

THE RUSSIAN ANIMALISTIC ART OF THE 20TH CENTURY AS A CULTURAL PHENOMENON OF THAT TIME

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ABSTRACT: *The article dwells on the Russian animalistic art that is considered as the distinctive feature of the 20th century, that represents the visual and cultural phenomenon of that time. Here we noted some prerequisites of its activation, which were connected with the significance of the biological science of that time, issues of ecology. Such a situation had led people to a change in worldview in the views of society on nature and the animal world. Painters were expressing their points of view on a world of flora and fauna, which helps to find out a system of moral values and ideals of the New time man. The meaning of the statements is to justify the historical role of animals in the development of civilization. The statement of cultural questions is important as in a theoretical sense – for identification of the spot and the role of the animalistic in modern culture and art, as in a practical sense – as a prerequisite of creation of a high-grade artistic image. Here the animalistic art has demonstrated its graphic and expressive qualities which are connected with the specifics of the genre. In the 20th century the animalistic acquired a special status, it becomes a popular kind of art and shows up as a mobile one in different types fitting in a conception of artistic styles of the second half of the 20th century.*

Keywords: phenomenon, animal world, culture, nature, animalistic genre

INTRODUCTION

The animalistic art appeared in Russia in the 18th century and, being different by its specific character, had expressed itself as an original genre phenomenon. It was represented mainly in numerous variations of "Hunting" and "hippic" genres, and in the 20th century, painters-animalists focused their attention on the embodiment of flora and fauna in various types of visual art. It's fair to call the animalistic a historical and artistic phenomenon, which, getting entrenched in its genre status, has gained integrity in the 20th century. The significance of the phenomenon is proved by the art practice and the interest of the public, cultural scientists, and art critics. In the first half of the 20th century, the researchers of the Russian and Soviet art raise the question of the genre nature of animalism on pages of magazines. A.V. Bakushinsky, A.A. Fedorov-Davydov, Ya. A. Tugendhold [1] were reporting about big achievements of V. A. Vatagin and I. S. Efimov – representatives of the animalism of that time. The catalogs from exhibitions of animal artists became a famous phenomenon, the beginning of which was given by the exhibition that had taken place in 1939 in the Moscow zoo and by the first publication about it. B.Alekseeva [2]. At the following time (1960–2000) the catalogs of animalistic exhibitions turned into a tradition. The study has become the purposeful and analytical one. All this forms the relevance of the article.

METHODOLOGY

On the background of the expanding nowadays information field, in the context of the current environmental issues, the *sociocultural aspect* of animalism sounds especially loud. Moreover, the necessity of consideration of this phenomenon was caused not that much by the subject and degree of study of it, as by a lack of conversation about it as a structural phenomenon in the interaction of *cultural and visual aspects*.

Russian animalistic genre as a graphic and cultural phenomenon

A human's view on nature is a cultural aspect, an animal is its inherent character. Researchers not even once have brought up the question of the human-animal relationship, noting

moral principles in it. Randy Malamud [3] tells about a human power over animals and underlines that human takes place of a monarch towards nature, easily destroying and polluting the environment, so it's impossible to call a human a master of the ecosphere. In ancient cultures, Sian Lewis, Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones [4] call animals holy, but Adrian Franklin [5] and Margo De Mello [6]. Annabelle-Sabloff [7] makes a point of a dramatic transformation in the relationship of humans and animals, that's happened in the 20th century when representatives of flora and fauna were perceived as a resource of human needs satisfaction. The authors believe that a significant part of society builds its relations with animals on exploitation. In Rod Preece's opinion [8], western culture, unlike the eastern one, encourages the relationship of the human domination and exploitation of nature and animals. But people could feel the unity with all living on earth, the authenticity of the "sacred world" [9].

The world of nature has never been in such a danger before, so issues of the law and ethics towards it turned into an urgent need.

Matthew Senior [10] notes that only in Modern times a person as if woke up from a dream and realized the tragedy of the situation and according to Aubrey Manning, James Serpell [11] man in modern society begins to re-explore the world of nature and animals.

