

Conference Paper

Section 5. Socio-Cultural Space of the Region

Representation of the Memory in the Exhibitions of the Museum of Naive Art

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Abstract

The article deals with the main exhibition projects of the Museum of Naive Art of Yekaterinburg in 2018. In studies aimed at designing the contents of the museum narrative, the creators of the expositions rely on "naive ego-history" as an important source and resource. We reveal the narrative potential of previously excluded forms of artistic reflection of historical processes, sensations of the destinies of the homeland and the people, embodied in artistic images.

Keywords: naive art, oral history, exhibition, text of the artist

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1. Introduction

The naive art and the collection of the new Museum of Naive Art in Ekaterinburg (the Museum opened in November 2017) are in need of valorization: in contrast to the exhibitions of the "classical" art, the display space of the Museum has to overcome the inertia of the classical art museums' attendance and the multi-year "chrestomatization" of the domestic museum classics.

The exhibition projects of the Museum of Naive are implemented in a contradictory field of expectations, associated with positive impressions from the acquaintance with master, highly artistic and apparent works, and, on the other hand, with the unexpected and paradoxical nature of naive art and the unobvious nature of its artistic value. The creation of naive artists is mostly based on personal experiences and stories, and not on artistic styles, the wishes of the customer or academic canons. The Museum gives voice to these stories.

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2. Moments of the History of Naive Art

Naive art is the fulfillment of the need to speak out, to describe one's attitude to the stored values – experience, knowledge, impressions, as a significant baggage which is worthy of storage in the transfer and directly related to the individual experience, including the personal experience of living through the basic values and epoch-making events. Storytelling is a way of understanding and justifying the experience. Maurice Halbwachs emphasizes the role of stories, coming from the elders in the family, in expanding the time horizon which is fixed in the concept of historical memory [5, 208-209].

The peculiarity of Russian history is that the work of amateur artists, whose childhood was in the 1930s-1940s, was significantly influenced by the fact that “family legends” and “stories about ancestors” were interrupted for various reasons: repression, hunger, and fear of connection with the past [4, 82-86]. In these circumstances, naive art performs the functions of ego-history in various artistic forms, becoming a kind of prosthesis for identity and life-saving completion of the plot. Through their works the naive artists patch up the gaps in memory, building a saving and consistent, coherent and meaningful story of the life.

It is believed that the source of the amateur artist's work as a verbal and visual narrative is the focus of the author's experience in the collective history. The relationship between personal and collective memory has its own characteristics. Individual memory is characterized by the communicative nature of the selection of significant facts, psychological methods of their retention and the unconscious support for the hierarchy of facts. Collective memory is external to the individual, it is rational and its grounds are beyond his control. Subjectively colored and valuable attitude of the individual to the past provides inclusion or exclusion certain realities, because individual memory is selective and is transformed by imagination.

The study suggests considering the works of artists-lovers relating to ethnographic or historical themes and their different kinds of everyday life narrative as a special kind of historical sources.

3. Forms of Preservation of Cultural Memory

From 3 March to 22 April 2018, the Museum held an exhibition of the works by Echik Bartsev “People of the White God. Memory of the Mari village”. In his works, Echik Bartsev introduces the life and history of the village of Mari, the events which took place

in his childhood - 1940-1950-ies. Being concerned about the fate of Mari culture, Echik Alexandrovich studied the history and life of the Mari people, capturing his recollections in paintings, supplementing them with memoirs, "I love my people, their unique way of life, their ingenuity, diligence and ability to adapt to any conditions" [2, 5].

Bartsev's Mari people live their lives: work, have fun and philosophize. Sometimes reminding epic heroes of legends and tales, they, according to the artist, remain real people and keepers of traditions. In his "Confession...", representing a kind of "text of the artist", Bartsev wrote, "I was afraid that the original culture of the Mari would eventually dissolve among others, and the legends and traditions would be forgotten. And the memory is still keeping a vivid impression of the childhood, the years of the village life, and some episodes of those years. The desire to capture it all on the canvas is still in me. I started painting only for the sake of preserving my memory in this way. There were no high ideals and morals; I had no aspirations to be super-original, it was just the type of obligations" [2, 18]. The exhibition space, in addition to paintings, was filled with the fragments of the author's texts and his philosophical and historiographic reflections.

From April 27 to August 5, the Museum hosted the exhibition "Shalom! Jewish life and traditions in painting by Nalina Heifetz", which presented the portraits of relatives and friends of the Heifetz family, the scenes from the family life of the Orthodox Jews, their rituals and holidays, as well as paintings-experiences of personal tragedy and the tragedy of the Jewish people. Nalina Aleksandrovna Heifets lives in Perm, visits the synagogue, with children and grandchildren listens to the Jewish songs and reads Sholom Aleichem. She is Russian, but her experiences, embodied in the paintings, is the pain of the Jewish people. In her works one can recognize famous literary plots and get acquainted with the paintings about the life of Jewish towns, while the portraits represent the author's relatives and a close circle of the friends from the Jewish community in Perm [3, 6].

The title of the exhibition "Years of labor and victories" (September 1 - November 25) is a paraphrase of the program picture by Fyodor Kamensky "70 years of work and victories" presented at the exhibition. The picture has been composed in the spirit of the ode to the Soviet man and built like lives and acts. But unlike the descriptions of the spiritual heroism of the Christian saints, Kamensky created a festive mythology and hagiography of the earthly, materialistic deeds and accomplishments of the Soviet man. Most naïve artists are text-centered, and sometimes the paintings were born as an illustration to the memoirs or manifesto of the artist, and sometimes simultaneously with the creation of the literary review. Thus, Pavel Ustyugov's paintings grew out of his memoirs, historical studies and screenplays.

An important part of the exhibition was a hall dedicated to the painting of the Gulag prisoner Ivan Vasilyevich Belokrylov. His paintings depict the hard years in the Gulag and the prison life of those dark times that he experienced. The whole cycle is linked through the plot of the prisoner's ordeal and, if desired, it can be built into a coherent story, like a book.

The Museum is a place of selection, storage and construction of collective memory. Through a series of visits and returns to the Museum, changing during their lives, visitors interiorize collective memory into personal and turn the changing Museum history into a fact of personal one. Not only archaeological and local history museums work on the field of functional memory, they are also *places of remembrance* [1, 56].

Paintings, drawings and sculpture are the essence of attributive places (a museum, a city, and a country), characterizing the place as the instance competent to form a canon, to carry out the selection, fixing and filling texts and paintings with "aura", to provide them a place not only in the passive, but also in the active social memory. In addition, the art museum is also the keeper of the basic plots and the themes of mythology, culture and history.

4. In Place of Conclusion

If one understands the narrative nature of memory, then the work of a naive artist can be seen as a manifestation of identity. The identity of the Soviet man is formed in the context of a *Great Story*, *legitimizing the meta-narrative*, which set not only the images of the right and "light path", the spaces of the "width of the native country", but also the ways of looking at and perceiving the surrounding phenomena and events. It is the given and accepted "methods of perceiving" that determine the manner and technique of writing, and the selection of techniques borrowed from the "folk" perception of the world or the "academic" art. Thus, the content of the museum statement in the exhibition of naive art is a special form of non-specialized vision of the events of history and the expression of collective memory.

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