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UDK 18

IMPRESSION AS A CAUSE OF PAINTERLY ARTISTIC IMAGE

SUMMARY. This article describes the role of impression as of a “starting point” of the artistic image in painting. The article provides classification of impressionability (sensibility) reflected in different ways in the process of image formation.

KEY WORDS. Impression, impressionability (sensibility), ideological impression, aesthetic impression, ethical impression, representation, conception, expression, rules of expression, artistic image, existential choice.

The creation of any kind of artistic image starts with a conception, i.e. it is a rational activity presuming the setting of goals. Generally, it's not the case for the image, since our creative activity may be instinctive, but the specifics of creative activity in the framework of art assume a quite conscious application of the rules of expression developed in the given art and the construction of a complicated artistic structure in a piece of work.

Thus, a responsible decision by a painter, taken during the (partly conscious, partly instinctive) determination of depicted objects and the meaning of the piece of work, is of key importance for what exactly will be depicted in the piece of work. And this choice by the painter is an existential decision by a person placed in a definite life situation. At the same time, the person possesses a number of personal qualities and a certain attitude towards the world.

Therefore, a mere conception is the initial creative element, setting the aesthetic and anthropological basis for the creation of an artistic image. Though, in this case we are interested in existential and culturological logics of origination of the conception itself, which push to subtler and deeper notions.

It is important to understand that at any moment the life experience of a painter may prompt him with a great number of conceptions for future works, which means that he makes a certain choice based on a certain provocation pushing him to select an option. It is not meant that a painter's choice is predetermined by the chain of external and internal circumstances; just that the existence of such circumstances provides possible alternatives of choice.

And since it is possible to single out a great number of circumstances related to our situation, and the creative hesitations of a painter presuppose a limited number of solutions, one may presume that the circumstances are not all of the same potential at the stage of artistic image conception, which is probably conditioned by the fact that different circumstances have different impacts on a person.

The term “impression” seems the most suitable for the description of this situation. “An impression” is 1. An effect produced on the conscience, on the soul

by an experience or a perception... 2. An influence, an impact. *Stay under the impression of a talk...* [1; 97]. Most often in psychology and philosophy, "the impression" was understood in the first meaning as stated above, but as far as the modern gnoseology has left behind understanding of gnosis as producing "an effect" by recognition of an active role of our cognitive instrument in the process of reflection of objects and events, the term is practically no longer used in this meaning.

In this case the second of the above meanings is used, i.e. the term "impression" acts as a measure of the impact of the external and internal world on a person and as a capability "to impress" a person so that the rate of impression would become a reason of increased attention to the given object and an interest in it.

Thus, an impression is a source of a certain fixity on an object. The object occupies the thoughts of a person; it becomes significant and makes the person think of it.

Undoubtedly, the impression is possible because originally a person is endowed with impressionability, i.e. the ability to be impressed. It is impossible to be a painter without impressionability in the same way as a creator of any kind of art. Impressionability is a feature of all people. The difference is only in its strength and in the character of events, which evoke the strongest impressions.

Of course, the result of being impressed may be different. It depends both on the nature of the object and the type of perception, and on the individual specific features and individual culture of the person on whom the impression is made. Insofar as the focus of this article is painting and the creation of artistic images in painting, it would be reasonable to look into the mechanism of forming a painterly image.

We can distinguish two ways and suppose that both depend on impressionability. The first way is based on a visual impression. In the simplest case such a visual impression is evoked by some subject or event of the material world. A person may be impressed by an object, by a certain perspective of an object (or, for example, by unusual lighting of an object), by a scene seen or by an unexpected natural phenomenon (something beautiful, frightening, fascinating). It is clear that the reason evoking impression should be something extraordinary and going behind the norms.

For example, a person used to the pale colours of city nature may be impressed by a rich and vivid palette of free and wild nature. A person accustomed to the fact that the neighbourhood lives according to the principle "Homo homini lupus est" may be impressed by magnanimity and benefaction. A man of humane character used to a comfortable world may be impressed by the seeing cruelty.

One can immediately notice here two essentially different alternatives of impression: in one case (a vivid palette) it deals with purely visual impression (unusual physiological feeling); in the other case (cruelty or, on the contrary, magnanimity) one is impressed not by what is seen, but by its meaning, i.e. the impression here is rather sense-bearing than physiological.

In this context it is important to specify that a person may be impressed not only by the directly seen, but also by the imagined. It happens when a person hears a description of events from someone, imagines it and then gets impressed by what is imagined. Thus, a sense-bearing impression is certainly formed more often and in a simpler way than a physiological impression, but the latter is also possible,

because in the description of events we can make comparisons, which can create impressive compositions in the minds of the audience.

