modern time, the complex temple with its own structure became even more diversified in the terms of style. What is called the stylistic upsurge became the formulation of a deeper understanding of the reality, of a more serious analysis of the problem of nature.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, it should be emphasized that in understanding the concept of "nature" the fact of the incomprehensible is hidden. Even in the 19th and 20th centuries, in the age of the so called conquer of the living nature, in the age of great scientific discoveries, its sacral significance did not vanish. Sensations bring forth more new challenges. Nature is being revealed in a new quality. The Universe now appears a grand idea rather than an eternal mechanism. This process of renewal in many areas of culture becomes clearly pronounced. Not for coincidence DeKoven and Lundblad (2012) pose the question whether researchers of our age should focus on the academia of studying animals or better focus on the concept of nature in the theory of contemporary culture, paying special attention to the animal welfare. Fundamentally, throughout the entire human history, the consistent tendency, leading to the understanding nature, fostered the formation of ecological culture. For this purpose, the intense development of the animalist genre turns into a significant sociocultural and historically expected process. The animalier art not only forms a cognitive impulse, based on its study it is possible to address many theoretic and practical problems of concern to modern society.

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