Adrian Franklin [5] names the end of the 20th century an important historical step, the period when humanity started talking about the «animals rights» and the importance of their existence. Publications of Russian authors of 1970–the 1990s also prove the significance of the problem. Social and moral issues were considered by V.A. Tihanova [12]. The author sees the roots of morality and ethical attitude to nature in the essence of animalistic arts. She notes that among a variety of expressive means and techniques, that painters of the 20th century turn to, the conception of the wildlife protection sounds absolutely clear and animals are considered as a big, important for everyone idea, which is matched with goals of animalistic art at the modern stage. K.M. Dolgov talked about the creation of a separate «philosophical theory of human», that studies questions of «interaction of human and nature,

people's attitude to nature and the impact of nature on human, the formation and development of human aesthetic sensuality and aesthetic consciousness, artistic values of nature» [13]. The important part of the cultural aspect of animalism in the 20th century were theoretical views of the artists, who are also a value due to the touch actual problems connected with the world of wildlife and convincingly say about the significance of animalistic art. The authors' points of view get put into a system of opinions, beliefs, teachings. They touch upon a lot of questions and reasoning about problems of genre specifics, values of ancient animalistic images, the method of work of an animalist. Their ideological position, based on love and awareness of nature, identified the creative face of the artist-animalist in the culture of the 20th century and drew the attention of society to the primary importance of natural history tasks. The view on the world of animals as a biological society, that is inseparable from the human's life and in many ways is an organic whole with him, became possible in the era of scientific discoveries when rethinking of the role of the animal in human society had happened. Then the formation of an ecological way of thinking, which is based on an ethical attitude towards nature as a unique value turns into reality. The human research interest in the first half of the 20th century led to the fact that the borders of the interaction between humans and nature become tinier and tinier. Such a dialog has led to a specific and more personal understanding of the animal, nature was endowed with thoughts and experiences, which undoubtedly caused a high moral sense.

V. Vatagin, V. Smirin, N. Kondakov had a serious biological knowledge. They were working for many years in the Darwin Museum in Moscow, the Zoological Museum of Moscow State University, was illustrating scientific works. On the base of the deep exploration of animals they, as scientists, professionals in their field, noting the beauty, pattern of the animals' world order, they reinterpreted the "cult of nature" that had emerged in ancient times. The animal, though it had lost its divine essence, still has kept some sacred meaning. It consisted of the fact that the artist-researcher was learning the complex world of animals, but not in a traditional way of worship of their physical strength. The knowledge of this world and admiration led to the fact that some masters (V. Vatagin, D. Gorlov, B. Vorobyev, and others) treated it almost with a religious reverence. They didn't like hunting, sometimes had a vegetarian lifestyle trying to not eat their potential models. In reality, it's a hard mission, which defined the artistic and cultural concept of the 20th century – the ratio of modern problems with the past, the ontological search for the truth of being, that brings human's thought back to those times, when there was a natural harmony in the head of the world, in particular – to the beginning of the Old Testament history. A.V. Bakushinsky, thinking about this topic, believed that the "new spiritual basis of life", built on the "torments of the former way", would have to «bring humanity to the origins of life back, its sensations, to that last simplicity and immediacy, that are the signs of the perfect wisdom and

permission for the past deep tragedy in its final cleansing act» [15]. «Then more complicated, more controversial and tenser human's life in the modern society becomes, – according to K.M. Dolgov, – then more and more often he looks to nature and culture trying to find a kind of break from hard work in them, something against meaningless existence, the harmony and the beauty, that were lost in such a far but at the same time close times. In such conditions people have to look to their "origins": to pristine nature, where it is still preserved, or somewhere, where it exists in an idealized shape, to the classical culture, that's not еще не disfigured by modern barbarians [13].