It is clear that a sense-bearing impression is of particular importance in modern times, when the development of mass media allows wide dissemination of information on impressive events. It is mainly due to the fact that the mass audience prefers the impressive (which notably explains the high interest of the press in extreme events and accidents). Sense-bearing impressions in such cases become not just visual anymore. The visual appears here not as a source of corresponding perception, but only as a form in which a person transforms their sense-bearing impression (mainly if the person is a painter). Thus, after reading a newspaper article on the Bulgaria shipwreck, a person presents a scene of tragedy (though the major part of imagined details is fictional), but this "image" will become an incarnation of experiencing horror and tragedy.

The second way of generation of a painterly artistic image starts with the impression of an idea. The source of an idea may be another person, religion, science, philosophy or a work of art. An idea may impress for different reasons. For example, it may impress because a person had some vague feeling but he was unable to express it; that he was convinced by good arguments; that he wanted to believe since the justice of this idea filled his life with sense; that he was impressed by a personality or by the deeds of the preacher of this idea, etc.

The impression by the idea is somewhat similar to the sense-bearing visual impression, and at the same time they are very different. Let us assume that a person is impressed by the thought that all people have the right to live, therefore all crime is monstrous. This represents a person's rational and principal position, not dependent on any concrete deaths or terrible scenes of murder. At the same time another person may be impressed by seeing a murder in reality and may adhere to the principles of pacifism. The difference between them is that in the second case, firstly, the idea may not be necessarily adopted. Secondly, the difference lies in the character of accepting fundamental values: on the basis of a rational position, or on the basis of being impressed by material concretion.

Eventually we have three alternatives for an impression: physiological (aesthetic), sense-bearing (ethical) and ideological. All three have different balances of rational and irrational in this process. We do not talk about the reasons of impression by certain things, which cannot be fully realized by a person as far as an impression can be originated from deeply hidden instinctive associations, as far as a person is able to explain his/her own impression by rationalizing it using one of the above methods.

It is clear that depending on the impression underlying the genesis of an artistic image, the latter shall be further developed. A purely aesthetic impression requires a purely aesthetic approach to the creation of an artistic painting to assure an adequate representation of the impression. But, curiously enough, it does not mean that a painting should be of ultimate verisimilitude or free from symbols. A vivid example of this paradox is Impressionist art and its perception by the public developed in relation to the artistic taste.

One of the researchers studying this art writes: "...the impressionists provide the audience with not just slices of life but with their colourful equivalents. They do not copy, they reproduce. Their vision of the world is absolutely true-to-life, but

different from the “common” vision and from the usual colours of objects, not so much “seen” but rather “remembered” by the audience (blue sky, green grass, white snow, etc.)” [2; 13]. Thus, the origination of impressionist art led to a fundamental dispute on whether the Impressionists tried to depict the objectivity of the world or their subjective feelings.

The problem is that a 3D object looks different in a space filled with light and air than its representation on a canvas. It is not so noticeable if an object is being painted in an art studio with permanent and poor lighting specially focused on the painted object. In this case, the light is smooth; it delineates a sharp outline and a distinct light and shadow effect, which “absorbs” the colours.

“However, finding himself in the plain air, the painter gets into a world of light, where there are no shadows killing the light. The shadows are of certain colours which are colder (i.e. closer to the blue sector of the colour spectrum); the lit places are of warmer colours (i.e. closer to the orange sector). Therefore, the Impressionists convey the colours through a combination and a contraposition of cold and warm tones” [2; 11]. The light rendering problem is also important. “A strong light does not make the colours more intense: it illuminates them brightly. From a certain moment the colours become inversely proportional to the lighting. The tones become nearly invisible next to the harsh glaring radiance of strongly lit surfaces alternating with shadowy drops” [2; 13]. It should be noted that the lighting kept changing permanently, which also influenced the manner of Impressionist painting. “They started capturing the moments in their works... What seemed to be a sketch or a rough drawing became the goal of their paintings. They decided to depict carefully and exactly, as far as it was possible, those quickly changing tones created by fast-changing lighting... They had to paint fast” [2; 12].

It is certainly impossible to reduce the whole art of Impressionists to depicting impressions, but there are several such works. One of them, for example, is Claude Monet’s painting “La Rue Saint-Denis. Fxte du 30 juin 1878” [3; 141]. We can easily imagine how this painting was conceived. The painter looked out from the window and at the first moment he was simply taken aback by the number of fluttering red flags. His first impression was that the city was “bathing” in common joy and festivity. And this impression turned out to be sufficiently stable.

