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## THE IMAGE OF MAN IN THE SOCIOCULTURAL SPACE OF THE PRESENT-DAY WORLD THROUGH THE PRISM OF THE INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF SCHOOLS OF ART AND DESIGN

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### ABSTRACT

This paper presents a survey and a brief analysis of some of the major topics in the present-day visual arts as seen from the perspective of a variety of architectural and artistic schools from around the globe featured at an arts festival held in 2015 in Turin, Italy. The authors undertake to examine some of the major historical factors for the postmodern era facilitative of artist efforts being concentrated in the direction of reflecting mankind's most salient topics and images – namely, man and his place in the world. This philosophical topic, which highlights the significance of man in society and the world as a whole, is not something new. It has been explored by many a Russian and foreign researcher. Most philosophical concepts have regarded man as an inherently valuable being, a major source of images and symbols in art. Contemporary art, naturally, owes its birth to a variety of artistic cultures and worldviews. One cannot but recall here the syncretism of man's primitive culture, the idea of the harmony of soul and body from the period of classical antiquity, and later from that of the Renaissance, the cult of the body from the Baroque era, etc. A new aspect examined in this paper is the attempt to focus, instead of going back to the analysis of past experience, on the subject from the perspective of the modern age and take an integrated look at some of the common consistent patterns in the process, which should help view the phenomenon under study in a more comprehensive fashion and in its development, and, eventually, determine its place in global art.

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Comparing various samples of art in an attempt to demonstrate some of the present-day trends may help gain a deeper insight into their nature in the domain of art and design in this constantly changing world of today, with these trends representing a single complexly structured space characterized by dynamic interaction between multiple variables.

**Keywords:** dimension, (focus) area; sociocultural reality; installations; artistic image; creative work by young people; modern age; man; human body; schools of art; space; exposition

## 1. INTRODUCTION

We know that man shapes the sociocultural space of a particular era by reflecting public consciousness. He is the main instrument for apprehending the reality in which he lives. In any era, directly or indirectly, he finds himself in the center of attention and it is through him that it is possible to express by means of a unique form like art the essence of the present-day worldview and cultural values of society. Both in the past and in the present, man is a projection of his time and helps forecast a future model for the world, while the artistic image serves as a vibrant and expressive means of actualizing the idea. The image of present-day man in art is characterized by a diversity of interpretations, which is a sociocultural characteristic of our time's society, representing in many respects the single world culture. Clearly, the information culture of present-day society, predicated on multiple interrelationships, reflects the "world picture" of present-day art. A creative conceptualization of sociocultural reality is international art festivals. In July 2015, the Italian city of Turin hosted the first International Festival of Schools of Art and Design, staged at the Accademia Albertina delle Belle Arti with support from the Italian cultural association Euroarte. The event featured graduation projects by young artists, architects, and designers from a number of countries, like Jordan, Greece, Romania, China, Germany, Turkey, Poland, Peru, and Russia.

It, above all, is worth characterizing the festival as a major sociocultural phenomenon of our time. Its significance has been noted by the head of the Accademia Albertina Salvo Bifonti: "We've been getting increasingly aware of the possibility that our ability to invent things and envision a possible future for us may well be facilitative of major transformations in the social, ethical, moral, and economic environments of our European civilizations – especially, of Western civilization, as well as of developing countries. And this may result from people's peculiar pictorial potential and creative talent. This gets highlighted and realized when various schools of art from around the world get an opportunity to have a real, rather than virtual,

encounter with each other. Gatherings of this kind appear to be of particular importance at the international level”<sup>1</sup>. The above process, which is well characteristic of international intercultural interaction between various nations, was given special attention through staging the Turin festival. It is of significance in many respects. First of all, it helps beget a spirit of rivalry and competition and cultivates a sense of unity in creative work. According to the head of the San Paolo company Luca Remmert, “the Accademia Albertina provides the impetus for the genuine career growth of artists, illustrators, and designers and affords them the opportunity to learn from professionals and compete with each other”<sup>2</sup>. Second of all, the diversity of artistic projects featured at the festival is about the possibility of getting the public to estimate the national originality of these projects and encouraging the artists to remember their ancestral roots. And, third of all, the festival is about looking into the prospects for further action and major creative decisions. By demonstrating the changes occurring today in the world and in art, the international festival of creative work, thus, acts as a sort of composite determinant of new ideas. It also excites viewer interest, attracting numerous participants to discuss some of today’s most topical issues.