On the wave of the mutual upswing of research and public enthusiasm, the Moscow school of animalism has appeared. In 1920–1930s reference points in the field of graphic art appeared, the scientific illustration, that's connected with exhibits of the Darwinian Museum, children's book animalistic illustration [16]. At the same time, a wide exhibition activity had started and formed a positive opinion about the genre in artistic and wider social circles. (Fig. 1,2,3)



Fig. 1. A. N. Mosquito Raccoon dog pencil

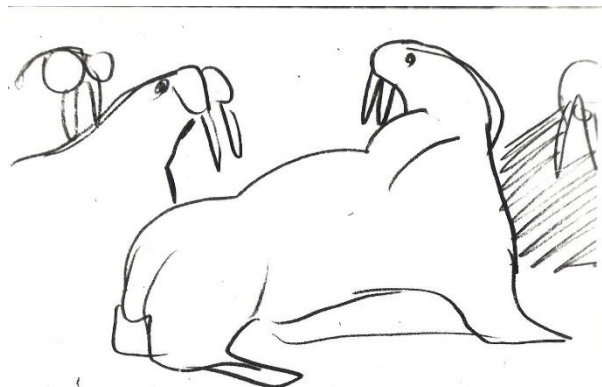


Fig 2. A. M. Belashov Chukotka black marker



Fig 3. D. V. Gorlov Lion. Color pencil

For example, Например, animalists were taking a long term part in recognized exhibitions of the Society of Russian Sculptors (SORS). At the same time, in the atmosphere of scientific research, interest in the world of nature and animals, a paradoxical situation has arisen. On one hand, society has an interest in animalism, on another hand, – people underestimate its significance. As for existing in the artistic environment of such a point of view, the head of the State Darwin Museum in Moscow A.F. Knots expressed his opinion at the meeting of artists of MOSH: «The questions of searching for moral culture can be expressed in the landscape, genre or portrait but not in the "painting of animals", not in the animalism! Here the conclusion comes: either landscape, portrait, and genre, or historical painting, and in this case, you are a true artist according to given settings, or you are an animalist, and by this, you have reduced yourself to the position of a second-rank artist, in the role of illustrator of zoological publications <...> Recognizing the landscape as the theme of true art, people have doubts if it's worth the same level of art the only one what is able to revive this nature – the world of animals. But this world, he continues, is the living embodiment of harmony and rhythm, of deepest organic patterns in comparison with which ones Marbles of Milan Cathedral are turning pale <...> The feathers of the paradise bird, designing a marshy-lady, immortalized in a portrait, can be honored as a model of "high art", the same paradise bird, but not as a parody of the bird, but as an authentic alive flower in its natural charm can't be worth a real painter. But it's fair to ask why the image of the landscape with a swan is more significant than the image of the swan without the landscape but with equal painting skills» [14]. By definition of D.V. Gorlov, they look at the animalism like «the element that is forced and undesirable [17].

The statement of a minority of an animalistic genre, misunderstanding of its specific sometimes led to the opinion