When creating his painting, C. Monet could not naturally represent the view from the window, because depicting a real street at once after a short look is different from painting after a continuous perusal of a completed plain canvas. This is why he removed everything which did not refer to his impression from the canvas, what he saw not in the first moment, but at the subsequent moment when he overcame the first impression of the view. It is depicted in a schematic and symbolic way to make us understand that we see streets, houses and people (but it’s unlikely that we can remember exactly which houses, streets and people are represented). We get the same first impression as Claude Monet did. The difference is that looking at reality he passed to the “second impression”, but we do not have the same possibility because the painting does not convey what participated in Claude Monet’s perception after getting the first impression.

The painting “Guernica” by P. Picasso can no doubt serve as an example of a work based on sense-bearing impression. Guernica is a city in Spain, which was almost completely destroyed by a bomb attack organized by General F. Franco’s

supporters and by his allies from Italy and Germany. Picasso did not see the bombing, but he could well imagine what it was like. Understanding the fact that it dealt with the city on the whole, combined with the painter's personal experience of similar tragedy and its consequences, or the painter's talking with people who had survived something similar, caused strong emotions. It would have been impossible if P. Picasso did not value human life or if he sympathized with Franco's supporters. Even though a certain ideological basis for such an assessment was significant for the painter before the tragedy, nevertheless the events in Guernica stimulated the origination of the conception.

Strictly speaking, P. Picasso moved on much farther based on the Guernica case. We understand from the title of the painting that it deals with this very city, and later from History we learn that the bomb attack is presented. Indeed, a certain reality is shown in this picture. This reality crippled a man (which is symbolically shown in the painting through the deformation of the human body). The title serves as a key, prompting us as regards what historical event is shown; later we understand the meaning of this event by looking at the painting. The event itself is a certain symbol of the history of the fascist advance on Europe and of the war as such.

Many of the Soviet paintings of the 1920s-1930s (e.g. "The Defence of Petrograd" by A. Deyneka, "Death of Commissar" of K.S. Petrov-Vodkin etc.) may serve as examples of implementation of the ideological impression in works of art, as well as the paintings of several trends in the art of the 20th Century which directly refuse to depict visible reality in favour of the implementation of ideas (e.g. "Black Square" by K. Malevich, some paintings by S. Dali, etc.). The general logic of an artistic image genesis is based on a certain idea on the part of a painter. The painter wishes to implement the idea and selects a view conveying this idea. As distinct from the first two cases, external reality does not encourage the creation of a piece of art at all, thus a painter does not have suitable visual impressions (direct or imagined), which could be laid as the basis of representation. The picture on the whole has to be constructed to match the set ideological content.

Exactly this type of work of art has a specific ideological meaning, since it is actively used by different authorities for making the population understand certain concepts developed by a certain ideology. Though, undoubtedly, the works of art belonging to a previously described type (sense-bearing impression) can be used for coverage of events in terms of required ideological position. A clear logic can be traced in relation to ideological pieces of art: an idea to be imposed on a society → a social order to paint an ideological piece of work → selection of a subject for the painting (a painter may select from events from a long time ago, which are suitable for expressing an idea, even though the painter was not at all impressed by them).

This kind of creation of an artistic image is mostly evident also for bleeding edge art: if the imitation of reality is rejected as a basic requirement for visual art [4; 93] (including painting), then a purely visual impression, in principle, may not be the cause for the creation of a piece of work; a sense-bearing impression, even if it acts as such, has rather a symbolic meaning as far as a painting is not presented as a commonly understood image of an event (due to refusal of mimesis), i.e. a certain symbolic image or a symbolic inscription (under a painting or on a painting) should indicate the event. Coming back to "Guernica": just the inscription under

the painting (its title) allows reference to the event, i.e. it depicts the impression on P. Picasso of this tragedy.

Ideological impression in bleeding edge art is still more evident and direct, because the idea to be expressed does exist and the impressive event which would fit the ideological margin should be expected. This is why one can quickly present the idea directly, not taking into account a concrete event. Also, such a piece of work is easier for comprehension. The knowledge of some event is not required; it is sufficient to be informed of the attitude of painters belonging to a certain trend in relation to depiction and expression (i.e. their theory of fine arts).

It is evident enough that depending on the type of impression giving rise to the formation of an artistic image, the difference will lie in proportion to the main characteristics of the artistic image: descriptive and impressive, social and individual, rational and irrational. The mechanism of image formation will be also totally different. In the first case, in the process of conveying *a visual impression* by the means of a similar visual experience, a painter, in the first place, shifts the accents, emphasizing some things in the picture of reality and removing others. In case of descriptive conveyance of *the evaluation of a certain event*, the selection of the aspect of consideration is of major significance. Usually this aspect distorts a usual neutral outside point of view (sometimes by simple selection of colours, poses and compositions, sometimes by distortion of spatial and temporal verisimilitude). The main thing in the descriptive conveyance of *an idea* is a concept encrypted in symbols; the concept which claims generality and typicality.

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