*Methods.* In investigating the topic, the authors employed the historical-problematic and systemic methods, which presuppose the analysis of the structure of the artistic image within the cultural-historical space of the present-day world and make it possible to assess the major trends and dimensions shaping the identity of the present-day artist, designer, or architect.

*Practical significance.* The material discussed in this paper may be of value both to art history, as it enriches national and European art with topical subjects and facts, and in a broader philosophical-culturological sense, as it helps identify specific priorities in relation to society and man. This is a philosophical issue that has some practical implications. The paper’s *practical significance* lies in that the topic’s specific aspect investigated in this paper may be taken as a basis and expanded in culturology with a view to gaining a proper insight into the issue of culture in postmodern era society and some of the major trends in the present-day artistic process.

This *paper’s primary purpose* is to provide, based on a body of empirical material, a characterization of new artistic approaches to the analysis of man in art in the context of contemporary history through the prism of a single art festival held in Italy and, based on this, identify some of the prospects for the present-day artistic process. The *paper’s scholarly novelty* is substantiated by man being considered as a culturological phenomenon of the information society.

The issue of man in the philosophy of post modernity has been examined by foreign and

Russian authors. In terms of the artistic aspect, man has been investigated by such foreign scholars as A. Jones<sup>3</sup>, J. Hirsh, I.L. Wallace<sup>4</sup>, K Stiles, P.H.Selz<sup>5</sup>, K.Harries<sup>6</sup>, T.L. Prescott<sup>7</sup>, W.Kelly<sup>8</sup>, R.V.Elder<sup>9</sup>, J.-F. Lyotard<sup>10</sup> etc., and such Russian scholars as A.V. Mikhailov<sup>11</sup>, O.S. Kordobovskii<sup>12</sup>, I.V. Nikitina<sup>13</sup>, A.K. Yakimovich<sup>14</sup> etc.

**Scientific novelty** This paper is an analytical reflection on how ambitious creative concepts may integrate with each other in the works of young artists creating their conceptual space at the scale of a 20<sup>th</sup> century exposition.

## 2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are 3 major ideas that have been of particular interest to, and have found reflection in works by, representatives of creative professions, like architects, artists, and designers. The 1<sup>st</sup> idea consists in demonstrating the positive effect of information technology on art, which will employ the various means of influencing the audience in demonstrating the fact of the comprehensive development of man and creating a new image of the world. The 2<sup>nd</sup> idea follows from the first one and deals with the biological essence of man in an urbanized world. Here it is about the environmental orientation of present-day art, capable of speaking out about man and his preservation in today's world of information technology as a natural integral being. And lastly, the 3<sup>rd</sup> idea is related to the issue of conveying the individuality of man in the broad mass information society.

Works by young masters have shown that in present-day postmodern era society much of the interest for man has been exhibited in the area of his biological essence. It is about the interpretation of the human body in art. Reflecting on the beauty and functionality of the human body, Salvo Bifonti draws upon the great ancient cultures: "The human body remains one of the major objects of study in Italian art academies. Still strong is the practice of using live models to paint from, which is mandatory in the curriculum. Back in the day, in Western art of the past, starting with ancient Greece through to neoclassicism, and even in ancient Egypt, the human body was always regarded as something perfectly harmonious. Ancient Egyptians were the first, ahead of the Greeks, followed by the Romans and all European art, to choose the human body as the core for sculpture, drawing, and painting – for art as a whole. This anthropocentric paradigm was predicated on the notion that through art one could derive much pleasure and excitement in contemplating the human body. These days, we are really limiting ourselves in this specific world of art, where a drawing, a painting, or a sculpture are about living people and all education comes down to just memorizing and identifying muscles on a human body, whilst there is a lot more to it than just that, like the

plasticity of forms, for instance, and much more. Our ancestors extolled the body as a “castle” for the soul, a treasure”<sup>15</sup>.