that to paint an animal [16] isn't a big deal. These reasons of artists, public figures touch the important issue – a study of genre patterns of animalistic art. Along with other genres of fine art, animalism as a sociocultural phenomenon reflects the era in its significant manifestations. Such a study can help to understand the specific nature of animalism, its characteristic features pointing at the necessary spot that is supported to be kept for it in the system of genres of the national art of the 20th century. Being a symbol of a particular time, animalism can be considered in the stylistic context of the era, the author's style. By the example of historical ideas about animals in folklore, religions, myths, literature, and art we can follow up with not only their role in the life of the human society but also visual solutions that masters were guided by in a process of creation of art image. Animals are keeping on appearing in the modern visual culture. Ziba Rasidian [18] gives different даёт разные interpretations about animals in the range of their relationship with humans. Adrian Franklin [5] wrote about how the development of rational ways of thinking in science has led to the weakening of mythological, religious features in the interpretation of animal characters. David Aftandilian [19] suggests not only new approaches of exploration of animals but also a new understanding of a wide circle of topics including the environment – the habitat of animals, their behavior, and interpretation in arts down to a variety of postmodern directions. Many authors have narrated the visual qualities of animalism. V. A. Tihanova [12] tells about the problems of the animalistic genre, considering its borders, she notes the necessity in such a classification, for example, during the organization of exhibitions. Arguing about the "purity" of the animalistic image, she defines its distinctive features unlike, for example, an image of an animal in crafts. Here, first of all, the main aim of the animalist is accuracy and concreteness of the animal image, secondly, the artist-animalist is supposed to give an artistic and imaginative characterization of representatives of the fauna, hi highlight the beauty of their poses and movements. On the pages of his memoir work «Memories. Notes of an Animalist [14] V. A. Vatagin was thinking on the same subject and was talking about specifics of animalistic art as an independent field. He doesn't use the term "genre", but analyzing the animalistic art, he concerns its genre specificity, noting the rich possibilities for capturing the appearance of the animal in all kinds (according to Vatagin, «categories») of arts: monumental, decorative, easel. Due to historical conditions animalism appears differently at each stage of features, a concept of the image is formed as a carrier of certain essential features that define the concept of the genre: the choice of themes, characters, their interpretation. However, a qualitative feature of the genre, characteristic of any era, is the presence in its structure of features related to the interpretation of the image of the animal as a whole. In this sense, from the point of view of the nature genre explorer, of its specific qualities, the judgments of V. A. Vatagin are very indicative. He identifies some typical properties inherent in the genre nature of animalism in general. In his opinion, the essence of the animalistic character is most deeply and integrally reflected in easel art, in particular in sculpture, the natural plastic of which is focused on reflecting the emotional state of the animal, and

there is no conventionality in it that appears in monumental sculpture. Decors and stylization typical for a monumental-decorative sculpture, are not determinative in the easel. The most important for it is that the richness of the image gets complemented by various nuances of interpretation, which makes perception much richer. According to V. A. Vatagin, «these masterpieces not only caress the eye, but wake the thought up and capture the viewer with emotional content. The form of easel art organically merges with the content, not overshadowing, but revealing the essence of the image» [10]. Other artists, such as I. Efimov, D. Gorlov, tend to see the full value of the animalistic image in different types of sculpture, not following strictly to the origin. The visual phenomenon of animalism, presented in the author's concept of masters, eventually comes to an organic understanding of them of the specific nature of the genre. Painters fairly note that the animalistic image will be authentic in that case if the master will be able to reflect its characteristics and properties, first of all, keeping in mind the movable nature of the model. V. A. Vatagin brings up the important topic when it goes to the qualities that an artist-animalist is supposed to have. In his conception moral qualities (love) and professional ones (knowledge) together form the traits and determine the criteria on the basis of which the artistic embodiment of the animal in art takes place. That necessary «feeling of animal» gets born in the synthesis of them, without which one the activity of the animalist will not take place. Thus, functions described by V. A. Vatagin that the artist-animalist is supposed to have, revealing the specifics of the genre, are the key parameters of the approach to the image in general.

CONCLUSION

In general, in the context of these questions caused by the problems of time, there the importance of animalism, as arts of purposeful, going beyond the previously established hierarchical system and occupying an equal place among other genres of Russian art, appears. In the cultural context, human creates an opinion about the world of wildlife, in the kingdom of animals the animal is tied up with human's life. The phenomenality of this process is explained by the interest and study of zoomorphic culture, different approaches, and visual interpretations of living beings. In fact, throughout human history, a consistent tendency to comprehend nature leads to the formation of ecological culture. M.N. Epstein was absolutely right with his statement: if «zoo-centrism is the initial, historically outdated stage of cultural development, then the increasing role of creation of prerequisites of an ecologically balanced culture belongs to animalism [21]. In this sense, the active development of the animalistic genre acquires the character of a socio-cultural significant, and historically natural process. Animalism forms not just a cognitive impulse, it also allows solving many theoretical and practical issues that modern society is worried about.

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