Salvo Bifonti speaks of man as a biological being, focusing on the idea of the multi-functionality of his body in unity with his spiritual essence. The discussion is continued by Mayor of Turin Piero Fassino: “The arts have always told us about the body, expressed it in a particular form, and explored the relationship between the body and space around it. The concepts of ‘beauty’ and ‘quality’, discussed in the works of Greek authors, have found reflection in Homer’s protagonist: the ideal and changeless man with divine (splendid) proportions of the body. This notion of man is destroyed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. That being said, we are regarding with rapt attention the works of students demonstrating a novel understanding of the body and searching for and analyzing things with inexhaustible vim, as they are seeking to capture the beauty of the human body”<sup>16</sup>.

The works of young artists are diverse both from the compositional and technical perspective and from the perspective of apprehending the very essence of man in present-day society. Traditional pictorial variants in the form of compositions of painting, graphics, and sculpture are neighboring constructive solutions, photography, and installations providing unexpected viewpoints and views that challenge entrenched stereotypes in art.

The 3 ideas mentioned above have found reflection in the works of artists in the subject of macro-cosmos, representing the existence of man in the vast global world, and in the construal of macro-cosmos within the usual intimate, personal space, spiritualized by him. In both the human body acts as a tool for cognizing the world and oneself. In their essence, these philosophical issues, which have preoccupied society since time immemorial, continue to be topical to this day. That being said, in the present-day world our view of man has changed in a major way. He has been losing – in today’s technogenic and highly informational zed space – his integrity, relinquishing the idea of universality, which used to preoccupy classical-era masters. What man has gained in exchange for what he has lost and how he has been realizing himself in this world has been a matter of debate among representatives of creative professions. While in antiquity the human body was regarded as a sort of sacrosanct vessel – a receptacle for the human soul, in the present-day world its sacred meaning has been totally lost. A switch in values has occurred. Nowadays, the human body is just a “pure form” subject to multiple experiments. Turning to the syncretic thinking of antiquity is perhaps a sort of nostalgia for the past with its phenomenon of an integral, undivided understanding of the world and man. According to Salvo Bifonti, “there, subsequently, develops a longing for the perfect, as is the case with artist Munch. This may be due to the fact that man is no longer

regarded as the center of the world – he has ceased to be the primary purpose of reality, has been lost in darkness, and lives in chaos. This is no more than a natural reflection of gruesome human games, like the Holocaust, Fascism, and Stalinism in Europe. We should not abandon artists who are trying to steer reality onto a different track. It is worth intervening in the artistic process positively and constructively. For art is rife today with instances of deconstructivism and nihilism. It is worth reviving humanism with a shift in focus to the beauty of the human body and separating the body from the universe, since it is man that God created in his own image, not what was around him. In this regard, I am convinced that the learning process ought to be dominated by drawing from a life model”<sup>17</sup>. It, however, is worth admitting that a buoyant perception of man is no common occurrence in present-day works – on the contrary, man seems to be at the end of his spiritual and physical resources. He is not elated but dejected. The environment, urbanized to the maximum, is a stranger to his biological essence. This issue has long preoccupied the minds of thinkers and artists. A perfect example is the era of sentimentalism (the late 18<sup>th</sup> century). The focus in literature and pictorial art is on the simplicity of human morals as an expression of real-life nature. In the present-day world, man searches for a way out of the situation he is in and often fails to find it. According to V.M. Dianova, the actual idea of the “interrelationship between man and the world has taken on a poignant and unsettling relevance”<sup>18</sup>. Quite representative are the following words of professor at the Repin Institute S.M. Daniel’: “One of the definitions of postmodernism is eclecticism. In other words, these are internally disparate, inorganic methods that are connected externally and mechanically. Philosophers of postmodernism are proclaiming the end of what is a single and integral whole – which, consequently, means an end to the legacy of many centuries, e.g. Christian culture. Some are even talking about the extinction of the principle of integrity altogether!”<sup>19</sup>. Philosopher, historian, and culturologist G.S. Pomerants has suggested that “it is worth reviving contemplative life, which should lead us to feel the sacred whole”<sup>20</sup>.

Artistic thinking covers this integrity most completely. The need to express integrity has been voiced by A.K. Yakimovich: “The objective must have been to show, through the amusingness and unexpectedness (and, therefore, inexhaustibleness) of life, creation as a single entity, i.e. as something that is not known a-priori and is not broken apart by paragraphs of rationalist thinking. And if it is a single entity, then things in there are interrelated to such an extent that it is possible for various levels of reality to connect with each other”<sup>21</sup>.

In carrying the plan into effect, it was necessary to come up with new approaches that would

be distinguished by a totally different vision of the world and unorthodox notions of man and his existence. According to the head of the Accademia Albertina Salvo Bifonti, the human body, which may be viewed in historical-cultural aspects in the sphere of art, design, and various technologies, is “returning to abstraction and minimalism. At the beginning of the century, following the loss of art’s sacred aura, center stage was taken by technical transformation. Today, the highly informationalized Internet and social networks are impalpably leading to the fadeout of our natural state. There is a new level of mobile information – digital information – that is penetrating into present-day art. In this regard, what remains the most technology-friendly, but at the same time still natural and genuine, is the “body”<sup>22</sup>. Man in this wide space of postindustrial society, who is forced to reclaim the world anew, seems at times to be losing his spirituality. To help attain the right degree of synthesis between man and the world around him and realize his bodily and spiritual potential – this is the problem worked on by artists from around the world. As we can see, the image of man has been developed in a variety of dimensions and using various technical means. That being said, it is worth pointing out a peculiar trend in the visual arts that has been around since the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – the blurring of the borders of art genres and forms. Over time, most of the visual arts genres firmly entrenched within the academic system have undergone a significant transformation and no longer lend themselves to clear-cut definition. The boundaries of the actual art forms, like graphics, painting, sculpture, and decorative applied art, have, notwithstanding that these art forms have always been regarded as self-contained, been extended – a consequence of universalism in present-day artistic culture. It looks like sculpture, painting, decorative art, and photography are now intertwined together to form a sort of polyphonic array of means of expression. The content of many genres has taken on a metaphorical meaning, with recourse made to allegory. Realism and “representing life in the forms of life itself” remained indissolubly linked within our artistic consciousness for a long time. But by the mid-1970s, as interest grew for the philosophical and artistic conceptualization of life processes, critics started to speak of a philosophical-intellectual approach, of parabolization and mythologism as fully appropriate forms of representing reality. Consequently, having inherited along the way the stylistics of past eras, particular genres have begun, in striving to reflect a variety of today’s topical, hot-button issues, to highlight vast philosophical content in their works, which has brought them close to each other and resulted in a genre commonality. This process of reconceptualization has been characteristic of all art forms. “In literature, the past decade is a time that witnessed the spread of parabolical and mythological constructions, narration techniques that allow you to extend



the time length of your narration to any limits to enable an in-depth understanding of man”<sup>23</sup>.

### **3. CONCLUSIONS**

To sum up, the paper highlights the thematic importance of the issue of anthropomorphism (being focused on man) in the present-day artistic process of the young generation of masters, who are keen to innovate and employ novel techniques and methods to come up with innovative solutions. Works by these artists make it possible to forecast the creative process of the future and gain a proper insight regarding the orientation of our present-day information society and the place of man in it, revealing the global essence of life processes.

By reacting to the critical issues of his time, the young artist forms his personal concept of man, making an extensive use of symbolic forms as a comprehensive reflection of ideas conceived in his mind and all kinds of installations as a means of expressing them. Thus, a festival like the one discussed in this paper is of significance in present-day society not only as a reflector of the new world picture – what actually sets it apart as a sociocultural phenomenon is that it acts as a crucial means of communication capable of cultivating fruitful social and creative ties in the global world.

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